

The Practice of Poverty Relief in Early Modern England: Central and Local Areas

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ABSTRACT

The Tudor and Stuart dynasties coincided with an important stage in the development of modern England, during which the social structure changed dramatically, and the governance of the country was plagued by the problems of poverty and vagrancy, and the importance of poverty alleviation to the stability of the society is self-evident. From the central government, the Privy Council and the Parliament to the local squires, magistrates, parish officials and merchants, the practice of poverty alleviation was accomplished by the combined efforts of all social strata: the central government gave decrees and supervised and guided, while the specific practice was carried out by the local government on their own, and the practice of poverty alleviation varied greatly from one region to another, which demonstrated the autonomy of the localities. At the same time, the practice of poverty alleviation, as a successful consensus cooperation between the central government and the local government in early modern Britain, is an important revelation of the benign relationship between the central government and the local government, and the practice of poverty alleviation is a reference for the exploration of the solution to the problem of poverty.

KEYWORDS

Early Modern; England; Central and Local; Poverty Alleviation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 19th century, international scholars have systematically studied poverty alleviation as an important transition point in modern British social history. E.M. Leonard's *A History of Poverty Alleviation in Early England* focuses on the enactment of poverty alleviation decrees by the English government and local measures to cope with poverty since 1514-1644. local responses to poverty, has achieved a high level of scholarship; The Webbs' *A History of English Poor Law, English Poor Law Policy, and Prisons under the Local Governance of the Government of England* collects numerous poor relief decrees and reports, with detailed information and a careful interpretation of the decrees.

Domestic scholars' related research started late, Xiaolu Chen 's *The Origin and Development of the British Welfare System*[1] gives a brief review of the poverty relief acts before the welfare system; since the 21st century, there has been an increase in the number of works on poverty relief, and scholars have focused on the poverty relief act system of the United Kingdom since the modern times. The main works include Ding Jianding's *A History of the British Poor Relief Act System*[2] , which systematically introduces the evolution and development of the poor relief act policy in Britain from the late medieval period to the early twentieth century; Zhang Jiasheng's *Poverty Problems in Sixteenth-Century Britain and Civilian Relief of Poverty*[3] , which describes in detail the transformation of the charismatic relief of poverty in the medieval period to the secular relief of poverty in the early modern period; and Yin Hong's *Study on the Problem of the Exiles in Britain* in

the Early Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries[4] , which provides a deep research on the problem of the exiles. Yin Hong's Study of the Displaced in Britain in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries has conducted in-depth research on the displaced persons, and the results of related papers are also very fruitful. The practice of poverty alleviation is a test of national governance ability, and the practice of poverty alleviation in early modern England was the first good cooperation between the central government and the local government in solving social problems together, which is of high reference value and important political significance. In recent years, scholars such as Yin Hong, Deng Yunqing, and Chu Qingdong have begun to pay attention to the specific measures of poverty alleviation in Britain, but they have not yet examined the structural relationship of poverty alleviation in Britain as a whole. This paper focuses on the decrees of poverty alleviation, the specific measures of the local municipalities, and the cooperation of multiple classes in accomplishing poverty alleviation in order to examine the structural relationship of the central and local power in the practice of poverty alleviation in the United Kingdom in the early modern period.

2. THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN EARLY MODERN BRITAIN

The establishment of the Tudor dynasty in 1485 put an end to the previously fragmented feudal era in England, and the wars came to an end, allowing society to recuperate and stabilize for the time being. The recovery and growth of the population contributed to the development of the Tudor economy, but the most serious problem since the reign of Henry VII was the growing gap between the rich and the poor and the intensification of social division. "For more than a century (1520-1640), it was vagrancy that received the closest governmental attention. There can be no doubt that vagrancy was widespread, that it was organized, and that it placed burdens and dangers on rural and village communities that they could not cope with"[5] Vagabonds and beggars had always been a serious social problem. in the 16th century almost all the countries of Western Europe were plagued by the problem of beggars in varying degrees. In the reign of Henry VII the vagrant problem has become a non-negligible problem, and intensified. 1566 a Kent squire Thomas Harman (Thomas Harman) in his work described himself to see "23 different types of vagabonds existed"[6] , and Harrison (Harrison) detailed the existence of the vagabonds since the beginning of the 16th century, and the problem has been a serious social problem. Harrison details how in less than thirty years since 1512, the ranks of the vagabonds have grown "I know not how they began to grow, but they are now more than ten thousand." [7]Such a large army of vagabonds was undoubtedly a serious threat to public order, and Harman records that some of them had been known to steal food and fowl at night, to hook the clothes off sleeping people, and even, in some isolated areas, to break into the houses of tenants and force the owners to hand over their money, among other vicious incidents. During the 15th century, the Wars of the Roses were the last to oppose the growth of royal power; the combination of the Wars of the Roses and the policies of Henry VII's policy destroyed the power of the English nobility. The destruction of the feudal system resulted in the lords no longer needing many followers to fight for them, and with that came the pursuit of wealth, as Scott writes in his work, "When I was young, every Highland gentleman placed a great deal of importance on the number of people he could support on his estate, and the next question was the number of black oxen he had stocked, and now the time had come to respect the number of sheep". The time has come to respect the number of sheep." This change of conception was sufficient to produce a great impact on the market for labor; the nobles were no longer keen on recruiting followers, and the unemployed were forced to look for other means of earning a living to support themselves, and this unemployed and impoverished portion of the population turned into strong, wandering beggars, of whom those who had been trained in arms were even more of an insidious danger to the security of the community; and as the Some of the society has been good for nothing, idle people to join, it formed the early 16th century groups of large-scale vagabonds.

Since Henry VIII's accession to the throne, divorce and the need for a male heir prompted him to push for the English Reformation, which was supported by the community. In the eyes of the English people at the time, the clergy were corrupt and privileged, and occupied a great deal of society's wealth, while Cardinal Thomas Wolsey's arrogance and nepotism stirred up anti-papalism in English secular society. 1534 saw the promulgation of the Act of Supremacy, the Act of Succession, which showed that the king had since become the head of the state religion in England. Henry VIII decreed the dissolution of the small monasteries with an annual income of less than £200, and the religious conflict stimulated to some extent the popular movement in the north; in 1536, the failure of the "Parade of Grace" riots, which started in Lincolnshire and spread rapidly to Yorkshire, accelerated the downfall of the large monasteries. Much of the wealth from the Dissolution of the Monasteries came into the hands of King Henry VIII, but it was used mainly to pay for foreign wars, especially Henry VIII's war against France in 1543-1546, which cost over £2 million. The king gave a small portion of his estates to his favorites, but this was not enough. But this is not enough, Henry VIII and reduce the color of the currency (between 1543 and 1551 the silver content of the coins was reduced by more than two thirds), in exchange for the public higher denomination of the coins, while charging a high processing fee, although this method to help Henry VIII raised a lot of money in a short period of time, but caused serious inflation, resulting in severe depreciation of the coins, and indirectly led to the 16th century, a serious problem of the mid-16th century, the price of goods doubled. Commodity prices doubled in the middle of the 16th century, with the price of grain rising fivefold, far exceeding the rise in wages, which greatly harmed Britain's economic development and people's lives.

The debasement of the English mint by Henry VIII in 1527, 1543, 1545 and 1546, and by Edward VI in 1551, further increased the poverty of the English poor. And the influx of silver from the New World led to a general rise in prices. Food, clothing and rents rose faster than wages, so the poor had less access to the necessities of life, adding to their already difficult lives. However, unlike other European countries, Britain was the world's largest wool exporter at the time, and its maritime climate and the unique advantages of grass growth made raising sheep more profitable than farming the land, after the first phase of the Enclosure culminated in 1510, a large number of farmers went bankrupt, and the land was taken by the aristocrats and the Lords by peaceful means or by force to change farms into pastures, and the land occupied by wealthy farmers became more and more, while employment opportunities became less and less. The rich peasants occupied more and more land, while employment opportunities became fewer and fewer; the displaced peasants were forced to come to the towns to make a living, and the towns were unable to absorb them for a while, and they were reduced to vagabonds. This undoubtedly created serious problems for the administration of the municipalities of the towns, causing the local municipalities to realize the importance of relieving the poor before the national Government did.

In medieval poor relief, the Church played an important role that cannot be ignored. Previously, parishes and monasteries were the mainstay of poor relief - parishes cared for the local poor and infirm, the Church's charities were always on hand to help families in dire need, abbeys were responsible for the relief of the underprivileged on monastic estates and for providing food and lodging for travelers[8] , and "hospitals" dependent on the abbey The monasteries were responsible for the relief of the disadvantaged on the monastic estates and for the accommodation of travelers[9] , and the "hospitals" attached to the monasteries also served as lepers' homes, homes for the poor, inns on pilgrimages, and clinics to treat the sick and poor . After the Reformation, a large number of monasteries were dissolved, and hospitals also fell into financial difficulties due to insufficient funds and mismanagement, so many church hospitals were also dissolved, and for a time, the society lost the institutions to undertake public relief, which led to many social problems and public grievances. At the beginning of the 16th century, there were 20,000 to 30,000 unemployed people out of a population of less than 3 million in England, some of whom became vagabonds or even criminals, which had a serious impact on social security.

With the Reformation and the spread of Protestant doctrines of faith, there was a greater belief in hard work for wealth and a harsh condemnation of laziness. The government decree of 1531 provided for vagrants to be whipped and sent back to their place of origin, and fines were imposed on any poor person begging without a license, as well as on those who recklessly gave them alms. Until 1576 the Tudor government made no distinction between professional beggars and the unemployed who were willing to work, and the Poor Law of 1536 was used mainly to distinguish between strong beggars capable of working and the old, infirm and sickly poor, and ordered parishes to employ beggars capable of working and to care for the infirm, while imposing strict penalties for begging[10].

The social tensions after the accession of Elizabeth I were accentuated, firstly by the further growth of the population: by the late 16th century England already had a population of nearly four million, and secondly by the serious inflationary problems caused by the reign of her father, Henry VIII, which had already reached its peak in 1560. At the same time, the deteriorating relationship between Spain and England was not conducive to the export of tweed produced in the northern regions of England, as the Spanish-controlled Netherlands was an important area for the export of English tweed, and occasional friction between the two countries and blockades by the Spanish governors in the Netherlands had an extremely negative impact on the export of English tweed, and the wool industry, the mainstay of the northern regions, was dealt a major blow in the late 16th century, which The wool industry, the mainstay of the northern region, suffered a major blow in the late 16th century, leading to serious discontent with the Tudor government in the north, and the outbreak of the "Northern Rebellion" in 1569 exacerbated the problem of exiles. 16th century, the end of the cereal and other grain harvests failed, food production shortages, the British price of goods, and widespread unemployment among workers in the country. The instability of employment income and unemployment seriously caused an imbalance between income and expenditure. In this social context, the practice of forming a public relief system for the poor was particularly important.

3. DIFFERENTIAL POVERTY ALLEVIATION PRACTICES UNDER LOCAL OWNERSHIP

Even before the central government enacted the national poverty alleviation ordinance, the local government had already realized that leaving the poor and vagrants unchecked would lead to endless dangers, so the local municipal authorities carried out poverty alleviation practices according to the specific conditions of different towns and cities: London and Norwich, as the first and the second largest cities in England at that time, were larger in size and more populous, and therefore took on more responsibility for alleviating the poor and demonstrating their poverty alleviation; in comparison with the towns and cities in the east and the south, the traditional agricultural towns in the north and the west faced more difficulties, including insufficient funds, difficult management, and the influence of vagrants. Compared with the towns in the east and south, the towns in the north and west, which were traditionally agricultural areas, faced more difficulties, including insufficient funds, difficult management, and the influence of displaced people, etc. The situation of poverty alleviation in the cities contrasted sharply between the south-east and the north-west, and the situation of poverty alleviation in the cities and the countryside was different, in contrast.

"Attempts to relieve the poor began in London", as the capital of England and the country's largest city, London began the practice of relief of the poor at an early age, as early as the end of the 14th century the mayor of London tried to bring in a continuous supply of cereals such as grain in the years of famine. Social changes since the 16th century exacerbated the problem of poverty, and London initially only took partial restrictions in response to poor relief, but municipalities did not have sufficient funds to complete the relief, and restrictions on begging were not thorough enough, a situation that became more pressing after the dissolution of the monasteries[11]. The main measures to help the poor in London were hospitals, bridewells and the compulsory collection of a poverty tax from the public.

Firstly, the hospitals. After the Reformation, a large number of church hospitals went bankrupt with the dissolution of the monasteries (or fell into trouble due to lack of funds), and the society lost its charitable relief house and became disordered, which made the king and the citizens realize the importance of the hospitals deeply, and in 1551-1552, under the good offices of the mayor, the three royal hospitals rebuilt by King Edward, namely St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Christ's Hospital, and St Thomas's Hospital, were established. St Bartholomew's Hospital, Christ's Hospital, and St Thomas's Hospital were established. The citizens of London elected representatives to negotiate with the king and eventually came to an agreement: the citizens paid £2,461 2 shillings and 6 pence (about £160 a year) and the king gave an endowment of an equal amount, both to be used for the relief of the poor. 1588 saw attempts to save the other hospitals, as documented in John Stow's *A Survey of London*, which was published in the 16th century. *Survey of London* by John Stow recorded the surviving hospitals at the end of the 16th century[12] He listed 15 hospitals and 4 leper asylums, 8 of which were in a state of disrepair and dilapidation. Secondly, there was the beidewell system, also known as the "house of correction", which was an institution with the dual function of employment training and discipline punishment.[] London was the first to experiment with bridewell's poverty alleviation, and this was closely related to the active facilitation of the Bishop of London, Nicholas Ridley. Ridley first wrote to fellow Protestant William Cecil, Chief Secretary of State, extolling the virtues of bridewell and asking for his support, and then enlisted the support of the King, the Mayor of London and the citizens. Together with the citizens, Ridley wrote a petition to the Privy Council, which stated that among the city's poor, the citizens saw three types, "poor children without support," "sick and incapacitated," and "strong vagabonds," and hospitals are now making some provision for the first two categories. With regard to the third class, the strong vagabonds or idlers, they considered that "most beggars, having been reduced to misery by war, sickness, or other unfortunate causes, have entirely lost their credit, and though they show themselves willing to labor, they are suspected and feared by all, and few, if any, dare or are willing to accept them for work, and we see no means of to change this state of things, but we do so by providing some general work, where the poor who are willing to work may be exercised; and where those who are hardy and strong wanderers may work for the benefit of the country ." The King and Privy Council were satisfied with the plan of the municipal authorities, and a compact was subsequently drawn up between the King and the citizens, which was afterwards confirmed by a patent of royal letters. The bridewell experiment in London was more successful, and as a model for experiments in helping the poor, the bridewell system was successively introduced into the boroughs of Oxford, Salisbury, Norwich, Gloucester, Ipswich and others [14].

Finally, there was the compulsory imposition of a tax on the poor. Previously, the churches of the London parishes had taken up collections every Sunday, but the amount collected was not enough to support even a single hospital for the poor, and in 1547, the Common Council of London decided to stop the Sunday collections and replace them with "a further payment of one per cent to be made by the citizens and inhabitants of the city to the paupers." [15] This may have been the first time the city imposed a mandatory tax for the relief of the poor; the policy was ordered by the Common Council of London more than twenty years before the national mandatory tax for the poor was authorized by Parliament.

In contrast to these success stories, poverty in some of the towns located in the north and in traditional agricultural areas was not as good: Bedfordshire, a traditional agricultural area, had been in steady decline since the Black Death, and poverty was a serious problem. In 1607 there were serious disturbances in Northamptonshire and elsewhere as a result of enclosure. Lancashire, with its vast area and many parishes, had varying results in relief of poverty, and at each quarterly meeting the justices of the peace always received a large number of indigent petitions for relief. An early attempt was made to relieve poverty in Yorkshire, but again the influence of the religious power there was of little avail.

Poverty alleviation practices vary from city to city depending on their geographical location and the state of the city's economy, and there are serious differences in poverty alleviation between cities and villages. In continental Europe, charities and formal poverty relief tended to be concentrated in towns and cities. This meant that when harvests were poor, the poor were forced to flee to urban centers for poor relief, and when they did so, they crowded into the suburbs where sanitary conditions were poor. This dislocation, and especially the migration of these people to crowded areas, greatly contributed to the spread of disease and thus to the mortality rate of the famine. In England, poor relief was available at home, even in rural parishes. This meant that the population was less likely to need to migrate in order to seek relief, and therefore somehow reduced the risk of disease transmission. This view made logical sense and was even sometimes obvious to people of the time. For example, the town of Lamport in Somerset County clearly saw how the failure of poor relief could lead to the spread of disease. During the outbreak of the plague in 1641, they complained to the hospital that taxes for the relief of the poor were not being paid, "and therefore the poor inhabitants of the town might make a migration to the urban areas, which might exacerbate further infections"[16].

4. POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN THE CENTRAL AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN THE PRACTICE OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION

From the Tudors to the Stuarts, the practice of charity was refined and systematized. It can be summarized as central legislative guidance, local municipal practice, magistrates' association, and individual charity supplementation. The process was characterized by a high degree of autonomy and pluralistic participation.

Although the importance of poor relief was recognized at the local level before the central government, it was the national decrees issued by the central government that really laid down the policies that guided the practice of poor relief. In 1563, Elizabeth I decreed the establishment of parish wardens, which strengthened the organization and management of poverty relief; in 1572, the government imposed a mandatory poverty tax, making parishes responsible for their poor, and the mandatory poverty tax finally became a nationwide law; and in 1601, the queen enacted the "Poor Law," the famous "Elizabethan Poor Law," mainly based on the 1536 Act of the Queen. In 1601, the Queen enacted the Poor Law, known as the "Elizabethan Poor Law", which was mainly based on the Poor Law of 1536 (Henry VIII) and the Vagabonds Act of 1572. The Elizabethan Poor Laws were based on the Poor Laws of 1536 (Henry VIII) and the Parochial Proportion Acts of 1572, and systematized the existing practices of the Poor Laws. Elizabeth relief of poverty law line inherited the central idea of the previous enactment of the relief of poverty act, such as the parish as the main relief unit, punishment for begging and other lazy and depressed behavior, and at the same time to encourage all sectors of the community to carry out charitable relief, etc.; Relief of poverty law also established an apprenticeship program for poor children, the establishment of the workhouses to save the poor (workhouses), the able-bodied but do not work the poor to be harshly punished. [17]At the same time, the government set up the Office of the Overseer of the Poor (responsible for collecting taxes on the poor and providing work for those who are healthy and poor), and also set up special overseers of the poor.

During the Stuart period, when Charles I sought to expand the power of the king, the Privy Council also increased its local supervision, which contributed to the development of the practice of helping the poor: the Privy Council attempted to buy cheap grain in years of poor harvests, to provide work for the unemployed, and to administer wages in the interests of the workers. Yet as late as 1631 there was still the problem of judges neglecting to enforce the law on behalf of the poor. In the same year, Charles I issued the Books of Orders, which brought many important powers, such as taxation and judging, into the hands of the king, and ordered that special sessions be held and that reports be submitted to the Privy Council. Nearly 1,000 reports from all parts of the kingdom reflected a vast improvement in the enforcement of the Poor Laws throughout the country: Elizabethan Poor Laws

were enforced, jobs were provided for the unemployed, and pensions for the disabled. Only in England did the system of publicly organized relief survive, and this was not unrelated to the results of the implementation of the Book of Decrees by the government of Charles I. The system of relief of the poor in the United Kingdom, however, did not survive. Since the specific measures for the relief of the poor were carried out by the parishes, parish officials during this period endeavored to transfer poor vagabonds to the parishes where they were born, as this would relieve the pressure on their own parishes to provide for the poor[18]. The system of poor relief matured under Charles I of Stuart.

Jezebel could not develop without the regular and constant intervention of the Privy Council under the government of Charles I from 1629-1640. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a period of state intervention, and this was mainly in the regulation of grain prices and cloth prices. The Thirty Years' War exacerbated the depression in the English cloth industry, and very little coin was in circulation in England. In 1622 the Spanish ports were also closed to English cloth. Merchants and manufacturers, realizing that they had large stocks on hand, stopped employing workers, and many lost their jobs. 1629-1631 and 1621-1623 were years of high grain prices and a crisis in the cloth trade, and once again Parliament engaged in acts of state intervention. The first measure of the government was to prohibit the exportation of grain. Proclamations to this effect were issued in 1629 and 1631. In 1630 the exportation of beer was also prohibited, in order to cultivate barley as much as possible. In turn, the activity of the Privy Council increased significantly during this period, which made the implementation of the Poor Law Acts in the 17th century more effective than in the 16th century, and its success depended mainly on the activity of local officials, especially municipalities and magistrates.

The beginning of regional poverty alleviation practices are almost always earlier than the promulgation of the national poverty alleviation decree, the above has explored the differences between different regions of poverty alleviation practices, which is closely related to its regional economic and political situation, poverty relief to carry out specific results vary, but the measures to alleviate poverty still have certain commonalities: Tudor period, the local municipal authorities are the first measures to distinguish between the strong lazy people and the really sick and weak beggars, to the sick and weak. The primary measure of the local municipal authorities in the Tudor period was to distinguish between the strong and lazy and the really sick and weak beggars, and to give the sick and weak beggars symbols, and at the same time to prevent begging in the streets, and to prepare a list of beggars by the police, and to give weekly relief (in the form of parishes). The magistrates were equally instrumental. As an important link between the government and the local municipal authorities[19], and is the most outstanding representative of the squire group, they are in the implementation of government decrees, relief of the poor, control of vagrants, maintenance of law and order and other aspects of the outstanding achievements.

Private charity was also an important part of the practice of poverty alleviation. Before the Reformation, 45% of London's charities went to religious purposes; by the end of the sixteenth century, only 7% of donations went to churches, and the situation in London was to some extent mirrored elsewhere. In essence, the main beneficiaries of this change in the purpose of charitable giving were the poor, which meant that more charitable money could be used for poor relief. The most significant contributors to private charity were businessmen. In Hackney, north London, the county records record charitable donations from a large number of people from all walks of life in the 16th and 17th centuries[20], with merchants making up the majority. In the 60 years from 1480-1540, merchants gave about £29,737 for the relief of the poor. 1541-1560 they gave a further £23,796, and during Elizabeth's reign this amount almost tripled, with merchants giving no less than £68,479 to charity. . And what is remarkable is that they were concerned with much more than the immediate relief of the poor. Many cities (established by the merchants) provided funds not only for the destitute, but also for poor artisans who were temporarily in financial difficulties. In addition, merchants were concerned with the welfare of prison inmates, especially those imprisoned for debt; they were also

active in providing apprenticeships; stocking almshouses with supplies for the poor; caring for the sick, especially in the building or rebuilding of hospitals; and providing wedding gifts for poor girls. There is no doubt that merchants were the backbone of private relief.

After the Reformation there was a general shift away from donations to the Church, in favor of leaving money to the truly poor. This shift in attitudes was rapid, and by the end of the sixteenth century even the most conservative group, the burghers, were making nearly seventy percent of their charitable bequests to the poor; at the beginning of the century most of their donations were for religious purposes. The nobility likewise contributed, with their "ownership of land, manorial rights, and traditional position in the social hierarchy giving lords and their ladies the opportunity to engage in informal, unrecognized philanthropy that merchants did not have"[21] Some of their charities were not officially recorded and were not limited to charitable donations. In 1489, at the funeral of the Earl of Northumberland, more than 13,000 poor people received alms of two pence each. A century later, three or four thousand poor people were fed from the leftovers of Edward, Earl of Rutland's feast, and more than a thousand were similarly treated at Lady Berkeley's feast in 1596[22]. These are just isolated examples, and the list of unrecorded examples is surely endless.

Nor should the Yeoman be overlooked, who did their best to attend to the needs of the poor in their own districts, as Professor F. G. Emison found in his study of Essex and Bedfordshire: the Yeomans paid the poor-taxes, voluntarily or involuntarily, throughout their lives, and their work as parish sheriffs and overseers of the poor made them particularly conscious of the poverty of their own districts.[23]. As a result, when faced with the problem of poverty, the yeomans tended to seek immediate solutions, and so they all chose to provide relief directly to their families. In the case of some of the wealthier yeomans, their charitable contributions went beyond the daily payment of taxes and donations, and at this level these yeomans were unknowingly integrated with some of the smaller nobles, at least in the sense that they shared the same responsibilities in the process of helping the poor. The fact that the yeomans were not as prominent as the nobility did not prevent them from making special contributions to the relief of the poor when appropriate.

But large private charities can also be unevenly distributed; for example, in Somerset, 84% of charitable funds are concentrated in 9% of parishes. This is extreme, but nationally about a third of the parishes in each region are worse off than their neighbors. It is here that real suffering of the poor occurs, and this is where private charity is most likely to be problematic. Large cities such as Exeter, Ipswich and Norwich have addressed this problem by having wealthier parishes subsidize poorer ones. But these are, after all, larger cities; in times of real hardship, many smaller towns have no choice. The local thing to do in such cases was to keep more people from falling into poverty. This ensures that poverty never gets out of hand, and that those who are truly poor remain at a manageable level that does not trigger political change and civil unrest. Private charity was an important complement to local municipalities' efforts to help the poor; without the generosity of merchants, nobles, squires, and yeomans, governments would have found the problem of relieving the poor much more onerous and burdensome than it actually was.

5. CONCLUSION

The change to absolute monarchy after the Reformation prompted the government to take on the task of social relief previously undertaken by the church (this is a trend in the transformation of society from traditional to modern), and poverty alleviation became an important practice to be accomplished by the government, and an important topic of national governance in the early modern period. The practice of poverty alleviation, as a successful consensus cooperation between the central and local governments in early modern Britain, is an important revelation of the benign relationship between the central and local governments, and its practice of poverty alleviation is also a reference for the exploration of the solution to the problem of poverty. In this process, the central government continuously provided leadership and guidance, and local governments gradually matured and

explored governance methods suitable for local conditions. In Europe at the time, which was also faced with the dilemma of providing relief to the poor, the United Kingdom seemed to be the only country with a nationwide tax-funded system of relief for the poor, which was based on the redistribution of funds to the needy poor.

During the late 16th century, the state of the nation continued to stabilize, and although there were still some plagues and food failures in the 80s and 90s and in the early 17th century, England was no longer prone to serious famines. It is therefore worthwhile to analyze Britain's escape from famine in the early modern period, which was certainly due to the growing purchasing power of the international grain market, crop diversification, and the plundering of the colonies' resources, but it is undeniable that the government's promotion of the Poor Laws also played an important role, and that the British Poor Laws were in a sense like a provider of a public good, although there is debate over the exact nature of the "public good" (or "public interest"). Although the exact nature of the "public good" has never been debated, the enactment and enforcement of the modern Poor Laws did help to promote social stability, end famine, and even support a large portion of the British labor force to focus on industrial development and economic ventures.

Inevitably, the birth and implementation of institutions are rooted in unique national circumstances. What makes England unique is the nature of the country. It is a unitary political entity with a Parliament and a well-developed and efficient legal system. Thus, the success of the Poor Law and Poor Practice depended both on the enactment of statute law and the political will of the nation's elites to implement and administer it. During the two centuries of poverty alleviation practice in Britain, the important political concept of "the state" was also gradually formed, and poverty alleviation practice provided rich experience and value for the dualistic relationship between central and local government and national governance, and also laid the foundation for the welfare state in the future.

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