

From Division to Coordination: A Study on the Power of Urban Rural Integration of the Minimum Living Security System from the Perspective of Multi Source Flow

-- Taking Nanjing as an Example

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ABSTRACT

For a long time, China's minimum subsistence guarantee system has suffered from the problem of large differences between provinces and cities, and between cities and rural areas within provinces and cities, and in this context, some regions have gradually implemented the urban-rural integration policy and have gained some experience. Based on the theory of multiple streams, it can be found that the convergence of problem or policy streams can open a window of opportunity for policy change, and in China, the political environment and the party's philosophy of governance can also provide reliance on and support for policy change, and the coupling of the three streams provides the conditions for the promotion of the process of urban-rural integration. On this basis, countermeasures are proposed to promote the urban-rural integration of the minimum subsistence guarantee system in three aspects: paying attention to the emergence of problems, exploring policy options and adhering to the political philosophy.

KEYWORDS

Multi-source Flow Theory; Policy Change; Minimum Living Security System; Motivating Factors; Urban-rural Integration.

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Since June 1993, when the Shanghai Municipality pioneered the Minimum Subsistence Guarantee Line System for Urban Residents, the Government of China has always attached importance to keeping the urban and rural minimum subsistence guarantee system up to date, constantly improving and enriching the system, and exerting a long-term influence on systemic changes.

Chinese scholar Zhang Haomiao summarised the process of change and improvement of the minimum living standard guarantee system with four important turning points[1]; Dong Zixiong divided the process of system change into three stages: exploration and initiation, promotion and popularisation, and consolidation and improvement[2]; Gang Shuge analyzed the process of system change in terms of the social background and main features[3]; Wang Zhengya et al. analyzed the necessity and logic of urban-rural integration of the minimum living standard guarantee system in terms of the equalization of basic public services. and logic of urban-rural integration of the minimum subsistence guarantee system from the perspective of equalization of basic public services[4]. These studies can present and review the history of change of China's minimum subsistence guarantee system and point out one of the major directions of system change, namely, "urban-rural integration",

but they fail to reveal the intrinsic causes and dynamics of the change. This paper will take urban-rural integration as an entry point to analyze the dynamics and reasons for the change in China's minimum living standard security system.

The analysis of the causes of policy change is an explanatory study. At present, the Advocacy Coalition Framework, Multiple-Streams framework and Punctuated Equilibrium Theory have a greater impact on policy change. This paper chooses to review the urban-rural integration history of the minimum living security system in Nanjing under the perspective of Multiple-Streams Theory, analyze the driving factors of its policy change, and then put forward countermeasure suggestions for urban-rural low-income security integration.

2. THE SOCIAL ASSISTANCE SYSTEM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE THEORY OF MULTIPLE STREAMS

2.1. Multi-source Flow Theory Explanatory Logic

Multi-source flow theory first appeared in 1984, based on the "Garbage Can Model" of Cohen, March and Olsen, and put forward by the American public policy scientist Kingdon. Since the theory was proposed, it has been widely used by scholars around the world in the analysis and research of public policies in different fields, such as health care, telecommunications, transport, and so on. It can be seen that multi-source flow theory is an important applicable theory for policy change research.

Kingdon has mentioned in his book "Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policy" that "an item is put on the agenda as a result of a combination of factors that converge at a given moment in time, not as a result of one or the other of them acting alone." [5], thus simplifying the four source streams of the bin model into three, namely the Problem Stream, the Policy Stream, and the Political Stream. The Problem Stream focuses on the definition of the problem, which includes how the problem is perceived and how the objective conditions are defined as a problem; the Policy Stream is related to the technical feasibility of solving the problem, the public acceptance of the solution, etc.; and the Political Stream involves the influence of politics on the solution of the problem, which includes the public sentiments, the competition among the pressure groups, the change of the executive or the legislature, etc. When these three streams converge, it is not possible for a problem to be solved by the public, but it can be solved by the public. [5] When these three streams converge, the problem, policy and politics are organically integrated to promote public policy change harmoniously and cohesively.

The opening of a policy window is the key to the convergence and coupling of the three streams, and its creation signals that an issue or project is on the policy agenda. The opening of the policy window is unpredictable and fleeting, and if this critical period is missed, it is difficult to propose or change policies. On the other hand, if policy promoters have already seized the opportunity, and policy entrepreneurs have stepped in to help, the chances of policy emergence or change will be greatly increased. In addition, policy windows can be categorized into issue windows and political windows, and it can be argued that the opening of a policy window is usually triggered by changes in the issue and political streams.

2.2. Relevance of the Multiple Streams Theory in China

Multi-source flow theory examines issues on the political agenda in Western political systems, respects the impact of contingent events on policy making, and analyses the process by which issues enter the political agenda. With the comprehensive deepening of China's reforms, the multiple streams theory can be better integrated with the pluralistic Chinese society, to interpret the emergence and change of public policies in Chinese society. Chinese scholars have applied the multiple source flow theory to different research directions such as housing policy, poverty alleviation policy, three-

child policy, higher vocational education policy, national fitness venue allocation policy, and rubbish classification policy, and some of them have constructed corresponding policy change dynamics models based on the theory. The emergence and recognition of these researches objectively prove the appropriateness of the multi-source flow theory to study the change and generation of public policies in China.

Of course, China still retains its characteristics after opening up and is different from the West in terms of its political system, social environment, and decision-making mechanism, which also determines that the references to the multi-source theory need to be modified according to the objective situation, to give full play to its greater effectiveness. Firstly, the strengthening and penetration of political source streams. The leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) is the most essential feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and the Party has always maintained a central leadership position in the process of proposing, formulating, choosing, and implementing policy issues, and has even played a decisive role in determining the issues and legitimizing policies. [6]Therefore, extra attention should be paid to the Party's ideology and ruling philosophy. Second, the weakening of the source stream of the problem. Taking the minimum living standard guarantee system as an example, many basic livelihood policies that appear early have a long life cycle and are themselves in a constant state of renewal and change. Therefore, the focal point of the source of the problem, which serves as a "trigger", should not be the necessary precondition for policy change.

In this paper, when applying the multi-source flow theory to analyze the dynamics of urban-rural integration of the minimum living security system in Nanjing, we will take into full consideration China's specific national conditions and combine theory with practice. The logic of the multiple streams theory in explaining policy change is summarised as follows: the issue streams, political streams, and policy streams are coupled by certain opportunities under certain social pre-conditions (social background), which drives the opening of the policy window, and the policy activists make effective use of the opportunities during the short window opening period, which helps the three streams to intersect, thus contributing to the creation or change of policies.

3. THE PROCESS OF URBAN-RURAL INTEGRATION OF THE MINIMUM SUBSISTENCE GUARANTEE SYSTEM IN NANJING

For a long time, China's economic and social development has been divided between urban and rural areas, and the urban-rural dichotomy has been deeply imprinted in all areas, whether it be the household registration system, the setting up of grass-roots organizations, or the deployment of production materials. [7]Similarly, in the field of basic livelihood protection, urban protection was carried out earlier and relied on units, while rural areas lagged in the construction of their low-income protection system due to the similar social security function of land, thus, the establishment of the minimum living standard protection system in various regions of China was also marked by a profound urban-rural dualistic structure, as was the case in Nanjing. With the continuous revision and introduction of policies, Nanjing's urban and rural minimum-security systems are slowly moving towards integration.

3.1. China's Urban and Rural Low-income Insurance Systems

In 1997, the State Council issued the Circular of the State Council on the Establishment of a Minimum Subsistence Guarantee System for Urban Residents in Various Places, requiring that by the end of the century, all cities and towns in which counties are located throughout the country should have established a low-income insurance system, and the Regulations on Minimum Subsistence Guarantee for Urban Residents, which were introduced in 1999, signaled that the system had become an official legal system and a long-term The Regulations on Minimum Subsistence Security for Urban Residents, introduced in 1999, signify that this system has become an official legal system and a long-term basic

state policy of the People's Republic of China.[8] Accordingly, the development of the rural minimum subsistence guarantee system lagged, and it was not until 1996 that the General Office of the Ministry of Civil Affairs issued the Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of a Rural Social Security System, which clearly stated that where a rural social security system was in place, a minimum subsistence guarantee system should also be built. However, the State has not introduced a unified policy for rural areas, as it has done for urban areas, nor has it made any special central financial inputs.

Under this influence, Nanjing established urban and rural minimum subsistence guarantee systems in 1996 and 1997 respectively, but the standards and implementation of the minimum subsistence guarantee system between different jurisdictions and within jurisdictions have yet to be standardized.

3.2. Urban-rural Integration of Nanjing's Low-income Insurance System

In 2007, China's urbanization level reached 43.6 percent, with the urban minimum subsistence guarantee system becoming more mature and standardized, and the number of beneficiaries tending to stabilize. The implementation of the Circular of the State Council on the Establishment of a Rural Minimum Subsistence Security System throughout the Country has standardized the rural minimum subsistence security system, and China's minimum subsistence security system has entered a new stage of integrated development between urban and rural areas[4].

Against the backdrop of increasing urbanization rates and economic development, Nanjing followed national policy and was at the forefront of achieving urban-rural coordination among the six main urban districts within the city at an early stage in that year. In 2011, it issued the Opinions of the Municipal Government on Raising the Level of Minimum Subsistence Security, stating that: by the end of 2011, based on urban-rural co-ordination in the six main urban districts, urban-rural co-ordination of the minimum subsistence security standard will be realised in the Qixia and Yuhuatai districts. Other districts and counties will promote the coordination of urban and rural low-income protection standards in due course when conditions are ripe[13].

Starting from 1 July 2014, the minimum living standard in Nanjing is RMB 660/month for urban and rural areas in the six districts of the main city, Jiangning and Pukou districts, and RMB 580/month for urban and rural areas in Liuhe, Lishui and Gaochun districts. This means that for the first time, Nanjing's minimum living security system has realized the same standard for both urban and rural areas in the sub-region. At the beginning of 2015, the Nanjing Municipal Civil Affairs Bureau debuted its 2015 Civil Affairs Blue Book, stating that it would strive to achieve the same standard in the city in the current year, i.e., one standard for urban and rural minimum living security for the whole city. [14]Since 1 July of the same year, Nanjing's urban and rural minimum living standards have been raised to RMB 700 per person per month, realizing the integration of the urban and rural minimum living standards in the true sense of the word. Since then, Nanjing has continued to raise the urban and rural minimum living standards each year, and has fully implemented a mechanism for the dynamic adjustment of the minimum living standards, namely, "setting the current year's minimum living standards by 30-40 percent of the average per capita consumption expenditure of all residents in the previous year".

In 2021, the Ministry of Civil Affairs issued the Measures for the Examination and Confirmation of Minimum Subsistence Guarantees, in which the concepts of urban and rural subsistence guarantees were deleted, and all the provisions no longer differentiated between urban and rural areas, and were standardized as "minimum subsistence guarantees". It can be seen that the integration of urban and rural areas in China's minimum subsistence guarantee system is an inevitable direction.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE DYNAMICS OF URBAN-RURAL INTEGRATION IN NANJING'S MINIMUM SUBSISTENCE SECURITY SYSTEM

In this section, we will use the multi-source flow theory as a tool to explore the problems and the dynamics of system change before the urban-rural integration of the minimum subsistence guarantee system in Nanjing and to analyze the important factors that have enabled the integration to continue.

4.1. Problematic Sources of Institutional Change

4.1.1. Wide Disparity in the Level of Minimum Subsistence Protection between Urban and Rural Areas

China's urban minimum living security system, which started early and has been heavily invested in, has become increasingly mature through the introduction of detailed policies and improved development, and its social security functions have been realized. In rural areas, however, due to the inherent attributes of land resources, agricultural risks, and the limitations of the characteristics of agricultural products, their social security capacity is on the whole at a low level. [10] In the early days of Nanjing, under the traction of national policies, there was also an obvious inequality of standards between urban and rural areas. For example, by the end of 2007, the minimum subsistence guarantee standard for urban residents in the former ten districts of Nanjing (the six urban districts, Qixia District, Yuhuatai District, the former Dafang District, and the former Pukou District) had reached at least RMB 300 per person per month, while the standard for rural residents in the city's main areas of implementation of the minimum subsistence guarantee had only been raised from RMB 140-180 in 2006 to RMB 150-200[15].

4.1.2. Excessive Urban-rural Disparities Jeopardize Social Equity and Justice

The fundamental value of a social system is social justice, which, as an eternal pursuit of human society, is usually guaranteed in practice by the system. This requires not only that the implementation of the system be able to guarantee social justice, but also that the system itself be fair and just. At present, there is still a lack of fairness between China's urban and rural minimum subsistence guarantee systems. Whether in terms of institutionalization, standardization, or the rule of law, there are obvious differences in the level of the urban and rural minimum subsistence guarantee systems. Firstly, there is the problem of inequality of rights in the design of the system; secondly, the scope of enjoyment of urban residents far exceeds that of rural residents; thirdly, there is a wide gap between the rich and the poor in urban and rural areas, while the system of minimum subsistence guarantees "guarantees the basics", resulting in inequality of distribution; and lastly, there is a wide disparity between urban and rural areas about infrastructure and related equipment, which harms the intuitive feeling of the recipients of the guarantees.

4.2. Policy Streams of Institutional Change

4.2.1. The Party's Attention to the Policy of the Minimum Subsistence Guarantee System

The Party has consistently paid attention to the policy of the minimum subsistence guarantee system; in 2012, the report of the Eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed the goal of achieving equalization of basic public services by 2020. In 2013, the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee explicitly proposed to "promote the integrated development of urban and rural minimum subsistence guarantee systems", further emphasizing the integration of urban and rural areas in the minimum subsistence guarantee system. In 2017, the "implementation of the strategy of rural revitalization" in the report of the 19th CPC National Congress was a major step forward in complementing the urban and rural integration of the minimum subsistence guarantee system. In 2017, the report of the 19th CPC National Congress included the "implementation of the strategy of rural revitalization", which is an important manifestation of the need to make up for the

shortcomings of the rural areas and to achieve a balanced development of the social security system in urban and rural areas.

The city of Nanjing has always paid close attention to basic livelihood issues in line with the decisions of the central government, and has introduced local "small policies" following the central government's "general direction". For example, in 2010, Nanjing formulated and issued the "New Nanjing Action Programme on Accelerating Territorial Co-ordination and Construction of Integrated Urban and Rural Development", which implemented the concept of "Greater Nanjing, New Nanjing" throughout the entire process of reorganizing and integrating Nanjing's factors of production and placing "public services" in the blueprint of the "five integrations". It places "public services" at the forefront of the "Five Integration" blueprint, and strengthens urban-rural coordination at a high level and in a wide range of areas, covering both economic development and social livelihoods[16].

4.2.2. Public and Community Support for Urban-rural Integration of the Minimum Subsistence Security System

In the public's access to information about policies, matters relating to "money" are usually considered to be related to social equity. Therefore, the unification of urban and rural standards for the minimum subsistence guarantee can play a useful role in several ways and is widely supported. First, at the level of social equity, the unification of standards is not only a major manifestation of urban-rural coordination of social assistance but also helps to break down the urban-rural dichotomy, thereby safeguarding the bottom line of fairness in people's livelihoods. Secondly, at the level of public philosophy, the unification of standards in urban and rural areas means that the amount of subsidy received is the same, directly reflecting the fact that urban and rural residents are given the same importance, which helps to alleviate conflicts between urban and rural residents and increase satisfaction with the policy. Third, at the level of poverty support, this can directly help more people in difficulty enjoy the fruits of economic development. Before the unification of urban and rural standards, standards in urban areas were usually higher than those in rural areas; the unification of urban and rural standards means that the minimum subsistence guarantee standard in rural areas has been raised directly to the same level as the urban standard, with a higher rate of increase, benefiting a wider range of people in difficulty in rural areas.

Before the unification of urban and rural standards, Nanjing determined the minimum living standard for urban and rural residents following the standard of "the ratio of the urban residents' minimum living standard to the per capita disposable income of urban residents in the previous year, and the ratio of the rural residents' minimum living standard to the per capita net income of farmers in the previous year of 20-25 percent of the per capita net income of farmers in the previous year" ([17]). The minimum living standard for urban and rural residents is determined by taking into account factors such as the growth rate of the actual income of urban and rural residents and the actual level of protection enjoyed by the people in difficulty. Following the unification of the urban and rural standards, Nanjing has adjusted and fully implemented a dynamic adjustment mechanism for the minimum subsistence guarantee, whereby the current year's minimum subsistence guarantee standard is set at 30-40 percent of the previous year's average per capita consumption expenditure of all residents. Every year, 1 July is the "standard raising day" for Nanjing's minimum living standard, during which the relevant policy documents issued by the Nanjing Municipal Government receive widespread attention, and the city's media, both large and small, focus on the item "Minimum living standard (amount)", which has led to a series of social discussions and public proposals. This has led to a series of social discussions and public proposals.

4.3. Coupling of Three Source Streams and the Opening of a Policy Window

Multi-flow theory suggests that issue, policy, and political flows will be coupled at a particular point to drive the opening of a policy window, thus promoting policy generation or change. However, due to China's special national conditions, the party's ideology and governing philosophy are crucial to

the formulation and implementation of social and public policy issues. It can be said that any policy issue that is in line with the Party's philosophy of governance, helps to enhance the people's well-being, and promotes the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics will have the assistance or support of the Party behind it. In addition, the implementation of China's system of people's congresses and multi-party cooperation and political consultation not only ensures that the Party and the government are kept abreast of social trends, but also enables them to solicit public opinion and gather public power. Thus, when the problematic and policy streams of the changes in the minimum subsistence guarantee system converge, and the political stream takes the lead and pushes them forward, it can lead to the opening of a policy window.

The Nanjing Municipal Government has long followed in the footsteps of the central government in its development, and its policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and improvement have been highly consistent with the central government. It can be said that the problematic, policy and political origins of the urban-rural integration of Nanjing's minimum subsistence guarantee system are all compatible with the reform of the system at the national level.

The development of economic globalization and the rapid transformation of the economic system in the 1990s put great pressure on China's immature social security safety net, with the urban economy bearing the brunt of the financial crisis. Land security in rural areas contrasted sharply with the acute problem of urban poor groups, and thus the start of the minimum subsistence security system naturally began in the cities, with rural areas lagging. As China's socioeconomic development and urbanization rate increased, the previous inconsistency between urban and rural standards became a source of concern, prompting questions and discussions about social justice, and the source of the problem of the large urban-rural disparity in the minimum subsistence security system.

To develop a better social security system, the Party and the Government have continued to optimize and refine specific social security policies. Among these, the minimum living standard guarantee system involves the issue of "bottom-line fairness", and the level of guarantee is an important indicator directly related to the level of development of the minimum living standard guarantee system, which is particularly important. Since the unification of urban and rural areas was proposed, Nanjing has focused on the development of urban and rural minimum living standards in various ways, such as through "action programs", "opinions" and "notices", and has always insisted on coordinating the development of the minimum living standards with the urban and rural areas. Internal regional equity, from the six main urban districts taking the lead in realizing the integration of urban and rural standards, to other urban districts and counties realizing the integration of internal urban and rural standards, to the realization of the same standard for all districts, the city of Nanjing has taken a step-by-step approach to creating a stream of policies to realize the integration of urban and rural areas into the minimum subsistence guarantee system.

The minimum subsistence guarantee system involves the issue of social fairness and justice, and the Party has already put forward the comprehensive rule of law in 2014, pointing out that fairness and justice are intrinsic requirements of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and a very noble value goal pursued by our Party. Moreover, the urban-rural unification of the system is an important part of the equalization of basic public services, and the equalization of basic public services is the focus point for realizing commonwealth, which is both an essential requirement of socialism and an important feature of Chinese-style modernization. In addition, the system of urban-rural integration itself embodies the principle of "insisting on development for the people, development relying on the people, and sharing the fruits of development with the people", and further illustrates the core of Xi Jinping's ideology of "insisting on people-centredness" in the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The advanced guiding ideology and basic philosophy of the Party and the Government have become the political stream that has carried through the entire process of institutional change.

The three sources of convergence and coupling, a strong impetus to the minimum subsistence guarantee system in Nanjing's urban and rural integration process, the policy window opens, and urban and rural coordination is imperative.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNTERMEASURES

The above analyses confirm that the collection of problem or policy streams proposed by the multiple streams theory can open a window of opportunity for policy change and that in China, the political environment and the party's governing philosophy can also provide reliance on and support for policy change. In addition, combining the multiple streams theory and Nanjing's actual situation, it can be concluded that the organic combination of problems, policy effects, and political situation is an important condition for the development of urban-rural integration of Nanjing's minimum subsistence system and that it is the coupling of problem streams, policy streams, and political streams that has promoted urban-rural integration.

By applying the multi-source flow theory and combining it with the Nanjing experience, it can clarify how the three factors of problems, policies, and political situation have promoted the emergence of the minimum living security system and the development of urban-rural integration. At the same time, it can provide new ideas for other regional governments on how to further promote the change of the minimum living security system reasonably in the future:

Firstly, it is clear that new problems may lead to changes in the minimum subsistence guarantee system. This will help the Government to better grasp the opportunities for policy change in the minimum subsistence guarantee system and to promote policy change promptly. The Government should be highly sensitive to changes in the social assistance problems to be solved, and solve the problems that arise as soon as possible so that it can establish a dynamic monitoring system that is updated promptly and interacts benignly, to accurately and efficiently locate the target group of the assistance and improve the efficiency of the assistance.

Second, feedback on policy effects is a difficult factor to predict and control. When positive feedback is generated, the Government should not stop but should keep pace with the times and continue to explore more reasonable and effective policy options by the specific local conditions and the latest environmental changes, to promote policy change and thus better solve the existing problems of social security, enhance the well-being of the people, and achieve the actual effectiveness of the policy.

Finally, the political concept is an important factor in promoting the step-by-step implementation and improvement of China's minimum subsistence guarantee system. The Government should continue to be guided by Xi Jinping's thoughts on socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, adhere to the people-centered approach, remain advanced by the changes of the times, tighten the screws of its thinking, not forgetting the original intent of the minimum subsistence guarantee system, and contribute to the improvement of the social security system with Chinese characteristics.

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