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THE COMMUNE-LEVEL POLITICAL SYSTEM IN VIETNAM
AT PRESENT: SOME THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL MATTERS

Abstract. The article clarifies the concept of the commune-level political system and analyzes characteristics of the commune-level political system. The article also analyzes the achievements and limitations in building the commune-level political system in Vietnam and proposes solutions to improve the quality of this system in the future.

Key words: Political system, commune, ward, town, grassroots, Vietnam.

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СОВРЕМЕННАЯ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКАЯ СИСТЕМА ВЬЕТНАМА НА
УРОВНЕ ОБЩИНЫ: ВОПРОСЫ ТЕОРИИ И ПРАКТИКИ

Аннотация. В статье описывается политическая система на уровне общины и анализируются ее характеристики. Показаны также достижения и ограничения в построении политической системы на уровне общины во Вьетнаме и предлагаются решения по повышению качества этой системы в будущем.

Ключевые слова: политическая система, община, район, город, первичный уровень, Вьетнам.

Introduction

The communal political system in Vietnam has been studied by many researchers. The system plays an important role; if it functions well, it will successfully implement the grassroots political tasks with the emphasis on exploitation and effective use of resources, on the local potentialities and those for economic development, on increase of income and living standards for the people. However, most of the commune-level localities in Vietnam have not yet reached their full potential.

Although there are many viewpoints on the communal political system, there is no consensus in awareness, not to mention specific factors when researching the communal political system as well as its achievements and limitations in the process of implementing functions and tasks. It is necessary to have proper awareness of the concepts and characteristics of the communal political system. On this basis, the solutions will be proposed to update the organization and operation of the communal political system in Vietnam in the context of many pressures to reform and innovate the communal political system itself from within, as well as to require objectivity from external factors.

Literature review

The communal political system plays an important role in the Vietnamese political system. At home and abroad, many authors concern themselves with this issue.

When talking about the leadership and political power of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Adam Fforde noted "an increasing VCP inability to focus its political power to secure authority and legitimacy, and an increasing ability of the population to take the political initiative" [Fforde 2020:

20]. In fact, these are just a few "unfortunate" cases that happened; leadership assessment that only through a few typical cases is not comprehensive.

In the process of national construction and development, the Communist Party of Vietnam is the force leading the state and society. But many scholars do not fully understand Vietnamese practices. A.Tsvetov, P. Tsvetov wrote: "The CPV positions itself as a party representing the interests of the entire Vietnamese people" (A.Tsvetov, P.Tsvetov 2018: 13). This view is not appropriate because it is not the Party proclaims itself but two wars and the achievements of Doi Moi period prove the Party's position and role.

Vu Hoang Cong [Vu Hoang Cong 2002] has pointed out the characteristics, development trends, pressing problems and proposed solutions to consolidate and improve the efficiency of the grassroots political system in Vietnam. However, the solutions are still macro, not really suitable for the commune level.

The author of the book "Power to the people? Local governance and politics in Vietnam" affirmed: "At each local administrative level, the People's Committee represents the executive body, is supervised by Party committees and this regulation, the same in all localities" [Mattner 2004: 2]. This comment of the author is consistent with the current Vietnamese law, but not sufficient, because in addition to the supervision of the Party, the People's Committee is also subject to the supervision of the People's Council at the same level and the inspection and supervision of the state management agencies at higher levels.

According to Tran Thai Duong [Trần Thái Dương 2006], the political system in the commune includes three constituent parts: the Party, the government, the Front and mass organizations in the commune. This viewpoint clearly shows the organization of the political system in the commune, but the limitation in the author's point of view emphasizes the role, management function and administration in all areas of social life within the commune administrative framework; with this point of view, the author is emphasizing the role of the communal government, but is not covering the role and functions of the party organization and the socio-political organization.

Recently, the book "Capacity of the Grassroots Political System in Some Key Areas in the Northwest: Some Theoretical and Practical Matters" [Phạm Quốc Thành 2019] has set up a system of assessment criteria for the capacity of the grassroots political system; the author assesses the current situation and proposes solutions and models for capacity building of the grassroots political system in some key areas in the Northwest.

The above-mentioned works show that until now (2020), many researchers have concerned themselves with the political system in general and the communal political system in particular. There are many approaches, and each article has important results in research on theoretical and practical issues of the political system. Summarizing the abovementioned studies, researchers have introduced the concept of the political system, the communal rule system; assessing the current situation and proposing solutions to update and perfect the political system, to improve the capacity and operational efficiency of the political system in general and of each part constituting the political system in particular.

Definition and characteristics of the communal political system

The political system is a concept of contemporary political science, which is one of the concepts that characterizes relations of political power; political system is the sum of political and socio-political organizations, that are officially recognized to exercise political power legally.

In Vietnam, the term “political system” has not been used throughout all organizations in the Vietnamese political system. Before the renovation, the term “proletarian dictatorship” was used concerning the system of the Party, the State and socio-political organizations. The concept of “political system” first appeared in the Resolution of the 6th Central Committee Plenum convocation VI and in some official documents of the Communist Party of Vietnam. By 1991 Political Platform [Communist Party of Vietnam 1991a] and Congress VII [Communist Party of Vietnam 1991b], the term “political system” had come to stay.

The Vietnamese political system is organized into four administrative levels: central, provincial, district, and communal ones. The communal political system is the political system organized in communes, wards and towns (usually referred to as the commune level), up to 10,614 [Ministry of Home Affairs 2020]. The communal political system is the lowest level, but it has many components and functions of political system and it performs a particularly important role due to its being closest to the people.

It can be said that the commune-level political system is understood as a unified body, which includes communal Party, commune-level local authorities, Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations operating under a certain mechanism aimed at implementing the Party’s guidelines and policies, the State’s policies and legislations and promoting the people’s rights at the commune-level.

The communal political system is of importance in organizing and mobilizing the people to implement the Party guidelines, the State policies and laws, to strengthen the universal solidarity, to promote the people’s right to mastery, to mobilize all abilities of socio-economic development, to organize the life of the population community. In the end, all the Party guidelines, the policies and laws of the State, no matter how big, must still be implemented in a certain commune level. The communal political system is like a cellular network which constitutes the whole political system of the country, the leadership, management and organization of the successful implementation, all the Party guidelines, the policies and laws of the State at the grassroots level. The system directly discovers, gathers and resolves the people’s thoughts and aspirations, the starting point of all the Party guidelines, the policies and laws of the State. It is the communal political system that directly manages, trains and creates a source of cadres and civil servants; it is the core force that determines the quality and performance of the political system at their level and immediately leads and directs the People’s Organization to fight and defeat all the conspiracies and tricks of hostile forces and reflects and denounces the degrading manifestations of cadres and Party members. For example: the role of the local government in a land dispute related to the case in My Duc district, Hanoi city is demonstrated by capturing information at the grassroots level, and mobilizing people to implement policies, the law on land, security and order contributed to the failure of the hostile forces’ conspiracies in the Mieu Mon airport incident such as the communes of My Luong, Tran Phu, Dong Lac. Particularly for Dong Tam commune, many households intentionally did not obey despite the dialogue and explanation of the commune authorities and other authorities. ”The investigation agency seized documents proving that Mr. Le Dinh Kinh was the ringleader, gathering other people, including rogue and drug addicts gathered to Dong Tam, divided into rafts to swear to be heavy consequences! This issue has called for contributions from many places, including funding from reactionary overseas organizations, turning the claim for land in Dong Tam into an excuse to put pressure on the government, against the State” [Dang Truong 2020].

The communal political system has not only all the characteristics of the national political system, but also those of its own: the communal level of the political system is not the level of policy making, it is the level of action, which brings policies to life. It is the place where political institutions

directly implement the Party views, guidelines, the State policies and laws into reality. The commune level is the last level in the administrative system as well as in the political system of this country; this is the level closest to the people's life and problems, at the same time immediately performing grassroots political tasks. The communal political system is the simplest institution compared to other levels of the political system; this is the level attached to the community. The communal political system is the most numerous. Its cells constitute the political system of Vietnam. Besides, the numbers of cadres and civil servants working in the communal political system are low, highly stable compared to the political system at other levels, the stability in the job position is evident mostly through the titles of civil servants in each commune, ward and town such as judicial officers – civil servants, cultural – social civil servants, financial – accounting civil servants, cadastral civil servants, because communal civil servants are Vietnamese citizens recruited to hold a title professional skills of the communal People's Committee, in the payroll and salary from the state budget [National Assembly 2008]; commune-level civil servants are rarely transferred to the district and provincial levels.

Achievements and limitations in building the commune-level political system

The building of the Party has many achievements. The grassroots Party organization basically guarantees the consistency of Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh's thought, and steadfast goal of national independence and mastery social meaning; steadfast in innovation. In all communes, wards and towns, there is a strong grassroots Party organization system; most of the villages, hamlets, residential groups, traders etc. have enough Party members to establish a Party cell; the situation of joining activities due to insufficient number of Party members decreased sharply. In the review report on branch of the State-level project "Research, review, evaluate results, impacts and propose solutions to effectively implement Decision 79/2005 / QD-TTg of the Prime Minister", code: KHCN-TB.02X / 13-18, under the Science and Technology Program "Sustainable Development of the Northwest Region" chaired by Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Bui Xuan Hoan affirmed: "Development of the Party, building of grassroots party committees was paid attention. From 2005 up to now, it has admitted over 50,000 party members" [Bui Xuan Hoan 2016].

Besides, the building of communal government has some achievements. In Report on Summary of 3 years of implementation of Law on Local Government Organization, the consolidated Standing Committee of the People's Council includes 1 Chairman of the People's Council and 1 Vice President of the People's Council. The Vice Chairman of the People's Councils are all arranged to be full-time delegates of the People's Council; however, in some localities, the full-time President of the People's Council of the commune is also arranged. Local People's Councils have set up legal boards and socio-economic boards. A committee of the People's Council of a commune consists of the Head, a Vice Head and members working part-time [Ministry of Home Affairs 2018]. The activities of the People's Council's sessions have also seen the latest changes, including the process of discussion and speech at the meetings, the quality and content of the meeting has been improved through the objectives and criteria in the Resolution to move socio-economic development nearer to local reality. Administrative procedures are simplified and many localities have built and operated public services online. The contents and modes of operation of the Front and socio-political organizations have been updated and become more transparent. Most households in the commune are members of socio-political organizations. One of the tasks recognized by the people and increasingly effective in operation is the policy to support members in economic development. Achievements in building

communal political systems stems from a number of reasons: the appropriateness of the path and institution as the basis ensuring still more effective organization and operation; the constant improvement of the contingent of cadres and civil servants; the development of socio-economics.

Along with the achievements, Party building at commune level still has many notable issues. The content of party activities in many places is still monotonous, with low form and efficiency. Leadership and fighting power of many party organizations is still low, even in some places there is no fighting power [Party Affairs Committee 2018]. The quality of Party organizations and Party cells in some places, especially ethnic minorities, has been changing slowly. Besides, in the Party building work at the commune level, many Party members are remote from the people, the most bureaucratic manifestations are Party members in urban branches; Party members and cadres show negativity. The biggest weakness of the People's Committees of communes is the spirit of cadres and civil servants in discharging of administrative procedures. It can be shown that administrative procedures are difficult to understand and to implement, many cases are solved according to the old working style, according to habits. As functions and tasks are not clearly distinguished, officials are inclined to intrigue against each other, blame others for mistakes. The management efficiency of the local government at the commune level is still low, which engenders many negatives, such as long drawn-out land disputes, environmental pollution, common social evils. In some places activities of the Fatherland Front and mass organizations are but administrative procedures. With little innovation and lack of attractiveness, they are not really linked to socio-economic programs. The coordination to resolve pressing and outstanding cases among the masses is not smooth. The practical capacity of staff working in the Front and unions has not met the requirements and has not been oriented properly. The process of building communal political system still has many limitations, due mostly to internal causes of the political system.

The aforementioned fact puts forward some issues to be solved: the new mechanism – the old apparatus situation; the re-arrangement of personnel when two communes are merging into one; the situation of the Party encroaching on the State or vice-versa. If leadership and management are ineffective, nobody takes responsibility; besides, negative manifestations such as bureaucracy, corruption and waste are still here.

Solutions to improving operational efficiency for the communal political system

In the near future, to improve operational efficiency for the communal political system, it is necessary to have some following solutions:

firstly, updating and streamlining the organizational structure in order to raise the effectiveness and efficiency of the communal political system. The process of updating and decreasing the commune-level organizational structure means not only to reduce the numbers of “officials” but to ensure the consolidation and to improve the quality of the “official” team along with enhancing the efficiency of operation and service in each agency and unit. This is a factor to ensure the effective implementation of all central and local guidelines and policies, contributing to promote the socio-economic development of each locality, focusing on reviewing, arranging and consolidating the organization of agencies, of the Party units, authorities and communal socio-political organizations. Leaning upon the organizational structure to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the political system is an important step, contributing to the successful implementation of the proposed political mission;

secondly, raising awareness of cadres, Party members and civil servants on the role of the communal political system in the new era. The lowest-level position, but not the least important one in the organization of the political system is the role of the commune-level political system. Currently, cadres and Party members must be determined to build a competent political system and operate more effectively;

thirdly, to update operating modes and relationships among members of the communal political system. The Party leadership procedure needs to improve the orientation of major advocates, strengthen the autonomy of the government, avoid making excuses, and execute something more than functions and tasks; Party grassroots organizations leadership must ensure the principle of democratic centralism, undertake a task to lead groups and individuals, pay more attention to cadre activity, improve the quality of cadres and Party members by political and ideology education, lifestyle ethics, and working style in order to promote the pioneering and exemplary role of the team cadres and Party members in the implementation of socio-political tasks. For commune-level authorities, the aim is to improve efficiency and effectiveness in management and administration. It is necessary to clearly define the Fatherland Front's contents and modes of operation with mass organizations on the basis of ensuring the true principles, objectives and directions returning to the commune, concentrating on the commune, practically protecting the legal rights and benefits of members and union members in order to improve the quality of mass mobilization.

Besides updating the operating modes of organizations in the grassroots political system, one of the important solutions to promote the role of this system in the performance of grassroots political tasks is the relationship of member organizations in the grassroots political system. Special attention should be paid to the relationship between the Party committee and the commune authorities;

fourthly, to update and improve policies for selecting, training, retraining and using of communal cadres and for their remuneration. To improve the quality of the contingent of communal cadres and civil servants in the near future, it is necessary to focus on specific solutions, such as: regular annual training according to regulations; educating on quality and ethics, eradicating degeneration of the contingent of communal cadres, especially key cadres; paying more attention to train and improve the qualifications of grassroots cadres according to the motto of linking training and retraining with the arrangement in order to promote the competent knowledge and create conditions to motivate staff for active and diligent study, for practice to improve qualifications; to increase the recruitment and admission of full-time university graduates to work in communes, to update and improve the recruitment policy, training, fostering, use and remuneration of commune-level officials;

fifthly, strengthening the work of directing, inspecting, supervising and doing well the assessment, rating, emulation and commendation; updating both awareness and implementation of the assessment, rating and commendation of Party organizations, especially the Party grassroots organizations, to ensure natural development, but not chase after achievements. Carrying out synchronous inspection and supervision at all levels from the branch office upwards, the Party committees must develop programs and plans and seriously implement the inspection, supervision, and prevention. It is important to concentrate on sensitive areas and public interest. Renovating processes and methods consolidate and improve the quality of the staff engaged in inspection and supervision.

Conclusion

In recent years, the construction of the communal political system in Vietnam has had many achievements in the work of Party- and government-building at the commune-level, in building the Fatherland Front and the commune-level social and political organizations, but there are still many limitations due to various causes leading to grassroots-level political tasks not commensurated with the position and role of the commune-level political system. On that basis, the study has pointed out the issues risen in the construction of the commune-level political system, thereby proposing a number of corresponding solutions to improve the operational efficiency of the future commune-level political system.

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