



Journal of Applied Sciences

ISSN 1812-5654

science
alert

ANSI*net*
an open access publisher
<http://ansinet.com>

Present Situation, Problems and Measures of Grass-roots Level Democracy in Rural Areas of Hangzhou

Zhong Xuemin and Liu Yuyong
City College of Zhejiang University, 362195988, Zhejiang, China

Abstract: Since the reform and opening up, countryside in Hangzhou, like the whole country, has carried on the economic system reform, mainly called the household contract responsibility system, has been carried out, farmers have become the relatively independent main body of the production and management. With the development of economy, the increase in people's living standards and the acceleration of the information exchange, farmers can not only be concerned about their material interests, but also pay close attention to their democratic rights and their requirements to participate in decision-making, management and monitoring the grass-roots affairs are increasingly strong. In recent years, townships of Hangzhou district explored the effective way to promote the villager's autonomy-through the democratic election, decision-making, management and supervision to realize the villager's self-management, self-education and self-service. At last, they achieved remarkable results and various contradictions of rural areas in transformation period have been digested. Based on deep investigation in the towns of Hangzhou, the exploration and practice of grass-roots level democracy in rural areas of Hangzhou are summarized, the weak village economy, insufficient internal driving force in democracy, elections and unpublicized village affairs are targeted at and the corresponding measures are put forward from five aspects so as to promote the healthy development of grassroots democracy in rural areas of Hangzhou.

Key words: Grassroots democracy in rural areas, present situation, problem, measures

INTRODUCTION

Grass-roots democracy is the system and procedure of which the majority of the people in urban and rural communities, grass-roots government, enterprises and institutions and a variety of other grassroots organizations can directly exercise democratic elections, democratic decision making, democratic management and democratic supervision. It includes the village level democracy, urban community level democracy and township level democracy. In the present paper, the problems of grassroots level democracy in Hangzhou are studied so as to promote the development of rural grassroots democracy in Hangzhou. To accomplish this task, nearly a thousand copies of questionnaires have been given out to 15 villages in the districts and counties of Hangzhou and the report is made about the field survey.

PRACTICE AND EXPLORATION OF RURAL GRASS ROOTS DEMOCRACY IN HANGZHOU

Since the reform and opening up, countryside in Hangzhou, like the whole country, has carried on the

economic system reform, mainly called the household contract responsibility system, has been carried out, farmers have become the relatively independent main body of the production and management. With the development of economy, the increase in people's living standards and the acceleration of the information exchange, farmers can not only be concerned about their material interests, but also pay close attention to their democratic rights and their requirements to participate in decision-making, management and monitoring the grass-roots affairs are increasingly strong. In recent years, townships of Hangzhou explored the effective way to promote the villager's autonomy through the democratic election, decision making, management and supervision to realize the villager's self-management, self-education and self-service. They have made remarkable achievements and various contradictions of rural areas in transformation period have been digested.

Innovate grassroots election form: In recent years, in Hangzhou the implementation of main body status of the rural party member masses has been centered on, the election form of rural grassroots organizations have been innovated, talent people have been given more opportunities to show their abilities and the election of

village-level cadres have been set up to make leaders rest assured and people satisfied. In the election of village party organizations, Hangzhou is the first one to implement the “Two Recommendations and One Election” in Zhejiang Province. In this way, the views of the party members and the masses have acted as the important basis to determine the candidate. Combined with the village-level election, the “Public Recommendation and Direct Election” has been organized and carried out by Hangzhou Municipal Party Committee Organization Department in rural areas. Taking the recommendations of organizations, party members, masses and individuals into consideration, the general membership meeting will directly elect the secretary, deputy secretary and members of the party organization and the nomination and choice are in the hands of the majority of party members and the masses. In other words, people can choose their own trusted leaders. The innovation of the method of election in the grass-roots party organizations will promote the breakthrough in the way of the other types of grass-roots organizations electing. In the village level election, approaches as self-introduced election and direct election are implemented in the village committees. Anyone who is qualified and interested in the management of village affairs can be enrolled in the election of village committee members. In the election, voters can either elect the self-introduced people listed on the ballot paper or choose other people who are not listed. The self-introduced election has changed the traditional concept of “chosen to be cadres” into “I want to be cadres”, thus, the meaning of direct election is expanded and a new breakthrough is made in the village leader electoral system.

Improve the democratic decision-making mechanism:

The system of democratic decision-making, which includes the conference of the villagers, village representatives, the major affairs referendum has widely established in city’s administrative villages to break the secretary or village head dictatorial situation and extensively draw on the views of all parties to make scientific decisions on village-level major affairs. Since, 1999, Yuhang District has comprehensively promoted the system of villager’s representative conference in villages there and democratic decisions have been made on matters authorized by the villager’s meeting in accordance with the law. According to regulations, the village collective economic projects over 30,000 Yuan and single unproductive expenditure over 3,000 Yuan must be decided by the villager’s representative meeting. In the procedure, an innovative way called the “Six Steps” has been set up, which includes issue raising, topic

announcement, the council and consultative committee of the people, the two committee’s written opinion and the implementation of voting and supervision. The major village-level affairs must be dealt with in the decision-making process known as “Three Conferences”, which are the party member’s conference, the group leader’s conference and the representative’s conference. The “Three Conferences” is held by the six steps of the democratic decision-making process, which includes raising issues, public acceptance, two committee’s consultation, democratic discussion, the vote of the villager’s representatives and the dynamic supervision of implementation. In 2010, Zhongzhou Town in Chunan County also proposed a five-vote decision mode to determine their annual livelihood projects.

Improve the democratic management system:

Hangzhou has attached great importance to the construction of democratic decision-making and management system. In accordance to the provisions of the Organic Law of Villager’s Committees of the People’s Republic of China, the city’s rural areas have established and regulated the decision-making system of the villager’s conference under the guidance of the Municipal Party Committee. Up to now, administrative villages of Hangzhou have generally established democratic decision-making system such as conference of villagers, conference of village representatives and referendum of major affairs. The sound management system effectively protects farmer’s right of democratic decision-making and supervision and enables the power to run in public. Yuhang District, for example, has fully implemented the “12345 Project Management of Village Affairs in Yuhang District” in the construction of democratic model village and has initiated the evaluation system of rural grassroots democratic political construction of Yuhang District, Hangzhou. Besides, combined with the reality, village rules and regulations and the villager’s self-government rules have been established and perfected.

Innovate democratic supervision carrier:

The supervision is necessary for the political structure and any power without supervision will corrupt inevitably. Therefore, constraints and effective supervision of power are important issues of political civilization. The democratic supervision system of villager’s self-government, that is, the villagers take extensive supervision over the village committee members and their behaviors. It is mainly reflected in two aspects: The system of the consideration of reports on the significant events and the system of making village affairs public, events that involve the vital interests of the villagers must

be regularly announced. Therefore, democratic supervision has become the foothold of villager's autonomy. In recent years, continuous innovations on democratic supervision carrier have made, the democratic supervision system have been improved and democratic supervision have been healthily developed in rural areas of Hangzhou. Basically, the vast majority of the villages hold their villager representative conference half a year in order to hear and deliberate the village committee' report. The village cadres make reports to the representatives on important matters such as financial revenue and expenditure, collective assets management, project bidding, etc. and they accept villager's inquiries. At the end of each year, the villagers will make democratic evaluations on village cadres, the review mainly including morality, ability, diligence, achievements, honesty, etc., and the result of this review will be linked with cadre's revenue and reward.

MAIN PROBLEMS IN THE PROMOTION OF DEMOCRACY AT THE GRASS-ROOTS LEVEL

Important achievements have been made in promotion of democracy at the grass-roots level. The Organic Law on the Villager Committee came into effect in the rural areas and "Four Democracies" has made great progress. However, in the new circumstances, there are still a lot of problems in promotion of democracy at the grass-roots level.

Imbalance of the development of rural collective economy restricts the democratic political construction: The democratic development should fit the development of society and economy; the level and the manner of democracy are restricted by economy. Cohen, an American scholar, once said that lively democracy would never occur if people are physically damaged or have to focus on their own living condition (Zhang and Peng, 2005). Although, Hangzhou is a developed city, the imbalance still exists. Compared with the average level, the economic development in Chun'an and Jiande still fall behind. Because of poverty, farmers living in remote mountainous areas have to leave their homeland and work outside to solve their food and clothing problems. To these farmer workers, living is still one of their first concerns. Thus, they have neither time nor energy to take part in political activities. In this year's general election of village cadres, more than 50% of voters, even 65% in one village are entrusted.

Problems in the election of villager committees: Election is the foundation of democratic politics. The democratic election of Villager Committees is an important measure to

build a new socialist countryside where the production is developed, the people's life is rich and happy, the atmosphere is civilized, the environment is clean and tidy and the management is democratic. In recent years, with the further implementation of the Organic Law of Villager Committees and the Villager Autonomy, the democratic election of village committee in Hangzhou has become more and more normative, sequencing, democratic and legalized, even though there remain some drawbacks. There are four aspects of problems all in all: Firstly, there exist briberies. During the election of many countries, various degree of briberies appeared in different forms, but the major form is to sent money or goods to electors to canvass. Secondly, the villagers have a strong sense of clansman that they prefer the candidate who has the same surname of their own family. They ignore the qualifications, quality and the capacity of the candidate but only care about their surnames and their relationship with the electors. Thirdly, their election is not very reasonable. At present, the villager's sense of participating can not reach the demand of the Villager Autonomy. Especially in the remote mountain areas, the rate of voting is rationally lower. Many villagers vote casually even without knowing anything about the candidate and then get the money given by the candidate. This kind of bribery has greatly influenced the equality and competitiveness.

System of grass-roots democracy in rural areas lacks inner impetus: Since, the party and government in Hangzhou have put high premium on the construction of rural grassroots democracy and continuously introduced innovative initiatives, such top-down to promote grassroots democracy construction continue to accelerate. A lot of grass-roots democracy system innovation has not yet been widespread and implemented deeply. Besides, its effect is not ideal yet. Take Xiaoshan District as an example, in terms of grassroots democracy construction, survey shows that democratic elections have been implemented or basic implemented (59%).

The rate of democratic decision making, democratic management, democratic supervision, village affairs and village financial disclosure considered to be implemented or basic implemented is between 25 and 31% among the respondents. In contrast, democratic decision making, democratic management and democratic supervision and village affairs, village financial disclosure still has a long way to go.

The phenomenon resulted the long time spent on democratic elections and the relatively late innovative implementation like democratic decision making, democratic management, democratic supervision, etc.

Besides, democratic system innovation lacks inner impetus.

Blind spot exists in the opening system of village affairs:

The opening system of village affairs means that the village committee puts in public the important village affairs which are related to the villager's profits and concerned by the villagers by some forms and process (Yu, 2013). All the villagers are engaged in the managing and controlling. This policy promotes the development and the completeness of the villager autonomy system with democratic decision-making, democratic supervision and democratic management.

Nowadays, the rural areas in Hangzhou are all equipped with Information Board of village affairs and developing their system of making village affairs known to the public. However, village affairs opening system has many problems in practice, such as hysteretic financial disclosure, incompleteness of the information and the process and the unsound supervision mechanism.

TAKE COUNTER MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN THE GRASS ROOTS LEVEL DEMOCRATIC CONSTRUCTION IN RURAL AREAS OF HANGZHOU

Coordinating urban-rural development, coordinating economic and social development and coordinating the regional development are the core of carrying out and fulfilling scientific development view (Zhu and Shao, 2012). Grassroots democracy in rural areas is a historical process which promotes rural economic reform continuously and also a process to establish the socialist democratic politics gradually. It needs to do a good job if we want to strengthen democracy at the grassroots level in rural areas of Hangzhou.

Develop the rural collective economy and provide the material guarantee for the countryside democracy at the grassroots level:

The construction of democratic politics needs to be provided material guarantee by the economic development. In rural areas, it aims to develop the rural collective economy, providing strong support conditions and material means for the normal operation of villager autonomy.

Various approaches should be taken to achieve the village-level preserving and increasing the value of assets:

Different channels of increasing the value and ways of development can be found for in every place in Hangzhou according to the existing forms of the assets. There are 3 main ways. The first is to use the currency

assets reasonably and effectively. The investment shares and financing can be applied to increase the value. To revitalize the collective capital and increase village-level income, we can use idle funds to set up agricultural projects which demand small investment but produce great output and hold high content of technology and efficiency. The second one is to optimize the operations on industrial assets. A number of new businesses should be developed based on the consolidation of village-level enterprises. We should make a comprehensive analysis of the existing enterprises and classify them to manage. As for those village-level organizations with local massive economic advantages, we can found some processing enterprises where the agricultural products are marketable according to local conditions. Improve the processing and distribution services of agricultural products and solve farmer's "selling problem" (Chen *et al.*, 2011). The third is to manage public assets well. For the non-operating public assets, we should make the contract of preservation and conservation and charge the user reasonable costs for the depreciation and maintenance to guarantee the compensation and update as well as the intact of collective assets.

Developing and taking advantage of source assets as to increase collective income:

The city and rural areas in Hangzhou should develop, take advantage of land according to the circumstances and develop collective economy. Firstly, unique agriculture should be developed. Mountain areas and semi-mountain areas such as Chun'an, Jiande and Lin'an can develop ecological, organic and tourism agriculture; plain areas can continue to greatly develop beneficial agriculture as to meet the increasing market needs. Thus, the village collective can increase income by exploiting resources and managing service. Secondly, the gardening economy should be strengthened. On the basis of stable contract authority in a long term, by exchanging the applying rights of land the village organization can actualize unified planning, linkage development and scale management can divide the benefit into collectives, operators and the original contracted farmers in proportion. Therefore, not only the economic garden resource can be exploited effectively, but also increase collective income. Thirdly, the surface of water and desolate lands should be developed. Such resources can be exploited by professional contracting ways to increase collective income. Forth, the applying fees should be charged properly. If an enterprise or a collective enterprise is turned into the private enterprise, the applying fees of the land that are occupied should be charged properly according to the collective assets nature of the land and principles of compensation for use.

Employ policies to resolve the problem of grass-roots democratic election: The existing problems of rural grass-roots democratic election not only affect the construction of rural grass-roots democracy, but also are a threat to the harmonious development of rural areas. Therefore, effective measures should be taken to solve these problems.

Improve the legal system and foster the civilized election: Bribery is a problem in the democratic election, which is always going hand in hand with the election. We think, to govern bribery during the Governance Committee Election, Hangzhou can learn from the experience of the typical cases to carry on system innovation. Innovation of electoral system can prevent and stop the illegal acts in election. It mainly consists of three systems: the first one is the experience from Dongyang, Zhejiang, the implementation of “public commitment, full supervision and mass assessment” system, which puts the election in public. Candidates, through signing and posting “letter of undertaking” commit to the public the items, the amount of money and time of welfare undertakings and meanwhile accept the supervision of the villagers. The second one is the implementation of Guangdong’s “observers monitoring villager-committee” institution. In the village’s committee election, taking example by observers monitoring the election in the reference of international practice, observers are sent to the village to observe and record the election of the whole process with a neutral and objective attitude. They should report to the administration department the violations in the village elections in time. The observer team is composed of experts, scholars, representatives of the National People’s Congress, college students and retired cadres. The government gives them 1 or 2 day’s training. The task is to find, expose and deal with the illegal actions in the village committee election. The third one is created by Hubei Province and Liaoning Province. That is, in the election of villager committee, the system of judicial procedure of notarization should be introduced. The procedures of judicial notarization should be guided into areas where elections may be disturbed and the whole process of election should be accompanied with judicial supervision.

Train villager’s rational spirit of democracy and change villager’s traditional ancestral: After going through the feudal society for more than two thousand years, Chinese democratic politics still influenced, more or less, by its residual power. As the main content in our traditional culture, the culture of clan and patriarchal clan, which originated from bloodlines, the ceremony of identity, religion, ethics, laws and all self-contained social

values, has now become our national spirit. The remnant feudal ideas can’t be eliminated in a short time because the patriarchal system and ideas have taken deep roots in people’s heart (Wu, 2008). Remnant feudal ideas affect our social life more or less, especially in some rural areas which have the strongest power of traditional and conservative force. We can also see the feudal ideas have reflected in the electors who have the thought that everything will go well if his relatives have status and power and the idea that having an officer in our own family is better than in other’s family. In order to release all the peasants from the shackles of the feudal ideas, practical measures should be taken to help those farmers develop a democratic and rational spirit and finally change their concept.

Firstly, the plan as a whole between urban and rural should be expanded and the rural economic development should be promoted. Secondly, appropriate removing and combing the administrative village and changing the present living pattern should be allowed. The government can take measures to appropriately remove and combine the administrative village as to break the present village patterns of structure, living and dependence, which can disrupt a part of family power to some degree. Thirdly, conversation system between leaders and people should be established so as to play a role in basic public service. During the process, the system can be established through adjusting measures to local conditions such as democratic conversation in Wenling and carried out seriously, which is beneficial to improve the democratic and scientific decisions of towns and villages, increase the diaphaneity through the process of decision making and carrying out, strengthen the serving ability of the government, promote the enthusiasm and capability of farmer’s participation in basic democratic establishment and finally decrease the family tendency in rural social and political life.

Strengthen the internal driving force of grass-roots democracy: An important way to strengthen grass-roots democratic political driving force is to reduce the cost of participation of villagers, improve the political participation of farmers, increase their income and establish a democratic political system on the basis of integration, expression, representation and coordination in a utilitarian manner. Then the grass-roots democracy, especially the democratic decision-making, democratic management, democratic supervision can really play a role. The grass-roots democratic political system has become in the expression of interest and coordination mechanism for the villagers to seek interests. Democracy can become the villager’s habit (CDI and SBX, 2008) only by then, can externally embedded

democracy develop its real roots and be turned into an internal incentive force or internal driving force, then become a way of life for the villagers. Therefore, when the democratic politics becomes the villager's benefit expression and realization mechanism, political participation of villagers in nature can see the gains.

In addition to the materiality of income, democratic politics and its value significance, the significance of rural grassroots democracy and political participation should be discussed. Political rights are usually unable to be turned into the real value, but through political participation, expression of free will and even the election, the value of its significance for the villagers can't be underestimated. Survey on the national condition of villager's autonomy in 2005 shows that, in the fairness evaluation of the village committee elections, 83.5% of voters say that the election of village committee is very fair or fair and those who say it is not too fair or unfair account for 15.2%. In the village the nomination of candidates by way of election, the fair appraisal reached more than 85%. The unfair evaluation accounts for only about 10% and in the village Party branch or superior to nominate candidates for the mode of election, the fairness of the evaluation is about 60%. The evaluation of flat injustice reached 40% left and right. Although, there are higher qualities in those candidates who are nominated by the village party branch or superiors, absence of democracy in such form will lead the villagers questioned the fairness of the entire election. It is from this sense, many measures of Hangzhou city in terms of democratic election, such as the village committee "also pushed the election" "recommend the sea election", organization of Party of rural basic level "two push one selected" "direct election", is particularly worth keeping and promotion.

Innovate the form and promote the village affairs: The premise of the rural grass-roots democracy is to solve the problem of asymmetric information. If village affairs and financial disclosures fail to carry out, the democratic decision-making, supervision, management will lose their information infrastructures. In this sense, village affairs disclosure is the basis of the democratic decision-making, management and supervision:

Use modern technology and implement the electronic management of village affairs: In order to eliminate the blind spots and problems existing in the system of village affairs, standardization and technology such as modern network technology should be applied. Viewed from the experience of the pilot areas, modern network technology

is of great practical significance to perfect and develop the process of bring village affairs to public: First, expand the scope of village affairs disclosure and introduce the power of public opinion in the rural areas. Exposure in the "sunshine" can be effective in reducing corruption. Second, prolong the open time, make the public information traced, thus village affairs can be supervised in a long time. Third, provide the message leaving online for the effective channel supervision of the villagers, face-to-face solutions to problems of the "acquaintance society", which will lead to the formation of a new, free and smooth space for public discussion so as to better express the villager's voice, provide the government and village group cadres with more chances to understand public opinion and make feasible decisions and implementation. Fourth, it is easy and convenient for the higher Party committees, government and social forces to supervise the local village affairs, their authenticity and timeliness at any time to promote better disclosure.

With the advances in information technology, especially the advent of the 3G era, some means used directly to all the villagers such as SMS, network, etc. can be applied to achieve the goals of showing village affairs and village finance in public. As its technical difficulty is getting less and less, the implementation costs will get lower and lower. Of course, technical personnel are needed to operate the electronic system to deal with village affairs and keep information open and managed. Now, more and more university students become village officials. Generally speaking, they are well qualified with technical knowledge and means. When they participate in this process, the village affairs management, financial disclosure and information maintenance will come into reality. At the same time, new IT technologies applied to manage the administrative village affairs are related to infrastructure construction, the construction of a new countryside and the construction of a harmonious society, which absolutely brings benefits to the villagers.

Improve policies and regulations to strengthen the incentive mechanism system: Firstly, strengthen the responsibility of township party committee and the government. The city level should make detailed and feasible policies and regulations in accordance with the "Village Committee Organization Law" "Notice" and province-issued "Village Affairs Implementation Measures" and bring the post assessment and performance assessment committee of the party and the government of the county and township into the village affairs evaluation system. Secondly, increase the weight in the evaluation system of village affairs of civil affairs system. Civil affairs departments, working as the village

affairs leading department, should take the opening of the village affairs and democratic management as one of the responsibilities for the staff positions of the Civil Affairs Department and as an important criteria for appraisal, rewards and punishments in the target responsibility system. Thirdly, perfect the incentive evaluation mechanisms for village cadres. On the one hand, the opening of village affairs and the progress of the democratic management should act as a sub-project of the routine work of the village cadres and one of the evaluation criteria by the higher levels of government departments and villagers. On the other hand, the opening of the village affairs can be combined with village election in which the opening of the village affairs can be taken as one of the conditions for the village committee candidates (at least one of the conditions for the candidate of the village director), which can be listed as an elections approach for the village committee candidates. Besides, the implementation of any commitments should be made before the villager's supervision, which is beneficial to improve the initiative and enthusiasm of the village cadres and encourage them to open village affairs and change their passive attitude into an active one.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The research above is the one supported by Policy Research Section of Hangzhou Municipal Government and the Project No. is 2011C003.

REFERENCES

- CDI and SBX, 2008. Investigation and Reflection to further strengthen the construction of rural grass-roots democracy. Commission for Discipline Inspection and Supervision Bureau of Xiaoshan.
- Chen, Z., H. Wang, T. Song, B. Rong, Y. Xiang and T. Hong, 2011. The contrast of several ways in grain production prediction. *J. Convergence Inform. Technol.*, 6: 248-256.
- Wu, Y., 2008. Problems and countermeasures of rural grassroots democratic elections. Nanhua University, China.
- Yu, J., 2013. Villagers autonomy: The value of the plight. Blog (In Press).
- Zhang, S. and S. Peng, 2005. On the constraints of rural grassroots democracy and development pathways. *Sci. Technol. Monthly*, 2: 66-66.
- Zhu, J. and G. Shao, 2012. An approach to evaluating the socialist new countryside democratic construction with intuitionistic fuzzy information. *Int. J. Digital Content Technol. Appl.*, 6: 684-690.