

Literature review on the efficiency of rural grassroots governance

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ABSTRACT

Rural grassroots governance is a crucial step in the process of national governance advancing towards modernization, and the modernization of rural grassroots governance is an important manifestation of the modernization of the national governance system, concerning the composition and improvement of the national governance system, as well as the realization of the Chinese Dream of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Rural areas are an essential part of the national "three rurals" (agriculture, rural areas, and farmers) governance system, where these elements are interdependent and influence each other. Placing "rural" work in a more prominent position is of great significance for deepening the transformation of concepts. Therefore, accurately understanding and grasping the connotation of the effectiveness of rural grassroots governance is the prerequisite and foundation for promoting the improvement and advancement of rural governance modernization, implementing the requirements of modernizing the national governance system and governance capabilities, advancing law-based governance, and comprehensively deepening reforms. To better understand and recognize this concept, based on the current status of rural grassroots governance, this paper summarizes and reviews the research by scholars on the concept of rural grassroots governance effectiveness, and identifies the shortcomings in the existing scholarly research on this concept.

KEYWORDS

Rural grassroots governance; Efficiency; Modernization; National governance

1 Research background

Rural governance is an organic combination of Western theory and Chinese practice, introduced to China alongside research on grassroots autonomy. In the 1990s, the concept of "governance" began to emerge in the field of public administration. Unlike traditional government regulation, governance does not rely on governmental authority as a means of rule but influences society through the interactions of actors, where external forces cannot drive or alter its internal structure and order^[1]. According to the more representative and authoritative statement of the Global Governance Committee, governance is the sum of various ways in which individuals or institutions manage unified affairs, and it is a continuous process to reconcile various conflicts and contradictions of interests^[2]. Rural governance includes not only the management of rural social order by the grassroots government, but also the spontaneous management of rural public affairs by the rural masses. The social attributes of the countryside and the level of grassroots governance are the key factors affecting rural governance^[3].

2 A review of the concept of rural grassroots governance efficiency

The effectiveness of rural governance primarily refers to the comprehensive reflection of the capabilities demonstrated and the outcomes achieved in governance activities aimed at realizing predetermined governance goals within rural societies. Correctly recognizing and reasonably defining the theoretical implications of grassroots rural governance effectiveness is the logical starting point for further development and deepening related research.

From the perspective of disciplinary terminology usage, governance effectiveness originally falls under the domain of management science and is not a native term in political science or public administration; therefore, there is a need for a shift in context and setting regarding the conceptualization of grassroots rural governance effectiveness. Existing research indicates that although a systematic theory and evaluation framework for grassroots rural governance effectiveness have yet to be established, the academic community has provided some highly insightful conceptual definitions.

2.1 Main points of rural governance research

2.1.1 The connotation of rural governance

In terms of governance subjects, Zhao Shukai according to^[4], multiple subjects participate in rural governance and resolve differences through negotiation and other means to achieve joint governance^[5] proposes that the main body of rural governance should be the party committees and governments of townships and their affiliated institutions, as well as village committees and other village-level organizations and various non-governmental groups. In terms of rural

governance objectives, He Xuefeng^[6] believes that "rural governance is the realization of orderly development in rural society." Here, "orderly development" refers to the public interest. Xu Yong points out that modernizing rural construction is the goal of governance.

2.1.2 Rural governance mechanism

Corruption has become increasingly serious due to the lack of transparency in public information, etc. Chen Liyu et al^[7] the household representative meeting system was proposed, and the villagers group meeting was established on a household basis to consult and supervise village affairs. Wang Pengqi et al^[8] points out that in terms of operational mechanisms for new rural construction, it is necessary to move away from traditional pitfalls, prohibit the use of "quota allocation" methods, exercise caution with "pilot promotion" approaches, and avoid "typical incentives." Establishing the concept of law supremacy is essential. In addressing the difficulties of providing public goods in rural areas, Zhang Hengli^[9] It is proposed to rebuild the rural public finance operation system and reform the rural public goods supply mechanism^[9]. In view of the current irrational voting of villagers and the obstruction of elite politics, Sheng Yilong^[10] it is proposed that the election mechanism should be consistent with rural governance as a whole, especially combined with economic development and social stability.

2.1.3 Rural governance model

Chen Hongsheng^[11] starting from the implementation effect of villagers self-governance, by analyzing the four fundamental conditions affecting the development and growth of social autonomy — economic development, interest differentiation, civic quality, and the degree of government control and dominance over social forces, a model of self-aware autonomous rural governance is proposed. Long Lijun^[12] taking the construction of Happy Village in Zhuhai, Guangdong as an example, it proposes to build a viable rural governance model. Integrating governance into the construction of Happy Villages and institutionalizing it makes the development of villages more humane and sustainable. Wang Haixia et al^[13] by examining the rural governance model of Fenyi, Jiangxi, it is proposed to explore governance from the perspective of "Party building + villagers self-governance," adopting the Fenyi model which strengthens Party building to reinforce rural governance.

Utilizing the "Party building +" concept, this approach aims to strengthen the construction of grassroots organizations in rural areas and enhance the level of villagers self-governance. Yan Zhanding et al^[14] propose a rural governance model embedded in farmers cooperative economic organizations. This model is the product of the combination of farmers cooperative economic organizations and rural governance, involving farmers cooperative economic organizations in the construction of rural economy, politics, and society^[15] taking Houxinglong Village in Zuoqi, Bahrain as an example, the original model of "farmer eggs" is put forward. In this mode, farmers always act as the main body of beneficiaries and construction implementation, and the policy effect has a diffusion effect.

2.1.4 Pathways of rural governance

Zhang Jilan^[16] believes that the problems of lack of autonomy, imperfect rural organizations and imperfect governance mechanisms in rural society can be solved by improving consultation and interaction mechanism and building a service-oriented government^[17] taking the rural governance of Yunnan as an example, this paper puts forward the development of farmers cooperative organizations, the improvement of the governance structure of villages and towns, the practical solution of financial difficulties in towns and villages, and the strengthening of rural grassroots organizations as paths to carry out rural governance.

Tang Shaohong et al^[18] Zhao Yanxia et al. proposed to define the power relations of each decision-making subject on the basis of the existing situation and take the scientific development road of diversified subject governance^[19] after investigating the construction of new rural dwellings in Tangshan^[19], proposed that the successful path of rural governance is to carry out the construction of new dwellings. Lan Haiyang^[20] believes that to achieve good governance in Chinas rural areas, there are three main approaches: first, optimizing the governance structure and harmonizing the political ecosystem; second, promoting new-type urbanization to achieve urban-rural integration and agricultural modernization; third, equalizing public services between urban and rural areas.

2.1.5 Governance effectiveness

Professor Guo Zhenglin, when defining the connotation of "governance," believes that governance is a process where multiple entities collaboratively manage public affairs in rural societies. After conducting a case study of Gaoba Village in the northern mountainous region of Sichuan, he pointed out that the main contents of evaluating the effectiveness of

rural governance include: first, measuring whether current policies and systems reduce farmers burdens and increase their income; second, measuring the fairness of distribution in rural society; third, measuring farmers level of public participation and their recognition of authority; fourth, analyzing whether the social order in rural society meets the needs of villagers for a peaceful and prosperous life. Subsequently, in his article "How to Evaluate the Institutional Performance of Rural Governance" (2005), he still holds the same view, starting from the theoretical perspective of institutional performance, conducting a preliminary performance evaluation of Chinas village self-governance system, with selected evaluation criteria including: economic growth and distribution; supply capacity and efficiency of public goods and services; political culture and public participation; social order and behavioral norms.

Dr. Ma Baocheng mainly starts from the internal relationships within villages, believing that the problems existing in Chinas rural governance structure are primarily manifested as imbalances between the two committees and tensions in village relations, which to some extent affect the effectiveness of rural governance. To improve the effectiveness of rural governance, the key measures lie in optimizing the rural governance structure: First, optimize the external structure of rural governance, with the main measures being to standardize the relationship between the two committees and village relations. Second, optimize the internal structure of rural governance, with the main measures including improving the level and quality of direct elections in village committees, ensuring that the village committee truly represents the interests of villagers; improving the village representative meeting system to enhance its functions.

Dr. Wu Xinye believes that in the practice of village-level public life in our country, the grassroots public management model centered on the Village Committee has encountered various difficulties in its implementation, which has constrained the improvement of rural grassroots governance efficiency. Theoretically, this is due to the insufficient autonomy of rural grassroots public spaces and the unreasonable allocation of public power at the grassroots level. Therefore, he believes that the development of non-governmental public organizations at the rural grassroots level and their participation in grassroots public management can better explain the logical relationship among multiple entities in the government-market-society triangle, thereby enhancing the efficiency of grassroots public management.

Professor Zhang Lijin believes from the perspective of political civilization that only institutional civilization has institutional efficiency, and the standard of institutional civilization is to adapt to the development of productive forces and help protect and promote economic and social development and progress^[21]. The economic system of rural social governance should adapt to the development of rural social productive forces and its economic laws, promoting the optimal allocation of rural economic resources; at the level of production relations, it should contribute to strengthening the socialist collective economy in rural areas, safeguarding collective economic property rights, providing public facilities and services conducive to rural economic development, and promoting the modernization of the rural economy; it should maintain the order of the socialist market economy in rural areas, protect the economic rights and interests of farmers, eliminate the polarization of wealth among farmers, and promote social distribution fairness and shared prosperity for farmers.

2.1.6 Negotiated governance

Consultative governance, it is one of the choices for the effective realization of villagers self-governance. As Zhang Rongjun proposed, the transformation from elite dominance to consultative governance in the transition of villagers self-governance, he believes that a collaborative mechanism between electoral democracy and consultative democracy should be established in villagers self-governance, and promote the realization of consultative democracy in the content of villagers self-governance^[22].

Wang Keyuan also recognizes consultative governance, which is more conducive to the effective realization of villagers self-governance. He once proposed that the focus of villagers self-governance must shift from democratic elections to consultative governance, integrating more elements of consultation into democratic elections to optimize the process of election, with a focus on developing consultative governance following democratic elections, thereby continuously expanding and deepening the democratic connotations of villagers self-governance^[23].

2.1.7 Overall governance

Some scholars have pointed out that holistic governance is the direction for the future development of rural governance. For example, Lang Youxing believes that one of the problems existing in Chinas rural governance is the multiplicity and fragmentation of governance logic, which will manifest in the crises caused by frequent and sudden mass incidents, and the root cause lies in the lack of holistic governance thinking^[24].

Holistic governance requires integrating the efforts of multiple parties including the government, market, and social members to establish a diversified governance framework and build new types of partnerships to jointly address various issues arising in rural societies. From this perspective, holistic governance has its significance and value.

2.1.8 Rule of law

Scholar Zhou Tietao realized that achieving the legalization of grassroots governance is an urgent bottleneck to be overcome integrating national laws into rural governance is a practical issue that needs to be addressed he confronts the difficulties faced by village-level organizations in promoting rural legal governance and accordingly chooses a legal path combining government leadership with village elite leadership the specific solutions include cultivating governance authority and fostering legal sentiment.

Scholar Peng Peng also proposed that the legalization can change traditional grassroots governance concepts integrating modern legal thinking, structure, and systems into the overall framework of grassroots governance embedding the legal governance model into every aspect of grassroots governance He pointed out that the legalization of grassroots governance has its unique logical composition and structural scope only by deeply exploring the governance elements and legal elements within the legal system of grassroots governance can support paths for promoting the legalization of rural governance be provided^[25].

2.1.9 Township Government

Grassroots governance still cannot be separated from the village-level organization, and the township government is the intermediary of the extension of the state power to the rural society. The rural grassroots organization has the comprehensive nature of politics, economy and society. The importance attached to it directly relates to whether the national governance goal can be smoothly realized.

Scholar Jiang Yan recognizes the importance of township government reform in the grassroots governance reform of rural areas. She addresses the controversy over the existence or abolition of township governments, thinking from the perspective of rural grassroots governance and the vision of reform. She conducts a rational analysis of the controversy and exploration, pointing out that recent discussions on the direction of township government reform have overlooked the significant role of township governments in modernizing national governance capabilities and systems^[26], so in rural grassroots governance, township government should not be abolished, but should be strengthened and improved.

Scholar Yu Jianrong also affirms the importance of township governments in rural grassroots governance. He points out that township governments are an important part of China's political system and the cornerstone of social stability and national construction. However, in the actual operation process, some township governments lack the motivation to provide public services for farmers^[27].

3 Research status and deficiencies of rural grassroots governance efficiency concept

3.1 Research status of the concept of rural grassroots governance efficiency

Since the proposal of the major strategic task of modernizing the national governance system and governance capacity, both the theoretical and practical circles have paid great attention to the issue of social governance efficiency construction. Whether it is the manifestation of the advantages of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics or the social demand for achieving good governance, it all depends on excellent institutional arrangements and their effectiveness. According to the explanation in the "Cihai," "institutional efficiency" refers to the ability and effectiveness of social entities in managing various social affairs using national institutions^[28]. For rural areas, it is necessary to "dedicate more resources to towns and villages, improving the efficiency of rural governance." The so-called "efficiency of rural governance" refers to the ability and effectiveness of grassroots social units in formulating and implementing national laws, regulations, systems, or policies to achieve rural grassroots governance. There are still some areas in the formulation, implementation, and feedback of China's rural grassroots governance system that are not conducive to improving institutional efficiency and require further reform and improvement. Therefore, it is essential to analyze the essential concept of rural grassroots governance efficiency, evaluate the criteria for assessing the effectiveness of rural social governance systems, and ultimately propose strategies to further enhance the effectiveness of rural social governance systems.

3.2 Insufficiencies in the Concept of Rural Grassroots Governance Efficiency

Reviewing the existing research, it can be seen that scholars have paid attention to many issues in the current rural governance of our country. Some people have started from relevant phenomena, studied the existing impacts and problems of current rural governance, and proposed corresponding countermeasures and suggestions; others have started from the rural governance model, suggesting the construction of a new governance model to make up for the existing shortcomings. However, some of them grasp rural governance too macroscopically without paying attention to

the differences in local villages; some even see the potential for diversification of rural governance entities but still focus on government-centered governance; some single-mindedly analyze the concept of rural governance effectiveness while ignoring the intrinsic synergy between the current rural governance system and regional rural customs and culture. In particular, some studies overly rely on external governance theories, mechanically applying analytical frameworks and numerous standards of good governance to evaluate the actual situation of China's rural areas, imagining the construction of an ideal state of good governance, completely ignoring the indigenous characteristics and historical continuity of our country's rural society.

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