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Mutual empowerment of state and peasantry: Grassroots democracy in rural China

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore alternative pathways to democracy by studying the origins, processes, and impacts of a recent political development in China: within the framework of an authoritarian state, the gradual emergence of some genuine grassroots self-government, especially in rural areas. The major argument is that the practice of self-government in rural China was promoted by the state to regain the legitimacy and governability it had lost during the economic reforms. It is a critical process in which the state and the peasantry are mutually empowering each other by linking peasant demands to state power through the mechanism of grassroots elections and self-governing villager committees. The Chinese case shows that the empowerment of new social forces does not necessarily weaken the capacity of the state to govern society and therefore, in the long run, a peaceful and orderly democratic transition might be possible.



Keywords

Asia; China; democratization; empowerment state; peasantry

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