

The Triple Embedding: Operational Mechanisms of Rural Collective Economic Managers

—A Case Study Based on a Village in Zhejiang

Linlin Li

Zhejiang A&F University. Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China

Haoyue Zhang

Zhejiang A&F University. Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China

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Abstract: The rural collective ownership system is China's primary property rights system, with its assets managed by village-level shareholding economic cooperatives. As rural development in China becomes increasingly complex and market-oriented, the operation of collective economies has entered a phase of professional management, with some villages hiring professional managers for specialized operations. In regions like Zhejiang and Guangdong, the introduction of rural collective economic managers represents a crucial pathway for advancing the market-oriented transformation of the rural collective economy. Drawing on embeddedness theory, this paper analyzes the triple embeddedness mechanism of such managers in village operations, encompassing governmental, market, and local community dimensions. By embedding within the administrative system, they secure policy support and resource integration; through local community embedding, they gain social networks and cultural recognition; and via market embedding, they activate village economic vitality through professional market-oriented operations. The study reveals that developing these multidimensional embedding capabilities forms the institutional foundation for high-quality and sustainable rural collective economic development. Specifically, local community embedding lays the groundwork for cultivating market capacity; institutional embedding within government structures is essential for achieving market-oriented goals; and market-driven village operations represent an effective pathway to realizing multiple objectives, including high-quality rural collective economic development and government-backed rural revitalization.

Keywords: new rural collective economy, rural collective economic managers, village operations, multi-dimensional embedding, rural development

I. Problem statement

In 2022, the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China explicitly stated the need to "develop a new type of rural collective economy." The 2023 *"Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Comprehensively Promoting the Key Work of Rural Revitalization"* pointed out the need to "establish operating mechanisms with clear property rights, scientific governance structures, stable management methods, and reasonable income distribution, and to explore diversified approaches such as resource contracting, property leasing, intermediary services, and asset equity participation to develop the new type of rural collective economy." The new type of rural collective economy is an important component and manifestation of the socialist public ownership economy, playing significant roles in regional economic development.. As a special legal entity, it possesses both public ownership attributes and special attributes that require market-oriented operation (Yanqiu Kan, 2025). The dual attributes of the new type of rural collective economy lead to numerous difficulties in its development. How to promote

the market-oriented development of the new type of rural collective economy tailored to local conditions is currently an important issue facing rural areas. A review of existing literature shows that current models for developing the new type of rural collective economy mainly include party-building led models (Dongliang Zhu et al., 2025; Wei Zeng, 2023), capital flowing to rural areas (Maoying Wu et al., 2024; Shan Luo, 2023; Yiran Hu et al., 2025), and government-led models (Shuliang Lyu, 2008; Hongzhen Zhang et al., 2020; Huang Du, 2023). However, these practices face problems such as insufficient marketization, excessive pursuit of self-interest, and unsustainable development of village resources.

Since 2019, regions such as Zhejiang and Guangdong have hired rural professional managers to manage rural resources comprehensively¹, representing an important exploration of the market-oriented development of the new type of rural collective economy. On May 8, 2025, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security further introduced a new occupation, officially defining "rural professional managers" as "rural collective economy managers," referring to "personnel entrusted by rural collective economic organizations to develop and strengthen the new type of rural collective economy, who engage in economic activity management such as resource contracting, property leasing, intermediary services, and management of operational properties." From the perspective of professional recognition, the relationship between rural collective economy managers and rural collective economic organizations is a principal-agent relationship. As an emerging profession, rural collective economy managers represent a nascent "rural actor" for the new type of rural collective economy, with far-reaching implications for reforming the rural collective economy and supporting rural revitalization.

¹ Institutional Origins: In response to the national rural revitalization strategy, the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Bureau of Yuhang District, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, in consultation with the finance department, decided to recruit rural professional managers for villages. The finance department proposed an annual salary of RMB 150,000 (at the negotiation stage, provisional). In June 2019, the Bureau issued the first recruitment announcement for rural professional managers, selecting pilot villages through voluntary applications by village committees and self-determined site selection. After the pilot proved successful, the second cohort of rural professional managers was recruited in 2020, this time using a competitive application process. The adopted model involved the establishment of "strong village companies" wholly owned by economic cooperatives, with village collectives as the sole shareholders. The district finance department and subdistrict offices contributed to the annual salary of RMB 180,000 for rural professional managers in an 8:2 ratio, which included a base salary of RMB 120,000 per year and a performance-based salary of RMB 60,000 per year.

As of June 2025, 358 rural collective economy managers have been publicly recruited across the country². In the process of operating villages, these rural collective economy managers have not only promoted the quality improvement and efficiency enhancement of the new type of rural collective economy, effectively increased farmers' incomes, and continuously optimized village environments, but have also been realizing their own economic and social value. However, through field research, we found that while rural areas face a shortage of operational talents, there is also a paradox of frequent resignations among hired professional managers. The reason is that governments, villages, academia, and even the professional managers themselves have overemphasized the market operation capabilities of professional managers, while neglecting a basic logic: the prerequisite for rural collective economy professional managers to exert their market operation capabilities is full integration into the administrative system and local society. Some professional managers, due to a lack of understanding of the government's governance logic such as project-based management, line-based management, task-force-based management, and special-commissioner-based management³, and unfamiliarity with the current "semi-familiar" social logic of rural society, resign, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, before demonstrating their operational capabilities. Therefore, our research team conducted in-depth research in the eight villages of "Yushang Daoxiang" in Yuhang Street, Yuhang District, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, deeply investigating the practices of rural collective economy managers in villages with successful experience, such as Yong'an Village, Zhuyuan Village, and Xiadoumen Village, studying the process of professional managers embedding into administration, society, and the market. At the theoretical level, we attempt to address the shortcomings in research on rural collective economy managers and provide theoretical support for the village operations conducted by rural collective economy managers; at the practical level, we hope to help more rural collective economy managers smoothly enter villages, efficiently promote the market-oriented operation of rural funds, assets, and resources, effectively promote the market-oriented transformation and development of the new type of rural collective economy, and drive increases in both collective and villagers' incomes.

II. Literature review

² The data are based on the application statistics of rural collective economic managers collected by our research team during the fieldwork in Zhejiang Province, Guangdong Province, Hunan Province, and other regions, including 294 from Zhejiang Province, 61 from Guangdong Province, and 3 from Hunan Province.

³ Science and technology special commissioners, rural culture special commissioners, rural revitalization special commissioners, etc.

From the perspective of existing literature, academic research on rural collective economy managers is generally relatively limited, mainly focusing on rural professional managers, rural CEOs, agricultural professional managers, and professional managers of farmer cooperatives, among which there is more research on rural CEOs, agricultural professional managers, and professional managers of farmer cooperatives.

First, research on rural professional managers mainly focuses on three parts: First, talent team building for rural professional managers, primarily proposing suggestions for talent team building from the perspectives of talent resource scarcity, insufficient localization, and institutional conflicts (Jiada Ding , 2022). Second, institutional improvement, mainly proposing suggestions to improve the rural professional manager system from the perspectives of imperfect selection systems, inadequate resource allocation, unsound performance evaluation, and difficulties in talent matching (Sheng Wang et al., 2023; Cui Tinglu Cui, 2024). Third, pathways to empowering rural operation, mainly emphasizing five empowering factors: innovative operation concepts and methods, coordinating multi-actor participation, obtaining government support, personal capabilities and literacy, and village innate resource endowments, and proposing suggestions for how rural professional managers can empower rural operation, such as "enhancing the endogenous attraction of villages to professional talents, improving the national resource acquisition capacity of rural operation talents, perfecting the rural industrial development capacity, leveraging new quality productive forces of digital intelligence technology, and hiring professionals to do professional work" (Kejie Sun , 2024).

Second, research on rural CEOs mainly focuses on three aspects: difficulties in village integration, mechanisms of autonomy generation, and innovations in the subjects, models, and mechanisms through which rural CEOs empower rural revitalization. Xiaoyun Li pointed out in *"Dimensions of Rural Revitalization"* that the main work of rural CEOs is the operation and management of villages (Xiaoyun Li , 2024). Hang Li (2023) defines rural CEOs as persons employed by rural collective economic companies, primarily responsible for the management of rural collective assets and the development and expansion of the rural collective economy. First, the difficulties of rural CEOs in village integration mainly focus on institutional integration, resource integration, economic integration, and cultural integration, and scholars have proposed solutions such as transforming external advantages, aggregating common knowledge, constructing common interests, cultivating social networks, as well as cultural capital re-adaptation, social capital reconstruction, and economic capital reproduction (Jin Xu

et al., 2022; Yan Zeng et al., 2024; Zhijun Liu et al., 2025). Second, Hang Li et al. (2024) proposed suggestions for the autonomy generation mechanism of rural CEOs from the perspectives of government and village collective empowerment, flexible talent embedding, and policy embedding. Third, from the perspectives of innovations in the subjects, models, and mechanisms of rural CEOs empowering rural revitalization, they explore the construction of the rural CEO talent market, the "subject embedding - function integration" of rural CEOs into villages, and innovative models of rural CEOs empowering rural revitalization from the dominant level, task level, and standard level (Shiping Guo et al., 2023; Jin Wu et al., 2024)

Third, research on agricultural professional managers or professional managers of farmer cooperatives mainly focuses on the impact of agricultural professional managers on cooperative performance and the promotion of agricultural operation mode transformation and operation mechanism innovation through the "agricultural co-management system." First, research on the impact of agricultural professional managers on cooperative performance from the perspectives of their personal literacy, pressure, and equity incentives (Ya Chen et al., 2020; Ya Chen et al., 2021; Rui Chen et al., 2021). Second, research focusing on learning from and promoting the practices and experiences of the "agricultural co-management system" in Chongzhou to promote the transformation of agricultural operation modes and the innovation of agricultural operation mechanisms (Shaolei Yang et al., 2018; Guoqiang Cheng et al., 2015; Biliang Luo, 2015).

In summary, the above research has laid a solid foundation for this paper, but there is still room for expansion. First, among the few studies on rural collective economy managers, existing research mainly focuses on three aspects: talent team building, institutional improvement, and pathways to empowering rural operation. These three aspects mostly focus on the development of the rural professional manager group itself, neglecting research on the unique role of rural professional managers in the development of the new type of rural collective economy. However, rural collective economy managers are key factors in promoting the market-oriented transformation and development of the new type of rural collective economy. The current academic perspective is relatively limited, lacking a systematic comb of the village operation mechanism through which rural professional managers promote the market-oriented and high-quality development of the new type of rural collective economy. Second, rural collective economy managers are not equivalent to rural CEOs, but some scholars have generalized rural collective economy managers into the group of rural CEOs (Hang Li et al., 2024). Rural collective economy managers are managers of the

new type of rural collective economy, with a principal-agent relationship to the new type of rural collective economy, while rural CEOs have a broader scope, including rural collective economy managers, young entrepreneurs, returned capable individuals, etc. Moreover, rural CEOs in places like Yunnan are more prominent as "deputies" or "assistants" to government task forces (Yifan Wu et al., 2023). Third, agricultural professional managers and professional managers of farmer cooperatives are primarily responsible for a single industry or organization, focusing more on the development of the primary industry, while rural collective economy managers pay more attention to the integrated development of primary, secondary, and tertiary industries in rural areas, indicating differences between them. Therefore, drawing on existing research and based on the practical investigation of the eight villages of "Yushang Daoxiang," this paper attempts to adopt new endogenous development theory and embeddedness theory to deeply analyze the internal mechanism of the village operation model of rural collective economy managers from the three dimensions of politics, market, and rural society, and to explore how rural collective economy managers, by linking internal and external village actors and utilizing internal and external village funds, assets, and resources to multi-dimensionally embed into villages, thereby promoting the market-oriented transformation and development of the new type of rural collective economy and increasing collective and villagers' incomes.

III. Analytical framework and case introduction

(I) Theoretical framework

1. New endogenous development theory

New endogenous development theory emerged to address the shortcomings of exogenous development theory and endogenous development theory (Xiaowenxu Yue et al., 2022), and has been widely applied in fields such as sociology and development studies. Exogenous development theory emphasizes entrusting external enterprises or governments with regional development, pursuing economic growth as the primary goal, but this has led to regions losing economic and cultural independence and falling into resource crises (Huanzhou Zhang et al., 2007). Endogenous development theory emphasizes that rural economic development does not rely on external forces but mainly on internal efforts (Xingfa Zhang et al., 2021), but this has also led to excessive "isolation" in rural development. Therefore, new endogenous development theory emerged. Dongliang Zhu et al. argue that effective interaction between internal and external resource forces in villages can promote sustainable

rural development (Dongliang Zhu, 2025). Maoying Wu et al. emphasize that "the new endogenous development model for rural areas is a systemic development concept containing multi-dimensional content such as multi-actor composition, collaboration models, benefit distribution, and governance mechanisms" (Maoying Wu et al., 2023). Ya Zhu et al. (2019) emphasize formulating rural development strategies in a "bottom-up" manner, encouraging local residents and regional public institutions to cooperate and participate in rural construction and development. The new endogenous development theory emphasizes adopting a holistic perspective, fully valuing local participation while actively introducing external actors and resources, combining internal and external elements to achieve regional overall development (Lan Wang, 2020).

Since the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy, various regions across the country have attached great importance to rural development, and rural development models vary widely, but various problems also exist. Practice in various regions has proven that only by combining internal and external factors can true regional development be achieved. Introducing rural collective economy managers is a positive measure taken by Yuhang District, Zhejiang Province, and other places to achieve rural development. Rural collective economy managers, by integrating internal village funds, assets, and resources, seeking help from external actors such as the government, and leveraging their own market operation capabilities, link internal and external rural factors (villages, government, market, operational talents, etc.), truly achieving the efficiency improvement and income increase of the village collective economy and the market-oriented transformation of the new type of rural collective economy, and promoting rural development. This is a vivid embodiment of the new endogenous development theory in rural areas of Zhejiang Province.

2. Embeddedness theory

New endogenous development theory provides a theoretical direction for village development at the macro level, but how villages achieve high-quality development inevitably involves specific implementation, and new endogenous development theory is difficult to provide specific practical guidance for village operation. To achieve realistic village development, this paper also adopts embeddedness theory, hoping to provide theoretical explanation for village operation at both the theoretical direction level and the specific implementation level. Embeddedness theory has been widely applied in economics and sociology. From an economic perspective, Karl Polanyi first proposed the concept of

"embeddedness," arguing that economic behavior is embedded between economic institutions and non-economic institutions. Building on Polanyi's ideas, Granovetter emphasized the influence of society on economic action, arguing that actors are embedded in social relationship systems. After the contributions of Polanyi and Granovetter, embeddedness theory gradually formed a complete theoretical system. From a sociological perspective, Jing Chen (2018) emphasized that new agricultural business entities should, in their development process, use "relationship construction" to "embed" into local society by leveraging the relational ties of acquaintance society and local customs such as personal connections and face. Shui Yu et al. (2023) emphasized that under the trend of counter-urbanization, the "returning to the countryside" group optimizes the rural revitalization pattern through four dimensions: political embeddedness, cultural embeddedness, identity embeddedness, and capital embeddedness. Long Zhang et al. (2023) argue that college student village officials should actively embed into villages adhering to the concept of "serving rural areas and achieving self-realization," achieving the identity transformation of "becoming village officials" and "becoming villagers." Yixuan Li et al. (2024) argue that the practical logic of cadres going to the countryside in the new era to optimize rural governance structures cannot be separated from the institutional adjustment of four-dimensional "embedded integration": political-structural-relational-cognitive. Yujie Chen (2019) argues that grassroots party organizations, facing the loss of authoritative resources and decline in governance performance, can re-embed themselves into rural society from the three levels of "organization, institution, and culture." Scholars have explored feasible paths for village embeddedness of different groups from different actor perspectives, while continuously enriching embeddedness theory.

The so-called "embeddedness," according to Aimei Xu et al. (2019), refers to "the process and state of one thing entering another thing," but from a sociological perspective, it refers to the process of individuals or groups integrating into a new social environment. For rural areas, different actors integrate using different methods such as political embeddedness, market embeddedness, cultural embeddedness, structural embeddedness, and organizational embeddedness, while also generating multi-faceted impacts including political, economic, cultural, structural, and organizational effects (Xu Yang et al., 2024). Existing research often analyzes the village integration paths of actors from the perspectives of new agricultural business entities, college student village officials, grassroots party organizations, etc., or explores how actors embed into villages from the perspectives of rural revitalization and

village governance. However, there is relatively little research on how actors conduct village operations after "embedding" into villages and how they promote the market-oriented transformation and growth of the new type of rural collective economy. Therefore, embeddedness theory not only provides certain theoretical guidance for actors to embed into villages but also provides a practical "administrative connection - village integration - market penetration" embedding process. The entry of rural collective economy managers into villages is a manifestation of the practical path of embedding into villages under the guidance of embeddedness theory. Therefore, this paper takes the emerging group of rural collective economy managers as the carrier and selects "embeddedness theory" as the analytical framework (see Figure 1), attempting to explain how rural collective economy managers embed into villages through the three dimensions of politics, market, and rural society to conduct village operations, and how they promote the market-oriented and high-quality development of the new type of rural collective economy.

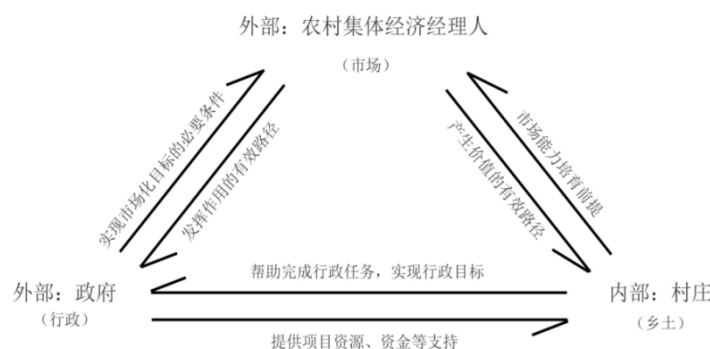


图1 新内源发展理论+嵌入性理论

Figure 1 Embedding Framework for Rural Collective Economic Managers

(II) Case introduction and research methods

1. Case introduction

This paper selects the eight villages of "Yushang Daoxiang" in Yuhang Street, Yuhang District, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province (Yong'an Village, Xiadoumen Village, Xita Village, Hongtong Village, Shanghu Village, Xianzhai Village, Zhuyuan Village, and Yiqiao Village) as the case study. Since June 2019, Yuhang District has introduced a rural professional manager system, recruiting market-oriented operation talents nationwide, and begun hiring rural collective economy managers. As of April 2025, Yuhang District has hired 41 rural collective economy managers, and the village operation model of rural collective economy managers in Yuhang Street has become relatively mature and has been promoted for reference.

Yuhang Street in Yuhang District is divided into two areas: the agricultural area north of Tiaoxi and the industrial area. The eight villages of "Yushang Daoxiang" are all located in the agricultural area north of Tiaoxi, with a total area of approximately 71.8 square kilometers, taking rice cultivation as the core industry, forming an agricultural, cultural, and tourism integration demonstration area. The eight villages are geographically close, with slightly different resources and similar leading industry types. The eight villages face the same development problem: abundant village resources but no one to operate them, and the village collective income needs to be increased. The main reasons are: first, the village's two committees are busy with village affairs and have no energy to operate village resources; second, due to the distribution of industrial parks nearby, most villagers are engaged in non-agricultural industries. Therefore, the villages urgently need an operational talent to operate village funds, assets, and resources, promote the market-oriented development of the new type of rural collective economy, and increase collective income and villagers' incomes.

Among the eight villages, the Yuhang District government first provided financial support for Yong'an Village to introduce rural collective economy manager LS, who was among the second batch of rural collective economy managers entering villages in 2020. Xita Village, Xiadoumen Village, Yiqiao Village, and Zhuyuan Village successively recruited rural collective economy managers in 2021 and 2022 respectively. Due to policy restrictions on the Yuhang District Finance Bureau's support for rural collective economy managers, Yuhang Street provided funding to recruit "village dream makers"⁴ for the villages among the eight that had not yet hired rural collective economy managers (Table 1). LS, together with the rural collective economy managers and village dream makers of the other seven villages, formed an operation team, gradually establishing an integrated system of primary, secondary, and tertiary industries and organizing activities such as rice dumpling making and "village galas" to achieve village collective development. During field research in May 2025, we conducted more than 20 in-depth interviews with the rural collective economy managers of the eight villages of "Yushang Daoxiang" in Yuhang District, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, accumulating substantial practical materials. Using these rich field materials, we aim

⁴ Village dream makers are a group with the same functions as rural collective economy managers, established due to the district's tight fiscal operational funds, with Yuhang Street providing funding (120,000 RMB/year). According to a village dream maker in Hongtong Village, "The villages that dream makers work with basically do not yet have the capacity to recruit professional managers. The street office set this up to coordinate with the Agriculture Bureau's plan of 'one professional manager per village,' so we are also called street-level professional managers."

to summarize the replicable pathways through which rural collective economy managers promote the market-oriented development of the new type of rural collective economy and support rural revitalization using the rich field materials.

Name	Entry Time	Current Position	Previous Occupation Type
LS	2020	Yong'an Village Professional Manager + General Manager of Eight-Village Company	Executive of a Listed Company
JF	2021	Xita Village Professional Manager + Project Application of Eight-Village Company	Government Staff
SY	2021	Xiadoumen Village Professional Manager + Deputy General Manager of Management Center of Eight-Village Company	Executive of a Listed Company
SHL	2021	Yiqiao Village Professional Manager + Deputy General Manager of Marketing Center of Eight-Village Company	Executive of a Listed Company
FLH	2022	Zhuyuan Village Professional Manager + Head of Operation Center of Eight-Village Company	Executive of an Agricultural Enterprise
LS	2022	Hongtong Village Professional Manager + Head of Agricultural, Cultural and Tourism of Eight-Village Company	Executive of a Listed Company
XXQ	2023	Shanghu Village Professional Manager + Head of Digitalization of Eight-Village Company	Head of Cross-border E-commerce
FYF	2023	Xianzhai Village Professional Manager + Head of Training Department of Eight-Village Company	Head of Scenic Area Operation

Table 1 Basic Information of Rural Professional Managers in the Eight Villages

IV. The village operation process of rural collective economy managers

The eight villages of Yushang Daoxiang are agricultural villages with rice cultivation as the core industry, among which Yong'an Village is the most typical, with 98% of its land being permanent basic farmland. After share reform, the farmland was allocated to various farmers for cultivation. Before the introduction of rural collective economy managers, the secretary of Yong'an Village, ZSB, had already begun farmland renovation as early as 2003. Later, considering that merely integrating resources was insufficient to meet the village's

development needs, he introduced LSYS Company and GL Network Technology Company in 2019 and 2020 respectively. However, due to insufficient operational and planning capabilities of the two companies and issues with profit distribution, they gradually withdrew from Yong'an Village. In 2019, the Yuhang District government, to further promote the construction of the "Thousand Villages Demonstration Project" and beautiful villages, introduced the rural collective economy manager system. LS learned of the release of this system from government leaders and successfully became the rural collective economy manager of Yong'an Village through a "written examination + interview." Building on the village's previous development, the professional manager leveraged his market operation capabilities, formed a team, improved the organizational structure, and ultimately achieved the development from Yong'an Village alone to a cluster of eight villages, while also transforming the village operation model he gradually explored from version 1.0 to version 3.0.

(I) Version 1.0: initial efforts

In 2020, when LS entered Yong'an Village, the village's original operating company, GL Company, had not completely withdrawn from Yong'an Village. Due to GL Company's team operation and the village's unfamiliarity with LS, professional manager LS faced certain difficulties in the initial stage of operation. He did not give up, but gradually built an operation system relying on his own market operation capabilities and the support of a preliminary team. In the preliminary team, each person held multiple roles, gradually winning the trust and support of the village secretary and villagers. In 2021, Yong'an Agricultural Technology Co., Ltd.⁵ (including LS) had only six team members (with the village accountant concurrently serving as the financial officer), mostly villagers from this village or nearby villages. LS divided the work among the employees, assigning them to relatively simple tasks such as supply chain and sales, while he himself held multiple roles (see Table 2).

Position	Main Responsibilities
Internal & External Supply Chain	Internally liaising with agricultural product suppliers; externally focusing on logistics coordination

⁵ Hangzhou Daoxiang Town Agricultural Technology Co., Ltd. is the strong village company established by Yong'an Village. Strong village companies are collective enterprises established by the government to transfer the operational risks of the village collective economy. Before introducing rural collective economy managers, each village is required to establish a shareholding economic cooperative funded by the village collective economy. The strong village company is then a collective enterprise wholly owned by the shareholding economic cooperative.

Visitor Center Reception, Courtyard Steward	Visitor reception, concurrently administrative work, shared courtyard management
Finance	Village accountant concurrently
Production Administrator	Re-employed former deputy secretary of Yong'an Village, responsible for technical guidance and production management of rice cultivation
Customer Service Assistance; Mini-program Operation	Intern (one local villager)
Chairman	Village secretary, coordinating relationships between the operating company, villagers, and the government
CEO	Overall responsibility, project application, sales, liaising with adoption enterprises, expanding adoption business, etc.

Table 2 Team Division of Labor, Version 1.0

In the initial stage of village operation, the LS team operated Yong'an Village with a branding concept, establishing the "Yong'an Daoxiang Town" brand. To increase the visibility of the village and its agricultural products, the manager team enhanced Yong'an Village's visibility by conducting brand activities, following contemporary trends, and using multiple channels for brand promotion. The LS team initially organized two brand activities: the Harvest Festival and the Spring Sowing Festival. Leveraging government support, they invited chambers of commerce and enterprises to participate, successfully expanding the "paddy field adoption" business and achieving a "B-to-B" business operation model. In addition to expanding the "adoption" business for corporate teams, the LS team seized the contemporary trend of "digital + green." Catering to the green lifestyle concept, the professional manager team used WeChat mini-programs to develop an adoption business for paddy field agricultural products targeting small clients (individuals). Users could monitor their planted grains or vegetables in real-time via surveillance cameras and harvest all the green crops they planted. The emergence and use of the adoption system increased the value of Yong'an Village's farmland from 2,000 RMB per mu to 6,000 RMB per mu, effectively increasing villagers' incomes. Furthermore, influenced by the brand concept of Professor H from Zhejiang University, the LS team placed great emphasis on brand promotion. They fully utilized platforms such as WeChat groups, WeChat public accounts, video channels, and Douyin, and also invited major media including television stations through the street office and district government to interview and promote Yong'an Village, thereby enhancing Yong'an Village's brand visibility. While attracting tourists to Yong'an Village, this also

brought tangible income growth to village homestays, farm stays, and other businesses, and the LS team gained the welcome and support of the villagers.

(II) Version 2.0: team formation

"Professionals do professional work. To achieve this goal, we definitely need professionals to do it; not any team can do it well. We have high requirements for both employing people and managing people" (LS, rural collective economy manager of Yong'an Village, 20220806-1). Starting in 2020, the government and village committee assisted LS in recruiting employees for the Daoxiang Town company. By 2022, the company had grown to 21 people, with clearer division of labor among departments and gradually improving work efficiency. In 2021, the LS team already had a preliminary company structure: "This is a fairly simple structure. With a total of 21 people, there is one business department and one non-business department. The R&D department definitely collaborates with others. For the finance department, the street office and village have financial management personnel. On our side, we actually have two departments: one operation organization, now headed by SY, and one management center, which I am concurrently handling" (LS, rural collective economy manager of Yong'an Village, 20220806-2). Over two years, the LS team continuously explored and improved the organizational structure of the strong village company. By 2023, the company structure was largely complete, with team members continuously increasing, forming first-level institutions including the Operation Center, Management Center, Development Center, Project Center, and Cultural, Tourism and Brand Center, each with multiple second-level sub-departments. At the same time, each center head was responsible for a different village, serving as either the rural collective economy manager or village dream maker of that village. The organizational system of the strong village company continuously improved, systematically operating Yong'an Village from multiple aspects, increasing Yong'an Village's collective economic income from 730,000 RMB in 2019 to 6.09 million

RMB in 2024, truly achieving the market-oriented transformation of the new type of rural collective economy and increases in collective economy income and villagers' incomes.

(III) Version 3.0: model replication

In 2021, the preliminary planning for the clustered and corporatized development of these eight villages began. "We are now uniting with the eight villages north of Tiaoxi to develop village brand management led by rice cultivation culture" (LS, rural collective economy manager of Yong'an Village, 20211221). At that time, this was only a development



Figure 2 Organizational Structure of LS Team Version 2.0 in 2023

concept, but in 2024, this concept became a reality, achieving the corporatized cluster development of the eight villages.

From 1 Village to 8 Villages (Figure 2). After seeing the development of Yong'an Village, the village secretaries of Xiadoumen Village, Xita Village, Hongtong Village, Shanghu Village, Xianzhai Village, Zhuyuan Village, and Yiqiao Village approached LS, hoping to achieve cluster development. After careful deliberation in meetings, the LS team decided to assign company employees to each village. They obtained the positions of rural collective economy manager or village dream maker in each village through a "written examination + interview" process, and adopted a "3+2" work model, ensuring the work of the headquarters while integrating and revitalizing the resources of each village. As of December 2024, Xiadoumen Village, Xita Village, Zhuyuan Village, and Yiqiao Village have achieved preliminary development, while Hongtong Village, Shanghu Village, and Xianzhai Village are still in the planning and construction stage. The LS team plans to connect the eight villages to form a study tour route, jointly developing agricultural, cultural, and tourism projects in the eight villages to achieve cluster development. At the same time, the strong village company has become more organized, systematic, and group-oriented, better able to provide services for rural operation.

From 8 Villages to Thousands of Villages. In 2023, Zhejiang Thousand Villages Operation Co., Ltd. was established. The LS team summarized the "Five Coordinations" operation model they had explored (i.e., brand leadership, digital efficiency enhancement, function expansion, technological support, and organizational innovation), and developed a replicable "3+1+N" Thousand Villages Thousand Societies promotion model (i.e., one set of professional operation systems + one set of digital tools + one set of shared resource packages → localized cultivation), aiming to pass on rural operation experience to more young talents and help more villages achieve operational development. As of 2024, the total number of applicants for the Zhejiang Thousand Rural CEO Training Program had reached 7,405, and the company had trained 720 trainees. The Thousand Villages model has been promoted to eight provinces including Zhejiang, Anhui, Jiangxi, Fujian, Guangdong, Hainan, and Inner Mongolia. The village operation model explored by multiple actors including the government and the LS team has gradually become a replicable rural operation pathway, continuously promoting the revitalization and development of villages across various regions.

V. Theoretical analysis: the triple embedding mechanism of rural collective economy managers

Since the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy, various actors including administrative bodies and capital have continuously flowed into villages, and rural society has become a complex field with multiple actors entering. How do rural collective economy managers, as an emerging group, embed into villages and conduct operations? We takes Yong'an Village, Xiadoumen Village, Xita Village, Hongtong Village, Shanghu Village, Xianzhai Village, Zhuyuan Village, and Yiqiao Village as examples to analyze the process through which their rural collective economy managers embed into villages and conduct rural operations from the three levels of government, market, and rural society.

(I) Administrative embeddedness

The *Rural Revitalization Organization Law of the People's Republic of China* states that "the state establishes a sound working mechanism for rural revitalization with central coordination, provincial overall responsibility, and implementation at the city, county, and township levels," emphasizing that "secretaries at five levels should jointly grasp rural revitalization work," which provides the "general direction" and "general policy" for rural operation in Yuhang.

Since 2008, Zhejiang Province has been engaged in the construction of beautiful villages, with provinces, cities, counties, districts, towns, and villages all attaching great importance to the work of beautiful villages. In 2018, Yong'an Village began undertaking beautiful village construction projects issued by the Yuhang District government, which significantly improved the village environment and continuously raised the level of infrastructure construction, laying a solid hardware foundation for the subsequent planning of Yong'an Village. In 2019, the Yuhang District Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, in response to the national rural revitalization strategy, consulted with the Yuhang District Finance Bureau to hire rural collective economy managers for villages, with the finance bureau providing annual support of 150,000-180,000 RMB. In 2020, LS became the rural collective economy manager of Yong'an Village. During 2020 to 2025, the LS team, by appointing project application specialists, led the eight villages to actively undertake projects issued by departments such as the Zhejiang Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the Yuhang District Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, and the Office of the Yuhang District Development and Reform Bureau. The projects undertaken mainly included several major categories: agricultural lines, party building and group building, management lines, and business (e-commerce department, commerce department, live streaming), including projects such as high-standard farmland construction, efficient ecological parks, Daoxiang Town, digital villages, common prosperity villages, future villages, and science and technology demonstration courtyards. As a result, Yong'an Village's collective operating income increased from 764,600 RMB in 2019 to 6.09 million RMB in 2024, and the per capita income of Yong'an Village villagers increased from 43,232.2 RMB in 2019 to 63,388 RMB in 2023. While helping the government complete relevant tasks, LS and his team also strengthened their own connections with the government, laying a good foundation for subsequently undertaking more government projects. Moreover, more importantly, in the process of undertaking projects, they promoted the growth of the village collective economy and villagers' incomes, the improvement of the village environment, and the enhancement of the village's hardware facilities.

(II) Local embeddedness

To effectively embed into villages, rural collective economy managers require interpersonal skills in the acquaintance-based rural society. After entering villages, rural collective economy managers need to handle relationships with the village secretary, the village's two committees, and the villagers well. The LS team's ability to establish itself in the

village and achieve village development is closely related to their interpersonal skills in the acquaintance-based rural society. After entering villages, LS and other rural collective economy managers, first, consistently maintain a sincere and humble attitude, actively seeking advice from the village secretary and the village's two committees on how to help the village develop in a better direction. The continuous positive development of Yong'an Village is inseparable from LS's good handling of relationships with the village secretary and the village's two committees, which is also an important condition for LS to smoothly integrate into Yong'an Village. SY, the rural collective economy manager of Xiadoumen Village, said, "I often take walks in the village by myself and often chat with villagers. Then I discover 'treasures' and open up new things" (SY, rural collective economy manager of Xiadoumen Village, 20250124-1). Since entering the village, SY has frequently taken walks in the village. From initially "not knowing the way after leaving the village committee" to now being able to "walk out" on any path in Xiadoumen Village, and being able to casually chat with villagers she encounters during her walks, even discovering usable resources from villagers' conversations and persuading villagers to actively participate in village operation, this has undoubtedly strengthened the emotional connection between SY and the villagers, gradually making the villagers accept her. Second, they actively recruit local people. In LS's initial team, the employees were basically villagers from Yong'an Village or nearby villages. Today, the LS team has 33 core members, 9 of whom are local people, most notably the re-employed Secretary Y, who is mainly responsible for the agricultural sector in the team, specifically including rice and vegetable cultivation, liaising with large-scale farmers, and supplying agricultural products for the Daoxiang Town. This allows the LS team, when encountering village affairs, to have rural collective economy managers contact villagers through the village secretary or other villagers to solve problems, which greatly helps them avoid conflicts with villagers and enables LS and others to better embed into the village. Third, they drive villagers towards common prosperity. Since the LS team entered the villages, the business formats of the eight villages have gradually enriched, including paddy field adoption in Yong'an Village, artistic village creation in Xiadoumen Village, rural study tours in Zhuyuan Village, and sports-themed Xita Village, etc. While undertaking projects, they have also increased villagers' incomes. Rural collective economy managers are good at discovering village value, able to revive rural resources and reshape rural culture. Although they experience various difficulties in the initial stage and throughout the process of village operation, rural collective economy managers gradually resolve various problems by actively communicating with the village secretary and the village's two committees, hiring local

people, and driving villagers towards common prosperity, embedding into villages with a more flexible posture.

(III) Market embeddedness

Market operation refers to the rural collective economy managers' own market operation capabilities, team organization capabilities, and their own market resources. While it is certainly important for rural collective economy managers to have flexible market operation capabilities, they can only better exert their market capabilities in villages if they achieve administrative and local embeddedness. LS, the rural collective economy manager of Yong'an Village, was among the second batch of rural collective economy managers entering villages. In village operation, LS, in conjunction with the government, experts and scholars, partners, etc., achieved the integrated development of primary, secondary, and tertiary industries in Yong'an Village through three measures: model innovation, digital empowerment, and talent introduction. Model innovation is mainly divided into three parts: first, innovation in cultivation models, transferring 97% of the land to the village collective for unified planning, unified arrangement, and unified investment attraction, achieving beautification of the rural landscape, increased output value, and increased production; second, innovation in sales models, establishing a "paddy field adoption + shared courtyard" system to achieve integration of primary and tertiary industries; third, creating the "Yushang Daoxiang" brand to achieve brand leadership. Digital empowerment mainly refers to empowering Yong'an Village through village digital construction (such as establishing a smart adoption mini-program with 24-hour field monitoring, a rice full-lifecycle management system, and a rural SAAS platform) to conduct visits and training businesses. Talent introduction refers to fully gathering and utilizing talents from various sources to continuously inject wisdom into Yong'an Village's development. With the help of the government, universities, and others, the LS team truly achieved the market-oriented transformation and development of Yong'an Village's collective economy through organizational innovation, brand leadership, and digital empowerment.

In terms of building the strong village company team, the LS team is not limited to Yong'an Village alone. They united the surrounding seven villages (including Xiadoumen Village, Xita Village, Hongtong Village, Shanghu Village, Xianzhai Village, Zhuyuan Village, and Yiqiao Village) to establish the "Eight-Village Company" - "Yushang Daoxiang" - to conduct market-oriented operations of the eight villages. At the same time, they have

developed a complete organizational structure, continuously improving team collaboration efficiency. Regarding the establishment of the eight-village company and its organizational structure, LS mentioned, "We established a subsidiary company for each village, and the subsidiaries established the head office. The head office provides system services, while the subsidiaries provide business support" (LS, rural collective economy manager of Yong'an Village, 20250124-2). "Secretary Z serves as the secretary of Yong'an Village, the supervisor is the secretary of Zhuyuan Village, I am the general manager, P is my assistant, and the financial center has an outsourced financial company. On the basis of this structure, we have eight villages, each with one person, and each person is responsible for different sector projects and leading projects" (LS, rural collective economy manager of Yong'an Village, 20250124-3). It can be seen that the rural collective economy managers of the eight villages, represented by LS, have a clear and specific plan for the market-oriented operation and development of the eight villages. Although the other seven villages are still in the process of operational exploration, the organizational structure of the eight villages is currently relatively complete, and the market-oriented operation of the eight villages is progressing steadily.

With the help of the government, universities, and villages, and relying on their own market operation capabilities, team organization capabilities, and their own market resources, the LS team has enabled Yong'an Village to operate smoothly in a market-oriented manner, with the village collective income continuously increasing, the village appearance continuously improving, and villagers' incomes continuously increasing. At the same time, he has gathered the surrounding villages for joint development, enabling the eight villages to truly achieve a transformation from semi-marketization to full marketization.

(IV) Synergy

The rural collective economy managers/village dream makers of Yong'an Village, Xiadoumen Village, Xita Village, Hongtong Village, Shanghu Village, Xianzhai Village, Zhuyuan Village, and Yiqiao Village, by embedding into the administrative system, obtain legitimacy and guarantee for policy support and resource integration as well as underlying economic support; by embedding into the local community, relying on local social networks and cultural identity, they construct a sustainable operational ecosystem; by embedding into the market, they activate village economic momentum through specialized operations. Through the deep coupling of these three dimensions, the rural collective economy managers/village dream makers have promoted the institutional goal of achieving

specialization, marketization, and high-quality development of the new type of rural collective economy in the eight villages, as well as the social goal of increasing villagers' incomes.

VI. Discussion and conclusion

For thousands of years, China's agricultural civilization has mainly consisted of individual peasant farming or joint peasant farming. The rural collective ownership system has been one of China's basic economic systems since the founding of the People's Republic of China, and the significance and impact of reform and innovation are far-reaching. The current practice, originating in Zhejiang, of collective economic organizations hiring professional managers to operate rural collective assets can be described as a revolution led by professional managers in the agricultural and rural fields. However, the group of rural collective economy managers and the relevant policy-making departments have not yet realized the value and significance of the emergence of this group for the reform of the rural collective economy system. As an emerging group, rural collective economy managers can achieve sustainable rural operation only by embedding into villages from the three dimensions of administration, local society, and market. However, this group still faces some problems at present. Currently, rural collective economy managers hired in various places are mostly specialized talents engaged in fields such as cultural tourism and event management, lacking experience and knowledge reserves in complex and special areas such as agricultural economic management, agricultural land systems, and rural housing systems. This may have a certain impact on the subsequent development of the rural collective economy manager profession. Therefore, academia should continuously follow up on the group of rural collective economy managers from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

The cultivation of professional managers requires not only business courses, but also additional courses on government-business relations, emotional intelligence, and management.

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