

# Dilemmas and Solutions of Rural Rule of Law Governance Under the Background of the “Hundred Counties, Thousand Towns, Ten Thousand Villages” Project

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**Abstract:** Guangdong’s “High-quality Development Project for Hundred Counties, Thousand Towns and Ten Thousand Villages” (the “Hundred-Thousand-Ten Thousand Project”) is a major strategic initiative to tackle unbalanced urban-rural development and promote comprehensive rural revitalization. The rule of law serves as the cornerstone of rural governance and an essential institutional guarantee for the solid implementation and efficiency improvement of the Project. Currently, rural rule of law governance in Guangdong is confronted with prominent challenges, including weak public legal awareness, unbalanced urban-rural allocation of legal resources, inefficient grassroots governance mechanisms, and inadequate effectiveness of public welfare legal popularization. With its unique strengths in public welfare, inclusiveness, grassroots orientation and serviceability, public welfare legal popularization has become a key approach to addressing rural legal shortcomings, resolving grassroots governance conflicts and cultivating rural legal culture. Based on the implementation context of the Project, this paper systematically reviews the practical dilemmas of rural rule of law governance, explains the epochal value of public welfare legal popularization in rural rule of law governance, and puts forward practical and replicable countermeasures tailored to rural Guangdong from the aspects of legal popularization system, content and form innovation, resource sinking and long-term mechanism improvement. It intends to empower the modernization of rural rule of law governance through public welfare legal popularization and consolidate a solid legal foundation for the in-depth advancement of the Hundred-Thousand-Ten Thousand Project.

**Key words:** Hundred-Thousand-Ten Thousand Project; rural rule of law governance; public welfare legal popularization; rural revitalization; modernization of grassroots governance

## I. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

Unbalanced urban-rural development is a prominent constraint on Guangdong’s high-quality development. To break the urban-rural dual structure and narrow the development gap among counties, towns and villages, the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee has launched the High-quality Development Project for Hundred Counties, Thousand Towns and Ten Thousand Villages, with strengthening counties, optimizing towns and beautifying villages as core tasks, and coordinating the extension of industrial layout, infrastructure, public services and grassroots governance to rural areas. Rural revitalization requires priority development of the rule of law. Improving the rural governance system integrating self-governance, rule of law and moral governance under the leadership of Party organizations is an indispensable part of the Project.

As a core part of grassroots governance modernization, rural rule of law governance covers the cultivation of legal concepts, supply of public legal services, diversified dispute resolution, standardized grassroots law-based decision-making and law enforcement, and regulated operation of village regulations (Yang & Li 2021). As a grass-roots carrier of national legal popularization, public welfare legal popularization, led by the government, participated by the society and free for the public, provides regular legal publicity, consultation, dispute guidance and rights protection services for rural residents. It is a basic project to open up the “last mile” of legal services and enhance the legal literacy of grassroots people (Li 2021).

At present, traditional mindsets still exist in rural Guangdong, such as prioritizing personal relations over law, trusting petitions rather than legal procedures, and seeking connections instead of legal means. Grassroots legal service resources are overly concentrated in urban areas, resulting in a shortage of professional legal personnel in towns and villages. Traditional legal popularization is outdated, divorced from public needs and lacks precision, which can hardly meet the high standards of the Project for sound rural governance, peaceful villages and law-based villages. In this context, it is of great epochal value and practical necessity to analyze the dilemmas of rural rule of law governance and explore solutions from the perspective of public welfare legal popularization.

## 1.2 Research Significance

This paper integrates the Hundred-Thousand-Ten Thousand Project, rural rule of law governance and public welfare legal popularization into a unified analytical framework, enriches the research dimensions of rural grassroots governance, national legal popularization and urban-rural integrated development, and remedies the deficiencies of existing studies that overemphasize institutional construction but neglect legal popularization, and focus on macro policies rather than grassroots practices. It provides theoretical support for rural rule of law construction and grassroots social governance modernization in the new era.

Targeting the difficulties of rural rule of law governance in Guangdong and based on the actual legal needs of rural residents, this paper proposes operable, replicable paths for public welfare legal popularization. It helps improve villagers’ legal awareness and ability to protect rights in accordance with the law, standardize grassroots administrative and self-governing acts, improve the rural dispute resolution system, optimize the rural business environment and grassroots governance ecology (Zhang 2025). The rule of law can escort rural industrial revitalization, living environment improvement and grassroots peace construction, ensuring the effective implementation of various tasks of the project.

## II. Concept Definition and Theoretical Basis

### 2.1 Definition of Related Concepts

Hundred-Thousand-Ten Thousand Project is a major strategic project for Guangdong to promote coordinated urban-rural development, break the dual structure and advance comprehensive rural revitalization. Taking counties as units, towns as links and villages as foundations, it aims to strengthen county economy, improve town functions and build harmonious and beautiful villages, coordinate the sinking of industrial, transportation, livelihood, public service and grassroots governance resources to rural areas, realize two-way flow of urban-rural factors, balanced allocation of public services and narrowing of regional development gaps.

Rural rule of law governance is a governance model under the leadership of the Party that regulates rural public affairs, resolves social conflicts, protects public rights and interests and standardizes grassroots power operation through legal thinking and methods. The core is to act in accordance with the law, resort to law in case of problems, solve problems by law and resolve conflicts through law, so as to solidify self-governance rules, lead moral governance and form a sound rural governance pattern integrating the three governance forms.

Public welfare legal popularization refers to free public services including legal publicity, interpretation, consultation and guidance for grassroots people, led by the government, coordinated by functional departments and participated by social forces. Featuring public welfare, inclusiveness, mass orientation and convenience, it is an important carrier for extending national legal popularization to rural areas and equalizing legal public services.

## 2.2 Theoretical Basis

Grassroots governance modernization emphasizes diversified subjects, coordinated methods and shared achievements. Public welfare legal popularization breaks the single government-led model and involves judicial organs, legal service institutions, social organizations, rural sages and legal professionals, which conforms to the concept of co-construction, co-governance and sharing and gathers forces to improve governance efficiency.

Equal urban-rural public services are an important goal of the Project. Legal publicity and services are basic public services. Public welfare legal popularization makes up for rural shortcomings and narrows urban-rural gaps through resource sinking, position relocation and door-to-door services, promoting the same quality and standard of urban-rural public services.

The essence of the rule of law is to protect citizens' legitimate rights and interests. Rural residents are prone to rights infringement due to lack of legal knowledge and unsmooth channels. Public welfare legal popularization enhances public legal identity and rule awareness by popularizing laws, clarifying rights and obligations and guiding rights protection, breaking the inertia of rule by man and establishing faith in the rule of law.

### III. Practical Dilemmas of Rural Rule of Law Governance

#### 3.1 Weak Legal Awareness and Deep-rooted Traditional Thinking

First, clan and personal relations interfere with legal identity. Guangdong's rural areas have obvious clan and acquaintance society characteristics. Disputes over neighborhoods, land, marriage and family are often resolved privately by elders, clan leaders and cadres, showing a preference for personal relations over laws.

Second, insufficient legal knowledge. Middle-aged, elderly and left-behind rural groups have low education and low awareness of the Civil Code, Land Administration Law, Rural Land Contract Law and Petition Regulations. They lack knowledge of rights and obligations and tend to take irrational measures such as cross-level petitions when their rights are violated.

Third, insufficient legal atmosphere. Traditional legal popularization relies on banners, leaflets and meetings with rigid content and professional language, resulting in low public participation. Legal culture squares, corridors and bookstores are underused and fail to create an imperceptible legal environment.

#### 3.2 Unbalanced Legal Resources and Insufficient Grassroots Services

On the one hand, professional legal talents gather in cities, leading to rural hollowing-out. Lawyers, notaries and professional services are concentrated in urban areas, while towns have few and low-level legal personnel. The "one village, one legal consultant" system suffers from nominal performance, low attendance and insufficient services, failing to meet villagers' needs for consultation, contract review and dispute mediation (Wang 2024).

On the other hand, grassroots legal service positions are weak. Some village legal service stations and aid sites have poor hardware, no resident staff and irregular services. Remote villages face difficulties in online legal services due to poor transportation and network, blocking the last mile of legal services.

In addition, supply and demand are mismatched. Existing legal popularization is extensive and not tailored to high-frequency fields such as characteristic agriculture, rural e-commerce, homestay tourism, homestead transfer and collective asset distribution, failing to meet the needs of rural industrial development and daily life.

#### 3.3 Inefficient Grassroots Governance and Inadequate Integration of Three Governance Forms

First, non-standard grassroots law enforcement and administration. Towns undertake more delegated law enforcement tasks but lack sufficient staff and professional capacity, resulting in non-standard procedures, opaque law enforcement and arbitrary management, which arouse public resistance and damage legal credibility.

Second, imperfect diversified dispute resolution mechanism. People's mediation, administrative mediation and judicial mediation are poorly coordinated and lack information sharing. Village mediators are mostly part-time cadres without systematic legal training, leading to limited capacity in handling complex disputes and escalation of minor conflicts.

Third, loose integration of self-governance, rule of law and moral governance. Some village regulations are formulated irregularly and contradict laws. Villagers' self-governance procedures are opaque and village affairs are not fully publicized. Moral governance is separated from legal constraints, making it difficult to achieve coordinated flexible education and rigid restriction (Yang 2021).

### **3.4 Backward Public Welfare Legal Popularization System and Limited Empowerment**

First, single subject and lack of diversified participation. Public welfare legal popularization is mainly led by judicial administrative and town governments, with low participation of law firms, associations, social organizations, university law schools and rural sages. There is a lack of regular channels and incentive mechanisms, resulting in weak forces and insufficient synergy.

Second, outdated content and rigid forms. Legal popularization content uses general templates and lacks practical topics such as rural land, support and inheritance, wage arrears, neighborhood infringement and anti-fraud. Forms are limited to lectures, leaflets and slogans, while short videos, live broadcasts, dialect popularization and field lectures are underused, leading to low attractiveness.

Third, insufficient team and long-term guarantee. Rural legal professionals and volunteers are mostly part-time without systematic training. Legal popularization funds are temporary and unstable for position construction, activities, materials and training. Lack of quantitative assessment and effectiveness evaluation leads to formalism.

## **IV. Core Value of Public Welfare Legal Popularization Empowering Rural Rule of Law Governance**

### **4.1 Ideological Value: Cultivate Legal Literacy and Reshape Rural Legal Culture**

Public welfare legal popularization transforms legal provisions into rural language, real cases and life truths through regular and localized publicity, breaking the traditional thinking of prioritizing personal relations over law and guiding the public to act in accordance with the law, resort to law and protect rights by law. Long-term immersive popularization creates an atmosphere of respecting, learning, abiding by and using the law, laying an ideological foundation for harmonious and beautiful rural construction under the Project.

### **4.2 Service Value: Sink Legal Resources and Bridge Urban-Rural Service Gaps**

As an important carrier of extending legal public services to rural areas, public welfare legal popularization integrates lawyers, grassroots legal workers, legal professionals and volunteers to provide on-site consultation, lectures, dispute guidance and aid referral in fields and farmyards. It effectively makes up for the shortage of rural legal talents and idle service stations, promoting the equalization of urban-rural legal public services.

### **4.3 Governance Value: Improve Governance Structure and Enhance Integration of Three Governance Forms**

Public welfare legal popularization standardizes villagers' self-governance, promotes the legalization of village regulations, standardized deliberation and transparent village affairs. It strengthens grassroots cadres' legal thinking and urges law-based administration. It connects people's mediation with legal publicity to prevent and resolve neighborhood, land and family disputes at the source, realizing "no trivial matters out of the village, no major matters out of the town", and improving rural peace governance efficiency.

### **4.4 Development Value: Escort Industrial Revitalization and Optimize Business Environment**

Industrial revitalization is the key of the Project. Public welfare legal popularization provides customized services for family farms, cooperatives, agricultural enterprises and rural e-commerce operators, popularizing laws on contracts, intellectual property, labor, agricultural product safety and risk prevention. It helps market entities operate legally and avoid risks, attracting talents and capital to rural areas and providing legal support for high-quality rural industrial development.

## **V. Countermeasures to Improve Rural Rule of Law Governance through Public Welfare Legal Popularization**

### **5.1 Uphold Party Building Leadership and Build a Multi-cooperative Legal Popularization System**

First, consolidate the main responsibility of Party committees and governments. Incorporate public welfare legal popularization and law-based rural construction into key tasks of the Project and grassroots performance assessment, forming a pattern of Party committee leadership, government responsibility, judicial administration coordination, departmental collaboration and town-village implementation, turning legal popularization into a hard indicator.

Second, implement the “whoever enforces the law popularizes the law” system. Public security, courts, procuratorates, agriculture and rural affairs, natural resources, civil affairs and market supervision departments formulate responsibility lists and carry out special popularization on land management, homestead approval, agricultural product safety, anti-fraud and marriage and family, forming departmental synergy.

Third, encourage extensive social participation. Support law firms, notary institutions and aid centers to establish volunteer teams. Recruit retired cadres, rural sages, teachers, college students and law graduates to join grassroots popularization. Set up commendation and incentive mechanisms to stimulate social enthusiasm.

### **5.2 Match Public Needs Precisely and Optimize Content and Forms**

First, customize localized content. Focus on high-frequency rural fields: livelihood (marriage, family, support, inheritance, neighborhood infringement); governance (villagers’ self-governance, village regulations, petition, public security); industry (land contract, agricultural product safety, e-commerce, contract risks); safety (anti-fraud, drug control, production safety, environmental protection).

Second, innovate down-to-earth forms. Offline: carry out mobile popularization, case interpretation and on-site consultation at rural fairs, festivals, fields and farmyards; build legal culture corridors, wall paintings and bookstores; create legal sketches, folk songs, clappers and dialect sitcoms. Online: use WeChat, Douyin and rural radio to produce dialect short videos, graphics and case stories; set up online consultation ports for anytime services.

### **5.3 Strengthen Grassroots Teams and Consolidate Talent Support**

Implement the legal professional training project, select candidates from Party members, cadres, rural sages and rich leaders, and carry out regular training, rotation and case teaching on common laws, dispute mediation and lecture skills to build a local, usable and practical grassroots legal team.

Strictly implement the “one village, one legal consultant” system, clarify service frequency, content and assessment standards, include on-site popularization, consultation, contract review and mediation in performance lists, and eliminate nominal performance.

### **5.4 Integrate Positions and Services and Open Up the Last Mile**

Improve the three-level network of town public legal service centers, village legal service stations and natural village popularization contact points, equip with books, materials and consultation facilities to ensure regular operation.

Promote the integration of legal popularization with mediation, legal aid and village governance, provide answers in lectures, guidance in consultation and popularization in disputes, and actively connect eligible groups with legal aid to realize the integration of popularization and governance.

### **5.5 Improve Funding, Assessment and Long-term Mechanisms**

Establish a stable financial guarantee mechanism, include funds for public welfare legal popularization, position construction, team training and material production into annual fiscal budgets. Broaden social donation and sponsorship channels.

Build a quantitative assessment system covering activity frequency, coverage, position utilization, public legal awareness, dispute incidence and service satisfaction, conduct regular supervision and link results with evaluation and funding allocation.

Deepen the integration of three governance forms with public welfare legal popularization, standardize self-governance by law, lead moral governance by law, and carry popularization through self-governance. Improve the legality review of village regulations and cultivate civilized rural customs, good family traditions and honest folk customs to achieve organic unity of rural rule of law, self-governance and moral governance.

## VI. Conclusion

The Hundred-Thousand-Ten Thousand Project draws a new blueprint for Guangdong's urban-rural coordinated development and comprehensive rural revitalization, and rural rule of law governance is a basic guarantee for its implementation. At present, rural rule of law governance still faces dilemmas including insufficient legal awareness, unbalanced resources, inefficient mechanisms and low popularization efficiency. As an important carrier of grassroots legal construction, public welfare legal popularization plays an irreplaceable role in cultivating legal concepts, balancing services, improving governance and escorting development.

To improve rural rule of law governance, we must uphold Party building leadership, build a multi-cooperative popularization pattern, customize precise content, innovate rural forms, strengthen legal professional and consultant teams, improve three-level service positions, and perfect funding and assessment mechanisms. Normalized, precise and localized public welfare legal popularization will empower rural governance modernization and provide a solid legal guarantee for the in-depth advancement of the Project, harmonious and beautiful rural construction and high-quality urban-rural development.

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