

Research Review On Involution

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Abstract. Since it was introduced into China, the theory of involution has been widely used in the analysis of economic, social and political issues in China. In this paper, the concepts, causes and approaches of involution are reviewed from the perspectives of economics, politics and society, although different fields have different definitions of this concept, they all come from the understanding of Geertz's concept of involution. It is precisely because the concept is vague that the concept is abused and generalized, and the theoretical system presents an imperfect status. The spread of internalization is mainly caused by the low productivity, the path dependence of institutional change and the increase of social contradictions. In the course of social and cultural development, involution cannot be avoided. Therefore, it should adapt to the national conditions and deepen the reform.

1. Introduction

The theory of involution has been widely applied to the study of economic, social, political and cultural issues through the research and promotion of Coldenweiser, Geertz, Huang Zongzhi, Du Zanzi and other scholars. As an interdisciplinary concept, it provides a new perspective for scholars at home and abroad to analyze problems. Since its introduction into China, internalization has been regarded as a concept that is closely related to some characteristics of Chinese society and has a high frequency of use and a wide range of influences in the field of Chinese sociology in recent years ^[1]. However, scholars have different understandings of the concept of enrolling, and have different views on the causes and ways of its elimination. This paper is based on these, divided into three fields of economy, politics and culture, to systematically summarize the concept, causes and breaking paths of involution, so as to provide a general overview for scholars.

This paper divides the whole into four parts: The first part sorts out the literature on the connotation of involution concept. The concept of involution is summarized as the phenomenon that a certain thing or model is restricted by environmental conditions and can only be complicated continuously, but can't get actual development. The second part analyzes the causes from the economic, political and social fields. The main reasons are the low productivity, the path dependence of institutional change and the increase of social contradictions. The third part summarizes the path of the above three fields. It is found that improving production technology, deepening institutional reform and promoting integration among communities are the main ways to break the involution in various fields. The fourth part summarizes the above three parts: the phenomenon of involution is inevitable in the development process, and only deepening the reform according to the national conditions is an important way to break the involution.

2. Definition of the concept of involution

2.1 The involution of the economic field

Scholars have different definitions of the concept of "involution". This concept originated from Kant and Coldenweiser and was later formed by the American anthropologist Geertz. After the application and promotion of Huang Zongzhi, great attention was paid to it. Through field research, Geertz found that Javanese due to capital, land quantity restrictions and administrative barriers. This

has led to a steady influx of labour into limited rice production, which has not led to a fall in per capita income, but has hampered economic growth. For such a self-defeating process, he calls it "Agricultural Involution"^[2].

Since then, this concept was quickly applied to the study of Chinese agricultural issues. Huang Zongzhi understood involution as diminishing marginal returns of labor force. The essence of involution lies in the highly intensive labor input per unit of land and diminishing marginal benefits per unit of production^[3]. Some scholars think that Huang Zongzhi introduced the marginal profit of labor into the involution and changed the basic direction of analysis. In fact, involution is a process of continuous refinement and complexity within the system under the condition that the external expansion conditions are strictly limited. In this regard, Guo Jiqiang proposed a new understanding, suggesting that involution is a generalization of the self-defeating and self-locking mechanism of economic entities, especially family farms^[4].

2.2 The involution of the political field

American scholar Du Zanzi introduced involution into the political field. Du Zanzi believed that it involves both growth without actual development and the rebirth and maintenance of a regime in a fixed manner. On this basis, Sun Yuandong further expanded the scope of application of Du Zanzi's "State Involution". He believed that the political structure of feudal society in China, especially the social structure model centering on the kingship, stagnated after reaching a certain form at a certain stage of development, making this model constantly replicated, extended and refined^[5].

2.3 The involution of the social field

In the social field, the research of involution mainly focuses on the involution of social groups. The involution of migrant workers is manifested in the inherent path dependence or lock in occupation, living space, social network and other aspects, and they cannot integrate into the city. Community groups similar to migrant workers also generally have complex interest relations and cannot effectively form a community of interests, which is called "community involution".

3. Causes of involution

3.1 The causes of economic involution

First, the contradiction between people and land is increasingly serious. Perkins proposed that with the marginal amount of arable land and the rapid growth of population, the potential of China's agricultural development was almost exhausted^[6]. Due to the limitation of arable land area, the increasing population and the increasingly serious contradiction between people and land, the labor force becomes increasingly cheap and finally falls into a backward trap. Second, too close labor input. Peasant households choose labor instead of capital, technology and other factors of production, and fall into the agricultural involution^[7]. Third, the production technology level is low. Due to the intensive input of agricultural labor force and technical stagnation, China fell into a "high level equilibrium trap". As a result, the agricultural production has been wandering in a low level for a long time, unable to promote economic development. Fourth, the national agricultural policy is ineffective. The state has carried out socialist transformation of agriculture by building people's communes and transforming individual labor of peasants into collective labor, but it has not solved the problem of involution of agriculture, and it has even become more serious in some aspects.

3.2 The causes of involution of politics

First, the expansion of state rights. State institutions expand their administrative functions by copying or expanding the old state and social relations, but do not bring about the improvement of benefits, thus leading to the involution of politics. Second, the path dependence of institutional change. Bureaucratic institutional innovation will certainly have an impact on all institutional levels of the government system, causing changes in institutional supply and demand, and the emergence of institutional imbalance will lead to a new round of institutional innovation and institutional

changes including bureaucratic restructuring, resulting in the result of "system involution". Third, policy refinement. Excessive refinement of policy objectives and implementation, such as "leadership responsibility system" and "guarantee responsibility system", also fails to take into account long-term development. The final result is that the overall quality of policies is not high, which leads to a large resource consumption.

3.3 Causes of involution of society

First, the solidified social cultural psychological mechanism. Involution is the result of continuous self-replication of the social system. Moreover, paradoxes such as "growth without development" and "progress without harmony" are full of society, and these paradoxes will spread disorderly and inefficient according to the logic of self-replication, leading to involution. Second, social groups fail to integrate. The social behaviors of migrant workers returning to their hometown have typical involution characteristics, which not only include the restriction of the urban-rural dual structure, the attraction of land and related policies to benefit farmers and other objective reasons, but also include the lack of human capital of migrant workers, the difficulty of integrating culture, psychology and lifestyle into urban society and other factors.

4. Involution break paths

4.1 The breaking path of economy involution

First, land policy should be improved. The way out for agricultural problems lies in land. The involution of de-agriculture needs to drive the adjustment of industrial structure and improvement of efficiency by the flow and reconfiguration of factors, which relies on the promotion of standardized and orderly farmland transfer. In order to develop modern agriculture and realize agricultural modernization, it is necessary to promote the transfer of agricultural land. Second, the production technology should be improved. By increasing rural capital input, improving agricultural production technology to increase production, improve efficiency, and promote the development of agricultural mechanization is the way to break the involution of agriculture. Third, developing rural industrialization and rural tourism. When Huang Zongzhi proposed that the agricultural economy was actually growing without development, he thought that rural industrialization was the fundamental path to break the involution of agriculture. The entry threshold of rural tourism is low, and its development will not lead to the transformation of land and production relations, but can improve the level of rural economic development and labor productivity.

4.2 The breaking path of politics involution

Institutional reform should be deepened. In order to get out of involution, it is necessary to pay attention to the in-depth reform of individual ability investigation, break the network barrier of political relations, prevent the abuse of one-vote veto system and accountability system.

4.3 The breaking path of social involution

First, improving the system of social organizations that undertake government functions. Establish a service-oriented social governance model, strengthen guidance for social organizations, and improve the "three-dimensional" system of cooperation between the government and social organizations. Second, strengthening community building. Zhang Fuqiang proposed to construct a spatial model to avoid the involution of community autonomy from three aspects: spatial transfer, power transfer and interest transfer^[8]. Third, integrating rural migrant workers with urban areas. The government needs to create a system conducive to promoting social exchanges between farmers and increase the frequency and depth of social exchanges between urban residents and migrant workers, so as to break the involution dilemma of migrant workers' integration into cities.

5. Summary

First, the definition of this concept is still unclear, and the existing ambiguity cannot be eliminated. Second, the concept was mistaken to be able to explain all the phenomena of no development and growth, which led to the generalization and abuse of the concept. Some scholars even defined the concept subjectively according to their personal needs for the sake of novelty, making the theoretical system lose its own significance and value. Through sorting out previous researches, this paper finds that scholars' researches mainly focus on rural society, migrant workers and system, while researches on the internalization tendency of state-owned enterprises and development zones are relatively scattered. Therefore, this research will become the direction of our further efforts. The causes of internalization are various, but the main reasons are the low productivity, the path dependence of institutional change and the increase of social contradictions. In the course of China's development, there is no way to avoid the problem of involution. Therefore, it should adapt to the national conditions and deepen the reform.

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