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## **LITERATURE REVIEW ON SELF- GOVERNANCE OF VILLAGERS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Villagers' autonomy is an important system of a special form of socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics. It is expected to improve the villagers' participation in rural management and promote the village democracy. There are many different academic views on villagers' autonomy in the past literature. However, we can still find a lot of problems in the practice. The meaning and difficulties of self-governance of villagers are focused by reviewing the previous literature in the process of villagers' autonomy. The election is one of the important problems in villagers' autonomy practice, as well as other issues, and suggestions also discussed for further development of villager's autonomy.

**Keywords:** villagers' autonomy, election, legal system, meaning, review, limitation

**JEL Classification:** H4

**Literature review**

**About the significance of villagers' self -governance**

China is a socialist state of the people's democracy and democracy has been highly concerned. As an agricultural country, the number of farmers occupies a considerable proportion in China, villagers' autonomy has become the concern of

many scholars and has made many achievements in theory and practice, but on the subject of villagers' autonomy in academic circles still has different opinions and the debate has been continuing on the following three views:

### **Promoting effect**

Professor Yong Xu (1997) is the main representative on *Rural villagers' self-government*. In his work, he pointed out that villagers' autonomy is a grass-roots democratic system; Farmers can manage rural public affairs by themselves in accordance with the laws and regulations. It can inspire the enthusiasm of the majority of farmers and stimulate their own political initiative. Of course, it can constantly help the villagers to improve their democratic literacy in the long-term practice, planting the villagers' autonomy idea deeply rooted in the hearts of the people and becoming a living habits and way of life and in the end laying a solid foundation for democracy.

### **Negative effect**

Yansheng Shen (1998) stated that in the operational mechanism of the current village governance, the villagers' autonomy is inefficient and the ability is poor, villagers' autonomy does not solve the problem with "the integration of government administration and commune management". On the contrary, it restricted the economic development and hindered the Chinese modernization process.

### **Questioning function**

Some scholars questioned the function of the villagers' Autonomy system. Guoyin Dang (1999) pointed out in his paper *the starting point of the democratic politics in the "villager autonomy"* that the villager autonomy does not necessarily guide rural society to the way of democracy. The traditional rural society can 'be autonomous', but not 'democratic autonomy, for autonomy and democracy does not necessarily linked with each other. There's no need of political democracy in traditional village society. The local democratic politics should be an organic part of the social democratic politics but not an "independent autonomous democracy" from democracy of the whole society.

### **The predicament of villagers' autonomy**

Jianrong Yu (2010) proposed that since the starting of democratic autonomy, the democracy mainly reflected in the election, but in practice we found that each

region exists a variety of problems, especially the election of bribery and violence, which has gone far beyond the meaning and connotation of democracy, and brought serious impact to the democratic autonomy, generated a bad social electoral environment. Therefore, the present form of election is not conducive to the realization of the villager autonomy and hinder the further development of the villager autonomy and its perfection.

Wanqing Ma (2010) pointed out in his paper *on villagers' autonomy right* that there are many problems in the process of the realization of the villagers' autonomy right, mainly reflected in the following aspects:

1. The lack of legislation and the existence of its inner contradiction;
2. Villager autonomy organization legal status is not clear;
3. The intervention of the local government to the villagers' autonomy;
4. The conflict between villagers' autonomy and the leadership of the basic party organization.
5. The relationship is not clear between villager autonomy and collective organization.

### **The future direction of the villagers' self-governance**

Yong Xu (1997) argued in his paper *On the stability and improvement of the governance pattern of "rural politics and village governance" in China's rural areas* that the key task of realizing and perfecting villagers' autonomy is to realize the cohesion between the government and the organization of villagers' autonomy, by coordinating the relationship between village Party committee and village self-government administration, and further distinguish clearly the duties between them.

Dameng Luo and Jianjun Zhou (2010) proposed a three-dimensional model of village governance in his paper *Construction of the under the leadership of the elite* that the village elites or administrators manage the village together with the grassroots voluntary organizations and the villagers. It is expected that the *"Trinity" mode of village governance* might enhance the development and stability of the rural economy, and protecting the villagers' autonomy as well as the interests of farmers.

### **The legal system of villagers' self-governance**

The German scholar Po man A studied the legal system of villagers' autonomy of China. He focused on the relationship between the village committee and the

township government and the grassroots party organizations. He found that the relation between the first two is to guide and to be guided, which has brought a lot of difficulties and problems to policy implementation. The second relation between the village committee and the grassroots party organization is the other dilemma for villagers' autonomy, for the former officially taking the lead of the latter which formed the main body of the villager autonomy. This contradictory relationship generates numerous issues, such as "buck-pushing" etc. Therefore, villagers' autonomy maintenance and development also requires legal and institutional support.

### **Village political reform**

Kevin J.O'Brien who teaches Political Science in State University proposed in his paper *In ongoing political reform in Chinese villages* that it is easier for villagers to be autonomous only under the conditions of having their collectively owned and well managed enterprise, especially having already good achievements.

### **Summary of existing studies**

#### **The research field is wide, involving numerous disciplines**

Past research on villagers' autonomy has been involved in many fields of management, history, political science and so on, among which the perspective from sociology and political science could be the most prominent. For example, Wanqing Ma adopts many theories of Socialist Autonomy, Freedom Theory, Civil Society Theory, Democracy Theory, legal Theory and so on when he analysis the theoretical basis of the villagers' autonomy.

Previous studies explored the villagers' autonomy from various perspectives such as its significance, election committee, autonomous dilemma and so on. Tianjian Shi focused on the issues of village committee elections, Kevin J.O'Brien studied village political reform, Po man A studied the legal system of villagers autonomous, Dameng Luo and Jianjun Zhou proposed a three-dimensional model of village governance.

#### **Using the combination of theoretical and empirical analysis, but The former is insufficient**

Some scholars analyzed the factors that affect the villagers' autonomy by adopting the empirical methodology such as field research and interviews etc, while others used a variety of related theory to explore and analyze the problems and obstacles

in the villagers' autonomy. And some studies made further surveys on ways and measures to the realization of villagers' autonomy.

The other limitation of the current study on villagers' autonomy sounded to be more practical other than theoretical, or in other words, some scholars put themselves into the existing concrete problems to explore the reasons and measures while less likely focused on the theoretical construction. For instance, Yong Xu created a conceptual pattern of the "rural politics and village governance" by only referencing the village committee law without any theoretical foundation support.

### **Macro and micro perspectives and practice is relatively strong**

Some perspectives on macroscopic aspect focused on the construction of legal system and democracy research while the perspective at the micro level mainly paid attention to the villagers' autonomy operation mechanism, which has strong color of democracy. For example, Kevin J.O'Brien deemed that it could be easier to manage the autonomy of the villagers only under the condition of the possession of collective enterprises and effective management.

The villagers' democracy itself is a subject that could be found in practice. Many studies emphasized the practice and puts forward and analyzes the problems and propose the corresponding rationalization proposals. Tianjian Shi focused on the research on the process of system implementation of the village committee election, dealing with some practical and operational issues and directly reflecting the importance of the villagers' autonomy.

### **Mainly focuses on the perspective of national construction, but how to play the initiative of the villagers is less**

Academic research on the problems of villagers mostly are from the perspective of national construction and focused on its reform toward the relationship between the administration committee and the party committee, but how to stimulate internal initiative of villagers is relatively less. Dameng Luo and Jianjun Zhou proposed a three-dimensional model of village governance, Kevin J.O'Brien studied the village political reform, which all restricted in the macro analysis, but how to mobilize the rural society enthusiasm is rarely talked about.

## Conclusions and future suggestions

Villagers' autonomy is after all a new rural governance approach during Chinese social transition. Previous studies has done various explorations and gained rich achievements in the past few decades. However, there are still some existing problems and difficulties for villagers' autonomy, including how to play a coordinating role of village committee, truly realize villagers' autonomy and how to mobilize the enthusiasm of the villagers' autonomy and take what kind of way to protect their legitimate rights and interests in village governance process etc. Therefore, future research on villagers' autonomy is suggested focusing on both some concrete measures to practical issues and its theoretical construction; combining theoretical analysis with empirical research methodologies so as to step out of the puzzles and dilemmas generated in the developing autonomy mechanism and realize the expected democracy and autonomy in Chinese rural areas.

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