



Research on the Educational Pathways of Student Association Practices under the Rural Revitalization Strategy: An Analysis Based on the Marxist View of Practice

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Abstract: Guided by the Marxist theory of practice, this study explores the educational logic and realization pathways embedded in university student association activities within the context of China's national Rural Revitalization Strategy. The findings reveal that student associations, through multi-dimensional practices such as educational support, technological services, and cultural inheritance, not only respond effectively to the developmental needs of rural communities but also facilitate participants' knowledge application, capacity enhancement, and value formation—thereby achieving a dialectical unity between social service and personal development. However, the study also identifies several challenges, including structural mismatches between service provision and rural needs, as well as tensions between cognitive enrichment and practical efficacy. To address these issues, this paper proposes the construction of an integrated practice-based education system, the deepening of collaborative education mechanisms through university–local partnerships, and the improvement of scientific and diversified evaluation and incentive systems. These measures aim to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the high-quality development of practice-oriented education models.

Keywords: Rural Revitalization; Student Associations; Practice-Based Education; Marxist Theory of Practice; Pathway Innovation

I. Introduction

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China elevated “comprehensively advancing rural revitalization” to a core strategic priority in the construction of a modern socialist nation. It called for accelerated efforts to “build a strong agricultural sector and promote industrial, talent, cultural, ecological, and organizational revitalization in rural areas”^[1]. This national strategy provides clear direction for youth engagement in social practice in the new era. In his letter to students of the Science and Technology Academy at China Agricultural University, General Secretary Xi Jinping urged them to “integrate classroom learning with rural practice” and to “make contributions and realize their aspirations on the grand stage of rural revitalization”^[2]. Within this historical and social context, university student associations—key platforms for fulfilling the educational mission of cultivating moral integrity and holistic talent—have assumed a significant role. Their practice-oriented initiatives not only enhance the quality of talent development but also serve as an important bridge connecting higher education with national development strategies.

The Marxist theory of practice defines practice as a purposeful and material activity through which human beings actively transform and explore the real world. It is both the foundation and ultimate purpose of knowledge, as well as its dynamic driving force^[9]. Xi Jinping’s statement that “classroom teaching and practical training should be organically integrated”^[3] offers a contemporary interpretation of this principle, providing a theoretical framework for understanding the educational value of student association practices. While the involvement of student associations in rural revitalization has diversified in recent years, challenges remain in ensuring the depth, sustainability, and transformative potential of these practices.

Most existing studies focus on descriptive case analyses or summarize practical experiences without constructing a coherent theoretical framework capable of explaining the internal logic, contradictions, and transformative mechanisms within such practices. Addressing this gap, the present study is grounded in the Marxist theory of practice and applies its dialectical analytical approach. Through a combination of empirical observation and theoretical reflection, it aims to systematically analyze the forms, dynamics, and dilemmas of student associations participating in rural revitalization and to propose an integrated model for educational pathways in practice-based learning. Ultimately, this research seeks to deepen understanding of the logic of practice-oriented education and to contribute theoretical insight to ongoing educational reform.

II. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Marxist theory of practice, emphasizing the dialectical relationship between subject and object in real world activity. Guided through this theoretical framework, the research follows an interpretive approach that seeks to understand how student association practices and rural revitalization interact as mutually transformative processes. The methodology prioritizes capturing lived experiences, organizational dynamics,

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and practical contradictions within student participation. Through the lens of Marxist epistemology, particularly the cycle of practice to cognition to renewed practice, the study aims to reveal the internal logic and developmental mechanisms that shape practice centered education within the contemporary context. The Shaanxi e commerce livestreaming initiative is selected as a representative case because it vividly reflects the mutual shaping of university knowledge, rural needs, and digital agricultural innovation.

To ensure systematic and multi angle observation, the study employs three core methods: field investigation, semi structured interviews, and document analysis. Field investigations include on site observation of the livestreaming practice in Lantian County, where students conducted a “produce from field to screen” activity in a cherry tomato base. These observations focus on broadcasting processes, interactions with farmers, livestream viewer engagement, and the challenges encountered once the livestream ended. Semi structured interviews involve university students participating in the livestreaming team, agricultural growers, local officials, and faculty mentors. Students are asked to reflect on their experiences with branding, logistics, and marketing constraints, while farmers share perceptions of the temporary sales boost, the need for sustained digital support, and their expectations for future cooperation. Document analysis covers association reports, project summaries, livestream transcripts, and institutional materials related to vocational colleges’ digital agriculture initiatives, allowing the study to identify structural patterns and long term mechanisms behind the case. Data from the three sources are integrated through thematic coding and dialectical analysis. Thematic coding identifies recurring patterns across the case, including short duration engagement, branding limitations, and mismatches between student skills and rural operational needs. Dialectical analysis, consistent with Marxist methodology, is applied to uncover underlying contradictions such as the tension between the rapid visibility generated through livestreaming and the slower pace required for institutionalized rural market development. Additional contradictions emerge when students’ theoretical competence interacts with the complexity of real agricultural production, and when university calendars limit long term follow up. Through the synthesis of empirical evidence from the Shaanxi livestreaming case and theoretical reflection, the study constructs an analytical model that clarifies both the forms and dilemmas of student association participation in rural revitalization and provides a foundation for innovating practice oriented education.

III. Theoretical Foundation and Practical Logic: The Co-Constructive Relationship between Student Associations and Rural Revitalization

From a Marxist perspective, practice represents a dynamic, reciprocal process of objectification between subject and object. Within this framework, the relationship between student associations and rural revitalization is not unidirectional, but rather co-constructive. As students engage in transforming the rural “object,” they themselves, as the “subject,” are simultaneously transformed in return.

(1) Empowering Rural Communities: From Intellectual Contribution to Systemic Integration

The engagement of student associations in rural revitalization primarily manifests as a form of external empowerment, evolving through stages from surface-level participation to deep, systemic collaboration.

First, targeted intellectual support enables student associations to address the specific and varied needs of rural communities by applying disciplinary expertise. For instance, agricultural associations provide technical guidance, e-commerce associations assist in developing digital sales platforms, and education or arts associations contribute through skill training and rural aesthetic education.

Second, the injection of youthful innovation brings fresh perspectives and creative energy to rural development. Students, through organizing cultural activities, exploring local cultural tourism resources, and using new media for promotion, introduce novel methods and ideas that invigorate local industries and cultural inheritance.

Third, systemic resource integration positions student associations as “connective hubs” linking academic, industrial, and community resources. By bridging universities’ intellectual capital with enterprises, social organizations, and local governments, these associations help construct collaborative support networks that extend beyond isolated acts of service. Through this multidimensional engagement, student associations contribute not only to rural empowerment but also to the transformation of educational practice itself, realizing a dialectical unity between learning and service, and between personal growth and social contribution.

(2) The Rural Counter-Feedback to Student Associations: From Field Practice to Value Reconstruction

The countryside is far from being a passive recipient of external assistance. As a living and dynamic field of practice, it exerts a profound counteractive influence on student associations and their members. This reciprocal interaction serves as a vital mechanism through which the subjects of practice undergo development and transformation.

First, capacity building through authentic experience. The complexity of rural life offers students an irreplaceable arena for experiential learning and applied problem-solving. When confronted with challenges such as unsold agricultural products, educational support for left-behind children, or the revitalization of local industries, students must transcend the confines of textbook knowledge and mobilize diverse skill sets to devise effective solutions. This engagement fosters a critical transition from theoretical comprehension to practical competence, transforming abstract learning into embodied capability.

Second, organizational evolution driven by problem orientation. To effectively address the multifaceted needs of rural communities, student associations are compelled to continuously refine their professional orientation. For instance, in assisting with agricultural marketing, they may engage in in-depth analyses of supply chain systems; when faced with technical challenges, they actively seek out advanced knowledge and expertise. Through this process, student associations gradually evolve from informal “communities of interest” into structured “learning organizations” and even “professional

service entities,” signifying a substantial shift in both their organizational identity and operational capacity. Third, the deepening and elevation of value identification. Direct participation in rural practice allows students to move beyond abstract perceptions of rural life and to develop a genuine emotional and moral connection with local communities. By witnessing the tangible impact of their contributions students experience a strengthened sense of social responsibility and civic commitment. This journey—from observer to participant, and ultimately to co-builder—represents not only a transformation of identity but also a sublimation of values, encapsulating the essence of practice-based education.

IV. Practical Forms and Multi-Dimensional Characteristics of Student Associations in Rural Revitalization

Viewed through the lens of Marxist theory of practice, the participation of student associations in China’s rural revitalization has evolved into a more systematic and diversified model. These practices reflect distinct orientations in values, modes of activity, and organizational structures, capturing the socio-historical vitality of the new era. As student associations increasingly align their missions with national development strategies, they have become an important conduit through which the educational objectives of higher institutions are translated into tangible contributions to rural transformation.

Value Orientation: The Unity of Social Service and Self-Development

The value orientation of these initiatives underscores the unity of social service and self-development, echoing the Marxist proposition that transforming the objective world and transforming the subjective world are inseparable processes. On one hand, student associations uphold the principle of “from the people, to the people,” dedicating themselves to solving concrete problems in rural development and thereby fulfilling higher education’s function of social service. On the other hand, these initiatives embody Marx’s concept of “the free and all-round development of human beings.” Immersed in real-world contexts and community service, students simultaneously deepen their professional expertise, enhance their practical competence, and refine their moral and civic consciousness^[9]. This dialectical integration of personal growth and collective contribution vividly illustrates the educational significance of practice—not only as a pedagogical method, but as a transformative process that links knowledge, action, and value formation.

Diversified Typologies of Practice

Student associations engaged in rural revitalization have developed multiple and increasingly specialized forms of practice to respond to the diverse needs of rural development. Educational support associations focus on strengthening rural education by providing teaching assistance, tutoring programs, and teacher training that help bridge the gap in educational resources. Technological service associations draw on disciplinary expertise to promote agricultural modernization, rural informatization, and the transformation of scientific research into productive capacity. Cultural inheritance associations devote efforts to preserving intangible cultural heritage, revitalizing folk traditions, and fostering artistic expression in rural areas, thereby enhancing cultural confidence and endogenous motivation. Industrial promotion associations assist in rural economic development by conducting market research, engaging in brand design, and operating e-commerce initiatives that empower local industries. Meanwhile, social governance associations participate in Party-building publicity, policy communication, and community service, contributing to the modernization of rural governance systems and capacities.

Organizational Modernity and Emerging Characteristics

The effective operation of these initiatives is supported by several defining features of modern student organizations. The first is an enhanced sense of student subjectivity. As planners, organizers, and implementers of practice projects, students are encouraged to exercise initiative, creativity, and leadership—an essential guarantee for the success of practice-based education. The second is a growing professional orientation. In response to the complex and evolving needs of rural revitalization, student associations now emphasize specialization and precision, shifting from general volunteering toward targeted, expertise-driven engagement. The third is the rise of collaborative networks. Associations increasingly transcend disciplinary and organizational boundaries, forming interdisciplinary and intergenerational teams while building partnerships with local governments, enterprises, and social organizations. This networked model fosters a collaborative “community of practice” that integrates diverse resources and promotes coordinated action. Finally, sustainability has become a guiding principle. By establishing permanent practice bases and pursuing long-term projects, student associations aim to overcome the short-term and fragmented character of previous activities, ensuring continuous and meaningful contributions to rural revitalization.

V. Unpacking Practical Dilemmas: A Marxist Contradiction Analysis

Applying the Marxist method of contradiction analysis to current student association practices reveals a set of underlying dilemmas concealed beneath the surface of apparent success. These challenges are not incidental; they represent concrete manifestations of the fundamental contradictions embedded in the practice process itself.

(1) Structural Contradictions between Service Supply and Rural Demand

From the perspective of supply and demand, a pronounced structural misalignment can be observed. A disproportionate number of student association initiatives remain concentrated in teaching support and educational assistance, while projects addressing pressing needs—such as industrial planning, digital infrastructure, and market innovation—are comparatively scarce. This imbalance reflects a broader tension between the homogenization of service supply and the diversification of rural demand.

Furthermore, disciplinary silos often fragment the service process, creating friction with the integrated and systemic approaches required for sustainable rural revitalization. For instance, agricultural technology teams may focus primarily on improving crop yields while neglecting complementary elements such as branding and market access, which are

essential for translating technical gains into tangible economic outcomes. A similar contradiction exists between the short-term duration of most student projects—typically around two weeks—and the long-term developmental horizon that rural revitalization inherently demands. This temporal mismatch undermines both the continuity and the cumulative impact of student engagement.

(2) Dialectical Tensions between Cognitive Deepening and Practical Transformation

In line with the epistemological progression of “practice–cognition–re-practice,” the current mode of engagement faces notable obstacles in bridging the transition from perceptual experience to rational cognition, and from knowledge acquisition to transformative action. One key manifestation of this issue is the rigidity in theoretical application. Students often attempt to transplant standardized academic theories directly into the distinct social realities of rural China, overlooking local knowledge systems, cultural specificity, and contextual complexity. The result is a form of “suspended knowledge”—theoretical understanding detached from lived experience.

A second challenge arises from the superficiality of initial cognition. Many students’ perceptions of rural society are shaped by indirect exposure or preconceived narratives, leading to an incomplete understanding of its structural and cultural intricacies. Consequently, their proposed interventions frequently display elements of idealism or formalism, rather than context-sensitive pragmatism.

Finally, the formalization of reflective processes—where post-project evaluations remain perfunctory—prevents the cognitive cycle from completing what Marx termed the “second leap”: the transformation of practical experience into generalized, transferable knowledge. Without this dialectical movement, valuable experiential insights fail to crystallize into sustainable learning, thereby constraining the advancement of students’ critical consciousness and practical reasoning.

(3) Contradictions between Resource Support and Sustainable Development

The sustainability of student association practices is further constrained by contradictions arising from both resource limitations and institutional mechanisms. At the participant level, the phenomenon often described as “three heavies and three lights” persists: greater emphasis on enthusiasm over professional capability, on project implementation over process reflection, and on experience inheritance over model innovation. This imbalance underscores a need to strengthen students’ core competencies for sustained, high-quality engagement.

At the institutional level, several structural bottlenecks remain. These include inconsistent financial support, inadequate incentive systems for faculty mentors, and insufficient risk management—especially concerning transportation safety and fieldwork protection. Such institutional weaknesses not only hinder effective coordination but also constrain program scalability.

At the outcome level, a substantial portion of valuable research reports and policy recommendations produced through student association activities fail to be effectively translated into actionable programs or institutional reforms. This disconnect leads to the underutilization of intellectual resources and, over time, diminishes students’ motivation for continued participation.

VI. Pathway Innovation and Mechanism Construction in Practice-Based Education

To resolve the dilemmas outlined above, it is essential to advance systematic innovation in both pathways and mechanisms under the guidance of Marxist theory of practice. The objective is to transform practice-based education from an activity-oriented approach into a model that is fully integrated into the curriculum and institutionally embedded within the university system.

(1) Building a Practice Education System Anchored in the Cycle of Knowing and Doing

First, the leading role of theoretical guidance must be reinforced. Courses such as *On Practice* and *On Contradiction* should be incorporated into the curriculum to help students internalize Marxist positions, viewpoints, and methodologies, thereby providing a robust theoretical foundation for practical engagement. Theory should not function as abstract doctrine but as a living framework that directs and deepens social practice.

Second, interdisciplinary project-based learning should be promoted through the establishment of comprehensive programs such as “Digital Countryside” and “Rural Governance.” These initiatives should require collaboration among students from diverse disciplines—humanities, social sciences, engineering, and agriculture—who work in mixed teams under joint supervision from both on-campus and community-based mentors. This structure encourages the integration of knowledge, fosters innovative thinking, and strengthens students’ capacity to address complex, real-world issues.

Finally, a progressive competency development model should be constructed, with tiered opportunities for engagement across academic levels. Introductory experiential learning for first-year students should evolve into structured project participation for intermediate students and culminate in leadership and innovation-oriented initiatives for senior students. This scaffolding approach enables the systematic cultivation of practical abilities and intellectual growth through a coherent developmental trajectory.

(2) Deepening University–Local Government Collaboration for Integrated Education

A central task in reforming practice-based education is to establish a precise mechanism for aligning university expertise with local needs. Universities and local governments should jointly develop rural revitalization research platforms that identify and match “demand lists” with “resource lists,” producing concrete “project lists” grounded in real community priorities. This ensures that student practice initiatives are problem-driven, contextually relevant, and solution-oriented.

In addition, a stable and long-term cooperation framework should be established through joint practice bases, industry colleges, and other institutional mechanisms. Such structures can sustain multi-party collaboration among universities, local governments, enterprises, and rural communities, forming a durable ecosystem that ensures continuity and depth in educational practice.

At the same time, universities should actively explore digitalized models of practice, using online platforms for remote supervision, cross-institutional collaboration, and the dissemination of outcomes. This not only enhances accessibility and flexibility but also extends the spatial and temporal dimensions of practice-based learning, allowing continuous engagement beyond traditional fieldwork periods.

(3) Establishing a Scientific and Diversified Evaluation and Incentive System

Reforming evaluation mechanisms is fundamental to setting the correct direction for practice-based education. A comprehensive and multidimensional assessment framework should be developed that combines process-oriented and outcome-oriented evaluation, with participation from multiple stakeholders, including rural residents, local governments, and partner organizations. This participatory evaluation should prioritize both social impact and educational effectiveness, assessing not only what students accomplish but also how they learn and grow through the process.

Furthermore, mechanisms for transforming and supporting practice outcomes should be strengthened. Special funding programs and translation pathways can be established to incubate promising projects, ensuring that student research and service results evolve into concrete social benefits. This approach bridges the gap between academic knowledge and community development.

Finally, a sustainable incentive and assurance system should be implemented by linking practical achievements to teacher promotions, student assessments, and collective recognition. Embedding these mechanisms within institutional performance structures creates strong internal motivation and ensures that practice-based education develops as an organic, enduring component of higher education rather than a short-term initiative.

VII. Conclusion

Anchored in Marxist theory of practice, this study highlights that the interaction between university student associations and rural revitalization is not a one-way transfer of knowledge or resources. Rather, it is a co-constructive relationship in which students and rural communities shape, transform, and elevate one another through sustained engagement. Student associations bring disciplinary knowledge, innovative digital tools, and youthful creativity into rural spaces, while the rural environment offers authentic conditions that challenge assumptions, refine competencies, and deepen students' social awareness. This reciprocal dynamic demonstrates that practice is both an educational method and a generative process that enables mutual development.

At the same time, the study reveals that this co-constructive process is marked practical dilemmas that emerge from real conditions rather than theoretical abstraction. The Shaanxi livestreaming case illustrates that short-term student interventions, though impactful, often struggle to align with the long-term, systemic needs of rural markets. Students' reflections expose tensions between theoretical preparation and the complex realities of logistics, branding, and digital commerce. Rural residents and local partners identify mismatches between enthusiasm and sustainability, as well as between visible activity and lasting infrastructure. These contradictions are not obstacles to be avoided but essential drivers that prompt deeper reflection, structural adjustment, and educational innovation.

The co-constructive dynamics and the contradictions revealed through practice suggest that the future of practice-based education depends on strengthening mechanisms that allow these interactions to unfold more continuously, coherently, and reciprocally. Establishing long-term platforms, integrating interdisciplinary expertise, and building sustained university–community partnerships can help transform isolated activities into enduring collaborative ecosystems. In this way, practice becomes not only a site of experiential learning but a framework for cultivating students' capacities while contributing meaningfully to the ongoing project of rural revitalization.

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