

Research on the Green & Circular Development Policy System in the Qinba Mountains Region

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Abstract: This study investigates the green & circular development policy system in the Qinba Mountains region. The study involves the five provinces along with one city of the Qinba Mountains: Shaanxi, Henan, Hubei, Sichuan, Gansu, and Chongqing, respectively. The study aims to build a policy system for a green & circular development to support the sustainable development of the region. Research methods used include discussions with the government departments of the five provinces and one city, field trips to the relevant counties (districts, cities) and countryside, a review of relevant documents from the central and provincial government, and an in-depth analysis of existing policies implementation. The study results propose a framework, basic ideas, and recommendations to build a green development policy system for the Qinba Mountains region.

Keywords: Qinba Mountains; green & circular development; study development; policy system

1 Introduction

A policy system in this paper includes laws, regulations, plans, and measures to support regional sustainable development. This research report consists of four parts: First, the necessity and urgency for establishing a policy system for the Qinba region; second, significant existing problems in the policy system; third, the overall thinking behind establishing a policy system; and fourth, suggestions for a sound green policy system.

2 Necessity and urgency for a policy system in the Qinba Mountains region

The Qinba Mountains region in China has a special geographical location, an outstanding ecological environment, a rich cultural connotation, and a good military-civilian foundation. Thus, during the process of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (China Dream), its geographical, ecological, cultural, and military safety value delivered irreplaceable strategic positioning

and second-mover advantage to the country. We can readily say that no mountain region cultivates, breeds, and affects the Chinese civilization process as much as the Qinba Mountains. Hence, it is necessary and urgent as well as of significant import to formulate and implement a policy system for the green and circular development in the Qinba Mountains region to guarantee that the “blue water and green mountains are of golden and silver mountains (wealth).”

2.1 Consolidating ecological safety and sustainable development

The Qinba Mountains, together with the Alps in Europe and the Rocky Mountains in North America, have been referred to as the “three famous mountains” of the world, and serve as the dividing line between climates in the south and north in China and the watershed of the Yellow and the Yangtze Rivers. With rich cultural, biological, and water resources, it is recognized as the birthplace of Chinese civilization, with an important ecolog-

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ical main function area, central cultural line, central green lung, central water source, and significant biological world gene pool. The Qinba Mountains are the water conservation area and supply for the Three Gorges Reservoir of China's Yangtze River and the middle route of the South-to-North Water Transfer Project. Additionally, the mountains have the important mission of transferring fresh water to the north and maintaining national ecological safety. The Qinba Mountains provide the surrounding areas—in particular, the Guanzhong Plain of Shaanxi—with the means to enjoy good weather for crops, green water and hills, economic prosperity, and social stability. By formulating and implementing a policy for green and circular development, we aim to protect the ecological environment of the Qinba Mountains, which is a necessity for the ongoing harmony between humans and nature in the continuous development of the surrounding areas. It is also necessary for water conservation, environmental protection, and soil pollution reduction in Mainland China, and relates to the economic and social development in China as a whole as well as the construction of an ecological civilization. Ecological protection and green development can benefit the current as well as future generations, and is of great importance in promoting national and global sustainable development.

2.2 Solving the contradiction between economic development and ecological protection

Our goal is to protect the ecological environment of the Qinba Mountains region. Since the foundation of China, and particularly after the country's major reform, the Chinese Communist Party and local governments have paid enormous attention to the ecological environmental protection of the Qinba Mountains region. As a result, within the region, the ecological environment remains strong, but the increase in population in the mountainous area and the acceleration of economic and social development poses an impending threat.

2.2.1 Rural sewage pollution

A universal trend in the region is for residents to randomly dispose of domestic sewage and household garbage. The sewage and garbage are disseminated into regional furrows, while on-the-spot burning of crop straw also causes serious pollution to the surrounding ecological environment.

2.2.2 Disorderly mining and excavation of mineral resources

In some areas, the development of mineral resources is disorderly, with numerous mining points invading forests and grassland, and tailings piled on the sites, wastewater discharged directly, and waste residue blocking river channels. As a result, this development is seriously harming the surrounding environment.

2.2.3 Industrial enterprises and severe pollution discharge

Enterprises do not normally use pollution treatment facilities

and frequently violate the laws to discharge pollutants and meet standards. Sometimes, they furtively discharge pollutants, reducing the water quality in stream segments.

2.2.4 Water and soil loss in the Qinba Mountains region

In 2011, water and soil loss reached 6.95×10^4 km² in the Qinba Mountains region, accounting for 22.5% of the total area. Water and soil loss can cause debris flow, landslides, and other geological disasters, and bring about significant damage to the ecological environment as well as the lives and property of the public. These factors drive the urgent, notable mission we face today to create and implement strong policies, guarantee harmony between humans and nature, and coordinate the ecological environmental protection of the Qinba region while alleviating poverty and promoting economic and social development.

2.3 Guaranteeing livelihood and welfare and building a well-to-do society

The Qinba Mountains region is a centralized area, continuously destitute, with the most provinces, largest population, and widest geographic area in China including 119 counties (districts and city) in Shaanxi, Henan, Hubei, Sichuan, Gansu, and Chongqing. The total territorial area is 308 634 km², with a population of 61.64 million, including 7.12 million impoverished people. In the 1930s, the Sichuan–Shaanxi and Hubei–Henan–Shaanxi revolutionary base areas were built in the region. The Sichuan–Shaanxi revolutionary base area was the second largest soviet area under the leadership of the Communist Party of China at that time, vigorously supporting other soviet areas and the Central Red Army's long march, all of which was considered a great sacrifice that contributed significantly to the foundation of New China.

Since the reform and the opening up of China—in particular, the implementation of China Western Development and the Rise of Central China Plan—the Qinba Mountains region has achieved positive results in economic and social development. However, due to restrictions in the natural environment and a weak economic basis within the region, its economic and social development still lags behind the entire national level. Moreover, local livelihoods remain a problem, and the regional poverty and backwardness have not fundamentally changed. Therefore, a significant economic task and important political mission is to hasten the green and circular development of the Qinba Mountains region, in particular, to support the development and rejuvenation of the old revolutionary base areas, which can become a new model for faster development in China. To formulate policy and support the green and circular development of the Qinba Mountains region means addressing the urgent demand to convert blue water and green mountains into golden and silver hills, alter the situation of poverty and backwardness, and guarantee the synchronous realization of a well-to-do society nationwide.

3 Policy system problems in the Qinba Mountains region

Over the years, the state, provincial, and municipal governments in the Qinba Mountains region have released many policies and measures to promote green and circular development. Though great strides have been made, compared with the ongoing need for green and circular development, problems still exist from the absence of policies, imperfect policies, and improper policy implementation. These local problems have led to a greater focus on development than on universal ecological protection in the Qinba Mountains region, and some places are trapped in this vicious circle: extensive development–ecological damage–poverty and backwardness.

3.1 Establishment of green development assessment mechanism is urgent

Due to the influence of traditional performance assessment systems, basic level governments pursue short-term performance and lack awareness and activities that conscientiously promote economic green growth. Moreover, they still depend on a large input of resource elements to stimulate extensive local growth in the economy. Thus, their drive and efforts increase in their pursuit of local investments and projects. Some leaders even believe that green development is only the business of the developed provinces in the east and has nothing to do with backward regions. They do not have enough knowledge about the necessity, importance, or urgency of green development. Moreover, some local enterprises pursue only outputs and profits while ignoring the cost of environmental damage, green value ideas, and any strong responsibility for protecting the ecological environment. Therefore, an examination and an evaluation system for local governments and enterprises focused on ecological environmental protection and green development is urgently needed.

3.2 Imperfect green and circular economic policy

3.2.1 The tax policy is not perfect

In an examination of overall taxes, the categories of taxes in this area appear incomplete, and taxes specifically for optimizing resource allocation and protecting the environment are not included in the existing tax system. At present, there is no tax collection for environmental issues such as environmental pollution, water pollution, air pollution, sources of pollution, or general ecological compensation. Thus, tax revenue is missing as an important tool for environmental protection.

3.2.2 The ecological compensation mechanism is not sound

There is currently no policy on ecological compensation in terms of content, scope, and compensator. The existing compensation method is overly simple, and there is no an operating

mechanism of marketization and a horizontal eco-compensation method. The compensation standard is not scientific and reasonable enough, and the opportunity cost and ecological value compensation are absent.

3.2.3 The environmental resources' price policy is unreasonable

The placing of low price on resources, the irreplaceable environment, and the penalty policy for low pollution discharge from enterprises have all become important reasons why the pollution problem must be solved.

3.2.4 Financial support for ecological environmental protection is insufficient

A lack of financial support is largely reflected in the small scale of the central and local governments' expenditures in the region, the low proportion of total public and private expenditures, and the inability of both governments and businesses to adapt to the need to develop the ecological civilization.

3.3 Laws and regulations for green and circular development need to be improved

At the state level, China need to accelerate the formulation and improvement of laws and regulations governing natural resources property rights, development and protection of national land and national parks, space planning, dealing with climate change, protection of the quality of cultivated land, water conservation and underground water management, grassland and wetland protection, pollution discharge permission, and compensation for environmental damage.

At the province level, laws and regulations for green and circular development are not perfect. Laws and regulations in key fields, such as economic policy for environmental resources, ecological compensation, ecological treatment and system repair, environmental information disclosure, ecological civilization assessment and evaluation, and a reward and punishment system, have not yet been created.

3.4 An unreasonable system affects the implementation of policies

3.4.1 The ecological treatment system is fragmented and segmented

In the region, the natural environment and ecological system is horizontally and vertically segmented by different departments and administrative districts. Thus, there are no coordinated and unified activities across the region. Cultivated land, forestland, wetlands, natural preservation areas, scenic spots, forest parks, and geological parks are managed by many different administrative departments. As such, overlapping and intersecting management has become a serious problem. This pattern has seriously restricted the overall protection and effective management of the area's natural ecological system.

3.4.2 Dispersive development leads to resource waste and ecological damage

Most governments in the region (counties and districts) have ignored the ecological environment and emphasized industrial development instead. In the 1980s, it was said that “every household in the village was engaged in construction.” Today, it appears that “every household in the county is engaged in construction.” As a result, point source pollution has become a area-source pollution.

3.4.3 The government is inattentive to ecological environment protection

Governments at all levels focus on microeconomic activities such as attracting investments and construction projects. When economic development activities conflict with environmental protection, governments place greater value on the form of environmental protection than its actual operation and instead support the economic development activities. These governments fail to play a proper role in the public management function of environmental protection.

3.5 Green technical innovation lacks policy support and motivation

A lack of support and a prominent conflict between the absence of policy and the need to promote technical innovation has led to insufficient green technical innovation. Though the Qinba Mountains region has outstanding advantages for developing ecological agriculture, advanced cultivation technology and management experience are still scarce. In addition, the support and guarantees from domestic scientific research institutes working in ecological industry research and development and scientific and technological power are not sufficient. This fact has resulted in a low survival rate for ecological agricultural cultivation projects, dissatisfaction with local achievements, and poor economic performance, all seriously affecting the attitudes of local peasants.

4 Thinking behind the policy system for the Qinba Mountains region

Due to the current need to formulate and implement policies for green and circular development for the Qinba Mountains region, we aim to construct a policy system using domestic and foreign experience as a reference, and integrating the knowledge of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Third, Fourth, and Fifth sessions of the 18th Central Committee of the CPC. This means firmly establishing and implementing the five strong development concepts of innovation, harmonization, green, openness, and sharing while pursuing efforts to protect the ecological environment. It also means hastening the development of the green and circular economy, focusing on the promotion of new industrialization, new urban-

ization, and agricultural modernization, and on the establishment of a green industrial system and spatial structure. The government must be responsible for formulating and implementing policies on green and circular development, and for changing the conventional thinking of valuing development over protection in the region. At the same time, it is expected to create harmony between humans and nature, coordinate development of an economic society and the natural ecology, develop the Qinba Mountains region into a demonstration area for scientific development and green increase polar, establish an important ecological safety curtain in Midwest China, and contribute to the creation of a well-to-do society by 2020, all while realizing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (China Dream).

4.1 Stick to ecological protection first and harmony between humans and nature

With the premise of protecting the natural ecology and the goal of sustainable development, it is feasible to divide the ecological red line and formulate corresponding environment standards and policies. Additionally, development should be conducted in a proper and orderly way in accordance with resource bearing and environmental capacity, guarantees of ecological safety in the region, constant improvements in the quality of the ecological environment, and the creation of harmony between humans and nature.

4.2 Stick to the basic requirement of hand-in-hand protection and development

Development is the key to solving the problems of the Qinba Mountains region. Protection is the key to realizing sustainable development. Both are of equal importance and neither can be neglected. We cannot sacrifice the environment to realize economic development, and we cannot solely pursue ecological environmental protection and abandon economic development. By vigorously developing a green and circular economy, we can realize the combination of both, and find a win-win road to economic development and ecological environmental protection.

4.3 Stick to the basic method of overall consideration and promotion

The ecological environment is an organic entirety, but pollution has no administrative boundaries. To optimize the allocation of resources and the layout of industries, we must break the restrictions on administrative boundaries. To promote green development, we must conduct urban-rural coordination and regional collaboration and linkages, systematic planning, and planned guidance. We can thus realize development without boundaries, resource sharing, the shared shouldering of responsibilities, and win-win cooperation.

4.4 Stick to the basic direction of concentrated and intense development

To effectively move forward, concentration and intensiveness should be the core principles of economic development, vigorously promoting population concentration, industry clusters, resource intensiveness, and functional centralization while following a development road of intensive space utilization. This means depending on existing towns and immigrant movement projects, actively designing layout and stronghold development projects, building strong counties, key towns, and new districts, and promoting intensive and concentrated development of the population and the economy.

4.5 Stick to the basic path of legal normalization and system guarantee

A perfect policy system can be the soft power and an important guarantee for promoting green and circular development. Central and local governments must establish a sound, systematic, and perfect law and regulation system, and improve the system for resource property rights, government performance examination, environmental supervision, and accountability while applying red lines for laws, regulations, and systems to maintain the ecological bottom line, and guarantee long-term green development with a system bonus.

5 Establishing and perfecting a policy system for the Qinba Mountains region

5.1 Urgently establish sound system guarantees

5.1.1 Establish and improve the system for natural resources property rights in the Qinba Mountains region

Under the framework that clarifies property rights, it is necessary for the Qinba Mountains region to scientifically clarify all functions of natural resources and ecological space, guarantee reasonable usage of natural resources and ecological space, and ensure accurate execution of the positioning of the ecological main function area and ecological environment by establishing a usage management system.

5.1.2 Establish assets statistic accounting system for natural resources

It is very important for the Qinba Mountains region to estimate the natural resource base in the region and a precise master inventory, as well as the increase and decrease in natural resources, and provide basic evidence for dividing the ecological protection red line and performance evaluation and assessment.

5.1.3 Establish a strict ecological red line management and control system

It is very urgent for the Qinba Mountains region to pay close

attention to the formulation of Qinba Ecological Red Line Planning, further clarifying the management and control scope and management method for the ecological red line, and execute grade/category-based management for the ecological red line area.

5.1.4 Establish a monitoring, warning, and prevention system for ecological and resource environment risks

It is necessary for the Qinba Mountains region to construct a monitoring and warning system for the ecological protection red line, predict the development trend and space-time distribution of ecological safety elements, gradually realize integration of monitoring and warning, as well as decision-making and technical support of the ecological protection red line, and create an ecological safety warning system with technical, labor, and material guarantees as well as the capacity for the timely handling of sudden events.

5.1.5 Facilitate negative list management and create a backward capacity withdrawal mechanism

For industries within the ecological function area that do not conform to the positioning of main functions, the government of this region should encourage enterprises to move, transfer, or close through means of an equipment depreciation subsidy, equipment loan guarantee, movement subsidy, or land functional replacement [1].

5.1.6 Undertake strict measures to control the total discharge of pollutants

In the city, the government should take measures to limit the emission of atmospheric pollutants; in the countryside, the government should also take measures to reduce water pollution. Especially, in water conservation areas, the government should strictly prevent the discharge of polluted water.

5.1.7 Establish an ecological protection assessment and accountability system

It is very important for the Qinba Mountains region to gradually create a differentiated evaluation system for the ecological protection red lines; include the evaluation results of the ecological protection red lines into the comprehensive assessment and evaluation system of party and government-leading cadres in the Qinba Mountains region. Make the assessment results an important basis for cadre selection and appointment, reward and punishment, and accountability.

5.2 Urgently establish a sound incentive policy system

5.2.1 Improve compensation policies for ecological environmental protection

According to the requirements of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and a series of policies about ecological protection compensation released by the Gen-

eral Office of the State Council, the provincial, municipal, and county government should quickly form a sound compensation method and mechanism for ecological protection in red-line areas of the Qinba Mountains region. They should enhance compensation standards; clarify capital sources, compensation channels, and methods; and promote ecological protection in the compensation area accordingly. They should Explore diverse ecological compensation modes, and establish a horizontal ecological compensation mechanism among different regions according to the principle that the beneficiary pays producers of ecological products in areas designated by the beneficiary [2]. Moreover, an environmental protection tax should be imposed for enterprises' carbon emissions, with all revenues used for environmental protection in carbon-absorption areas, such as grassland, forest, wetlands, and other ecological function zones [3], and quantified for a supply fee for fresh air in the region.

5.2.2 Establish a special fund for ecological protection and circular industry development

The Qinba Mountains region should establish a special guiding fund for the ecological environmental protection industry through intergovernmental transfer capital, thus engendering a well-leveraged industry role. The guiding fund can be set up by the provincial governments, and the central government can supply a certain proportion of the fiscal subsidy to the provinces and cities with the guidance capital. The guiding fund is mainly used for ecological protection, circular economic development, the development and promotion of green and low-carbon technologies, as well as engaging in publicity, training, education, and capacity creation for green and circular development and ecological protection.

5.2.3 Urgently establish a tax policy supporting ecological environmental protection

It is necessary for the Qinba Mountains region to properly collect environmental taxes, expand the collection scope, and increase the tax rate; take the lead to collect taxes on major pollutants such as SO₂, NO_x, chemical oxygen demand, and volatile organic compounds, including CO₂ emissions in the collection scope. It is also important to perfect resources tax's policies, expand the scope of taxation on mineral energy and sources, which is currently based on the price of oil and gas resources, and reform taxation according to the price of coal and other mineral products; properly increase tax rates for some mineral products, and protect resources; cancel the value-added tax preference policy for pesticides, agricultural film, and chemical fertilizers that do not conform to requirements for ecological protection, and establish preferential policies for agricultural material products that do not easily cause soil pollution.

5.2.4 Urgently to improve fiscal and monetary policies

It is necessary for the Qinba Mountains region to increase

fiscal incentive on the areas where ecological construction is well done; reduce or stop transfer payments to regions with insufficient work efforts and decreasing ecological environmental quality. According to the principle of equality and public service, it is important to increase transfer payments in the Qinba Mountains region, and implement national procurement for the ecological function zones and important ecological elements. It is also important to strengthen green financial innovation, for example, exploring financing methods for mining rights, prospective earnings on energy conservation and environmental protection, and mortgage of dumping rights under the premise of risk controllability; supporting qualified energy conservation and environmental protection enterprises in exploring and conducting carbon financial transactions through the issuance of bonds or by going public, and extending the pilot work on environmental pollution liability insurance. Additionally, governmental green procurement policies and green procurement should be improved.

5.2.5 Execute a dynamic management policy for key ecological function zones

To counter the momentum of valuing development more than protection in scenic spots, geological parks, and forest parks, these areas can use the experience of the United Nation Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a reference. This means implementing a dynamic management policy and adopting punishment methods such as warnings, checking, downgrading, issuing a "yellow card," and even delisting scenic spots, forest parks, and heritage sites that have national and world titles but have gone against relevant laws and regulations, and requiring them to make a correction within a definite time-frame [4].

5.2.6 Further improve land policy

The Qinba Mountains region should carefully implement the Notice of the State Council on Issuing Recent Work Arrangement for Soil Environmental Protection and Comprehensive Treatment and implement restrictive repairs to soil; vigorously support and guide agricultural operating entities to implement land retirement and crop rotation plans to properly fertilize the land; give proper compensation to entities with crop rotation measures. This region should formulate a work scheme for soil environmental protection and a comprehensive treatment as soon as possible; clarifies goals, tasks, and specific measures. Additionally, this region should initiate a new round of projects for returning the grain plots to forestry (grassland) as soon as possible (in the past, the scope was steep slope land with an angle over 25°; now, the recommended steep slope land is over 15° in some areas.), thereby expanding the implementation scope of returning vegetation to grasslands, animal husbandry, and grassland.

5.2.7 Intensify support policies for ecological protection

The government should increase financial support for vege-

tation restoration and ecological treatment in this region. To be specific, it includes supporting programs closely related to water environment security such as the depth control of industrial pollution, the control of rural non-point source pollution, the upgrading and maintenance of sewage treatment facilities, the pipe network matching of the existing sewage treatment plants, and garbage harmless treatment; further increasing the support ability for the construction of environmental monitoring within the region; gradually increasing the central financial standards for public welfare forest protection and restoration; accelerating the establishment of steady growth mechanism for public welfare forest compensation; and supporting to establish the pilot project of national parks on some eligible ecological function zones.

5.3 Establish a perfect law and regulation system

To be specific, it includes scientifically and reasonably modifying and formulating laws and regulations relating to ecological protection, and establishing a law and regulation system for green development that is internally unified, and has clear functionality and alignment. This law and regulation system involves the property rights of natural resources, the development and protection of national land, national parks, space planning, handling climatic change, protection of the quality of cultivated land, water resource protection, water transfer and water function area management, grassland and wetland protection, pollution discharge permission, carbon emissions permit trading, ecological compensation, and compensation for eco-environmental damage. This region should formulate the ecological environmental protection laws of the Qinba Mountains, clarify and standardize goals, methods, and guarantees of ecological environmental protection within the region, and fundamentally ensure the realization of green and circular development.

5.4 Intensify reform and innovation and improve the system

5.4.1 Further reform the administrative management system

The Qinba Mountains region should build an ecological protection management system with clear affiliations, defined responsibility, and effective supervision; create overall plans for comprehensive agencies with green development in the region, changing the fragmented management system; continue to promote the transformation of government functions and strengthen the environmental protection function of governments at all levels.

5.4.2 Establish a collaborative development system

The five provinces and one city in the Qinba Mountains region should design unified plans, connect unified transportation, develop unified industries, construct unified market, build unified ecology, and share development achievements. They should pursue efforts to form an industrial structure with a rea-

sonable labor division, dislocation development, environmental improvement, and full accessibility to benefits for all areas, and integrate a development mechanism in the Qinba Mountains region through open cooperation and frequent interaction.

5.4.3 Establish a green GDP indicator system

China should hasten to create a green national economy accounting system, based on green GDP and a resource environment statistical indicator system, and design a green development monitoring index system and an index calculation system to assess green development in all areas.

5.4.4 Create a carbon emission and water rights trading market

It is necessary for Qinba Mountains region to implement a ladder-type charging standard for sewage charge to expand collection scope; extend pilot reform on emission trading to facilitate the creation of a carbon emission permits and water rights trading market.

5.5 Vigorously promote green technical innovation

This region should focus on the development of ecological and characteristic agriculture to increase technical research and development and create an advantageous industrial chain of characteristic agricultural products. It should focus on development in key fields of ecological industry and energy conservation and emission reduction to break through key common technologies that restrict industrial development and should focus on strengthening comprehensive utilization of resources to vigorously implement an industrial technology roadmap of the characteristic industry, thus to improve extensive resource processing and efficient technological usage. Universities and colleges should be encouraged to develop green technologies, such as cyclic utilization, remanufacturing, zero release, and industrial linkage, and to research and develop the whole process of energy conservation and low carbon management technologies. It is also important for this region to proactively promote “Internet Plus” technology in modern agriculture; apply modern information technologies of cloud computing, big data, Internet of things, and the mobile Internet; facilitate transformation and upgrading of the entire industrial chain; and support the green, circular, and sustainable development of the Qinba Mountains region [4].

6 Conclusion

The paper presents the comprehensive and extensive study of the problems of constructing a green and circular development policy system in the Qinba Mountains region, and proposes certain recommendations and guidelines for supplementing and improving the existing policy system, supporting sustainable development in the Qinba Mountains region, and realizing the long-term development goal of “blue water and green mountains

are of golden and silver mountains.” Due to the limited study period, the study does not include sufficient successful experience and actions of domestic and overseas development in similar regions; therefore, future studies are recommended. In addition, in terms of the policy system, the innovation and operation of some policies are in the early stages and could not be included in this paper.

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