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How to identify poor immigrants? - An empirical study of the Three Gorges Reservoir in China

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to study on the precise identification and targeting of immigrant poverty in the TGRR, with a multi-dimensional poverty line as a standard, which has transcended the traditional income poverty line. Then, we figured out the changing trend and the causes of immigrant poverty under the perspective of multidimensional poverty. Based on the dual cutoff method and regression analysis, the study results show that the discrepancy of poverty before and after immigration is significant, but the poverty problem of immigrants in the TGRR is still serious. The current multi-poverty incidence of immigrants is 30.15%, which means that there are still 2.3097 million people under poverty. The major causes of poverty in this region are poverty in assets, poverty in education and poverty in health. The poverty contribution rate of land scarcity has increased from 12.16% to 29.52% with the deterioration of land loss, which has a negative effect on immigrants' livelihood. The results reveal several outstanding poverty problems in this region: the coverage of social security of immigrants is far from ideal; There are still 12.75% of the impoverished immigrants without medical insurance and 11.36% without pension insurance; the percentage of female laborers, the education level of laborers, the percentage of agricultural expenditure and the percentage of medical expenditure have significant correlations with immigrants' poverty in this region. The paper argues that the precise identification and targeting of poverty reduction in China should be undertaken from a multidimensional perspective.

1. Introduction

China's poverty alleviation has made remarkable achievements. As China's largest water conservancy project and the largest migrant program in history, the Three Gorges project has changed the natural, ecological and living environment of the project areas, resulting in over 1.2 million involuntary migration (59% urban and 41% rural). The Three Gorges Reservoir Region (TGRR) is situated at an important geographical location with complicated geo-conditions. Poverty in this region appears to be particularly complicated when the deterioration of eco-environment and complex geological conditions are intertwined with the changes of immigrants' livelihood. The region of the TGRR is the intersection of the Qinba mountains and the Wuling mountains, both of which belong to the extremely poverty-stricken areas in China. The relocation of over one million people has extremely changed the livelihood models and living environment of immigrants, large stretches of paddy fields and a great many houses were flooded. The Three Gorges Reservoir Region has fallen into "a vicious circle of poverty". The poverty of reservoir immigrants is usually an intertexture of the influence from ecological environment (Liang, 2009). Therefore, the immigrants' demands for poverty alleviation are more complex, and their desire for poverty eradication is more eager and intense.

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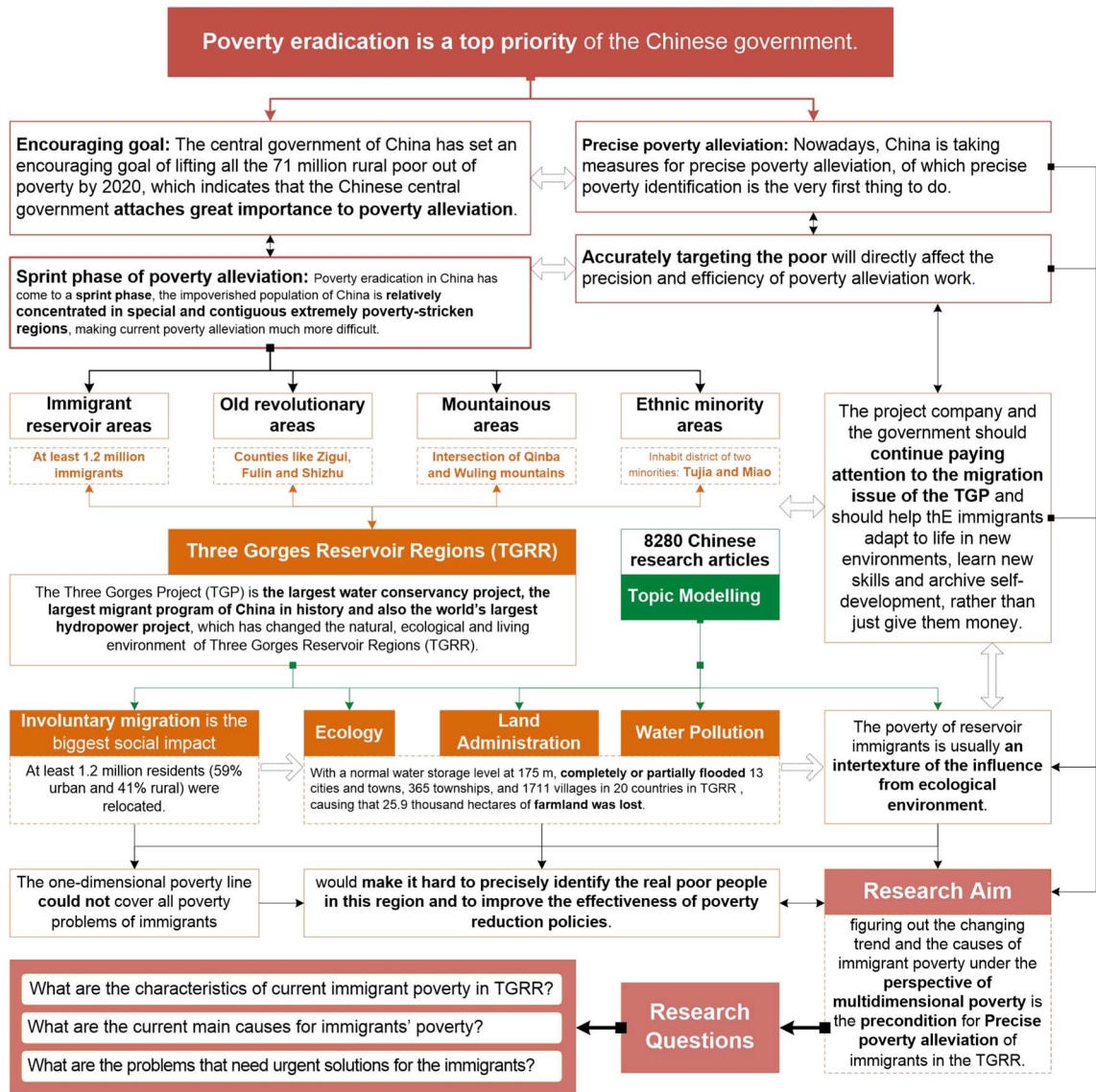


Fig. 1. The framework of the research topic.

Nowadays, China is taking measures for precise poverty alleviation, of which precise poverty identification is the very first thing to do. Accurately targeting the poor will directly affect the precision and efficiency of all the poverty alleviation work. Currently, the poor are identified primarily by income poverty lines. In Yichang, where the Three Gorges Reservoir project is located, the rural impoverished population reduced from 606 thousands in 2010 to 443 thousands in 2015 based on the national poverty line of 2011 (annual per capita farmers net income of 2300 yuan), and the poverty incidence dropped from 24% in 2010 to 17.6% in 2015 (The Three Gorges Daily, 2015). However, the newest national poverty line is set to 2800 yuan in 2014. Thus, the updating of income poverty line makes the inaccuracy of Yichang poverty reduction effect, and this poverty line obviously could not include all dimensions of the poor performance. Therefore, under the current poverty alleviation circumstances, a single income poverty line will cover many poverty problems of immigrants, and would make it hard to precisely identify the real poor people in this region and to improve the effectiveness of poverty reduction policies (Alkire & Seth, 2015; Wang & Alkire, 2009). The measurement of multidimensional poverty requires huge amount of basic work of data collection and rigid sample surveys including multiple time point household questionnaires, therefore it calls for a large amount of preparation for data collection and consolidation.

In view of this problem, figuring out the changing trend and the causes of immigrant poverty under the perspective of multidimensional poverty is the precondition of alleviating the poverty problem of immigrants in the TGRR. Fig. 1 describes the special of the TGRR and the reasons why it is important to study on the poverty of the TGRR.

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