

Research Article 01

A Perspective on the Practical Logic of China's Poverty Reduction: A Historical Analysis through the Agent-Target-Instrument-Goal Framework

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Abstract

This paper systematically examines the evolution and internal logic of China's poverty governance, constructing an analytical framework of "Agents-Targets-Tools-Goals." The research demonstrates that by establishing a pluralistic and coordinated "Large-Scale Poverty Governance" system, China achieved a precise downward shift in its poverty targeting mechanism from regional to individual, a systematic upgrade of policy tools from singular development to comprehensive empowerment and a continuous deepening of goal management from abstract vision to quantifiable assessment. This process reflects an integrated unity of long-term consistency and phased approaches, stability and reform, and doing the best within capacity while acting according to capability. This has resulted in a distinctively Chinese model of poverty governance, offering significant insights for the global effort to reduce poverty. This study illustrates that sustainable poverty reduction is fundamentally rooted in strong political commitment, adaptive policy design, and an effective governance apparatus capable of delivering those policies. This integrated, context-specific approach has not only shaped China's own achievements but also offers a distinctive model and knowledge base from which other developing countries may draw in designing localised poverty alleviation strategies.

Keywords: Policy instruments, poverty governance model, poverty reduction, poverty targeting

Introduction

Since 1980, the Chinese government has launched organised poverty reduction efforts. By 2020, China had secured a complete victory in the fight against poverty, achieving historic milestones in poverty governance. Not only has China eradicated absolute poverty in rural areas, but it has also contributed Chinese wisdom and solutions to global poverty reduction. China's achievements in poverty reduction are mainly reflected in four aspects:

First, the historic eradication of absolute poverty. China has consistently placed poverty reduction at the forefront of national governance. According to the 1978 standard, the rural poor population was 250 million, with an incidence of poverty of 30.7%. Through sustained efforts, by 2012, the poor population had decreased to 98.99 million. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the targeted poverty alleviation strategy has been fully implemented. By the end of 2020, all 98.99 million rural poor population had been lifted out of poverty, all 832 impoverished counties had been removed from the poverty list, and all 128,000 impoverished villages had been delisted, completely eliminating absolute poverty.

Second, comprehensive improvement in the lives of the impoverished population. The income and consumption levels of residents in poor areas have significantly increased. The per capita disposable income of rural residents rose from 133.6 yuan in 1978 to 17,131 yuan in 2020, a real increase of 17.6 times. The income structure has been continuously optimised, with the proportion of wage income and transfer income gradually increasing, reflecting the broadening of employment channels and the improvement of the social security system. Meanwhile, infrastructure in poor areas has been comprehensively strengthened, housing and drinking water safety have been guaranteed, and the tap water penetration rate reached 83%.

Third, effective resolution of regional overall poverty. By 2020, regional overall poverty had been resolved historically. In 2021, the cumulative growth of per capita disposable income of residents in the eastern, central, and western regions all exceeded 110%, with the western region leading in growth rate. The regional income gap has continued to narrow, accelerating the formation of a coordinated development pattern.

Fourth, making significant contributions to global poverty reduction. China achieved the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goal for poverty reduction 10 years ahead of schedule. Over the past 40 years, China has lifted a cumulative total of over 850 million people out of poverty, accounting for more than 70% of the global reduction in poverty during the same period.

How did a developing country with a massive population achieve this goal through a set of effective policy systems? From the perspective of public governance, a complete poverty alleviation governance system typically includes four interconnected core elements: "who supports" (the actors), "who is supported" (the target), "how to support" (the policy tools), and "to what extent" (the policy goals). These four elements together form the basic analytical framework for understanding poverty alleviation actions. Reviewing China's poverty reduction journey over the past four decades, although its poverty alleviation policy system has undergone multiple adjustments and evolutions, from regional development-oriented poverty alleviation to targeted poverty alleviation, its governance logic has always revolved around these four core questions, undergoing dynamic optimisation and systematic integration within this framework. By continuously redefining "who is supported" to improve targeting accuracy, consistently enriching "who supports" to build a broad-based poverty alleviation pattern, innovating "how to support" to enhance policy effectiveness, and gradually raising the goal standards for "to what extent," the Chinese government ultimately accomplished the grand task of eradicating absolute poverty. Therefore, this paper aims to construct a four-

dimensional analytical framework of "actors-target-tools-goals" to systematically review and evaluate the evolutionary logic, internal connections, and effectiveness of governance of China's poverty alleviation policies over the past forty-plus years, revealing the institutional drivers and governance wisdom behind China's poverty reduction miracle.

Poverty Alleviation Agents: From Singular to Plural, From Fragmented to Coordinated

A defining feature of China's government-led poverty governance system is the establishment of a systematic and comprehensive organisational structure and working mechanism. Since the founding of the State Council Leading Group for Economic Development in Poor Areas in 1986, renamed in 1993 as the State Council Leading Group for Poverty Alleviation and Development, this institution served as the core leadership mechanism for China's poverty alleviation work until it fulfilled the historic mission of eradicating absolute poverty in 2021. Its evolution profoundly reflects the institutional development and capacity enhancement of China's poverty governance system, exhibiting three key characteristics:

First, the continuous elevation of strategic importance, transitioning from a specialised task to a national strategy. Adjustments to the Leading Group's structure signify the rising prominence of poverty alleviation within the national governance system. Initially headed by the Secretary-General of the State Council, the group was led by a Vice Premier of the State Council after 1998, marking its transition beyond a departmental affair to a strategic national priority. By 2015, the central authorities further institutionalised the mechanism of "Party secretaries at five levels tackling poverty alleviation," achieving comprehensive mobilisation from the central to the grassroots levels and underscoring its status as a core task of the entire Party.

Second, the continuous expansion of participating entities, evolving from an agriculture-related department to a "broad-based poverty alleviation" pattern. Changes in the composition of the Leading Group's member Ministries reflect the systematic expansion of participating actors. Initially dominated by departments related to agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, planning, and finance, the framework gradually incorporated departments overseeing education, health, human resources, social security, and civil affairs, shifting the focus from a purely economic dimension to comprehensive interventions for capacity building. The inclusion of financial regulatory bodies and policy banks enhanced resource allocation capabilities, while the participation of the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) and the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce effectively channelled state-owned and private enterprises into becoming major forces in poverty alleviation.

Third, the continuous improvement of the governance structure, building a pluralistic and coordinated super execution network. China's poverty governance system gradually formed a structure involving the coordination of multiple actors: the Party, government, military, mass organisations, and enterprises. Party institutions (e.g., Organisation Department, Publicity Department, United Front Work Department) strengthened top-level design and political guarantees. Notably, the Organisation Department's promotion of the "Party secretaries at five levels" and "resident first Party secretary" mechanisms transformed organisational advantages into governance effectiveness. The government system achieved cross-departmental coordination. The military and mass organisations (Trade Unions, Communist Youth League,

Women's Federations, Disabled Persons' Federations) became crucial links for engaging specific groups and conducting social assistance. Various market actors enhanced the sustainability of poverty alleviation through resource investment and industrial impetus. The evolution of the Leading Group's membership reveals that China's answer to the question of "who supports" has been a dynamically optimised and continuously enriched process. It successfully integrated the Party's leadership, government execution, market vitality, and social cohesion, constructing a poverty governance system that extends fully across sectors and administratively down to the grassroots. This constitutes the fundamental guarantee at the actor level for China's successful fight against poverty.

Table 1 details the composition of the Leading Group for Poverty Alleviation and Development across different periods, including the title and position of the team leader, the participating institutions as deputy team leaders, the member organisations, and the key characteristics of its adjustments at each stage. This information clearly showcases the ongoing expansion of the key actors in China's poverty reduction efforts.

Table 1: Changes in the Member Ministries of the State Council Leading Group for Poverty Alleviation (China)

Period & Phase Characteristics	Group Leader	Vice Leader Ministries	Member Ministries	Significance of Changes
1986	State Council Secretary	4 Ministries: Agriculture, SDPC (State Planning), Science and Technology, SEC (State Economic Commission)	12 Ministries: Education, Civil Affairs, Finance, Commerce, Agriculture, Forestry, Water Resources & Hydropower, Transport, Health, Agricultural Bank, etc.	The dedicated poverty alleviation institution was born, but the scope of member Ministries was relatively concentrated, mainly comprising ministries directly related to rural economic development. \ Marked the institutionalisation of poverty alleviation work in China, separating targeted actions for "poor areas" from general rural reforms.
2003	Vice Premier	6 Ministries: Added: Finance, PBC (People's Bank of China), State Council General Office	22 Ministries: Added: Labour & Social Security, Science & Tech, Ethnic Affairs, Land & Resources, All-China Federation of Supply & Marketing	Establishment of the "Three Pillars": The structure was upgraded from specialised economic development to a comprehensive framework encompassing macro-control (NDRC), financial support (Finance Ministry, PBC), industrial foundation (Agriculture Ministry), and multiple social undertakings.

			Cooperatives, ACFTU (All- China Federation of Trade Unions), ACWF (All- China Women's Federation), CYLC (Communist Youth League), CDPF (China Disabled Persons' Federation), Statistics, etc.	
2013	Vice Premier	9 Ministries: Added: General Political Dept, Central Rural Work Leading Group Office, Civil Affairs	29 Ministries: Added: Foreign Affairs, MIIT (Ministry of Industry and IT), Environmental Protection, MOHURD (Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development), Culture, SASAC (State-owned Assets Supervision and Admin Commission), Tourism, Energy, ACFIC (All- China Federation of Industry and Commerce), etc.	Formation of the "Broad- Based Poverty Alleviation Pattern": Expanded poverty alleviation dimensions; new Ministries covered key areas like IT, employment, housing, culture, tourism, energy, and systematically incorporated forces from the military, state-owned economy, and private economy.

2015	Vice Premier	9 Ministries (Vice Leader Ministries stabilised)	37 Ministries: Added: Central Organisation Dept, Central United Front Work Dept, CBRC (China Banking Regulatory Commission), CSRC (China Securities Regulatory Commission), CIRC (China Insurance Regulatory Commission), China Railway Corporation, etc.	"Precision Empowerment" & "Strongest Guarantee": • Central Organisation Dept joined, providing organisational guarantee for "Party Secretaries at Five Levels Tackle Poverty Alleviation", the core mechanism for implementing targeted measures. • Three major financial regulators gathered, achieving comprehensive "Financial Empowerment" for poverty alleviation.
2018 (Final Push System)	Vice Premier	10 Ministries: Added: Central Organisation Dept	39 Ministries: Added: Central Propaganda Dept, State Grid, China Southern Power Grid, China Development Bank, Agricultural Development Bank of China, National Health Commission, etc.	"Super Execution Network" Completed: Deployed the core forces to overcome the final strongholds: • Central Organisation Dept elevated, strengthening political mobilisation. • The National Health Commission focused on the bottom line of "Health Poverty Alleviation". • Policy banks and power grid giants provided massive resource guarantees, ensuring no blind spots.

Source: Compiled by the author (2025)

Poverty Alleviation Targets: From Regions to Individuals, From Broad to Precise

The evolution of China's poverty targeting mechanism represents a dynamic process of increasing precision, adapted to the nation's fiscal resources and governance capacity. In the early stages, confronted with widespread rural poverty and limited governance capacity, the state adopted a regional targeting strategy. In the early 1980s, by establishing funds for supporting development in less developed economic areas, resources were concentrated in

"old revolutionary base areas, border areas, and ethnic minority areas." The aim was to universally benefit the poor through improved regional infrastructure and economic growth. This "broad-brush" targeting approach, given the large, concentrated poor population at the time, covered most impoverished people with relatively low administrative costs, representing a rational choice suited to the national conditions and capabilities of the period.

As the total number of poor decreased and their distribution changed, issues of resource leakage and insufficient precision in regional targeting became apparent. In 1986, China's poverty governance capacity achieved a critical leap with the establishment of the dedicated State Council Leading Group for Poverty Alleviation and Development, signalling the state's ability to organise more refined actions. Consequently, the targeting unit shifted down to the county level, establishing "National Poor Counties." Initially, 331 were designated. As economic growth boosted state fiscal capacity and demonstrated government commitment, the number was increased to 592 in 1994. In 2001, the quota for all 33 National Poor Counties in the eastern region was reallocated to central and western regions, ceasing the designation in the east, thereby allowing more impoverished counties in central and western China to receive support. By 2011, further counties in the most profound pockets of poverty were designated, bringing the total to 832. Designating National Poor Counties allowed for more concentrated resource allocation and leveraged the complete administrative and fiscal systems at the county level, reducing policy implementation costs. Using a quantifiable income standard made resource distribution more operational, reflecting a strategy to maximise input-output efficiency under limited resources.

Entering the 21st century, the poor population became further dispersed into non-poor counties, and disparities between villages became prominent. National governance capacity, particularly in technical means, advanced again with the introduction of the Asian Development Bank-supported Participatory Village Poverty Index identification system. This enabled village-level targeting, leading to the identification of 148,000 impoverished villages and the implementation of the "Whole Village Advancement" program. This shift from county to village targeting meant the state was now allocating resources directly to the terminal communities where the poor were most concentrated, clarifying the objective from promoting regional economic growth to directly improving the production and living conditions of the impoverished.

However, wealth differentiation within villages necessitated ultimately targeting the individual ("person"). With unprecedented strengthening of the national economy and the maturation of technological capabilities like digital governance, the costliest household-level targeting became feasible. The targeted poverty alleviation mechanism, centred on the "Registration and Filing System," was established. Through complex household surveys, multidimensional identification, and dynamic management, it ultimately achieved precise identification and assistance for nearly 90 million impoverished people. The creation and operation of this system, arguably one of the world's most refined poverty targeting systems, marked a new height in China's national resource mobilisation and grassroots governance capabilities.

Over more than 30 years, China's poverty targeting mechanism underwent continuous refinement and downward shift from region, to county, to village, to household. This evolution was not a simple substitution but formed a multi-level, complementary system. The downward

shift significantly enhanced the precision and coverage of poverty alleviation resources, transitioning from initial reliance on the "trickle-down effect" of regional development towards direct, targeted intervention for the poor, effectively reducing resource leakage and targeting errors. Different levels of targeting served specific purposes: regional targeting suited for cross-regional infrastructure coordination; county-level targeting beneficial for coordinating industries and public services; village-level targeting for improving overall village conditions; and household-level targeting for implementing personalised support based on individual causes of poverty. This pluralistic targeting system not only improved the efficiency of resource utilisation but also provided clear guidance for social forces participating in poverty alleviation, laying a solid foundation for the remarkable success of China's poverty eradication efforts.

Table 2 provides details on the evolving units, criteria, scale, and coverage of China's poverty targeting across different periods, and highlights the poverty reduction impact of these mechanistic changes.

Table 2: Poverty Targeting Mechanisms in Different Periods

Targeting Unit	Period & Phase	Identification Criteria	Scale	Coverage Rate of the Poor Population	Characteristics & Evolutionary Logic
Regional Targeting	Early 1980s	"Old Revolutionary Base Areas, Border Areas, Ethnic Minority Areas, and Poverty-Stricken Areas"	Covered 18 provinces (autonomous regions)	Under widespread poverty, covered most of the poor population.	Adapted to pervasive poverty and limited governance capacity. Achieved large-scale poverty reduction by promoting regional economic growth ("trickle-down effect"), with low management costs.
County Targeting	Launched in 1986	Income Standard: Based on 1985 per capita net income (ranging from 150 to 300 yuan).\ Policy Consideration: Relaxed standards or special	331 National Poor Counties	High concentration of poor population in poor counties; initially covered most target groups effectively.	Leveraged complete county-level administrative and fiscal systems to improve resource delivery efficiency. Marked the beginning

	consideration for old revolutionary base counties, ethnic minority counties, and specific old revolutionary areas.			of refined and organized poverty management by the state.
Adjustment in 1994	• Raised Standard: Per capita net income below 400 yuan (new criterion in 1992) or below 700 yuan (original criterion).	Increased to 592 National Poor Counties	By 2000, the proportion of poor population covered by poor counties fell to about 50%.	Expanded support scope to address remaining poverty, but issues of insufficient targeting precision began to emerge.
Adjustment in 2001	Indicators measuring a county's economic development level (e.g., per capita income, per capita fiscal revenue, per capita GDP) were assigned a weight of 10%, while the incidence of poverty (weight 60%) and farmers' per capita net income (weight 30%) became the primary indicators.	592 counties; the quota for 33 key counties in the eastern region was reallocated to central and western regions; the eastern region no longer designated National Key Counties.	--	Central poverty alleviation resources were concentrated in the central and western regions, with provincial governments responsible for poverty alleviation in the eastern region.
Adjustment in 2011	Counties (cities, districts) where the average of three indicators—county GDP per capita, county general budget fiscal revenue per capita, and county farmers' net income per capita—from 2007 to 2009	832 Poor Counties (including 680 contiguous destitute area counties)	--	Brought more poor counties under the scope of central government funding support, further highlighting the government's emphasis on poverty

		were all below the Western region's average for the same period; counties connected geographically, sharing similar climates, traditional industries, cultures, customs, and poverty causes; additional weighting applied for ethnic minority counties, old revolutionary base counties, and border counties.			alleviation work.
Village Targeting	Launched in 2001	Multidimensional Index: "Participatory Village Poverty Index," covering 8 core indicators including income, infrastructure, health, and education.	Identified 148,000 poor villages nationwide	Covered 83% of the poor population at the time.	Targeting unit shifted downward, directly focusing on communities with concentrated poor populations. Poverty alleviation resources systematically reached "villages and households" for the first time; the goal shifted from economic growth to human development.

Household Targeting (Registration and Filing System)	Fully implemented in 2014	National Standard: The 2011 poverty line of 2,300 yuan per capita annual net income of farmers (constant 2010 prices). Multidimensional Assistance: Practically combined with the "Two Assurances and Three Guarantees" and local exclusion clauses (e.g., "Four Inclusions, Seven Exclusions").	Identified 89.62 million poor people (29.48 million households) in 2014	Achieved nearly 100% coverage of the national poor population.	Became possible after the state possessed strong fiscal and governance capacity, allowing for the most costly precision targeting at the household level. Ensured resources directly targeted poor individuals through precise identification, precise assistance, and precise management.
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Source: Compiled by the author (2025)

Poverty Alleviation Instruments: From Broad Policies to Targeted Interventions, from External Aid 'Blood Transfusion' to Endogenous Development 'Blood Creation'

The evolution of China's poverty governance pathway clearly reflects a deepening process from macro regional development to micro individual support, and from singular development-oriented poverty alleviation to comprehensive protective poverty alleviation, forming a poverty alleviation tool system with Chinese characteristics.

In the early stages (1980s to late 1990s), China primarily adopted a development-oriented poverty alleviation strategy focused on regions as the unit. The tools of this phase concentrated on improving the overall development environment of poor areas, emphasising infrastructure construction such as roads, water conservancy, and electricity, aiming to break bottlenecks hindering economic development. Through measures like establishing special development funds, designating National Poor Counties, and developing regional characteristic industries, the goal was to drive poverty reduction through economic growth, with the core concept being to stimulate the endogenous "blood-creating" function of the regions.

Entering the new century, as the characteristics of poverty evolved, the tools began to show a trend towards comprehensiveness. On one hand, the focal unit shifted further down to impoverished villages, continuously improving village-level infrastructure and public services through the "Whole Village Advancement" model. On the other hand, policymakers recognised that singular economic growth could no longer cover all impoverished populations, and risks like illness and education costs were significant causes of poverty.

Therefore, while adhering to development-oriented poverty alleviation, the state began systematically constructing a rural social safety net, comprehensively establishing the rural subsistence allowance system, the new rural cooperative medical care system, and the new rural social pension insurance. This marked the entry of China's poverty alleviation strategy into a stage driven by the dual wheels of "development-oriented poverty alleviation" and "protective poverty alleviation," focusing both on enhancing development capacity and beginning to build a "safety net" for poor households against livelihood risks.

During the Targeted Poverty Alleviation phase (2013-2020), the tools achieved unprecedented precision and multidimensionality. In this stage, poverty alleviation resources are directly targeted at poor households and individuals, implementing "targeted treatments" based on different causes of poverty, forming a comprehensive, multi-faceted intervention system. Specifically:

- For the poor with labour capacity, the core tools were industrial poverty alleviation and labour collaboration, stimulating their endogenous motivation through cultivating characteristic industries, providing skills training, and organising employment relocation.
- For those living in areas where "the land could not support the people," relocation poverty alleviation was implemented, accompanied by follow-up industry and employment support, fundamentally changing their living and development environment.
- For the poor in ecological protection zones or fragile areas, eco-compensation poverty alleviation combined environmental protection with income increase, allowing farmers guarding the green mountains and clear waters to reap tangible benefits.
- For families impoverished due to illness or education expenses, medical assistance was strengthened, and the education subsidy system was improved, blocking the intergenerational transmission of poverty.
- For those with weak labour capacity, public welfare jobs were created, and poverty alleviation workshops were set up, providing opportunities for employment near their homes.
- For groups who had completely or partially lost labour capacity, social assistance policies like the rural subsistence allowance played an ultimate safety net role, ensuring their basic livelihood.

The combined application of these precise tools marked a fundamental shift in China's poverty governance from "flood irrigation" to "targeted drip irrigation," from emphasising external inputs to focusing on endogenous development, and from a singular economic dimension to multidimensional capacity building, providing solid strategic support for winning the battle against poverty.

Poverty Alleviation Goals: From Abstract Visions to Quantified Indicators, from Aggregate Development to Individual Lifting out of Poverty

China's poverty alleviation goals underwent a profound evolution from abstract visions to quantified indicators, and from focusing on regional aggregate development to targeting the precise lifting of individuals out of poverty.

Early policy goals, such as "changing the face of poor areas" (1984) and "solving the food and clothing problem for the majority of the masses" (1987), were relatively macro and abstract, focusing on driving poverty reduction through developing the regional economy (e.g., forestry, animal husbandry, processing industries), reflecting the "flood irrigation" approach of development-oriented poverty alleviation.

Marked by the "Seven-Year Priority Poverty Alleviation Program" (1994), poverty alleviation goals began to include clear time limits (7 years) and quantitative targets (80 million poor people), signalling the entry of poverty alleviation work into a new stage of being planned and measurable.

After entering the 21st century, the two "Outline for Development-Oriented Poverty Alleviation" documents (2001, 2011) featured richer and more specific goal setting. They not only focused on income ("consolidating the gains of having adequate food and clothing") but also incorporated multidimensional development indicators such as infrastructure, ecological environment, quality of life, and comprehensive quality. The goals shifted from a singular focus on economic income to multidimensional, comprehensive development.

The "Decision on Winning the Battle Against Poverty" (2015) brought this evolution to its peak. It inherited the core goals of the 2011 outline and condensed them into the world-renowned, clear, and assessable quantitative indicator system of "Two Assurances and Three Guarantees". Simultaneously, the goals explicitly pointed to "rural poor population under the current standard achieving 脱贫 [lifting out of poverty], all poor counties being removed from the poverty list." This marked the final focus of poverty alleviation work, shifting completely from overall regional development down to every single poor individual and poor county, ensuring the precision and authenticity of poverty eradication outcomes.

Table 3 lists the pivotal poverty reduction documents issued by the Chinese government in different periods, presents the poverty alleviation objectives for each stage, and discusses the characteristics and significance of these phased goals. This table provides a clear depiction of the evolutionary trajectory of China's poverty alleviation.

Table 3: China's Poverty Alleviation Goals at Different Stages

Policy Document	Issuance Year	Goals	Significance
Notice on Helping Poor Areas Change Their Appearance ASAP	1984	Within several years, effectively develop forestry, animal husbandry, processing, and mining industries in mountainous areas, solve energy and transport problems, and change the appearance of poor areas.	Macro and Abstract: Vision focused on regional industrial development and changing appearances, lacking specific quantified indicators.

Notice on Strengthening Economic Development in Poor Areas	1987	Solidly achieve the goal of solving the food and clothing problem for the majority of the masses in poor areas during the "Seventh Five-Year Plan" period, and accelerate the pace of the low-income population shaking off poverty and becoming prosperous.	Initial Concretisation: Proposed the general goal of "solving the food and clothing problem for the majority of the masses," but still lacked precise population figures and deadlines.
Eight-Seven Poverty Alleviation 攻坚 Plan	1994	From 1994 to 2000, concentrate human, material, and financial resources, mobilise forces from all sectors of society, and strive to basically solve the food and clothing problem for 80 million poor people in rural areas nationwide in about 7 years.	First Quantification: Set a clear timetable (7 years) and population target (80 million), marking a new stage in goal management.
Outline for Development-Oriented Poverty Alleviation (2001-2010)	2001	The overall Objectives for poverty alleviation and development from 2001- 2010 is to: Solve the food and clothing problem for the few remaining poor population as soon as possible, further improve the basic production and living conditions in poor areas, consolidate the gains of having adequate food and clothing, improve the quality of life and comprehensive quality of the poor population, strengthen the infrastructure construction in poor villages, improve the ecological environment, gradually change the backward economic, social, and cultural conditions in poor areas, and create conditions for reaching a moderate prosperity level.	Multidimensional Expansion: Goals expanded from basic needs to multidimensional development, including quality of life, comprehensive quality, infrastructure, and ecological environment; richer connotation.
Outline for Development-Oriented Poverty Alleviation (2011-2020)	2011	By 2020, stably ensure that poverty alleviation objects have no worries about food and clothing, and guarantee their compulsory education, basic medical care, and housing. The growth rate of per capita net income of farmers in poor areas should be higher than the national average level; the indicators in the main areas of basic public services should be close to the national average level; and reverse	Systematic Quantification: First explicit proposal of the core indicators "Two Assurances and Three Guarantees", and set relative development goals compared to the national average.

Decision on Winning the Battle Against Poverty	2015	the trend of widening development gap.	Precision Downward Shift: Based on "Two Assurances and Three Guarantees," emphasised "all poor population lifted out of poverty, all poor counties delisted", directly targeting individuals and counties.
		By 2020, stably ensure that the rural poor population have no worries about food and clothing, and have guarantees for compulsory education, basic medical care, and safe housing. Achieve a growth rate of per capita disposable income of farmers in poor areas higher than the national average level; indicators in the main areas of basic public services should be close to the national average level. Ensure that the rural poor population under the current standard in China are lifted out of poverty, and all poor counties and regional overall poverty is resolved.	

Source: Compiled by the author (2025)

Conclusion and Recommendation

China's successful practice in poverty reduction is a path of governance that is rooted in national conditions, keeps pace with the times, and is systematically advanced. It is specifically manifested as follows:

First, the continuous expansion and systematic integration of poverty alleviation actors. What began as specialised work primarily led by agriculture-related departments gradually evolved into a core task for the entire Party. The mechanisms of "Party secretaries at five levels tackling poverty alleviation" established a "broad-based poverty alleviation" pattern spanning the Party, government, military, mass organisations, and enterprises. The evolution of the member Ministries of the State Council Leading Group for Poverty Alleviation and Development clearly demonstrates this process: the governance network continuously incorporated diverse forces such as education, health, finance, state-owned assets, federations of industry and commerce, and even the military, forming a "super execution network" with highly coordinated resources and layered accountability. This strong capacity for social mobilisation and resource integration was the fundamental guarantee for winning the battle against poverty at the actor level.

Second, the continuous downward refinement of the targeting mechanism from regional inclusiveness to individual precision. China's answer to the question of "who to support" has been a process of continuous refinement, adapting to national fiscal capacity and governance technology. The targeting unit evolved through four levels of downward refinement: from "old revolutionary base areas, border areas, and ethnic minority areas" to national-level poverty-stricken counties, then to impoverished villages, and finally, through the "registration and filing" system, to precise targeting of households/individuals. This evolution was not a simple replacement but constituted a multi-level, three-dimensional complementary system: regional targeting was responsible for cross-regional infrastructure, county-level targeting coordinated industry and public services, village-level targeting improved overall community conditions,

and household-level targeting addressed individual causes of poverty. This dynamically optimised targeting mechanism ensured the maximisation of allocation efficiency for limited resources.

Third, the continuous iteration of poverty alleviation policy instruments from single-dimensional development to comprehensive empowerment and full-cycle intervention. China's poverty alleviation tools underwent a systematic upgrade from "blood transfusion" to "blood creation," and then to "empowerment + protection." Initially focused on development-oriented poverty alleviation, emphasising regional infrastructure and industrial cultivation aimed at generating a "trickle-down effect" through economic growth. Since the new century, the toolset has become more comprehensive. While advancing "whole village advancement," China began systematically constructing a social safety net, including rural subsistence allowances, the new rural cooperative medical system, and the new rural pension system, marking the entry into a new stage of "development" and "protection", driving progress together. During the targeted poverty alleviation phase, the tools achieved unprecedented precision and multidimensionality, forming "targeted treatment" plans for different causes of poverty, such as industrial poverty alleviation, relocation, ecological compensation, education and medical assistance, public welfare job creation, and social security provision. This set of combined tools, including the "Five Batches" policy, signified China's shift from "flood irrigation" to "targeted drip irrigation" in poverty reduction, and from ex-post relief to ex-ante prevention and whole-process intervention.

Fourth, the quantification of target management from abstract visions to evaluable specific indicators. The setting of poverty alleviation goals clearly demonstrated a quantification process from abstract to concrete, from macro to micro. Early goals were often macro visions like "changing the landscape" or "solving the problem of food and clothing." Starting with the "Seven-Year Priority Poverty Alleviation Program," clear timelines and population targets began to be set. By the period of the "Outline for Development-Oriented Poverty Alleviation in China's Rural Areas," goals expanded to multiple dimensions, including income, infrastructure, and public services. Finally, during the period of the battle against poverty, the goals were condensed into hard, quantifiable indicators such as "ensuring access to food and clothing, and access to compulsory education, basic medical services, and safe housing" ("Two Assurances and Three Guarantees") and "all impoverished population lifted out of poverty and all impoverished counties removed from the poverty list." This evolution made poverty alleviation work a hard task that could be assessed and held accountable, ensuring the timely achievement of the final goals.

In summary, behind China's poverty reduction miracle lies profound governance wisdom, centrally embodied as "three unifications":

The unification of long-term and phased approaches: The long-term goal of eliminating poverty and achieving common prosperity remained consistent, but specific poverty alleviation standards, target groups, and core strategies were dynamically adjusted in phases according to national development and the changing forms of poverty, showing a clear process of "version upgrades."

The unification of stability and reform: The basic principle of development-oriented poverty alleviation and the core leadership of the Party remained stable, but the institutional mechanisms, technical means (such as the registration and filing system), and methods of

resource integration continuously broke new ground, reflecting a capacity for reform and policy flexibility while adhering to the fundamental direction.

The unification of doing the best within capacity and acting according to capability: The state consistently increased poverty alleviation investment in line with the growth of financial and material resources, deploying its best forces at critical moments; meanwhile, it pragmatically set goals matching the development stage at the time, progressing step by step from solving food and clothing problems to achieving moderate prosperity, avoiding over-commitment and ensuring policy sustainability.

China's practice convincingly demonstrates that the success of poverty reduction efforts is inseparable from a country's firm political commitment, a set of policies that keep pace with the times, and a governance structure capable of effectively implementing those policies. This distinctively Chinese path to poverty reduction has not only contributed Chinese wisdom to global poverty reduction efforts but also provided a relevant Chinese model for other countries exploring localised poverty reduction solutions.

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