

# Social anomie induced by resource development projects: A case of a coal mining project

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## Abstract

This study takes Xincun Village (to protect the privacy of the village, the name we are using is not the real name of the village) in the Golden Triangle of China's coal industry to conduct research focused on the frequent occurrence of anomic social actions by villagers after sudden wealth. Based on 160 days of structured and semistructured interviews, the results show that the anomic actions of suddenly wealthy groups mainly include self, other and socially oriented actions. The implication is that appropriate governance measures can weaken or prevent the occurrence of anomie and its devastating consequences.

## KEYWORDS

rapid industrialization, resource extraction, social anomie, suddenly wealth groups

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Large-scale resource and infrastructure projects inevitably require land either temporarily or permanently (Owen & Kemp, 2015). This land is often obtained by relocating people, with a loss of physical or economic assets and sometimes both (Cernea, 1997; Owen et al., 2020; Vanclay, 2017). Over the past half-century, different countries have invested considerably in large-scale natural resource projects, such as coal mining and hydropower, as a means of rapidly achieving economic and political objectives (Tilt & Gerkey, 2016). Millions of citizens have relocated to make way for projects, which has had a definitive impact on the social structure and lifestyle of urban and rural areas throughout the country, including social anomie (Wang et al., 2019; Wilmsen, 2016). The concept of anomie is a mainstay of classical sociology. Developed by Emile Durkheim and later Robert K. Merton, the concept refers to the absence of clear social values and a lack of social regulation.

Sudden wealth is a process of rapid increase in material wealth. The development of human society can be understood as the process of creating and accumulating material wealth. Poor groups always exaggerate the importance of material wealth and tend to think that wealth means happiness; as a result, they pay more attention to earning money, somewhat avoid spending it, and think that money can be spent without learning. In particular, the move

from an agricultural sector service-based industrialized society has been accelerated. Therefore, spending money is a major problem because it involves the transformation of farmers' consciousness (Fei, 2019, p. 710). If a farmer becomes rich, when his wealth grows and exceeds the farmer's consciousness, the action norm shaped by the farmer in his relatively poor life is not effective (Form, 1972, 1975). Under these circumstances, if the new action norm has not yet been formed, the farmer's money-spending action may fall into the vortex of anomic action and cause devastating social consequences.

In general, the regular development process usually follows the existing social norms and conventions rules, while an innovative development process usually challenges the status quo. Therefore, the faster the speed of social development is, the higher the frequency of anomic behaviour is. As a result, anomic behaviour violates the existing regulations or rules. The idea of anomie was conceived at the end of the 19th century in the context of the rapid development of European and American countries. On a global scale, the focus of research on anomie also basically reflects the shifting trajectory of Europe-America-Asia in space. This shift is not in the sense of one after another, but rather closer to. Therefore, reviewing the relevant research in the logic of gradual expansion is a reasonable way to proceed.

Although Durkheim and Merton put forward the ideas of depression anomie and prosperity anomie (lack anomie and wealth anomie) in their respective studies, the later related studies of these and other scholars mainly focused on depression or lack anomie, ignoring prosperity or wealth anomie. After that research, the anomie phenomenon has occurred in different countries and regions up until today, but it has not attracted enough attention from sociology scholars.

The phenomenon of anomie among rich villagers has occurred frequently, causing a series of destructive consequences in China's period of industrialization (Chen, 2002). Many adverse consequences have caused many losses to individuals, others and society. Moreover, the cost of anomie has increased greatly. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to take the phenomenon of sudden wealth caused by resource development as an example to study wealth anomie and its social consequences from a sociological perspective. This study attempts to enrich and expand the sociological theory of social anomie and promotes governance research on anomie in practice.

Five sections follow this introduction. Section 2 is the literature review. Section 3 introduces the materials and methods. Section 4 presents the results. Section 5 provides critical implications for researchers and policy makers. Finally, Section 6 concludes.

## 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

Durkheim first advanced social anomie idea in *The Division of Labour in Society*, referring to the decline of collective consciousness. In *The Division of Labour in Society*, Durkheim's anomie is articulated as a temporary response to industrialization, but in his latter works *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897) and *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), anomie is used to describe the absence of basic social controls (Huschka & Mau, 2006). Although Durkheim's thinking evolved, the trends of his theory of anomie continued to centre on three aspects: (1) collective consciousness, (2) abnormality and (3) the interaction between society and individuals in times of wholesale change.

In Durkheim's theoretical system, anomie is closely related to the background of social changes (Durkheim, 1984; Marks, 1974). Merton was another important sociologist who promoted research on anomie. Merton believed that under the shadow of the American dream, success only means winning the game rather than abiding by its rules. As a result, society has two tendencies of demoralization and deinstitutionalization (Merton, 1938). As a junior scholar, Merton was deeply influenced by Durkheim's writings, but he intended to proceed further by spelling out what produces anomie in more detail. After Merton, most of the research on anomie continued Durkheim's or Merton's tradition and was carried out under the orientation of the binary division between rules and irregularities. According to the common tendency, empirical research on anomie has focused on individual

dispositions and attitudes rather than on society at large. In other words, anomie has been caused by a form of alienation of the actor (Srole, 1956). In 1957, Merton promoted two kinds of anomie: depression anomie caused by economic depression and prosperity anomie caused by a sudden increase in wealth. However, what is the relationship between these two kinds of anomie and alienation? Seeman (1959) and Dean (1961) both emphasized that social isolation, normlessness, self-estrangement and powerlessness are the key features. It is found that several socioeconomic factors such as occupation, income and gender are significant in the US. In contrast to previous studies, Rushing (1971) explained that the pattern of social organization of the ghetto may foster a normative system what leads to feelings of relative well-being, reflected in low anomie scores. The survey of two anomie scales across different black neighbourhoods showed that socio-political variables that highlight the relationship between neighbourhoods and the structures of power in a city are a more important source of subcultural differences between black residential areas. In other words, the continuous development of anomie at the theoretical and practical levels has mainly benefited from the attention of European and American scholars (Cohen, 1965; Dohrenwend, 1959; Mestrovic, 1987). For example, Simon and Gagnon used the terms “depression anomie and prosperity anomie” to describe the anomie of scarcity and the anomie of affluence, respectively (Simon & Gagnon, 1976).

Since the 21st century, more empirical studies have been conducted. The integration of quantitative and qualitative research has become a major trend in anomie research. Overall, with the acceleration of industrialization, the phenomenon of social anomie is intensifying. It is found that general state policy liberalism and the governing ideologies of state governments are linked to suicide rates. For example, between 1993 and 2006, US and European crime declines occurred in tandem because both were brought about by upturns in the economy (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2009). Another example is that over the past three decades, happiness in China plummeted despite massive improvements in material living standards, caused by the intensified anomie phenomenon (Brockmann et al., 2009). All these studies can be said to confirm the connections among macro policies, macro situations and anomie (Smith et al., 2009; Teymoori et al., 2017). Interestingly, large-prize lottery winners experience sustained increases in overall life satisfaction that persist for over a decade and show no evidence of dissipation over time (Lindqvist et al., 2018, 2020). These findings and Mortgage Fraud across US Counties (Baumer & Gustafson, 2007; Baumer et al., 2017; Bernburg, 2002; Maume & Lee, 2003) are consistent with classic and contemporary anomie theories. Nevertheless, the following problems have been ignored intentionally or unintentionally: First, people often pay attention to their anomie in the process of winning the game but ignore it after winning the game. Second, there is a lack of corresponding focus on people and their anomic actions in rapid social changes, such as sudden wealth. To fill this gap, we take Xincun Village to explore social anomie phenomenon induced by coal mining project.

## 3 | DATA AND METHODS

### 3.1 | Case introduction

This study takes Xincun Village at the border of three provinces (Shanxi, Shaanxi and Mongolia), as a case study and implements qualitative analysis as a research method. In the field investigation, this study adopted a variety of methods to interact with the research objects; used interviews and participatory observation to obtain comprehensive information; and collected data through multiple channels, such as township cadres, administrative village staff, villagers and coal mine shareholders.

Due to the continued upward trend of the coal economy, investors continued to purchase mining rights in large quantities in 2003–2013 in northwest China. The author's survey in China's coal Golden Triangle found that a large number of villages began to sell collectively owned coal mining rights and then received huge amounts of funds. According to the Law of the People's Republic of China Villagers' Committee on Autonomy, large amounts

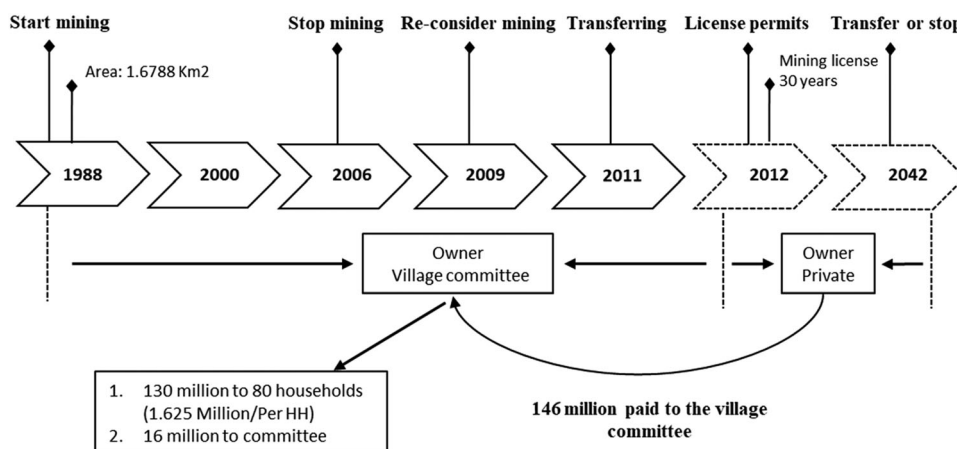
of funds are distributed to households by villagers, and factors such as household registration and land are considered in the distribution plan. For long-term poor farmers, sudden wealth presents an opportunity to lead happy lives. However, this research found that the lives of rich villagers are not happy but rather that sudden wealth causes suffering. This is largely related to the anomic actions taken by villagers after they become rich.

Why does this large amount of wealth not make farmers happier? This question includes three more specific questions. First, what actions have rich villagers taken? Second, what are the characteristics of suddenly wealthy villagers' actions? Third, how should the actions of suddenly wealthy villagers be governed? Classic theories about anomie mainly focus on the anomic behaviour of poor people due to the scarcity of resources and lack of attention regarding the anomic behaviour of people who become rich abruptly. Therefore, research on the phenomenon of the anomie of affluence has innovative significance for classic anomie research, which has continued for more than 100 years. At the same time, based on changes in the village society, the villagers' anomic behaviour has not been able to adjust over time. In short, taking appropriate measures can slow or correct the villagers' anomie, thus avoiding falling into the vortex of anomie. Based on this, the theoretical contribution is to expand and bring innovation to classic anomie theory. This study helps analyse the social causes of the anomie of affluence at the practical level and provide a reference for governance to address them.

Based on the research needs, the author has conducted long-term research in the Golden Triangle of China's coal industry. The Golden Triangle of Coal refers to a triangular area located in the middle reaches of the Yellow River, including Yulin in Shaanxi, Ordos in Inner Mongolia and Shuozhou in Shanxi according to the explanation of China's National Database Neologism Data Centre. It is rich in coal resources and is the main producing area of China's industrial energy. From 2002 to 2012, the region experienced a golden period of development and then began to decline in 2013. The research site of this paper is within the Golden Triangle of Coal. From 2002 to 2012, the area took off economically due to the rise in coal prices. Many people became rich because of coal. The Xincun village investigated is in this rich rural area. Shenfu Dongsheng Coalfield in the region is one of the eight largest coalfields in the world, with predicted coal reserves of 280 billion tonnes and predicted natural gas reserves of 5 trillion cubic metres, by far the largest part of China's proven land-based integrated fields. After investigating multiple resource-rich villages, the author chose Xincun Village as the case study for the following reasons. First, Xincun Village is located in F County at the junction of Shanxi, Shaanxi and Inner Mongolia, and it is a village with sudden wealth. Thus, it has strong representativeness. Second, research on Xincun Village benefits from the convenience of data collection. Because the phenomenon of sudden wealth involves private property, data are not easy to collect. However, in Xincun Village, as one of the author's hometowns, there is a natural network of acquaintances; therefore, it is relatively convenient to collect data. Third, one of the members of the research team is from F County, which is conducive to overcoming the dialect difficulty in the investigation.

Xincun Village's sudden wealth occurred in 2011. On 8 June 2011, after several rounds of negotiation, an investor finally purchased the 30-year mining rights to Xincun Village's collective coal mine and the 30-year use rights of 7 acres of land for 146 million yuan (USD 22.51 million) (Figure 1). It should be noted that mineral resources and mining rights are owned by the state in China. However, mining rights are owned by collectively villages is a history legacy with two reasons. First, in the early 1990s, the ownership of coal resources was not valued by organizations or groups other than villagers. At that time, villagers' collective ownership of coal mines was recognized as collectively owned coal mines just like land resources. The second is that before the promulgation of the "Regulations for Registering to Mine Mineral Resources" in 1998, collective ownership of coal mines existed, so the villagers applied for mining rights in accordance with the procedures prescribed by the law. In addition, before 1998, the mining rights application procedures were relatively simple, and the mining rights were easier to obtain. Therefore, Xincun Village had a number of collectively owned coal mining enterprises from the 1980s to around 2000 by obtaining mining rights through legal procedures.

On 8 August, 146 million yuan (USD 22.51 million) was transferred to the village's collective account. After a month-long village meeting (according to the villagers, discussions were held almost every day during that period),



**FIGURE 1** History of coal mining in Xincun Village. Source: Designed by authors

130 million yuan (USD 20.07 million) was finally distributed to 80 family accounts, with an average of 1.625 million yuan (USD 250,575) per household, and some families received up to 2.8 million yuan (USD 431,760). It is worth noting that in 2011, the annual per capita income of rural residents was 6,977 yuan (USD 1075) in China (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Additionally, 16 million yuan (USD 246,720) was used to repay village debts and improve village infrastructure. In early September, after distributing the money to the households, the villagers rejoiced and planned how to use the substantial amount.

If the villagers used the money reasonably, they could eliminate poverty or become rich. However, in an investigation conducted in 2017, the author found that the villagers who had once become wealthy suddenly did not lead rich lives but rather experienced a series of crises. At the time of the survey in 2017, the village has experienced multiple crises, including frequent anomic actions by young and middle-aged groups and a large number of villagers who preferred to relax and hated work. The normal income of the villagers was not sustainable. The consumption of luxuries by villagers enabled by their former wealth is continuing and has increased the economic burden on families and individuals. During the period from the dividend to 2017, the divorce rate of the villagers remained high (divorce rate 16%). One important phenomenon was that the wealthy villagers did not take appropriate actions, and instead anomic actions were frequent and diverse. This research investigates the reasons why this occurred.

### 3.2 | Methods

In this study, participatory observation and semistructured interviews were conducted. The investigation of Xincun Village included two main stages: first, the centralized investigation (2016.4–2016.8), lasting nearly 150 working days; second, the supplementary investigation (2017.1 and 2017.8), during which two investigations were conducted for approximately 15 days. During the centralized investigation, the author conducted 13 semistructured interviews with the cadres of the administrative village and six heads of the natural villages and interviewed more than 60 family members of the households that had attained sudden wealth. In addition, the author observed the daily lives of local villagers. During the supplementary investigation, the author conducted a return visit to the four cadres of the natural village and six previously interviewed villagers, in addition to interviewing another seven villagers (Table 1).

**TABLE 1** Methods, time, duration and interviewees

Types	Methods	Time	Duration	Interviewers	Interviewees
Centralized investigation	Participatory observation and semistructured interview	2016.4–2016.8	150 days	The authors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 cadres of the administrative village</li> <li>• 6 heads of the natural villages</li> <li>• More than 60 household members</li> </ul>
First supplementary investigation	Semistructured interview	2017.1	6 days	The authors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 cadres of the natural village</li> <li>• 6 villagers</li> </ul>
Second supplementary investigation	Semistructured interview	2017.8	9 days	The authors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 cadres of the natural village</li> <li>• 7 villagers</li> </ul>

## 4 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

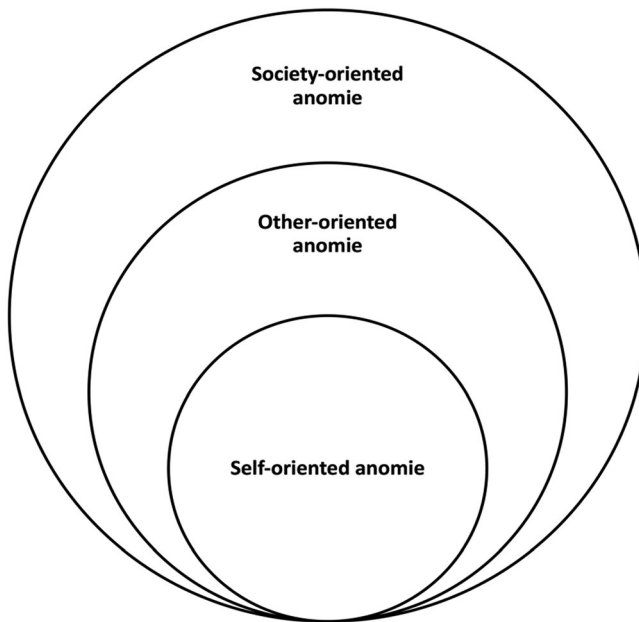
### 4.1 | Three differently oriented anomies

The anomie of the suddenly wealthy group can be understood as a social morbidity with the following main characteristics. First, abnormality; anomie is a negative, chaotic and destructive social phenomenon that deviates from the positive and harmonious order in society. Second, sociality; anomie is a social fact that is widespread within a certain range. Third, particularity; anomie has the characteristics of time and space and exists in a certain period of social history and a specific region.

Confined to the villager groups in this study, according to the direct targets of the harmful consequences, the villagers' anomic behaviours are divided into three types, namely, self-oriented, other-oriented and socially oriented. The three types of anomies present a process of self-centred and outward diffusion (Figure 2), and they have a certain degree of compatibility rather than absolute exclusion and can transform into each other in a certain sense, causing varying degrees of negative impact on the local society. For example, self-oriented anomie harms not only individuals themselves but also others (such as relatives and friends) and society because it is not static in time and leads to other-oriented or socially oriented anomie. For example, alcoholism may cause drunk driving, and drug abuse further induces drug trafficking. In short, a series of anomic behaviours triggered a collective social anomie and had many negative effects on the local social order.

#### 4.1.1 | Self-oriented anomie

Self-oriented anomie refers to anomic behaviour causing damage mainly to the anomie subject himself, including the following. (1) Alcoholism: From 2011 to 2014, most young and middle-aged male villagers (approximately 20–45 years old) often feasted with each other, during which they would persuade each other to drink. Sudden wealth made villagers no longer need or willing to devote themselves to work and eating and drinking became the most important aspects of their enjoyment of life. At that time, alcoholism rate is reaching 60% and led to other anomic behaviours, such as drunk driving, gambling, and prostitution. (2) Drug abuse: Before the dividend, no one in Xincun Village took drugs. In August 2012, villager S started to take drugs, and as of July 2013, six young people in the village were doing so. (3) Excessive luxury consumption: Almost all families began to purchase high-end consumer



**FIGURE 2** Three types of anomies of suddenly wealthy villagers. Source: Designed by authors

goods, prominently reflected in the use of cars. In the first 1 to 2 years after the dividend, the prices of their cars increased, from Mercedes-Benzes (more than 300,000 yuan, equal to USD 46,200) to Volvos (more than 500,000 yuan, equal to USD 77,000) to off-road Toyotas and BMWs (800,000 yuan to 1 million yuan, equal to USD 123,200 to USD 154,000). Excessive luxury consumption aggravated the economic pressure on families. Taking drug abuse as an example, the village head, Wang, said:

Money is a good thing and a bad thing. After we got money, gambling, prostitution and drug abuse appeared. In our group, two of the drug abusers are clean now, but four are still in prison. They used drugs at first and then they sold drugs. How could this happen when there was no money before? These drug users have damaged their health and their reputations, and they will have trouble in their future life. (Interview record: 20160517W)

This suggests that anomic behaviour (drug abuse) continuously occurs. On the one hand, it damages the body and spirit of anomic individuals. On the other hand, it has a negative impact on the village community through dissemination and continuous expansion.

#### 4.1.2 | Other-oriented anomie

Other-oriented anomie refers to the anomic behaviours of the anomie subject towards others and causes damage others' personal, property and spiritual rights and interests. It includes the following. (1) Disputes over money: According to the village's dividend policy, when the accountant transferred the money to the account of the head of each household, the village's dividend was completed, and the money had to be distributed within the family. A series of disputes about the dividend strategy occurred between small families within a larger family and caused personal harm. Disputes over money are very common in Xincun Village, and family disputes frequently occur. (2) Prostitution:

From 2005 to 2008, KTV, ballroom, nightclub, bath centre and other service-oriented stores exploded in F County, their numbers peaking in 2011. These service stores essentially provide different levels of sex services. Approximately half of the adult males in Xincun Village had visited prostitutes. In addition, they do not think it is shameful or that it is a privilege of rich people. (3) Baoyang (包养)<sup>1</sup>: Compared with visiting prostitution businesses, Baoyang in Xincun Village is more intolerable. After becoming rich, five married men in Xincun Village had kept women. (4) Divorce: In general, divorce is not defined as anomie. However, after the occurrence of sudden wealth, divorce directly or indirectly caused by the fact that one member of a couple had a sudden increase in wealth or an extramarital affair after the increase in wealth could be defined as anomie. (5) Gambling: After the dividend, gambling was among the most common anomic behaviours of the villagers. The gambling behaviour of Xincun villagers generally has the following characteristics: extensive group participation, huge amounts of money involved, high levels of organization, participation of professional gambling personnel, and the intervention of organized crime. Gambling has caused serious economic losses to the villagers, as seen from a dialogue between the head of the natural village and the villagers:

- Villager L: : "I lost more than 300,000 yuan in playing Mahjong, and I have lost a total of 1 million in total. I could not even afford a car. I could not help but to play, and after that, I often lose money."
- Village head W: : "I won more than 100,000 yuan and lost more than 400,000 yuan in one game at most. Some people are bad and they just want you to lose."
- Villager L: : "If you do not gamble, you can save at least 4 to 5 million. I always lose when I drink." (Interview record: 20170509WL dialogue).

The abovementioned dialogue on villagers' gambling shows that villagers cannot reasonably control their huge wealth after becoming rich, thus bringing a destructive influence to families and others. In addition, the wealth gained from villagers' dividends began to be coveted by other groups, who began to defraud villagers of their wealth through various improper means.

#### 4.1.3 | Society-oriented anomie

Socially oriented anomie refers to the anomic behaviour of villagers that causes damage to the regional social order and includes the following. (1) Excessive waste: In general, waste is difficult to define as a kind of anomic behaviour, but its connection to anomie will be made more obvious through comparison between different time periods. After the dividend, the villagers' wasteful behaviour was reflected in almost all aspects of their clothing, food, housing and transportation. (2) Drunk driving: The young and middle-aged groups began to buy cars in large quantities. At the same time, because they often drank and partied outside, it was difficult for the local traffic police department to eliminate the acquaintance relationship of local society in the process of law enforcement, which somewhat contributed to drunk driving. (3) Bribery: In the villagers' view, bribery could lead to better resources or services, and after becoming rich, they were more willing to obtain more resources and better services through bribery, which exacerbated local corruption. (4) Poaching: After the occurrence of sudden wealth, some young and middle-aged men began to buy hunting guns and air guns through illegal channels and participated in illegal hunting in autumn and winter, which was even worse for mining areas with deteriorating ecological environments. (5) Drug trafficking: After becoming addicted to drugs, subject to certain economic pressures, four of six young drug addicts obtained financial support for their drug use through drug trafficking, thus embarking on the road of "drug taking relying on drug trafficking". Villager Z's words reveal the seriousness of the phenomena of drunk driving and bribery.

My brother likes drinking. He often drives around with a bunch of friends after drinking, which got him arrested by police several times. Every time my brother got arrested, I had to spend money and depend on acquaintances to get him out of prison. This year, for example, I requested help from some



acquaintances working in the Transportation Bureau and the Public Security Bureau and spent more than 40,000 yuan to get him out of prison. In this small county, as long as you have enough acquaintances in your network and money, you can basically solve all problems. One of my relative's sons graduated from college and wanted to find a job in the Power Supply Bureau. I reminded them that in our county, with so many rich people, you have to spend money if you want to find a good job. After that, they spent around 200,000 yuan to get the job. (Interview record: 20170612Z)

Due to having money, he could engage in all kinds of anomic behaviours such as drinking, drunk driving and bribery.

## 4.2 | Factors contributing to the anomie caused by sudden wealth

### 4.2.1 | Changes in social values

Merton noted that the adaptation methods of social individuals generally include five types: compliance, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and resistance. In China, the policy of common prosperity allows and encourages some people and some areas to become rich through honest labour and legal management, which may drive other people and areas to later become rich and achieve common prosperity. Since the reform and opening up, the living standards of the Chinese people have steadily improved. The encouragement policies for the individual and private economy all indicate that the staged goals of some people becoming rich first are generally consistent with the institutionalized measures that can be adopted by social individuals. Thus, the most likely way for social individuals to adapt is compliance, not anomie. In Xincun Village, the anomie of the villagers did not occur in the process of pursuing prosperity but after the achievement of prosperity. Durkheim's research noted that anomie is the lesion of industrial society, but the mechanism has an endogenous root of modernity (Qu, 2017). In fact, his theory indicates that the occurrence of anomie is based on certain social and economic developments. For example, behaviours such as divorce, drug addiction and Baoyang all require a certain amount of economic capital, and the dividend provides financial support for anomie but not sufficient conditions.

Driven by sudden wealth, the original social value goals of the villagers were destroyed. Meanwhile, the behavioural norms corresponding to the economic situation after attaining sudden wealth were not formed sufficiently quickly, which led to disorientation of the social value goals. If wealth is the goal pursued by the villagers, there is no set of social norms suitable for the rich in the local society. Most villagers in this research believe in the principle that the rich can do anything. Before sudden wealth, the villagers had heard about and witnessed the lives of rich people, and they seemed to aspire to the lifestyle of the rich. The huge amount of wealth came with subsequent added value (e.g., some villagers participated in private lending and invested in real estate), and the villagers knew that under the conditions of the market economy, a large amount of wealth would allow them to not only enjoy life but also pay to avoid punishment for possible anomic behaviour, such as Baoyang and drug addiction. The villagers believed that if they could afford to pay, no one would care. Even after drunk driving was included in the criminal law, the villagers could still find ways to avoid punishment.

### 4.2.2 | Disappearance of village public space

A village is a field composed of an acquaintance society. In the normal state, villagers live within reach of each other, thus forming a public space of mutual cultivation and supervision. More importantly, although cultivating power is most evident in the parent-child relationship, it can also expand to elders and juniors in the community (Fei, 2007). The exercise of cultivating power requires a basic premise that the publicity of village life is the basis for the

operation of Mianzi (面子)<sup>2</sup> (Dong & Guo, 2017), which is embodied in the following characteristics. (1) Low mobility: In traditional society, villagers spend most of their lives, especially the juvenile stage, living in villages. (2) Acquaintance society is equivalent to kinship and quasi-kinship in some cases. In the traditional acquaintance society, the village cultivation space, in the form of a public space, provides the possibility for elderly people to cultivate juniors in kinship or quasi-kinship relationships. However, this cultivation space is gradually disappearing with the development of rural society and the acceleration of urbanization. In modern rural society, most young and middle-aged villagers leave the village and flow into cities due to schooling, employment, and marriage, and village cultivation space no longer exists.

In Xincun Village, the sudden wealth provided an opportunity for villagers to migrate from the countryside to the city, which appears to have accelerated the disappearance of the village's cultivation space. Approximately 1 month before the dividend, almost all the adult villagers in Xincun Village participated in the dividend discussion, and the village public space was unprecedentedly active. However, after the dividends, a large number of people left the village. (1) Most of the villagers working in the county or other places outside the village returned to the village to participate in the dividend meeting but left the village immediately after the dividends were distributed; (2) some of the villagers who originally lived in the village made use of the huge amount of money gained from the dividend to buy property in the county or other places and gradually flowed from the village to the city after the dividend. In the context of villagers fleeing their village, cultivation power lost its space, thereby decreasing the cultivation power of the elderly. Therefore, on the one hand, the result of the disappearance of the village cultivation space is that the villagers were easily affected by external society after the dividend and anomic behaviour began to increase; on the other hand, young people's anomic behaviour could not be timely corrected by the elders because of the lack of cultivation power. Thus, anomie became more serious.

#### 4.2.3 | Not accepted by urban residents

The wealth from the dividends provided a powerful driving force for villagers to flee villages. However, the villagers who flowed into urban areas were not accepted by the urban residents in an active or passive process. (1) The villagers found it difficult to integrate into urban mainstream society. While living in the city, the villagers were either not working or engaged in marginalized work, such as being a shopping guide and driving a taxi (most eventually changed jobs due to a lack of experience). (2) Compared with the huge wealth obtained from the dividend, the income obtained through labour was small, so the villagers could not be attracted to engage in fixed work.

Villagers who were excluded from urban society gradually formed subcultures during the process of self-entertainment, resulting in villagers' anomie being concealed and secret. General anomie, even if discovered, can be exempted from punishment through the operation of acquaintance relations. Within the scope of F County, villagers have acquaintances in the government and functional departments through various channels. Villagers are well versed in the operation of interpersonal relationships in the area, which provides them with convenient bribery opportunities after the occurrence of anomie, resulting in exemption from punishment. This scenario, to some extent, contributed to the villagers' anomie.

#### 4.2.4 | No experience in the use of sudden wealth

In traditional Chinese culture, although there are certain ethics to regulate the use of wealth, such ethics have emphasized the ideology of diligence and thrift. Therefore, the concept of thrift is much more internalized than the concept of wealth utilization. Applying the concept of thrift rather than extravagance in the process of wealth accumulation, on the one hand, is related to the accumulation speed of wealth; that is, in traditional agricultural society, the accumulation of wealth is slow, and it is usually necessary to accumulate a certain amount of wealth for use in

family events, such as weddings and funerals, which usually consume a large proportion of family savings. On the other hand, it is related to the accumulation mode and the upper limit of family wealth. Traditional agricultural families usually accumulate wealth through cultivation and weaving, so they become rich slowly rather than quickly. Moreover, they usually accumulate wealth by making a small fortune rather than a large one. The sudden fortune received by Xincun Village does not occur in traditional agricultural society. Therefore, the Xincun villagers lacked experience and a strategy for using their sudden wealth.

The villagers shared the dividends in an almost carnivalesque manner. Villagers who had never seen such a huge amount of wealth simply did not know how to effectively utilize their wealth. As a result, they began to imitate the real or imagined lifestyle of the rich, and many anomie behaviours began to invade the villagers' daily lives. (1) Male villagers stayed in the clubhouse with friends, eating, drinking and playing cards from noon. They lived in hotels all year round rather than staying at home. (2) Cultures of prostitution, gambling and Baoyang spread among the villagers. (3) In the process of seeking stimulation, the villagers started taking drugs actively or passively.

## 5 | IMPLICATIONS

### 5.1 | Local government: Rectifying social values

Local government, as the representative of the country, has the responsibility of promoting local development and ensuring local safety, including moral, political, administrative, litigation and economic responsibility. The country must intervene in people's lives and supervise and control the way people operate. The government focuses on personality, that is, the general individual, not a specific individual. However, the state government and Chinese communist party have the obligation and ability to shape citizens in the sense of personality, that is, to provide effective moral guidance and encourage citizens to live in a moral way. Especially when there is an event that may have a significant impact on villagers' production and lives, it is not only possible but also necessary for the country to intervene in some form. In Xincun Village, if the government could have intervened appropriately, it may not only have reduced or prevented the villagers' social anomie but also reduced the villagers' economic losses and prevented the negative impact on local governance. National government institutions can play a role if government institutions intervene before a dividend, for example, via financial management training and unified planning. The resolution of social conflicts is a postintervention, and the prevention of social conflicts is a preintervention. The former is the secondary policy for the treatment of symptoms, while the latter is the best policy for the cure of the root cause. National intervention should adopt a combination of preintervention and postintervention policies to comprehensively manage the symptoms and the root cause to achieve a good governance effect.

China has proposed value goals for individual citizens as patriotic, dedicated, honest, and friendly (Xinhua News, 2016). However, in local society, social value goals may somewhat deviate from the above due to specific events. For example, in County F, the ability of rich people and successful people is indeed viewed as far greater than that of ordinary villagers. Rich people enjoy certain privileges and are not subject to corresponding moral condemnation and legal punishment after anomie. For example, coal owner Z is said to be operating two coal mines and investing in more than 30. After investing in the coal mines, he started to engage in real estate development in the provincial capital city. He has multiple high-end cars worth more than one million yuan and at least one kept woman, and frequently visits various clubs. He also escaped punishment after being caught drunk driving. Although rumours about Z have not been confirmed, some privileged people do exist, thereby leading the local villagers to adopt the wrong social values. Therefore, at the level of local government management, the distorted values of the villagers should be corrected. The following correction strategies might be adopted: (1) guide the villagers to establish correct social values and abandon the wrong social value goals that are contrary to the spirit of the times; (2) strengthen law enforcement in the local society and put an end to the so-called privileges as much as possible and maintain the dignity of the law.

## 5.2 | Rural society: Reshaping the village public space

In the current rural society, it is indisputable that villages have been “hollowed out” (Chen & Liu, 2017). The loss of villagers in Xincun Village is no different from that of ordinary villages in western China, but the dividend incident injected considerable cash flow into the village. When the dividend was complete, the village public space gradually disappeared until it was close to dormant. The current rural social public space is far less than that in the old Chinese society that Liang discussed. In the old society, there was interaction between ethical standards and professional separation. Education, etiquette, and self-sufficiency jointly maintained the social order (Liang, 2016). In Xincun Village, the natural loss of villagers transformed the village from a normal population structure to a “386199” structure. With the rapid development of urbanization in China, the number of rural male young and middle-aged labourers working in cities has increased dramatically. The majority of rural left-behind women (named “3.8” for Women's Day), children (“6.1” for Children's Day) and the elderly (“9.9” for the Double Ninth Festival of the Chinese lunar calendar) have also attracted much attention as a special group and have been nicknamed the “386199 troops.” The dividend incident has exacerbated the loss of villagers, especially young women who move for work and school-age children who move for school, and the “386199” structure is transitioning to a “99” structure.

Nevertheless, the village public space still needs to and could be reconstructed for the following reasons. (1) Villages exist, and anomies still exist among middle-aged and elderly people. The establishment of a public space can provide middle-aged and elderly people space for activities, enrich their daily lives, and reduce their risk of slipping into anomie; (2) Villagers flow into the city and flow between the city and the village. The establishment of the village public space is conducive to forming strict supervision between rural and urban society, and only with this approach can the best effect be achieved.

## 5.3 | Urban society: Constructing professional villager groups

Durkheim noted that the primary factor of moral facts is the spirit of discipline. The normative and external authority of morality aims to regulate and fix behaviour and avoid personal arbitrariness. It is not only a system of habitual behaviour but also one of command and it plays a decisive role in (daily) behaviour (Durkheim, 2006). Therefore, how is the moral system established? Durkheim believes that the system is usually the affairs of the group, and it can only be operated if the group protects it. Moreover, (when other conditions remain unchanged) the stronger the structure of the group is, the more moral norms are applicable to the group, and the greater the authority of the group system to control its members is. Durkheim's theory of moral education and moral anomie asserts that the reconstruction of professional groups is a good measure to establish moral norms and correct anomic behaviour.

## 5.4 | Individual villagers: Cultivating the concept of healthy wealth

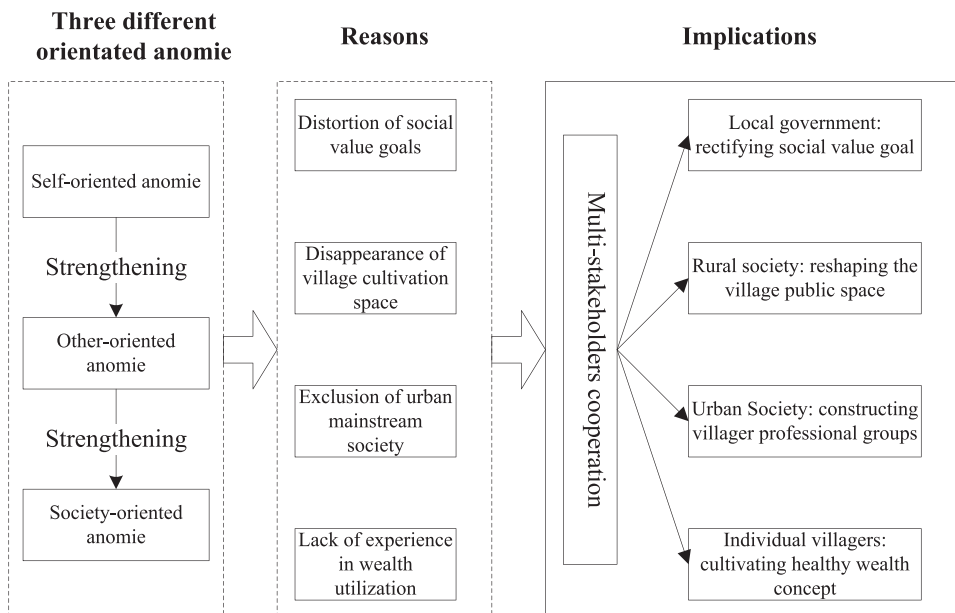
The concept of wealth is people's perception of wealth and their ideological views on how to obtain and use it. The concept of wealth is deeply influenced by traditional culture. Furthermore, people's perception of wealth is constantly changing, and the standards of wealth are constantly being refreshed. In China's transition period, rapid economic development is also changing people's views. In traditional agricultural society, the wealth concept that thrifty is better than extravagant is compatible with the traditional accumulation speed of wealth. The villagers became rich overnight, and their desires rapidly increased. However, no corresponding concept of wealth was formed. In the face of considerable sudden wealth, many villagers were overwhelmed and did not know how to handle it. Some villagers gained self-worth by showing off their wealth through profligacy and buying luxury cars and luxury goods, a phenomenon called sudden wealth syndrome (Wang, 2018). This process has many adverse effects on the local society. On the one hand, the behaviour of showing off causes envy and dissatisfaction among the public, which is not

conducive to social solidarity. On the other hand, sudden wealth has a great impact on local society, with a speculative mentality and large amounts of money the goal of many people (Zhang, 2015). In Xincun Village, the groups that became suddenly wealthy were eager to become richer faster, which led to the emergence of anomie, such as gambling and drug trafficking. Therefore, cultivation of the concept of wealth of villagers is needed. Likewise, the villagers decided how to split the dividend, so it is vital that they also devise solutions for themselves on how to solve these problems.

By analysing the villagers' sudden wealth, the process of anomie, the causes of anomie, and the research implications, this study creates a framework to analyse the anomie implications of local villagers' social behaviours brought about by the Chinese resource extraction industry (Figure 3).

## 6 | CONCLUSION

When the opportunity to become rich came to the villagers, they returned to poverty because of various types of anomies and even led the younger generation astray. In the process of losing money, enmity formed between the villagers, damaging the local social ethos and interpersonal relationships. From the perspective of the occurrence of social anomie, the existing research focuses on the process under the guidance of policy objectives, while the social anomie on which this study focuses differs from that of the existing research. The main difference is that the existing research can be classified as investigating socially anomic behaviours in the process of wealth acquisition, whereas the social anomie examined in this study is related to the process of wealth utilization. Based on the investigation of the phenomenon of villagers' sudden wealth caused by the mining industry, this paper shows that sudden wealth, that is, the rapid increase in economic wealth, will directly impact people's ideas and lead to anomic actions. The contribution of this study to Durkheim, Merton and other classical anomie theories lies in the following. First, this study divides anomie into three types: self-oriented, other-oriented and society-oriented which enriches and expands the types of anomies. Second, this study focuses on wealth anomie, a specific anomie type that has long been neglected by the academic community, which in a certain sense corrects the focus of the academic community and is



**FIGURE 3** Villagers' anomie and its implications. *Source:* Designed by authors

conducive to making the study of anomie more comprehensive. Third, the causes of wealth anomie are due to the superposition of two effects: first, the villagers' process from poverty to wealth is realized in a short period of time. Villagers' ability to control this wealth lags far behind the speed of wealth growth. Therefore, villagers cannot reasonably control their wealth and engage in anomic actions in the process of irrational control of their wealth. Second, the current development of China's villages and the flow of population between urban and rural areas have led to the increasing atomization and hollowing out of rural society. At the level of consciousness, this is reflected in the absence of collective consciousness and the vacillation of individual consciousness.

In particular, this study explores the causes of social anomie after villagers' sudden wealth, including changes in social value, disappearance of village public space, no acceptance by urban residents and lack of sudden wealth utilization experience. Although these causes were juxtaposed in the analysis process, the changes in social values were the primary cause, and the other three factors were secondary causes. In other words, if the guidance of social value is appropriate, the other three factors will not induce anomie in villagers. With constant expansion of the market, consumer problems have become more diffuse and even have begun to transform into a kind of consumption anomie (Ilmonen, 1987). However, Xincun Villagers' anomic behaviour caused harmful consequences, and their action were beyond the general sense of consumption anomie.

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## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> A married man having a sexual relationship with a woman (other than the man's wife) for long time.

<sup>2</sup> One's acquired reputation.

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