Rural Social Governance in the UK: History and Patterns

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Abstract: The problems that arise in the development process of the UK are also quite similar. Studying the history, models, and modern technologies of rural governance in the UK can help solve many problems encountered in the process of rural governance. The UK's rural governance has reference significance. This section will interpret it from the UK's rural background and rural development policies, the UK's green rural governance model, and digital governance strategy.

1. The Policy Background of Rural Development in the UK

1.1 Policies for the development of rural agriculture

The process of Britain from modern to modern times was a transition from a feudal society dominated by traditional agriculture to an industrial capitalist society, and the Industrial Revolution accelerated the transformation of British agriculture.

The early rural development policies in Britain can be traced back to the intersection of the 15th and 16th centuries. The enclosure movement triggered subsequent land ownership changes. With the changes in rural development policies and the agricultural technology revolution caused by industrialization, the British Agricultural Revolution achieved historic success between 1750 and 1870. From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, the Industrial Revolution advanced, and industrial production resources far exceeded agriculture. This led to a one-sided industrial situation in British society, with stagnant agricultural development, a trade deficit in agricultural products, and serious damage to rural ecological environment.

In the context of World War II, the British government issued the Scott Report in 1942, which outlined long-term development plans for agriculture to address material shortages and trade deficits caused by World War II. After the end of World War II, Britain's first Agricultural Development Act, the Agriculture Act, was introduced to ensure the stability of the agricultural market, set reasonable prices, and enhance the status of agriculture, Increasing the labor force engaged in agricultural production and processing, promoting the post-war recovery of British agriculture. During this period, the core of British agricultural development policy was government led, intervention in the market, protection of farmers' interests, and ensuring the development of rural agriculture.

In the 1950s, Britain made a second round of adjustments to its agricultural development policy. In 1957, the British government issued a new "Agriculture Act", which made adjustments to the problem of excessive government intervention in the agricultural market, ensured agricultural product prices, provided budget for rural land consolidation and development, and repaired and improved farm buildings. In the 1967 revised Agriculture Act, the government provided a certain amount of grants to farms to improve land productivity, while also providing loans for land acquisition. A new regional institution, the Rural Development Bureau, was established to balance the demand for other aspects of agriculture and ensure the smooth merger and boundary adjustment of farms. In the 1970s, Britain's agricultural development policy was influenced by the European Community, and in this era, the British government provided more protection and rights to tenant farmers.

1.2 Rural land policy

The land policy in the UK has undergone a continuous process of evolution. The author believes that land policy can be divided into three stages.

The first stage is before the promulgation of the Scott Proclamation in 1942, which is the land development period. The British government has a relatively extensive approach to land management, an imperfect management system, and unclear regulations on land use rights.

The second stage was from the promulgation of the Scott Proclamation in 1942 to 1980, which was the period of

land protection. Strict policy restrictions were imposed on development, and land compensation mechanisms were established to prevent the disorderly development of rural areas and the spread of urban development, protecting the cultural environment of rural areas.

The third stage is from 1980 to the present, which is the continuous management period of land. The main characteristic of land policy during this stage is to consider social, economic, and environmental development when planning land, and increase the sustainable development and protection of land.

1.3 Policies for rural ecological development

The urban development in the UK comes at the cost of rural erosion and has gone through urban-rural industrialization. The UK government has also formulated green development policies for the protection of natural and cultural resources in rural areas. On the one hand, it is the development and protection of forest resources, and on the other hand, it is the development and protection of water resources.

The earliest forestry resource policy in the UK was the Forest Act 1919, which introduced the restoration of timber reserves as soon as possible and encouraged farmers to plant trees, as 400000 acres of forest resources were destroyed by German blockades during World War I. In 1945, a new version of the Forest Act was enacted to address public forest land issues. After World War II, Britain relaxed the field of timber production and gradually allowed private individuals to enter the forestry production system. The Forest Act revised in 1947 added projects that allowed private land for forestry development. The introduction of this bill greatly promoted the privatization of rural forest logging. The main purpose of the Forest Act adjusted in 1951 was to ensure and maintain the country's timber reserve stock, and a series of reasonable scientific logging systems were established, restricting unauthorized private logging has greatly protected forest timber resources. After the 1960s, the concept of forest resources underwent a certain degree of change. The Forest Act, revised in 1967, relaxed the restrictions on forestry harvesting projects, established the Home Growth Timebr Advisory Committee, promoted the improvement of forestry resource returns, and strengthened the privatization of forestry resource development.

The policy of utilizing and protecting rural water resources in the UK can be traced back to the 19th century, when local governments did not take obvious measures to manage and protect river environments. After the 20th century, the UK gradually attached importance to the protection and development of rural water resources. In 1944, the Rural Water Supplies and Sewerage Act was born, Subsequently, the British government raised the issue of water supply for the impoverished population in rural areas and the issue of sewage treatment in rural communities, providing financial subsidies for rural water supply and

sewage treatment. In 1948, the River Environmental Protection Law was introduced, strengthening policy efforts in rural river pollution control. After the 1960s, the demand for water resources in the UK increased day by day, and the purification and protection of rural water resources was urgent. In 1963, the Water Resources Management Authority was established in the UK, and the Water Resources Act was promulgated. The formulation of this bill led to the regionalization and multi departmental utilization of water resources protection. Since the 1970s, the UK has set higher requirements for the entertainment function in rural water resource utilization, and has started to develop towards entertainment, leisure, and landscape utilization. The Water Resources Management Bureau maintains the natural beauty of public places in their respective jurisdictions.

2. The Green Governance Model of Rural Areas in the UK

In the context of rural development in the UK, the rural governance model is a combination of "top-level design" and "multi-level co governance". The 'top-level design' is a top-down design blueprint that ensures that the UK central government plays the role of top-level design, providing the necessary planning framework and institutional guarantees for rural revitalization, and promoting rural governance. The top-down governance also fully respects the development conditions of different regions, ensuring that each region has a certain degree of autonomy in planning, governance, and other aspects, forming a multi-level management system promoted by the central government, local collaborative management, social organizations, and industry associations in the UK. In addition, with a focus on protecting the environment and promoting harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, a green governance model for rural areas in the UK has been formed. The following is a diagram of the green governance model for rural areas in the UK.
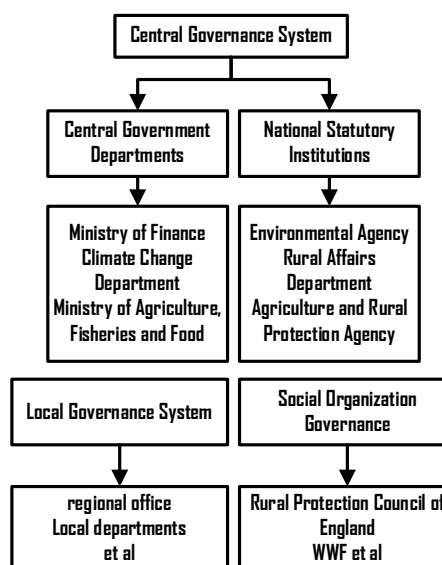
Figure 1. Top-down governance pattern in the UK

At the top-level design level, the central governance system in the UK is divided into central government departments and national statutory bodies. Central departments such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Ministry of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Ministry of Climate Change, and the Ministry of Finance are responsible for the formulation and implementation of agricultural policies, as well as the formulation and implementation of rural governance plans. National statutory agencies such as the Environment Agency, Rural Affairs Agency, Rural Practice Committee, and Agriculture and Rural Protection Agency focus on policy formulation in areas such as urban-rural disparities, rural landscapes, environmental protection, and rural economy.

At the level of local collaboration, the local governance system (regional offices and local departments) in the UK flexibly formulates planning rules that are in line with the specific cultural and geographical environment of the local rural areas. After the UK government introduced the 2011 Localism Act, many local administrative organizations have gained greater autonomy in rural construction and governance. Local administrative departments have the right to organize steps such as rural research, prospect assessment, and community consultation, and have successively completed the preparation of local rural planning. The autonomy of rural planning fully respects the diversity of rural development and also mobilizes the enthusiasm of the UK rural public to participate. The focus of this plan is on economic development, ecological environment, tourism industry, and regional connectivity.

At the social organization level, organizations represented by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the Rural Conservation Council of England (CPRE), and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) influence public opinion, policies, construction, and other aspects of rural areas in the UK through public participation and policy lobbying, promoting sustainable development in rural areas. CPRE has established a multi-level structure including national offices, regional organizations, branch agencies, and local organizations to guide public participation in policy legislation and public construction, and participate in top-down rural development planning across the UK. CPRE also uses paper media, publications, videos, and speeches to promote rural environmental awareness, and utilizes open new data and visual maps to deepen public understanding of environmental issues.

Overall, the top-level design led by the UK central government, coupled with local collaborative governance and supportive participation from social organizations, has made the UK's rural governance model more mature, ensuring the implementation of rural policies from macro to micro levels. From the perspective of policy organization, rural development in the UK is committed to achieving a balance between policy unity and regional diversity, fully mobilizing the vitality of rural development.

3. The Digital Strategy of Rural Governance in the UK

Digital governance in rural areas is an important aspect of modern rural governance. In recent years, with the development and promotion of computer technologies such as big data, the Internet of Things, the Internet, and cloud computing, the British government has actively promoted the digital transformation of rural governance. Overall, through data collection, processing, analysis, and prediction, various information resources are integrated and utilized, effectively promoting the participation of multiple entities in rural governance. And achieve scientific decision-making, refined management, and democratic governance, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of rural governance. Digital governance has become an important area of digital development in the UK. Since the UK government first proposed the government's digital strategy in 2012, with the goal of "building a 'data-driven' government and accelerating the process of government 'digital' services", the UK government has successively introduced multiple national digital strategic plans. These strategic plans have promoted the development of rural governance in the UK from multiple perspectives such as digital government, digital countryside, and digital agriculture, and have formed a digital rural governance strategy of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature based on the UK's green governance model.

In 2013, the UK's "Strategic Plan for the Development of Data Capability" proposed using big data technology as an important means to enhance government governance capabilities, integrating distributed systems into the UK's government system to enhance governance efficiency. In the same year, the UK government also proposed the UK's "Agricultural Technology Strategy", which applies modern information technology, including database technology, network technology, computer model base, knowledge base system Multimedia technology and embedded software development technology. These technologies have greatly improved the production process and methods of agricultural products, continuously improved the level of modern agricultural management, and facilitated the participation of multiple parties in agricultural management and services. Between 2014 and 2015, the British government implemented another rural development project in the UK, which built on the previous information technology strategy and provided financial support for digitization in rural economy, agricultural and forestry development, natural environment protection, climate change, and rural community construction. From 2017 to 2020, the British government focused on the digital transformation strategy, established standards and industry norms for digital technology, improved data mining

technology, paid attention to the privacy protection of agricultural information, and improved the promotion level of digital technology. In addition, at the level of digital infrastructure construction, it not only targeted rural residents but also provided all citizens with the necessary digital technology, built "urban-rural integrated governance", and adopted a pattern of urban-rural integration. In 2019, the "Rural Gigabit All Fiber Broadband Connection Plan" was also implemented to build a central network model centered around primary schools and connecting rural areas.

At the level of rural governance, the UK relies on advanced e-government systems to provide high-quality services such as fast and secure identity recognition, government announcements, and online payments for rural residents, thereby improving the efficiency of government services.

At the level of rural education, the implementation of the "Rural Gigabit All Fiber Broadband Connection Plan" has increased the online education rate of rural students, enabling rural students in remote areas to enjoy the dividends of rural distance education systematization.

At the level of rural and rural healthcare, the UK government promoted the implementation of the "Digital Health, Mobile Telemedicine Services" plan in 2019, increasing the popularity of remote healthcare, and actively promoting the establishment of shared networks between hospitals based on the needs of rural residents, to carry out extended remote healthcare services. At the level of rural environment, the British government has established the Urban Rural Autonomous Network (AURN), which organizes residents to wear smart wearable devices, collaborates with environmental protection organizations in the UK to collect and analyze environmental data, and transmits relevant information to the public through various electronic devices, media channels, and online platforms, providing a data foundation for the optimization and governance of environmental air quality.

At present, environmental governance in the UK is integrated with natural and cultural environmental governance, forming a digital rural governance strategy of "people-oriented, highly inclusive, and multi-party participation".

4. Summary of Governance Experience

The rural development policy in the UK mainly focuses on agriculture, land, forestry, and information technology reform. Its effective green governance model is worth learning from. The multi-level system of top-level design, local collaboration, organizational co governance, and association promotion jointly participates in rural governance in the UK, from national design to multi-level planning, respecting the diverse choices of rural

development, reflecting the transformation of the UK's rural development concept to sustainable development.

And on the basis of green mode, digital construction has been carried out, constructing a digital rural governance strategy of "people-oriented, highly inclusive, and multi-party participation". Although the rural environment and living conditions in the UK are constantly improving, the population is experiencing a phenomenon of reverse urbanization, and some urban populations are moving into rural areas, posing significant challenges to rural areas that still need continuous improvement and fragile rural natural and cultural systems.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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