

Changes in Our Government's Counterpart Support Policy, Logic of Evolution and Prospects for Reform

-- An Analysis based on Historical Institutionalism

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ABSTRACT

Coordinated regional development is inextricably linked to the practice of the counterpart support policy, and a scientific understanding of its historical process, evolutionary logic, and power mechanism is an important issue in realizing comprehensive economic and social progress and common prosperity. Based on the perspective of historical institutionalism, a panoramic overview of the internal logic of the change of the counterpart support system can help improve the foresight of reform. China's counterpart support system has experienced three stages: early germination, initial establishment and deep promotion, and the reform process has been deeply influenced by the transformation of the economic system, the requirements of regional coordinated development and the consensus of community values, and has shown obvious path dependence. The birth of the "factory-package commune" model, the convening of the National Conference on Border Defence, and the speeches made at the conference on post-disaster reconstruction are three key points in the development of the counterpart support system. The power mechanism for the evolution of the counterpart support system comes from the vertical "administrative contracting system" and the horizontal "competition tournament". In the future, the counterpart support system will continue to develop along the lines of scientific, intelligent and balanced development, exploring new modes of counterpart support, and pushing forward the improvement of the quality and effectiveness of counterpart support work.

KEYWORDS

Counterpart Support; Coordinated Regional Development; Historical Institutionalism; Aid to Xinjiang and Tibet.

1. PRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Issues Raised

Coordinated regional development is one of the key ways to resolve the major social contradictions of the new era, and the emphasis on coordinated regional development is conducive to promoting the realization of the essential requirement of the common wealth of all the people, thus making the achievement of balanced development between urban and rural areas and regions an important goal for the high quality of China's economy. The report of the 20th Party Congress points out that "the common prosperity of all people is the essential feature of Chinese-style modernisation, and coordinated regional development is the inevitable requirement for realising common prosperity." And as a mechanism of regional co-ordinated development with Chinese characteristics, counterpart

support has played a key role in winning the battle against poverty, building a moderately prosperous society in all aspects, and consolidating the foundation of commonwealth. As an important mechanism of regional mutual development, counterpart support refers to a policy behavior of economically developed regions or regions with stronger strengths to implement assistance to economically weaker regions or regions with weaker strengths, which mainly includes four types of assistance to ethnic minorities and border regions, central and western regions and resource-depleted regions, regions with major national engineering construction, and regions that have suffered from major natural disasters or sudden public health incidents.

The counterpart support system has undergone more than 70 years of development, and has been continuously improved and enriched. In terms of its mode of operation, it has evolved from "single-help" to "two-way cooperation"; in terms of its areas of implementation, it has expanded from ethnic areas to the central, western and eastern parts of the country, and from a single underdeveloped area to disaster-stricken areas and areas with major construction projects; in terms of its policy tools, it has been expanded to areas with major construction projects. In terms of areas of implementation, from ethnic regions to central, western and eastern regions, from single underdeveloped regions to disaster-stricken regions and regions with major construction projects; in terms of policy tools. It has changed from simple capital injection to intellectual assistance and industrial co-construction. Counterpart support has played a significant role in promoting the high-quality development of China's economic construction, narrowing the gap between regional development, and improving government governance, etc. However, there are still many deficiencies in its practice, such as the role of the government needs to be coordinated, the enthusiasm of the main body needs to be improved, and the efficiency of the implementation needs to be strengthened and so on.

At present, the research on the counterpart support system is mainly divided into three paths, the first is the theoretical basis of counterpart support, mainly from the horizontal transfer payment, the inter-regional flow of factors of production, and inter-governmental relations; the second is the policy tools of counterpart support, such as financial direct transfer payments, skills training, government procurement, etc. ; the third is that some scholars have combed through the literature related to the counterpart support system, including the study of horizontal transfer payment behaviour, as well as the review of the theory and practice of the system, but these combing rarely combined with the historical background of the evolution of the system to systematically analyse the development of policy. The third category is that some scholars have sorted out the literature related to the counterpart support system, including the research on the behaviour of horizontal transfer payments and the overview of the theory and practice of counterpart support, but these sorts of sorting out seldom combine the historical background of the system's evolution with the systematic analysis of the policy development, and the use of the normative theoretical tools for the in-depth excavation of the logic of the evolution is still insufficient, and there is a lack of the grasp of the system as a whole and in-depth analysis in putting forward the outlook for reform. "History is the best textbook and the best sobering agent", therefore, this paper starts from the perspective of historical institutionalism, traces back the change of China's counterpart support policy, analyses the evolutionary logic of its change, and looks forward to the future direction of the reform of the counterpart support policy, with a view to solving the existing problems of the policy, realizing the goal of regional coordination, and promoting the high-quality development of the economy. The purpose is to provide reference for solving the existing problems of the policy, achieving the goal of regional coordination, and promoting the high-quality development of economy.

1.2. Analytical Framework

Historical institutionalism, as the main theoretical school and key analytical path of the new institutionalist political science, explores how time processes and events affect the origins and transformations of institutions. The comparative-historical analysis of historical institutionalism explores the evolution of meso-institutions from a structured, dynamic and historical perspective, and

the counterpart policy is a meso-institution, which is more compatible with the historical institutionalism paradigm.

Specifically, its analytical steps include the following three aspects: firstly, to carry out deep structural analysis at the macro level, to find the root causes of change in the political and economic environment in which the system is located, and to explain the special and complex institutional phenomena; secondly, to carry out institutional analysis at the meso level, to focus on path dependence and key nodes, and to explore the mechanism of institutional generation and the conditions of maintenance, as well as the specific moments that trigger the major changes in policy; Lastly, at the micro level, we will explore the dynamics, study the complex interactions between actors, and explain the mechanism of the interaction between multiple subjects.

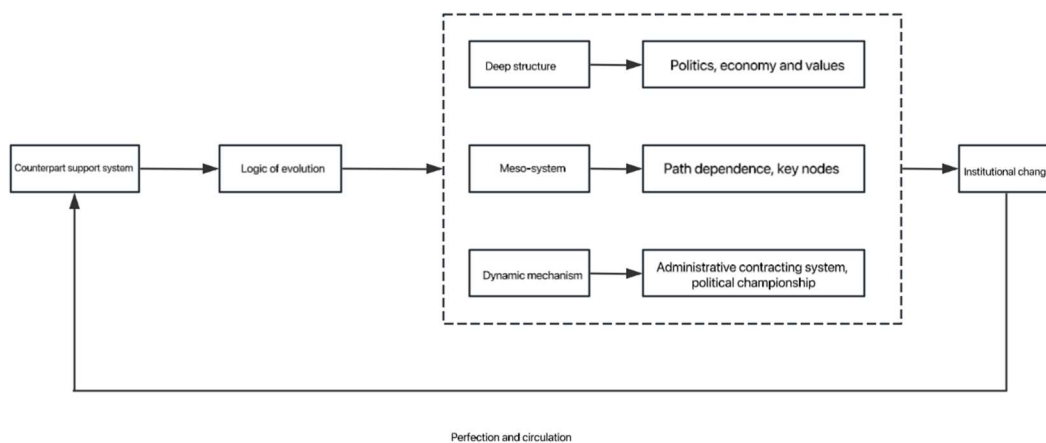


Figure 1. Analytical framework for historical institutionalism

Source: Author's own

2. CHANGES IN CHINA'S GOVERNMENTAL COUNTERPART SUPPORT POLICY

2.1. Early Embryonic Stage: 1949-1978 (Tibet Assistance Policy)

As early as the beginning of the founding of the People's Republic of China, a large number of reports on "support" appeared in the People's Daily, mainly including war and class support, support among various industrial sectors and regions, and in the practice of a large number of support activities, a number of practices with the characteristics of "counterpart support" activities began to emerge. In 1953-1956, when New China was in a period of frequent natural disasters, a large number of voluntary activities for disaster relief began to emerge, such as the first support for agricultural floods in North China in 1953, etc. In this period, a kind of support based on organised organisational support began to emerge, and the support for agricultural floods in the North China region was also a major part of the support. During this period, a kind of organised, cross-regional and targeted support activities began to appear, and this kind of voluntary support activities laid the foundation for the emergence of "counterpart support" in the later period.

It was not until 1960-1978 that the practice of the above-mentioned cross-regional support activities began to be enriched, and the characteristics of the categories of the central Government helping localities, cities helping rural areas, industry helping agriculture, and the coast helping the hinterland gradually became more apparent, so that this period can be regarded as the stage of germination of the idea of the practice of "counterpart support". During this period, there were three main forms of

counterpart support activities throughout the country. The first type was industrial support for agriculture and urban support for rural areas, and in the 1960s, the model of "factories wrapped around communes" appeared, which was also called "factory-community counterpart cooperation". This model was also called "factory-community counterpart collaboration". Specifically, it means that large and medium-sized factories collaborate with one or two counties, and after the factories are matched with the counties, they are directly linked through the counties and a certain number of people's communes (according to the size of the factories) to help the communes to develop a variety of economies. This kind of support originated in March 20, 1960, "Shanxi Daily" published an editorial entitled "factory factory package social counterpart support - on the new situation of industrial support for agricultural technological transformation", for the first time in the non-government level put forward the concept of counterpart support, and affirmed that the counterpart support is a new kind of collaboration between workers and peasants, urban and rural collaboration, It also affirms that counterpart support is a brand-new and effective form of support that involves collaboration between workers and peasants, urban and rural areas, factories and communities. In terms of the content of support, it not only includes direct material support, but also fosters technical strength for agricultural development.

The second type is the coastal support to the inland, in 1949, the national financial and economic work conference "the whole country supports Shanghai, Shanghai supports the whole country" was put forward, the collaborative action between Shanghai and the inland regions is specifically manifested as "stabilising Shanghai's economy through the united dispatch of the national important resources, and then stabilising the national economy" . In 1950, the Chinese government prepared the first five-year plan of the new China, and started to promote the new socialist construction. Stabilising the national economy through the unified dispatch of important national resources". In 1950, the Chinese government prepared the first five-year plan of the new China and started to push forward the new socialist construction. During this period, according to the overall deployment of the central government, Shanghai sent tens of thousands of cadres, workers and intellectuals from various industries, such as finance and construction, to support the construction of the Shaanxi area. In 1957, the Shanghai Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) held a meeting on the economic cooperation among five provinces and one city. In 1957, the Shanghai Bureau of the CPC Central Committee held a meeting on economic co-operation among five provinces and one city, and further proposed that "Shanghai should support the five provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Fujian and Jiangxi in terms of equipment and technology, while the abovementioned provinces should support Shanghai in terms of foodstuffs and industrial raw materials". From an economic point of view, coastal support for the hinterland could combine the technical and financial resources of the coast with the natural resources of the hinterland, and also solve the problem of insufficient jobs in the coastal areas while the hinterland was in urgent need of technicians; from a political point of view, it drew lessons from the problems of the imperfect national economic system caused by the highly centralised model adopted by the USSR in the construction of socialism.

The third category is the support activities from non-disastered areas to disaster-stricken areas, which mainly refers to the practice of "one-to-one" support from non-disastered areas to disaster-stricken areas to varying degrees in the face of different natural disasters, with different provinces and regions usually adopting a variety of support methods, such as the delivery of food, ploughing oxen, seeds, medical materials, and the resettlement of foreign disaster victims. The three main types of support are not included in this list. Apart from these three main types of support, there are also other types of support such as educational support and medical support for border ethnic minority areas. For example, in 1976, when the great earthquake occurred in Tangshan, the State Council put forward the principle of organising support for industrial production, which was: "The relevant departments of the State Council, in consultation with the relevant provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions, should provide support according to industry on the basis of a counterpart approach, and the required manpower and material resources should be balanced by the State Planning Commission and then

reported to the Central Committee of the Anti-Earthquake Disaster Relief Command for approval and implementation."

Between the early years of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the end of the 1970s, the concept or system of "counterpart support" had not yet been clearly put forward at the government level, and counterpart support had not yet become a substantive national policy. These practices have achieved good results and have continuously enriched the content of counterpart support, laying a solid foundation for the formal introduction of the counterpart support system.

2.2. Initial Establishment Phase: 1979-2011

In 1979, the convening of the National Border Defence Work Conference marked the formal introduction of the counterpart support policy at the national level, at which the central government explicitly proposed that economically developed provinces in the east should support economically underdeveloped ethnic minority regions. From the reform and opening up to the 1990s, the counterpart support system started with support for the border areas and many ethnic minority regions, and gradually broadened its scope to areas such as economic and technological cooperation, health development, educational resources support, etc. We refer to this period as the initial establishment stage of the counterpart support system. We call this period the initial establishment of the counterpart support system.

The counterpart support activities in this period are roughly distinguished into five forms: support for the Tibetan region, economic and technical cooperation, health counterpart support, education counterpart support, and major project construction. To sort out these practices in chronological policy order, we unfold the exposition of the support activities in this period according to the three types of central intentions it loads.

First, support for the Tibetan region primarily reflects the Central Government's intention to emphasise the maintenance of stability on the frontier. First, it was to build up the frontier and thereby consolidate national defence; second, it was to implement ethnic policies and promote national unity; third, it was to achieve complementarity of regional advantages and promote coordinated regional development; and fourth, it was to ensure the political stability of the country. In 1982, the practice of holding regular meetings on counterpart support was established at the Symposium on Counterpart Support and Economic and Technical Collaboration Between Economically Developed Provinces and Municipalities and Ethnic Minority Areas. adopted in 1984, the Article 61 of the Ethnic Regions, for the first time in the form of a basic national law, clarified the legal principle that higher state organs should organise and support counterpart support. In April 1987, the Report on Several Important Issues Concerning China's Ethnic Work of the United Front Work Department of the Central Committee and the State People's Committee defined counterpart support as a historical mission, and that the developed regions should do a good job of supporting it. The CPC Central Committee attaches great importance to assistance to the Tibet region, in effect emphasising the development of the frontier economy and the consolidation of the country's border defences, two purposes that are both fundamental to and mutually reinforcing of each other, and at the Fourth Work Symposium on Tibet held in 2001, it was decided to extend counterpart support to Tibet for a further ten years, and to step up efforts to support Tibet, with seventy new counterpart-support projects being established in various provinces and municipalities. Since that meeting, Tibet has achieved economic growth of more than 12 per cent for four consecutive years, and in 2006 the central government formulated a forty-pronged policy for stabilising Tibet's development, and identified 180 construction projects for Tibet's "Eleventh Five-Year Plan", which in fact gave a major impetus to the development of Tibet's economy and the improvement of the local infrastructure. In January 2010, the Fifth Symposium on Work in Tibet was convened, extending the policy of counterpart aid to Tibet until 2020, and in 2011, Xi Jinping put forward the "Five Always" at the Symposium on Work in Tibet, which further called for the improvement of the policy of counterpart aid to Tibet.

Secondly, the background of the era of strengthening economic and technical cooperation is the early stage of reform and opening up, when China's economic system was in urgent need of transformation from a planned economy to a market economy, and when economic and technical counterpart support began to shift from vertical support to horizontal economic and economic and technical cooperation. In October 1982, at a symposium on counterpart support and economic and technical cooperation between economically developed provinces and municipalities and ethnic minority areas, it was pointed out that. Economically developed provinces, cities and ethnic minority areas to carry out counterpart support and economic and technical cooperation, to accelerate the economic and cultural construction of ethnic minority areas, to promote the development of economically developed provinces and municipalities, is an important way to invest less, see the results of the quick gains", for example, in 1981, the industrial collaboration between Shanghai and Yunnan Province, to solve the problem of the shortage of industrial welding in Shanghai, to promote the economic development of both regions. The National Economic and Technical Cooperation and Counterpart Support Conference held in 1984 further pointed out that the promotion of national economic and technical cooperation and counterpart support should be developed in accordance with the principles of equal consultation, mutual benefit, mutual support and common development, and emphasised the need to revitalise the economy and improve economic efficiency.

Thirdly, the main purpose of counterpart support for health and counterpart support for education is to coordinate regional development and reduce the imbalance of development between regions. In 1983, the Ministry of Health drew up the Implementation Programme on Counterpart Support for Health Construction in Remote Minority Ethnicity Areas by Economically Developed Provinces and Municipalities, which identified twelve provinces, such as Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong and others, to support the health sector in Tibet. In the same year, the Ministry of Health issued the Opinions on Several Issues Concerning the Organisation of Urban Medical and Health Care Institutions to Support the Construction of Rural Health Care, which played a great role in guiding and promoting the practice of urban health care in support of the rural areas. In 1991, the Ministry of Health issued the Opinions of the Ministry of Health on Further Strengthening the Support of Urban Hospitals for the Construction of Rural Health Care, which guided the urban hospitals to follow the spirit of the document and the regulations on hospitals to take effective support measures.

In the area of educational support, a conference on support and collaboration between institutions of higher learning in the interior and in remote ethnic areas was held in 1987, and the Implementation Plan for Mainland Oral Support for Education in Tibet was promulgated, beginning inland counterpart support for educational resources in the Tibetan region. In the same year, in accordance with the Minutes of the Conference on Support and Coordination between Higher Education Institutions in the Mainland and Remote Ethnic Areas, the target groups for educational counterpart support in the six less-developed regions were re-established, and in 1995 the Central Government selected and dispatched the first batch of a total of 621 cadres to Tibet to provide assistance. This further advanced the strategic practice of sending outstanding talents to Tibet for support. In 2006, the Central United Front Work Department and the State People's Committee issued the Opinions of the Central United Front Work Department and the State People's Committee on Further Strengthening Educational Counterpart Support for Tibet, proposing that the mainland expand its support programmes such as the enrolment of undergraduate and postgraduate students in Tibet. At the Fifth Central Committee's Symposium on Tibet Work held in 2010, Wen Jiabao emphasised the need to "increase the intensity of counterpart support, continue to adhere to the methods of division of responsibility, counterpart support, and regular rotation, and further improve the work pattern of combining cadre support for Tibet with economic support for Tibet, talent support for Tibet, and technical support for Tibet".

Between the reform and opening up and the early 1990s, the counterpart support system was established for the first time in a formal policy document, and has continued to expand to include health and education services, with Tibet-aid activities as the foundation and economic cooperation

activities as the centre of gravity. The goal of counterpart support activities focused on enhancing the horizontal economy, and the direction of support began to focus on the economic sector, with an emphasis on revitalising local enterprises, promoting inter-provincial exchanges and cooperation, and optimising the allocation of resources. In addition, most of the support activities of this period were led by the central government, and the theoretical ideas related to the specific guidelines and principles of the counterpart support system, the state of practice, and the direction of improvement were also gradually defined during this period.

2.3. Vertical Advancement Phase: 2012-Present

2.3.1. Counterpart Support is Well Developed

Since the 1990s, the counterpart support system has continued to advance and develop, and new progress has been made in terms of the content of support, the modes of support, and the institutional system of support.

Starting from the content and mode of support, firstly, the practice of assisting Tibet, which occupies the main body of counterpart support, still continues to develop. In 2012, in order to carry out the spirit of the Fifth Central Committee's Work Symposium on Tibet, the Ministry of Environmental Protection issued a relevant policy of selecting and dispatching technical backbones to provide technical support to Tibet, and it has become the practice of the department to send out technical backbones to carry out support every year. The convening of the Sixth Work Symposium on Tibet in August 2015 signalled that the policy of counterpart support entered a stage of maturity and perfection. The policy of counterpart support for Tibet entered a stage of maturity and perfection. The meeting further clarified the requirements for ruling Tibet according to law and building Tibet in the long term, such as doing a good job of regional Buddhism and clarifying economic development priorities, etc. In 2017, the Ministry of Education issued a notice on the Implementation Plan of the Ten Thousand Teachers Supporting Tibet and Xinjiang Plan and actively responded to the call of the Sixth Symposium to increase educational assistance. In 2020, the agriculture department and the justice department issued policies on animal husbandry, fishery assistance, and lawyer assistance, respectively, and the content of assistance work for Tibet was further developed. In 2023, the civil affairs department issued a relevant notice on social organisations' counterpart assistance to Tibet, and the main body of assistance to Tibet began to expand from the government to multi-party organisations.

Second, under the framework of economic development, new forms of counterpart support have been developed, including counterpart assistance, counterpart cooperation and poverty alleviation collaboration, etc. In 2017, the Beijing Municipal Party Committee and Municipal Government issued the "Beijing Municipal Counterpart Assistance to Poverty-stricken Areas in Hebei Province", which highlighted the role of counterpart assistance in poverty management. Typical examples of counterpart support include the "mountain and sea collaboration" between Fujian Province and Zhejiang Province, the "south-south-south-north cooperation strategy" implemented by Jiangsu Province, and the "district-county" collaboration implemented by Hangzhou Municipality, among others.

In addition, the role of counterpart support in the construction of major projects has become increasingly prominent. In August 2012, the State Council initiated the preparation of the National Cooperation Plan for Counterpart Support to the Three Gorges Reservoir Area (2014-2020). In 2015, the Office of the Three Gorges Project Construction Committee of the State Council, together with the Hubei Province and the Municipality of Chongqing, decided to build a platform for economic and trade fairs, where the two provinces and municipalities would take turns to hosting the economic and trade fair for counterpart support. On 24 November 2017, the Office of the Three Gorges Project Construction Committee of the State Council organised a national symposium on counterpart support for cooperation in the Three Gorges Reservoir Area in Wanzhou, Chongqing. In 2018, in November, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the State Council issued the

Opinions on Establishing a More Effective New Mechanism for Regional Coordinated Development, which called for the continuation of the work of counterpart support for the Three Gorges Reservoir Area. In December, with the consent of the State Council, the Ministry of Water Resources and the National Development and Reform Commission jointly issued the National Cooperation Plan for Oral Support to the Three Gorges Reservoir Area (2021-2025), which was fully implemented in 2022.

Generally speaking, since the 1990s, the counterpart support system has involved various social fields such as rural revitalisation and major project construction, and the relevant institutions and mechanisms have gradually matured, with the main features of this period being summarised in the following aspects: firstly, the content of the support has been further expanded, and in addition to the basic activities of support for Tibet and Xinjiang, economic and technical cooperation among various regions and health and education services, major project construction and poverty alleviation support activities have also become new key areas of the counterpart support system. First, the content of support has been further expanded; in addition to basic support for Tibet and Xinjiang, economic and technical cooperation between regions, and health and education, major construction projects and poverty-alleviation support activities have also become new areas of focus for the counterpart support system; second, the mode of support has undergone new changes, shifting from the one-way mode of gratuitous support focusing on material and technical support in the past to the two-way mode of reciprocal support focusing on bi-directional co-operation; and, third, the system of the counterpart support system has gradually been improved, with a system of laws and regulations being established at an early stage.

3. THE EVOLUTIONARY LOGIC OF CHANGES IN CHINA'S GOVERNMENTAL COUNTERPART SUPPORT POLICY

3.1. Deep Structure: A Macro-contextual Analysis of Our Government's Counterpart Support Policy

According to historical institutionalism, the emergence, development, change and termination of a system are closely related to deep structural factors such as politics, economy, society and values, so we can analyse the macro background of the change of the counterpart support system from three aspects: political guarantee, economic foundation and social promotion.

3.1.1. Political guarantees: A Balanced Requirement for Regional Development

China's regional economic development strategy and its means of implementation are the policy basis for the implementation of counterpart support, and the counterpart support provided by the developed regions in the east to the less-developed ethnic regions in the west is a fulfilment of the strategic concept of the "two big picture" put forward by Comrade Deng Xiaoping. There are two main ways to implement this strategy: one is to increase the level of support from the central Government, and the other is to strengthen economic exchanges and cooperation between regions, which provides a material basis for the implementation of the counterpart support policy and the expected results.

The reality of unbalanced regional development has had a catalytic effect on the counterpart support system in the following three areas: First, the development gap between the eastern and western regions has been widening; for a long time, the western ethnic regions have been supplying the eastern regions with resource products, primary agricultural products, and cheap labour at lower prices, which to a large extent has contributed to the rapid development of the eastern regions; however, the resource advantages of the western ethnic regions have not been transformed into economic advantages, and the development of many regions is still relatively backward. However, the resource advantages of the western ethnic regions have not been transformed into economic advantages, and the development of many regions is still relatively backward. On this premise, the counterpart support provided by the eastern regions to the western ethnic regions, in turn exporting technology, talents

and economic support, is in fact maintaining two-way co-operation between the eastern and western regions.

The western ethnic regions have made great contributions to the country's ecological balance and environmental protection, such as the damage to the environment caused by natural gas in the West-to-East Gas Transmission Project, etc., and have made great sacrifices in the process of advancing the country's economic development. The costs of these environmental protection projects are borne by the ethnic regions, but the benefits of the resources are shared by the whole country, so the implementation of the policy of reciprocal support is also a cost-sharing of environmental protection problems in the western regions by the eastern regions.

The complementarity of resources between the eastern and western regions is a realistic basis for the implementation of the counterpart support system. The southeastern coastal region has a significant advantage in terms of economic and technological strength, and the ethnic minority regions are richer in natural resources; it can be seen that the southeastern coastal region and the ethnic minority regions have a great deal of complementarity in terms of capital, technology, human resources, resources and management experience. The establishment of counterpart support and economic and technical collaboration between the two types of regions can promote the effective flow of resources between the regions, improve the effectiveness of resource utilisation, and achieve a "win-win" situation in terms of economic output and balanced development.

3.1.2. Economic Base: A Strong Support for Institutional Transformation

After the reform and opening up, China's economic system urgently needed to be transformed from a planned economy to a market economy, and the demand for institutional transformation pushed the content of counterpart support to expand to economic and technical collaboration, and to change from vertical support to horizontal economic and technical co-operation. The "National Symposium on Counterpart Support Work of Some Provinces, Regions and Municipalities Directly under the Central Government" held in Shanghai in 1991 mentioned that "counterpart support work is to a large extent intertwined with horizontal economic association". It was mentioned in the "National Symposium on Counterpart Support Work of Some Provinces, Regions and Municipalities" held in Shanghai in 1991 that "Counterpart support work is to a large extent intersected with horizontal economic alliance". It can be said that the combination of counterpart support and economic co-operation in that period was a product of the era of institutional transformation.

By combining economic and technical collaboration with counterpart support, the enthusiasm of regions, departments and enterprises was mobilised, thus laying the groundwork for multifaceted, multilevel and varied alliances and collaborations, and changing the past situation of relying only on vertical support from the central government. At the symposium on counterpart support and economic and technical collaboration held in Yinchuan in October 1982, it was mentioned that counterpart support and economic and technical collaboration were beneficial to both parties involved: "The facts show that counterpart support and economic and technical collaboration between economically developed provinces and cities and ethnic minority areas is a good way to speed up the economic and cultural construction of the ethnic minority areas, and to promote the development of the economies of the economically developed provinces and cities, and is an effective and efficient way to promote the development of the ethnic minority areas. an important way to invest less, achieve quick results and reap big benefits".

3.1.3. Social Promotion: Consensus on the Values of the National Community

In the course of the practice of the twinning support policy, the central government relies on its political authority to require local governments to implement twinning support across administrative regions, but local governments lack the direct motivation to do so. In addition, a large number of twinning support practices are high-cost, low-benefit co-operation projects that violate the efficiency principle of economic collaboration. Therefore, the smooth implementation of counterpart support is

very much related to the political concept of "great unity" rooted in society and the sense of community of the Chinese nation that "when one side is in trouble, all sides will help".

Firstly, the political concept of "great unity", which forms the ideological basis of Chinese civilisation to this day, does not require only geographical unity, but also a high degree of political and cultural unity. The cultural differences between the less developed ethnic regions in the west and the developed regions on the east coast have led to fewer exchanges between the two regions in the past. However, the political concept of "great unity" requires the strengthening of exchanges and co-operation between all regions of the country, and the counterpart support system fits this ideology better, and is therefore easier to be accepted by the social consciousness in the process of implementation.

Secondly, from the point of view of the historical logic of the Chinese national community, the Chinese nation is a historical community, a community of destiny and a community of construction, and "when one party is in trouble, support from all sides" is a universally accepted value of the Chinese people. In ancient times, there were often natural disasters in a certain area, and examples of joint assistance from various regions existed widely, such as the Old Book of the Tang Dynasty - Legends, it is recorded that "and share the disaster and compassion for the suffering of the state party's common sense; loss of the remaining to help the queue, the good neighbourhood of the good loan said that the idea of all-all-absorbing, the matter of funds to save and help! rich and poor alike, ploughing in time". In modern society, the system of counterpart support also includes post-disaster reconstruction, major construction projects, etc. For example, in the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, the whole country cooperated in the "province-to-city" post-disaster reconstruction counterpart support activities, which demonstrated the consensus of the value of the Chinese people's mutual cooperation to tide over the difficulties together.

3.2. Fractured Equilibrium: A Meso-institutional Analysis of China's Governmental Counterpart Support Policy

3.2.1. Path Dependency

Historical institutionalism holds that institutional change is characterised by self-sustainability and reinforcement due to the existence of adaptive expectations, learning effects and coordination effects, and is path-dependent. The path dependence of counterpart support system change is mainly manifested in the following three aspects.

The first is that the development process of the counterpart support system is influenced by adaptive expectations, which means that when the system has a tendency to gradually improve in the course of its operation, actors will gradually lower their uncertainty expectations of the system, while gradually raising their adaptive expectations, and will change their own behavioural patterns in accordance with those expectations, thereby enabling the system to continue and be further strengthened. The counterpart support system has already set a precedent of mutual assistance in material and human resources between different regions since the relief of natural disasters in ancient times in China. With the further development of the counterpart support system, despite the gradual expansion of its content in different directions such as economic and technical cooperation, major construction projects, poverty alleviation, etc., the main features of the system which are cross-regional and government-led are still retained, and the subsequent changes and development are all carried out within the general framework of the central government-led system. Subsequent changes and developments have been made within the framework of the central government, and the reform goals pursued at various stages of development, such as coordinated regional development and maintenance of border stability, are all long-term adaptive institutional arrangements. The sustained effect of the policy in the context of this "adaptive expectation" will, on the one hand, enhance the confidence and security of the policy implementers, but on the other hand, it will also make the development of the system itself dependent. Therefore, in recent years, the policy of reciprocal

support has also been expanding the main body of the support, such as the development of social organisations, and shifting from unilateral assistance to two-way reciprocal cooperation. Therefore, in recent years, the counterpart support policy has also been expanding the number of support subjects, such as the development of social organisations, and shifting from unilateral assistance to two-way reciprocal cooperation, with a view to breaking away from excessive reliance on past experience and making the policy development more in line with the reality.

The process of development of the counterpart support system is affected by coordination effects. The establishment and operation of the system requires the support of a coordinated system, and changes in the system itself will also trigger changes in its supporting system. The development of the counterpart support system actually involves a number of sectors such as agriculture, energy, water conservancy, education, health, etc., such as in 2022 "Notice of the Comprehensive Department of the National Energy Administration on the Issuance of the Key Points of Rural Revitalisation Targeted Assistance and Counterpart Support Work in 2022", the counterpart support policy has actually been closely linked with the rural revitalisation policy, and the two policies promote and complement each other.

Finally, the process of development of the counterpart support system is affected by the learning effect. In order to achieve certain goals, government departments adjust their own policies based on the results of past policies and new information, a process we call learning. In fact, the emergence of the counterpart support policy is originated from the practice of "factory package commune" in Shanxi, Shanxi carried out a partial pilot of counterpart support and achieved good practice results, so the counterpart support policy has been expanded and extended, and finally established as a formal national system.

3.2.2. Key Nodes

The key nodes of historical institutionalism refer to the decisive events in the longer course of policy development that led to major changes in policy. Throughout the development history of China's counterpart support system, three key historical nodes can be found, China's counterpart support system in the role of these three key nodes, was able to grasp the reality of the demand and the requirements of the times, to shorten the time gap between the system supply and the system demand, to achieve China's counterpart support system was formally established as a national policy, and then to the sight of the one-way assistance to the two-way co-operation of the major transformation, from a realistic point of view It has solved the problem of balanced regional development in China.

The first key point was that on 20 March 1960, the Shanxi Daily published an editorial entitled "Counterpart support for factories - on the new situation of industrial support for agricultural technological transformation", which highly praised the practice of "mutual planning and signing of support contracts" and "mutual planning and signing of support contracts". The exploratory practice of "mutual planning and signing support contracts" was highly praised by. At that time, the practice of "factory-encumbered commune" was born in Shanxi, which was the prototype of the counterpart support system, and the research and exploration of counterpart support started from then on. The second key point was in 1979, when the National Conference on Border Defence was held, the central government explicitly proposed the policy of economically developed provinces in the east of the country to counterparts in economically underdeveloped ethnic minority areas, which marked the formal introduction of the counterpart support policy at the national level. The third key point is that in 2011, at the "Wenchuan Earthquake Post-Disaster Recovery and Reconstruction Symposium", Premier Wen Jiabao emphasised that: "Recipients should make good use of the co-operation mechanism of the counterpart support to strengthen economic co-operation with the relevant regions, and combine the undertaking of industrial transfers with the development of industries with special characteristics and advantages, so as to promote the accelerated development of the economy of the affected areas. Promote the accelerated economic development of the affected areas." This is the first time that it has been formally emphasised that the supporting party should change from "blood

transfusion" to "blood creation and enhancement", and from the previous hardware support to software support such as technical and intellectual support, marking the beginning of the transformation of the counterpart support system.

3.3. Power Mechanism: Microstructure Analysis of China's Governmental Counterpart Support Policy

Counterpart support has a dual dynamic mechanism, namely the vertical "administrative contracting system" and the horizontal "competition tournament". The former means that the central government delegates authority to lower levels of government, while the latter refers to the comparative competition between local governments at all levels in order to obtain more political achievements. Under the dual dynamic structure, the responsibilities and pressures of counterpart support work are distributed to different levels, fields and institutions through the decomposition of tasks, which drives each main body to actively carry out the relevant support work.

3.3.1. Vertical "Administrative Contracting System"

Firstly, the vertical "administrative contracting system" is the first driving force behind the operation of the counterpart support system. The "administrative contracting system" refers to the fact that under the unitary system, the central government and all levels of government deliver the authority of territorial management to the lower levels of government by way of agency from level to level. In the system of counterpart support, the central government exerts influence on the local governments by contracting out the "counterpart support policy" at each level. On the one hand, the central government's centralised management and dominant position reflects its authority, and on the other hand, the local governments are instructed to implement the policy in a more flexible way, but they need to carry out the relevant work under the framework of the central government's decision. On the other hand, local governments are instructed to implement policies with greater flexibility, but they need to do so within the framework of central policymaking.

For example, Hangzhou's counterpart support to Changchun City in 2018 is a typical case. In 2018, according to the decision-making and deployment of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council to implement a new round of strategy to revitalise old industrial bases in the Northeast region and other old industrial bases, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) identified Jilin Province and Zhejiang Province to carry out counterpart cooperation, and planned to set up a counterpart cooperation relationship between Changchun City and Hangzhou Municipality. According to the Circular of the National Development and Reform Commission on the Issuance of the Implementation Plan for Counterpart Cooperation between Jilin Province and Zhejiang Province, the State Council Leading Group for Revitalising Old Industrial Bases in the Northeast Region and Other Areas has taken a coordinating and leading role in the work of counterpart cooperation between the two provinces. On this basis, Jilin Province and Zhejiang Province respectively set up a leading group of counterpart support work as the main body of coordination and implementation of support work. At the next level, the two provinces further set up the Changchun City Leading Group for Counterpart Cooperation Work and the Hangzhou City Leading Group for Counterpart Support Work, with the municipal leading groups being responsible to the provincial leading groups. In this case, from the central government to the two provinces to the municipal level, a complete political system is formed, and interdependent decision-making, implementing and evaluating bodies all exist in the political system formed by this political process. Task instructions from higher levels were sent down layer by layer to lower levels of government departments, which promoted the efficient fulfilment of counterpart support tasks between local governments within the framework of the central directives.

3.3.2. Horizontal "Competition Tournaments"

Horizontally, the "competitive bidding race" provides a second source of motivation for counterpart support. The results of the evaluation of counterpart support practices initiated at the central level are often used as important reference indicators for the performance appraisal of local government

officials. The pressure of a "competition tournament", which includes both positive incentives and negative penalties, is generated when local governments on the supporting side face the task of providing counterpart support contracted by the central government. For example, from 2011 to 2019, a total of 13 Kunshan cadres and talents in aid of Xinjiang have been named "Advanced Individuals in Aid Work in the Autonomous Region", "Outstanding Cadres and Talents in Aid of Xinjiang in the Autonomous Region", and "Advanced Individuals in Striving for Excellence in the Autonomous Region". Negative punitive pressure is mainly to urge the local government to focus more on the actual effect of counterpart support by way of notification of criticism and punishment. For example, some local governments will conduct a final assessment of the cadres who support Xinjiang and Tibet at the end of the year.

4. PROSPECTS FOR DEEPENING THE REFORM OF OUR GOVERNMENT'S COUNTERPART SUPPORT POLICY

Since the 20th Party Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasised the further strengthening of counterpart support cooperation and east-west collaboration, and the counterpart support system has continued to evolve in the direction of greater perfection, initially presenting the characteristics of intelligent support techniques, balanced support practices and scientific support methods.

4.1. Enhancement of Support Technology Intelligence

The arrival of the digital era has provided a brand-new path for government governance, and digital governance has been widely used in government affairs, greatly enhancing the effectiveness of government governance. Similarly, digital governance empowers counterpart support, which can effectively solve the practical dilemmas and enhance the responsibility of the counterpart support subject and the participation of the support object.

With regard to the accountability of the supporting body, the work status of various government departments can be better monitored dynamically through digital connectivity mechanisms, thus effectively preventing the avoidance of responsibility by the supporting government. In addition, digital technology can predict and monitor the risks that may arise in the support practice in advance, so as to provide reference for the decision-making behaviour of the supporting parties. The right course of action can increase the confidence of the supporters in their practice and reduce their "tactical behaviour" to avoid risks. In terms of the participation of support recipients, in the past, support recipients could only rely on the assistance provided by the supporting government, and it was difficult for enterprises, social organisations and other subjects to play a real role in the support activities. However, after the digital technology-enabled government governance, enterprises and residents in the digital space have become the main body of government governance, and with the help of the digital platform constructed by digital technology, multiple subjects have achieved synergies and complementarities, so that the supporting government, enterprises, social organisations and other main bodies can make joint efforts to carry out counterpart support, and the supporting subjects can dock with enterprises, social organisations and other main bodies and carry out cooperation, which will stimulate the participation of the supporting subjects. Endogenous motivation.

4.2. Promoting Balanced Support Practices

The objective of counterpart support is not only to promote the economic development of less developed regions, but also to maintain the balance of assistance and cooperation among regions. In past support practices, some supporting parties, because of their dominant position in terms of material resources, often relocated highly polluting and labour-demanding industries into underdeveloped regions, making uncontrolled use of local ecological resources to gain economic

benefits, and the recipients often supported cooperation because of their own disadvantaged position as well as their huge economic output. However, the recipient side relies only on its own labour and ecological resources to develop labour-intensive industries, which is obviously not conducive to achieving long-term sustainable development. Therefore, when formulating policies on counterpart support, it is necessary to establish the goal of green economic development, and make ecological protection and industrial upgrading in the recipient areas the way forward. In addition, in terms of areas of co-operation, the balanced development of various regions should also be promoted. It is necessary to further expand the areas of counterpart support and co-operation, so as to achieve all-round, multi-level and wide-ranging counterpart support and co-operation. In addition to traditional economic assistance and technical support, attention should also be paid to strengthening humanistic exchanges and social co-operation, promoting co-operation and development in the fields of education, medical care and culture, and fostering comprehensive development and social stability in impoverished regions. At the same time, all regions are encouraged to strengthen exchanges and mutual understanding, draw on advanced experience, jointly explore new modes of counterpart support, and promote the continuous improvement of the quality and effectiveness of counterpart support work.

4.3. Promoting Scientific Approaches to Support

Overseas support has two power mechanisms: the vertical "administrative contracting system" and the horizontal "competition tournament". Driven by the pressure from both sides, the support actions of local governments are often characterised by the "project system", which seeks to achieve quick results in the short term, but neglects the suitability of the project to the recipient area, as well as the effectiveness and continuity of the practice of supporting less developed areas. Under the pressure from both sides, local governments' support actions are often characterised by a "project system", which pursues short-term and rapidly visible political performance, but neglects the suitability of the project and the recipient place, as well as the effectiveness and continuity of the practice of supporting the less developed regions. For example, in the course of supporting some rural areas, some infrastructure construction projects have failed to give full consideration to the realistic conditions of the localities and the maintenance costs of the facilities at a later stage, blindly investing a large amount of aid funds in the construction of roads, libraries, landmarks and other hardware facilities, and lacking a reasonable co-ordinated planning and a long-term mechanism. Therefore, in improving the policy of counterpart support, we need to strengthen the supervision of aid funds and adopt a standardised system as the guarantee and guideline for the operation of counterpart support. In the process of using the funds, we should avoid the problems of "focusing on hardware but not software", "focusing on construction but not maintenance", and the short-termisation and homogenisation of industrial assistance, so as to further improve the co-ordinated planning of the assistance funds and the evaluation of their effectiveness, and to improve the efficiency of counterpart support.

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