

Reflection and Exploration of Rural Homestead Reform - A Case Study of Ningguo City

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Abstract: This paper focuses on analyzing the current situation of rural homesteads in Ningguo City, including the widespread issue of idle homesteads and the phenomenon of rural hollowing. Due to the hilly terrain in Ningguo City, rural residents' dwellings are relatively scattered, posing challenges to the construction of the new countryside and increasing management complexity. Through in-depth investigation and analysis, the paper proposes diverse solutions to address these issues: 1. Homestead return and compensation: Promoting methods for returning homesteads and compensating with cultivated land or exchanging homesteads for vouchers to offset urban housing purchases, facilitating the rational use of land and the urbanization process of farmers. 2. Centralized resettlement and nursing homes: Through centralized resettlement, reducing the scattered living of rural residents is conducive to the construction and management of the new countryside. 3. Innovative utilization of homestead resources: Distinctive homesteads with resources such as Qinglong Bay and Fangtang Township in Ningguo City can be leased for the construction of homestays, exhibition halls, and popular tourist spots, promoting regional tourism and cultural industry development. 4. Exchange of rural homesteads for cultivated land: Adopting the form of exchanging one acre of homestead for three acres of cultivated land makes it more acceptable for farmers. This research not only provides specific and feasible solutions for the reform of rural homesteads in Ningguo City but also offers references for other regions facing similar problems, contributing to the broader implementation and success of rural homestead reform.

Keywords: Rural homesteads, Reform exploration, Hollowing, Land exchange, Centralized resettlement.

1. Introduction

With the rapid changes in China's rural areas, the issue of rural homesteads has become increasingly prominent. Problems such as hollow villages, a large number of idle homesteads, and scattered rural living pose challenges to the rational use of land and the construction of the new countryside, especially in regions with complex terrain and dispersed populations.

Taking Ningguo City as an example, located in the hilly terrain of Anhui Province, the phenomenon of rural homesteads in Ningguo City highlights this issue. Numerous idle homesteads not only waste land resources but also hinder the orderly construction of the new countryside and the modernization process. Simultaneously, the phenomenon of rural hollowing and the scattered living of residents bring challenges to local management.

Effectively utilizing these land resources, changing the current situation of rural hollowing, and promoting the concentrated residence of farmers and the modernization process have become urgent issues. Therefore, this paper takes Ningguo City as the research object to explore diverse paths for the reform of rural homesteads.

This paper aims to provide specific and feasible reform proposals through in-depth analysis of the current situation of rural homesteads in Ningguo City. It not only serves as a reference for the reform of rural homesteads in Ningguo City but also hopes to provide inspiration for the reform of homesteads in similar areas.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Domestic Research Review

2.1.1. Background and Theory of Homestead Reform

In recent years, rural homestead reform has become a key focus of the government. Li Aixin (2023) suggested organizational leadership, improvement of regulations and systems, and the establishment of a statistical survey system based on research in Puyang, Henan. Ding Dechang's (2023) study revealed the reasons for the government's attention to homestead reform and rural modernization. Guo Xin's (2023) exploration of China's rural homestead reform based on Marxist land property theory proposed insights from aspects such as talent, qualification rights, and digitization. Zhang Yong's (2023) analysis of numerous cases of rural homestead reform nationwide focused on the improvement and outlook of the rural homestead system.

2.1.2. Practical Exploration and Case Analysis

Many local governments have initiated practical exploration of homestead reform. Mei Hao's (2023) careful analysis of Henan Province found that reform can effectively promote the rational use of land. Kang Zhuang's (2023) case analysis of Yongchuan District, Chongqing, discovered that establishing rural collective operating construction land markets promotes rural revitalization. Wu Gang's (2023) systematic exploration of Longxi County in Gansu Province outlined challenges faced and methods that can be borrowed. Meng Panpan's (2023) in-depth investigation of multiple pilot areas in Fujian Province deepened the role of market elements in reform. Kang Wenjie's (2022) exploration of reform achievements in 33 pilot areas focused on the exploration of "separation of three rights."

2.1.3. Reform Challenges and Prospects

Legal and social challenges exist in the reform process. Liang Jianzhong (2022) believed that existing laws on the use and transfer of rural homesteads are insufficient, and farmers have weak legal awareness. Zhang Zheqi (2022) pointed out the imperfect legal and regulatory system and the lack of a homestead transfer platform. Wang Zengbao (2019) emphasized the impact of reform on farmers' property income and social welfare. Despite many challenges in the reform process, there is optimism about the prospects after overcoming resistance.

2.2. Foreign Research Review

2.2.1. Rural Land Use and Planning

In Europe and America, rural land use and planning are well-managed. Smith's (2005) research indicated that reasonable land management effectively promotes rural revitalization.

2.2.2. Land Property Rights and Management

Foreign scholars have also focused on land property issues. Johnson's (2010) study revealed the importance of clear land property rights for protecting farmers' interests.

2.3. Specific Research on Homestead Reform in Ningguo City

2.3.1. Geographic and Social Background

Ningguo City, as a region with unique geographic and social backgrounds, has distinctive homestead reform. Numerous scholars have conducted in-depth analyses of Ningguo City's socio-economic conditions. Ningguo City belongs to a typical southern hilly terrain with scarce land, known for its "eight mountains, one water, half-field, half-road, and manor." Hong Shuguang (2015) implemented coordinated urban and rural land planning in 2011.

2.3.2. Practical Analysis of Homestead Reform

Zhang Jing (2017) conducted a practical analysis of homestead reform in Ningguo City, studying policy choices, implementation difficulties, and effects. Zhang Yong (2017) conducted a willingness survey of farmers in Ningguo City, finding that compensation issues had the most significant impact. Zhang Yong (2016) found that many farmers are suitable for homestead withdrawal but have low willingness, proposing diversified compensation solutions.

2.3.3. Limitations and Future Prospects

Tan Bing (2015) analyzed the limitations of reform in Ningguo City and proposed specific suggestions for future reform directions.

Rural homestead reform is a complex and crucial task. Both domestically and internationally, there are many issues worth exploring. The practice in Ningguo City provides a valuable research sample, revealing the unique challenges and opportunities of rural homestead reform.

3. Current Analysis of Rural Residential Land Reform in Ningguo City

3.1. Policy Background and Regulations

Ningguo City has introduced a series of specific policies for the reform of rural residential land, covering aspects such as land rights confirmation, circulation, and utilization. The local government actively cooperates with national regulations to ensure the legality of the reform.

3.2. Land Rights Confirmation and Registration

3.2.1. Progress in Land Rights Confirmation

Ningguo City has completed the land rights confirmation and registration in most villages, clarifying both land ownership and usage rights.

3.2.2. Data Informatization

Through the establishment of a residential land informatization management system, unified management and inquiry of residential land data have been achieved.

3.3. Circulation and Utilization of Residential Land

3.3.1. Circulation Models

Ningguo City has explored various models for the circulation of residential land, such as cooperative societies and leasing to enterprises, ensuring the flexibility and diversity of land circulation.

3.3.2. Effects of Circulation

The circulation of land has facilitated the rational allocation of rural land resources, enhancing land utilization efficiency and stimulating the development of the local agricultural industry.

3.3.3. Development and Utilization

Ningguo City has made progress in the development and utilization of residential land, promoting initiatives such as rural tourism and the establishment of farmer cooperatives. Notably, approaches like leasing in West Village, Gangkou Town, have effectively revitalized rural residential land, contributing to increased income for local farmers. Similarly, projects like the "Hongju" in Xianxia Town, involving the construction of homestays, have yielded positive results.

3.4. Public Participation and Safeguarding Interests

3.4.1. Farmer Participation

During the reform process, Ningguo City actively encouraged farmers' participation, extensively seeking their opinions and suggestions, ensuring the democratic nature of the reform.

3.4.2. Interest Safeguarding

Through reasonable distribution of circulation benefits and strengthening farmers' awareness of property rights, the reform has ensured comprehensive protection of farmers' interests.

3.5. Challenges and Existing Issues

3.5.1. Regulatory Support Issues

Despite substantial policy efforts, some regulatory support measures still need improvement, such as standardizing circulation contracts and addressing tax policies related to land circulation.

3.5.2. Farmer Awareness Barriers

Some farmers still face cognitive obstacles regarding the circulation and reform of residential land, necessitating further efforts in publicity and education.

The residential land reform in Ningguo City constitutes a complex systematic project involving policy adjustments and practical exploration in various dimensions. While achieving initial success in promoting rural revitalization and enhancing farmers' interests through reforms in land rights confirmation, circulation, and utilization, challenges and issues persist.

Subsequent efforts should focus on reinforcing regulatory support, optimizing circulation mechanisms, and safeguarding farmers' interests to facilitate the continuous progress of the reform.

4. Goal Analysis of Rural Residential Land Reform in Ningguo City

4.1. Clarifying Land Ownership for Monitoring

4.1.1. Clear Rights Confirmation

Clearly delineate ownership relationships for all residential land, eliminating historical legacy issues.

4.1.2. Standardizing Circulation

Make the transfer of land usage rights and contracting rights more standardized for easier management and monitoring.

4.2. Optimizing Land Use to Serve Indicator Adjustments

4.2.1. Enhancing Efficiency

Optimize the allocation of land resources to improve land utilization efficiency.

4.2.2. Moderating Scale Operations

Promote moderate-scale operations of rural land, fostering the development of modern agriculture.

4.3. Safeguarding Farmers' Rights to Promote Income Increase

4.3.1. Rights Protection

Ensure the legitimate rights of farmers are not infringed upon during the residential land reform process.

4.3.2. Fair Distribution of Benefits

Guarantee that farmers receive fair benefits during the land circulation and development processes.

The goals of residential land reform in Ningguo City encompass clear ownership, optimized land use, and safeguarding farmers' rights. Specific measures corresponding to these goals involve regulations, finance, education, technology, and various other aspects. Through the implementation of these reform measures, there is potential to promote the rational allocation and utilization of rural land resources, ensure the legitimate rights of farmers, and drive both rural revitalization and the development of modern agriculture.

5. Empirical Research

5.1. Research Samples

5.1.1. Sample Selection Criteria

The survey aims to collect data on relevant variables related to rural residential land reform and includes urban and rural residents as participants. Recognizing that urban residents often possess residential land in rural areas, their inclusion broadens the scope of the survey. Therefore, the sample includes both urban and rural residents.

5.1.2. Survey Methods

The survey is conducted through offline distribution of questionnaires and online distribution using platforms like QuestionStar. The sample is randomly selected within Ningguo City.

5.2. Data Source

To better understand residents' evaluations of rural residential land reform and identify existing issues in current reform programs, the survey results are analyzed and integrated. The survey questionnaire is designed based on questionnaires used by various domestic scholars in the field of rural residential land reform.

5.3. Questionnaire Design

The content of the questionnaire is formulated based on the research objectives, covering the basic information of the respondents, their perception of rural residential land, evaluation, and suggestions. The questionnaire includes data such as gender, age, occupation, and assesses respondents' opinions on policies related to rural residential land reform. The survey adopts a combination of online and offline questionnaires for efficient data collection and analysis. The precision and accuracy of the questionnaire are ensured through its design and distribution on platforms like QuestionStar, QQ, Weibo, and WeChat. The survey is conducted in multiple stages to minimize potential errors in results caused by a single time frame. After a sufficient number of responses are collected, incomplete or insincere questionnaires are removed to guarantee the authenticity and effectiveness of the data. Subsequently, the questionnaire data is input and organized using EXCEL software.

5.4. Data Analysis

5.4.1. Basic Information of Samples

A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed, and 200 valid responses were selected.

- Gender: 60% male, 40% female.
- Age Distribution: 18-30 (30%), 31-40 (25%), 41-50 (25%), 51 and above (20%)
- Occupation: 70% farmers, 15% government officials, 10% agricultural experts/scholars, 5% other
- Location: Spread across urban areas and villages in different townships of Ningguo City.

5.4.2. Issues Related to Residential Land Reform

- Attitude toward Current Residential Land Reform Policies:
 - Strongly support 15%
 - Support 40%
 - Neutral 25%
 - Oppose 15%
 - Strongly oppose 5%
- Opinions and Suggestions on Land Rights Confirmation and Registration:
 - Generally positive, but 30% express concerns or confusion.
- Opinions and Suggestions on Optimizing Land Use:
 - Majority express support, but 20% are concerned about potential disadvantages to small farmers.
- Opinions and Suggestions on Safeguarding Farmers' Interests in Residential Land Reform:
 - 80% believe there is a need for enhanced legal protection and government supervision.
- Issues and Challenges Encountered:
 - 50% reflect difficulties in land circulation, among other problems.
 - Impact of Residential Land Reform on the Local Economy, Society, etc.:
 - 70% believe it has a positive impact on the local economy.

- Expectations and Suggestions for the Future Development of Residential Land Reform:

- 40% hope for increased government support, 30% hope for clearer policy direction.

6. Discussion of Issues

I have visited almost all the townships in Ningguo City, such as Fangtang Township, Zhongxi Town, Nanji Township, and Zhufeng Street, and identified the following issues regarding collective economic organizations in rural areas.

6.1. Lack of Management in Rural Collective Economic Organizations

The reform of rural residential land involves issues of land property rights and land circulation, requiring clear legal regulations for guidance. Due to the lack of management, inconsistencies in policy interpretation and inadequate implementation may occur, leading to the compromise of the rights of rural residents during the circulation and utilization of homestead land.

One of the objectives of rural residential land reform is to optimize the allocation of land resources. However, due to the absence of effective management mechanisms, issues such as land idleness and misuse may arise, impacting the efficient utilization of land resources.

In the context of homestead reform, collective economic organizations play a crucial role. However, poor management within these organizations may result in insufficient internal coordination, making it challenging to execute decisions and thus hindering the progress of the reform.

6.2. Information Asymmetry in Rural Residential Land Reform

Due to rapid policy changes or ineffective information dissemination, rural residents often cannot accurately understand the latest dynamics of reform policies, potentially missing out on reasonable opportunities for homestead land circulation. Without accurate assessment and pricing mechanisms, the value of homestead land may be underestimated, leading to insufficient returns for rural collective economic organizations.

During the process of homestead land circulation, rural residents may face negotiation difficulties and low transaction efficiency due to a lack of understanding of market conditions and transaction processes. The inability of rural collective economic organizations to accurately comprehend market demands and trends may result in the irrational development and utilization of homestead land, failing to adapt to market changes.

6.3. Lack of Professional Talents

Rural residential land reform is a complex issue involving multiple fields such as policy, law, economy, and society. It requires diverse professional knowledge and skills. However, the age of rural primary organization workers is generally higher, indicating a slower absorption of new knowledge and potential deficiencies in professional knowledge related to homestead land reform. Additionally, some solutions are easily discovered at the grassroots level, requiring timely submission to higher authorities.

6.4. Insufficient and Ungrounded Popularization Efforts

Firstly, rural residential land reform involves complex policy and legal content that many rural residents may not fully understand. Insufficient popularization efforts may lead to misunderstandings about the importance and impact of reform, potentially causing skepticism.

Secondly, popularization efforts often lack practical relevance to the actual situation, making it challenging to resonate with rural residents. If popularization content deviates from reality, it may reduce interest and hinder active participation in the reform.

Furthermore, diverse communication methods should be employed to ensure information reaches a broader audience. Rural residents with different ages, education levels, and cultural backgrounds have varying preferences for information acceptance.

6.5. Lack of Market Participation

Firstly, the lack of market participation may lead to irrational resource allocation. In the absence of market mechanisms, the circulation and utilization of rural homestead land may be restricted, hindering the flow of resources to optimal utilization areas.

Secondly, market participation can drive innovation and competition, enhancing the value of rural homestead land. Without market mechanisms, rural collective economic organizations may lack the motivation to innovate, as there is no competitive pressure.

Moreover, market participation can improve the efficiency of homestead land circulation.

7. Conclusion and Discussion

7.1. Pre-reform of Rural Collective Economic Organizations and Expansion of Talent Pool

7.1.1. Enhance Management Capability:

The government can conduct training courses for management personnel of rural collective economic organizations, covering knowledge in organizational management, rural policies, and laws.

Establish training bases for rural management personnel, providing long-term systematic training plans to enhance their management capabilities.

Experience Sharing:

Encourage experience sharing among rural collective economic organizations. Successful cases and practical experiences can flow between different regions through regular meetings, seminars, forums, etc., promoting the accumulation and sharing of management experiences.

7.1.2. Attract Talent:

Provide incentive measures: The government can offer scholarships, training allowances, and other incentives to attract young people interested in rural collective economic management. This can increase the enthusiasm of rural management personnel to a certain extent.

Establish cooperative relationships: Collaborate with universities and research institutions to jointly train and select rural management talents. Establish specialized research projects or disciplines to attract talents to engage in rural economic management.

Career Development Path:

Establish a sound career development path to show rural management personnel the growth prospects within collective economic organizations. For example, provide promotion opportunities and salary incentives to motivate talents to actively participate in rural economic management.

7.1.3. Introduction of Professional Consultation:

External consultant teams: Collective economic organizations can consider introducing professional consultant teams to provide strategic advice and assist in decision-making and management. This can address the internal talent shortage issue and ensure the smooth progress of rural homestead land reform.

Technical support: Utilize modern technology, such as digital management systems and remote training, to provide more efficient management tools and knowledge support for rural collective economic organizations. This can help overcome the deficiencies in management capabilities.

In summary, strengthening the management capabilities of rural collective economic organizations and attracting talent require collaboration from the government, universities, research institutions, etc. Through training, experience sharing, incentive measures, and collaborative relationships, the quality of rural management personnel can be improved, providing stronger support for homestead land reform and promoting rural economic development.

7.2. Strengthening Popularization Efforts for Rural Households, Ensuring Grounded Popularization

Firstly, formulate a popularization plan tailored to rural households. Based on the actual needs and concerns of rural residents, select topics closely related to their lives, such as agricultural production and rural policies. Ensure that popularization content genuinely aligns with the interests and needs of rural households.

Secondly, use language and methods close to rural life for popularization. Avoid using overly technical terms and strive to use straightforward and understandable language to facilitate easy understanding and acceptance of information by rural households. Incorporate daily examples and stories to increase the readability and interest of information.

Additionally, use a variety of communication channels, such as lectures, village broadcasts, mobile phone messages, etc., to convey popularization information to rural households. Utilize local media and social platforms to directly deliver information to them, ensuring the coverage of information.

Finally, cooperate with village committees, agricultural cooperatives, and other organizations to jointly conduct popularization activities. Through organized collective training, demonstration practices, and other forms, deliver popularization content to rural households more effectively, helping them better understand and apply the knowledge learned.

7.3. Paid Use, More Occupancy Fines

Currently, there is widespread excessive use of homestead land in rural Ningguo, with one household having multiple houses exceeding the standard area. The usage scope of rural homestead land should be opened up, allowing external involvement. Outsiders can obtain the right to use rural homestead land through leasing, purchasing, or renovation, but it must adhere to unified planning standards.

At the same time, appropriate fines should be imposed on

households with excessive area usage, and they should be given the option to demolish a part of the area if they choose not to pay the fine.

7.4. Homestead Land Exchange for Cultivated Land

Given the emotional attachment of older farmers to homestead land, they can choose to exchange homestead land for cultivated land. For example, one acre of homestead land can be exchanged for three acres of cultivated land, aligning with the psychological expectations of farmers.

Because rural homestead land still serves agricultural production functions, exchanging it for cultivated land allows for the continued cultivation of vegetables and grains.

7.5. Unified Placement and Provision of Elderly Care Services

Currently, there is a phenomenon of hollowing out and aging in rural areas, with most elderly people staying in the countryside. The reluctance of the elderly to give up homestead land is mainly due to concerns about future elderly care. Therefore, the option of merging multiple villages, concentrating settlements, and establishing nursing homes should be considered to accommodate the elderly population.

7.6. Homestead Land Return and Compensation

Young people are more concerned about the compensation price for rural homestead land. If the price is satisfactory, they are willing to give up their rights. Cash compensation and vouchers for deducting the price of new houses in urban areas can be adopted.

7.7. Entry of Social Capital, Market-oriented Operation

Ningguo City itself has abundant tourism resources, such as Qinglong Bay, Chujiatan, Banqiao, and the Wannan Tibetan Plateau route, with beautiful ecology and pleasant scenery. Development can be based on scenic spots to establish homestays, involving state-owned enterprises, unified planning, and creating a leisure town.

7.8. Combining Industrial Development, Developing Handicrafts or E-commerce Towns

Ningguo relies on industrial development, with Gangkou Town and Zhongxi Town being industrial strongholds. Leveraging these resources, rural homestead land can be used to develop handicrafts and the e-commerce industry.

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