

# **A Historical Review of Rural Enterprises in Ethnic Tujia Areas: From an Environmental and Cultural Perspective**

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*A historical review of the rural enterprises shows that the development modes of TVEs in the 1980s and 1990s were unsustainable. TVEs used to focus on income exclusively while sacrificing the needs of rural ethnic residents, because the TVEs in those minority areas did not have sufficient ethnic characteristics. To play a more active part in rural revitalization, TVE development needs ongoing reform and deeper consideration from the perspectives of environment and culture.*

*Keywords: township and village enterprise, ethnic region, environment, culture*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Township and village enterprises (known as TVEs) have been playing a crucial part in China's rural development since the late 1980s. They could absorb surplus rural labor, explore local resources and bring optimistic income to local residents, especially for the local government. Therefore, TVEs have been embraced by local people, particularly local officials. The relevant TVE regulation in China supports the development of TVEs and Chinese state leaders have referred to TVEs as "a major pillar of the national economy" (Zweig 1993: 254).

However, rural industry in minority areas has its dilemmas. The minority regions in China cover 64.2 percent of the country's whole territory.<sup>1</sup> These regions have been acting as bases of raw materials and markets for finished products for a long period of time. At the time the socialist market economy took its initial shape, and the public sector of the economy expanded in the reform of state-owned enterprises (known as SOEs). Under this condition, the competitive market caused inclement conditions to the survival of self-employed or private enterprises and other non-public sectors of the economy. Thus the management and administrative systems of TVEs turned out to be inadequate. Furthermore, since the TVEs are located dispersedly over large areas, they have been doing enormous harm to the natural environment and life of villagers as well.

This paper discusses the historical problems brought about by the development of rural industry in minority areas. It generally describes the history, situation and future of rural industry in remote areas where minority ethnic groups live. Then, taking the research in the ethnic Tujia areas in Xiangxi, Hunan province as a case study, the paper looks into questions such as "what policies had been established to control rural industries"; "what were the biggest problems facing TVEs and how did they arise"; "what was the relation

between the local administration system and TVEs”; and “how did rural industry increase local people’s income and what loss it had resulted in”.

## DEVELOPMENT AND PROBLEMS

From 1979 to 1983, the development of collective enterprises began to take shape, which created institutional resources and conditions for the development of TVEs. In September, 1984, the state’s Seventh Five Year Plan proclaimed that “the enhancement of TVEs is an essential way of developing Chinese rural economics”. Peasants were greatly encouraged by the state government to set up TVEs. There have been many other policies supporting rural industries such as the Xing Huo Plan (星火计划) since 1986, and these policies have directly improved the condition for TVEs.

The reform in rural areas also saw the burgeoning of rural industries. Since the old rural labor system had been broken, peasants were freed from their land. At the same time, agriculture was developed and the increasing agricultural products provided peasants with more and more living materials, improving peasants’ lives to a large extent as well as stimulating their desire to develop rural industry. The average income of rural resident working in TVEs had increased from 20.1 yuan in 1978 to 133.79 yuan in 1985 (Liu 2001:1).

The characteristics of TVEs are another factor resulting in the growth. Flexible daily production operation, labor employment and dismissal, product design, plan and management systems helped TVEs easily imitate SOEs while produce their products with lower costs and sell them at lower prices in the market. In the middle 1980s, the reform in SOEs was not accomplished yet, thus presenting TVEs a good chance to prosper. In 1984, TVEs began to reach the peak of their development, their number reaching 6,065,200 (Liu 2001:1).

China has worked very hard and achieved much in developing the economy in its minority regions. Zhou Enlai, the first premier of the People’s Republic of China, once remarked that “none of the nationalities should be excluded during the process of constructing a socialist industrial country. We cannot imagine that only the regions where the Han live are highly developed whereas Tibet is left to lag behind, or Inner-Mongolia to be depressed. This would not be a socialist country. Our socialist country should civilize and modernize all autonomous regions and prefectures where xiongdi minzu (兄弟民族) live.”<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, autonomous regions and prefectures have made their own contributions to the national construction, as commented by the top leader Mao Zedong: “To a great degree, socialist modernizations need ethnic groups and ethnic groups need socialist modernizations” (Lin 1997:531).

Geographical locations of ethnic groups in China make for this kind of reciprocal relationship. The national population census in 1982 showed that about 74.5 percent of the ethnic population lived in those autonomous regions (Fei 1999:7), which cover 64.2 percent of China’s whole territory.<sup>3</sup> Ethnic -minority areas, especially the peripheral lands, are rich in natural resources such as minerals, oils and forests. These boast 90 percent of China’s grassland, thus serving as bases for the stockbreeding of the whole country, and producing 50 percent of the nation’s sheep and cow, 80 percent of the whole country’s horses and 100 percent of camels. For example, Yunan province, where multi-ethnic groups live, is called a “kingdom of plants” due to its vast forest (Lin 1997:531). The areas where the Tujia people dwell are rich in different natural resources, providing a good condition for economic development (Tian 2002:17). Stevan Harrel describes that the geographic situation of minorities has been seen by the economic planners in China as sources of raw materials and markets for finished industrial goods (2001:51).

Historical conditions rendered ethnic groups in need of socialist modernizations. Before 1949, many different tribes lived in remote poor areas and remained underprivileged. The founding of the People’s Republic of China changed their life styles, eliminating various old systems and ways of doing things and helping them catch up with the mainstream development of the country. However, the socialist system could not bring them to a desired prospect. To eventually change their lives in the following decades, the Chinese government came up with measures helping ethnic groups to enhance the economic development. And to realize industrialization in ethnic regions, rural enterprises would play a crucial role. According to

Reg Kwok, TVEs had been booming since the early 1980s, their total value adding 250,400,000 yuan to 2,074,000,000 yuan from 1990 to 1997. During the same period, the number of employees in TVEs increased from 92,648,000 to 130,500,000.<sup>4</sup> This development had certainly benefited those ethnic areas.

However, problems concerning TVEs throughout China emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. First, there was a shortage of financial input. For example, in 1993, loans from the state owned banks to TVEs covered only 8.5 percent of the total fund needed, and this even decreased to 5 percent in 1994. This financial support obviously could not meet the need of TVEs' development. The plan for state's funding allocation to rural areas was difficult to implement. What's more, SOEs interfered with TVEs, due to the complex relationship between the two types of enterprises. Other aspects such as the depressed international economic situation in those years and increased tax rate in the country also prevented TVEs from making further progress.

Negative aspects of management system of TVEs have resulted in the limitations to growth. The TVEs were actually controlled by the local government, so that the decision making was always disturbed by local cadres, who cared a lot about the government or personal revenue rather than the growth of TVEs themselves. This always caused endless negotiation between TVE managers and local governors. TVE managers had but limited power to operate production, and they had to abide by local cadres' advice. The cost of supervision was therefore higher than expected. The discrepancies between TVEs and local governments led to the enterprise strategic plans being hindered than putting into practice.

Moreover, dispersed locations of TVEs posed severe problems to the environment. According to an investigation in 1992, more than 19,000,000 out of 20,790,000 TVEs were placed in natural villages, and only 1 percent located in county seats. This situation, which was commonly known as *cun cun mao yan* (村村冒烟, smoke rising in every village), had led to difficulties in controlling industrial pollution. TVEs pursued expansion and profit blindly and thus the environment was always sacrificed. In 1985, the three industrial wastes (waste water, waste air and waste residue) took an observable proportion of the nation's whole industrial waste. Take waste air as an example, its proportion was 9.3 percent in 1985, which increased to 12 percent in 1990 (Liu 2001:1). Along the Huaihe River Drainage areas, the pollution caused by TVEs rendered large stretches of farmland uncultivable.

Meanwhile, rural industry in minority areas changed people's attitude toward their traditional social life. Yang Mingchuan describes that, with the development of rural factories, the life styles of villagers underwent diversification, which Yang analyzes in an anthropological way. He lists the attitudes of the villagers towards the factory, their income differences, life discrepancies, and changes in social relations. From all his description, the author comes to an conclusion that "rural industrial development has promoted the emergence of different social classes from a formerly relatively homogeneous peasantry and new communities based on industry and commodity production from communities previously dominated by an agricultural economy" (Yang 1994: 176).

These new communities based on industry are different from traditional agricultural ones, with the traditional perspectives having been changed. Rural people have been concentrated to some extent on monetary income and forgotten other facets of their life. In a certain period, tourism and TVEs became major economic strategies in the minority areas. To gain more money, residents in cultural cites had thought out or created rhetorical programs to win the favor of tourists.

## **TVES IN XIANGXI**

The Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture for Ethnic Tujia and Miao also experienced development in TVE sector. Table 1 shows the burgeoning TVEs, especially since 1987, and the total number of enterprises in Xiangxi expanded from 681 to 21,587, with 20,905 being village enterprises. More than 14,3052 employees out of 2,410,053 rural laborers worked in TVEs in 1995, and the total output of Xiangxi TVEs was 1,173,660,000 yuan.<sup>5</sup>

**TABLE 1**  
**NUMBER OF INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISES IN XIANGXI (1959-2000).<sup>6</sup>**

Year	Industrial Enterprises						
	Total	State-owned Enterprises	Collective-owned Enterprises	Village-owned Enterprises	Individual-owned Enterprises	Light Industry	Heavy Industry
1959	893	182	711			433	460
1960	691	190	501			322	369
1961	525	144	381			245	280
1962	416	107	309			246	170
1963	387	100	287			229	158
1964	321	79	242			271	50
1965	343	103	240			290	53
1966	279	88	191			236	43
1967	454	98	356			365	89
1968	389	100	289			313	76
1969	278	102	176			185	93
1970	342	134	208			380	115
1971	697	142	555			529	168
1972	718	167	551			552	166
1973	692	160	532			532	160
1974	765	149	616			554	211
1975	535	169	366			355	180
1976	645	173	472			502	143
1977	686	175	511			515	171
1978	695	180	515			534	161
1979	702	179	523			508	200
1980	693	177	516	370		460	233
1981	630	184	446	290		485	145
1982	684	180	504	345		501	183
1983	694	178	516	350		508	186
1984	712	193	519	356		525	187
1985	658	213	445	297		495	163
1986	681	217	464	318		505	176
1987	21587	211	471	327	20905	12984	8603
1988	18701	204	509	323	17342	11248	7453
1989	18778	211	507	312	17552	11995	6783
1990	20241	223	483	285	19082	12461	7780
1991	19466	229	503	297	18314	11236	8230
1992	21096	245	482	294	20032	12055	9041
1993	22791	282	494	255	21628	12407	10384
1994	24092	266	506	311	22972	15302	8790
1995	17420	314	512	303	16272	13614	3806
1996	24565	319	502	302	23504	16718	7847
1997	25369	270	496	280	24290	17782	7587
1998	25485	282	532	317	24431	17963	7522
1999	21409	205	630	525	18703	11791	9618

2000	19663	204	760	679	16850	10752	8911
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Xiangxi is the only autonomous prefecture for minority ethnic nationalities in Hunan. The Tujia area mainly refers to the areas around Wuling Mountain (Deng 2002: 3). Thanks to its social characteristics, economic conditions, ecology, environment and location, this prefecture was also the only region in Hunan Province programmed as part of the Great Western Development in the general state plan. The Chinese government established a number of policies that encourage preferential treatment for the economic development of minority groups and, correspondingly, the Hunan provincial government made great efforts to promote the economic development in Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Prefecture. In 2000, as part of the allocation of the State Great Western Development Program (known as xibu da kaifa, 西部大开发), the Hunan government adopted a policy to assist the economy in the Tujia and Miao Prefecture: the input of provincial finance to the Tujia-Miao autonomous prefecture should not be less than 40 percent of the province's total financial allocation to comparatively poor areas in Hunan.<sup>7</sup>

The three major types of TVEs in Xiangxi were mineral excavating, chemical smelting and building construction. Chemical smelting took up the main proportion, which was equivalent to 43 percent of all TVEs. The agricultural product took up only 13 percent. The electrolyzed manganese was the first largest production in Xiangxi, reaching as much as 14.3 tons annually. While exported to Southeast Asia, this product could gain for Xiangxi 5 million US dollars each year. The other major TVE products were electrolyzed zinc, phosphor, cement, industrial silicon, paper, etc.<sup>8</sup> From such a high percentage of major products, problems of pollution incurred could be easily imagined.

Despite of the official announcement of the achievement in Xiangxi's development, dilemmas there became very clear when we made a comparison between the two counties, Baojing and Fenghuang. Baojing had more advanced industry than Fenghuang, while all employees' yearly average income (take 1998 as an example, see Table 2) in Fenghuang was higher than that in Baojing.

Fenghuang, one of the 7 counties in Xiangxi, has developed tourism along the Tuojiang (沱江) River, by showcasing typical suspended attics, beautiful environs, cultural customs, communication programs, ethnic handcrafts, and celebrity effect brought by Xiong Xiling, Shen Congwen and Huang Yongyu, all hailing from this place and becoming famous in the political, literary and artistic circles of 20th century China. All these measures have benefited Fenghuang County and the township people thereof: the citizens provided the tourists with accommodations. All the traditional wooden houses have been well preserved and become family hotels with the development of tourism. Travelers prefer living with local people for experience and security reasons, and it is also cheaper to stay in local people's homes. Typically, for an overnight stay, the price ranges from 10 yuan to 50 yuan per person. The host families also provide food, which is of traditional flavor and sold at low prices. Therefore, the travelers can get an exciting travel experience, and the host families have monetary gain. The residents also sell their local handcrafts to travelers, including items such as batik products made by some local township enterprises. This, together with many components connected with tourism, has made the small county much richer than before. The residents in Fenghuang thus enjoyed a higher income than people in Baojing, though Baojing has achieved more industrial production. The average income of Fenghuang employees was also the highest in the whole region.

Compared with Fenghuang County, Baojing had more advanced industry and rich resources of minerals, the exact reserves of 12 of them having been determined. For example: limestone: 5,000,000,000 tons; navajoite: 17,110,000 tons; charcoal: 5,000,000 tons. Therefore most of the factories in Baojing County were mineral melting enterprises, located within the periphery of the county so that many farmers were hired to work in them. The only two electrolyzed zinc factories in Xiangxi are both located in Baojing, and in the township of Maogou a factory of metal smelt created 50 million yuan of the total annual production value of the county.<sup>9</sup> During the 1990s Baojing had quite effective development: its GDP kept an increasing pace of 6.22%, and its product of agriculture rose by 5.17%. Its industrial product increased on average by 16.06% annually, and in 1997, the gross product of Baojing reached 369,230,000 yuan.<sup>10</sup>

**TABLE 2**  
**XIANGXI ALL EMPLOYEES' YEARLY AVERAGE INCOME (1998)<sup>11</sup>**

Counties	Average annual salary (yuan)		State owned		Collective	
	Absolute count	Value added or decreased (%)	Absolute count	Value added or decreased (%)	Absolute count	Value added or decreased (%)
In total	7060	14.55	7371	15.81	4587	2.8
Jishou	7623	12.89	7829	14.26	4961	-5.93
Luxi	5480	15.42	5847	14.76	1639	-4.21
Fenghuang	<b>8365</b>	9.75	8698	8.97	5885	24.73
Huayuan	<b>7651</b>	23.94	7794	20.24	6980	79.62
Baojing	<b>6715</b>	1.02	6911	8.19	5835	-13.04
Guzhang	6636	23.71	6748	19.5	5750	45.79
Yongshun	7177	35.18	7548	41.96	4003	-23.68
Longshan	6283	10.02	6885	12.74	2861	-23.38

Ethnic identity and cultural preservation in Fenghuang County have benefited residents in there, who lived in their traditional buildings and made money without worrying about problems such as pollution. In Baojing and other counties, things were different: in the 1990s, many accidents related to industry happened, destroying the environment. In one serious case the phosphorus containers in a factory leaked, and tons of phosphorus released into the Youshui River. Tons of the fish in that river were killed and no more fish could be bought from the market in those days. Nowadays, the antipollution procedures there are yet in need of improvement. Before sensible scientific steps were taken to prevent pollution, industry was running with the sacrifice of the environment. In Fenghuang, since people benefited from their tourism business, they have preserved their environment better. So either by attracting tourists or by enjoying their cultural atmosphere, they have kept their ethnic culture and identity.

The pollution in Baojing was not a rare case. In Huayuan, another county in Xiangxi, a branch of the Youshui River was dreadfully polluted by the factories such as paper mills and cement factories along the banks. The branch river was no longer green and clear, but filled with white foams. The shepherds and cow herds there needed to be very careful to prevent their cows and goats from drinking in the river, or else the livestock would get sick from the poisonous water. This branch river was definitely not a right place for people to swim in. Even the fish caught from the mainstream of the Youshui River were not healthy anymore due to this industrial pollution.

Table 2 shows that the employees in Huayuan had the second highest average yearly income in 1998, mainly because of this county's TVEs; for example, Huanyuan had the biggest electrolyzed manganese factory in Xiangxi, which produced about 8 tons<sup>12</sup> of electrolyzed manganese.

TVEs in Xiangxi had gained inadequate achievement in employing surplus labors in this region. Many rural-urban migrants went to big cities from Xiangxi to seek jobs. In 2002, about 301,000 young peasants from the Xiangxi Ethnic Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture went on this road, accounting for about 12 percent of the population of the region.<sup>13</sup> These migrants worked in the factories of other regions far away from their homes. Most of them could gain a little bit more than those who work in TVEs in Xiangxi. The migrants had to travel and live apart from their families, and thus the cost of living was higher. At the end of each year, many of them found out they actually had not earned more than the workers in Xiangxi.

The Chinese government always says to strengthen the development of *minzu jingji* (民族经济), which means economy with ethnic characteristics. However, many industries such as TVEs in Xiangxi had insufficient ethnic characteristics. The situation was that, while more and more funding had been allocated to Xiangxi from the state or provincial government, more and more Xiangxi ethnic minority people migrated to big cities to seek jobs. The industries in those places turned out to be a depredation of the natural and cultural environment by some investors, many of whom were outsiders.

## LESSONS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Lack of knowledge was one of the reasons for the problems that TVEs had caused in minority areas such as Xiangxi. When there were some conflicts between TVEs and environment, the former were always supported by the local government because they were able to provide the local government with revenue in the form of administrative management fee. It was the main reason for the nonstop pollution. The village cadres always lacked of knowledge about how to protect the environment and thus gain benefit in the long run. These cadres obviously needed education so that they could keep a balance between TVEs and environmental protection. Rural labors could be trained to meet the TVEs' working requirements so that they would be able to find jobs even at their hometowns, instead of going far away for their livelihood

Continuous development in minority areas should be on the basis of good environment, saving natural resources and using evolution of technology. In minority areas, ethnic culture and arts have potential values. Fenghuang County is a right example in Xiangxi, as its development has been quite unique and could be considered as a model. But to excavate minerals blindly and develop chemical industry without a parallel pollution controlling system causes severe pollution. Baojing and Huayuan are adverse example, suffering from this short-term gain actions.

Further reform in TVEs then was necessary. The TVE regulations needed to be more powerful. Also, in the years when globalization impacted the world, too much government control of TVEs would limit the speed of the latter's development. The enterprise managers needed more power in management such as production operation, labor employment and dismissal, product design, etc. The TVEs also need combine with each other according to their development strategies; they should sell their stocks to individuals and bring in investors to operate the enterprises. The reform of TVEs could lead to the simplified operation system and local people could take some action directly against TVE owners whenever pollution occurs. As Chen Hongyi (2000: 245) states, the re-organization of large and very profitable TVEs into sharing-cooperative enterprises and the direct control of community government over such enterprises are typical measures to be taken when market development reaches a certain level.

## CONCLUSION

TVEs in minority areas such as Xiangxi, as well as throughout China, had benefited from the state policies, therefore they grew rapidly. They absorbed surplus rural labors and created comparatively high income to local residents and local government. TVEs used to play a crucial role in China's economic development; hence they had been widely called Way of Urbanization with Chinese Characteristics.

However, take Xiangxi an example, the TVEs there were always in lack of *ethnic characteristics*, and there was little difference between *industries in ethnic regions* and the enterprises in other regions. The only difference might be in the allocation of funding from the state or a provincial government, which was more preferential than the regions with Han people being the majority. Actually, these allocations had been widely used to pursue profit by the local government. Controversially, the more allocation made by the state to Xiangxi, the more laborers migrating to urban areas in hope of seeking jobs. The TVEs in Xiangxi were not absorbing employment efficiently. Limited number of investors became extremely rich, and their investment had brought them tremendous profit, but destroyed the environment in Xiangxi dreadfully, resulting in a typical case of "killing the goose that lays the golden eggs".

From a historical review on the rural enterprises, one can see that further reform of TVEs becomes very urgent. Local government could consider giving TVEs more self-operation rights and more scientific supervision. Regulation and education could be effective for solving problems and developing TVEs. Value of ethnic culture and ethnic identity could also be explored to enhance the industrial characteristics in ethnic regions, which will indubitably contribute to the national campaign of rural revitalization.

## ENDNOTES

1. By 1997, the total area of ethnic autonomous regions reached 6,162,900 square kilometers, which is 64.2%.
2. Translated from Zhou Enlai's Several issues on ethnic policy (关于我国民族政策的几个问题), Page 23. People's Press, 1980.
3. By 1997, the total ethnic autonomous regions reached 6,162,900 square kilometers, which is 64.2% of China's total territory. Cited from Xinhua Wang (新华网): [http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-01/18/content\\_695284.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-01/18/content_695284.htm).
4. R.Y.Kwok, Lecture in ASAN 638, April 3, 2006. University of Hawaii.
5. Cited from Xiangxi Government Website: <http://www.xxz.gov.cn/goxx/showdiary.php?id=92>
6. [http://222.240.156.37/xxtjww/winopen\\_2.jsp?m\\_xlh=17438&myse1=&myse2=](http://222.240.156.37/xxtjww/winopen_2.jsp?m_xlh=17438&myse1=&myse2=)
7. Based on the interview with the governors of Xiangxi, June 2005.
8. Cited from Xiangxi Government Website: <http://www.xxz.gov.cn/goxx/showdiary.php?id=92>
9. Cited from Xiangxi Government Website: <http://www.xxz.gov.cn/goxx/showdiary.php?id=92>
10. Xiangxi Statistical Website. [www.hntj.gov.cn/sxfx/xxfx/200311060085.htm](http://www.hntj.gov.cn/sxfx/xxfx/200311060085.htm)
11. Xiangxi Statistical Website. [http://222.240.156.37/xxtjww/winopen\\_2.jsp?m\\_xlh=16355&myse](http://222.240.156.37/xxtjww/winopen_2.jsp?m_xlh=16355&myse)
12. Cited from Xiangxi Government Website: <http://www.xxz.gov.cn/goxx/showdiary.php?id=92>
13. Cited from Statistics Net of Hunan province. <http://www.hntj.gov.cn/sxfx/xxfx/200311060081.htm>

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