

# **Operating Mechanism of China's Western Border Areas Governance from the Perspective of New Regionalism**

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**Abstract:** Under the background of globalization, based on the new situation of national governance and the spatial characteristics of the western border area in China, this paper will take "new regionalism" as the analytical framework to examine the governance of the China's western border areas. On this basis, the macro operation mechanism of the region's governance is studied systematically.

## **1. Introduction**

The concept of "new regionalism" was first proposed by Palmer to illustrate new developments in regional cooperation[1]. Generally speaking, new regionalism refers to the governance subject and its organizational form, constituted by local governments, non-profit organizations and market entities in the region to better solve regional public problems, as well as the governance concept and relevant institutional design that these subjects jointly abide by in the process of governing regional public affairs[2]. In recent years, regional functional planning in China's national development strategy has become increasingly clear, and the development framework based on region as a unit is also becoming more and more efficient.

The "China's western border areas" is a regional concept. According to China's "Western Development Strategy", there are 12 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities located in the west of China, among which the areas adjacent to the western boundary are designated the western border areas. From north to south, across central Asia, South Asia, and southeast Asia, they are Inner Mongolia, Gansu, Xinjiang, Tibet, Yunnan and Guangxi, bordering Mongolia, Russia, India, Nepal, Burma, Vietnam, Laos, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan, with a borderline of more than 10,000 kilometers. These areas are the region with weak ecological carrying capacity, numerous ethnic minorities and religious beliefs, low level of economic development, complex geopolitical issues in neighboring countries, etc. The coordinated development of politics, economy, society, culture and ecology is the common goal of the governance in the six provinces and regions. Similar regional spatial characteristics, local governance subjects, objects and objectives make the western border areas have independent regional connotation and the necessity and feasibility of regional cooperative governance. The core values of new regionalism, such as comprehensiveness, systematicness, interregionality and openness, are also highly consistent with the current governance situation of China's border areas, which can effectively examine the macro-mechanism of the governance in the western border areas.

## **2. Operation Mechanism of New Regionalism Governance in China's Western Border Areas**

### **2.1. Cross-Regional Spatial Interaction Mechanism**

The linking mode between China and its western border areas, western border areas and other border areas, border areas and inland areas, border areas and their neighboring countries should be explored to establish a regional interaction mechanism at the spatial levels of China, western border

areas, inland areas and neighboring countries. On this basis, a new type of regional cooperation alliance can be established.

The spatial structure is the physical basis for the construction of the governance mechanism in the western border areas. The planning and positioning of the physical space function combined with the social and economic development characteristics of the western border areas can help construct the macro-spatial structure for the governance mechanism in the western border areas. The spatial function planning based on the social and economic development characteristics of the western border areas can help construct its macro-spatial structure of the governance mechanism. The macro-spatial structure is divided into domestic and international aspects. Domestically, in the “National Plan for Functional Zones”, promulgated in December 2010 in China, five of the six western frontier provinces and regions, with weak resource carrying capacity, low developing level of large-scale agglomeration economy and bad demographic conditions, are covered for ecological security, and they are positioned as a restricted or prohibited development area. At the same time, the western border areas are a key region for China to carry out the national strategy of poverty alleviation and regional coordinated development, and to realize the goal of building a well-off society in an all-round way. How to realize the green poverty alleviation, green economic transformation and green development in the western border areas through green governance, and how to coordinate the two seemingly contradictory functions in the same region are important spatial variables for the construction of the governance mechanism in the western border areas.

Internationally, in the the Belt and Road initiative, the integrated development between China's western border areas and inland areas is placed in a broader international spatial channel. Based on the unique geographical advantages, the six western frontier provinces and regions have been transformed from the inland regions of Eurasia and the border areas of China into the frontier areas of the reform and opening up. And they are endowed with new regional spatial functions: Xinjiang is positioned as the “core area of the Silk Road Economic Belt”; Guangxi is positioned as an important gateway linking the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road and the Silk Road Economic Belt; Yunnan is positioned as a radiation center facing south and southeast Asia. The positioning of Gansu is to form a channel for countries in central Asia, south Asia and west Asia, a trade and logistics hub and an important industrial and cultural exchange base. Inner Mongolia is planned to be an important window to the north. The addition of these new regional functions brings new opportunities for the development of the western border areas, and introduces new positive spatial elements for the building of the region’s governance mechanism.

The western border areas and their governance mechanisms are examined in the such spatial systems as the nationwide, the western border areas, the inland areas and the neighboring countries, building various mechanisms, platforms and channels between each of them, so that the positive elements in the political, economic, social, cultural and ecological fields of the region can be effectively driven.

## **2.2 The Driving Mechanism of the Governance Subject Network**

In view of different governance issues, in the broad areas consisting of the western frontier, the inland, and the surrounding countries, a multiple governance subjects network and its driving mechanism should be established to promote the co-governance performance of local governments, market entities and social entities. Due to the unique spatial characteristics of the western border areas, the governance objects and the involved spatial fields are complex and multidimensional, which leads to the complexity and diversification of the governance subjects network and their dynamic mechanisms. How to construct the interaction mechanism among the regional multiple governance subjects is the key to evaluate the driving mechanism of the governance subject network.

First of all, the provinces and regions in the western border areas should adjust their administrative divisions reasonably according to the regional functional positioning and their special governance issues, so as to break down the original bureaucratic system barriers.

Secondly, according to different strategic positioning of the six western frontier provinces and regions in the national Western Development strategy and the Belt and Road Initiative, the exchange of market entities should be promoted to form complementary advantages of enterprises in different regions. A smooth channel for market elements among the western frontier provinces should be built to form an effective interaction of finance, talent, culture and other social elements.

Thirdly, inland provinces and cities are also the governance subject in the western border areas. The inland provinces' participating levels in the development of the western border areas determine their behavior modes in the multiple governance subject network. At present, there are mainly two ways for the inland areas to participate in the western border areas' governance. One is state-led participation in the governance of the western border areas through partner assistance and preferential poverty alleviation. The other is market orientation, where the production factors in the east and the west flow in accordance with market laws, so that the resource advantage of the west and the technology advantage of the east can exchange efficiently.

Fourthly, according to the international geopolitical characteristics of the western border areas, the cooperation mode in the economic, social, cultural and ecological fields at the levels of governments, enterprises and social organizations between neighboring countries and regions and the western border areas should be explored to promote the positive role of international actors in the governance of the western border areas. For example, China's western border areas are adjacent to many countries in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), which is an important actor to help solve many international issues, such as Drug crimes, human trafficking, environmental pollution etc. Besides, in the frameworks of "One Belt And One Road", "Pakistan Pakistan Economic Corridor" and "China, Bangladesh and Myanmar Economic Corridor", effective interaction has been achieved, and positive elements of international organizations have been actively introduced to turn the geographical advantages of the western border areas into its development advantages.

### **2.3 Governance Object Identification Mechanism**

With the acceleration of the frontier-inland integration and development of the Belt and Road initiative, the western border areas have transformed from a relatively closed field space into the frontier of opening up and the core link of integrated development. The elements in politics, economy, society, culture, ecology and other fields are more active, which, showing a strong intra-regional and inter-regional mobility and linkage, presents a big challenge to the governance of the western border areas.

The problems in each area or field are not isolated, but have a deep linking logic behind them. The political, economic, social, cultural and ecological problems in the western border areas should be categorized and identified from a systematic perspective, especially about ethnic issues, national security issues and other special objects of border governance. They should be placed in the special social and cultural background and geopolitical background of the western border areas to find their correlations and identify the resonance of different risk elements. For example, in the ecological governance of the western border areas, many political, economic, cultural and social factors are closely connected to the environmental pollution, which should be solved in green administration, green economy, green social culture and other comprehensive systems. Only by constructing the system of ecological civilization construction in the western border areas can the contradiction between development and ecology be fundamentally solved, and the goal of governance of the beautiful frontier and the ecological frontier be realized.

In a word, we need to systematically examine the objects of border governance in the system network, and identify their problems, risks and impacts respectively, so as to realize good governance of the western border areas.

### **2.4 Legal and Policy Protecting Mechanism**

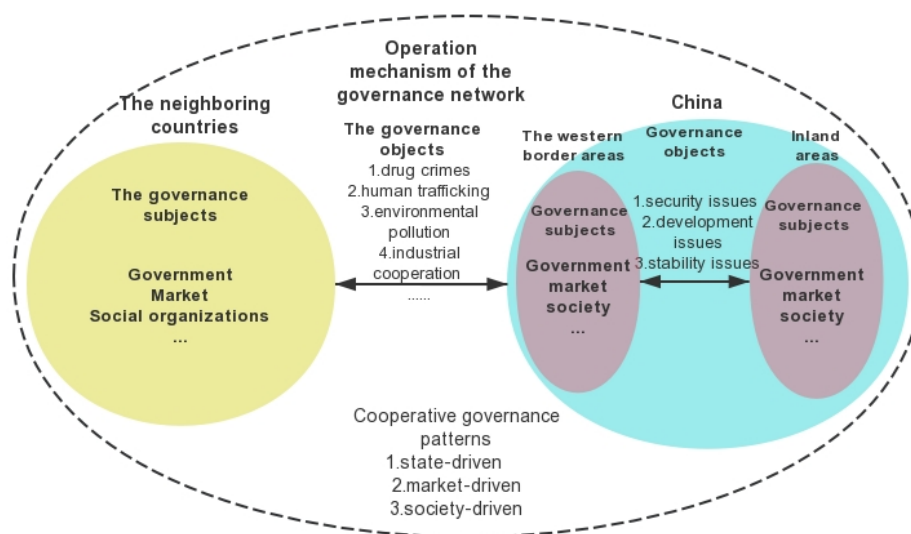
The governance of the western border areas is driven through the building of multiple governance subjects network, the identification mechanism of governance objects as well as the inter-regional spatial field linkage mechanism, to form a joint force to promote each other.

However, the establishment of these mechanisms is not spontaneous and needs to be guaranteed by a sound legal and policy framework. The norms of legislation and the guidance of regional public policies have the advantages of stability, compulsion and authority[3] .

Specifically, the new regionalism advocates that regional development should not only focus on the economic growth, but also give consideration to the development costs and benefits of society and environment. Social factors, environmental factors and economic factors should be combined closely[4]. The efficient operation of the macro-governance system requires the coordination of its sub-systems, which can be realized by not only a perfect market mechanism and macro-policy guidance, but also a perfect legal guarantee conducted by national government[5]. To construct the policy system and legal system of regional governance, the key is to balance the interests of different governance subjects within and between regions, which is closely bound to the efficient legal framework and policy reconfiguration. For example, the existing vertical administrative management model of bureaucracy may cause local governments to pay close attention to local functions, but turn a blind eye to regional interests, leading to the difficulty in building regional coordination mechanisms. Local governments usually play a dominant role in regional governance, while citizens, NGOs, media and other social organizations are not involved enough. As both the management subject and the interest subject, local governments have the possibility to obstruct the interest proposition of other organizations and the public. Besides, there are still many institutional and institutional obstacles to regional development in the current regional governance system of the western border areas. So it is necessary to establish a sound policy framework and legal system for regional governance and regulate regional cooperative governance behaviors, so as to ensure the balance of interests and equal partnership between local governments and other regional governance subjects.

### 3. Conclusion

Through the above analysis, we can get the general framework of the new regionalism operation mechanism on the governance of the western border areas. In this framework, based on the interconnection of spatial elements and the interaction rules of various elements such as politics, economy, culture and ecology, a unique macro-governance operation mechanism suitable for China's western border areas is generated, which can be shown as the following picture:



**Fig 1.** General framework of the new regionalism operation mechanism for the governance of the western border areas

With its systematic, comprehensive and socialized theoretical quality, “new regionalism” has built a good integrated framework and interactive network for us, and provided a lot of enlightenment for the administration of western border areas. Based on the current situation of China's western border areas and the theoretical advantages of “new regionalism”, we need to

conduct an in-depth field research on the western border areas, so as to work out effective mechanisms and reasonable paths for the governance of the western border areas. That is, in the multiple spatial dimensions of nation-frontier, frontier-inland, and frontier-neighbouring country, the governance issues in the western border areas should be classified and identified under the guarantee of perfect regional and inter-regional laws and policies. In the complex governance network, the economic prosperity, political democracy, cultural prosperity, social equity and sound ecological development can be achieved effectively in the western border areas.

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