

# Under the Background of Rural Revitalization, an Overview and Analysis of the New Role of Contemporary College Teachers and Students as “XiangXian”

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## Abstract

Along with the implementation of the rural revitalization development strategy proposed by the 19th National Congress of CPC, and the **Strategic Plan for Rural Revitalization (2018-2022)** issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, in recent years, experts and scholars in various fields have been conducting research from different aspects, searching for rich perceptual materials from practice, obtaining real perceptions and making rational academic analysis of their survey materials, so as to promote the development and upgrading of villages. According to the statistics of this paper (full-text database of Chinese journals), a large number of experts and scholars who have conducted research on “rural revitalization” come from universities. In the process of research, university teachers and students have gradually become “villagers” who understand the rural environment, status quo and development, and play a positive role in the “villages”. Therefore, I believe that the university teachers and students here as the “villagers” should become one of the main subjects of the participation of multiple subjects in rural governance. Based on the definition and change of the role of “rural sages—XiangXian”, I propose that under the background of rural revitalization, the contemporary university teachers and students should become the new role of “rural sages—XiangXian”.

## Keywords

Rural Revitalization, New Rural Sages, College Teachers and Students

## 1. Introduction

With the development of time, especially the progress of modern science and

technology and information society, the educators and the educated in higher education have a more difficult task. The research work is more accurate and timely, and the research results are not just general advice and guidance, but scientific results with comprehensive statistics and quantitative data. In the context of rural revitalization, for the effective implementation of the strategy, various experts and scholars not only stand in the perspective of social science research, but also stand in the “village” as “villagers”. According to the statistics, since 2016, the full-text database of Chinese periodicals (Chinese literature) has 22,865 articles with the keyword “rural revitalization”, and most of the research institutions are universities such as China Agricultural University, Renmin University of China, Central China Normal University, Wuhan University and other universities. From this point of view, university teachers and students have played a very important role in the research of rural revitalization strategy. In recent years, relevant domestic scholars have proposed to promote rural governance and rural construction with “Xiang Xian” in response to “rural governance”. The eighth article of the “[Strategic Plan for Rural Revitalization \(2018-2022\)](#)” also mentions a sound modern rural governance system. Therefore, this article comprehensively sorts out the changes of the “XiangXian” in the historical process, and their effects on rural development. The article analyzes the importance of the role of “rural sages—XiangXian” in the strategy of rural revitalization, thus suggesting that the positive role of university teachers and students in academic research work on the “countryside” should become “rural sages—XiangXian”, the new role of “villagers”. It enables university teachers and students to think and explore in the role of “villagers” in a deep and embedded way, and at the same time, it is more guiding, which plays an active and effective role in the implementation of “rural revitalization”.

## 2. The Definition and Changes of “XiangXian”

### 2.1. The Definition of “XiangXian”

Since the time of Chunqiu, there has been a tradition of honoring the wise philosophers of previous generations to inspire their descendants. “Xiangxian” is a historical concept, and its meaning varies from period to period ([Zhao, 2018](#)). During the Ming and Qing dynasties, local virtuous people were called Xiangxian; in the 1980s, with the contraction of state power in rural societies and the penetration of the market economy providing space, risks and opportunities for rural economic and social activities, some capable and enterprising rural elites emerged as a result ([Huang & Liu, 2011](#)). The question of whether the contemporary rural elite is a local elite or a private authority becomes a question to be explored. Up to now, the definition of the role of rural sages is still changing, as shown in the latest research from the China Journal Full Text Database: Reimagining the Role of Rural Sages in Rural Governance ([Dou, 2020](#)) and the study on rural sages and rural governance under the social network vision ([Song & Chen, 2020](#)).

## 2.2. “XiangXian” in the Development of Chinese History

Back in history, XiangXian had a significant influence and contribution to the local area. “Zhou Guan·Chunbo” says: “anyone who has virtue will make teachings. If they die, they will be worshiped in the schools as ancestors”. From ChunQiu period, there has been a tradition of honoring the wise men of the past to enlighten future generations. Since the Han Dynasty, sacrifices to the ancestors have been regarded by officials and scholars as an important event to educate the people. “XiangXian” came from the South Han dynasty, and the ritual can be found at the end of the first Han dynasty. During the time of Emperor Xian from the Han Dynasty (the last emperor of the Eastern Han Dynasty), Kong Rong pioneered the form of ritual of XiangXian. “In the four years of Tang Zhenguan, Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty (Li Shimin) built Confucian temples and county schools in Xiazhao. Confucius became a sage that can be ritual to all prefectures and counties in the world. Later, more local sages were included in the ceremony”. “In the thirteenth year of Tang Tianbao, Emperor Xuanzong Li Longji of the Tang Dynasty ordered various places to build pantheon”. In the Song dynasty, there is a separation of “XiangXian”. Until the ChengHua, Hongzhi period, “XianXian” were divided into “XiangXian” and “MingHuan”. Qing dynasty succeeds in the ritual system of “XiangXian” from Ming dynasty. From the Song dynasty to Qing dynasty period, the historical definition of “XiangXian” became really clear, therefore, the related scholars learned a lot information of “XiangXian’s” social construction and system from early Qing dynasty (Yu & Hui, 2003). And the study was the target of the changes and logic behind “XiangXian” and “MingHuan” (Zhao, 2018).

## 2.3. The Exploration of “Neo-XiangXian” and “Neo-XiangXian” in Contemporary Society

In the process of the continuous development of Chinese society, a group of capable and motivate rural elites have emerged, which has attracted the attention of many scholars. They have conducted various discussions on contemporary rural sages and tried to explore their influence in contemporary rural society. The role and significance of this process, discovering new opportunities and new developments benefit the state power and rural society. Xing & Li (2009) explored the space and conditions for the rise of the “rural elite” as an intermediary between the state power and rural society and summarized the new pattern of relations between the “rural elite” and the society, from the acquisition of authority in informal rural society to the eventual recognition of the rural elite by the State. Huang & Liu (2011) conducted a study on the context and trend of China’s “rural elite” research from two aspects. Li Jing (2016) uses the line of time: the transformation of the image of the XiangXian after the birth of New China—the the reconstruction of the traditional image of the rural sage since the 1990s—A vivid and summarized overview and analysis of the image of the growing XiangXian since the new century. Summarize and put forward the dif-

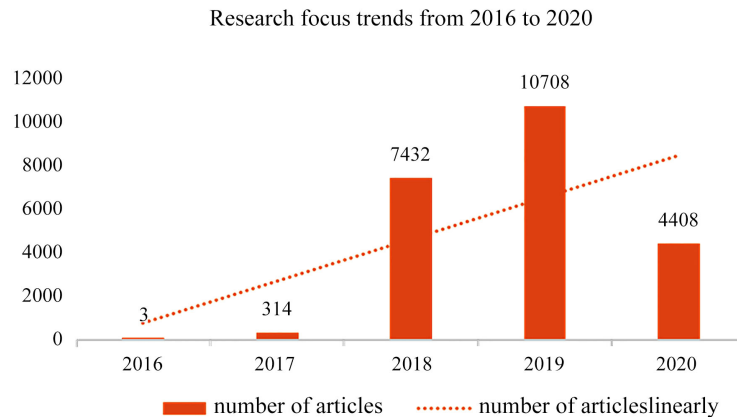
ference between the image of Neo-XiangXian and traditional XiangXian and summarize the main types of Neo-XiangXian. Finally, the author puts forward a prospect for “what kind of cultural concept should be used in this era to recreate XiangXian”. Li Xiaofei (2016) explored the question “Should contemporary XiangXian be regarded as local elites or civil authorities, or a combination of both?”, combining the concepts and context of local elites and civil Virtue can be regarded as being between the objective control of local elites and the subjective identification of civil authority. It can come from local elites or grassroots cadres, or from ordinary people, provided that respect and satisfaction of local cultural concepts. Zhao Hao (2016) conducted a theoretical experiment on “Xiang Xian”: Moral Philosophy Analysis. The first part focuses on the analysis of the ethical spirit of the ethical spirit. The second part analyzes the transition from the historical “XiangXian” to the contemporary “new-XiangXian”. Finally, the significance of the “new-XiangXian” for contemporary China is proposed. Xu Guanting (2016) mentioned that the selection of rural sages and the construction of new-XiangXian culture have important practical significance. For the current selection of rural sages, you can learn from past experiences and avoid past bias; advance with the times and seek truth and pragmatism.

### 3. Relevant Study about “Village Revitalization”

From the time that the implementation of the rural revitalization and development strategy proposed by the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2017, experts and scholars from all walks of life have carried out research work, conducted in-depth exploration, and put forward various effective suggestions. Different disciplines have used many methods and methods to explore long-term research work.

#### 3.1. Research Attention (Statistics by Time)

Based on the bibliometric statistics of the Chinese periodicals full-text database, with the keyword “village revitalization” as the search target, the relevant literature (Chinese literature) for this research has been 22,865 since 2016, 3 in 2016, and 314 in 2017, 7432 articles in 2018, 10,708 articles in 2019, 4408 articles since 2020 (Chinese Journal Full-text Database predicts 14,423 articles in 2020). The research trend is increasing linearly, the popularity continues to increase, and the attention of experts and scholars in various fields to “rural revitalization” continues to rise. According to current statistics, the highest period is 2019. In the early research, experts and scholars have explored and thought about rural revitalization between Japan and our country (Yang, 2016; He, 2016; Liu & Hu, 2017); Since the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, research has continued to deepen, and scholars have proposed development strategies and implementation paths for rural revitalization. According to the research trend, the research work can be further explored in order to summarize its development law and provide reference and direction for future (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Research attention trend of “Rural Revitalization” (Data source: China Journal Full-text Database).

### 3.2. Subject Attention

Based on the bibliometric statistical analysis of the full-text database of Chinese periodicals, the keyword “rural revitalization” is used as the search target. Since 2016, the most concerned discipline among the research disciplines is 10,168 (accounting for 50.97%) of agricultural economics, and the remaining disciplines are Political Science 3031 (15.19%), Tourism Economics 827 (4.15%), Finance 751 (3.76%), Cultural Studies 694 (3.48%), Education 652 (3.27%), Urban Planning and Municipal Administration 469 articles (2.35%) in the study of science, 409 articles in urban economics (2.05%), 375 articles in business economics (1.88%), 286 articles in environmental science (1.43%), 261 articles in business administration (1.31%), 243 articles in sociology articles (1.22%), 240 articles on labor economics (1.20%), 166 articles on journalism and communication (0.83%), 153 articles on law (0.77%), 140 articles on regional economics (0.70%), 137 articles on public administration (0.69%), 117 articles on industrial economy (0.59%), 116 articles on finance (0.58%), etc. in order. According to the statistics of this subject classification, the research on “rural revitalization” is diversified in disciplines, conducting strategic research from politics, agriculture, tourism, culture, education, planning, etc. However, facing this complex and huge practical task, Experts and scholars put forward many scientific and effective suggestions from multiple disciplines and perspectives through various methods (Figure 2).

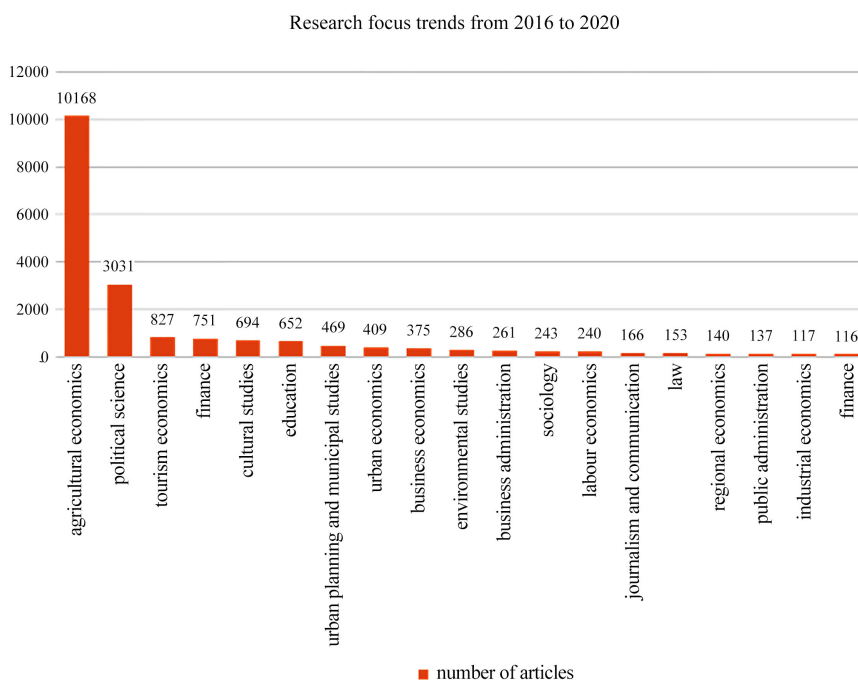
### 3.3. Institutional Attention

Through the bibliometric statistics of the full-text database of Chinese periodicals, most of the experts and scholars with the keyword “rural revitalization” as the research topic are agricultural economics, political science, tourism economics, and other disciplines. Most of the research literature comes from China Agricultural University, Renmin University of China, Central China Normal University, Wuhan University, Nanjing Agricultural University, and many other

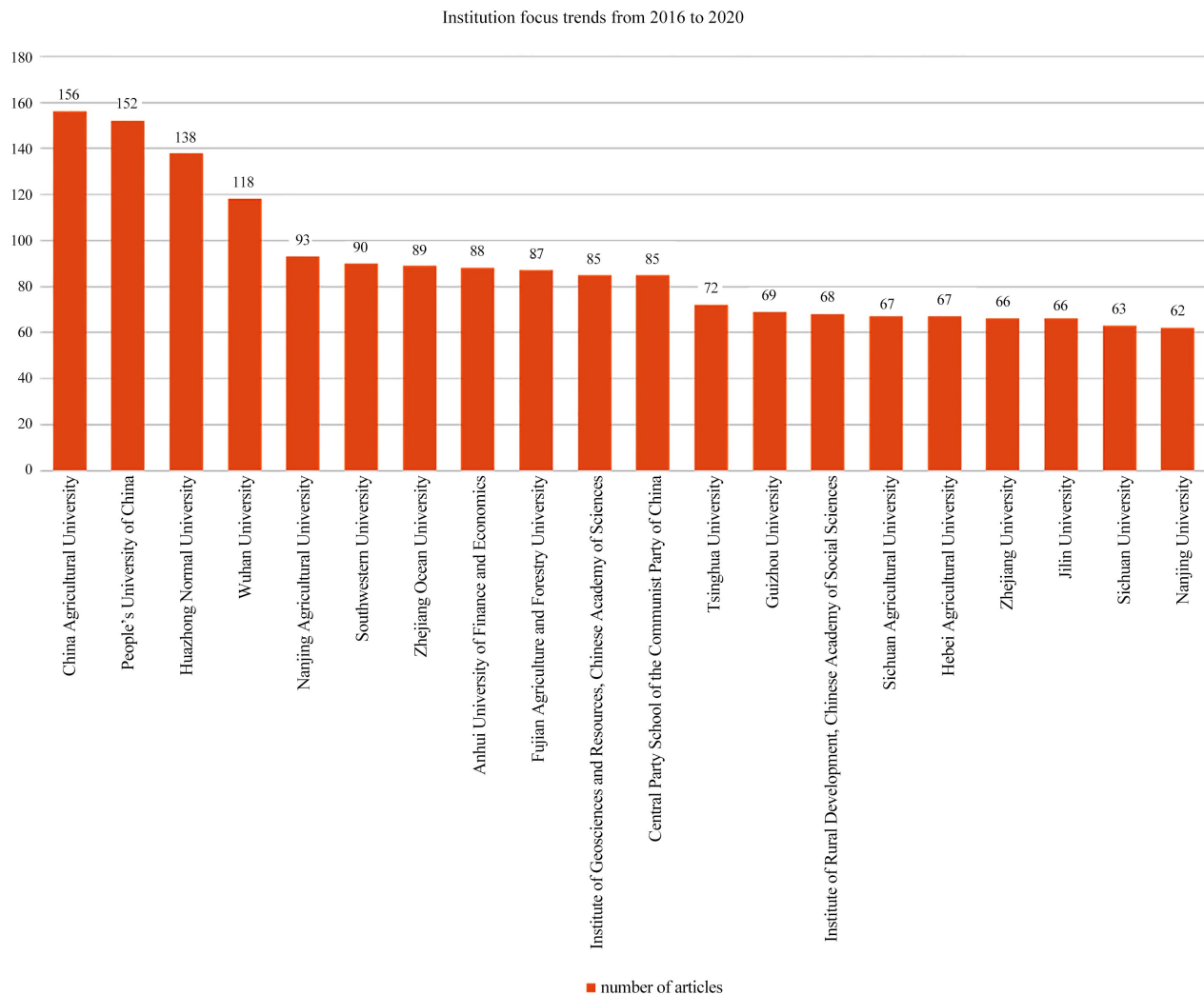
universities. Statistics show that among the top 20 institutions with the most documents, 18 are universities. This reflects the important role of college teachers and students in the research work of “village revitalization”, and through continuous exploration and practice, in order to play an active and effective role in the strategy of rural revitalization (Figure 3).

#### 4. The Importance of Chinese “XiangXian” in “Rural Governance” under the Background of Rural Revitalization

In the context of rural revitalization, rural governance is also continuously advancing, and the participation of “XiangXian” has subsequently played an important role. Yan Deru (2016) summarizes the impacts and problems faced by rural governance in order to identify and propose the feasibility of the new Xiangxian in institutional construction, as well as to promote the role of the new Xiangxian from two dimensions of culture and institutional construction in order to carry out rural governance. Qiu Bin (2016) analyzes the historical causes and governance effects of traditional “squire governance”, then the contemporary causes and practical significance of the contemporary “XiangXian governance”. From tradition to contemporary times, from “squires governing villages” to “XiangXian governing villages”, this paper summarizes the inheritance and innovation of Chinese rural governance in the historical evolution and proposes a rural governance model based on the combination of mass autonomy and wise leadership, to make sure the moral culture and economic development started in the same time. Xie, Xie, & Zhang (2016) analyzed the present situation



**Figure 2.** Academic focus trend of “Rural Revitalization” (Data source: China Journal Full-text Database).



**Figure 3.** Attention trends of rural Revitalization Organizations (Data source: China Journal Full-text Database).

and construction issues in new villages about XiangXian. This paper puts forward the importance and value of townfolk in the construction of new countryside, and then puts forward the cultivation and development of townfolk. [Bai & Zhang \(2016\)](#) explored the historical evolution of political functions from traditional village XiangXian to contemporary XiangXian, summarized the problems of modern rural governance, explored the many possibilities of rural XiangXian groups participating in rural governance, and allowed them to return, and proposed that XiangXian groups participate in modern villages. The mechanism of governance is constructed to play its unique effect. [Li Jinzhe \(2017\)](#) explored the plight of rural governance and its causes based on the reform and opening up and the advancement of new-type urbanization and explored the material, political, technical, historical, and psychological conditions and effects of new Xiangxian in contemporary rural governance. And he proposes New XiangXian promotes contemporary rural governance with its active role to play.



## 5. Conclusion and Outlook

The focus of this research is to demonstrate the active role of university teachers and students in the study of “rural revitalization” through a comprehensive review of the study and a description of each discipline and institution. At the same time, the definition of rural sages, the role of rural sages in history and the transformation of new rural sages are also summarized and explained. The importance of “Xiangxian” in “rural governance” in the context of rural revitalization and the effectiveness and enthusiasm of university teachers and students in becoming the new role of “Xiangxian” are proposed. Its specific significance lies in: 1) Making different proposals based on different situations in the “villages”. In the process of research and study, in-depth understanding of local needs and conditions is obtained through sampling, individual cases, interviews, questionnaires and many other methods. The results of the research are more targeted and practical, so that relevant strategies can be implemented accurately and effectively. 2) The ability to make more practical and professional recommendations for rural development. University faculty and students will be able to make informed recommendations about the countryside from different disciplinary perspectives through different research methods and approaches. 3) The criticality of effective communication and influence. Based on the fact that a large number of scholars come from university teachers and students, it is more effective to follow the correct guidance in the process of practice exchange, so as to promote the implementation of the recommendations of the results. 4) The importance of role change. The reason why the author suggests that university teachers and students should become “rural sages” in the background of rural revitalization is: firstly, it makes university teachers and students have more sense of responsibility and at the same time they can think differently, so that they can work and put forward suggestions from the perspective of “villagers” themselves; secondly, when university teachers and students carry out research and implement research suggestions in the role of “rural sages”, they can collect information more deeply and guide them effectively.

Based on the review and analysis of this study, I believe that contemporary university teachers and students become “rural sages” in their new roles, not only as researchers, professional advisors, and interviewers of research work in each village, but also as “villagers” “local people”, who can guide the effective development of the village and make positive contribution with relevance for rural development and strategy implementation.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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