

Construction of Cross-Regional Cooperative Governance System in Qinba Mountain Area

Yuan Xiaojun, Wen Na, Zhang Jinle

School of Humanities, Economics and Laws, Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xi'an 710072, China

Abstract: The solution of regional problems depends on the cooperation among local governments within the same region. Currently, cooperation among local governments in the Qinba Mountains (QMs) area is inadequate; moreover, it lacks systematic planning and overall ideas and has a narrow scope. The overlap in governance and lack of policy coordination between the local governments have markedly constrained the sustainable development of the economy and ecology in the QMs Area. To solve these problems, this study proposes a three-level cooperative governance system based on the theory of inter-organizational cooperation networks and analyzes the successful experiences of co-governance in the Yangtze River Basin. It also proposes some suggestions, including strengthening overall planning, establishing a specialized agency for coordination at the national level, giving full play to the leading and practicing role of regional key construction projects in cooperative governance, and promoting personnel exchanges among local governments within this area. This study hopes to provide references for establishing a coordinated governance mechanism among local governments in the QMs Area and meanwhile improving their governance effectiveness.

Keywords: Qinba Mountains (QMs) Area; government governance; coordination and cooperation; inter-organizational cooperation network (IOCN)

1 Introduction

During the process of regional development, it is hard to meet the target of governance by the way “everyone only sweeps the snow in front of his door” [1]. This is because the mode of isolated and fragmented governance can only lead to the “tragedy of the commons” [2]. Under the background of proactive response to the new situation and the strategy of coordinated regional development, more and more local governments have started to accept the model of coordination and cooperation governance [3]. For example, the behavior of coordination and cooperation governance among the governments of Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei has effectively promoted regional ecological protection, economic development, and cultural heritage [4–6]. In recent years, the effective governance of the Yangtze River Basin has also benefited from the collaborative cooperation of local governments [7–9].

The Qinba Mountains (QMs) is the north–south boundary of China’s geography, climate, and culture. For that, it has a high location value, ecological value, cultural value, and military security value. However, in this region, the ecological environment is fragile. The relation between economic development and environmental protection is contradictory. It is one of the 11 contiguous areas in the country and still faces arduous development tasks [10,11]. The QMs span the “five provinces and one city” areas, namely Sichuan, Shaanxi, Gansu, Henan, Hubei, and

Received date: November 25, 2019; **Revised date:** December 30, 2019

Corresponding author: Yuan Xiaojun, associate professor of the School of Humanities, Economics and Laws of Northwestern Polytechnical University.

Major research field is industrial development and national defense economy. E-mail: july_yuan99@nwpu.edu.cn

Funding program: CAE Advisory Project “Research on the Strategy of Green Circular Development in Qinba Mountain area (II)” (2017-ZD-02)

Chinese version: Strategic Study of CAE 2020, 22 (1): 050–055

Cited item: Yuan Xiaojun et al. Construction of Cross-Regional Cooperative Governance System in Qinba Mountain Area. *Strategic Study of CAE*, <https://doi.org/10.15302/J-SSCAE-2020.01.005>

Chongqing. It is difficult to solve the overall problems in the QMs area by relying on a regional government alone. Unfortunately, the current situation of the QMs region shows a horizontal or vertical division among different administrations, lack of coordination and unified action [12], weak economic connections with surrounding areas [13], serious industrial homogeneity, unreasonable spatial layout [14], and so on. So, it is necessary to adopt the coordinated governance mechanism between different regional governments. Together, related theory and application research are urgent.

Based on the theory of inter-organizational cooperation networks, this paper proposes an idea of constructing a governance system in the QMs area from the perspective of collaboration, to provide a reference for the coordinated development of the region.

2 Theory of inter-organizational cooperation network

The inter-organizational cooperation network (IOCN) originates from the management research of network organization, which is a relatively stable form of cooperation established by related enterprises during long-term cooperation or interaction. Through collective decision-making and joint actions among the members of the IOCN, all participants can adapt more quickly to changing technology and market environments, which is conducive to obtaining more market benefits. Therefore, whether organizations can establish a long-term and stable cooperative relationship determines the long-term benefits of participating enterprises.

Since the theory of IOCN was proposed in the 1960s, it has become a hot topic in the field of public governance. It is generally believed that (1) when each participant is engaged in a similar field and has resources that can be exchanged with each other, a relationship of interdependent and complementary is constructed among the agencies [15]; (2) the IOCN can effectively promote the formation of common goals and rules, continuously interact and exchange resources among members of organizations [16]; (3) through mutual contractual arrangement rather than administrative order, each member of the IOCN reaches collective decision-making and joint action, which will eventually bring greater benefits to the whole network and the members of the network [17]; (4) the history of interaction among network members will affect the decision to get equal relations and common rules. The longer the interaction time and the higher the frequency of transactions, the more stable social relations can be established among all members; (5) the distribution of cost and benefit among the main bodies always threatens mutual dependence and trust, therefore, a “third party” is needed to coordinate the interesting relationship among all participants which is usually a subject with high credibility in the network, or a subject not in the network and without interest sharing relationship.

The theory of IOCN has also been effectively practiced in China. In recent years, an important reason for the great achievements in the comprehensive governance of the Yangtze River Basin is that 11 provinces and cities in the basin have formed an IOCN and carried out effective governance. As mentioned above, the foundation of an IOCN is that the members should have the same goals, equal status, and peer-to-peer learning through continuous resource exchanges to achieve governance goals. As a single provincial government, it is difficult to independently solve the overall problem of comprehensive governance of the Yangtze River Basin for its limited administrative governance resources. Due to the foundation of the IOCN among those provinces or cities which have the same goals and equal status, they exchange governance resources with each other and eventually facilitate the solving of governance issues. In addition, at the national level, the Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt was established to act as the “coordinator” of the IOCN, ensuring its stability, synergy, and linkage. By the end of April 2018 [18], 959 illegal wharves in the Yangtze River Basin have been completely demolished and 402 have been rectified and regulated. Special remediation actions such as drinking water sources, sewage outfalls, chemical pollution, and solid waste have been carried out. The Yangtze River water quality improved from 74.3% at the end of 2015 to 77.3% in the third quarter of 2017.

3 The current status and problems of QMs regional cooperative governance

The “five provinces and one city” in Hubei, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Henan, Gansu, and Chongqing, which are located in the QMs area, have carried out cross-region cooperation very early. For example, as early as 1986, four provinces and nine cities (districts) including Shiyan, Xiangfan, Shennongjia forest area, Jingmen in Hubei province, Ankang and Shangluo in Shaanxi province, Nanyang and Luoyang in Henan province, Dazhou in Sichuan province, have established the Economic and Technological Cooperation Zone in the Central and Western Regions, whose cooperation expanded from regional industries to in-depth areas such as ecological environmental protection and ecological civilization construction. The Sichuan-Shaanxi District Tourism Cooperation

Conference, which was first initiated by Bazhong, Hanzhong, and Guangyuan in 2002, attracted Longnan, Tianshui and other cities in Gansu Province in 2008. In 2010, Wanyuan City and Tongjiang County in Sichuan Province, Chengkou County in Chongqing, Zhenba County and Ziyang County in Shaanxi Province signed the *Qinba Mountain Area Poverty Alleviation Coordinated Pilot Area Cooperation Agreement* to jointly build a QMs poverty alleviation coordinated pilot area which would be conducive to change the economic situation and improve their income. In 2014, Dazhou City, Sichuan Province, in conjunction with nine cities including Guang'an, Nanchong, Bazhong, Hanzhong, Ankang, Shiyan, Wanzhou, and Fuling, built the "Qinba Regional Development and Poverty Alleviation Demonstration Zone," and carried out continuous poverty alleviation cooperation with neighboring counties (districts) of Shaanxi and Chongqing. In 2015, the *Municipal Tax Cooperation Agreement for Part of the Qinba Mountain Area* was signed by the tax bureaus of six cities in Sichuan, Shaanxi, and Gansu, to carry out in-depth cooperation in tax policy implementation, tax service, information sharing and so on. In 2019, Bazhong and Hanzhong signed a strategic cooperation framework agreement to deepen exchanges and cooperation in many aspects such as infrastructure connectivity, cultural and tourism integration, poverty alleviation, industrial development, and rural revitalization.

Although a certain cross-domain cooperation mechanism has formed among related provinces and cities, there are still some problems.

(1) The phenomenon of "fragmentation" of cross-region cooperation among provinces and cities is relatively serious. As a result of that, no systematic ideas and plans have been proposed. At present, the regional governments can only cooperate on some prominent issues, but not carry out a unified, holistic and long-term plan for the development of the QMs area, which hinders effective and comprehensive governance.

(2) The degree of cross-regional cooperation among regional governments is still shallow, which is manifested in an emphasis on agreements rather than implementation. Most of the cross-regional cooperation still stays at the level of cooperation with forums, alliances, and other carriers. There are lots of appeals and suggestions, but few actual cooperation actions. Even if some local governments have reached some cooperation agreements, there are still many problems to be solved in their practical implementation.

(3) The cooperation areas among regional governments are narrow, and the participants are fewer. There are 107 counties (cities and districts) in the QMs area, but the proportion of counties and cities that have reached cooperation agreements is less than 30% of which there are fewer participants and at lower administrative levels. In addition, just focusing on tourism and environmental protection, the cooperation agreements contribute less to jointly promoting the development of the QMs area.

4 Thoughts on the construction of cross-regional government cooperative governance system in the QMs area

With an advantageous ecology but underdeveloped economy [10], there are a lot of tasks for the regional governments. Only systematically solving the major problems facing the current development by strengthening cooperation and building a network of regional government organizations, can promote local economic development.

4.1 Feasibility of constructing a cross-regional cooperative governance network

There are foundations and conditions for establishing IOCNs in the QMs area. The governance issues in the QMs area are mutual issues faced by the regional governments. The solution to a specific issue in a certain region depends on the solutions to other issues which shows that there is strong interdependence among the governments of the QMs area. At the same time, specific governance resources owned by every regional government can be exchanged with each other, which has the potential to promote the regional development of the QMs area to a greater extent. The exchange of governance resources among the governments at the same level in different regions will further promote rational planning and layout, optimal allocation of resources, and common rapid development in the QMs area.

Resource exchange and coordination among the members of the IOCN can cultivate a good cooperation relationship among the regional governments in the QMs area. With longer interactions and the higher frequency of governance resource transactions among regional governments, a more stable and mutually beneficial cooperation relationship can be cultivated among all members. This kind of cooperation relation contributes to the long-term and stable development of the whole QMs area. If the cooperation environment is stable or predictable,

the IOCN among the governments intends to duplicate this success, which will encourage and strengthen deeper and broader cooperation, and eventually urge local governments to embed deeper into the network.

4.2 The process of building a cross-government cooperative governance system

Initially, due to the division of administrative authority, there was no cooperative relationship among the regional governments and no existence of IOCN. Due to the inherent needs to achieve common governance goals, regional governments have gradually exchanged governance resources and learned from each other which has led to IOCN providing a way for exchanging resources and sharing of benefits. This kind of IOCN, which is based on inherent needs, is a weak network that takes a relatively loose form. Due to the lack of trust, there are no unified and common rules among regional governments, which can create conflict from a shared interest. Once an administration believes that it has not achieved satisfactory returns, it tends to withdraw from IOCN.

This kind of “weak” IOCN may eventually evolve into a “strong” IOCN with mutual trust, fair sharing of benefits, and close connections through long-term resource exchange or benefit-sharing behavior among members. However, the process will take a long time. During this process, the network relationship is always scattered because of various friction between members of the organization.

In this situation, a “coordinator” with high credibility, not sharing interests in the network, and being able to coordinate interests of members, will play a key role in promoting the rapid evolution of a “strong” IOCN from a “weak” IOCN. For this, the higher-level government has a natural advantage, which is willing and able to take the role of coordinator. It can help to establish an IOCN with mutual trust and a good connection by the way of its active communication and organization with regional governments. This evolution of the cooperation network among administrations is illustrated in Fig. 1.

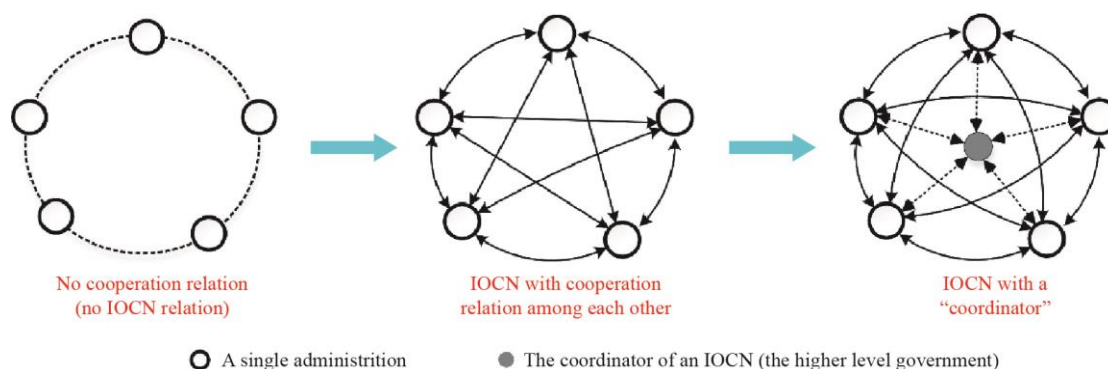


Fig.1. The evolution of IOCN among different administrations.

Although the government can promote the establishment of an IOCN among the lower-level administrations which are under its control, it is more difficult to build a collaborative relationship among administrations that are not under its control. Therefore, sustainable development of the QMs area can be promoted only by establishing the cooperation network at a higher administration level in the QMs area.

Fig. 2 illustrates this situation in detail. The same numbers represent areas with direct administrative jurisdiction. For example, “①” means Bazhong, “①” means Sichuan, “②” means Hanzhong, and “②” means Shaanxi Province. The upper part of the figure represents the IOCN of the lower-level administrations, and the lower part represents the IOCN of the high-level administrations in a different region. The establishment of an IOCN among the lower-level administrations depends on the formation of a cooperative governance system among the high-level administrations. For example, if Bazhong and Hanzhong want to establish a collaborative governance network, it depends on a good cooperative relationship between the two provincial governments of Sichuan and Shaanxi. Only by establishing the IOCN among the provincial governments, removing all kinds of barriers, and exchanging governance resources, can the comprehensive cooperative relationship between Bazhong and Hanzhong be implemented.

As mentioned above, the IOCN established by the lower-level administrations for the sake of internal needs is loose and weak. The governance effect of this kind of IOCN is often greatly discounted, which explains the reason why the governance effect of many local governments in the QMs area is still not obvious even after establishing cooperative relations.

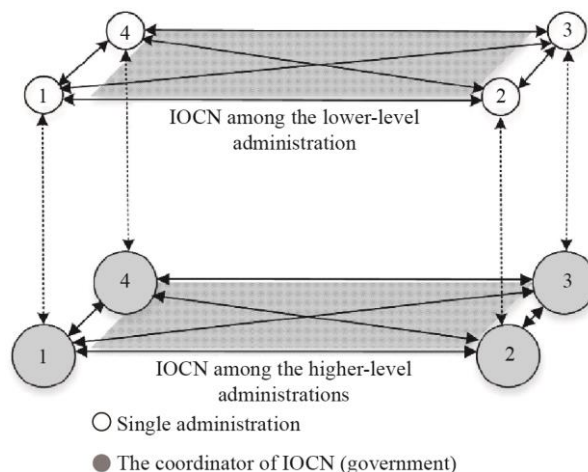


Fig. 2. The relation between different IOCNs of different level administrations.

4.3 The cooperation system among governments in the QMs area

If the IOCN in the QMs area is formed solely for internal needs, the network relationship remains weak. Therefore, for the sake of the development of the QMs area, it is necessary to play the role of “ultimate coordinator” at the national level to promote the establishment of IOCN among provincial governments. According to the consistency of the goals and equity of network members proposed by the theory of IOCN, we can establish a three-level collaborative system among the same level administrations from the top to the bottom: provincial, prefecture, and county levels.

In detail, the IOCN among administrations in QMs areas can be constructed as follows. (1) Set up a specific institution at the national level, or give authority to a specific department so that it can allocate the governance resources among provincial administrations directly, develop the collaborative governance relationship, jointly protect the ecological environment, and stimulate economic and social development of the QMs area; (2) set up a corresponding agency or grant specific authority to a corresponding department in a province so that it not only coordinates cities in a province but also builds a connection with the counterpart administrations of other provinces; (3) set up a corresponding agency or grant specific authority to a corresponding department in a city so that it not only coordinates districts in the city but also builds a connection with the counterpart administrations of other cities.

5 Suggestions for the construction of cross-regional IOCN among administrations

5.1 Strengthen the top-level design

We can learn from the governance achievements in the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei area and Yangtze River Basin that the central government pays a lot of attention and makes the top-level design, which provides a key basis for the long-term effective governance. There are many important issues for sustainable development in the QMs area. Only by making the top-level design in advance, carrying out a comprehensive development and protection plan, making a scientific layout, taking reasonable adjustments, and integrating administrative resources of governments at all levels in the region, can we effectively promote the sustainable development of the QMs area.

5.2 Set up a special institution at the national level

The sustainable development of the QMs area covers major issues such as environmental protection, resource allocation, economic development, and structural adjustment. To realize these goals at the same time is difficult only by relying on a single department or a single administration. It is suggested to set up a special agency at the national level as the coordinator of the IOCN to coordinate different region’s co-governance behavior, which is characterized by barrier-free, resource sharing, responsibility-sharing, and win-win cooperation.

5.3 Give play to the leading role of key construction engineering channels

Key construction projects generally require coordinated promotion by different regional governments or administrations. Focusing on the national development goals and plans, we should set up some key projects in the QMs area, and guide regional governments at all levels to work together to achieve development goals. At this stage, according to the goals of the *Regional Development and Poverty Alleviation Plan of the Qinba Mountain*

Area (2011–2020), it is suggested to coordinate the governance step to improve its ability of cooperation. After 2020, we should also set up some key development projects to further consolidate poverty alleviation achievements, and guide the regional governments to achieve collaboration and cooperation to ensure and improve the development quality of comprehensive management of the QMs area.

5.4 Encourage personnel exchanges among governments in the QMs area

Government behavior theory suggests that maintaining the interests of a region is the basis for the regional government survival. Unfortunately, the behavior of protecting the regional interest often leads to local protectionism, which can prevent cooperation with other regions. It should establish a personnel exchange mechanism to evoke government employees' transposition thinking. As a result of that, governments in the region need to reach consensus and goals for comprehensive governance of the QMs area and supporting the establishment of a dynamic and efficient IOCN.

6 Conclusion

The current situation of relative backward development cannot conceal its huge development prospects due to the vast geographical space and abundant natural resources in the QMs area. To modernize our governance system and capabilities, we should enhance the ability of governance in the QMs area to promote sustained and sound economic and social progress as well as consolidate the achievements of poverty alleviation and ecological environmental protection.

To promote the comprehensive management of the QMs area and the development of various economic and social undertakings, it should use the idea of "one game of chess" in the QMs area. It should also promote the construction of IOCN among local governments to set up a collaborative governance system. Under the coordination and guidance of the central government, we can build up a three-level collaborative governance system in the QMs area, which will contribute to a relationship of mutual trust and cooperation, facilitate an efficient governance resource exchange mechanism and a fair benefit-sharing mechanism among regional governments. All of those measures will result in comprehensive governance of issues in the QMs area.

References

- [1] Wei X Q. Cross domain collaborative governance: An effective way to solve the problem of regional development fragmentation [J]. *Journal of Tianjin Administration Institute*, 2016, 18(2): 34–40. Chinese.
- [2] Li G P, Wang Y Q. "Tragedy of the commons" theory and empirical study in the transboundary water pollution treatment [J]. *Soft Science*, 2016, 30(11): 24–28. Chinese.
- [3] Zhou W. Collaborative governance of cross domain public problems: Theoretical expectation, practical problems and path choice [J]. *Gansu Social Sciences*, 2015 (2): 171–174. Chinese.
- [4] Liu X J, Wan C W, Ye Y M. The institutional dilemma and countermeasures for the coordinated development of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei: A case study of the coordinated development of Tongzhou District and three northern counties of Langfang [J]. *Urban Development Studies*, 2019, 26(11): 5–10. Chinese.
- [5] Ren L, Kong W. The structure, characteristics and strategies of the cultural collaborative governance system in Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei [J]. *Hebei Academic Journal*, 2019, 39(6): 180–184. Chinese.
- [6] Zhao X F, Yuan Z W. The dilemma and the path selection for the collaborative governance in Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei regional air pollution [J]. *Urban Development Studies*, 2019, 26(5): 94–101. Chinese.
- [7] Li Q W. From hierarchical management to community governance: Mode transformation and legal protection of integrated governance in Yangtze River Economic Belt [J]. *Journal of Jishou University (Social Sciences Edition)*, 2018, 39(6): 60–68. Chinese.
- [8] Pan H, Zhou X F. Research on approaches to quasi-marketization of horizontal ecological compensation in the Yangtze River Basin: Based on the perspective of land management and property rights [J]. *Ecological Economy*, 2018, 34(9): 179–184. Chinese.
- [9] Tang Y L, Yu Y. The top-level design of governance power division among local governments in the Yangtze River Delta and the choice of Shanghai: In the perspective of megalopolis collaborative governance [J]. *Academics in China*, 2018 (2): 57–68. Chinese.
- [10] Lei H X, Jing B. Study on development strategies for an national central park in the Qinba Mountain Area [J]. *Strategic Study of CAE*, 2016, 18(5): 39–45. Chinese.
- [11] Xu D L, Pan Y H, Li W, et al. The green & circular development strategy of the Qinba Mountain Area [J]. *Strategic Study of CAE*, 2016, 18(5): 1–9. Chinese.

-
- [12] Xu D L, Zhang Z J. Research on the green & circular development policy system of the Qinba Mountain Area [J]. Strategic Study of CAE, 2016, 18(5): 74–79. Chinese.
- [13] Zhou Q H, Niu J Q. A study on the coordinated development of the urban areas around the Qinba Mountains [J]. Strategic Study of CAE, 2016, 18(5): 10–16. Chinese.
- [14] Wu Z B, Jing B, Guo Q, et al. Study on the development of urban and rural green living environment in the Qinba Mountain Area [J]. Strategic Study of CAE, 2016, 18(5): 60–67. Chinese.
- [15] Bao F X. Cross domain cooperation in local government emergency management: An analysis framework based on inter organizational network [J]. Gansu Theory Research, 2013 (4): 130–135. Chinese.
- [16] Tan Y J. The adjustment and optimization of the relationship between local governments in the development of regional economy: An analysis framework of inter organization network [J]. Administrative Tribune, 2013, 20(1): 41–45. Chinese.
- [17] Li H J. Construction of inter organization cooperation network: Research on the innovation of public service supply mode based on multi-agent participation [J]. Journal of Gansu Administration Institute, 2016 (3): 24–33. Chinese.
- [18] Xi J P. A speech at the symposium to promote the development of Yangtze River Economic Belt [J]. Qiushi, 2019 (17): 4–11. Chinese.