

Illegal drug problem in Chinese rural areas – a case study of Linquan County in Anhui province in central China

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Linquan County is in northwestern Anhui province in central China. It borders nine counties and cities in Anhui Henan province.

In 2016, Linquan County had a population of 2.37 million people [1]; it is considered to be the county with the highest population in China. Linquan is also known as one of eleven key remediation areas with drug problems in China. The growth rate of drug consumers was 33.2% from 1991-1995, and the proportion increased to 69.4% from 1996-1997. In the town of Miaochoa, the population was 60,200 people, and the registered number of drug consumers in 2001 was 509, nearly 8.5%, with 389 drug dealers. From 1998-2001, 410 drug dealers from Linquan were arrested in Yunnan province, which is near the golden triangle area and 23 were sentenced to death. In 30 of 33 villages in Linquan county, some people grew poppies [2].

Linquan County has a long history of drug issues. Before 1949, there was not a unified government in China. China was separated by different warlords, at that time, China's industry and commerce were underdeveloped. Taxes were limited and not enough to support the large warlords, most of whom openly or secretly supported the opium business; sometimes, they forced peasants to grow poppies. Wang has estimated that in 1906, Henan province grew 480,000 Mu (a unit of area=0.0667 hectare) of poppies [3]. At that time it was reported that in Linquan county, 80% of peasants and 20% cultivated land grew poppies [4]. During World War II, Japan

occupied huge areas of China. Linquan bordered the occupied Japanese area, and the Japanese army did not allow any strategic goods to be transported to Linquan; however, drugs were not limited [5]. In the Japanese occupied area of Xiayi county, the Japanese army allowed that 7000 Mu poppies to be grown [5]. The Japanese army needed the taxes from the drug to support their war. After 1949, the Chinese government effectively halted the cultivation of drugs by severely punishing the drug trade and consumers and restricting the movement of the population. In 1978, an economic reform took place in China. Peasants from Linquan left their hometown, and went to Yunnan province. They began to go to plantations to help the local people reap rubber and bananas. If the harvest was not successful, sometimes plantation owners paid the workers in drugs [6]. Some peasants found that making drug deals was an easy method of becoming rich, and they transported drugs from the golden triangle to their hometowns, and from their hometowns the drugs were sold to other Chinese provinces. Thus, Linquan county become a distribution centre for drugs.

The drug dealers in Linquan always say that, "sacrifice me for a few generations of happiness" [6]. This means, with drug deals comes high risks and high rewards; most drug dealers are ready to be arrested by police, and even there is a possibility of them to be sentenced to death; at the same-time, through their drug deals, while in the meanwhile, their families can improve their living conditions. This attempt to rid their families (and even their clans) of poverty is the difference between drug dealers from rural areas and cities [7]. This process rationalizes their crimes. The drug dealers buy one kg heroin in Yunnan province near the golden triangle area, it is nearly 20000 yuan (nearly 3074 US Dollars), when they transport it to Linquan county, where they can sell it for 10 times the price; this prospect is attractive for peasants with low incomes.

The development of drug issue is correlated with poverty. Linquan county has long been one of the poorest counties in China. It is the most poverty-stricken county in Anhui province. The disposable income of peasants was less than 1000 yuan (149.2 US Dollars) per month in 2016 [8].

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Economics is an important issue, the other factor can be the serious urban and rural conflict. Since 1949, the government has used the household registration system to manage this country, which has large regions with great differences. On the one hand, the country has quickly become industrialized, popularized basic education, and the mortality rate of children and adults has been reduced. On the other hand, there are great welfare differences between urban residents and rural residents, which are manifested in employment, education, medical care and so on. This inequity has long been repressed in the hearts of the rural residents. A famous Chinese Intellectual named Prof. Qian Liquan in Peking University wrote, "During the near 20 years economic reform many peasants left their land and went to the cities. It can be regarded as social progress. The cities absorbed the peasants as labour but did not give them the corresponding rights (education rights for their children, medical care), and they do not really integrate into the cities. The old generation, tolerates this kind of injustice, while the new generation faces difficulty in integrating into the cities (high housing price). However, at the same time, they even do not want to return to their land. This paradox often leads to discontent and irrational behaviour. For example, some new generation migrant workers become member of gangs [9]. Another Chinese Intellectual named Wang Xuetai called them "immigrant people" [10].

In Chinese history, peasants tend to be attached to the land. They were generally not allowed to migrate, and they always lived with their clans. When major disasters occurred or war broke out, peasants had difficulty in surviving in their hometowns, and many of them moved to another region. In their hometowns, they lived under the discipline of the clan, however, when they left their hometown under the pressure of survival, some of them lost their discipline [11]. The following are two examples of immigrants and the changes in their morality. In modern society, the extremely high suicide rate of elders in Jingsan county in South China is caused by the lack of respect from their children. The residents are primarily immigrants, and the traditional clan culture is weak; therefore, the moral management of young people is also weak [11]. They are unfriendly to their parents, and their parents do not feel that their own existence is valued. Throughout history, during peasant revolts, many Chinese insurrectionists destroyed rather than constructed. The Nian-army (1853-1899) is a famous Chinese peasant uprising army in Qing dynasty, The primary purpose of the uprising was to steal grain [12]. They developed a five point discipline program. The first point was robbing the rich of all their money. This thought process is that of bandits [13]. They displayed extreme thoughts and behaviours. In the great Chinese romance [the three kingdoms], two insurgents killed one another's families before uprising, to express their determination [14]. This story may be not a historical fact, however it expresses some ideas of these people.

Wang has found that immigrant Chinese people do not successfully integrate into their new areas, and they will develop sub-cultures or ideologies

1. Strongly antisocial
2. They take the offensive in social struggles.
3. They pay attention to building gangs and group interests; they do not pay attention to right and wrong.
4. They lose their social position, and lose their culture and discipline [14].

From the Sui dynasty to the Qing dynasty (1300 years), the Chinese governments chose people to be the officers through the imperial examination system, and many descendants of the peasants have had the opportunity to rise and change their own fates and that of their families. Throughout history, Chinese people have emphasized the meaning of education. Chinese peasants have a saying: "looking down". It means that children are their hope. If the peasants can not see the hope, that their children can change their fate through education, what happens? In many rural areas in China, a number of peasants find that having their children go to school is useless. They do not send their children to school, or they allow their children to have only limited education.

University tuition increased sharply during last 30 years. At the beginning of economic reform in 1978, there is no university tuition. In 1989, 44% of the students in all universities in China came from rural areas, with 56% from urban areas. In 1999, at the best universities in China, Peking University and Tsinghua University, only 17.8% of all enrolled students that year were from rural areas. The average cost for college is approximately 40000 yuan for four years recently, which is nearly 13.6 years of income of a Chinese peasants; thus, many peasants could not afford the high heavy load [15].

Many peasants involved in drug deals have low education levels, low competitiveness in the labour market, and they are easily lured by fast money [7]. If so many peasants let their children receive limited education based on their own initiative, it is easy to let them go astray in the future. The purpose of education is not only to allow young people to find a good job, but also to help them develop independent judgment.

Keywords: China, Illegal drug problem, Rural area

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Author Contributions

Zhuoli Tao – Substantial contributions to conception and design, Acquisition of data, Analysis and interpretation of data, Drafting the article, Revising it critically for important intellectual content, Final approval of the version to be published

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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