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Under the Visage of the "Hundred-Town, Thousand-County, Ten-Thousand-Village Project": The Endogenous Dilemmas and Breakthrough Paths for Synergistic "Attraction, Cultivation, Retention, and Utilization" Talent Policy in the Northern Guangdong Urban Agglomeration

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Abstract: The "Hundred-Town, Thousand-County, Ten-Thousand-Village Project" (HQT Project) is a major strategic deployment for promoting regional coordinated development, with its core in overcoming the urban-rural dual structure. The talent element is the critical variable determining its success or failure. The Northern Guangdong (Yuebei) urban agglomeration, as a typical area of unbalanced development within Guangdong Province, has long faced the dual pressures of the Pearl River Delta's "siphoning effect" and its own insufficient "hematopoietic function." The synergistic failure of talent work—"unable to attract, cultivate, retain, or utilize" talent—is particularly prominent. Under the new visage of the HQT Project, this paper focuses on the "endogenous" dilemmas of the talent policies in the Yuebei urban agglomeration, rather than merely the "external" siphoning. Using qualitative research methods, including policy text coding and semi-structured in-depth interviews in a typical Yuebei city (City C), this study reveals four major endogenous dilemmas hindering the full-chain synergy of "attraction, cultivation, retention, and utilization" (ACRU): namely, the "structural mismatch" between policy goals and industrial demands; the "spatial imbalance" of policy resources between central urban areas and the county/town domains; the "path dependence" on "prioritizing attraction over cultivation" in policy tools; and the "institutional obstruction" of "fragmented implementation" (tiao-kuai). The study argues that breaking through these dilemmas requires moving beyond the "piecemeal" element subsidy model and shifting towards a systemic, ecological governance paradigm. To this end, this paper proposes four breakthrough paths: First, constructing a "precision" policy supply mechanism guided by industrial demand. Second, establishing a "differentiated" resource allocation system with the "county and town domains" as the focus. Third, promoting an "endogenous" cultivation shift from "incremental attraction" to "stock activation." Fourth, shaping a "synergistic" institutional guarantee aimed at "holistic governance." This research aims to provide theoretical insights and practical strategies for late-developing regions to overcome talent bottlenecks and achieve policy synergy under the HQT Project.

Keywords: Hundred-Town; Thousand-County; Ten-Thousand-Village Project (HQT Project); Northern Guangdong (Yuebei) Urban Agglomeration; Talent Policy; ACRU; Synergistic Governance; Endogenous Dilemmas.

1. Introduction: The New Talent Imperative under the Visage of the "HQT Project"

Regional unbalanced development is a significant challenge that has long plagued China's high-quality development. Against this backdrop, the "Hundred-Town, Thousand-County, Ten-Thousand-Village Project" (HQT Project) has been put on the agenda as a major strategy aimed at breaking down the urban-rural dual structure and promoting regional coordination. For Guangdong Province, the development shortcomings of the eastern, western, and northern regions (especially the Northern Guangdong "Yuebei" urban agglomeration) are particularly prominent. The economic and public service gaps between these areas and the Pearl River Delta (PRD) core constitute the greatest constraint on the province's high-quality development.

The HQT Project is, in essence, a profound transformation concerning the reconfiguration of development factors (capital, land, technology, talent) between urban-rural and regional spaces. Among all factors, talent—especially S&T innovation talent capable of leading and supporting industrial upgrading in county and town domains—is seen as the core lever for activating regional coordinated development. However, for a long time, the Yuebei urban agglomeration (mainly including Qingyuan, Shaoguan, Heyuan, and Meizhou) has been in a weak position in the competition for talent. Academia and policy circles have commonly attributed this to the "siphoning effect" of the PRD core. That is, the core cities, with their powerful economic volume, comprehensive public services, and superior career prospects, act like "black holes," absorbing the existing and potential talent from surrounding areas [3].

However, solely blaming "external siphoning" can easily lead to a "fatalistic" policy inertia, where late-developing regions believe they can only passively "hedge" against talent loss by continuously increasing financial subsidies (e.g., settling-in fees, living allowances). This "blood transfusion" model of talent policy is not only fiscally unsustainable but

also overlooks the "endogenous" problems of the regional talent system. This study argues that the new visage of the HQT Project provides an opportunity to re-examine the talent dilemma of the Yuebei urban agglomeration. The main battlefield of this project is in the "county" and "town" domains, and its goal is to stimulate the region's "endogenous dynamics." Therefore, the focus of talent work must shift from "passively responding to siphoning" to "proactively reshaping the ecosystem."

Based on this, the core research questions of this paper are: In the specific policy context of the HQT Project, what are the "endogenous dilemmas" that hinder the full-chain synergy of the "attraction, cultivation, retention, and utilization" (ACRU) talent policies in the Yuebei urban agglomeration? (i.e., beyond "siphoning," what are we doing wrong ourselves?) And, what are the feasible pathways to achieve a "breakthrough"?

This paper attempts to move beyond the traditional "siphoning vs. anti-siphoning" analytical framework to focus on the "endogenous obstructions" to policy synergy. Using qualitative research methods, it takes City C in Yuebei (a typical late-developing, catch-up city and a key region for the HQT Project) as an analytical case. Through deep coding of 35 talent and industry-related policy documents issued in the last five years (2020-2024) and supplemented by semi-structured interviews with 20 key informants (including government officials, enterprise managers, high-level talent, and township cadres), this study endeavors to provide a "thick description" of the common dilemmas in talent policy synergy within the Yuebei urban agglomeration and to construct corresponding breakthrough paths.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

2.1. The "HQT Project" and the "Field" Transformation of Talent Policy

The HQT Project is not just an economic project; it is a governance project. It demands that the center of gravity for development shifts downward to counties, towns, and villages, strengthening the comprehensive service functions of counties and the connecting (urban-rural) functions of towns. The implementation of this strategy poses a fundamental challenge to the traditional "field" of talent policy.

In traditional talent policy, whether for "attraction" or "retention," resources (e.g., talent apartments, high-quality school placements, research platforms) are highly concentrated in the central urban area (downtown). The implicit assumption of the policy is that talent belongs to the "city," not the "county" or "village." However, the main battlefield of the HQT Project is precisely in the vast county and town domains. This creates a sharp contradiction: on one hand, county and town industries (e.g., advanced manufacturing, modern agriculture, cultural tourism) urgently need talent; on the other hand, the "supply" of talent policy is severely mismatched "spatially" with the "demand" of the HQT Project. Therefore, talent policy research under the visage of the HQT Project must transcend the singular "urban" paradigm and shift towards a new paradigm of "urban-rural integration" and "territorial balance."

2.2. Literature Review: From "Factor Competition" to "Ecological Synergy"

Existing research on regional talent competition has roughly gone through two stages. The first stage is the "factor competition" paradigm. This paradigm views talent as a mobile "factor of production." Research focuses on the "attraction" stage, exploring how local governments "scramble" for talent through material incentives (subsidies, housing, household registration) [3]. The drawback of this paradigm is that it ignores the agency, social needs, and developmental aspirations of talent, leading to problems like "prioritizing attraction over retention," "homogenized competition," and "excessive fiscal burdens."

The second stage is the "talent ecosystem" paradigm. This paradigm borrows the metaphor of ecology to describe the systemic state in which talent interacts and co-evolves with the surrounding environment (including industry, policy, capital, culture, services, etc.) [2]. This paradigm argues that the endgame of talent competition is not "scrambling" for factors but "cultivating" an ecosystem. A healthy talent ecosystem, like a tropical rainforest, possesses the ability to self-propagate and evolve. From this perspective, "attraction, cultivation, retention, and utilization" are no longer fragmented stages but rather the "energy cycle" of the ecosystem [9].

The goal of the HQT Project is, in essence, to reshape a sustainable "economic-social-talent" ecosystem in late-developing regions like Yuebei. However, the current talent policies of the Yuebei urban agglomeration, in both concept and practice, are still largely stuck in the "factor competition" stage and have not yet shifted toward "ecological synergy."

2.3. The Entry Point of Research: "Endogenous Dilemmas" of Synergy

Although the "siphoning effect" is a powerful external cause of talent outflow from Yuebei, this study argues that the "endogenous" deficiencies of policy are the fundamental reason why an "ecosystem" cannot be established. "Endogenous Dilemas" refer to the institutional and mechanical obstacles—originating from within the region's own governance structure, policy paradigm, and resource allocation model—that inherently impede the achievement of systemic goals.

Existing literature either focuses on "siphoning" as the external cause [3] or generally discusses the common ailment of "fragmented" governance [1]. Few studies have managed to combine the new context of the "HQT Project," the "endogenous dilemmas" of the Yuebei urban agglomeration, and the "full-chain synergy" of ACRU for a systematic qualitative analysis. This paper attempts to fill this gap. By "dissecting a sparrow," it aims to distill the common predicaments in talent governance in the Yuebei urban agglomeration and explore breakthrough paths that match the strategic goals of the HQT Project.

3. The Four "Endogenous Dilemmas" of Talent Policy Synergy in the Yuebei Urban Agglomeration

Through coding analysis of City C's policy texts and interview data, this study finds that there are four main "endogenous dilemmas" hindering the full-chain synergy of the ACRU talent policy in the Yuebei urban agglomeration. These dilemmas are intertwined and collectively lead to the "systemic barrenness" of the regional talent ecosystem.

3.1. Structural Mismatch: The Dilemma of "Elitist" Policy Supply versus "Applied" Industrial Demand

The first dilemma is the severe "structural mismatch" between the supply of talent policy tools and the real demands of local industry (especially county-level industry).

"Elitist Preference" of Policy Tools: Qualitative analysis reveals that in City C's talent policy texts, high-frequency words are "PhD," "Professor," "High-Level Talent," and "Leading Talent." The "metrics" for policy rewards are also highly concentrated on "academic degrees," "professional titles," "hats" (honorary titles), and "overseas backgrounds." This "elitist" policy orientation aims to benchmark against the PRD core cities, demonstrating a "thirst for talent."

The "Blue-Collar/Grey-Collar" Nature of Industrial Demand: However, the main body of the HQT Project and "Manufacturing as the Mainstay" in Yuebei consists of transferred manufacturing industries, local specialty agriculture, and cultural tourism. In interviews, multiple enterprise managers from new materials and advanced manufacturing sectors reflected: "What we urgently need are senior engineers who can solve production line process problems and 'senior technicians' who can operate precision equipment (utilization). But the policies are more inclined to reward 'scientists' who publish papers (attraction). The PhDs 'attracted' by the government are not well 'utilized' here, nor can they be 'retained'."

The Lag of the "Cultivation" System: The Yuebei region generally possesses (or hosts) large-scale vocational education resources (like City C's provincial vocational education town), which should be the main force for "cultivation." But in interviews, interviewees from both the education and industry/IT departments admitted that the professional setups and curriculum systems of local vocational colleges are not deeply "embedded" with local industrial needs (such as new materials, fine chemicals), leading to a "cultivation-utilization disconnect."

This mismatch between "elitist supply" and "applied demand" results in the "acclimatization failure" of "attraction" and the "supply-demand failure" of "cultivation." The policy chain, from the very sources of "attraction" and "cultivation," deviates from the "utilization" end-point, making synergy impossible.

3.2. Spatial Imbalance: The Dilemma of "Urban-Centric" Resource Concentration versus "County-Domain" Battlefield Distribution

The core battlefield of the HQT Project is in the counties, towns, and villages. However, the allocation of talent policy resources in the Yuebei urban agglomeration shows a strong tendency of "central urban area concentration," leading to a "spatial imbalance."

"Spatial Barriers" to Policy Benefits: Textual analysis shows that the vast majority of talent policies (e.g., talent apartments, high-quality school placements, medical services, research platforms) are located in the central urban area. An interviewed township cadre stated: "The city's talent policies are great, but they are all for 'municipal-level' units and 'urban' enterprises. An enterprise in our town wants to bring in a technician. When he arrives, he finds the talent apartment is dozens of kilometers away in the city, and his children can't enjoy the 'green channel' for schooling in the city. How could he possibly be 'retained'?"

The "Internalization" of Siphoning: This "urban-centric" concentration not only fails to attract external talent but also exacerbates "internal siphoning"—that is, the "blood-sucking" of talent by the central urban area from its own counties and towns. In interviews, multiple county-level cadres and enterprise representatives reported that the core talents (like teachers, doctors, technicians) that the county had painstakingly "cultivated" or "attracted" ultimately try every means to get transferred to the central urban area.

The Spatial Paradox of "Attraction" and "Retention": The HQT Project requires talent to "go to the mountains and the countryside," while talent policy guides talent to "enter the city and go upstairs." This "spatial imbalance" completely disconnects the "landing point" of "attraction" policy from the "battlefield" of the HQT Project, leading to a "systemic collapse" of the "retention" and "utilization" stages at the county and town levels.

3.3. Path Dependence: The Dilemma of "Incremental" Attraction over "Stock" Activation

The third dilemma is that, faced with a talent deficit, policymakers in the Yuebei urban agglomeration have generally fallen into a "path dependence" on "incremental attraction," while neglecting the activation and cultivation of their massive "talent stock."

"Prioritizing External over Internal" Resource Mismatch: In City C's policy texts, the fiscal budget and policy space devoted to "attraction" far exceed the parts for "cultivation" and "retention." An interviewee from the Organization Department admitted: "'Attraction' work is visible; it can produce data and highlights in the short term. In contrast, 'cultivating' local talent (cultivation) is a long-term, slow-return process, and 'retaining' existing talent (retention) is an 'invisible' task, not easily assessed."

"Incentive Numbness" of the Talent Stock: This "prioritizing attraction over retention" orientation leads to the phenomenon of "attracting a new son-in-law while angering the old son." Multiple local enterprise talents interviewed stated that the benefits for newly introduced talent (settling-in fees, subsidies) are far higher than for "veterans" who have contributed locally for years. This creates a "relative deprivation" and "policy alienation" among the existing talent [4], accelerating the loss of the local backbone.

The Marginalization of the "Cultivation" System: The policy focus on "attraction" leads to relatively insufficient investment and support for the local "cultivation" system (universities, vocational colleges, research institutes). This has kept the "self-hematopoietic" function of the Yuebei region weak for a long time, forcing it to rely on "external blood transfusions" and falling into a vicious cycle of "the more we attract, the more we lack."

3.4. Institutional Obstruction: The Dilemma of "Fragmented" (Tiao-Kuai) Implementation versus "Full-Chain" Synergistic Goals

The fourth dilemma stems from deep-seated "institutional obstruction." Talent development is a "full-chain" systemic project, but the government's implementation system is "fragmented" (tiao-kuai, vertical-horizontal segmentation).

"Fragmented Governance" and Departmental Barriers:

City C's talent management functions are dispersed across multiple departments: Organization (macro-coordination), HRSS (attraction, retention), S&T (utilization), Education (cultivation), and Industry/IT (utilization demand). This "nine dragons managing the waters" structure naturally severs the "full chain."

Information Silos: Each department's talent database (HRSS's social security database, S&T's expert database, Education's student records) is isolated, forming "data chimneys." "No single department can say clearly how many S&T talents City C has, what their structure is, or where they are distributed," (according to an S&T bureau interviewee).

Disjointed Actions: Departments "each manage their own segment." HRSS is responsible for "attracting" people, but S&T's research projects (utilization) may not follow. Education is "cultivating" people, but HRSS's "retention" policies (e.g., employment subsidies) may not be precisely targeted to these graduates.

Shirking of Responsibility: When core cross-departmental matters are involved (such as talent apartment allocation or children's schooling), departmentalism becomes prominent. One corporate HR manager complained: "We applied for a talent apartment. Department A said it was managed by Department B. Department B said they needed a letter from Department A first. The responsibility was just passed back and forth. In the end, the talent couldn't wait and left." This "synergy failure" caused by functional overlap and ambiguity is rampant at the grassroots level.

These four "endogenous dilemmas"—structural mismatch, spatial imbalance, path dependence, and institutional obstruction—collectively lead to the "systemic internal friction" of the ACRU policy chain in the Yuebei urban agglomeration, leaving it "willing but powerless" in the face of the major opportunities presented by the HQT Project.

4. The Synergistic Governance Paradigm Shift: From "Element Management" to "Habitat Cultivation"

The shift from "policy silos" to "talent ecosystem" is by no means a simple policy "patch-up" (da bu ding); it is a profound governance paradigm shift. This study argues that the core essence of this shift lies in promoting four transformations:

4.1. Conceptual Shift: From "Element Management" to "Habitat Cultivation"

The underlying logic of traditional "siloed" policy is "talent element management." The government acts as a "craftsman," attempting to "manufacture" or "acquire" standardized "talent parts" through tools like subsidies and rewards. The philosophy of "ecosystem-based" governance, however, is "habitat cultivation." The government acts as a "gardener," whose primary duty is to cultivate a "tropical rainforest" environment with suitable "water, soil, light, and air" (i.e., the habitat). The "gardener" does not directly "manufacture" species but rather improves the habitat, allowing talent (species) to spontaneously flow in, thrive, and evolve. This conceptual shift requires the government to move from "prioritizing subsidies" to "prioritizing the environment," and from "short-term attraction" to "long-term cultivation."

4.2. Value Shift: From "Government-Centric" to "Talent-Centric"

"Siloed" policy is "government-centric." The starting point for policymaking is "what the government has and can give." The process design is "what is convenient for the government to manage." The evaluation standard is "how many indicators the government has completed." In contrast, "ecosystem-based" governance must shift to being "talent-centric" (or "user-centric"). With talent and employers at the core, the starting point for policymaking is "what does talent need?" The process design is "what is the most convenient way for talent to access services?" The evaluation standard is "what is the talent's satisfaction and contribution?" This requires the government to set aside its "manager" persona and transform into a "service provider," achieving a value shift from "managing talent" to "serving talent."

4.3. Structural Shift: From "Linear Segmentation" to "Networked Synergy"

"Siloed" policy is structurally "linearly segmented." "Attraction, cultivation, retention, and utilization" are like independent steps on an assembly line, mutually exclusive. In contrast, "ecosystem-based" governance is structurally "networked and synergistic." It recognizes the complexity of talent development: there is "cultivation" in "attraction," "retention" in "cultivation," and "utilization" is in itself "attraction." For example, a high-level "utilization" platform (like a new R&D institute) is itself the best "attraction" magnet and "cultivation" base. This structural shift requires the government to break its "linear thinking" and build a "policy network" where all links and elements empower each other and promote a virtuous cycle.

4.4. Model Shift: From "Sole Dominance" to "Multi-Actor Co-Governance"

"Siloed" policy is characterized by "sole government dominance"; the government is the only policy supplier and resource allocator. However, the complexity, emergence, and self-organizing nature of a "talent ecosystem" are far beyond the control of a single government entity [2]. Therefore, "ecosystem-based" governance must shift to a "multi-actor co-governance" model. The government is no longer the "all-powerful player" but an "ecosystem organizer" and "platform builder." It must actively guide enterprises, universities, research institutes, industry associations, financial institutions, and talent agencies to jointly participate in the entire process of talent "attraction, cultivation, retention, and utilization," forming a new governance pattern of "government builds the stage, the market takes the lead, multiple parties participate, and all co-build and share."

5. From "Silos" to "Ecosystem": Implementation Pathways for the Synergistic Governance Shift

Based on the analysis of City C's governance dilemmas and the refined essence of the synergistic governance shift, this study argues that realizing this systemic change requires starting from "mechanism design" to reconstruct the governance system.

5.1. Pathway 1: Construct a "Holistic" Synergistic Governance Hub

To break the "departmental silos" of "fragmented governance," the primary prerequisite is to establish a "holistic" governance hub that transcends departmental interests.

Establish a "High-Specification" Talent Work Leading Group. This group should be chaired by the main leaders of the Municipal Party Committee and Government, and must include the "top leaders" from core departments such as Organization, HRSS, S&T, Education, Industry and Information Technology, Finance, Development and Reform, Natural Resources (for land security), and Housing (for talent apartments). Its core function is not "coordination," but "decision-making" and "arbitration."

Empower the Leading Group with "Substantive" Authority. "High-specification" should not be merely nominal; the key is to empower it with substantive "three powers" to give it "teeth":

The Unified Policy Review Power: All major talent-related policies, regardless of which department drafts them, must be reviewed and approved by the Leading Group. This prevents policy conflicts and "multiple decrees from different gates" at the source.

The Coordinated Resource Allocation Power: Integrate the scattered special talent funds from various departments into a "Municipal Talent Development Strategy Fund." This fund should be uniformly managed and deployed by the Leading Group's office (which can be seated in the Organization Department's Talent Bureau) to ensure resources are directed to the "full chain's" critical nodes and "short planks," changing the "fragmented" model of resource mismatch.

The Final Adjudication Power for Evaluation: The performance evaluation of all departments' talent work should be uniformly organized by the Leading Group, shifting from "departmental evaluation" to "synergistic evaluation," to fundamentally reverse the cognitive bias of "prioritizing attraction over cultivation."

5.2. Pathway 2: Re-engineer a "Closed-Loop" Policy Operational Process

To address "link silos" and "operational blockages," the government must re-engineer policy processes using digital and integrated thinking, guided by the "talent-centric" value shift.

Establish a "Single-Window" Synergistic Service Platform. Integrate the approval items and service windows of various departments to create an online "Talent One-Stop" platform and an offline "Talent Service Single Window." Whether for talent household registration (HRSS), project application (S&T), or children's schooling (Education), all applications should be "accepted at a single window, processed internally, and concluded within a time limit," thereby minimizing the "transaction costs" for talent and employers.

Establish a "Single-Database" Data Governance Mechanism. Break down "data chimneys" by building a unified, city-wide "S&T Innovation Talent Database." Using ID numbers (or a unified talent ID) as the index, horizontally link data from HRSS, S&T, Public Security, Education, Medical Insurance, and Market Regulation (for enterprise information), and vertically cover the talent's full life cycle from "inflow," "growth," "contribution," to "outflow." Only through data synergy can "precision profiling," "precision policymaking," and "precision services" be achieved.

Establish an "Integrated Feedback" Dynamic Response Mechanism. Create standing channels for talent demand surveys and policy satisfaction feedback. Through the "Talent One-Stop" platform's "government hotline" or "Entrepreneur/Talent Through-Train" formats, ensure that "downstream" (utilization, retention) feedback can be promptly fed into the "database" and trigger a response, driving dynamic adjustments in "upstream" (attraction, cultivation) policies, thus forming a "perceive-respond-decide-act" closed loop.

5.3. Pathway 3: Innovate "Precision" Industrial Embedding Tools

To resolve "supply-demand silos" and "talent-industry silos," the talent policy chain must be deeply "embedded" and "fused" with the industrial and innovation chains.

Establish an "Industry-Demand-Driven" Policy Generation Mechanism. Completely reverse the "government-supply-oriented" policymaking model, shifting to an "industry-demand-driven" one. The formulation of talent policy (especially for "attraction" and "cultivation") must be closely aligned with City C's "Manufacturing as the Mainstay" key industrial chains (e.g., new materials, advanced manufacturing, biomedicine).

Compile an "Industrial Talent Map." In collaboration with the S&T, Industry and Information Technology, HRSS, and Education departments, as well as industry associations and leading enterprises, periodically compile and release a "City C Key Industry Talent Demand Catalog" (White Paper). This map must clearly identify the "pain points" and "gaps" in each stage of the ACRU chain for each industry. This "map" should become the "navigator" for all talent policymaking.

Implement "Categorized and Precise" Synergistic Incentives. Move away from "elitist" incentives that "only value titles and degrees" and establish a "classified evaluation" system [10]. For "Scientists" (basic research), provide long-term, high-autonomy research support (utilization). For "Engineers" (technology application), provide incentives based on their contribution to enterprise projects and process innovations (utilization), supplemented by corresponding professional title evaluations (retention). For "Master Technicians" (high skills), provide full guarantees in terms of social status and compensation (retention), and support them in establishing "master workshops" (cultivation).

5.4. Pathway 4: Establish a "Long-Cycle" Ecosystem Evaluation Orientation

To break the cognitive bias of "prioritizing attraction over retention," the "conductor's baton" of evaluation must be reformed, guiding government departments away from "short-term achievements" and toward "long-termism" and "habitat cultivation."

Shift from "Stage-based Evaluation" to "Full-Chain Evaluation." Reform the performance evaluations for the HRSS, S&T, and Education departments. Do not just assess the HRSS bureau on "how many people were attracted," but on the "retention rate of attracted talent after three years" (attraction + retention). Do not just assess the Education bureau on "how many graduates were cultivated," but on the "local employment rate and starting salary levels of graduates" (cultivation + retention + utilization). Do not just assess the S&T bureau on "how many projects were

approved," but on the "local commercialization rate of research projects" (utilization).

Shift from "Explicit Indicators" to "Ecosystem Indicators." Introduce "long-cycle" evaluation [8]. Reduce the weight of short-term, explicit indicators like "quantity of talent attracted" and "amount of funds disbursed." Increase the weight of long-term, systemic "ecosystem indicators" such as "talent's contribution to industry" (e.g., new output value, tax revenue), "regional innovation vitality" (e.g., patent applications and transformations), "talent satisfaction and retention rates," and "talent ecosystem diversity."

Introduce "Multi-Actor Co-Governance" Evaluation. Establish a "third-party evaluation mechanism" composed of representatives from enterprises, talent, industry associations, and professional think tanks. This body should periodically conduct independent evaluations of the "talent ecosystem's" construction effectiveness. The evaluation reports should serve as a key basis for the performance assessment of government departments and for the dynamic adjustment of policies, ensuring the objectivity and professionalism of the evaluation.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

Talent is the number one resource in regional competition. In the intensifying "war for talent," it is no longer sustainable for local governments to rely solely on "crude, subsidy-based," "fragmented" attraction policies to win. Shifting from "policy silos" to a "talent ecosystem" and promoting the synergistic governance of the full "attraction, cultivation, retention, utilization" chain is the inevitable choice for achieving high-quality talent work and a strategic opportunity for late-developing regions to achieve "corner-overtaking."

Using "talent ecosystem" theory as a lens, this paper has constructed an analytical framework for the shift from "policy silos" to "synergistic governance." Through a qualitative analysis of the typical case of City C, this study revealed four practical representations of "policy silos"—link silos, supply-demand silos, departmental silos, and talent-industry silos. These dilemmas are common governance challenges faced by late-developing regions, deeply revealing the "choke points" of synergy in practice.

The study argues that the core of achieving this governance paradigm shift lies in promoting four transformations, from "element management" to "habitat cultivation." To this end, this paper proposes four implementation pathways from the perspective of governance reconstruction:

Constructing a "holistic" governance hub, re-engineering a "closed-loop" operational process, innovating "precision" industrial embedding tools, and establishing a "long-cycle" ecosystem evaluation orientation. The core of this mechanism is to propel the government to transform from a "policy supplier" into an "ecosystem cultivator." The ultimate goal is not to "possess" talent, but to "fulfill" talent, and by "fulfilling" talent, to "fulfill" the city's own development.

This study also has certain limitations. First, as a qualitative study based on a single case, its conclusions should be applied with caution when generalizing to other regions (especially developed regions with net talent inflow). Second, due to the limitations of accessing interview data, it may not have comprehensively covered the voices of all stakeholders, and interviews cannot fully replace the depth and vividness of actual fieldwork. Finally, the implementation mechanisms proposed in this paper lean toward an "ideal" construction of "top-level design." The executive deviations and strategic gaming that may be encountered in practice require further follow-up research.

Future research could be expanded in the following directions: First, "comparative case studies" could be introduced, selecting multiple cities with "successful synergy" and "failed synergy" for comparative analysis to more precisely distill the key variables and contingent factors for achieving synergy. Second, (quantitative) empirical tests could be conducted along the chain of "policy synergy—talent perception—innovation performance" to measure the specific contribution of the "talent ecosystem" to regional innovation output. Third, a longitudinal "process tracing" of the implementation of the "synergy mechanisms" proposed in this paper could be conducted to explore the specific transformation process between "what is said" and "what is done" during policy execution.

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