

IRSA - CONGRESSO MUNDIAL DE SOCIOLOGIA RURAL (01/10/2025 A
20/01/2026) - IRSA 34 - DIVERSE TRANSITIONS OF FARMING AND
PEASANTRIES

**GOVERNING MARINE COMMONS: HOW SPATIAL RIGHTS ALLOCATION
AND PARTICIPATION STRUCTURES SHAPE BENEFIT DISTRIBUTION IN
CHINA'S MARINE RANCHING**

Yu Hongwei (343673251@qq.com)

Hou Yufeng (hyf@cau.edu.cn)

Wu Jin (wujin@cau.edu.cn)

Liu Feng (Liufeng2008@cau.edu.cn)

This study examines the diversified transition pathways of coastal small-scale producers under marine ranching development in China, focusing on how institutional arrangements shape participation and livelihood outcomes. Marine ranching represents a new form of agricultural and fisheries transition in coastal rural areas, where traditional fishing households are re-integrated into hybrid production systems combining aquaculture, stock enhancement, and collective resource management. These transformations generate differentiated opportunities and risks for smallholders, depending on governance structures and participation channels.

Based on 510 household surveys and qualitative interviews conducted in Yantai, a major marine ranching demonstration area, the study develops a Rights–Decision–Delivery (RDD) framework to analyze how spatial rights allocation and decision-making participation affect benefit distribution among small-scale producers. The results show that participation in collective decision-making strongly increases the likelihood that households receive dividends, subsidies, and other material benefits from marine ranching. In contrast, centralized or enterprise-dominated management arrangements significantly constrain participation and indirectly weaken livelihood outcomes for smallholders.

Mediation analysis indicates that more than half of the governance effect on benefit distribution operates through participation mechanisms, revealing how institutional design shapes differentiated transition trajectories within the same rural community. By situating marine ranching within broader debates on agrarian transformation and peasant differentiation, this study contributes to understanding how new agricultural forms can either support inclusive smallholder transitions or reinforce new patterns of inequality in coastal rural development.

Palavras-chave: marine ranching; rural livelihoods; participatory governance; coastal commons; benefit distribution; china.