

**Tamed village “democracy”: elections, governance and
clientelism in a contemporary Chinese village**

Guohui Wang

Department of Politics
University of Glasgow

March 2008

81,403 words

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Ph.D in
politics in the Department of Politics at the University of Glasgow

© Guohui Wang March 2008

Abstract

The thesis is an exploration of the elections and governance in a contemporary Chinese village. It is a qualitative case study of one village in Shandong Province, China, using in-depth interviews with villagers, village candidates, township officials as well as national, provincial, township and village documents. It reveals how the clientelist system functions in and shapes the process of the village elections and governance.

Drawing upon the qualitative data and empirical evidence collected in the field site, the thesis challenges the liberal-democratic view that the implementation of direct village elections and self-governance, which is generally considered to be “village democracy”, has empowered villagers to resist the state and may mark the beginning of a bottom-up democratization in China. In contrast, it argues that even procedurally “free and fair” village elections largely fail to deliver meaningful results, and that village governance, although in the name of self-governance, actually continues to be dominated by the Chinese local state. This is because clientelist structures, embodied in vertical patron-client alliances between political elites and villagers, have strongly influenced the actors and functioned to facilitate and supplement the authoritarian control of the state.

The thesis also contests interpretations of village elections and self-governance that stress the state’s formal administrative capacity over controlling and manipulating village politics. While it shows some of the formal mechanisms by which township government control village affairs, it demonstrates also that after the implementation of the “village democracy” the state is still able to maintain its authoritarian capacity by taking advantage of the informal clientelist interaction between local state officials and the village elites.

Table of Contents

<i>List of abbreviations</i>	iv
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	v
1. Introduction	<i>page 1</i>
2. The social and system background of villagers’ self-governance	 31
3. Villagers as clients and locked-in voters	56
4. Candidates, patrons and factions	81
5. The role of local state officials in village elections	110
6. Village self-governance: a “democratic” style?	137
7. The local state’s sustained control of village governance	168
8. Conclusion	194
<i>Appendix 1: Interviewee list</i>	209
<i>Appendix 2: Organic Law of the Villagers’ Committee of the People’s Republic of China (Provisional)</i>	 212
<i>Appendix 3: Organic Law of the Villagers’ Committee of the People’s Republic of China</i>	 217
<i>Appendix 4: VC election results of B village in 1999, 2002 and 2004</i>	 225
<i>Bibliography</i>	228

List of Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
MoCA	Ministry of Civil Affairs
NPC	National People's Congress
NPCSC	National People's Congress Standing Committee
OLT	Old Leading Team
PRC	People's Republic of China
VC	Villagers' Committee
VPB	Village Party Branch
VEC	Village Election Committee
VFST	Villagers' Financing Small Team
VGM	Village General Meeting
VRA	Villagers' Representative Assembly

Acknowledgements

This thesis is a shared enterprise. In the research and writing of this thesis, I have incurred an unusually extensive array of debts, both personal and intellectual. I am particularly indebted to my supervisor, Professor Jane Duckett, for her invaluable guidance, utmost support, continual encouragement, infinite patience as well as her detailed feedback on numerous drafts of the thesis throughout. Her dedication, preciseness, stimulation and optimism have contributed enormously to my completing this work.

I am also grateful to a number of persons who have generously shared their wisdom with me by commenting on different drafts of my thesis at different stage: Christopher Berry, Stephen White, Yang Tuan, Ariel Hui-Min Ko, Thomas Johnson, Christopher Lamont, James Derleth and Jack Gallagher.

Politics Department of Glasgow University is an excellent place for academic work and it has provided me with an extremely supportive and encouraging environment throughout my work toward a Ph.D. I would like to thank the Director of Postgraduate Studies, Alasdair Young, the graduate secretaries, Pamela McNair, Michelle Smith and Silvia Arabia for their excellent assistance and support.

I also owe large debt of gratitude to those people in China who have generously offered various indispensable help during my fieldwork in China. In particular, I am very grateful to my uncle Wu Hongzheng, without whose assistance I would not have carried out my fieldwork in China with great advantage. I must also thank the officials in Xinjia Township and people in B village, who have kindly offered various assistance and cooperation but need to remain anonymous. They have shared their experiences and

taught me about rural China. However, none of the above bears any responsibility for the opinions expressed below. I am, of course, solely accountable for all errors and omissions in this thesis.

My deep gratitude also goes to my wife, Ying. It is her love, support and optimism that have provided me the strength to overcome all the difficulties throughout the years leading to my Ph.D and this thesis would have proved impossible to complete without her dedication, commitment and encouragement.

Finally, an immeasurable degree of thankfulness goes to my loving parents. My dream of pursuing Ph.D study in Britain only came true with their utmost support, both financial and emotional. This thesis is dedicated to them.

1 Introduction

Understanding village elections and governance in contemporary rural China

Villagers' committee (hereafter VC) elections and villagers' self-governance¹, as a policy adopted by the central Chinese party-state, is considered to be one of the main substantive and continuing political reforms in rural China following the 1989 crackdown, and therefore has received a great deal of attention in the past decade and a half. As one scholar has put it: since very few developments can be regarded as having moved the Chinese regime towards democracy since June 1989, "village self-governance, of which village election is the foundation as well as the salient feature, stands out prominently" (Louie 2001: 135).² For those who hope for China's democratization, village elections and villagers' self-governance represent the major positive indicator that even if full-scale democracy is not in prospect in the foreseeable future, small steps in that direction can be taken.

When initially passed in 1987 with great controversy among Chinese legislators, the Organic Law of the Villagers' Committee of the People's Republic of China (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo cunmin weiyuanhui zuzhifa*), which defines and validates VC elections and villagers' self-governance, had only "provisional" status (hereafter the

¹ The overwhelming majority of west literature on Chinese village politics has applied the term "village election" or "village self-governance" when referring to *cunmin weiyuanhui xuanju* or *cunmin zizhi*, which, if literally translated, should be "villagers' committee (VC) election" or "villagers' self-governance". In this thesis, the term "village election" is used interchangeably with "VC election" and it is the same for "village self-governance" and "villagers' self-governance".

² The quoted description here about the relationship of villagers' self-governance and VC elections is consistent with the Chinese official definition, according to which, VC election is actually part of the content constituting villagers' self-governance system. The villagers' self-governance is claimed to have four constituents: "democratic elections, democratic decision-making, democratic management and democratic supervision". See *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo minzheng bu* (Ministry of Civil Affairs of the PRC): (1994) and article 2 of the Revised Organic Law. For clarification purpose, this thesis, however, take village election and (self-)governance separately in some places.

provisional Organic Law). It was only ten years later that the “provisional” label was removed and the Law was finally fully promulgated in 1998 (hereafter the revised Organic Law or the Organic Law). Since 1998, VC elections and villagers’ self-governance have been implemented throughout rural China with the central government’s backing, and VC elections in particular have been seen as the “largest-scale and most influential political activity in contemporary rural China” (He, Wu, and Tong 2001). Nowadays, “competitive elections have become an important part of village life, arousing much interest and excitement” (Bernstein 2006: 32). Some scholars even hold that village elections and villagers’ self-governance are “a genuine revolution, whose impact and influence cannot be less than any transformation in the Chinese modern revolutionary history” (Liu 2002: 8). As a result, in the past decade, Chinese village elections and self-governance have attracted considerable academic attention from both Chinese domestic and overseas researchers. What is more, the western media and politicians³ have also shown great enthusiasm for the VC elections, which are considered to be a way going along with the “trend of international democratic politics” (Chen 2000: 9-10). Also, a number of international non-governmental organizations such as the Ford Foundation, Carter Centre, International Republic Institute, National Democratic Institute, United Nations Development Program and European Commission have been involved by providing research funding, training Chinese electoral officials as well as offering other support of various forms (Shelley 2000). Village elections and self-governance have become a very hot topic in Chinese studies, resulting in a large number of scholarly works.

The key reason that contemporary Chinese village elections and self-governance have attracted so much academic attention and enthusiasm is that they have been closely associated with or even directly labeled by many scholars as “democracy” or “democratization” in an authoritarian party-state, something new and unexpected. Terms like “grassroots democracy”, “village democracy”, “democratic elections”, “electoral

³ For example, in 1997 and 1998, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton both lauded village elections in discussions with ranking Chinese officials. See O'Brien and Li (2000): 484.

democracy”, “bottom-up democratization” have been widely used to refer to village elections and self-governance by these China observers (e.g., Brandtstadter and Schubert 2005; Kennedy 2002; e.g., Lawrence 1994; Li 2002; Li 2003; Manion 2006; O'Brien 1994; Pastor and Tan 2000; Pei 1995; Shi 1999b; Zweig and Fung 2007). This thesis, however, challenges the view that “democratic village elections” and “grassroots democracy” have been gradually developing and flourishing and may make a significant contribution to China’s democratization from the “bottom up”. It also challenges the arguments of those who have rejected the view that village elections are somehow a form of training ground for democracy in China by emphasizing the party-state’s authoritarian control of village administration. Instead it argues that the “authoritarian” approach does not adequately address the interaction between the authoritarian state and villagers who are supposed to have been empowered by village elections and reforms of village governance.

This thesis is a qualitative study based on the in-depth investigation of one Chinese village. I argue that the majority of scholarship focusing on the formal rules and institutions of village elections and governance overlooks the “invisible rules” or social institutions, notably informal personal (patron-client) ties and networks and their role in village elections and governance. Despite decades of reform, Chinese villagers today are still largely dependent on their informal social networks. Ordinary villagers in particular are still dependent on various patrons who can claim their votes in elections, even when those elections are conducted in a way that is formally and procedurally free and fair. Similarly, effective village self-governance and grassroots democracy (if it can be called “democracy”) have been undermined by clientelism. As a result, village elections are not leading to what Lawrence called “democracy, Chinese style” (Lawrence 1994) or bottom-up democratization, but may even be discrediting democratic institutions.

This chapter first reviews in detail the current approaches to studying contemporary Chinese village politics. It then elaborates the clientelist perspective adopted in the

thesis and discusses the research methodology that has been used.

Approaches to analyzing Chinese village elections and self-governance

The current literature analyzing contemporary Chinese village elections and governance can be divided into three approaches: liberal-democratic, authoritarian and developmentalist.

The Liberal-democratic approach: bottom up democratization?

Scholars favouring this approach either argue or assume that direct village elections and villagers' self-governance in contemporary rural China are moving in a liberal-democratic direction (Brandtstadter and Schubert 2005; Hong 2006; Kennedy 2002; Lawrence 1994; Manion 2006; O'Brien 2001; Pei 1995; Tan 2004; Wang 1997). These scholars, who often use concepts like "village democracy", "electoral democracy" or "democratic elections" when referring to village elections or governance, tend to emphasise a strengthening civil society. They argue that "democratic" elections and governance in Chinese villages are the result of state retreat from society with the liberalization of both economy and political control. Villagers, grouped in their village communities, are conceived as an emerging and empowered civil society, which has increasing bargaining power for a "collective good" (Brandtstadter and Schubert 2005: 804) against the state. Kevin O'Brien (2001: 416) argues, for example, that village elections, as a "breeding ground for citizenship rights", have encouraged and promoted villagers' sense of citizenship. Thus he predicts that Chinese villagers have begun to claim a more complete "citizenship from below" (2001: 423). Brandtstadter and Schubert (2005) echo this view. They suggest that "grassroots democracy" has enabled villagers to resist the state in a "full scale" if their "rightful" demands are not met (2005: 801). Similarly, Li and Manion find that "electoral democracy" can promote villagers' political efficacy⁴ (Li 2003) and trust in their elected village leaders (Manion 2006). Li

⁴ By political efficacy, Li means external efficacy, which he defines as "beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizens' demands". See Li (2003): 650.

goes even further to conclude that a higher level of efficacy may result in villagers' more active political participation, which may lead to political restructuring in Chinese villages and a change of villagers' understanding of political legitimacy (2003: 660). Wang (1997) also agrees that "grassroots democracy" has empowered the society, but at the same time he argues that the empowered society may largely cooperate with rather than challenge the state.

A major contribution of the liberal-democratic approach is to spotlight and emphasize the role of civil society by focusing on villagers' collective action, community autonomy, or the emerging civic culture in Chinese rural society. However, analysts taking this approach, by almost always using concepts denoting liberal-democracy, clearly assume, although sometime implicitly, that political institutional reform in rural China is a process of political transition leading to liberal-democracy, in other words, democratization.

This approach has two prominent weaknesses. First, in highlighting civil society, it largely downplays, or even ignores the role of the authoritarian party-state in the process of village elections and especially in day-to-day governance. To advocates of this approach, with decollectivization and market reform the Chinese party-state at the rural grassroots level has been largely in "a state of collapse" and unable to "perform [its] normal duties" (Pei 1995: 73). Thus with reduced power the state has no choice but to retreat from the rural grassroots. Or alternatively, the Chinese central government, with the primary intention of supervising and disciplining the local state and its agents, has allied with the peasantry by pushing through grassroots democratic reform. In both cases, the context of rural Chinese society in reform era has therefore created strategic space, at least in village level, where "sprouts of democracy" (Brandtstadter and Schubert 2005: 802) can grow.

While it is apparent that the Chinese party-state has retreated in part from rural society with the ongoing decollectivization and marketization, this does not necessarily mean

that the state is becoming too weak to govern and cannot play a role in village politics. On the contrary, the state in fact has been still in a strong position especially when carrying out “crucial policy issues” like maintaining local social and political stability, economic development, and population control (Zhong 2003: 130-136). As one scholar has pointed out: “the liberalized institutions of rural society are bestowed by the state and, in fact, the state has not reduced the sphere of control in rural society but merely changed the form of control upon village communities—at most, it has reduced redundant and over-direct intervention. The state may ignore what it does not want to control, but it can resume control at any time if it wants to” (Mao 1998: 14).

Although some scholars taking this approach may be aware of the existence of local state and its intervention in village elections and governance, they seem to assume that since village “democracy” is bestowed and supported by the central government, the empowered villagers therefore have been able to strategically make use of the central policy to confront the local state through “rightful resistance”, which may significantly contribute to the peasants’ “growing right consciousness” and the strengthening of social interests (O'Brien 1996). This view, however, may underestimate the local government’s powerful role by risking overestimating the potential of peasants’ “rightful resistance” and the divergence between the central state and its local agents. While the central government may support and push through “grassroots democracy” on the one hand, it also demands local governments to carry out “crucial policy issues” (Zhong 2003: 130-136). It may intend to discipline and supervise its local agents by drawing in villagers, but it is also reluctant to grant them wider political power (O'Brien and Li 1999: 181), which may endanger “stability” or the monopolistic power of the Party. Thus, local governments can always employ strategies, such as “feigned compliance” (Kelliher 1997: 84) or “selective policy implementation” (O'Brien and Li 1999) to resist central policies which do not suit their local situation.

By emphasizing the peasantry or the society’s empowerment by “grassroots democracy”, those taking the liberal-democratic approach downplay the role of the authoritarian state

in village politics and therefore are more inclined to see bottom-up democratization underway. However, if the authoritarian state can still exert power on crucial issues, how far can so-called bottom-up democratization go?

Second, the liberal-democratic approach has failed to recognize both the inequality between villagers and the informal power relations that connect them. Advocates of his model, when portraying Chinese villagers as citizens empowered by “democratic” institutions, often see them as free, equal and able to defend and fight for their “collective good” based on village solidarity (e.g., Brandtstadter and Schubert 2005; O'Brien 2001). When taking “Chinese villagers” or “China’s peasants” as a unitary category, these scholars have largely overlooked or obscured the huge differences among Chinese villagers.

Others or the same scholars in other studies have differentiated between villagers in their research. O’Brien and Li for example, in earlier research on villagers’ efforts at lodging complaints, have argued that villagers are actually divided into two groups: a “handful” of activists of lodging complaints and “*shunmin*”, or compliant villagers, who are “the vast majority” in the village they have studied. They have also noted that some compliant villagers may be either followers of incumbent cadres or supporters of the complainants (1995: 767, 771, 772 and 781). In subsequent research on peasant resistance, they categorize Chinese villagers into three types: compliant villagers, recalcitrants, and policy-based resisters (1996). Nonetheless, when writing on village elections, O’Brien does not make such distinctions, talking instead simply of “Chinese villagers” who actively fight for their “citizen rights” may achieve “a more complete citizenship” (2001: 426) in the future.

Similarly, Brandtstadter and Schubert (2005) argue that the “sprouts of democracy” can be found in village lineage institutions (temples or ancestral halls), which both represent the “rightful collective” (p. 808) and “stand for the idea of a unified group of essentially equal brothers” (p. 814). According to them, the lineage formations of Chinese rural

society in the reform era can contribute to the democratization process because, according to them, villagers can “generalize” the sense of “collective good” and “equality” to their lineage by “thinking (and acting) beyond the village boundaries” (2005: 816).

These studies, while helping deepen our understanding of village politics, also raise important questions. Why are only a “handful” of villagers more conscious to their “citizen rights” while the overwhelming majority of them not? Why do some villagers choose to be followers of incumbent cadres while others support the complainants? Why some villagers fear the retaliation from the cadres but some do not? If, according to Brandtstadter and Schubert, the lineage really represents the idea of a group of “equal brothers” (men), then where is the role of “sisters” (women)? What’s more, even within the group of men, can age, wealth or social status function to privilege some members while disprivilege others? Have the patriarchal authority and filial devotion by which the traditional Chinese family and lineage are ordered (Hsu 1963: 28 ff.) now evolved to value equality?

In short, by downplaying the state while overstating civil society and peasantry, studies taking the liberal-democratic approach have downplayed the power of the authoritarian state and has tended to see village society or villagers as an unitary group empowered by village democracy (and where it has differentiated among villagers has not explained what underpins differences in villagers’ actions relating to the state).

The Authoritarian approach: bringing the state back in

A few scholars, who are critical of the liberal-democratic approach, have tried to “bring the state back in” to the analysis of village politics. Unlike those taking a liberal-democratic approach, these scholars have switched their focus from the society back to the state. They particularly stress the top-down authoritarian party-state structure and its dominant role in village elections and governance. They tend to hold that village elections are highly mobilized and manipulated by the local state (Zhong

2000), village governance is still dominated by administrative power rather than self-governing or autonomous logic (Alpermann 2001; Mao 1998), and elected village officials, or, the village community as a whole, are largely subject to the authoritarian control of the state (Bai 2000; Bernstein 2006; Guo and Bernstein 2004). It is worth noting that scholars taking this approach do not deny that, as a matter of fact, the state has partially retreated from the rural society in the reform era (Louie 2001: 150) and its governing power or capacity of control has declined (Zhong 2003: 182). However, they do not maintain, as do those taking the liberal-democratic approach, that the partial retreat and decline in the power of the state will largely lead to the empowerment of rural civil society. Rather, they tend to see it has more likely resulted in poor implementation of state policies and even paralysis of village governance (Zhao 2006: 82; Zhong 2003: 178-182). Against such background, the local state has no choice but to further tighten up its administrative control over villages so as to maintain its capacity of effectively mobilizing the rural society. As a Chinese scholar, Zhao Shukai, has observed: “while the vigorous launch of direct village elections... [which is] initiating a process of democratization, township party committees and governments are concurrently promoting a process of intensified administrative control over village organizations. ... And as village socioeconomic life is becoming increasingly market oriented and self-determined, organizations of public power within the villages are increasingly controlled by higher administrative levels” (Zhao 2006: 91). From this perspective, therefore, direct village elections or “grassroots democracy” have neither promoted the growth or empowerment of civil society/peasantry, nor made any substantial difference to the authoritarian/administrative control of the state.

While the authoritarian approach is revealing in highlighting the role of the authoritarian local party-state and stressing its powerful control over village elections and governance, it tends to discount the role of civil society and conceives of peasants as atomized, powerless and politically apathetic. In particular, scholars taking this approach would regard village cadres and village organizations as part of the state rather than part of the empowering civil society—even after the arrival of direct village elections. Yang Zhong,

for example, argues:

Even though village authorities are not a formal level of government in the PRC (according to the Chinese Constitution), they are, in reality, perceived, treated, and utilized as part of the state organ. Village cadres thus function as foot soldiers in carrying out state policies. ... The recent experiment with election of a villagers' committee has yet to create a genuine self-governing or autonomous body working for the villagers due to a series of institutional constraints (the village Party secretary's dominant power, subjugation of the villagers' committee to township/town governmental authorities, and the restricted and flawed nomination and election processes) in many villages. Village officials are bound ... to provide service for the state authorities (Zhong 2003: 190).

The authoritarian approach seems to be more persuasive when applied to the places where village elections are merely controlled, rigged, or intentionally ignored by local state. But in places where elections are carried out in accordance with the law, it exposes its weakness. This is because it cannot countenance any interaction between the authoritarian state and elected village cadres. Do elected village cadres who are supposed to serve their constituents passively accept the arbitrary power of state? If so, how can they seek to be re-elected in the next round of elections? If they choose to challenge the state on behalf of its constituents, what will the state's reaction be? In short, advocates of the authoritarian approach have failed to give an adequate explanation of this question: why and how do popularly elected village cadres in what are considered to be procedurally "free and fair" (Li 2003) village elections still largely side with the local state rather than serve villagers. By discounting the role of civil society and peasants, the authoritarian model loses sight of the interaction between state and society.

The Developmentalist approach

Some scholars, by adopting a developmentalist approach, have attempted to explore

why village electoral reform have been implemented more successfully in some places or areas than others in China. They are inspired by “classical” modernization theory in seeing a direct correlation between democratization and economic development, making the former a consequence of the latter. However, the scholars who adopt this approach have far from reached a consensus.

Some argue that economic development can promote the implementation of democratic village elections and the Organic Law has been carried out more successfully in economically developed areas than backward ones (eg., Hu 2005; O'Brien 1994). For example, in an often quoted article of 1994, Kevin O'Brien connected the implementation success of the provisional Organic Law directly to the material wealth in the villages or the townships/counties. Things were going smoothly where local cadres did not have to fear sanctions of the electorate for their management and control of the collective economy. It was they who had led the village to prosperity and who used the income from the collective economy to benefit the village population, for example by investments in local infrastructure or by paying obligatory levies to the township government without charging the peasants. Consequently, they not only substantially enhanced the possibility of their (re-) election; they became also interested in “clean” elections themselves, because these helped them to gain political legitimacy. In villages in poor areas, however, local cadres not only failed to provide satisfactory public services for villagers but also had to come to villagers for economic extraction. This led to very tense relations between local cadres and peasants. Therefore, village cadres in poor areas, who had to offend villagers in extracting funds from villagers and faithfully carrying out tough state policies, had no confidence in winning elections. As a result, local officials in poor areas either choose to ignore the Organic Law or manipulate elections so as to keep those loyal village cadres in office.

Contrary to this view, some scholars have found that village elections are carried out more successfully in poorer areas rather wealthy ones. Based on their single case investigation, both Lawrence (1994) and Hong (2006) argue that village elections have

been organized more successfully in economically underdeveloped villages. Jean Oi (1996) has gone so far as to argue that there is a negative correlation between the level of economic development on the one hand and the degree of electoral implementation on the other. She found that “high levels of economic development do not necessarily bring enthusiasm for implementing democratic reforms” (ibid., p137). In rich villages, the powerful party secretaries have become powerful entrepreneurs who control the villages’ financial resources. Whereas the introduction of direct elections makes the village head accountable to the village population, the party secretary usually is not touched by such an arrangement. His privileged access to the local collective economy enables him to substantially limit the VC’s authority. Based on this empirical finding, Oi concludes that there is an “inverse relationship between level of economic development and progress in the implementation of democratic village rules” (ibid., p141).

Other researchers have suggested a more complex relationship between economic development and electoral implementation in rural China. Based on empirical data gathered from a nationwide survey, Shi (1999a) argues that the relationship between economic development and village elections appears to take the shape of a concave curve. According to him economic development leads to a higher probability of semi-competitive elections. But then growing prosperity translates into a declining probability after a certain point is reached, so that villages in middle-income areas are the most likely to have free and fair elections. In contrast to poor villages, rural income here is above the subsistence level. The peasants have to deliver money to the state and find themselves in a position of relative deprivation against the economically more advanced villages nearby. As a consequence, they are very critical of local cadres who have not contributed enough to the material well-being of the village. At the same time, the cadres face great pressure because they lack financial resources - the village’s collective industry is not developed enough – to win over the villagers or persuade their superiors to manipulate elections and keep them in power. This weak position results in the township and county governments’ determination to implement the Organic Law, because they hope that this will generate new political legitimacy to help carry through

their policies in the villages, push modernization and development, bringing personal benefits to township and county politicians in the long run. According to Shi, in poor villages the peasants are totally absorbed by survival or migrate to the rich coastal provinces and they are simply not interested in political participation in their home villages. In rich villages the motivation to implement true semi-competitive elections is reduced again: The village heads use the financial resources for 'buying' their superiors who manipulate the elections. At the same time, the economic success of village cadres make township government and party branches want to keep them. And the villagers are ready to renounce to clean elections, as long as clever village heads pay their duties and taxes to the state and even redistribute profits of the local collective economy to the villagers.

In an empirical study of the competitiveness of village elections, Oi and Rozelle (2000) also suggest that the nature of the economy in a given village is much more important for the competitiveness of its village elections. They first find that where peasant income is predominantly attached to the cultivation of the land, the degree of political participation and electoral competitiveness is high because of the special importance of land issues in local politics (for example land distribution, irrigation and environmental protection). Second, in industrialized villages the degree of participation and electoral competitiveness is low because, they argue, village cadres are more interested in perpetuating their privileged position and therefore work against the Organic Law; and because the rural population is comparatively well-off it does not see any particular reason to demand more direct participation in local politics. Third, however, the degree of competitiveness rises in those villages that extract surplus revenues out of the collective economy. According to the authors, this was an effect of exactly the same reasons that Shi Tianjian put forth to explain the implementation successes of the Organic Law in middle-income areas: economically successful cadres do not fear elections, but consider them useful fortifiers of their legitimacy. They can influence the outcome of elections through offering material favours without compromising their formal procedures. And they are more likely to transfer the responsibility for local

policies to the VC as long as they keep control over the local economy. Fourth, in villages with a high percentage of out-migrants, participation and electoral competitiveness are declining because villagers who seek employment away from the village have less interest in village elections. In other words: the higher the degree of integration of the village economy into the external economy, the lower the degree of local political participation. Finally, the more private entrepreneurs there are in a village, the higher the competitiveness of local elections. According to Oi and Rozelle this might be due to the fact that entrepreneurs - especially those without party membership - see in village elections a means to defend their interests against the cadre bureaucracy that is often sceptical, if not openly antagonistic towards the private economy.

A developmentalist approach is taken by these China researchers to explore the relationship between economic development and the implementation of VC elections. But the conclusions, based on empirical data from a range of different localities, are often contradictory. More importantly, by focusing on economic development measured by people's income level, all these scholars have paid less attention to the nature of social relationships, which may not necessarily change with the development of the economy.

Toward a clientelist analysis: the interaction between peasant and state

Clientelism, as a widespread phenomenon and important political concept, refers to relationships between "patrons" and their "clients". A patron-client relationship, as defined by Lande (1977: xx) "is a vertical dyadic alliance, i.e., an alliance between two persons of unequal status, power or resources each of whom finds it useful to have as an ally someone superior or inferior to himself". Clientelism, in the view of many scholars (eg. Powell 1970: 421; Scott 1972b: 93) contains three elementary factors that define and differentiate it from other kind of power relations. First, it is a relationship between people of unequal status. Second, it involves reciprocity in the exchange of different

kinds of goods and services between the two parties. Finally, it involves intimate (face to face) contact between the two parties.

Although it has been identified in a variety of social contexts, clientelist politics may be dominant in some societies while marginal in others. Based on his research in Southeast Asia, James Scott (1972b: 101) has argued that three conditions may account for the ascendancy of patron-client structure: first, the existence of prominent inequalities in the control of wealth, status, and power; second, the absence of impersonal institutions that provide personal security; and third, the failure of the kinship unit to offer personal security of advancement. Similarly, Rouquie (1978: 26) points out that the social context in which clientelism thrives may exhibit three characteristics: “insecurity, isolation and the privatisation and concentration of power”.

Clientelism, which has been established to analyze political associations cutting across horizontal groups, such as class, has proven particularly useful in analyzing politics in developing countries. As Scott points out, clientelist analysis can be especially relevant in studies of small local communities where informal interpersonal relationships are salient and may even subvert formal institutional arrangements (Scott 1972b: 92).

The first and most prominent work to apply clientelism to modern Chinese village politics is Jean Oi's *State and Peasant in Contemporary China: The Political Economy of Village Government* (1989). In her stimulating study on Chinese village governance during both commune and post-commune era (1956-1985), Oi argues that “village politics in China is best described as clientelist” (1989: 7). According to Oi, to a large degree, it is informal patron-client ties, rather than formal institutions or official channels, that link the cadres and peasants together at the village level, and which enables both the bureaucratic control of the party-state and individual villager's participation in and influence over the political system. Clientelist interaction between village cadres and ordinary villagers, she suggests, makes a significant contribution to understanding the state-society relationship in communist rural China.

Oi believes that the clientelist nature of Chinese village politics does not come from Chinese culture or tradition. Rather, it is rooted in a socio-economic structure that is “characterized by a scarcity of goods, a centralized distribution system, and unequal access to and personalized control over allocation of goods and opportunities” (Oi 1989: 10). She holds that so long as these characteristics persist, marketization and decollectivization in the post-commune era are unlikely to eradicate the clientelist nature of village politics, though it may transform it. Although her macro-level analysis focusing on “the political economy of village government” means that she did not elaborate on the dynamics of village clientelist politics, Oi’s clientelist perspective on Chinese village politics and state-society relation made a very significant contribution to the study of contemporary Chinese rural politics.

At the time of her research in the early-to-mid-1980s, Oi could not, of course, foresee that village elections would be introduced by the Chinese central government and finally implemented throughout rural China one and half decades later. However, as Oi has correctly argued, as long as the key underpinnings of clientelism endure in China, clientelism will remain important to the understanding of Chinese village politics today even if formal political institutions change. Yet few analysts have paid attention to the role of clientelism in village politics since the introduction of village elections. Even Oi herself, when writing more recently on village elections and government, has abandoned the clientelist perspective on Chinese village politics that she once so eloquently defended (see Oi 1996; Oi and Rozelle 2000).

I argue that it is time to bring patron-client analysis back in to village politics in China today. The workings of village elections and post-election village governance can best be explained using the concept of clientelism.⁵ This thesis emphasizes the informal dyadic alliances between individuals, especially those between people of unequal status.

⁵ Unger (2000: 77-78), Brandtstadter and Schubert (2005: 808-809) have noted that patrons, factions and patronage play a role in village elections and governance today, but they do not pursue this analysis in depth.

In a challenge to the liberal-democratic approach, which focuses on formal “democratic” institutions relating to village elections and governance, this thesis will show how informal personal ties shape political processes and subvert formal rules and institutions. I argue that rather than being empowered by “democratic” rules and horizontally grouping themselves to fight for a “collective good” or “citizenship rights”, Chinese peasants⁶ today still often pursue their individual interests by intentionally entering into or creating particularistic, informal personal alliances. Vertical patron-client association remains the most convenient, simple, effective strategy for peasants to protect themselves against risks and maximize their individual interests. Village direct elections have not changed the long-standing underpinnings of clientelism. Rather, clientelism has become much more overt and pervasive with the arrival of village elections: voting for a particular candidate in an election may be enough to enable a voter to become a client, and thus all voters may have potential opportunities to access a patron’s favoured treatment (See Piattoni 2001: 202-203). Meanwhile, village elections have also led to the competition between patrons with different resource bases within the village community, who are under pressure to enlist as many clients or voters as possible so as to win elections. Village electoral competition, to the extent it exists, has become a contest enrolling personal followers among patrons who are now standing as candidates in elections.

In contrast to the authoritarian approach, which spotlights the powerful and effective administrative control of the party-state, the clientelist perspective shows how informal interactions between state officials and village elites/villagers may constitute an important dimension of the power relationship between state and society. Clientelism reminds us that in the context of an authoritarian state with significant distributive capacity, it is individual state officials who actually monopolize a wide range of scarce resources, like job opportunities, market channels, various business licenses and so on. The monopoly of these critical resources means local officials remain in an ideal

⁶ In this thesis “Chinese peasants” are referred broadly to those with rural household registration in China. The term is not defined as people who work in the agricultural sector.

patron's position to ensure obedience from those who wish to access these scarce goods. Patron-client relationships between local state officials and village elites has largely defused the potential conflict between elected village leaders and township officials and makes the village elites, especially the elected village cadres, more inclined to privilege cooperation with township officials over serving their constituents. At the same time, to win compliance and exercise control state officials nowadays often use patronage rather than the administrative coercion that is highlighted by the authoritarian approach.

Bringing under closer scrutiny examination of the nature of social relationships might help explain the apparent inconsistencies in the developmentalist explanations of differences in the implementation of village elections. The clientelist perspective indicates the need to probe beneath the surface of apparently competitive village elections, since even elections that comply with the letter of the law and adhere to formal procedures can be undermined in practice by patron-client relations that may not be immediately identifiable to researchers. Though further study is needed to determine empirically the prevalence of clientelism in rural China and its effects on village elections and governance in the 21st century, I argue that it is highly likely to be found across rural China regardless of level of economic development. If clientelism and its impact on the conduct of village elections and governance is not found in all villages, the question is then under what conditions it does flourish.

Finally, although based on the study of only one village, that village is one with a relatively good level of economic development, and this suggests that clientelism can persist even when villages have escaped conditions of economic scarcity. This challenges the conventional explanations of clientelism as developed by Scott and Rouquie, which sees scarcity or poverty as an essential pre-requisite. This is something to which I will return in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

Methodology: A case study of one village community

Why a case study?

The choice of research strategy was shaped by my research questions and the nature of the information I need for my analysis. I chose a qualitative case study approach for three reasons.

First, the unique strength of the case study approach in discovering questions and puzzles is particularly important for this project. Compared to quantitative methods, which usually use large samples and examine a limited number of and quantifiable variables, the qualitative case study method involves an in-depth, longitudinal examination of a single instance or event. It offers a systematic way of exploring events, collecting data, analyzing information and interpreting phenomena. As a result, the case study method enables a researcher to gain a sharpened understanding of *why* the instance happened as it did and what might become important to look at more extensively in future research (Flybjerg 2006; Yin 2003).

Due to the complexity of China's rural transition process and limited knowledge of the subject under examination, a variable-oriented approach, which in most cases starts by specifying the relevant variables, matching them to theoretical concepts and collecting information on these variables, is unsuitable. As Zweig and Fung, who although themselves employed a quantitative method in their inquiry of Chinese village elections, have frankly confessed that "good indicators of democracy, stability, economic development or good governance are not easy to collect". They add: "though few analysts confess to the limitations of their data, because it would call into question their findings, surveying rural China on political variables is costly and very difficult." Therefore, they suggest analysts of Chinese rural politics "should not give up case studies, or in-depth interviews" (Zweig and Fung 2007: 43). This is not, however, a sufficient reason to do case study research in rural China. In terms of case studies in

village China, in-depth survey and information collecting can be as difficult as quantitative research, if not more (See Friedman 2006). In terms of Chinese village politics, the real problem with quantitative surveys in my view is not difficulty in collecting data of “good” indicators but difficulty in *identifying* those “good” indicators. In other words, quantitative analysts often fail to choose proper indicators at the very beginning due to lack of detailed understanding of the villages under survey. For example, in their study on village elections, Jean C. Oi and Scott Rozelle take the villagers’ participation rate as an important indicator to measure the villagers’ enthusiasm of choosing their village leaders (Oi and Rozelle 2000). However, my study shows that villagers’ high participation rate can be due to either government mobilization (by paying money to villagers who vote) or by mobilization of village elite (by using the influence of personal relationships). This demonstrates that without full understanding of various variables and the relationship between them, large-scale quantitative survey and analysis may lead to inaccurate results. The unique strength of qualitative research, which enables the use of different methods—interviews, observations and secondary materials, is that it can help identify questions, select measurement indicators, and develop questions for further quantitative research.

Second, the great regional and socioeconomic diversity of rural China justifies a refined and focused approach. In contemporary rural China, there is great regional differentiation and huge socioeconomic diversity. For example, Bernstein and Lu (2003: 241) argue that to understand the complexities of China’s countryside, it is essential to differentiate between three rural Chinas: industrializing rural China, middle-income agricultural China and low-income western China. According to the village economic context, Oi and Rozelle (2000) differentiate between industrialized villages, agricultural villages, villages with more (fewer) out-migrants, villages with more (fewer) self-employed. Despite these efforts to reflect the huge diversity of China’s countryside, when analyzing village elections and governance, they are far from enough. In terms of population, there are big villages with several thousand villagers, small villages with only several dozen villagers and also middle-sized villages with several hundred

villagers (Shen 2004: part 1); in terms of geographical location, there are remote villages in mountain areas, suburban villages and villages enclosed by urbanization; in terms of clan background, there are villages dominated by one single clan, villages dominated by two or more big clans and villages without any clan background; in terms of economic development, there are agricultural villages, industrialized villages, villages with strong collective economy as well as villages without collective economy at all. China's countryside is like a kaleidoscope composed of numerous diverse villages. Even in the township where I conducted my fieldwork, villages have very distinctive characteristics. With the coming of the national policy on elections and governance, dramas performed in these various village arenas will be by no means similar. Thus, an intensive exploration of a single case can provide in-depth analysis and fully reveal the political dynamics.

Third, there is a further benefit to qualitative method: interviews instead of questionnaires are a much better way to get at the issues. Quantitative surveys are desirable in those circumstances where respondents have no difficulty in understanding questions and expressing themselves freely. But the nature of the data needed for this research on village politics does not fit well with these requirements. On the one hand, due to the low educational level in Chinese countryside, many villagers can either be illiterate or have difficulty in correctly understanding the meaning of the questions on questionnaires. On the other hand, a traditional "culture of fear", though much relaxed now, may still deter people from expressing their true ideas when answering questionnaires. Long interviews, however, can provide substantial room for interviewers to explain confusions and clarify misunderstandings for the interviewees. Interviews can also provide additional advantage of capturing the true information from the interviewees' body language, expression in their eyes, tone as well as their implications. Meanwhile, interviewees may get familiar with the interviewer during a period of prolonged fieldwork and then feel free to express their views to the interviewer, especially on some politically sensitive issues.

Of course, generalizations made from a detailed case study of one single village may not be applicable to other villages. But it can be used to generate hypotheses and comparative material for further investigation. This is the soundest way to obtain scientific generalizations. As some scholars have pointed out, “the rural grassroots politics and intricate patterns of development and change in China’s villages can most fully be understood and appreciated through detailed microstudies”(Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1992: 2).

Why B village?

To choose a village for qualitative research, practicalities are very important consideration. It would have been extremely difficult to carry out an intensive study in a Chinese village relating to politics as an outsider. That is why I firstly confine my case within my native place, where I own some unique advantages. As a native, I can start with a linguistic advantage. Differences in Chinese dialect are one of the practical difficulties in carrying out field investigation. Being a native of the district, it was not necessary for me to spend time in learning the local dialect. And because I spoke the same dialect, people seemed to see me as a native of the same district, enabling me to penetrate into more personal lives without arousing much suspicion. Meanwhile, as a native, I could fully use the personal connections (*guanxi*) to facilitate my study.⁷

In fact, personal connections played an indispensable role in facilitating my fieldwork. One of my relatives is a government official of my hometown Yantai City. At my request, he introduced me to an official of Longkou City, which is one of the county-status cities under the jurisdiction of Yantai City. The leader of Longkou City then introduced me to the Party secretary of Xinjia Township, which is under the jurisdiction of Longkou City. Thus, I was accepted by Xinjia Township, where I was able to carry out my fieldwork. During my stay in Xinjia Township, an office in the township government building was specially allocated to me. Being able to stay in the

⁷ Actually, in order to do solid investigation and collect reliable data, it is not uncommon for some China analysts to carry out fieldwork in places where they have personal connections. For example, see Yang (1994), Wang (2003: 12 and 13), Yan (1992: 2) and Yin (2004: 239).

township government allowed me to contact and observe the township officials as an “insider” rather than an “outsider”, which could make the information collected much more reliable.

After settling down, I started to consider which village to choose as my case. There are a total of 28 villages under the jurisdiction of Xinjia Township. I first tried to get familiar with as many villages as possible by reading some official documents about each village. Then, I tried to get a direct impression of the village by visiting each one and interviewing the respective village cadres. Finally, I also discussed and consulted with township officials so as to gain more background or inside information about the individual villages. The process was by no means a simple one. The villages were very different across social, political, and economic dimensions. But among the different villages, I finally selected B village.

B village is located in the middle of Xinjia Township. A motorway leading to the Longkou City centre just passes the main entrance of the village. It takes no more than 15 minutes by bus to get the Xinjia Township government and around 25 minutes to arrive the Longkou City centre (town centre) from the village entrance. So the traffic is actually quite convenient for the villagers of B village and the mobility of the villagers is rather frequent.

B village is an administrative village consisting of four villagers small groups (*cunmin xiaozu*). According to the figure for 2002, B village has a total of 316 households, 909 villagers, among whom there are 700 eligible voters.⁸ By 2002, B village has a total of 820 *mu*⁹ farmland, and it is 0.9 *mu* per villager by average. It is said that B village once had around 1,400 *mu* farmland (about 1.5 *mu* per villager) in the beginning of 1980s

⁸ This figure was according to B village's household registration. Namely, only the people whose household registration was in B village were legally considered villagers of B village. By 2002, there were about 40 people who resided in B village but had no B village household registration. These people included relatives of some villagers, outsidery workers employed by some villager entrepreneurs as well as some villagers who owned urban household registration but still resided in B village.

⁹ 1 *mu* = 0.1647 acres = 0.0667 hectares.

(Interviews 32 and 50). However, over the last 20 years, hundreds of *mu* have been either confiscated by the government for public construction (like road construction) and industrialization or turned to industrial use by the village collective. B village once had been one of only a few industrialized villages in Xinjia Township, with a strong collective economy. From the early 1980s until the middle of the 1990s, a number of village owned enterprises had been created and run by the village collective. However, all these collective-owned undertakings had eventually become bankrupt. During the late 1990s, all these collective-owned enterprises were either closed down or sold to private owners in line with the government's privatization policy. By early 1999, shortly before the first direct VC election, B village's last collective enterprise, a hennery, was privatized. Since then, the collective income of B village has been derived mainly from renting out collective land or property, which earns around 15,000 Chinese *yuan*¹⁰ a year (Interviews 52 and 55).

Although the village collective economy is stagnant, the average living standard of the villagers of B village actually is much better than that of most rural dwellers in the inland rural areas of China. The average annual net per capita income of B village in 2004 is RMB 3,500, according to Xinjia government figures.¹¹ Most of the village's young and middle-aged villagers have chosen to seek paid employment jobs outside the village, which makes a significant contribution to village per capita income. But unlike their counterparts in the inland rural areas, who have to migrate from their native places to find jobs in the developed eastern coastal areas, the overwhelming majority of young and middle-aged villagers in B village can easily find off-farm jobs within the area of their native township or city and therefore still reside in the village.

Quite a few villagers also have their own private businesses, such as repairing vehicle tyres, handy shops, restaurants, henneries, small factories and so on. Income from cultivating farmland is only a small share of most villagers' total. Even in terms of

¹⁰ 100 Chinese *yuan* is equal to approximately 6.67 pounds sterling by the exchange rate in 2004.

¹¹ Whereas the national average figure in 2004 is 2936. See *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guojia tongjiju* (National Statistics Bureau of the People's Republic of China) (2005).

cultivating farmland, many villagers in B village nowadays prefer to grow commercial crops, such as ginger, leeks and garlic, rather than corn or grain. Thanks to a big food processing factory invested in and established by a South Korean company in Xinjia Township, villagers can sell their crops directly to it at a good price. Thus, the comparatively higher incomes of B village residents is largely due to its location in the eastern coastal area of China where the economy development and industrialization have been undergoing rapid development since reform (Jing 2006).

B village is a single lineage village. The overwhelming majority of the households (over 95 percent households) belong to one big lineage with the surname *Qu*. It is said that during Qing dynasty one family moved to B village and settled down and this is the source of the *Qu* lineage today. But the whole *Qu* lineage is subdivided into seven lineage branches (interviews 47 and 50). So, although all the *Qu* families of B village can be traced back to the same ancestry, they nowadays belong to seven different lineage branches. Unlike many villages in other Chinese rural areas, particularly in southern China, where lineage organizations have played an active role in village politics (e.g. see Tsai 2002), in B village lineage-based organizations are absent today. Although it is said that the *Qu*'s lineage temple and lineage activities existed in B village's history, after the takeover of the communists all these were banned. During the Cultural Revolution, the *Qu*'s lineage temple was pulled down. Since then, no effort has ever been made to revive the lineage institutions in B village. Today, only a few older villagers remember the *Qu*'s lineage organizations and activities before 1949.

B village was finally chosen as my case for three reasons. First, VC elections in B village had apparently been highly competitive. By the time of my first fieldwork in March 2004, two rounds of direct VC elections had been held in B village. Both rounds had been competitive in the sense that they had resulted in a change of leadership. In the 1999 election, the incumbent VC cadres (old factions) were ousted by the challengers (new factions); However, in the 2002 election, the candidates of the "old faction" won back office and supplanted the "new faction" (B village's elections based on factional

contests will be discussed in Chapter 4). The competitiveness of elections makes the case of B village much more interesting than others and perhaps made it a more likely example of democratic elections. Quite a few villages in Xinjia Township had barely changed VC leaders from elections because, for example of the dominant role of big clans, no strong opposition challenging the incumbent or lack of willing candidates. Unlike those villages, the politics in B village had seemed to be dynamic and attractive, which greatly aroused my curiosity.

Second, B village had developed an industrialized collective economy during 1980 and 1990s. But that collective economy had collapsed and privatized economy developed just at the time of the implementation of direct VC election. The relationship between economic development and VC elections and governance has been a controversial topic. B village would provide a good field for the analysis of this problem.

Finally, B village is more information-accessible to me. To base my research on a single case, information accessibility is of great importance. The township government official responsible for B village (the “village guarantee cadre”, see Chapter 7) is an experienced official who has worked in Xinjia township for more than twenty years. He is also a very nice and accessible person, who was willing to help me with my research. Also, the cadres of B village during my first trip were all easily accessible.¹² What is more, since there have been two “factions” running for power in this village, I found that each faction was eager to defend itself while attacking the other. Compared to many other villages that are in a style of the ruling village elites vs. the silent masses, this village would be a better field for me to collect, judge and compare data.

Sources of the study

The sources of this study come from three parts: field visits and in-depth interviews, non-participant observations and official documents and published materials.

¹² In quite a few villages, those village cadres also run their own businesses or act as the managers of the village collective enterprises. I found that those cadres were usually too busy to be bothered. However, none of the cadres of B village at that time had had such burdens. So they had been more free to talk to me or help me.

Field visits and in-depth interviews

A total of three field visits were made for this research project (1 March to 7 May 2004, 12 November 2004 to 10 January 2005, and 8 November to 17 November 2005). During my three research trips, I conducted qualitative interviews with more than fifty interviewees. The interviewees include ordinary villagers, village cadres, village elites and government officials. In addition, in the course of my writing up this thesis, I had also conducted a number of follow up interviews by telephone.

The interviews with government officials were made through personal contact by me. The interviews with those incumbent or former village cadres were arranged by the Xinjia Township officials. Some average villager interviewees were introduced by the village cadres. And the rest villager interviewees were randomly chosen according to the village household registration and then I approached them with the introduction of the village cadres. All interviews were conducted confidentially by me alone. I explained to all the interviewees that the interviews were for academic purpose and they were also given the option of anonymity and confidentiality.

Non-participant observations

During my first research trip (18 March to 7 May 2004), I was able to observe (as a researcher) the administrative activities in B village, such as the VC meetings, villagers' representative meetings, Party members meetings and activities of villagers' financing small team (VFST). During my second trip (12 November 2004 to 10 January 2005), I observed the 8th session of VC elections in Xinjia Township. I observed a total of 15 VC elections including B village.¹³ I also participated the election preparation meeting of Xinjia Township, the election of villagers' representatives in B village and the villagers' representatives' meeting for electing villagers' financing small team of B village. In addition, I attended the handing over and taking over procedure between the step-down

¹³ There are a total of 28 villages under the jurisdiction of Xinjia Township. I could not observe all 28 elections personally because in a few cases two electoral meetings were hold simultaneously in two villages.

and newly elected VCs.

Official documents and published materials

During my fieldwork I systematically collected official documents, especially from the village committee, township and county governments. These documents include the government circulars, local policies and regulations, official speeches, various meeting records and so on. A significant portion of these is “internal documents” (*neibu wenjian*), i.e. materials which are restricted to the administration only. Meanwhile, the relevant published materials, such as newspapers, magazines, books, were used extensively as well.

Structure of the thesis

The rest of the thesis will be divided into seven Chapters.

Chapter 2 starts with a detailed introduction of the historical and institutional context for village elections and governance in rural China. Both the national and local institutions concerned are discussed. Special attention is paid to the changes after the implementation of direct VC elections in 1999. This serves for setting a historical and institutional background for the further detailed inquiry of the case village.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 explore VC elections in B village by analyzing three different political actors respectively, namely, the voters/villagers (Chapter 3), the candidates/village elites (Chapter 4), and the local state officials (Chapter 5). These three chapters attempt to reveal how different actors behave and why they choose such strategies in the course of direct VC elections. Chapter 3 deals with the ordinary villagers/voters. It argues that, rather than having a strong empowering effects, direct VC elections have far from changed the fact that ordinary villagers today remain in the position of client, who are dependent and therefore subject to the influence of a few

patrons in their village community. With the coming of elections, the villagers' votes are actually largely captured by their patrons through the clientelist networks. Despite the "free and fair" elections, villagers are virtually locked-in voters in their village community. Chapter 4 mainly focuses on the strategies of the candidates for winning the VC elections. It reveals that that, as patrons and middlemen, the village candidates/elites capture votes largely by taking advantage of their patronage resources and clientelist network. During an election, candidates reach villagers/clients to claim their votes mainly on the basis of past, current or future particularistic benefits or favours rather than certain common concerned issues. In order to facilitate vote soliciting, opposing factions formed and consequently village election is largely the factional contest based on factional/clientelist networks. Chapter 5 elaborates the role of local state officials in village elections by concentrating on their strategies to influence or even manipulate the electoral results. It shows that as the policy implementer, the local state officials have skillfully developed some strategies, particularly the clientelist strategy, to strongly influence the electoral results for their advantages on the one hand but without violating the "letter" of the law on the other. These three chapters as a whole attempt to explain why and how "free and fair" VC elections have been largely subject to the clientelist control in reality.

Chapters 6 and 7 deal with post election governance in the village community. It aims to find out whether after direct VC elections the mechanism of "grassroots democracy" has actually worked in the village. Chapter 6 examines how the specially designed "democratic" institutions actually work in reality. It reveals that "grassroots democracy" has been far from functioning properly. The "democratic rules and institutions" are either not implemented at all or are overwhelmed by factional/clientelist considerations. Rather than bringing harmony or legitimacy, "grassroots democracy" risks triggering conflicts within the village community. Chapter 7 discusses the local state's efforts and strategy to handle "grassroots democracy" and maintain its control over village governance. It argues that local state officials' direct, administrative and, more and more indirect, clientelist control has supplanted the "grassroots democracy".

The thesis concludes with Chapter 8, which further clarifies the clientelist nature of village politics today. It ends with an evaluation of village politics and a discussion of the prospect for China's rural political future.

2 The social and system background of villagers' self-governance

The system of villagers' self-governance in rural China has been in place for nearly three decades since a few Guangxi villages decided to elect their own village leaders in late 1980 and early 1981. What began as a stopgap effort to fill a political vacuum with the dismantling of the commune system has developed into one of China's most talked-about political reforms. This chapter aims to provide a general background to this system, particularly in terms of the formal institutions, so as to facilitate analysis in the subsequent chapters on how and why those formal "democratic" institutions have been largely subverted by clientelism in B village.

The discussion will start by reviewing the origin of villagers' self-governance in rural China in the early 1980s. Then I will describe the national legislation (provisional Organic Law) and local regulations for villagers' self-governance before 1998. Finally, I will discuss the revised Organic Law and the related local regulations issued after it was enforced in 1998.

The origin of villagers' self-governance

The dismantling of the people's commune system

Villagers' self-governance germinated and developed on the ruins of the people's commune system. Since the end of the 1950s, with gradual collectivization, the people's commune system was established throughout China. The structure of the commune was such that households were organized into production teams (*shengchan dui*), then production teams formed production brigades (*shengchan dadui*), and production brigades formed the commune.

Under the commune system, the commune controlled all resources and the peasants were tied tightly within it. Peasants had to take part in unified, collective production activities and distribution. With the household registration system carried out from 1958 the whole population was divided into two parts, namely urban households (*chengshi hukou*) and rural ones (*nongye hukou*). Without the approval of the commune organization, peasants had no way to leave this organization. The peasantry was highly organized through the commune, the Party organization and the other organizations subject to the party-state. Through this system, the state realized its totalitarian control of the peasants and was able to extract the maximum surplus from the countryside (See Chen and Ridley 1969; Ling 1997; Shen 2003b; Shen 2004; Zhang 1998; See Zweig 1989).

However, its function completely depended on state coercion, which led to extremely inefficient agricultural production and popular pauperization (Song 2002: 20-21; Xiao 2002a). With the death of Mao Zedong, the new Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders were determined to reform.

The emergence of Villagers' Committees (VCs)

VCs emerged with the collapse of the commune system. Since 1980, confirmed by the third plenary session of the eleventh Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, the household contract system was established and spread throughout rural China. Decollectivization freed peasants from the tight control of the commune (brigade) while bestowing upon them the right to take the initiative regarding decisions concerned with production. Individual households became the accounting units, replacing the production teams set up under the commune system. As a result, peasants, with their newly bestowed autonomy over production, were much more willing to produce, and the rural economy grew quickly. However, with the dismantling of the commune system and the retreat of the state from village communities, a serious “political vacuum” (Hu 2001: 18) appeared in the countryside. On the one hand, the dismantling of the commune system

had left village (brigade) cadres with unclear authority and limited resources; on the other hand, in many villages, since previous village cadres were able to take advantage of the new economic opportunities afforded by decollectivization, they were inclined to leave their positions of leadership and focus on their own family production. Consequently, some public services, such as social security, public facilities, community welfare, and irrigation infrastructure were neglected and rural China was in a state of potential crisis (Chen 2000: 34-37; Song 2002: 21-23; Xiao 2002a: 35-36).

In order to fill the political vacuum formed by the retreat of state power, in some places peasants established village level management organizations by themselves. The earliest villagers' committees (VCs) emerged in Yishan and Luocheng counties, Guangxi Province, in late 1980. Take, for instance, the example of the first VC to be established in China, Guozuo VC of Yishan County. After the implementation of the household contract system, the production brigade stopped functioning and the brigade leaders lost their authority to lead. Meanwhile, unlawful behaviour such as theft became rampant in the village and public facilities such as irrigating aqueducts and village lanes were in a poor condition. As a result, it became urgent to find someone who could stand out and organize the scattered peasants and take charge of public affairs. In February 1980, a former production team leader suggested establishing an organization to manage village public affairs, which was subsequently named the villagers' committee (VC). In order to gain enough authority, the sponsors called for a household representative meeting of the whole village, producing the VC members by anonymous voting. Then the VC worked out the regulations and rules for villagers (*cungui minyue*) and started to manage village public affairs. With the establishment of the VC, village order resumed and public affairs were carried out effectively (Chen 2000: 34-37; Song 2002: 22).

Guozuo village set an example for other places. With the recommendation of local Party leaders, VCs were established throughout the region (Chen 2000: 36). At the same time, similar organizations were created in the rural areas in provinces including Shandong, Sichuan, and Henan. The names of these village organizations were not uniform,

although they were usually called “leadership group for village public security” (*cun zhi'an lingdao xiaozu*) or “village management committee” (*cun guan hui*). Initially, the function of those organizations was keeping social order and maintaining irrigation facilities. Later, these functions gradually extended to the self-governance of rural grassroots social, political and economic affairs (O'Brien and Li 2000).

Peng Zhen's pushing and the Constitutional confirmation of VCs

The popularization of VCs received great attention from the CCP senior leader Peng Zhen, who was then vice-chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) and secretary of the CCP Central Politics and Law Committee. He believed that VCs were the creation of the masses and represented grassroots democracy in practice. He immediately instructed the NPCSC and Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) to investigate carefully in order that it might be spread throughout the country (Song 2002: 22).

Why was Peng Zhen so enthusiastic about the creation of VCs in rural China? His “singular enthusiasm for grassroots elections and villagers' committees can be traced to the era before the foundation of the PRC, when the communists had organized grassroots elections of various forms affording peasants the right to choose their cadres in the rural areas under their control” (O'Brien and Li 2000: 467-469). Peng, as major leader, at that time had clearly expressed his support for such institutions. After the PRC was founded, Peng continued to show interest in grassroots mass organizations and it is said that his later experience as one of the first victims of high level officials in the Cultural Revolution particularly reinforced his commitment to gradually build up “socialist democracy” in China. In relation to the VCs, he said that through the construction of VCs Chinese peasants would be able to get “democratic training”, and after they became qualified in managing their own villages, they might then move on to govern townships and counties (Cai 1989; O'Brien and Li 2000: 40).

Mainly because of Peng's support (Bai 1995: 284-285), the central government gave its endorsement to VCs in the 1982 Constitution, which stated that "VCs are the mass self-governance organizations of grassroots countryside; the Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons of VCs are elected by the villagers" (Article 111). According to this article, all village level management organizations were given a uniform name, VC, and it also confirmed that VCs' status should be "self-governance organizations" at the rural grassroots level.

In October 1983, the CCP Central Committee and the State Council issued "The notification on carrying out separation of government and commune and establishing township government" (*guanyu shixing zhengshe fenkai jianli xiang zhengfu de tongzhi*), declaring the end of the commune system and paving the way for establishing VCs throughout the country (Song 2002: 22). By February 1985, the task of establishing VCs in the whole country had basically been completed, with the number of VCs totaling 948,629 (Wang and Tang 1994: 1). By estimation, 97 percent of VCs were just established by the scope of former production brigades. Among them, 47 percent of VCs were formed on one natural village; 51 percent were based on several natural villages; and 2 percent were formed by the division of large natural villages (Liu 1994: 54).

The transition proceeded so smoothly because, at that stage, it was "little more than a change in name" (O'Brien and Li 2000: 472): the communes were simply replaced by township governments; brigades were converted into villages and production teams into village small groups (See table 1.1). And the constitutional provision for "electing" VC members had not been put into effect in subsequent years. Most of the VC leaders throughout the country were still appointed as were during the commune era rather than being democratically elected (Ibid.).

Table 1.1 Commune organization and post-commune division

<i>Commune Organization</i>	<i>Post-Commune Divisions</i>
County	County
Commune	Township
Production brigade	Village
Production team	Villagers' small group
Households	Households

The legislation for village self-governance: the provisional Organic Law and relevant local regulations before 1998

A controversial legislative start, 1984-1987

Though Article 111 of the 1982 PRC Constitution confirmed the legal status of VCs, from the very start the legislation on VCs has been a source of great controversy. The process of more fully legislating of VCs started since 1984, when VCs had been established around most of the country. The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA), which is the ministry in charge of villagers' self-governance, dutifully drafted the law on VCs. However, there were divergent views on how to draft the law. The legislation on VCs had stimulated the "hottest debate in the legislation history of the PRC" (Shen 2004: part 2).

The debates were mainly focused around the following issues. First, was the timing "ripe" for applying democratic self-governance to backward rural areas? Second, should the relationship between townships and VCs be one of leadership or guidance? To what degree should the VCs' autonomy be allowed? Would village autonomy hurt the enforcement of state policy? Third, what kind of electoral approach should be applied to produce VC leaders? Fourth, what kind of relationship should there be between the VC and village party branch (VPB) (Kelliher 1997; O'Brien and Li 2000: 470-475)?

Due to the great controversy, the Bill had been amended repeatedly before it was finally presented to the fifth session of the sixth National People's Congress (NPC) in March 1987. When discussing the Bill, Peng Zhen had to make a long and enthusiastic speech to persuade the NPC members to support the passing of the Bill (Chen 2000: 63). Peng argued that "grassroots democracy" in rural China was a matter of "life or death" for the Party. He acknowledged that self-governance might "make rural cadres' life a little harder", (that is, it might complicate policy implementation in the short term), but insisted that it would not "produce chaos" because "the masses accept what is reasonable" (O'Brien 1994: 474). Despite Peng's impassioned efforts, opposition voices were still strong. For example, delegates of Fujian Province held that social conditions were not ripe to put the law into practice immediately; delegates of Shandong Province suggest putting off the approval of the law; delegates of Guizhou Province proposed making the VCs a level of governmental authority since if the VCs were stipulated as autonomous organizations the township governments' management job would be very difficult and state interests would be very hard to guarantee. Most opponents recommended that the draft be revised; some even went so far as to advise that the Constitution should be amended so that VCs were converted into government organs whose leaders were appointed by the government (Bai 1995: 282-309). With time running out, the NPC presidium thought it was improper to force through the draft law and instead recommended approval of it "in principle" and authorized the NPCSC to make further revisions before promulgating it. NPC deputies accepted this advice. Eight months later, in November 1987, after further opinion soliciting and debates, the Organic Law (provisional) was passed and came into force on 1 June 1988 (O'Brien and Li 2000: 475). It should be noted that because the Organic Law was passed with only "provisional" status, this opened a backdoor for some places where the conditions had not been "ripe" to not implement it.

The provisional Organic Law (See appendix 2) has a total of only 21 articles, which stipulate such things as VCs' nature, status, functions and power, organization settings, electoral principles, office tenure and working regulations, as well as the need for

villagers' meetings. The law finally realized Peng's intention, defining VCs as villagers' self-governance organizations. The key spirit of the law is: the relationship between the township government and the VC is *not* that of leading and being led, rather, the former gives guidance, assistance and help to the latter's work; VC cadres are directly elected by villagers and take their duties on a part-time basis without being released from their own production work. To the supporters of the villagers' self-governance policy, the approval of the provisional Organic Law marked an "historic stage for the legalized operation of villagers' self-governance" (Chen 2000: 65).

Irresolution and implementation of the provisional Organic Law at the central level: 1988-1998

The provisional Organic Law was in place for a full decade before the formal revised version was finally passed in 1998. Although the ten-year trial was considered to be a period of "establishing and perfecting" laws and regulations for villagers' self-governance (Song 2002: 29-31), doubt and resistance coming from both the central and local officials had persisted.

After the suppression of the 1989 protest movement, views on villagers' self-governance diverged more severely at the central level. Some opponents reiterated that the provisional Organic Law had been divorced from rural China's reality and it was "far ahead of its time". Some even labeled the Law "bourgeois libertarianism" condoned by purged Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang (Tang 1992: 44). Opponents demanded that the Law be revoked (Bai 2000). To determine whether the Law should essentially be scrapped, the NPC, the Central Organization Department, the MoCA and the Ministry of Personnel dispatched a team of investigators to report on the performance of village level organizations. However, the team could not reach a consensus. Only a small minority favoured continuing implementing the Law, while the majority suggested that VCs be replaced by government administrative offices (Li 1994: 69-72).

At this crucial juncture, Peng Zhen, who was nearly 90 years and retired, once again exerted his influence and strong political prestige as a Party senior to defend the Law, on which he had placed so much effort. He privately summoned the minister of MoCA and pressed him to take a firm stand on villagers' self-governance policy (Bai 1995: 223-224; Li 1994: 72). It is also reported that Peng even summoned (unnamed) opponents in private, complaining about their foot-dragging on the implementation of villagers' self-governance (Shi 1999b: n.37; White 1992: 277).

Another crucial reason for the survival of villagers' self-governance was the intervention and support coming from a second Party elder, Bo Yibo, who was a close ally of Deng Xiaoping and one of a few most influential Party seniors. After reading a MoCA report praising villagers' self-governance, Bo gave his backing to this policy, which proved to be "decisive" for its survival (O'Brien and Li 2000: 477; also see Thurston 1998: 11-12; Wang 1998: 244).

Largely due to Peng's insistency and Bo's support, the responsible CCP Politburo Standing Committee member Song Ping finally ended all the indecision. He instructed, at a conference for nationwide village-level organization construction in August 1990, that the Law be implemented rather than debated (Li 1994: 73). The central government stopped the debate by issuing Central Committee Document No. 19 (1990), which decreed that each of China's counties should establish "demonstration villages" (*shifan cun*) for villagers' self-governance in areas that had "good working conditions" (O'Brien and Li 2000: 478). Only weeks after the endorsement of the Centre, the MoCA issued a document (Zhonghua renmin gongheguo minzhengbu 1990), calling for establishing not only demonstration villages but also demonstration townships and counties nationwide.

In 1994, MoCA issued another document, systematically stipulating the aim, tasks and measures for the demonstration activity. For the first time, it raised "four democratics" of village self-governance, which are democratic elections, democratic decision-making, democratic management and democratic supervision (Zhonghua renmin gongheguo

minzhengbu 1994). This document considerably accelerated the implementation of villagers' self-governance. After the issue of this document, 63 demonstration counties, 3,917 demonstration townships and 82,266 demonstration villages were established all over the country by the end of 1995. It is said that, with the influence of these demonstration units, "the villagers' self-governance has kept developing and relevant democratic procedures have further improved in the countryside" (Song 2002: 31).

Local regulations for implementing the provisional Organic Law and villagers' self-governance: 1988-1998

Responding to the Centre's decision to implement the provisional Organic Law, local governments also gradually issued their corresponding regulations and rules in relation to the implementation of the provisional Law. From 1988 to 1995, 24 provincial level governments had issued their implementing measures for the provisional Organic Law. And by 1997, the overwhelming majority of provincial governments had issued their rules and regulations for implementing villages' self-governance (Chen 2000: 65-66). Following the issuing of provincial level regulations for the provisional Organic Law, many lower level governments (municipal, county and township) had also worked out a number of detailed rules and regulations for implementing villagers' self-governance in their locales. It has been said that during that period a "legalized and institutionalized" system for villagers' self-governance was created from the Centre to each level of local government (Ibid.: 66-67).

However, the timing of local regulations and implementing the provisional Organic Law varied significantly in different places. For example, shortly after the provisional Law took effect in 1988, Fujian and Zhejiang provinces swiftly passed "Measures for implementing the Organic Law (Provisional)" in their own provinces. At the same time, provinces including Yunnan, Guangdong, Hainan and Guangxi did not carry out the system of villagers' government nor make any corresponding local regulations until the revised Organic Law took effect in 1998 (Yu 2002: 186-191). To serve the purpose of this thesis, I will only focus on local regulations and rules applicable where B village is

located.

Four years after the provisional Organic Law took effect, on 10 May 1992, the Standing Committee of the People's Congress of Shandong Province passed *Measures for Shandong Province Implementing "PRC VC Organic Law (Provisional)"* (Shandongsheng shishi "zhonghua renmin gongheguo cunmin weiyuanhui zuzhifa (shixing)" banfa) (hereafter the 1992 Measures), setting out supposedly detailed rules and regulations for implementing the provisional Organic Law.

On VC elections

The 1992 Measures have only a total of 15 articles on VC elections, which at best set out some basic principles and regulations. They generally provide regulations on four major issues: election management, voter registration, candidate nomination, and electoral meetings. First, the management and organization work of VC elections is undertaken by the Village Election Committee (VEC) "under the guidance of township/town government" (Article 26). VEC is composed of 3-5 persons who are selected by villagers' meeting (Article 26). Second, voters must register before the VC election and the electoral roll, the date and venue of elections must be publicized (Article 26). Third, VC candidates are recommended by each villagers' small group¹⁴. The number of VC candidates should be one third to double more than the number of available VC positions. VECs should publicize formal candidate list five days before the election day. The order of candidate names appearing on the list is sorted according to the number of character strokes in their names (Article 28). Finally, electoral meetings should be held to elect VC cadres. Electoral meetings are presided by VECs and the electoral meeting is not legal unless more than two thirds of eligible voters attend (Article 29). A voter who can not attend the electoral meeting may, with the consent of the VEC, entrust another voter in writing to vote on behalf of him/her (Article 31). Roving ballot boxes are allowed to use for those old, weak, sick and disabled voters

¹⁴ Villagers' small groups (*cunmin xiaozu*) are derived from former production team. A village comprises several groups, each is made up of about 30-50 households and 150-200 villagers.

who can not walk to the electoral meetings (Article 31). Candidates must win more than half the votes cast by voters to get elected. If there are more candidates winning more than half the votes than VC posts, the one who gets more votes wins (Article 33).

Due to the looseness and vagueness of the 1992 Measures and, more importantly, due to the doubt and resistance of local officials, VC elections and the 1992 Measures were carried out in name only in most places of Shandong before 1998 (Xiao 2002b: 63). For example, a 1989 survey in Shandong Province revealed that over 60 per cent of township leaders disapproved of villagers' self-governance (Yang and Sun 1989: 113). Some county leaders in Shandong even claimed that they had the authority to decide if their counties were ready for VC elections (O'Brien and Li 2000: 479). As far as Longkou City (county status) and Xinjia Township are concerned, VC elections were not seriously implemented at all before 1998, just as elsewhere in the province (Interviews 1 and 33). I was unable to find a single government document in Xinjia Township on implementing VC elections before 1998.

In Xinjia Township, VC candidates were usually nominated by the village party branch (VPB) (the role of VPB will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6) with the permission of the township government, or directly handpicked by the township government. Rather than holding an electoral meeting, if an election was organized, only roving ballot boxes were used. Usually the incumbent village cadres appointed two election workers from each villagers' small group to carry a roving ballot box and ballots to each household of their village small group in order to let villagers vote. The election workers would instruct villagers whom to vote for and after the voting finished, all roving ballot boxes were sent to the VC/VPB office and votes were counted by village cadres and election workers in private (Interviews 1 and 33).¹⁵ To a large degree, this was nothing but a mere formality. VC candidates, or to be precise VC cadres, had actually been decided before the election.¹⁶ As a former VC cadre of B village told me:

¹⁵ Roving ballot boxes were also widely applies in other provinces. See Pastor and Tan (2000: 498).

¹⁶ For local officials' tactics of rigging VC elections elsewhere before 1998, see Ma (1994: 19-20) and Fan (1998: 14-15).

Before (direct elections), elections in our village were just a formality. The VPB secretary usually recommended the VC candidates to the township government before the election. If the township government approved them, this usually meant that the VC cadres had been decided. On election day, the village cadres would arrange a few of their trustworthy persons, coming to villager's house with roving ballot box and ballots. Those persons holding ballot boxes of course knew who were the 'right' candidates on the ballot. They would indicate villagers whom to vote for. Villagers knew it was a mere formality and they were not serious about it at all. Some villagers simply asked those persons to write for them. In the end, the ballots were just counted by village cadres privately in their office. In some other villages, I heard that village cadres even ignored the formality by filling all the votes by themselves (Interview 47).

On village self-governance

Regarding village self-governance, the 1992 Measures set out some basic regulations on duties and functions of village general meetings (VGMs), villagers' representative assemblies (VRAs) and VCs. The VGM is supposed to be the supreme power organization of village self-governance. According to the 1992 Measures, a VGM is formed by villagers over 18 years of age or by household representatives. According to it (Article 6), VGMs have the following powers:

- to scrutinize and approve the social and economic development strategy and annual plan of the village;
- to elect and recall VC cadres;
- to discuss and approve rules and regulations in the village;
- to hear and examine the VC annual work report;
- to discuss and approve the extraction and usage plans of village collective fees;
- to discuss and decide the division and adjustment of farmland;
- to change or revoke the improper decisions made by the VC;
- to scrutinize village financial affairs;

- to discuss the allocation and usage of housing plots;
- to discuss and approve other issues relating to the interests of villagers.

According to the 1992 Measures (Article 7), the VRA is a “supplementary form” of VGM in villages where the population is too big to convene a VGM. VRA members are recommended and elected by each villagers’ small group on the basis of one representative in 10-15 households and the VRA assumes some of the power that the VGM has (item 5-10 of the above mentioned power of VGM).

An elected VC, according to the 1992 Measures, has the duties of carrying out self-governance issues such as managing collective property, dealing with public affairs, providing village welfare, organizing various cultural or spiritual activities for villagers, mediating people’s disputes, and reflecting villagers’ opinions and demands to the government (Article 13). Although a VC is required to “assist” the township government in carrying out state policies, such as family planning, tax collecting, and conscription, according to the 1992 Measures (and the provisional Organic Law as well) it is responsible and must report to the VGM (Article 13). A VC must carry out decisions made by the VGM. Village spending on village public affairs, villagers’ welfare as well as VC members’ pay must also be discussed and decided by the VGM (Article 16 and 17).

Just as with VC elections, the 1992 Measures’ regulation on villagers’ self-governance had also merely stayed on paper and been simply ignored by subordinate county and township governments like Longkou county and Xinjia Township. I found no government documents or circulars issued by Longkou or Xinjia governments on convening VGMs, establishing VRAs, or implementing village self-governance regulations set by the 1992 Measures before 1998. Interviews with both Xinjia officials and villagers also proved that rules and regulations relating to villagers’ self-governance had not been given attention before 1998 (Interviews 1, 3, 31 and 47). Actually, before 1998, except in a few demonstration villages, implementation of villagers’

self-governance had been ignored in the overwhelming majority of villages throughout the country. As O'Brien (1994: 49) points out, since the provisional Law was vaguely phrased and the implementing regulations at the provincial and lower levels were still incomplete, local officials had no incentive to implement and so chose to ignore them. What happened in Xinjia Township during that period largely fits O'Brien's description.

Before 1998, village governance in Xinjia Township had been centred around and dominated by the VPB, which was appointed by and directly responsible to the township government. The VC was by and large treated as a tool and immediate subordinate of the VPB, whose duty was to carry out orders from the township. Actually, the VPB and VC were commonly considered as *one* leadership group with two different names (Alpermann 2001: 46). The VC chair was usually appointed as the deputy VPB secretary and it was also common that other VC members concurrently served as VPB members. In terms of village governance, it is the VPB, rather than the VC, that is the governing and decision-making body in a village. All major decisions concerning village affairs have to be approved by the VPB before formal adoption by the VC. The power of the VPB, however, was concentrated in the VPB secretary, who was undoubtedly the most powerful village cadre (*first hand*). The VPB secretary was appointed by and responsible to the township government (Zhong 2003: 163 and interview 5). Under this system, VPB/VC cadres were simply treated as implementing arms of the local state. Village affairs were often indistinguishable from township tasks. In many respects, such a top-down system had not been much different from the commune era (O'Brien 1994: 54). The situation of B village before 1998 was no exception. The VC and VPB were merged as one integrated village leading team headed by the VPB secretary Qu Sixiang. All village cadres were directly appointed by and responsible to the Xinjia Township government/Party Committee. Although, according to the provisional Organic Law and the 1992 Measures, the VGM or VRA was supposed to play a crucial role in the so-called village self-governance, in practice they did not exist except on paper.

The revised Organic Law and relevant local regulations after 1998

The revised Organic Law

The efforts to work out a revised and formal Organic Law started from 1994 (Chen 2000: 71). It is said that from 1994 to 1998, the MoCA, the State Council and the NPCSC carried out quite a lot “in-depth” and “careful” surveys and held many hearings on the nationwide practice of village self-governance. It was claimed that many people who were interested in it, from government officials and scholars to ordinary peasants, “involved enthusiastically” in the process of making the revised Organic Law (Fan 1998c). However, in the revision process, opponents’ of village self-governance still made their voices heard. Although in a “minority”, some NPCSC members, when debating the revised Organic Law, still insisted that the nature of the VC should be a grassroots administrative organization rather than a mass autonomous organization. Opponents also suggested that township governments should “lead” rather “guide” VCs because VCs must implement state policies (Fan 1998b).

This time, proponents of village self-governance managed to win support from the top leaders again. One of the successful tactics employed by proponents was, as Kelliher (1997: 77) puts it, trying to “use village self-governance to manipulate foreign opinion, and then use that foreign opinion to manipulate higher Chinese officials”. When the MoCA arranged for foreigners to visit models of self-governance, it attempted to promote a specific human rights image outside of China. For instance, then deputy minister of MoCA, Yan Mingfu, made his point explicit at the end of a 1995 trip to Lishu county, the village self-governance model in Jilin Province to which many foreigners have been invited. Upon his return, Yan said, “Lishu’s experience has received worldwide recognition ... and it has greatly aided the counterattack on Western accusations about human rights in China” (Kelliher 1997: 76). According to an article published in the newspaper affiliated to the MoCA, VC elections were considered to be the key to positive foreign publicity. Supposedly, when foreigners witness a good

election (preferably with competitive candidates and secret ballots), “the first emotion they feel is astonishment: it dawns on them that this is real democracy ... and then they praise it to the skies. ... Their reports and commentaries help the international community to understand the reality of democracy and human rights in China. Objectively, they serve the function of aiding our propaganda” (Wu 1995).

Particularly realizing that VC elections and self-governance actually functioned to improved China’s international image in terms of human rights and democracy, the top central leaders after the Deng Xiaoping era, such as Jiang Zemin and Li Peng, had been prone to taking a supportive stance on village self-governance (Kelliher 1997: 77; O'Brien and Li 2000: 484). For instance, on an inspection tour to Anhui Province in September 1998, then Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin sang high praise for village elections and self-governance, stressing that they are “fundamental issues” for Chinese peasants and “the practice of socialist grassroots democracy” (Jiang 1998). Li Peng, then Chair of NPCSC, during his visit to a county in Jilin Province known for its open nomination procedures, explicitly stated: “villagers’ self-governance is good” (Fan 1998c).

Thus, with the top leaders’ favour, the marathon legislation for the Organic Law finally came to an end on 4th November 1998, when the revised Organic Law (see Appendix 3) was finally approved by the fifth session of the ninth NPCSC. There is probably no other law that has arisen through such harsh and prolonged debate in the PRC’s legislation history.

As far as the nature of VC is concerned, the revised Organic Law not only confirms the provisional Organic Law’s provision that the VC is the “primary mass organization of self-governance, in which villagers manage their own affairs, educate themselves and serve their own needs”, but also adds that VCs “apply democratic elections, democratic decision-making, democratic management and democratic supervision” (Article 2).

In terms of VC elections, the revised Law, in contrast to the provisional Law, sets out more detailed regulations on election requirements and procedures. The provisional Law only states that “the VC chair, deputy-chair and members are directly elected by villagers” (Article 11), but does not specify how or through which procedures the elections should be carried out. The revised Law, however, has seven articles that deal specifically with election requirements and procedures. There are several noteworthy added provisions. Article 9 specifies that the composition of a village committee should consist of three to seven members: a chair, deputy chair(s) and members. In response to the influence of township governments over candidacy and village elections, Article 11 makes it clear that no organization or individual is permitted to “appoint, designate, remove or replace members of the village committee”. Article 14 is the most detailed legislation on village election procedures. It first stipulates that candidates are “directly nominated by eligible villagers” and their number should exceed that of positions to be elected, which is supposed to limit the possibility of township officials manipulating nominations. Then the winning requirement is written into the article—that an election is valid if the winner gains more than 50 percent of the votes cast (rather than 50 percent of the eligible votes), as long as more than 50 percent of those eligible cast their votes. The article also specifies that secret ballots and open counting be adopted in the electoral process, and that private voting booths be set up during elections. Article 16 further adds the procedures for villagers’ recalling incumbent VC cadres.

In terms of village governance, the revised Law confirms the provisional Law’s stipulation that VCs are villagers’ self-governance organizations and defines the content of VC’s self-governance mainly as managing public affairs, undertaking village welfare, mediating disputes among villagers, reflecting the villagers’ opinions and demands to the government, and managing village collective economy and property (Articles 2 and 5). Township government offers “guidance, support and assistance” to VCs, which in turn should also “assist” township governments to carry out state tasks (Article 4). In addition, the revised Law clearly defines the VCs’ “democratic” nature, stating that VC “applies democratic elections, democratic decision-making, democratic management

and democratic supervision” (Article 2). In addition, it clearly stipulates that township government “must not intervene in the village affairs that belong to the sphere of villagers’ self-governance according to law” (Article 4). The revised Law further specifies the VGM’s working procedures and its duties in village governance, stipulating that “the VC is responsible for and must report to the VGM” (Article 17-19). It also specifically endorses the legal status of VRA, which functions on behalf of VGM in village government (Article 21).

However, Article 3 of the revised Law also specifies that VPB, as the grassroots organization of the CCP in countryside, works according to the CCP Constitution and “exerts the effect of a leading core” in village elections and governance. This stipulation, as will be discussed later in this chapter and Chapter 6, causes serious confusion and conflict when the Law is enforced in practice.

After the revised Organic Law was passed and put into practice in 1998, the central government showed determination to seriously carry out village elections and self-governance in the Chinese countryside. By early 2000, villagers’ self-governance was implemented throughout rural China (Wang 2002: 95). However, how the Law should be concretely implemented is a matter of local efforts. After the revised Law took effect, individual provinces made their own enforcement regulations one after the other. And in terms of provincial regulations on implementing the revised Organic Law, there have been differences among different provinces (Yu 2002). But I will still focus on the relevant regulations of Shandong province, where the fieldwork for this thesis was carried out.

Institutional background in Shandong after 1998

On VC elections

No more than three weeks after the revised Organic Law was approved by the NPCSC on 4th November 1998, the Standing Committee of the People’s Congress of Shandong Province passed “Measures for VC Elections in Shandong Province (hereafter the 1998

Measures)” (*shandong sheng cunmin weiyuanhui xuanju banfa*). This made Shandong the first province in the country to issue its new village electoral measures (Yu 2002: 186). Thanks to the pushing by the provincial government, this new electoral regulation was carried out all over the province in the subsequent village elections since 1999 (Shandongsheng renmin zhengfu bangongting 2001). And since then VC elections have been called “direct elections” (*zhixuan*).

The 1998 Measures set out detailed electoral procedures and methods for VC elections. According to it the process of VC elections can be divided into four stages: election preparation, voter registration, primary election for candidates and formal election.

The first stage is election preparation. Before holding village elections, the electoral institutions should be established first. The township government sets up a Leading Team for VC Elections (*cunmin weiyuanhui huanjie xuanju lingdao xiaozu*), whose duties are to 1) propagandize relative laws and regulations on VC elections, 2) work out and carry out the plans for VC elections, 3) decide the dates for elections, 4) train the election workers, 5) direct the affairs relating to the election or selection of VCs, VC sub-committees, heads of villagers’ small groups and villagers’ representatives, 5) be responsible for other issues in relation to VC elections (Article 6).

Each village establishes a Village Electoral Committee (VEC), which will preside over the election-related work under the guidance of the township Leading Team for VC Elections. The VEC members, usually 5 to 9 persons, are elected by each villagers’ small group or the village general meeting (VGM). Members of the VEC elect one person among them to preside over the work of the VEC (Article 7).

Stage two is voter registration. The VEC is responsible for voter registration. All villagers who are over the age of 18 have the right to vote and stand for election, except those who have been deprived of their political rights. Voter registration should be completed ahead of the election date. And the electoral roll should be publicized at least

twenty days before the electoral date. Any villager who has objections to the electoral roll can make an appeal to the VEC, which should make an explanation for or correct it within three days (Article 8, 9 and 10).

Stage three is primary election of candidates. VC candidates are directly nominated by villagers and formal candidates come out by primary election. The VEC should set up a polling station and secret voting booths for the primary election. The formal candidates come out according to the nomination votes they get from voters. The number of formal candidates should be one or two more than the number of VC posts subject to election (Article 11 and 12).

Stage four is formal election. Article 14 regulates that an electoral meeting should be held when electing VC cadres. The election is not valid unless more than half of the eligible voters cast votes (including proxy votes) and the candidates can only get elected by winning more than half of the votes cast in an election. Secret voting booths must be set up and used by voters in election. Proxy voting is allowed, but the villagers who need to make proxy voting must apply and get approval from the VEC. A voter who is present at the election can only take on no more than three proxy votes (Article 15).

Due to the fact that in rural areas it is quite difficult to summon an electoral meeting, Longkou, as with most of the places in Shandong Province, has chosen to merge the primary election and the formal election into one electoral meeting. Namely, at the electoral meeting, villagers first vote for formal candidates and then, after the formal candidates come out, vote for the VC cadres. In Xinjia Township, since 1999, direct VC elections have been organized and carried out “carefully” by township government officials, of course, only in terms of satisfying the letter of the concerned laws and regulations. Every key link and step, such as voter registration, secret voting, direct nomination, open vote counting and so on have been strictly carried out according to related rules and regulations. In the words of a government document of Xinjia Township: “every step and procedure of the VC elections must be carried out strictly

according to the stipulation of the Organic Law and the 1998 Measures and every stipulated step or procedure must not be omitted” (Zhonggong Xinjiashen weiyuanhui 2001).¹⁷

To examine “democratic” VC elections, numerous complicated details may need to be attended to in order to ascertain whether the elections are “free and fair”. However, it is not this thesis’ intention to discuss in detail the formal institutional rules and procedures of VC elections. It is sufficient to say here that since 1999 Xinjia Township government has not been able to manipulate VC elections by boldly violating the formal rules and procedures laid out by the laws. However, what I will try to argue in the subsequent chapters is that, even though the formal electoral procedures in Xinjia Township or B village are considered to be “free and fair”¹⁸, VC elections in B village can also be largely manipulated by informal clientelist associations or networks.

On village self-governance

On 22 December 2000, the Standing Committee of Shandong People’s Congress passed another important regulation for implementing the revised Organic Law, which is called “Measures for implementing the PRC VC Organic Law in Shandong (hereafter the 2000 Measures)” (Shandongsheng shishi “zhonghua renmin gongheguo cunmin weiyuanhui zuzhifa” banfa). The 2000 Measures mainly specify rules and regulations on villagers’ self-governance. The content of the 2000 Measures focuses on three aspects respectively: 1) VGM and VRA, 2) VC and 3) transparency in village affairs.

First, on the VGM, it specifically stipulates that a VGM be convened at least once a year and that the VGM should assess and supervise the work of the VC (Article 5 and 6). VGM can also revoke or change VC and VRA’s improper decisions (Article 5). On VRA, it stipulates that a VRA must be convened at least once each quarter and that it

¹⁷ My personal observation of the 2004 VC elections in Xinjia Township confirmed that the VC elections had been organized and conducted strictly according to the stipulation of the Organic Law and the Shandong Measures.

¹⁸ Li Lianjiang (2003: 653), for instance, considers VC elections as “free and fair” or procedurally “democratic” as long as four practices are applied: (1) direct nomination of candidates by villagers; (2) contested election of VC members; (3) anonymous voting; and (4) open count of votes.

should discuss and decide on issues that are authorized by the VGM (the role of VRA will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6). If more than one thirds of representatives propose it, then the VC should convene a VRA within a reasonable time. It also specifies that the VC must inform villagers' representatives of the issues to be discussed and decided three days before convening a VRA, and villagers' representatives must seek opinions and recommendations from their constituents (article 9). Second, as far as the VC is concerned, it mainly sets out the duties of the VC, such as carrying out the VGM's decisions and resolutions, managing village collective property, carrying out public services, and providing village welfare, as well as developing various cultural and entertainment activities (Article 13). Thirdly, it stipulates that the VC is committed to making village affairs open and transparent. The VC must ensure villagers' "broad rights of being informed, participation and supervision" and it should be "subject to the inquiry and surveillance of villagers" (Article 25). The 2000 Measures also specify that the villagers' financing small team (VFST), which can be recommended and elected by the VGM, checks and audits the VC's financing account (the role of VFST will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6). The VFST checks the VC's financing account at least once a month and every sum of expense can only be entered in the account after an audit by the VFST (Article 26).

Apart from the above stipulations on self-governance, one important but problematic provision should be particularly noted. Consistent with the Organic Law, the 2000 Measures also stipulate that the VBP is "a leading core" in village governance. But Article 3 of the 2000 Measures further specifies that "the VC must consciously accept the leadership" of the VPB (Article 3). So, a difficult problem arises here. As indicated previously, according to the 2000 Measures, the VC should be responsible to the VGM and carry out its decisions. However, according to the same regulation, VCs also need to "consciously accept the leadership" of the VPB. What would happen if the VGM's decision is different from the VPB's decision? Whose decision should the VC carry out? Another related contradiction is the relationship between the township government and the VC. According to the Organic Law and the 2000 Measures, the township

government can only “guide and assist” the VC to do its job, namely, the relationship between the two should be “guidance” rather than “leadership”. However, if the VC must accept the leadership of the VPB and, according to the CCP Constitution, the VPB must accept the leadership of the township government/Party committee, then how can it be guaranteed that the township government does not intervene in the VC’s job? Consider this imaginary example: according to law, the daughter-in-law (VC) enjoys the right of not being controlled by the mother-in-law (township government). But at the same time the law also stipulates that wife (VC) must obey her husband (VPB) and the husband (VPB) must listen to his mother (township government). So how can the daughter-in-law (VC) truly enjoy her legal right of not being controlled by her mother-in-law (township government)? If the law itself is contradictory, its practice must be problematic. (In chapter 6, I will discuss in detail the problematic VC-VPB relations in practice.) As I will examine in Chapters 6 and 7, these related regulations and rules on self-governance largely stay on paper in practice.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to set out the background of VC elections and villagers’ self-governance in China and the institutional context for the case study of B village. With the dismantling of the commune system at the end of the 1970s, a potential crisis appeared in rural China arising from the paralysis of the long established social-political organizations. The situation at village level in general grew rather chaotic. Originally, as a means to tackle the political vacuum left by the collapse of the commune and to resume law and order, VCs were established voluntarily in a few villages in Guangxi Province in late 1980. The phenomenon, however, greatly interested Peng Zhen, one of a few highly powerful CCP elders, who later exerted his strong influence to support and promote the establishment of VCs throughout rural China. Mainly due to Peng’s influence and urging, VCs were written into the 1982 PRC Constitution as elected, mass organizations of self-governance (Article 111) and, despite strong opposition, in

November 1987 the provisional Organic Law was “forced through”. And after the crackdown of the 1989 movement, particularly with the support of another influential CCP elder, Bo Yibo, the Chinese central government finally decided to implement the provisional Organic Law by setting up demonstration units in rural areas. Although Shandong Province enacted the Measures for implementing the provisional Organic Law in 1992 (the 1992 Measures), Xinjia Township officials, like most of other places, had simply ignored the provisional policy of villagers’ self-governance. Before 1999, village cadres were largely appointed by the Xinjia Township government and were treated as implementing arms of state tasks. Self-governance institutions set out by law, such as VGM and VRA, had not been implemented even in form.

Although the practice of the provisional Organic Law had been far from satisfactory, the top CCP leaders after Deng Xiaoping, particularly realizing that village elections and “village democracy” have functioned to improve China’s international image and promote positive foreign publicity, endorsed the policy on villages’ self-governance. Therefore, in November 1998, despite persistent opposition, the revised Organic Law, which confirms the principles of “democratic” VC elections and self-governance, was finally approved and subsequently was implemented throughout the country. Shandong Province, like all other provinces, set out its own specific regulations on implementing the revised Organic Law within the province. As far as Xinjia Township is concerned, since 1999, VC elections have been carried out strictly to satisfy the *letter* of the related laws and regulations. But with the implementation of the “free and fair” electoral institutions, can the VC electoral processes be truly “free and fair”? What factors have influenced the VC elections? How have the regulations on self-governance been implemented in practice? Is it really “democratic”? After setting out the background, I will discuss these questions in the following chapters.

3 Villagers as clients and “locked-in” voters

Prior to their urban counterparts, Chinese peasants nowadays have found themselves in the context of electoral politics, though this is confined within the boundaries of their village communities. With the implementation of “democratic” village elections, Chinese peasants are again under intense study by many political observers. How do Chinese rural dwellers (villagers) behave in the context of village electoral politics? To what degree have direct village elections changed their pattern of political behaviour? How do they respond to their “democratic” rights bestowed from above? Answers to these questions are critical for the understanding of contemporary Chinese village elections and governance. This chapter attempts to explore these questions.

Advocates of the liberal democratic approach hold that Chinese peasants as a group have not only been “empowered” by “democratic” village elections but also started to take the form of “rightful resistance”(O'Brien 1996), fighting for their “collective good” (Brandtstadter and Schubert 2005) or “citizenship rights” (O'Brien 2001). In other words, they believe that “electoral democracy” has really made a difference to ordinary villagers’ lives as well as their political thinking and behaviour and this change in turn may further promote the grow up of democracy from grassroots level. Chinese peasants, according to them, are approaching “a more complete citizenship”(O'Brien 2001: 426) by skillfully making use of grassroots “democratic” institutions.

However, I argue that direct or so-called “democratic” village elections have not made any substantial difference to ordinary villagers’ lives: it has had little effect on the village structure and the villagers’ behaviour. Securing relationships with more powerful patrons continues to be an appealing strategy for villagers and to shape the nature of village politics. And in the position of clients, villagers who are dependent on their local

patrons cannot vote freely even when formal election procedures are “free and fair”. The web of personal relations (especially patron-client ones) that are so dense and crucial in villagers’ lives has helped candidates capture votes during elections. Villagers are largely mobilized through personal networks and are also “locked in” by them. In fact, in contrast to the view that village elections may “empower” villagers (Li 2003), I argue that they may even risk further damaging the unity and harmony of village community and put ordinary villagers in a difficult position, and bring more problems than benefits to their lives.

This chapter will first outline the socioeconomic structure in which villagers find themselves during the reform era. I will evaluate the socioeconomic structure to show that although reform has improved villagers’ economic well-being, decollectivization has deprived villagers of collective welfare and safety nets which they enjoyed during commune era. The absence of a social security system and safety nets, increasing wealth gap and income inequality resulted from the development of a market economy, absence of free peasant associations, as well as peasant burdens and a strong and unchecked bureaucracy have made ordinary villagers largely insecure and vulnerable. The second part of the chapter will discuss the predominance and importance of informal social *guanxi* networks to villagers’ lives and how villagers value and are embedded in their social networks. This will lead to the third section discussing why villagers are inclined to become clients and depend on the power of various patrons, who, with the advent of direct VC elections, are able to “lock” them in and prevent free voting despite the fact that VC elections may be “free and fair” in terms of formal procedures.

Villagers in the reform era: the socioeconomic structure of rural society

Improved economic well-being

Chinese peasants’ economic well-being has been dramatically improved even in the

poorest regions since the economic reforms of the early 1980s (Cheng 2000; Oi 1999b; Unger 2002). As far as B village is concerned, this is also the case. Located in an area that Unger calls a “prosperous coastal region” (2002: 204), B village has undergone intensive industrialization over the past two decades. During 1980s and 1990s, a number of factories were established and managed by the village collective, although by the end of 1990s, those collective-owned enterprises had either closed down due to poor management or been privatized. However, thanks to the continual development of local economy as well as the ongoing industrialization and urbanization, most young and middle-aged villagers of B village can either find employment outside their villages or set up small businesses themselves. For most families in B village, the share of their income from cultivating farmland has fallen significantly. As a result, according to the township government official figure, the average annual pure per capita income of B village in 2004 was RMB 3,500 (Interview 3), whereas the national average figure for rural China in 2004 was RMB 2936 (Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guojia tongjiju 2005).

According to B village’s own cadres, infrastructure networks of electricity, tap water, TV cable as well as telephone have reached and been used by almost every household within the village and consumer goods such as refrigerators, mobile phones and motorcycles are also common in most (Interview 47 and 50). My personal visits to B village during my fieldwork confirmed this. Even without entering individual villagers’ houses, a visitor can see that there is a big difference between the B village and villages in poor, agricultural inland areas: the streets are cemented, the houses are decent and the environment is clean. Whereas B village is considered to an economically “average” among all the villages in Xinjia Township, one township government officials boasted to me, “look, here, our place really is the socialist new countryside” (Interview 12).

Absence of a social security system and safety nets

Improved economic well-being and higher income due to market economy and industrial development, however, is only part of the picture. Following the collapse of

commune system and decollectivization, the collective welfare safety nets that protected villagers during commune era has been seriously eroded: education and health costs have been transferred to individual villagers; there are no old-age pensions; and, although waged employment is prevalent especially in the coastal districts, rural dwellers working outside their villages are not entitled to labour insurance (Han and Luo 2007; Hussain 1994: 278). Social assistance provided in rural areas is primarily meant to relieve extreme poverty and is narrowly targeted (Liu, Rao, and Hu 2002).

Longkou City, chosen as an experimental unit by the higher-level authorities, undertook in 2002 to establish a Cooperative Medical System (CMS). This has been regarded as a first step toward re-establishing the system of collectively-financed health services for villagers in rural China. However, the effects of the experimental policy have been far from satisfactory, if not a failure, in Longkou at least. According to the scheme, each individual peasant pays 10 *yuan* per year and the government gives 20 *yuan* subsidy per person each year. The peasant who joins such scheme may be entitled to claim a certain percentage (25-50 per cent) of the their medical costs if they suffer from a serious disease. But the scheme has not been successful for two key reasons. First of all, the reimbursement does not cover the treatment and medicine cost of outpatients. In other words, only if a peasant is seriously ill and is admitted to a hospital as an inpatient can he/she claim some reimbursement of the cost. Secondly, there is an upper limit for reimbursements. Each peasant can claim no more than 10,000 *yuan* per year and the excess has to be paid completely by the patients. Such a scheme has very limited effects on improving villagers' sense of security. On the one hand, ordinary peasants still have to pay the whole medical costs for less serious illness in their everyday life; on the other hand, if they contract a serious illness, and, for example an operation is needed, they can only be reimbursed for less than 50% of the actual cost with an upper limit of 10,000 *yuan* and the cost therefore is often still too heavy a burden (Interview 12 and 20). As one villager of B village told me:

Nowadays we peasants are really afraid to go to hospital. Once we have to go there,

the fees for various tests and examinations are terribly expensive, let alone the price for medicines and medical treatment. The hospital wants to make money. We simply cannot afford to get sick. So if a peasant gets small disease in their life, he usually either simply lives through or gets some medicine by himself at random. Therefore, some time the small disease gets more and more serious and finally becomes a very serious one, which needs a large sum of money to get treated. The life may be OK for a peasant if they do not fall ill, but once they do, it is a complete disaster for them and their family. But who can guarantee that he will never get sick? For instance, last year there was an old person in our village who got esophageal cancer. Since he could not afford the operation fees and his two children were also too poor to pay for him, he ended up dying at home just six months later (Interview 22).

In short, although villagers' incomes have risen since the economic reform period began, at the same time, they have lost the protection of their collective. If they suffer a personal crisis or accident, such as serious illness or grave physical injury, or if they suddenly need a large sum of money, villagers are not able to count on their collective, their government or any other impersonal social institutions. As a result ordinary villagers today are still extremely insecure.

Market reform and the wealth gap

Although continued market reform has offered more opportunities and choices to become better off, peasants also face greater uncertainty in an unpredictable market (Oi 1999a; Oi 1989: 212; Unger 2000). Lacking information and knowledge about market demand, supply and prices, individual peasant and small family businesses are quite vulnerable in a free market. Even though more and more peasants have chosen to seek off-farm wage employment, most of them are only treated as "temporary workers" without any job security (Unger 2002: 119-130).

As a result of the market economy, the wealth gap between the rich and poor is also getting more and more serious. Former village cadres and those who own specialized

knowledge, entrepreneurial skills, ability, and, maybe most importantly, those who have connections and privileged access to various scarce recourses and opportunities, have become rural entrepreneurs and the wealthy (Oi 1989: 213-214; Unger 2002: 140-143). Most average peasants who are poorly armed to deal with a complex market and insecure life have to largely rely on and thus get dependent to those successful rural elites, no matter they are rural entrepreneurs, village cadres, or anyone who is able to offer jobs, contracts, loans, market opportunities or any assistances that are crucial and badly needed by peasants (Ibid.).

In terms of the wealth gap, B village is no exception. A B village cadre told me about the different economic status of villagers within the village:

Generally speaking, the villagers' average living standard in our village is OK. There are almost no households that live in extreme poverty and are not able to clothe and dine themselves. However, the gap between the rich and the poor is huge. A few able persons who have successfully run their own businesses are really rich. In our village, among those most wealthy villagers, some run hennery, some manage electric welding machine factory and some do flower business. All those villagers are wealthy private entrepreneurs. They often hire fellow villagers to work for them. Apart from those big bosses, some villagers with skills, knowledge or connections are engaged in some small business like repairing vehicles, making food oil, running restaurant, selling milk and so on. Most young and middle-aged villagers in our village seek employed jobs somewhere. You know, nowadays only depending on cultivating farmland is not enough for a living at all. But for most ordinary villagers, the income is not stable. Certain business can be prosperous this year, but stagnant in the following year. It is impossible to predict, isn't it? Those villagers who do paid jobs often work on a temporary statue. When the employers don't need you, you have to leave and find jobs somewhere else. The life is not easy for the ordinary villagers (Interview 48).

Absence of free peasant associations

In Xinjia Township, as in elsewhere in rural China, voluntary villagers' associations on the basis of political motivation are not allowed to form. As Bai Shazhou points out, "Although the population of Chinese peasants is huge, in the process of the Chinese Communist Party's forceful social restructure, all the organizational strength beyond the Party had been absorbed or eliminated, as a result of which, seven or eight hundred million peasants have become the group of weakest social influence. In today's rural society, except for kinship associations in some places which may exert very limited influence upon village elections, the sole organizational force is the Chinese Communist Party's grassroots organizations" (Bai 2000). In the absence of peasant associations, the atomized peasants face the powerful state apparatus individually (Dang 2005: 9). The direct outcome of villagers' poor organization degree is that villagers' capacity for self-protection is too weak, which makes it very difficult for them to resist the outside infringements upon their rights.

Peasant burdens and official corruption

The issue of peasant burdens has been a prominent problem in Chinese society for years. Since the mid 1980s, peasants' financial burdens have been increasing. These financial burdens of peasants mainly refer to a range of "unreasonable" taxes, fees, fines, governmental expenses, administrative fund-raising and so on, which are imposed on peasants by the government (Bernstein and Liu 2003; Liu 1997). "Some of these were authorized; many were not; most had a dubious basis in law and official regulations. Most were bitterly resented by the peasants for their unpredictability and open-endedness and the coercive manner in which they were collected" (Bernstein and Liu 2003: 1). These increasing taxes, fees and levies have taken a significant part of peasants' income (Murphy 2005: 5).

Although in recent years, the central government has kept making efforts to cut official taxes and fees imposed upon peasants and finally abolished all the agricultural taxes by 2006 (Yang 2006), peasants' financial burden has not been significantly relieved. As

noted above, peasants nowadays have to pay a considerable and increasing amounts in medical costs and school fees, which, under certain circumstances, may very likely result in “plummeting a household into destitution” (Murphy 2005: 5). Peasants’ burden is also exacerbated by increasing cost for buying production materials (fertiliser, fuel and tools), building houses, accumulating bride-prices and dowries, paying funeral fees, and buying consumer goods (Cheng 2005; Murphy 2005: 5). As a villager in B village commented:

Nowadays it is so difficult for peasants to make money but there are so many things on which they need to spend money. After a whole year’s hard work, most common peasants can only save a little money. In recent years, you can hardly make money from digging fields. The price for agricultural products keeps changing and it is very likely that after all your hard work you find that your farm products are so cheap that you even lose money in the end or some times your products cannot be sold at all. In the countryside, only a few courageous and smart people are able to make money, while, for most dull peasants, it is not easy at all. But for peasants there are a number of issues to spend money on: giving birth to children, marriage, funeral and exchanging human feelings [gifts] as well. Money spent on these matters is increasing as time goes by. You know, people really care about their face. If they want to have face and be respected by their fellow villagers, they have to spend a huge amount of money on these things (Interview 27).

In addition, peasants are also extremely vulnerable when dealing with local state officials or going through complicated bureaucratic formalities. Due to the absence of rule of law, the discretionary and unchecked use of public power, as well as officials’ rent-seeking and self-enrichment attempts, corruption is endemic. Since local officials wield crucial and broad power over peasants, peasants have to frequently approach those officials for particularistic favours by offering gifts, showing of deference, or using personal relationships (Unger 2002:143-146).

It is crucial to have a wide view of the socioeconomic structure of Chinese rural society before rushing to explain peasants as well as other actors' political behaviours or strategies employed in village politics. Although peasants, especially those in prosperous coastal districts where B village locates, have been economically much better off in comparison with the past, they actually still face a largely unstable and even hostile world full of uncertainties and threats. Most Chinese peasants today are able to feed and clothe themselves so that subsistence may no longer be their top priority (something Scott thought was important to clientelism but which Oi challenged), however, peasant insecurity and dependence is continued.

Guanxi and clientelism

In such an insecure context, the most important “anxiety-reduction behaviour” (Powell 1970: 411) that Chinese peasants have employed to make life more secure and bearable is to maintain, create and manage *guanxi*, and especially to seek particularistic benefits or protection from various patrons.

Guanxi in Chinese rural society

To translate literally, the Chinese term “*guanxi*” means “relationship” or “connection”. In a research on *guanxi* in Taiwanese rural society, Jacobs refers to *guanxi* as “particularistic ties” (Jacobs 1979). The sum total of one's *guanxi* is called a *guanxi* network (Gold, Guthrie, and Wank 2002a: 6), perhaps indicating the dense and overlapping nature of these social relations.

Guanxi as a social phenomenon exists and operates in a wide social scope and a variety of contexts in Chinese society, and in both urban and rural areas (For a collection of articles on this see Gold, Guthrie, and Wank 2002b). But some argue that it is more pervasive in rural areas since it is rooted in a rural context where kinship ties, mutual aid and obligation have always been indispensable and predominant (Yang 1994). And,

the function of *guanxi* in Chinese rural society has been intensively studied and recognized by social scientists (Kipnis 1994; 2002; 1996; 1997; Yan 1996a; 1996b). Yan, for example, points out that *guanxi* networks, which are functionally useful and important for villagers, actually involve all aspects of people's life in the community from agricultural production and recreation to political alliances (Yan 1996a: 8-9). And those who fail to cultivate and maintain their *guanxi* networks risk being isolated by the majority in the village, which under circumstances of personal crisis could result in severe social sanction. He argues that the necessity and importance of *guanxi* is demonstrated and strengthened by its "economic, social and political functions in everyday life" (ibid.: 15).

Thus Chinese peasants intentionally build up, maintain, rely on and are also deeply embedded in their *guanxi* networks because, most importantly, their *guanxi* networks serve to offer mutual assistance, protection as well as opportunities. The insecurity arising from decollectivization, market reform and increasing chances of dealing with difficult world beyond village boundary have made peasants continue to rely – perhaps even more than they did in the past – on their *guanxi* networks (Oi 1989: 183-226; Unger 2002: 143-146; Wilson 2002).

Likewise, all my interviewees in B village have indicated to me, in one way or another, that *guanxi* is crucial for their life. One villager interviewee, for instance, talked about the importance of *guanxi*:

In the countryside, *guanxi* is very important for people, particularly for us ordinary villagers. Why? Because, in everyday life, no one can be certain that he/she or his/her family will never need assistance of various forms from other people. For example, during busy season of farming, you may find to be shorthanded; when sending your children to school, or starting your private business, or when your family member needs expensive hospital treatment, you may have a sudden need of a large sum of money; when holding weddings for your children or funerals for your parents, you

may be short of both money and hands. In addition to these, you may also encounter various difficulties when dealing with the authorities, say, applying for licenses, going through legal formalities and so on. In short, for us ordinary villagers, it is fairly easy to fall in trouble under such circumstances. Therefore, without relying on relatives and friends, it would be almost impossible to go through these life crises. These relatives and friends are your *guanxi*, ... which is extremely important for your life (Interview 30).

Another villager's comment helps to demonstrate why villagers today have to turn to their *guanxi* for assistance rather than the village collective:

During the common era, although all villagers were poor, at least there was a 'collective' that we could rely on. At that time, the collective was supposed to take care of villagers' life. The issues such as childbirth, illness, schooling and burial arrangements were all guaranteed. But nowadays the village collective cares nothing about villagers. You cannot rely on the village collective at all once you are in need. Last year, for example, one villager in our village was seriously wounded in a car accident and urgently needed a large sum of money for operation. His wife could not gather the needed money in a sudden and therefore came to the village cadres requesting to borrow some money from the village collective. You know what? Her request was turned down by the cadres, saying that the collective money could not be lent to individual villagers. Look, even in such circumstances, the collective could not be counted on, what's the use of the collective though? Once in trouble, people can only rely on their own family members, relatives and close friends (Interview 31).

The above citation has served to demonstrate that informal *guanxi* ties have been continually cultivated, maintained and relied on by villagers to reduce their sense of insecurity and pursue their individual goals and opportunities under the existing structure. Particularly, in the reform era, with the relative absence of impersonal guarantees of security, *guanxi* networks seem to play a more important role in villagers'

life.

Guanxi and patron-client relationship

Guanxi, in its primary form, is a dyadic alliance between two individuals based on reciprocal exchange, and it largely fits in Foster's concept of "dyadic contract". Dyadic contracts, according to Foster, are created and maintained by people so as to defend themselves as well as maximize the opportunities in an insecure world (Foster 1963; Foster 1961). Dyadic contracts, or *guanxi* ties can mainly fall into two types: one is symmetrical/horizontal ties made between people of equal socio-economic status; the other is asymmetrical/vertical ties, that is patron-client bonds between people of unequal socio-economic status (ibid.). *Guanxi*, as a term, is used indiscriminately by Chinese people to refer to both types of ties.

Although symmetrical/horizontal dyadic alliances and asymmetrical/vertical dyadic alliances are both functionally helpful to ordinary villagers, the vertical patron-client alliances are much more attractive and useful. This is because through the patron-client bond, a peasant can associate himself to someone, namely a patron, who owns greater status, power, influence, wealth and authority. Exchange based on patron-client relationship can bring scarce resources, opportunities, protection, security, or any critical things that a client badly needs. This is why Oi, when analyzing Chinese village politics, chooses to apply the concept of patron-client relationship rather than that of *guanxi* (Oi 1989: 131-132).

Since contemporary rural Chinese society is conducive to the flourishing of both *guanxi* and vertical patron-client relations, the question is how and to what extent patron-client alliances affect and constrain villagers' behaviour in village elections.

Why do villagers participate in village elections?

With the coming of direct village elections, villagers are required to take time and energy to participate and vote. The Organic Law stipulates that “a VC election is valid only when over half the eligible voters cast their votes” (Organic Law Article 14). This means without 50 per cent of voters participating, village elections are not lawful. In fact the voting rate of B village has been extremely high in each round of three direct elections held since 1999 at 98.7%, 97.8% and 99.7% respectively (see table 2.1 below). Why is the voting rate always so high in B village? What factors motivate villagers to go to the ballot booth?

Table 3.1 Information on voters’ participation in B village’s three rounds of direct VC elections

Year	Total eligible voters	Voters participating in electoral meeting	Proxy votes	Absent voters	Voting rate	Voting subsidy (yuan)
1999	700	315	386	9	98.7%	10
2002	693	251	427	15	97.8%	10
2004	706	254	450	2	99.7%	N/A

Voting subsidy

The voting subsidy has been taken as a popular measure to lure villagers to go to vote in village elections especially in economically wealthy area (Guo 2003; Guo and Tong 2006; Hu 2001: 61). Because Article 14 of the Organic Law stipulates that the VC election is valid only when more than half eligible voters attend the electoral meeting, distributing a voting subsidy to voters is often used to encourage voting and a quorum for VC elections.

The voting subsidy as a measure to attract villagers’ electoral participation has also been applied in Xinjia Township. According to a Xinjia Township leader (interview 1), a

voting subsidy has been used in all the 28 villages of Xinja Township since the first direct VC elections in 1999. But rather than the township government, it is each village collective that pays for this sum of money. In most villages, each voter is given 10 *yuan* for attending electoral meetings. However, in a few villages with relatively weak collective economic capacity, 5 *yuan* per voter has been given (Ibid.).

One point should be noted here. In theory a voting subsidy is supposed to subsidize voters who take time to attend the electoral meeting for earnings lost and those who do not personally participate the electoral meeting are not eligible to have such subsidy. But in reality, a voter who does not show up personally but authorizes someone else to go to vote for her also receives such a subsidy. In B village this was certainly the case in the 1999 and 2002 elections: so long as a voter's vote was cast, not matter whether she attended the meeting herself or asked someone else to vote on her behalf, she received the 10 *yuan* subsidy.

Obviously, this seems to be unfair for those voters who really spend hours participating in an election. However, this small institutional adjustment has three advantages. First, there are always some eligible voters who are not able to go to vote personally on the election date (for instance, the many young people working outside the village), and if these voters are deprived of their voting subsidy, they may lack the inducement to go through the formalities of even proxy voting. If these voters neither go to vote nor adopt proxy voting the participation rate may substantially decrease and even risk falling below the lawful minimum, leading to an invalid election. Second, since often proxy voting is carried out by a voter's immediate family member or close relative, for example a wife voting for a husband, a son for his parents (Interview 47 and 55), the actual voter is unlikely to consider it unfair that the trustee (the person making the vote by proxy) gets the voting subsidy. Third, the total number of on-the-spot voters on the election day will be dramatically reduced, which can make the organization of electoral meeting much easier.

The voting subsidy is adopted to lure villagers' to participate in the election. This seems to indicate that without it the voting rate should be significantly lower. But is the subsidy the main motivating factor for villagers? One indicator is whether the voting rate falls when there is no subsidy. As Form 2.1 shows that although voting subsidy was not adopted in B village's 2004 election, the voting rate that year was higher than in 1999 and 2002. This indicates that it is at least not a decisive factor affecting villagers' decisions to participate in elections.

Local issues

An important local issue which is of wide concern to people may largely motivate voters to cast their votes. However, in B village, only the 1999 election, that is, the first direct village election, were more or less affected by issues of wide concern. When the first direct village election was approaching in 1999, the challengers (Qu Jiamao, Qu Jiaxian and Qu Jiaji) reportedly raised two issues in their political campaign to attack the incumbent old cadres and canvass votes: anti-corruption (auditing village financial account) and refunding villagers' share in a bankrupt village collective factory.

Corruption was considered to have been very serious in B village before 1999. Collective funds had been abused and embezzled by the village cadres; collective properties and enterprises were badly managed; village cadres took advantage of their public position to get illegal benefits for themselves, their relatives and friends. In short, cadre corruption was serious and many villagers were disgruntled (Interview 31, 41, 50, 51 and 53). Thus in 1999 election, the challengers promised villagers that once they got elected they would audit the previous village financial accounts to figure out how village collective fund had been spent in the past and who should be responsible for what (Interview 31, 41 and 50).

The second issue was about refunding villagers' shares in a bankrupt collective factory. In 1996, the then cadres of B village had decided to run a pencil factory, which was supposed to be very profitable. However, since the collective funds were short at that

time, the then village cadres raised money from many individual households (about 50 households) and promised return with good interest. Unfortunately, this investment, like other collective-managed enterprises, failed: it was not long before the factory went bankrupt. Thus villagers who had contributed money wanted to get their money back. However, the then cadres said the village collective had no money to pay back the villagers. In the 1999 election, the challengers promised to those villagers who contributed money for the pencil factory that once they came to power they would refund their money (Interviews 31, 41, 50 and 53).

Many villagers were concerned about these two issues and the challengers' promise did seem appealing to voters in 1999 election. However, although the challengers won the 1999 election, neither issue was solved by the time they left office in 2002. The "democratically" elected first VC's failure to deliver their promises on widely concerned issues made villagers very disappointed in and cynical about the big promises made by candidates. As a result, in the following 2002 and 2004 elections, no candidates, neither the incumbents nor the challengers, attempted to make promises on issues of wide public concern (Interviews 31, 41 and 47).

Although both the 2002 and 2004 elections did not revolve around particular public issues, the voting rate in the three rounds was not significantly different. Thus issues of public concern do not seem to explain the sustained high voting rate.

Political efficacy

Political efficacy, as defined by Campbell, Gurin and Miller, is "...the feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change" (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954: 187). Political scientists have considered political efficacy as predictor of political participation (Abramson and Aldrich 1982) as well as an important result of participation (Finkel 1985).

As far as Chinese village elections are concerned, Li (2003), who examined the first

direct VC elections in twenty villages in Jiangxi Province in 1999, argues that Chinese villagers feel a higher level of political efficacy after their first “free and fair” village election because they realize that they are able to eliminate unpopular cadres. He further predicts that enhanced efficacy will cause more active participation as well as political restructuring in Chinese villages. Li’s conclusion is based only on the first direct village election and his logic is that since villagers have realized that they now can make a difference by removing unresponsive village cadres, thus their political efficacy may improve and they will participate more actively in following elections. The question here, however, is: whether the change of cadres really can make a difference in terms of village governance? In other words, even if villagers’ votes can lead to a change in village leaders, would their efficacy be affected if they find that the change of village leaders actually made no difference to village governance? Li finds that villagers’ efficacy in this sense has been enhanced based on his survey of 20 villages soon after the first direct village elections. However, without longitudinal observation, it is impossible to know whether the level of villagers’ efficacy will continue to increase, will decrease, or will remain stable afterwards and through further rounds of elections.

My study of B village through its three rounds of elections shows that because the new cadres elected in 1999 election failed to make any substantial difference to village governance, villagers became frustrated and sceptical. As one villager commented:

In 1999 election, Jiamao and his men promised to audit the village financial accounts, to refund the money raised from villagers for the pencil factory, and some other things as well. But did they make it in the end? Nothing. They achieved nothing. What is the use of elections? Whoever comes to power has to listen to the Party and government, don’t they (Interview 35)?

If political efficacy mainly refers to the villagers’ feeling that they can make a difference to village governance by voting in VC elections, in B village, I think villagers’ political efficacy has not been the major factor in promoting electoral participation at least in the

2002 and 2004 elections.

Thus, voting subsidy, local issues and political efficacy all fail to explain the consistently very high voting rates in the three rounds of direct elections in B village.

What then is the reason for it?

Social connections

My research indicates electoral mobilization based on informal social connections (*guanxi*) is largely the cause of the high voting rate in each of B village's three direct elections. As I have discussed earlier, in a small rural community like B village people are bound together by a large number of personal relations, such as kinship, marriage, friendship, and patronage. Without reference to the norms, values, and rules held by the actors and the sorts of interpersonal relationships which commonly occur in this community, namely, without an understanding of the informal institutions and relationships, it is very difficult to fully understand political activities like elections.

As a single lineage village, over 95 per cent of households in B village that bear the surname *Qu* actually can be traced back to a common founding ancestral family (Interviews 47 and 50). Although the single lineage has been divided into different lineage branches and there is no close horizontal association based on lineage (no village-wide lineage activities have been reported during my fieldwork), villagers are related to each other through a variety of informal social bonds. The aggregation of these bonds is effectively the village *guanxi* network, which is central in the everyday life of every villager. Mutual aid, kinship obligations and reciprocal exchange have always been the most important function of these ties, effectively providing material and non-material security. And with the introduction of direct village elections, electoral mobilization in B village has soon become tied into this network of village social connections. Voters are mobilized on the basis of various ties, especially patron-client ones. Villagers are largely embedded in and dependent on this network and once these ties are utilized in an electoral campaign, voters can be pressured to cast their votes. For

example, being asked what had motivated him to come to vote in the 2004 VC electoral meeting, one villager interviewee of B village talked about the importance of *guanxi* and “face” (*mianzi*):

Actually I have my own business to mind and don't want to come to vote at all. There's absolutely no use in electing so many cadres in a village and no matter who gets elected, he cannot really make a difference to the village. But because of the issue of face (*mianzi wenti*), I came to vote anyway. How could you refuse them if you are approached by relatives or friends to urge you to vote for a candidate? In countryside, *guanxi* and *renqing* (human feelings) are too important (Interview 41).

“Face” is an important concept in Chinese culture in relation to a person's social status and prestige in his social network and social exchanges. Ho defines “face” as “the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim for himself from others, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in his social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in that position as well as acceptably in his general conduct ...” (Ho 1976: 883). Hwang (1987: 953-957) points out that abiding by norms in social exchanges adds to one's face, a form of social capital. And Wilson (2002: 166), based on his recent research in Chinese villages, argues that “maintaining one's face is a prerequisite for acquiring capital and material goods through social relations”. Applied to the villager's comment analysed here, “the issue of face” actually implies a norm of informal social exchange. The villager was mobilized to vote because he was “approached by a relative or friend”, who asked him to do a favour by going to vote for certain candidates. He did so because otherwise he would be regarded as refusing to give “face” (respect, deference or assistance) to the person approaching him. Refusing to give other people “face” may very likely lead to his difficulty to acquiring favour or assistance from those people in the future.

Among all my 26 villager interviewees in B village, 23 (88%) revealed that “face”, “*guanxi*” or “*renqing*” had been very important factors motivating them to vote in VC

elections. As Hu has noted in research on VC elections in Fujian Province, villagers' active participation is related to "the characteristics of residency of rural community" (Hu 2001: 57-60). He argues that villagers and their families live within the same village for generations and develop longstanding and deeply involved relationships. They then actively participate in elections out of the personal connections with those candidates, who may be their relatives, neighbours or friends. He further illuminates that some kinds of ethics or norms followed by villagers, such as reciprocity, exchange of favours, mutual aid in time of need and so on, may push villagers to go to vote because a villager may risk being subject to the censure of morality if he stays away from elections for which his relatives, friends, and neighbours are running (ibid.). Similarly, the research of Tong (2003) and Xiao (2003) also indicates that the mobilization of village elites by making use of social connection (*guanxi*) networks largely contributes to villagers' high participating rate in VC elections.¹⁹

How do villagers vote: the development of clientelism under direct elections

Among all these various informal social bonds that connect villagers to each other, patron-client relationships are perhaps most crucial and effective in mobilizing villagers to voting in village elections. As I have demonstrated at the beginning of this chapter, Chinese rural society is strongly favourable to and characterized by clientelism. In the reform era, ordinary villagers not only confront larger insecurity in life due to the demise of village collective, but may also need financial, technological, and marketing assistance and services to improve their standard of living. However, these limited but critical resources are often controlled by a few village patrons within the village community. Thus there is a continuing need for villagers to seek patrons so as to respond to increasingly complex demands on particularistic basis. And as a result,

¹⁹ In Taiwan's local elections, *guanxi* or informal social connections also played a crucial role in mobilizing voters to take part in elections. See Bosco (1992) and Gallin (1969).

patron-client structure is still predominant in the village community with ordinary villagers/clients depending on their patrons.

With the coming of direct village elections, the client has acquired a new political resource, since simply his or his family's votes may be required by his patron. Even someone with no other valuable services to offer may now find that the votes of his immediate family can be needed by a potential patron, which enables the continued existence or new creation of a patron-client bond. In Chapter 4, I will give a detailed analysis of the patron-client exchanges in VC elections focusing on the strategies that candidates use, as patrons, to secure the votes of villagers. From the point of view of ordinary villagers, they find themselves being approached by their patrons to ask for their votes in VC elections. As clients, they are bound to their patrons by a debt of obligation and therefore cannot refuse their patrons' request for their electoral support. Some villagers also find themselves being offered immediate benefits by candidates to exchange their votes and perhaps to create a patron-client relationship, which is appealing to them. On the whole villagers are pulled together in VC elections largely on the basis of a variety of *guanxi* relationships, particularly patron-client ones. Their votes are actually delivered in cluster to their (potential) patrons as a matter of course. Just as Scott has described the local electoral politics in Southeast Asia, "working on voters individually or by class affiliation made little sense [for a candidate] when most of the electorate was divided into patron-client clusters" (Scott 1972b: 110).

In classifying English voters from mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, Scott puts them into three categories:

A central distinction [of voters] is the extent to which they were free agents and, if they were, whether they were motivated by short-run inducements or by larger policy issues. Those who were, by and large not free agents were termed "locked-in electorates"; those who were more nearly free agents but oriented to short-run gains we have termed "potential machine electorates"; and those who were oriented to broad policy issues we

have termed “issue electorates” (Scott 1972a: 97-98).

Perhaps the bulk of villagers in B village fit well in Scott’s category of “locked-in electorates” who are embedded and locked in to the patron-client networks. Some villagers may fit in the category of “machine electorates”, who have “relative freedom from the economic and social pressures that operated on most ‘locked-in’ rural electorates” (Ibid.: 99). These villagers are likely to have relatively better economic well-being, stronger supportive ties or better sense of security, which enable them to gain relative independence and to bargain with candidates. These “machine electorates”, however, as Scott points out, are largely oriented to trade their votes for short-range and particularistic favours (or promises) from candidates. “Issue electorates”, who are “oriented to broad policy issues”, hardly exist due to the nature of village elections although, as discussed previously, local issues perhaps more or less played a role in the first direct VC election in B village.

To the locked-in voters/clients, the electoral contest between candidates/patrons can put them in difficult position when they find that competing candidates/patrons approach them to solicit their votes. For example, one B village villager told me that in the 2004 village election the two competing candidates canvassed an old couple who were poor, physically weak and had no kin background within the village. Their only son was seriously disabled due to their consanguineous marriage. At that time, both candidates had a distant relative relationship with the couple. When soliciting their votes, the both candidates implied that if the couple did not give their votes to them, they would not help when the couple encountered difficulties in the future. The couple felt so embarrassed and helpless that cried ceaselessly in private (Interview 42). This villager added:

Many villagers have become annoyed about the elections because they are very likely to be put in a dilemma. You know, villagers are often approached by two competing candidates or factions, with both sides soliciting your vote. And it is very likely that

you have some kind of connection with both sides. How do you choose? Not matter which side you give your vote, you will offend the other side. It really is an annoying thing for people. It is not unusual that, due to village elections, friends have turned to enemies and neighbours don't talk to each other. The Centre calls for building a harmonious society. How can this contribute to the harmonious society (Interview 26)?

Analyzing clientelist politics in peasant society, Powell points out that the electoral competition among patrons “may lead to less bargaining power for the client, rather than more, as for example the case of a peasant who finds himself within the power domain of a landlord, a moneylender, and a storekeeper, all of whom pressure him to vote in accord with their particular preferences” (Powell 1970: 416). Powell's analysis largely fits the situation in B village. Where clientelism is pervasive, villagers are pressured at the same time by different candidates/patrons in village elections, and this actually makes many of them more vulnerable because no matter which side a villager chooses, they will inevitably offend the other candidates/factions and may therefore damage part of their supportive network in the village community.

It is suggested, particularly by those taking the liberal-democratic approach, that since direct village elections have empowered villagers to elect the VC cadres they think will serve them best and remove those whose performance has been poor, villagers, as a whole, have shown great enthusiasm and have actively participated in VC elections (Li 2003; O'Brien 2001; O'Brien and Li 2000; Wang 1997). However, in contrast, many villagers of B village have become increasingly apathetic and even sceptical to direct VC elections. As one villager put it: “In my opinion, whether village elections are held or not makes very little difference for our lives. Although it is supposed to be self-governance, in fact no matter who gets elected, they still need to carry out the work assigned by the Party and the government, don't they? Village elections only matter to those who want to struggle for power” (Interview 30). To a large degree, the reason that villagers of B village are not enthusiastic about VC elections is that, as clients or “locked-in” voters, they are not free agents and their votes can be easily claimed by

their village patrons.

Conclusion

Although B village is located in an economically developed area and in the reform era the villagers' average living standard has dramatically improved and is much better off than their counterparts in poor in-land areas, due to absence of a social security system and safety nets, serious wealth gap formed in market reform, absence of free peasant associations as well as strong bureaucracy and villagers' heavy financial burden, average villagers nowadays still experience serious insecurities and are perhaps more vulnerable than in the pre-reform period due to the collapse of collective welfare and protection. In this context, villagers use informal social connections, especially patron-client ties, to seek security as well as opportunities and particularistic favours. Direct village elections were introduced in B village in this context.

With arrival of direct village elections, what is the main factor that motivates villagers to cast their votes? Although voting subsidies, political efficacy, and local issues may play a role they cannot fully explain the very high voting rate in each of the three rounds of direct village elections held since 1999. This chapter argues that it is the electoral mobilization based on informal social connections (particularly patron-client relations) that accounts for the high voting rate in B village. Villagers are highly dependent on and deeply embedded in the social network of their village. And electoral mobilization based on such personal relationships and networks can involve almost every member of the village community.

Villagers are mobilized into elections largely by personal relationships, and especially their patron-client ties. A villager usually chooses to give his vote to a patron in exchange for something that she badly needs or to repay a previous debt owed to the patron. Votes like that are to a great extent under clientelist control and therefore not

free, even when election procedures adhere to the regulations and are formally “free and fair”. Villagers are largely “locked in” to the patron-client networks of the village community. In addition, in B village, the vote-soliciting competition between different candidates/factions has put many villagers in a dilemma, and may have caused partial damage to their crucial community network and therefore decreased their “bargaining power” with village patrons. How villagers’ votes are solicited by the candidates/factions will be the subject of the next chapter.

4 Candidates, patrons and factions

The role of villager's committee (VC) candidates and how they campaign to win village elections have largely been unexplored. Some researchers hold that self-promotion and campaigning for winning votes are culturally not acceptable in small Chinese rural communities and therefore candidates have tried to avoid campaigning. For instance, Pastor and Tan say they have observed "little or no campaigning" in Chinese village elections. They argue, "In a small village, where everyone knows each other and where it is viewed as culturally inappropriate to promote oneself, most candidates have been reluctant to campaign" (Pastor and Tan 2000: 496). The question is, however, if candidates are reluctant to campaign, how they gain votes from their fellow villagers? Moreover, who actually runs for VC election? What are their incentives? Little academic attention has been paid to such questions so far. This chapter will examine these questions by focusing on the role of candidates in VC elections.

This chapter will start by discussing the changing composition of village patrons in the reform era. I will demonstrate that village patrons are no longer mainly limited to the village cadres as during the commune era. Village patrons today may include any people with wealth, power, skills, knowledge, status, and most importantly, useful connections outside the village. VC candidates are usually among the village patrons, whose influence over their villager clients can be easily translated into votes in VC elections. Then in the second section, I look at why some patrons stand as candidates in elections and then explore in detail how candidates solicit votes from villagers through informal clientelist relations. Finally, I will discuss how and why factions emerge in village elections and demonstrate their role in village elections. The chapter concludes that VC electoral candidates are invariably patrons and they solicit votes largely by making use of their patronage resources and clientelist networks. As patrons, on the one hand, they

are able to attract a sizeable following by distributing benefits or patronage; on the other hand, they are comparatively free to behave in an arbitrary and highly personalistic way in dealing with their followers. During an election, candidates reach their villager clients to claim their votes on the basis of past, current or future benefits, and usually, those clients have relatively little recourse to bargaining in such a situation (and many of them actually do not want to bargain with their patrons as they can find it useful to support a patron in the election – a rare chance to reciprocate). In order to facilitate vote soliciting, factions form around alliances between candidates and their clients. As a consequence, village elections are largely a factional contest structured around clientelist networks.

The changing composition of village patrons and patrons as VC candidates

The composition of village patrons: before and after the reform

A patron, as defined by Foster (1963: 1282), “is someone who combines status, power, influence, authority—attributes useful to anyone—in ‘defending’ himself or in helping someone else to defend himself.” And, he further defines that “a person, however powerful and influential, is a patron only in relationship to someone of lesser position—a client who, under specific circumstances, he is willing to help”. Scott (1972b: 93) points out that a patron “often is in a position to supply unilaterally goods and services which the potential client and his family need for their survival and well being”, and, “being a monopolist, or at least an oligopolist, for critical needs, the patron is in an ideal position to demand compliance from those who wish to share in these scarce commodities”. However, an individual may be both a patron and a client in a “clientele pyramid”, i.e., a patron may be the client of a higher patron who in turn is the client of a patron even higher than himself (Lande 1977: xxi).

The composition of patrons in B village, as in many other Chinese villages in transition, has changed over time. During the Mao era, patrons were almost exclusively cadres in a

village community. Villagers under the commune system could be clearly divided into two types of political actors: “the masses” and the cadres. Due to the strict household registration system which forbade the commune members’ other occupational choices outside their village, it was very difficult to change their social status as agricultural laborers and rural residents. Therefore, in this context, to become a cadre was almost the only way for villagers to improve their socioeconomic status. Some villagers who combined “good class” background, outstanding skills in agricultural production, ability to deal with various problems among villagers and most importantly, the support of commune leaders, were able to become village (brigade or small team) cadres. Village cadres during commune era possessed authority, political power, prestige, and scarce resources as well. They could get villagers to comply by offering to grant them access to goods and opportunities (such as income, inputs, leisure or social services), or by threatening to deprive them of these resources (Oi 1989). By doing so, village cadres in the commune era could not only have a better life themselves, but also favour their relatives, friends and clients (Oi 1989; Unger 2002). Thus village patrons during commune era, were almost exclusively brigade or team cadres, or what He Xuefeng (2002b) called “elites within the political system”. For example, Qu Jiazhi, who had been a team leader of B village during the commune era, recalled that period proudly and with pleasure:

To be a cadre at that time [the commune era] was really a pleasant and authoritative job. As a team leader, I was in charge of allocating work tasks to my team members. Every team member was obedient and submissive. You know, I could punish a defiant member by allocating him heavy task and favour an obedient one by letting him do light work. Since every one wanted to do light work, no body dared to confront me. It was really much easier and commanded more respect to be a cadre then than it does nowadays (Interview 47).

Since the dismantling of the commune system, rural society has been under transition. On the one hand, with the disbanding of collective agriculture, individual households

have been able to do their own business and enrich themselves under the household contract system, thus the opportunities for villagers to change their socioeconomic status have greatly increased; on the other hand, due to the development of the market economy, the closed boundary of the village community has been broken, which enables villagers to find and make use of alternative chances and resources out of their village to change their socioeconomic status. As a result, in the reform era, village patrons have no longer been limited to village cadres as they were under the commune system. As Unger suggests, today “a more pluralistic structure of patronage has developed” (Unger 2000: 78). Village patrons nowadays can refer to anyone who owns, controls, and thus can offer scarce resources, opportunities or other valuable and useful goods. Although in the reform era village cadres still control a range of scarce resources and remain patrons, they no longer monopolize scarce resources within the village community as they did during the commune era. Especially with outside-community contacts becoming more and more frequent and the development of a market economy, those persons who are able to offer jobs, loans, market opportunities, or assistance in dealing with “outsiders” can draw a following among those villagers who have had much more limited experience with the market and outside opportunities (Oi 1989: 224). In research on Italian rural society under transition, Silverman also finds that as outside relationships and contacts became more important over time, “the most valuable patron was neither the wealthiest nor the most generous, but the one with the best connections” (Silverman 1967: 289). As far as rural China is concerned, although the demise of the commune system and the development of the market economy has undermined village cadres’ monopoly over opportunities and resources and other patrons have emerged on the basis of other resources, the clientelist nature of village politics has not diminished; it has merely evolved.

However, in terms of the role of patrons after the commune era, there are two prominent characteristics: first, the resource base of patronage has enlarged in reform era. The patronage base, according to Scott, can be classified into three categories: a) one’s own knowledge and skills, b) direct control of the personal real property, and c) indirect

control of the property or authority of others (often the public) (Scott 1972b: 97-98). By this classification, village cadres/patrons under the commune system almost totally relied on their position and power derived from the higher-level authority, or, in Scott's term, the "indirect office-based property" (Ibid.: 98). However, with the end of the commune system, apart from the village cadres, some villagers who possess knowledge and skills (especially market-related ones) or own personal real property have also become potential patrons. For instance, Qu Jiamao, as a person with knowledge, is constantly approached by his fellow villagers who want to ask him his views on the wisdom of things they are contemplating doing; Qu Sixu, who is a truck driver and has a transportation business, is often requested by villagers to transport their property; Qu Sifa runs a motorcycle repairing shop and is able to offer fellow villagers better services with lower prices (Interviews 50, 51 and 53). People like them, although not acting as village cadres before the advent of direct VC elections, actually have become patrons in the reform era based on either their knowledge, skills or personal real property, instead of the cadre status (indirect office-based properties).

Second, village patrons have increasingly functioned as middlemen or brokers in the reform era. The patron's role in connecting his clients to the world outside the local community is one of the most crucial features in descriptions of patronage systems in different cultural settings (Kenny 1960: 17&18; Pitt-Rivers 1954: 141; Silverman 1965: 178). Patrons of local communities have been validly described as "gatekeepers" (Kenny 1960: 17), "mediators" (Silverman 1965) or "brokers" (Wolf 1956: 1075). More and more frequently in the reform era, villagers have had to deal with "outsiders" (especially when facing complicated bureaucracies, such as when they apply for loans, credit, licenses of different kinds, or when dealing with the police and tax officials) and find opportunities outside their village community (looking for employment, market opportunities and so on). Ordinary villagers do not feel safe when facing a hostile outside world and would not trust those strange outsiders. So they tend to seek assistance from people they feel they can trust and those who are better equipped and more experienced to deal with the outside world, namely, their patrons. These patrons,

relying on their knowledge, skills and experience, as well as strong outside connections, thus can act as middlemen offering brokerage services to their clients. Oi, focusing on the changing role of village cadres of the early post commune era, has argued that “village cadres can no longer act as absolute gatekeepers” but “will remain middlemen between the peasants and the state as well as the market” (Oi 1989: 226).

Apart from village cadres, other villagers with outside connections have also assumed the role of middlemen or brokers. Some of them have connections with the market system, and some with the political system. But all these persons are capable of offering their fellow villagers crucial assistance in one way or another. For instance, Qu Jiaji has been able to act as a patron largely due to his valuable connection with his uncle, who is a People’s Liberation Army general. For many young people in the countryside, to join the army is an opportunity to escape farming and pursue a promising future. However, the quotas for recruitment are very limited each year (about one or two per village) and the selection process is usually rather stringent. Qu Jiaji, thanks to his uncle, is able to get valuable extra quotas for his fellow villagers who are eager to send their children to the army, or to help some applicants in the selection process. This has made Jiaji a respectable and valuable person (patron) in the eyes of many villagers (Interviews 29 and 51). Qu Jiamao also gains his prestige partly from his outside connections. He was a deputy head teacher of the township primary school for many years before and at the end of 1980s he resigned to set up his own private business selling paper boxes. According to Jiamao, his many students now have been in various positions and some are “very successful persons”. With these connections and contacts with his previous students, Jiamao is often approached by fellow villagers to seek help in time of need. For example, one of Jiamao’s neighbours was caught by police and faced a fine for driving a car without a valid driving license. After the neighbour turned to Qu Jiamao for help, Qu Jiamao contacted one of his previous students who was an official in the County government for help. With the help of Jiamao’s student, the fine that his neighbour faced was withdrawn (Interview 50). These outside connections, together with Jiamao’s knowledge and personal economic endeavors, enable him to have an

influence among villagers, namely, to be a patron.

Candidates arising from the village patrons

With the coming of direct village elections, village patrons who want to seek village public office and have a clientele at their command thus get the chance to stand as a VC candidate running for elections. As the patron-client structure is predominant in the village community, to be a patron is actually a crucial precondition for a candidate who wants to run for VC election. As noted above, a patron is someone who combines authority, power, prestige, wealth or any scarce resources and maintains a number of clients through clientelist exchange. Therefore, if a patron stands for election his chances will be good: on the one hand, as a person with prestige or “face”, he is well-known in the community in terms of his reputation, ability or personality; on the other hand, and more importantly, as a patron, he may easily claim votes from his clients who are bound to him by a debt of personal obligation, which largely facilitates his winning office. In other words, a patron’s influence over his clients can be easily translated into political resources, which are essential for winning VC elections. In contrast, a non-patron candidate (if there is one), who has no patronage resources and a big size of personal following, does not have the advantage in elections as a patron candidate does and therefore have little chance to win elections in the village arena that is ridden by clientelism. As a result, in B village, all candidates who had actively run for village elections and got elected in elections are considered by villagers “able persons”, namely, patrons who own their local leadership to their personal skills, wealth, and outside connections—all of which enable them to build a personal following.

Candidates’ motivations for running for VC positions

Salary

Being able to get salary from holding VC positions should be one of the factors that lure some village patrons to run for VC offices. But village cadres’ salary standards vary greatly in different regions of rural China. In economically developed regions, village cadres are paid much more generously than those in poorer areas. For example, in a

wealthy village in southern Jiangsu Province, one of the most developed rural areas in China, the major village cadres were paid over 43,000 *yuan* in 1999 (Zhong 2003: 176). Another rich village in Guangdong Province, three top village cadres' salary averaged 190,000 *yuan* (Unger 2002: 155). In some poor inland rural areas, village cadres only receive about 1,000 to 2,000 *yuan* a year and even this small amount of income means a lot for most villagers in that regions (Cao 2005: 186; Zhong 2003: 176). According to the township officials, the highest pay level for village cadres in Xinjia Township is around 9,000-10,000 *yuan* per year and this is only applied in three or four villages with very good collective economic condition. The average level is about 5,000-6,000 *yuan* per year and in a few villages with poor collective economic condition, the village cadres can only have 3,000-4,000 *yuan* (Interviews 1,5 and 8). The salary of village cadres in each village usually depends on the economic condition of the village collective, village cadres' workload, as well as the village tradition. The economic condition of the village collective, however, is the basic and principal factor deciding the salary level of village cadres since it is the village collective funds that pay for their salaries.

The collective funds of B village are wealthier than that of other villages for two reasons. First, at the end of the 1990s, with the privatization of the collective-owned enterprises, the money obtained from selling enterprises went into the village collective funds. Second, in recent years, the government has bought pieces of farmland from B village for public construction or industrial development and the money has also gone into the collective funds. As a result, the annual salary for VC chair of B village is around RMB 7,000, which is relatively high compared with most other villages of Xinjia Township. Deputy VC chair and VC member usually get 80% of VC chair's salary (interview 3). However, the annual average income per person of B village is reported to be RMB 3500 in 2003 (interviews 2, 50 and 53). What is more, since the VC members of B village usually work part time (often in the morning of weekdays) and still have quite some time to run their own businesses, this salary should be quite attractive, at least in the eyes of some ordinary villagers. For example, one villager of B

village commented:

What a good job it is (to be a village cadre)! They just sit in the office comfortably, having tea, smoking and reading newspapers. What's more, they basically only work three, four hours in the morning a day and are paid six, seven thousand *kuai* (Chinese *yuan*) each year. Isn't it good enough? You know, many villagers work laboriously in their farmland early and late and can just make no more than a half of their salary (Interview 36).

Although no village cadres of B village have ever indicated to me their satisfaction to their salary, rather, they often complained that their hard work could not match the low pay (Interviews 50 and 53), comparatively speaking, such a salary is quite desirable.

Hidden benefits

In addition to the official monetary pay, village cadres can also enjoy quite some hidden benefits from their posts, which include dining and drinking on collective funds and seeking personal interests with power.

Eating and drinking on public funds, which is called *gongkuan chihe* in Chinese, actually is a prevalent phenomenon among Chinese officialdom. Although it is normal for the governmental departments (at the township level and above) to have a budget for entertainment in relation to official businesses such as official reception for higher up officials or other guests, due to the lack of strict public supervision, such entertainment expenditure is often exploited or abused by government officials (Wang 2007; Zhang 2006). Some officials even entertain their family members or personal friends by taking advantage of public funds (Wang 2007).

At village level, a reasonable sum of money spent on entertainment should have been a normal expenditure for village administration. In Longkou and many places elsewhere, the expenditure item for village entertainment is officially recognized and formally

shown on village account statement (interview 3 and Cheng 2001). In theory, the village entertainment expenditure should only occur in the process of doing necessary public affairs, such as serving meals to some guests or providing entertainment in relation to certain public activities. In reality, however, due to lack of transparency and oversight (this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6), village cadres, actually have considerable discretion on how to spend on entertainment. As a result, despite the central government policy to constrain village level entertainment expenditure (Guowuyuan bangongting 2006), in many villages, a significant part of village public funds is often overspent and even abused on dining and drinking, particularly for entertaining township officials who make inspection visits to villages (Cheng 2000: 52-53; Liu 2006; Zhang 2001; Zhang 2003).

As far as B village is concerned, its entertainment fees added up to about 20,000 *yuan* in 2004 (interview 2). On average that is about 1,700 *yuan* per month. However, the annual salary for VC chair is 7,000 *yuan* (about 600 *yuan* per month). And the average annual income per person of B village in 2004 is claimed to be 3500 *yuan* (interview 55). This means that the public money that B village cadres spent on dining and drinking each month almost equals a villager's half-year income. An overwhelming majority of the entertainment fees in B village was spent on entertaining township officials who made frequent inspection visits to B village. It was even alleged that village cadres abused public money on entertaining their relatives and friends by the excuse of doing official businesses (interviews 50 and 53). In addition to meals and drinks, village cadres can also get some other benefits. For example, their tea and cigarettes are paid by the village collective funds as part of village administrative or entertainment expense (interview 55).

Another form of hidden benefits of being a village cadre comes from seeking personal interests with power. Traditionally, official status in China usually means privileges and respect (Zhong 2003). Though officially village cadres do not have cadre status, they do have semi-official status since they are assigned many administrative tasks to fulfill, and

the most important thing is that, in terms of village affairs, village cadres do have a say in getting things done. In other words, village cadres do have considerable power on their village arena. Those powers may include discretion in how to carry out the township government's regulations and orders, like for example in implementing family planning policy or in allocating plots of land for housing, the uses of village collective funds, arranging village production activities or what to do for village daily administrative affairs. All these things can be done with considerable discretion and particularistic considerations based on *guanxi*. And often gifts, bribe or favours are expected of villagers in return for services provided by village cadres, which involves corruption or patronage (Cao 2005: 186-187; Zhong 2003: 176; interviews 10, 28 and 51).

Prestige and private resentment

In addition to the material benefits, prestige is another important incentive for village patrons to run for VC elections. Some village patrons run for VC elections mainly to gain prestige for themselves or damage their enemies' prestige. Holding village public offices can bring prestige to the village patrons and make them more respectable in the eyes of ordinary villagers (Interview 6). Especially with the arrival of direct VC elections, winning VC office through villagers' direct voting can, to a large degree, be regarded as meaning that a village patron has a significant influence and a large following in the village community. And holding village public offices and controlling power and authority enable a patron to nurture and extend his personal clientele (Scott 1972b: 98), which in turn adds up his prestige or "face".

Private resentment seems to be another important factor encouraging candidates to run for VC elections. Within a village, personal conflicts may easily lead to resentment. These conflicts among people can be out of various reasons, for instance, daily quarrels between neighbours, friction between cadres and the masses, fights on personal benefits or even out of jealousy to others (Interviews 1, 7, 49 and 50). Personal conflicts have played so big a role in the competition for VC offices that many Xinjia Township cadres

criticize this phenomenon. A Xinjia cadre said: “After we carried out the direct VC elections, some candidates actively ran for elections just out of private resentment toward the incumbent village cadres. Their aim was merely to remove the incumbent cadres and retaliate against them once they get elected.” (Interview 7) When I asked this cadre if the same thing happened in B village, he replied, “I think Jiamao and his mates did have this incentive because they started to scrutinize the previous village accounts as soon as they got elected in 1999. Their true intention was to retaliate against Qu Sixiang [the VPB secretary] and other old cadres” (Ibid.).

Interviews with both Jiamao and Sixiang confirmed that personal conflicts between them played a role (Interviews 49 and 50). For instance, Sixiang told me:

Personal conflicts together with the faults in my job made me become the object of resentment for some people in the village. Jiamao and I have mutual resentment. I once offended Jiamao’s brother for the sake of the village collective. Since then, his brother has harbored a grudge against me and has often come to my home or office after he’s been drinking, vituperating against and trying to provoke me. In the end, I could not stand it and called the police. The police punished his brother. In the countryside, people have a strong sense of kinship, which means if you offend one person, you will become the enemy of his whole kindred. Since I had such severe conflict with Jiamao’s brother, Jiamao would hate me and be eager to find chances to strike back as well. So, direct VC elections offered him the chance (Interview 49).

Similarly, one Xinjia Township official revealed that one of the reasons that motivated Jiazhi’s running for VC elections in 2002 was also for personal resentment:

Jiazhi had been the deputy VC chairman for many years before direct elections were introduced. In 1999, when the first direct VC election was held, Jiazhi also actively took part in the election campaign, attempting to be elected VC chair. However, Jiamao beat him in the end, which made Jiazhi choked with resentment. Three years later, in the 2002

election, Jiazhi made a determined stand again. This time, he won VC Chair and finally vented his anger (Interview 9).

It is very unlikely that the candidates themselves confess publicly that their incentive of running for VC offices is out of private resentment. It is also impossible to gauge to what degree this factor pushes a candidate to run for VC offices and whether his intention is to retaliate against the incumbent cadres or just to prove himself.

Strategies for winning votes

La piao: guanxi mobilization for village electoral campaign

During my fieldwork in B village and Xinjia Township, the most often heard term concerning village elections was “*la piao*” (perhaps best translated into English as “soliciting votes”). As one villager told me: “nowadays, (village) elections are actually about competition in *la piao*. It is almost unimaginable for any candidate to get elected without *la piao*.” *La piao*, however, was viewed negatively by villagers and usually conducted furtively and in private. When I asked Qu Jiamao if he had won the 1999 election by *la piao*, he replied me cautiously: “I did visit my fellow villagers’ houses, telling them my opinions and my plans for village governance in the future so as to gain their support. But I don’t think *la piao* is the correct term for my action. Look, if you don’t let your fellow villagers know your intention to run for the election, how can they vote for you?” (Interview 50) Here, Jiamao does not think visiting fellow villagers and telling them his will to run for election equates to *la piao*. According to my fieldwork investigation in Xinjia Township, although few elected village cadres would like to attribute their winning offices to *la piao* (although they often do so when talking about their electoral contenders). Instead, they all tended to claim they had got elected due to “the support and trust of the masses” (Interviews 50, 51, 53 and 57). However, “the masses” seem not to agree fully with this statement. At least, the overwhelming majority of my villager interviewees do not think so. How, then, do candidates *la piao* in village

electoral campaigns? Why is *la piao*, in terms of village elections, a kind of activity with negative connotations? Based on interviews and observation in B village, I have identified four forms of *la piao* that are employed by candidates: claiming votes from their clients, making particularistic promises, offering specific material benefits and voting buying.

First of all, claiming votes from his/her clients perhaps is the most common and effective way for a candidate (patron) to gain votes. As discussed previously, in a patron-client relationship, the patron is in fact in a position to supply critical goods and services which the clients need for their survival and well being. In this sense, a client is someone who has entered an unequal exchange relation in which he is unable to reciprocate fully. A debt of obligation binds him to the patron. The patron therefore is in an ideal position to demand compliance of his/her clients. As Scott puts it: “the patron’s domination of needed services, enable him to build up savings of deference and compliance which enhance his status, and represents a capacity for mobilizing a group of supporters when he cares to. The larger a patron’s clientele, and the more dependent on him they are, the greater his latent capacity to organize group action” (Scott 1972b: 94). With the arrival of direct VC elections, the patron who seeks VC office is in an ideal position to claim votes from his/her clients by take advantage of their deference, compliance and obligation to reciprocate. In B village, for example, almost all candidates have tended to mobilize the votes of their fellow villagers who owe them a debt of human feelings (*requing*) (Interviews 47, 49, 50 and 52).

Second, in exchange for their votes, a candidate would make various particularistic promises to villagers for whom he is not a patron—in doing so he is seeking to become a patron and establish clientelist relations. Promises are made according to the very need of different persons, from promising village subcommittee posts or job opportunities, to decreasing people’s contract fees for renting village collective properties, or offering future help in applying for house construction licence and so on (Interviews 38, 47, 48, 50 and 55). In short, each villager, or family may have or will have different and

specific problems to solve and they are therefore willing to exchange their votes for some particularistic concern of a potential village patron.

Third, to villagers who are not his clients, a candidate would exchange their votes on an instrumental basis by directly giving specific material benefits. Although wining, dining, and the exchange of gifts among villagers, are part of villagers' everyday lives (Kipnis 1996), such activities, particularly when undertaken by a candidate shortly before a village election, can be considered very instrumental. For example, one villager interviewee told me that, shortly before the 2004 election in B village, one of the candidates had entertained many fellow villagers at dinner. He said, "Just about two weeks before the election, Qu Jiaji invited the men to the restaurant, while his wife entertained the women at home. Every guest was clear about why he/she was invited by the couple" (Interview 39). In addition to B village, in Xinjia Township's 2004 VC elections, candidates of other villages were also reported to give cooking oil, restaurant free meal voucher, cigarettes or things like that to their fellow villagers to exchange their votes days before election (Interview 40, 45, 50, 51 and 54).

Finally, vote buying is a direct trade between money and votes. Vote buying may happen when a candidate solicits vote from a fellow villager with whom he/she has no patronage relationship and perhaps only distant or no *guanxi* relations at all, while the villager is ready to sell his/her vote for immediate economic return. Especially in a close and highly competitive election, vote buying is very likely to be used by candidates to win votes. During the 2004 village elections in Xinjia Township, vote buying had happened in some villages according to my interviewees (Interviews 13, 16, 26, 55 and 57). Since vote buying is usually carried out privately and secretly, and neither the buyers nor the sellers would like to admit such clearly illegal action, it is very difficult to get reliable and accurate data on this. Nonetheless, in B village's 2004 VC election, candidates of both factions (factions in B village will be introduced and discussed below) accused their rivals of "buying votes" (Interviews 47, 52 and 53). Also, in Xinjia Township's 2004 VC elections, one elected VC chair of Z village admitted to me that he

had had to give money to some villagers to win their votes (Interview 58); one villager of T village told me that one of the candidates in his village had wanted to buy his vote, but he had refused (Interview 59). In addition, there were also quite a few interviewees, including both villagers and township government officials, who had simply assured me of the “facts” of vote buying but refused to give more specific details on it (Interviews 13, 16, 26, 55 and 57). Nationwide, vote-buying in village elections has also been reported in many places. A prominent example is a case which happened in Shanxi Province and was reported by the Chinese official newspaper, *People's Daily* (Liu 2003). Due to the spread of vote buying in village elections nationwide, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) issued a circular in 2004 which demanding every place to “firmly forbid the candidates or their relatives and friends to directly or instigate others to buy off their fellow villagers, electoral workers as well as other candidates by using money, properties or other benefits in village elections” (Ministry of Civil Affairs of the PRC 2004).

All the four forms of *la piao* employed by the candidates are based on face-to-face informal social bonds that can pull villagers together. These social connections are generally called *guanxi* or *renqing* by villagers. A candidate may pull together voters on the basis of kinship relations, workmate relations, neighbour relations, in-law relations, or any kind of personal relations. However, as I have analyzed previously, these social connections can be divided into two categories: the horizontal ones and the vertical ones. The horizontal ones are between villagers of equal status, while the vertical ones are formed between villagers of unequal status and are patron-client relationships. As far as *la piao* is concerned, a candidate will put all his *guanxi* ties into full use, namely, he may employ both the horizontal and the vertical ties to gain votes. However, what I would like to emphasize here is that since the candidates almost always emerge as patrons, they are actually likely to be able to command quite significant support from their clients in elections. In the process of *la piao*, a candidate actually always attempts to reach his clients on the basis of a past, present, or future particularistic benefits (or implicit threat to withdraw such benefits). A candidate's behaviour in *la piao* largely fits

a pattern of patron mobilization, through which he is able to claim votes from those who owe favours or are indebted to him or those who want to gain favours from him in the future.

This analysis may be viewed as a simple method by which a single candidate tries to solicit votes through his ego-centred personal network. In practice, due to the strong competition between opposing candidates and the necessity of gathering as many voters/votes as possible, candidates are induced to make alliances to integrate their different *guanxi* networks so as to mobilize a larger group of followers. Mutually opposed factions therefore come into being, sometimes realigning over time.

Patrons and the formation of factions

Factions, as defined by Nicholas, are non-corporate political conflict groups with members recruited by a leader on diverse principles (Nicholas 1977: 57&58). When addressing this definition, he especially points out that a faction leader usually has “several different kinds of connections with his followers; he makes use of all possible ties to draw supporters into his faction” (ibid.: 58). Most other scholars, when analyzing factions, also have stressed the particularistic ties formed between individuals (Bailey 1969: 52; Boissevain 1977: 279-287). In the Chinese rural context, “factions are held together not by common ideology or class but by social ties (kin, patron-client, friend, etc.)” and they thus can be considered as “mostly exclusive *guanxi* networks” (see Bosco 1992: 158&168).²⁰

Since the followers attached to a single candidate’s personal network can be limited, they may be insufficient to win elections. However, if a group of candidates ally together and form a faction, with each faction member trying to secure votes/followers for his faction candidate through his own connections, the possibility of winning will of course significantly enhanced. In fact, in B village, *la piao* is carried out in a

²⁰ Evidence for factions’ recruiting supporters on the basis of *guanxi* in a non-election context in Chinese rural society can also found in Gallin (1969: 391 and 397).

“team-work” style based on faction. Since there are three village committee posts (one chair, one deputy chair and one member) subject to election in B village, each faction would usually choose the same number of candidates to run for these posts.²¹ For instance, in a village where three posts were subject to election, each of the two opposed factions had three candidates. When soliciting votes, faction members just directly told their followers which three they should write on their ballots (Interview 47 and 50). Although one villager may like one while hate another concerning the candidates of a faction, faction mobilization attempts to confine villagers choices within the “package” of each faction. It is also worth noting that in most cases, the candidates who ally and run for elections together are themselves faction leaders. However, this is not always the case. In some villages, the real faction leaders may not run elections themselves but pull wires behind the curtain instead (Interview 15).

Two factions crystallized in B village with the coming of the first direct VC elections in 1999: the Old Leading Team (OLT) Faction and the New Faction. Since then, the electoral contest in B village has been between the two groups. Briefly, the OLT Faction mainly consists of those former village cadres who had led B village before direct election in 1999 and a number of villagers who once benefited from their power. The core person in the OLT Faction is Qu Sixiang, who was the Party secretary or boss of B village (initially when it was a “brigade”) for almost thirty years. Sixiang was appointed as the brigade secretary in 1970s during the commune era and had continued to be the village Party secretary until 2000. Having been the boss of B village for three decades, he was regarded as an “able” and “authoritative” leader by both many villagers and the Xijia Township cadres. One villager comments:

Sixiang is really a scarce and prominent leader in the countryside. He started to establish and run village-owned factory even as early as the end of 1970s and B village was almost the first one in Xijia Township to develop rural industry. You know, Sixiang did

²¹ In most cases, the candidates who ally and run for elections together are themselves faction leaders. However, this is not always the case. In some villages, the real faction leaders may not run elections themselves but pull wires behind the curtain instead.

make a great contribution to the economic development of B village (Interview 23).

Another villager, however, was very critical of him:

Sixiang is a corrupt cadre who had abused power for many years. When he was in power, he only favoured his own relatives and friends, who had enriched themselves at the cost of the village collective. He appointed his men as the managers of the village-owned factory, but made no profit for the collective. All those village-owned factory ended up bankrupt, but he and his men had got enough benefits. He sold a large amount of village farmland without the consent of the villagers, and till today people have no idea where the money has gone (Interview 28).

Although villagers have different views, Sixiang has always enjoyed the support of the township government. A Xinjia Township leader appraised him:

Sixiang is the kind of village leader who are very scarce in countryside. You know, acting as village cadres is the kind of job that able guys avoid to do and unable guys wish to do but cannot manage. So it is not easy for villagers to get an able person to be their village leader. Sixiang is really a good leader. He is brainy, flexible, familiar with government policies and full of leading experiences of rural work (Interview 10).

Sixiang also left me with similar impression when I interviewed him. His talk was clear, logical and persuasive. Actually there were no any other village cadres who had left me such an impression during my fieldwork in Xinjia Township. In the interview, Sixiang said:

I was the village Party Branch secretary of B village for 30 years since 1970s. I started to set up village-owned enterprises in the early 1980s shortly after the national policy of reform and opening up. The first village-owned enterprise that I set up was an electric welding machine factory. We had great success in running this factory,

which returned considerable profits for our village. With the accumulation of collective funds, one by one, I set up a series of village-owned enterprises: a raincoat factory, a hencoop factory, a paint factory, a hennerly, a gas station and a pencil factory. B village became one of the best collective-economy-developed villages in Xinjia Township. I am hated by some villagers due to personal resentments and some mistakes I had made in my job. Direct village election simply gave a chance for those guys to revenge us old cadres (Interview 49).

Mainly based on the power derived from his position, Sixiang has been able to build up a following in the village. Qu Jiabo, Qu Jiazhi and Qu Shaodong and Qu Sifa are among his most loyal followers and core members of the OLT Faction. Jiabo, Jiazhi and Shaodong had been VC chair, deputy chair and VC member respectively since early 1990s under Sixiang's leadership. Sifa was appointed by Sixiang as manager of the village-owned paint factory in late 1980s. In 1998, Sifa bought the paint factory from the village collective and was still managing it in 2006. In short, all the core members of the OLT Faction have vested interests in village power.

The opposing faction, which I call the New Faction, first emerged in 1999 with the coming of the first direct village election. Core members of this faction, largely consists new village patrons who did not act as village cadres before but gained significant prestige and patronage resources in the reform era because of their ability, entrepreneurial skills or useful outside connections. With the advent of direct VC elections, these new patrons became serious contenders for village power largely due to their obtained patronage resources. The initial core members of this faction were Jiamao, Jiaji and Jiaxian, who united together running for the VC offices and won in 1999. Since core members of this faction did not personally benefit from the village power held by those old village cadres, they were therefore very critical to the "corrupt" deeds committed by the members of the OLT Faction. Jiamao said:

For a long time, villagers have been very discontented with the old village cadres'

corrupt and evil doings. When they were in office, they only sought benefits for themselves, their relatives and friends by abusing the power. The first direct village election in 1999 offered us a chance to challenge them. Shortly before the election, Jiaji and Jiaxian came to me, inviting me to run for the election together with them. I agreed and that is why we three cooperated together and won the 1999 election (Interview 50).

Like the OLT Faction, the New Faction also unites and acts on the basis of personal relationships. However, the New Faction does not have a strong and prominent leader as the role Sixiang plays in the OLT Faction. Originally, the reason that Jiamao, Jiaji and Jiaxian united together to run for VC elections was that they were neighbours and friends and were all discontented with the old village cadres for different reasons (Interview 50, 51 and 53).

Taking advantage of proxy voting

In theory, proxy voting is supposed to guarantee every voter's right to vote, even when one can not personally go to vote on the election day. The revised Organic Law does not include any content on proxy voting. It is stipulated in provincial or local regulations for implementing the revised Organic Law. For instance, "Measures for VC Elections in Shandong Province" (the 1998 Measures) stipulates that:

If a voter is illiterate or not able to fill ballot due to disability or will be away in the election day, he may entrust other voters (except the candidates) to vote for him. Proxy voting should be applied for by the voter himself and approved by the village electoral committee. Proxy voting must not be against the will of the client. Each voter must not accept more than three proxy votes (Article 16).

As discussed in the previous chapter, proxy voting in B village is very common. Over the last three rounds of elections, there have been many more proxy votes cast than votes in person. Proxy voting was accounted for more than 50 per cent of the total votes

cast in each round VC election (see Table 3.1). Despite this, proxy voting has been endorsed by local authorities because, without it, it would be very difficult to reach the quorum for VC elections.²² In practice, however, proxy voting has been misused to gain “safe” votes by candidates. A villager in B village explained how it was misused in reality:

In reality, proxy voting actually has become a method employed by the candidates to gain safe votes. For example, suppose a candidate (or his supporter) M comes to a voter to request his vote. For the sake of face-saving, this voter usually would agree to vote for M even if he does not really want to. Because this voter knows that, as secret voting is applied in election, he may still vote someone else on the election day while avoid offending M at the moment. However, M also knows that despite his promise, the voter may still probably vote for someone else in the election. To secure the vote, M would then ask for this voter’s voting certificate, by which M can arrange a person whom he trusts to vote for this voter on the election day [in accordance with proxy voting stipulation]. And this voter in the end would be very likely to agree to do so even though it is against his will. Because, he doesn’t want to or may not afford to offend M. So, by taking advantage of proxy voting, a candidate can easily turn those uncertain votes into his safe votes (Interview 34).

Proxy voting can also facilitate candidates’ vote soliciting in another way. Since quite often, one voter will vote for his whole family, the candidate therefore does not have to solicit votes from each individual family member, instead, he only needs to work on one member and can get his whole family’s votes. For example, a villager said:

It is very rare that family members go to cast their ballots individually. Usually one person, say the husband or wife, will cast all the votes on behalf of his family. Family votes usually go as a block. If you have some influence over one member, the whole

²² Article 14 of the revised Organic Law stipulates that a VC election is only valid when more than half eligible voters cast votes.

family's votes will very likely go to you as a whole. It is usually needless to work on each family member separately. Of course, it is important to work on the one whose opinion carries the weight in the family. For instance, Siyou is a henpecked guy and always obedient to his wife. If you want to get his family's votes, you have to deal with his wife (Interview 25).

Proxy voting actually serves to further lower the freedom of the voters and subject them to various personal relations (especially the clientelist ones) that the candidates can deploy. Although anonymous voting is formally practiced in VC elections, the existence of proxy voting largely discounts the anonymity of voting and facilitates candidates' vote soliciting.

Patronage and factional politics in three rounds of electoral contest

The 1999 election

The 1999 election was the first direct village election in B village and the first time that the two opposing factions crystallized. The New Faction candidates, Jiamao, Jiaxian and Jiaji, campaigned to challenge the then incumbent village cadres, who belong to the OLT Faction. Sixiang was village party secretary at that time and his intention was to keep the incumbent VC cadres, his allies, in power. The incumbent VC cadres before 1999 election were Jiabo (VC chair), Jiazhi (deputy VC chair) and Shaodong (VC member). But the result was the New Faction won all the three VC positions and came to power (See Appendix 4, table 1).

Three reasons contributed to the New Faction's victory in 1999. First, its members carried out *la piao* successfully. All three candidates united together and solicited votes cooperatively. By taking advantage of their factional network, a large number of villagers were mobilized and enlisted into their network. As Jiamao said, "Each one of our three made use of our own connections and go about the work separately. We visited

almost each household at that time and tried to persuade fellow villagers to support us” (Interview 50). Compared to the New Faction, candidates of the OLT Faction, i.e. the incumbent cadres, did not try their best to mobilize villagers by the same way. A government official of Xinjia Township commented in regard to the failure of the OLT Faction: “Failing to *la piao* seriously is one of the most important factors leading the lose of the old cadres of B village in 1999. When the first direct VC election came about, those old incumbent village cadres did not carry out *la piao* seriously. Since they had been village cadres for years and had always been appointed by the township government, they felt shameful to solicit votes from ordinary villagers household by household. On the contrary, Jiamao and his men had no such thinking because they had been ordinary villagers all along” (Interview 17). Second, the three candidates of the New Faction were politically “clean” to villagers. Since all three candidates of the New Faction had never been cadres before and therefore had nothing to do with the “corruption”, “unfairness” or “abuse of power”, which some claimed had characterized the leadership of those members of the OLT Faction. In the words of Jiamao, “I was a piece of white paper in the eyes of the ordinary villagers at that time” (Interview 50). By contrast, those old incumbent cadres had been “dirty” in the eyes of many villagers after years in office. And the New Faction also attempted to destroy the integrity of the OLT Faction by circulating numerous charges of corruption against its core members and candidates (Interview 40 and 42). Apart from the allegations of corruption and misdeeds, during years in power, they had offended many villagers in the process of implementing various unpopular state policies, such as family planning, tax collecting and so on (Interview 17, 31 and 50). As a result, the New Faction skillfully took advantage of villagers’ discontent to those old village cadres. Finally, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the New Faction candidates made promises on two local issues in this election: to audit previous village account and punish those old cadres who had committed corruptions and to refund some villagers’ share in a bankrupt village collective-owned factory. The promises seemed to be appealing to many villagers.

These three factors led to the overwhelming victory of the New Faction in 1999. All

three VC positions were filled the candidates of the New Faction. Jiaomao, Jiaxian and Jiaji won VC chair, deputy chair and VC member respectively in this election (See Appendix 4, Table A).

The 2002 election

In the 2002 election, the OLT Faction fought back. Jiazhi and Sifa, who belonged to the OLT Faction, won the VC chair and deputy chair respectively. Jiamao and Jiaxian, who were core of the New Faction, stepped down, although Jiaji kept his position as a VC member (see Appendix 4, Table B).

Why the OLT Faction won back in the 2002 election? First of all, the OLT Faction had drawn a lesson from their failure in the 1999 election. They had realized the importance of *la piao*. Thus in the 2002 election, members of the OLT Faction had actively carried out *la piao*, mobilizing villagers through their factional networks. As a Xinjia Township official told me: “In the 2002 election, Jiazhi, Sifa as well as other members of their faction understood that without seriously *la piao*, it’s almost impossible to get elected. Therefore, they also tried their utmost to *la piao*” (Interview 14). Second, the New Faction had failed to deliver their promises on the two local issues they raised during their tenure, which more or less damaged their prestige among many villagers. Jiamao told me the reason for which he had failed to deliver the promises:

Initially, when I just started to do my job after being elected, I was really ambitious, attempting to investigate and solve those problems left by the old cadres as soon as possible so as to give the villagers a clear and satisfactory answer. However, once I really did, I realized how difficult it was. I actually stirred up a hornet nest. Those old cadres kept making trouble. They even incited some of their supporters to break into my house, cursing me. I asked the township government to support me to do my job and help to investigate those corrupt things done by the old cadres. The township leaders, however, had been always indifferent or simply ignored my requirements. In the end, I

thoroughly became disappointed and lost confidence. Look, to work seriously, I could not get the support of the higher-level government and the understanding of the people; to work halfheartedly and seek personal benefits, I am not that kind of person. Therefore, three years later I did not want to do the job any longer and refused to run for reelection (Interview 50).

Thirdly, Jiamao's decision not to stand for re-election in 2002 led to the decrease of the followers/voters who could have been recruited to the New Faction. Since Jiamao had been so frustrated that he did not stand as a candidate, the New Faction lost a core member who could have enlisted a significant number of voters/followers. Jiamao said, "When the 2002 election came, Jiaxian and Jiaji urged me to seek reelection with them, but I firmly refused. Because I had stayed away from the election, many villagers who should have voted for me were likely to give their votes to the other faction" (Interview 50).

The 2004 election

The 2004 election²³ was the third electoral contest between the two factions. Interestingly, in this election, each faction had a core member defect to the opposing camp. Jiaji, who had been the core member of the New Faction, defected to the OLT Faction. Jiaji defected to the OLT Faction mainly for two reasons. First, it was said that during his last VC tenure working with Jiazhi and Sifa (both are core members of the OLT Faction), Jiaji "colluded" with the two exploiting village public power for improper personal gain. This motivated him to continue to work with Jiazhi and Sifa as VC cadres so as to get more improper personal benefits (Interviews 50 and 53). Second, he reckoned that to join the OLT Faction and seek re-election together with Jiazhi and Sifa as the incumbent would be his best chance to get re-elected (Interviews 50).

While Sichun, who had actively solicited votes for the OLT Faction in the 2002 election,

²³ The seventh session VC, i.e., the VC elected in May 2002 should have been due in April 2005 if serving a full term of three years according to Article 11 of the revised Organic Law. However, Shandong Province authorities called the eighth session VC election in November 2004, almost half year earlier.

stood as the candidate of the New Faction this time. It was said that Sichun, who was a wealthy milk dealer, secured many votes for the OLT Faction and “significantly” contributed to the OLT Faction’s winning in the 2002 election. But Sichun actually had been keen to be a VC cadre himself rather than merely playing a supportive role. However, despite his contribution, the OLT Faction would not make him a VC candidate for unknown reasons. With the advent of the 2004 election, the New Faction, in order to defeat the OLT Faction, asked Sichun to defect to them. In exchange, the New Faction would make Sichun a VC candidate in the election. Eager to be a VC cadre himself, Sichun defected to the New Faction and ran against the OLT Faction in the 2004 election. His defection led to a significant number of votes/voters affiliated to him going to the New Faction.

Thus, in the 2004 election, the candidates of the New Faction were Jiaxian, Sixu and Sichun. The candidates of the OLT Faction were the incumbent VC cadres, Jiazhi, Sifa and Jiaji. The result was that Sixu and Sichun got elected and became the VC chair and deputy chair respectively. Jiazhi and Jiaji were ousted. At the same time, although Sifa was re-elected, he lost the position of deputy chair and became the VC member (see Appendix 4, Table C).

Analysis of the three elections

Each VC election has led to the change of VC cadres in B village since 1999. The change of personnel, however, is largely due to factional competition based on the personal/factional networks. The faction that could enlist more followers would win the election in the end. The degree of factional mobilization has also increased.

In the first direct VC election, the factions were delineated on “old cadres versus new challengers” lines. But the degree of factional mobilization was much less than the following two. And issues—or at least two issues, i.e., anti-corruption and refunding villagers’ money in a bankrupt village factory—were more or less significant in mobilizing voters (alongside considerations of personal relations and benefit). Although

the two issues may have played a role in mobilizing voters, Jiamao and his men's failure to make any difference during their tenure greatly discouraged the villagers and made them quite cynical to the so-called public promises. This has further strengthened villagers' inclination to exchange their votes for particularistic benefits which are largely distributed by village patrons.

In the following 2002 and 2004 elections, the degree of clientelist mobilization has clearly increased as no candidates or factions attempted to attract voters by raising issues or making promises concerning the whole village community. Instead, candidates of both factions tried their best to *la piao* through their *guanxi* ties. The faction that could lock in most voters would win the election. It is also worth noting that, although factional mobilization is decisive in winning elections, factional solidarity is fragile. As B village's 2004 VC election has demonstrated, defection in factional membership can be an important factor that strongly influences the electoral result. The defection of Jiaji (from the New Faction to the OLT Faction) and Sichun (from the OLT Faction to the New Faction) demonstrates that the factions in the 2004 election were formed on a different basis from those in the 1999. As for voters, the point of view of candidates were no longer an issue; for candidates, seeking power, prestige and personal gain also take precedence over loyalty to one's group or consideration of village issues. As Spiro has observed in a Burmese village: "if factionalism is a characteristic feature of village life, the fragility of factional solidarity is, in turn, one of the characteristic features of factionalism" (Spiro 1969: 412).

Conclusion

The scope of village elites has been enlarged in the reform era. Unlike the commune era, when the village elites had been largely limited to the village cadres, nowadays, any villagers who own entrepreneurial skills, knowledge, wealth, job opportunities, or, more importantly, outside connections have been able to become patrons and middlemen in

an evolving clientelist village politics. These patrons/middlemen are important to villagers, who are eager to get security, assistance, opportunity, or various favours from them. Meanwhile, a village patron also feels free to require services from his clients in time of need. Village election can be such a moment, when the patron can require service from his clients.

The coming of direct village election has made it possible for some village patrons to stand as candidates in elections due to various reasons: attractive pay, invisible benefits or personal honor/resentment. In B village, *la piao* has become the principal method for winning votes. *La piao*, to a large degree, is to secure votes through making use of informal personal connections. These personal connections can be either horizontal ones or vertical, patron-client ones, patron-client ones. But it is argued that the patron-client relations can be more helpful for a candidate to secure votes. Since, as a patron, his clients have relatively less freedom and may even bound to be his followers.

To facilitate electoral competition and *la piao*, opposing factions have crystallized. The capacity of enlisting supporters is crucial for the winning of village elections. All three rounds of elections in B village have been based on factional competition. Village elections in B village have largely become a factional contest based on factional/clientelist networks.

5 The role of local state officials in village elections

In the previous two chapters, I have analyzed the behaviour and strategies of ordinary villagers and VC candidates in village elections. I have argued that within the village community ordinary villagers today still tend to behave like clients, depending, to a greater or lesser extent, on a small number of village patrons who own wealth, power, various resources and outside connections. In village elections, VC candidates, who rise from the ranks of village patrons, solicit votes through a range of means, but especially through their patron-client relations. In this chapter, I will discuss other important actors in village elections—local state officials—often themselves patrons of village leaders or candidates.

“Local state officials” here refers to township government officials—those officials who deal with villagers and village committees directly in the everyday politics in rural China. Township government officials actually play a crucial role in terms of village elections: they are responsible for implementing electoral laws and regulations, organizing village elections, and dealing with various electoral issues for example. Existing research has made clear that Chinese local state officials, as a whole, do not support village elections (Kelliher 1997; O'Brien and Li 2000). They sometimes violate the electoral laws and regulations, adopting tactics like monopolizing nominations, handpicking nominees, conducting snap elections, banning candidates of whom they disapprove from running for elections, annulling electoral results if the “wrong” candidates win, or conducting elections by a show of hands (Fan 1998a; Ma 1994). However, with both pressure from above (the higher level authorities) and “popular resistance” (Li and O'Brien 1996) from below (villagers), local state officials in more and more places have been forced to take the electoral laws and regulations seriously, holding “free and fair” village elections in their locales (Li 2002; Xiang 2002; Xiao

2002b). But has this meant that they have changed their attitudes toward it? If not, how do they play their role and pursue their goal in village elections?

This chapter will begin by describing local state officials' roles as state agents and policy implementers, and the strategies they employ in the process of policy implementation. I will then discuss local officials' attitudes to village elections and their strategies to influence them. I argue that local state officials, as policy implementers in a "pressurized" political system (Rong 1998), have to rely on village cadres to carry out various state policies at the village level. Yet the implementation of direct VC elections seem to deprive these officials' power to handpick their favoured VC cadres. However, by making use of administrative regulations and, particularly, informal clientelist relationships, local state officials are still able to exert a strong influence upon so-called "free and fair" VC elections.

Local state officials as state policy implementers

Chinese local governments and officials today still largely remain policy-implementing arms of the central government. Even though the political system has become somewhat more decentralized and relaxed in the reform era, the central government in Beijing still exercises significant power and influence over the local governments. However, policy implementation at local levels in China over the last two decades has primarily evolved from voluntary compliance due to Party discipline and heavy ideological indoctrination (Lampton 1987: 17) to a "pressurized system" (Rong 1998) involving monetary incentives and career-jeopardizing punishments. The new pressurized system is embodied in the cadre responsibility system or political contract system (*ganbu zhengzhi zeren zhi* or *gangwei zeren zhi*) at the county and township/town levels. This system was first implemented in the early 1980s in some regions in China and later adopted nationwide (Edin 2000: 50). Under the cadre responsibility system, county and township/town leaders sign political performance contracts with their immediately

superior authorities. Even though the specific content of the contract may vary from place to place, some key elements in the performance contract always include promoting local economic development, maintaining local social and political stability, controlling local birthrates and collecting state and local taxes (Rong 1998: 29). Also included in the contract are specific rewards and punishments that depend on whether or not the goals are met. The performance contract is the main basis for cadre evaluations at the end of each year. If the specific performance goals in the contract are successfully met, contracted officials are rewarded with better career opportunities and monetary awards or bonuses. But if they fail to achieve the goals laid out in their contracts, local government leaders may be reprimanded and lose further promotion opportunities (ibid.: 31).

Even though the cadre contract system as practiced at the local levels has helped the central government and provincial authorities in China achieve some specific goals and policy compliance from local governments and officials, this system has also caused “selective policy implementation” (O'Brien and Li 1999) or policy distortion at local levels. However, as Zhong (2003) has argued, it is simplistic to say that central government policies are ignored or distorted. Policy implementation in China is much more complicated. Much depends upon policy issue areas, which are intertwined with the rational career behaviour of local state officials. On the one hand, local officials are legally and politically obligated to implement policies passed on to them from the above. Administrative punishments or even removals from office remain the most effective mechanisms by which higher authorities force local government officials to carry out and comply with central or provincial government policies. This is why open defiance of higher authorities is rare in China. On the other hand, there are numerous, often conflicting factors, that local officials have to take into consideration in implementing policies from above (Ibid.). How to balance the two skillfully is an art that local government officials must master in order to advance their careers.

O'Brien and Li (1999) find that the strategy of “selective policy implementation” has

often been used by local state officials. According to them, on readily measurable policies the Centre has established effective controls that lead implementers to define their tasks as policymakers wish. Enough feedback reaches higher levels, and well-designed inducements and sanctions encourage most ground-level officials to execute even remarkably unpopular measures. On other policies, for which success or failure cannot be assessed without increased popular input, top-down controls have been largely ineffective, and local officials have considerable discretion, which often lead to ignorance or cheating of state policies. Similarly, Zhong (2003) suggests that five important variables are likely to specifically affect policy implementation in China, which are the amount of attention paid by higher authorities, monitoring mechanisms involved in supervising policy implementation, clarity in policy goals (including setting quantifiable targets in policy evaluation), issue intractability, and conflict or potential conflict with local interests. And based upon these variables, he has divided policy issue areas at local levels in the PRC into the following four categories: crucial, spotlight, guideline, and routine legal/regulative issues. He argues that local government officials in China tend to pay more attention to policies in the first two categories than the last.

As existing research has suggested, reacting to different degrees of scrutiny and severity in punishment for implementation failures, which is embodied in the political responsibility contract system, Chinese local officials tend to prioritize policy issues. What then is the attitude of local officials to village elections?

Local state officials' attitudes toward direct village elections

Township cadres deal with peasants directly, and according to the official propaganda to “serve” the peasants is their daily work. And so they think they know rural reality and peasants well. During my investigation in Xinjia Township, every time I interviewed township cadres about village elections or villagers’ self-governance, they would begin

by reminding me about rural reality and the character of peasants. In particular they tended to expound on peasants' poor "quality" (*su zhi*).

Peasant quality

Though most of them are themselves of peasant origin, Xinjia Township officials tend to view peasants negatively, often with scorn. They like to iterate the "fact" that peasants' quality is so low that they should not be permitted to enjoy political rights such as the right to directly choose their village leaders. Nationwide surveys have also found that a majority of township cadres agree with the hypothetical statement, "peasants' political and educational quality is too low for them to practice democracy" (Xin 1993: 37). In these cadres' opinion, villagers are vengeful, self-serving, feudal, superstitious and faction-ridden. Peasants see democracy as a weapon, ideal for revenge and they are materialistic and short-sighted, so they vote against the common good (Li and Zhao 2004; Wang 2005a). For example, one Xinjia Township official told me why he believed villagers were not competent to choose leaders by themselves:

Peasants are selfish, narrow-minded and short-sighted. They only consider themselves and think about their short-term interests. They don't consider collective interests at all. Most of them do not care who the village cadres are as long as those cadres don't come to them collecting money Many villagers don't take their suffrage seriously at all. When we held the first direct elections in 1999, one village even elected an old man who was over eighty and had been paralyzed in bed for years (Interview 4).

Similarly, another Xinjia official commented:

Peasants always haggle over every ounce. They always concentrate on their every little loss and gain. As a township cadre, a lot of things I deal with every day involve mediating in villagers' quarrels: most of them are like 'your dog bit my chicken'; 'the Zhangs' sheep ate the Wangs' crop'. Don't think those things are too small. If you do not handle it properly, the two sides will become enemies easily. When a villager comes to

vote, he will above all consider which candidate has good personal relationship with him instead of putting a candidate's morality and ability in the first place. If you once offend him, even for carrying out proper government policies, he will hate you and will never vote for you (Interview 13).

Although local state officials tend to emphasize villagers' low quality, another important reason that they do not support direct VC elections is that they have no confidence that villagers themselves can elect "ideal" village cadres who must enforce the state's unpopular policies. Those who are "ideal" village cadres in the eyes of local state officials may well antagonize people if they do their jobs effectively. Effectiveness in the job may lead to unpopularity at the poll. Thus it stands to reason that the competent will be voted out, while those elected may be unwilling to implement the unpopular state policies or tasks. So local state officials also firmly hold that VC elections should be subject to the party-state's leadership.

Elections and the Party's leadership

Township officials seem to be firm apologists for the principle of Party leadership. They always stress that the Party's leadership is a precondition of village elections or self-governance and that village elections should be under the Party's leadership. In terms of village elections, the Party's leadership means to township officials the leadership of township Party committee (township government) and its subordinate organizations in villages, i.e. VPBs. They will try their best to bring the elections under their control and would deem it a mistake on their part if a village election were to produce a VC that defied the government's authority or "made trouble" (Interview 1 and 3).

A township official spoke of the importance of strengthening the Party's leadership:

No matter whether in village elections or something else, we must adhere to the Party's leadership. Without the Party's leadership, the countryside will definitely fall into chaos.

At the same time, without a stable situation, the economy will not be able to develop. When we held the first direct elections in 1999, the Party's leadership was not stressed enough so that many villages encountered turmoil afterwards. The most outstanding problem was that the elected VCs attempted to fight for power with the VPBs. Seeing the situation getting worse, a deputy Party secretary of Longkou had to make an emergency speech on TV reiterating the need to adhere to the Party's leadership (Interview 4).

According to the deputy Party secretary of Xinjia, after its first direct election in 1999 B village fell into "chaos" largely because Jiamao and his men who were elected VC cadres, had "no sense of adhering the Party's leadership" but fighting for power against the VPB secretary Sixiang. He commented:

B village fell into chaos soon after the first direct election in 1999 when Qu Jiamao and his two fellows were elected to the VC. All three were not former village cadres and they got elected by soliciting votes and making empty commitments to their fellow villagers. After getting elected, these guys have no sense of adhering the Party's leadership, wrongly holding that they can do whatever they want. They not only refused to accept the leadership of the village Party branch but also intentionally opposed it. This led to instability and even paralysis of the village governance. You know, with endless conflict, how could the village work and the government tasks be done (Interview 1)?

In a Xinjia Township government report reviewing the 1999 village elections work, it set out the problems with elections: "Some VC cadres cannot understand the correct relationship between VCs and VPBs and have an one-sided view of villagers' self-governance"; "some VC cadres don't have the right motivation for holding office" but "put most of their energy into retaliating against the VPB secretaries or former VC chairmen"; and some VPB secretaries "do not have confidence and ideas to strengthen and improve the VPBs' leadership over VCs" (Zhonggong Xinjia zhen weiyuanhui 1999: 1). So, to solve these problems, Xinjia Township planned to further stress the

“importance” and “necessity” of adhering to and strengthening the Party’s leadership, strengthening and guaranteeing the leadership of VPBs, and “educating” the VC and VPB cadres so that they could fully understand their duties and “exert their power according to law” (Zhonggong Xinjia zhen weiyuanhui 1999) .

With the implementation of direct VC elections, the local state still emphasizes its “leadership” over them and over village administration largely because it has a vital interest in the outcome of village elections. Township government is the lowest level of government, while the village committee is legally a mass organization responsible for implementation of numerous tasks and policies handed down from above. As indicated previously, township officials’ performance in meeting targets is evaluated and motivated in a “pressurized system”, which decides township officials’ rewards and punishments. However, most of the assignments can only be accomplished with the cooperation of village cadres. Before direct VC elections were introduced, village cadres had long served primarily as implementers, facilitators, and enforcers of policies made by various levels of government. They had been treated as the “legs” of township government officials, who depended heavily upon them to implement various state policies, particularly important and difficult ones, like collecting taxes, developing economy, carrying out family planning, and keeping social stability. The arrival of direct village elections, however, may risk township officials losing their “legs”. The township officials’ reach into the villages to carry out state policies has depended largely on its power to appoint and control village cadres. But village elections are designed to take this power away.

Holding direct village elections belongs to the policy issue areas that Zhong calls “laws and regulations”, which, according to him, are “routinely violated” by local government officials and are the “most problematic area” in the policy-implementation process at local levels in China (Zhong 2003: 138-139). Likewise, O’Brien and Li classify the Organic Law and village elections as “popular policies”, which tend to be ignored and cast aside by local officials because compliance cannot be accurately assessed (O’Brien

and Li 1999).

Although local officials are unwilling to let peasants directly elect village cadres, they cannot simply cast aside the electoral regulations because ignoring or violating them may lead peasants to lodge complaints and appeal to higher levels of government (see O'Brien and Li 1995). A high frequency of complaints and appeal visits by local residents indicates a lack of political and social stability in a particular locale, and may seriously affect the career of the leaders of that locale (Zhong 2003). So how can local state officials ensure that they have reliable “legs” to stand on on the one hand but avoid violating the electoral regulations on the other? Based on my fieldwork in Xinjia Township, I have identified a range of subtle strategies adopted by local officials to strongly influence village elections without breaking the formal rules and risking the ire of local villagers.

Free and fair? Local state officials’ strategies for controlling village elections

Organizing village elections strictly according to the procedures

To avoid villagers lodging complaints and appeals and reduce the risk of being punished by the higher-level authorities, local officials in Xinjia Township have chosen to abide by the letter of electoral laws and regulations since the first round of direct elections in 1999. “The principle of carrying out VC elections strictly according to the laws and regulations” has been repeatedly stressed in the Xinjia Township government documents. For example, the 1999 village election work plan reads: “[Officials] must implement the laws and regulations strictly—no legal procedure must be ignored and no villagers’ democratic rights should be reserved” (Zhonggong Xinjia zhen weiyuanhui 1999: 3). The 2002 VC election work plan reads: “Throughout the whole election process, [officials] must abide strictly by the laws and regulations, seriously implement the procedures as set down by the government and make sure that villagers enjoy their

right to democratic elections. No stipulated procedure must be omitted, no step must be ignored and no discretionary simplification of the procedures must be allowed” (Zhonggong Xinjiazhen weiyuanhui 2001: 9).

In practice, Xinjia Township officials have—in so far as I have been able to determine—strictly followed the standard election procedures set out by the Longkou government (see Longkoushi diqijie cunweihui huanjie xuanju gongzuo lingdao xiaozhu bangongshi 2002; Longkoushi nongcun "liangwei" huanjie xuanju gongzuo lingdao xiaozu bangongshi 2004), especially when organizing the formal electoral meetings. Voter registration has been carried out shortly before the formal electoral meeting and posted publicly; candidates have been directly nominated by the villagers; there have been more candidates than seats; secret voting has been guaranteed; and the vote count has been carried out in full public view. Based on my observations of elections in 2004 in B village and 14 other villages in Xinjia Township, a videotape of B village’s 2002 electoral meeting, and my interviews and conversations with township officials, village leaders and ordinary villagers, it does seem that all these rules and procedures have been implemented strictly in VC elections in the township since 1999.

A Xinjia Township official talked about their great care in implementing electoral rules and the pressure on them to ensure that everything was handled correctly:

We township cadres were all very tense on the day of electoral meeting. Each stage had to be carried out with great care. Even negligence over a small matter could lead to invalidation and make our efforts go to waste. And in some villages, due to complicated factional and clan tensions, some troublemakers attempted to make trouble. If they found any fault on our part, they would either appeal to higher authorities or make trouble on the ground (Interview 6).

Because the township government organized the electoral meeting strictly according the letter of the relevant laws and regulations, few villagers questioned the authenticity of

the procedure. Even Jiaxian, the losing candidate in B village's 2004 election admitted, "It is unlikely that anyone will cheat in the formal electoral meetings" (Interview 53).

If the focus were merely on the formal implementation village elections of Xinjia Township since 1999 would be considered "free and fair", or procedurally "democratic" by most scholars. For example, Li takes village elections he has surveyed in Jiangxi Province in 1999 as "free and fair" because four practices were adhered to : (1) direct nomination of candidates by villagers; (2) contested election of villagers' committee members; (3) anonymous voting; and (4) open counting of votes (Li 2003: 653). Similarly, Pastor and Tan believe that two most important indicators of "free" village elections should be the "secret ballot" and "competitiveness" (Pastor and Tan 2000: 509). All these factors have been evident in Xinjia Township since 1999. So, have township officials really organized village elections freely and fairly? If we switch our focus to other aspects of the election process and focus on how officials use informal techniques, including clientelist relations, to influence the outcome of elections, the answer may be very different.

The comment of one Xinjia Township official vividly conveyed preparation that he and his colleagues put into influencing the elections before election day:

As the organizers of village elections, we township officials can actually be compared to a chef who makes a banquet. You know, the guests can only see the meals after the banquet starts and the dishes are served. However, you know, the menu, the recipe and the cooking materials are all prepared and made in the kitchen by the chef long before the banquet starts. When the dishes finally show up on the table one by one, the chef's job has already finished. Similarly, the process of formal election is just like the process of serving dishes. To us, the electoral meeting is just like serving the dishes rather than making them. The electoral meeting may look gorgeous, but even before it starts, our job has already finished (Interview 16).

How are the “dishes” made in the kitchen? Township officials use a range of techniques, notably, trying to influence which candidates stand for election.

Defining the qualifications of the candidates

The revised Organic Law stipulates that “all villagers over 18 years old have the right to vote and stand for elections regardless of nationality, race, sex, occupation, family origin and residential period. But the persons whose political rights [mainly people who are in prison or on probation for committing offences] have been deprived are excepted” (Article 12). However, local officials have often tried to specify certain qualifications of the candidates. For example, in the work plan for the 2002 village elections, Xinjia Township government tried to clearly “raise the standards and conditions” (*tichu tiaojian he biao zhun*) of VC candidates and to form a “correct guiding direction” (*zhengqu daoxiang*) for selecting VC cadres from among villagers (Zhonggong Xinjiazhen weiyuanhui 2001: 10). “In the light of the Xinjia Township’s reality”, the township set out the conditions VC candidates should have. These conditions reflect the township’s desire for village cadres who are compliant with Party policy, law-abiding, and have leadership qualities. They also reveal a preference for younger, better educated candidates, and perhaps implicitly also males with some ability to promote economic growth (Ibid.):

- be of high political quality, be supportive of the CCP’s leadership, implement seriously the Party’s lines and policies as well as the resolutions and decisions of higher-level government;
- conscientiously abide by the Constitution, laws, statutes and national policies, have comparatively strong sense of law and policy, be able to fulfill citizens’ duties, take the lead in handing in all kinds of taxes and fees and have no criminal record or record or violating discipline;
- be impartial, decent and stick up for solidarity, have the ability to correctly understand and deal with the conflicts among the villagers in the new era and to have high prestige among them;

- be in the prime of one's life, have relative high educational level and ability of leading and organization, be able to serve the villagers heartily and lead the mass to develop economy and get rich together.

In addition to the specifications set out in 2001, by the 2002 VC elections, Xinjia Township in a further document made two other “suggestions” (*jianyi*) about the type of candidates it preferred. These related to the gender balance of the village leadership and the relationship between the VC and the village party organization. First, the township proposed that “VCs should have an appropriate quota for women” (*yingdang you shidang funu de ming'e*), though it did not set a specific quota for the number of women on the VC. This does not seem to be due to concerns to control village politics more than application of a common gender balance policy in government to the village level. Second, the township encouraged concurrent office-holding for VC and VPB members (Xinjiashen huanjie xuanju gongzuo lingdao xiaozu 2002). This is likely to have been motivated partly by the desire for compliant VC leaders—VC members who are also Party members would automatically be VPB members and subject to Party discipline and therefore more responsive to the township's wishes (the VC and VPB relation after direct VC elections will be attended in detail in Chapter 6). The township might also have been motivated, however, by financial considerations: the village would spend less on salaries under concurrent office-holding. And as we shall see in the next chapter, the township controls village finances.

The Xinjia Township's work plan for the 2002 VC elections also listed the characteristics of those “unsuitable” for nomination as VC candidates. These often are the direct opposite of the characteristics that the township has said it prefers, so that they include non-compliance with the Party discipline, a criminal record or record of violating Party or government key policies. However, this list gives more detail of the kinds of behaviour the township finds problematic. These range from things which it seems would be subjectively defined and identified by township officials (for example, “being a bad influence”, “not behaving well”, having a “bad moral character”), things

which relate to higher level party-state political fears (for example in relation to Falungong activities), and others which make villages difficult to manage from a township perspective (cliques, factions, bust-ups). These are articulated as follows:

- those who have poor political quality and consciousness, and do not support, carry out, and even resist the Party's lines and policies;
- those who have had criminal punishment within three years and have not behaved well afterwards;
- the criminal suspects who are undergoing legal investigation; the persons who have been convicted of illegal acts, such as gambling, watching pornography and drug-related behaviour; those who are under punishment by Party disciplines within the fixed years that is prescribed by *CCP Statutes of discipline punishment* (zhongguo gongchandang jilu chufa tiaoling);”
- those who violate policies of family planning, house building regulations and to break the village rules and regulations (*cun gui min yue*) and causing a “bad influence”;
- those who take part in organizing feudal and superstitious activities; those believing in evil religions like *Falungong*;
- persons who refuse to pay taxes and fees according to the law or perform other personal duties;
- those who bad moral character and do not abide by social morality, and those who have strong selfish motives and even form cliques and factions to engage in violence and cause a bad influence;
- those who have been deprived of political rights or who are on probation, parole or released from custody for medical treatment;
- those who are old and weak, or who have an illness which will affect their ability to carry out normal duties (Zhonggong Xinjiazhen weiyuanhui 2001: 10-11).

From the above document we can see the township's effort to influence villagers by setting out the qualifications that VC candidates should have. From the qualifications

listed, we can see that the township prefers obedient VC candidates and that prime among its qualifications are those that relate to implementing the “lines”, policies, resolutions and decisions of higher levels of government and to “consciously” fulfilling duties, particularly those relating to collecting taxes and fees.

The revised Organic Law does not contain these specifications for VC candidates. This means that the VC candidates’ “qualifications” as set out in the township document are not mandatory, otherwise the township’s regulation would go against the national law. So instead of using “must” (*bixu*), the Xinjia Township used “should” (*yingdang*) or “not suitable” (*buyi*) in its election-related documents.

The township officials usually try to influence the villagers to vote for candidates with these qualifications by propagating them, but finally it is the villagers’ votes that decide who is elected. So township officials complain repeatedly that the qualifications and standards for VC candidates have not been clearly stipulated by the Organic Law, and that this has made it difficult for them to organize the elections, or rather, to preclude those unfavourable candidates from their perspective. As one Xinjia Township official put it:

Because the law doesn’t stipulate clearly the detailed characteristics for VC candidates, we feel that it is very hard to implement it in practice. We need clear, rigid (*gangxing*) standards to establish candidates’ qualifications so that unqualified people, such as those who want to make trouble or seek personal interests, will not be able to win elections. Actually we have reported this to the higher-level government but have not yet had a response (Interview 16).

Actually the higher-level government has not ignored the demands of its subordinates. In a summary work report on VC elections to its higher level in 2002, Longkou government has pointed out that one of the problems in implementing the Organic Law is “the lack of specific standards for VC candidates’ qualifications” and suggested that

this be remedied (Longkou shiwei zuzhi bu 2002: 11).

Pre-election mobilization and opinion investigation

Xinjia officials have viewed pre-election mobilization as a very important step in their efforts to organize VC elections. In the first direct VC election in 1999, however, Xinjia Township seemed to mainly focus on the general publicizing of related laws and rules on VC elections to township cadres and villagers. According to the Xinjia Township's work plan for the 1999 VC elections, the township government emphasized the importance of training officials and educating and mobilizing villagers so as to let them understand and take part in VC elections. For example, Xinjia Township intended to hold training courses for township officials and village cadres to study "related laws and regulations"; it required each village to hold various meetings to "carry out electoral mobilization and educate villagers" so as to "strengthen their sense of rule of law, to understand various regulations on VC elections, to be clear about the significance, requirements and approaches for elections, to improve understanding, to correct attitudes, to enhance democratic consciousness and sense of responsibility and to take part in the elections enthusiastically and voluntarily" (Zhonggong Xinjiazhen weiyuanhui 1999: 6).

In 1999, at least according to the official document, pre-election mobilization was mainly aimed at educating the masses and generally publicizing relevant laws and rules. This is backed up by the recollections of a township official: "Because it was the first time for us to organize direct VC elections in 1999, we had had no experience before and therefore failed to make full preparations" (Interview 7). However, based on the experience of the first VC elections in 1999, Xinjia government updated their strategy in organizing the following 2002 and 2004 elections. In addition to requirements on generally publicizing the relevant laws and regulations to the people, unlike in the 1999 elections, in the following two sessions of VC elections, the Xinjia government paid great attention on pre-election mobilization and opinion investigation.

Pre-election mobilization was mainly attempted to shape people's voting orientation by, in the words of the Xinjia government, "creating a correct atmosphere and guiding people to choose up-to-standard candidates" (Zhonggong Xinjiazhen dangwei; Xinjiazhen zhengfu 2002) . To realize this, township officials made and distributed to each household leaflets containing candidate standards and qualifications that the government required; they also made tapes with the same kind of content, broadcasting to villagers twice a day in every village; and they also posted up government announcements and propaganda slogans relating to VC elections in each village (Zhonggong Xinjiazhen dangwei and Xinjiazhen zhengfu 2002; interviews 18 and 19).

Opinion investigation was another important step taken by the township before holding formal elections particularly in 2002 and 2004 elections. According to the township government, the purpose of carrying out opinion investigation was to "find out the real situation" in each village so as to "hold the initiative" (*zhangwo zhudongquan*) and "working out specific work measures" for organizing VC elections (Zhonggong Xinjiazhen weiyuanhui 2001: 3). To achieve this purpose, the township government document required the responsible township officials to carry out "intensive and careful investigation" in each village before election, which was quantified as 100% household-visiting rate in small and medium sized villages and 80% in large-sized village (Ibid.). Although such household-visiting rate as a government target perhaps has largely failed to be achieved in reality (For example, in B village, no ordinary villager interviewees reported that he or she was ever visited by township cadres to solicit his opinion on VC elections.), it does reflect, however, the intention of the township government to have an careful opinion investigation to take the initiative in influencing the election.

In practice, the Xinjia cadres know that it is not necessary to visit each household or ordinary villager to achieve the aim of opinion investigation. It is much easier and efficient for them to just approach the village's elite, namely, a small number of influential village patrons. The deputy Party secretary of Xinjia who are responsible for

organizing VC elections put it: “Actually it is not necessary for us to visit each household or each villager at all to find out the real situation. The elite within a village are just a few. If you can grasp the elite’s views [on VC elections], you will basically know the real situation” (Interview 1).

Influencing the village elite

How do township officials solicit the opinions of village elites on VC elections? According to the Xinjia Township government’s summary work report on the 2002 elections, perhaps the most important form is to send work teams to individual villages holding symposiums in which the village elite attended:

We transferred 16 township cadres, who are experienced with rural work, and formed four work teams, going deep into each village to make intensive and painstaking investigations. Our work teams in total convened more than 30 symposiums, in which VC and VPB cadres, Party members, villager’s representatives and ordinary villagers participated ...We mainly discussed and exchanged views on aspects of politics, economy, social conditions and public opinion in each village. Through the surveys, we particularly found out which villages have competent leading teams, a healthy atmosphere and harmonious cadre-mass relations and which ones have severe clan and factional conflicts (*maodun*) and tense cadre-mass relationships (Zhonggong xinjiazhen weiyuanhui; Xinjiazhen zhengfu 2002).

I failed to find the record of detailed content on the symposiums in Xinjia government files. There were no files recording for example who spoke what at that time, how the views were exchanged or how the township finally drew its conclusions. This is most likely because although formally the symposiums are to “solicit opinions”, in reality their aim is to help influence who will stand as candidates in the elections. However since this is not strictly legal, it cannot be recorded in the official records.

A lower-ranking Xinjia official talked about pre-election opinion solicitation in 2002,

describing how it was conducted, with individual officials like himself being allocated villages and sent there to convene meetings with villagers identified as influential by the township. This was done in preparation for further, “closed”, high-level meetings among senior township officials and key villagers:

... my colleagues and I went to each village and convened meetings of influential village figures, usually including current and former village cadres, villager’s representatives, Party members or those villagers who have high prestige and have strong influence and interest in village politics. Our bosses had instructed us in advance that instead of making any comments in the meeting, we should only listen and write down the participants’ words and viewpoints, such as their evaluation of the incumbent village leaders and their expectations of the persons most likely to win the next elections ... Afterwards, we would report what we had heard and noted to our bosses. Then they would make visits and talk to the people concerned in private according to their need. Actually we had no idea about what our bosses would do. There are quite some techniques in this affair. We, rank and file, just don’t know (Interview 17).

The private talks between township leaders and village elites seem to be a quite important, if not decisive, element in influencing the final election results. However, the content of the talks are never revealed. The township leaders who carried out the talks were unwilling to reveal any detailed information when I interviewed them. For instance, when being asked about how the relevant work had been done in B village, the deputy Party secretary of Xinjia, who was in charge of the election-related affairs, appeared to be very reserved. But she did give me some general information:

Generally speaking, different villages have different situations. Each village has its own characteristics. We, above all, need to get a clear understanding of each village’s situation, such as who wants to run for VC cadres, who is likely to win, how the incumbent village cadres have performed and what kind of relationships there are among the key figures within a village. And then we will carry out our work (*zuo gongzuo*)

based on the various characteristics and problems of the village. Actually to do this job requires many. When arranging the leading team of a village (*cun lingdao banzi*), we township cadres should first of all have an impartial mind. With investigation, we must determine who are the people most suitable to be village cadres and who are not. Then we need try to set out the reasons objectively to villagers, especially to those influential and prestigious village figures, when talking to them. What we need to do is to present the facts and reason things out (*bai shishi, jiang daoli*) to them. What we absolutely avoid is directly telling the villagers whom to vote for and whom not to vote for. If we do like this, we would definitely encounter problems (Interview 1).

This deputy secretary also told me of a case in which she successfully dissuaded an influential village figure from supporting an “unsuitable” candidate. This happened in the 2002 VC elections. There is a village, the incumbent VC chairman of which, according to the deputy secretary, was a “competent” and “upright” cadre. However, out of personal resentments, one of his enemies, who had a strong clan background, attempted to oust him by supporting and soliciting votes for another “unsuitable” candidate. Knowing this situation, the deputy secretary privately talked to the opponent, asking him to “consider things from an impartial mind”. Though have personal resentments, the opponent admitted the competence of the incumbent and gave up his support to the other candidate. The incumbent was re-elected as VC chairman finally (Interview 1). This case demonstrates that, to the township officials, investigating and finding out the real village situation before holding VC elections is not the end but the means. The end, however, is to exert their influence over village elites or key figures accordingly so as to secure a township government favourable electoral result.

Meanwhile, as revealed from above interview, the township officials are also very careful and cautious when intervening and exerting their influence to realize their own electoral intention. They must avoid excessively intervening so as to be accused of manipulating or controlling elections, which is clearly against the law and may bring them trouble. That is why they only choose to exert their influence informally by

“presenting the facts and reasoning things out” to people concerned but avoid directly and explicitly supporting their favoured candidates. As Xinjia Township government puts in its work plan for the 2002 elections: “when carrying out investigations, cadres should mind their ways and means. Especially to some sensitive issues, cadres should hold proper limits for their wording and action to avoid triggering new unstable elements” (Zhonggong Xinjiazhen weiyuanhui 2001). In fact, in order to hide their true intention of influencing election results, Xinjia officials often claim that their pre-election involvement is “impartial” (interview 1) or “without any predetermined viewpoints” (interview 9). But when I asked the interviewed Xinjia Township official, “If the township cadres come to the masses without their own bias, what is the aim of the pre-election mobilization and opinion investigation? Is the purpose merely for forecasting the final electoral result?” This official did not give me an answer, which I interpret as he was unwilling to tell the truth that township officials’ pre-election involvement is not impartial but the opposite. Nonetheless, the mayor of Xinjia Township, who is an outspoken person, disclosed the truth in an informal occasion, when he said:

Come to the masses without any bias? This is just what is said. We must try our best to ensure that satisfactory candidates are elected. If necessary, we even need to help them with their election work (*zuo gongzuo*). Although we cannot directly tell villagers to vote for X, Y, Z, we do talk to those influential figures in the village to make clear some facts so as to gain their understanding and support [for government preferred candidates] (Interview 2).

It is clear that before holding elections, Xinjia Township cadres usually have had preferred candidates. What they attempt to do in the pre-election mobilization stage is to influence villagers, especially village elites, to realize the government’s preferences. As it was put in the government work plan for the 2002 VC elections: “we should enhance education and guidance for the key figures in a village including Party members and villagers’ representatives ... so that these key figures will influence and help the mass of

the villagers correct their consciousness (*duanzheng tamen de yishi*), make clear their aim and finally turn the Party committee and government's intention into villagers' voluntary actions" (Zhonggong Xinjiazheng weiyuanhui 2001: 3). The question here, however, is why those "key figures", namely, village elites or patrons, would respect rather than defy the township officials' opinions and preferences and help "turn the government's intention into villagers' voluntary action"? How do township officials achieve their intended goals in the "free and fair" village elections? Explanation can be found, again, by looking at clientelist relations both within the village and between village elites and township officials.

Patron-client relationships between village elites and local state officials

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, village elites/patrons who have critical goods and services to offer can have a number of villager clients affiliated or subordinated to them and during VC elections, village patrons can effectively mobilize their clients over who they have some critical leverage based on the patronage. These village patrons, however, themselves tend to be clients of more powerful, higher-status patrons beyond their village community. As Lande has pointed out, "[i]t is common for clienteles to be pyramided upon each other so that several patrons ... are in turn the clients of a higher patron who in turn is the client of a patron even higher than himself" (Lande 1977: xxi). To be applied in the analysis here, these higher patrons are often played by local state officials.

Chinese local officials have always been able to wield power in a significantly discretionary way, and in a way which may directly affect the lives of the people under their jurisdiction. In the last twenty years, official status and power have become even more important due to decentralization, weakening ideology, and deterioration of morality (Gong 1994; Lu 2000). Even though China has been developing a market-oriented economy, that economy is still closely tied to political power and governmental intervention. *Guanxi* is till the most important asset in getting things done in China and is intricately linked with governmental offices and officials (Gold, Guthrie,

and Wank 2002b). Local state officials' discretionary use of broad power continues to make the rural population dependent upon the goodwill of them to get access to loans, new housing sites, business licenses, market information, jobs and contracts. Village patrons, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, have much more frequent interactions with local officials. The relationship between local officials and village patrons is both give and take, just as it is between them and their own clients. On the one hand, village patrons, although much more prosperous than ordinary villagers, know very well that alienating their local officials may cost them more than it is worth. They have fully realized that local officials have the ability to sanction the insubordinate and make life difficult for them or their family in subtle but nonetheless effective ways. On the other hand, those elites in a clientelist relationship with local officials can receive valuable goods, services and opportunities in exchange. Local officials can not only offer land, contracts, job opportunities, but also facilitate various bureaucratic processes, such as gaining approval for loans and getting various licenses (Murphy 2002: 67-68; Oi 1989; Unger 2000; Unger 2002: 140-146). Local officials, who in fact monopolize a broad range of critical resources and opportunities, are in an ideal position to trade these scarce resources for obedience from those who are eager to share. What is more, local officials can also aid their clients by their nonenforcement of state policies in time of need (see Zhong 2003: 138-139). Consequently, with the introduction of direct village elections, township officials have realized that although they can no longer simply handpick village cadres as before, they still can strongly influence electoral results through clientelist exchanges with village patrons.

An interesting example happened in C village of Xinjia Township. In the 2002 election of that village, a villager who was a construction businessman had actively run for VC chair. As a construction businessman (and a patron), he employed a number of fellow villagers to work in his construction team and therefore owned a large personal following in his village. By claiming votes from his followers, he seemed to have a good chance of winning the election. However, this person was not satisfactory to the township government, which preferred the incumbent village cadres remain in office. In

order to dissuade him from running for VC office, the mayor of Xinjia Township promised him that, if he would withdraw from the electoral contest, a profitable government construction contract could be offered to him and he would also be given prior consideration when similar government construction contracts appeared in the future. As a result, this person quit the electoral competition and in exchange he got the government contract; the government kept their preferred incumbent VC cadres in power (Interview 8). As far as this example is concerned, it demonstrates that a patron-client relation was created between the township mayor and the construction businessman. And through the clientelist exchange embodied in the relation, the township mayor exerted decisive influence and successfully precluded the unwanted candidate (the construction businessman) without violating the formal electoral rules (although the clientelist exchange itself clearly constituted corruption).

There was another example in B village. In 2004, Jiamao's brother, who was a construction worker, fell from a roof when doing construction work and was seriously injured. Investigation revealed that Jiamao's brother had drunk a lot alcohol before doing his job. Since in doing this he had violated occupational regulations, his employer refused to offer any compensation for his injury. Thus, Jiamao turned to the Xinjia Township party secretary for help. Although the party secretary did not think the employer bore any fault in relation to the injury of Jiamao's brother, he finally pressured the employer to pay a sum of money to Jiamao's brother out of "humanitarian considerations". The party secretary told me:

The accident was because Jiamao's brother asked for it. He was an alcoholic and had been drinking before going to work. Nobody should be responsible for his injury. According to law, his employer has no duty to compensate for it under such circumstances. But as Jiamao came to us asking for help, we did try our best to do him a favour by pressuring his brother's employer to compensate 80,000 yuan. You know, the employer did not deserve this. But we considered that Jiamao had not made many troubles for the government when he acted as village chairman of B village and remained

to be an influential figure in his village, we therefore did him a favour as we may still need Jiamao's cooperation with the government in the future (Interview 3).

Although this example seems not directly relate to village elections as the previous one does, it serves to highlight the role of patron-client relationships between the village elites such as Jiamao and the local state officials, which are very likely to be invoked by the local state officials (patrons) to influence the village elites (clients) in village elections. As Scott has suggested, once a patron-client relation is created, it can persist for long periods as long as the patron and the client have something to offer one another (Scott 1972b: 95 & 100). In this case, Jiamao invoked the patron-client relation by seeking assistance from the township party secretary at one time when he needed help; At another time, say during the election, the township secretary may approach Jiamao for help in supporting the government favoured candidates.

Due to the "face-to-face" nature of patron-client association (the creation and maintenance of a patron-client relationship rests heavily on face-to-face contact between only the two parties) (See Powell 1970: 412; Scott 1972b: 94), and because the local state officials who exploit their office to reward clients, usually violate the formal norms of public conduct and get involved in corruption (as the two examples have demonstrated), concrete data on the process of patron-client exchange between local state officials and village elites is very difficult to collect (I will present further data on the patron-client exchange between local state officials and village cadres in the analysis of Chapter 7). Nonetheless, the two examples here may suffice to make the point that because local state officials are in positions of broad power from which they are able to dispense political favours to their clients and also take sanctions against the insubordinate, the village elites/patrons who are eager to obtain the political favours therefore are willing to act as clients of local state officials and in exchange respect and follow the "will of the higher ranks". This is largely why and how the local state officials choose to influence the village elites/patrons and attempt to "turn the Party committee and government's intention into villagers' voluntary actions" (Zhonggong

Xinjiashen weiyuanhui 2001: 3) in village elections.

Conclusion

Local state officials are largely policy implementers of the central government. The pressurized political system and the political responsibility contract system make local officials, reacting to different degrees of scrutiny and severity in punishment for implementation failures, tend to prioritize policy issues. Some issues are given more serious attention than others. However, no matter how local state officials prioritize their tasks, they need village cadres as their “legs”. Before the introduction of direct village elections, local state officials had the power to appoint their favoured village cadres, but the elections have taken this power away. As a result, local state officials as a whole are rather critical of direct village elections and have developed strategies to influence the electoral results without violating the “letter” of the laws and regulations.

First of all, township officials have carried out elections strictly according to the electoral laws and regulations. The electoral procedures set on paper, such as direct nomination of candidates by villagers, contested elections, anonymous voting, open counting of votes and so on, have been implemented carefully so as to both please the higher-level authorities and avoid villagers’ complaints and appeals. This may also leave electoral observers with the impression that local officials have faithfully implemented the electoral policy in a free and fair way. In-depth analysis, however, reveals that local state officials have set out qualifications for candidates so as to exclude “troublemakers” or unqualified candidates perceived by the government and most importantly, they have actually intervened and influenced elections in an informal but powerful way through manipulating intra-village clientelist relationships and using their own direct clientelist relations with potential candidates. Local state officials are actually in position of powerful patrons, being able to both offer a variety of favours to their clients and take sanctions against those who are insubordinate. Village elites, although as

patrons/middlemen of their fellow villagers, are also rational enough to deploy clientelist exchange for their own benefits. Consequently, the local state officials are still able to strongly influence the electoral results, even though the letter of the law and regulations have been strictly followed and the “free and fair” elections are held.

A clientelist perspective is the key to understanding the local state’s role in direct village elections. On the one hand, in contrast to the liberal-democratic view, it reveals that the local state actually still exerts substantial influence over so-called “free and fair” village elections by employing informal clientelist influence; on the other hand, it also challenges the view taken by the authoritarian approach advocates, who tend to put the emphasis upon the local state’s authoritarian intervention or manipulation of village elections, showing that the local state officials have to use clientelist inducement more than administrative coercion to guarantee their preferred electoral results.

Although the “invisible hand” of local state officials has played an influential, often even decisive, part in village elections, direct village elections have removed local state officials’ 100 per cent certainty of having their preferred candidates elected. For instance, in B village’s 1999 election, all the government’s preferred candidates lost and in the 2004 one, only one government-preferred candidate (Sifa) won. However, even if the government-preferred candidates lose, the system of post-election village governance still to a large degree guarantees the dominance of state power. In the next chapter, I will examine post-election governance, showing how “democratic” or directly elected village administration has failed to function after the elections.

6 Village self-governance: a “democratic” style?

In the previous chapters, I have examined B village’s VC elections, mainly focusing on the behaviour and strategies employed by villagers, VC candidates and township officials. I have argued that clientelism undermines the implementation of direct or so called “democratic” or “free and fair” village elections. Clientelism, both an informal social institution and a political strategy, has been used by different actors for different ends as part of (but not only in relation to) the process of VC elections. Through clientelism, VC elections, despite formally being organized in a “free and fair” way, that is in line with the law, are dominated by patrons within the villages and by township state officials.

In this and the next chapters, I will examine village governance in the era of direct VC elections in B village. In theory, VC elections should only be the means, while villagers’ “self-governance” or “grassroots democracy” or “village democracy” should be the end. The revised Organic Law specifies in its first article that the purpose of making the Law is “to guarantee villagers’ self-governance, make sure villagers managing their own affairs, develop rural grassroots democracy...” (Article 1). Therefore it is crucial to examine post-election village governance to see whether direct VC elections have had any effects upon “self-governance” and whether/how the rules and institutions on “self-governance” have been implemented in practice.

This chapter will focus on B village’s post-election governance by examining three questions. First, it will explore the relationship between the VC and the VPB in village governance. I argue that intra-village institutional and factional conflicts, have made it difficult for the two bodies to cooperate in village governance as they did before the advent of direct VC elections. The VC-VPB conflict is largely the manifestation of the

factional struggle triggered by direct VC elections. Second, the chapter will analyze the operation of the institutions that aim to make village affairs open and to supervise villager cadres' power. I argue that democratic institutions stipulated in the Organic Law have failed to function properly in reality. Third, another crucial institution for village governance, the villagers' representative assembly (VRA), will be examined. The examination will show that the VRA, which is the body supposed to be responsible for crucial issues within the village, remains a rubber stamp in practice due to both the institutional deficiency and clientelist relations between the village cadres and the villagers' representatives.

The role of the VPB and VPB-VC conflict in post-election village governance

It is impossible to discuss village governance, even after direct VC elections, without fully exploring the role of the VPB. As Oi and Rozelle have suggested: "Even free and fair elections cannot be assumed to bring meaningful change to the contours of rural power where there is a dual authority structure – Party and government – in every village" (Oi and Rozelle 2000: 513). This section discusses the role of the VPB and VPB-VC conflict in post-election village governance.

VPB before the introduction of direct elections

According to the Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), a Communist Party branch (*dangzhibu*) should be established in any work unit or place where there are three or more full Party members. A Party branch—a smaller unit than a Party committee—is the grassroots or primary Party organization in China. Therefore, the VPB, as the grassroots organization of CCP in countryside, exists in almost every Chinese village. The CCP Constitution defines grassroots organizations as the "militant bastions of the Party in the basic units of society" and attaches eight functions to these organizations, including the most important function of "propagating and carrying out

the Party's line, principles, and policies, the decision of the Central Committee of the Party and other higher Party organizations, and their own decisions" (Article 31).

Before the implementation of direct VC elections, that is before 1998, the VPB's status as the leading core of a village had been underlined repeatedly by Party policy²⁴ and had always been taken for granted. For instance, the Central government issued a circular in 1994 specifically emphasizing that "VPB must strengthen the leadership over VC" and "VC must be subject to the leadership of VPB" (Zhonggong zhongyang 1994). As I have indicated in the Chapter 2, the VPB was the central decision-making body in village governance. All major decisions concerning village affairs had to be approved by the Party branch before formal adoption by the VC. This was how higher Party and governmental authorities made sure that decisions made by the village administration conformed to the Party line and policies. A VPB usually has one secretary, one deputy secretary and several members. Traditionally, VPB cadres and particularly the VPB secretary, who dominated the power of village-level, was appointed directly by and responsible to its higher level Party organization, that is the township Party committee. It was also common that the VPB cadres concurrently held key positions in the VC (Zhong 2003: 159-162).

In B village, Qu Sixiang, as VPB secretary, had dominated village politics for more than twenty years. He was first appointed as VPB secretary in 1976, and presided over village affairs until 2000, when he resigned the VPB secretary post one year after the first directly-elected VC came into power. Before direct VC elections were carried out, the VPB cadres in B village were simply appointed by the township Party Committee though in the form of election by all village Party members (B village has a total of 38 Party members in 2000). And also the VPB cadres usually concurrently held VC office. For instance, from 1995 to 2000, the personnel composition of the VPB was Qu Sixiang (VPB secretary), Qu Jiabo (deputy secretary and concurrently serving as VC chair), Qu

²⁴ A Central document issued in 1994 stressed that "VPB must strengthen the leadership over VC" and "VCs must be subject to the leadership of VPB". See Zhonggong zhongyang (CCP Central Committee): 1994.

Jiazhi (VPB member and concurrently serving as deputy VC chair), Qu Jialing (VPB member and concurrently serving as VC member), Qu Shaodong (VPB member). The VPB was the decision-making body in the village at that time and the VC primarily implemented the decisions made by the VPB. All major decisions concerning village affairs had to be made or approved by the VPB before formal adoption by VC. By this, the township Party committee and government made sure that Party policy was implemented smoothly in the village (Interviews 11, 47 and 49).

The VPB secretary was no doubt the most important and powerful village official (“first hand”, or boss) in the village. He served as the personification and chief representative of the Party at the village level. One of the crucial powers held by the Party secretary was recommending personnel composition of village administration and recruiting new Party members in the village. The VPB secretary also had the final authority over village public financial and budgetary matters. Usually all major village expenditures had to be approved by the VPB secretary. The power of the VPB secretary over financial matters was especially significant in well-to-do villages like B village, which once owned a number of enterprises (Guo and Bernstein 2004; Interview 10).

VC-VPB conflict following the introduction of direct elections

With the implementation of direct VC elections in 1999, the VPB’s traditional power in village governance was potentially challenged by the VC. The Organic Law and direct VC elections have empowered the VC and potentially changed the village power structure. The previous unified leadership, centred around the VPB, has become dualistic: VPB cadres are elected by village Party members or appointed by the township Party Committee, while VC cadres are elected by ordinary villagers through VC elections. Now village power is supposed to be shared between the two bodies. The revised Organic Law states that the VPB should “exert the effect of the leading core” even though the Law also stipulates that the VPB should “support and guarantee” villager’s self-governance (Article 3). Article 3 of *Measures for Implementing the PRC VC Organic Law in Shandong* (the 2000 Measures) specifies that “the VC must

consciously accept the leadership” of the VPB and “perform its responsible duties well”. This stipulation means that the VPB exercises leadership “over important matters” while the VC should take charge of specific issues (Guo and Bernstein 2004: 258). But even so, such an ambiguous formula says little about who is actually in charge of specific issues and the division of work between the two bodies. How could the VPB exert its leadership over the VC without intervening the VC’s work? In village governance, what should be considered as “important matters” to be decided by the VPB and what should be classified as “specific issues” belonging to the duty of the VC? Unfortunately, no regulations has set out these clearly. The confusion and contradictions in the revised Organic Law are largely the root of the so-called “two-committee” (the VPB is also called VPB committee) conflict (*liangwei maodun*). Bewildered VPB secretaries in Xinjia township asked their superiors what use it was to have elected VC cadres when the leading core remained the VPB. By the same token, the village committee chairs were also perplexed: if the leadership of the VPB must be adhered to, why bother with elections in the first place (Interviews 1 and 14)?

Since the implementation of the revised Organic Law, conflict between VCs and VPBs in village governance has become a nationwide problem (Bernstein 2006; Guo 2002; Guo and Bernstein 2004; Xu and Zhou 2001). In order to solve the VC-VPB conflict, in some provinces, particularly in Shandong, Guangdong and Hainan provinces, local governments chose to merge the VCs and VPBs by oblige the Party secretary to run for the office of VC chair, thereby establishing his/her acceptability to the villagers (Guo and Bernstein 2004; Tan and Xin 2007: 594). For example, in November 1999, Shandong province issued a circular, stating that “the government encourage VPB secretaries and other VPB members to concurrently hold the position of VC chairs or other VC positions through electoral processes”; and “those VC chairs and VC members who are Party members and are considered to be qualified should be recruited to the VPB leading teams in accordance with related regulations and procedures of intra-Party elections” (Zhonggong Shandong shengwei; Shandongsheng remin zhengfu 1999).

Concurrent office holding emerged as the arrangement favoured by the Central government later. In July 2002, the Central government issued a “notice” on the new round of VC elections, “recommending” (*ti chang*) that candidates for VPB secretary should first run in the VC elections: if they received popular recognition by winning VC chair, they should then be nominated for the post of secretary; if they fail to be elected as VC chair, they should not be nominated for the VPB secretary post by the higher level party committee (Zhonggong zhongyang bangongting; Guowuyuan bangongting 2002). The concurrent holding of both VPB secretary and VC chair is also called “carrying two posts by one shoulder” (*yijiantiao*) (Guo 2002: 115).

Concurrent office holding has failed to be widely adopted throughout China. In many provinces, such as Guangxi, Shanxi, Yunan, Neimenggu and Hunan, it is estimated that this method is adopted only in less than 20 per cent villages (Tan and Xin 2007: 594). And despite Shandong authorities’ preference, concurrent office holding rate in Xinjia Township, after its 2002 VC elections, for example, was only 32 per cent (9 out of 28 villages) (Interview 3). B village, was among the rest 68 per cent villages, that did not adopt this method. According to the Xinjia Township officials, concurrent office holding is difficult to be implemented due to three reasons. First, many VPB secretaries who have faithfully implemented the state policies could not be elected if run in VC elections; second, those elected VC chair may be unwilling or not competent to implement the state policies and tasks; and finally, concurrent office holding, although may solve the problem of formal jurisdictional/institutional conflict between VC and VPB, can not necessarily solve the problem of informal power struggle between factions, which is usually the root of the VC-VPB conflict (Interviews 1 and 3).

The nature of the VC-VPB conflict, according to a Yantai government official, is that, after direct VC elections, the elected VC chair and the VPB secretary are likely to have a tense personal relationship and fight each other for power (Interview 56). Similarly, Guo Zhenglin, a Chinese scholar, also points out that due to the absence of institutionalized work divisions and rules or norms about cooperation between the VC

and the VPB, the relationship between the two bodies stands or falls largely on the personal relationship between the VC chair and the VPB secretary: if the VC chair and the VPB secretary have good personal relationship it is not likely that there will be serious conflict between the “two committees”; however, if the two persons have a tense personal relationship, “two-committee conflict” will be very likely to arise. He indicates that because it is based on a personal relationship, the two-committee relationship is “highly unstable” (Guo 2002: 111).

As clientelist theories have also suggested, dyadic relationships can be ones of mutual hostility as well as of mutual aid and hostile exchanges between two factions may create continuing conflict and lead to community fragmentation (Lande 1977: xxxii-xxxiii). So, if the VC chair and the VPB secretary are in a dyadic relationship of mutual hostility, and with the absence of institutionalized work procedures, conflict between the two bodies is bound to arise. In B village the VC-VPB conflict manifested itself soon after Jiamao and his two fellows (the New Faction) won the VC election in 1999. Sixiang and his followers (the OLT Faction) remained in the VPB posts, and it became almost impossible for the two factions to work together without the township government officials’ frequent intervention. In particular, the hostility between Jiamao and Sixiang reportedly turned the village office site into a virtual battlefield. Jiamao’s working priorities as the elected VC chair were “auditing previous village financial accounts”, “clearing old debts” and “rectifying various previous mistakes” (Interviews 11 and 50). All these activities were aimed at striking blows at the OLT Faction. As Jiamao told me:

According to law, as the elected VC chair, I took responsibility for the village affairs. To do my job, I of course had to find out what had happened in the past when the old leading team was in power. Otherwise, how could I just take over the job without knowing anything about it? Auditing the previous village financial records, clearing old debts, tackling the misdeeds committed by the old leading team was what I had to do and promised to do. But Sixiang and his men tried their best to make trouble and intentionally obstruct us from doing our jobs (Interview 50).

Sixiang, however, expressed his anger to Jiamao and this men's behaviours of intentionally retaliating the old cadres after the first direct VC elections. Sixiang told me:

Jiamao and his men had harbored a private resentment against me for a long time. Their very purpose of running for elections was not to serve the villagers but to retaliate against us old village cadres. After Jiamao became the VC chair, he was not concerned with his job at all but always attempted to make waves. To them, "self-governance" meant they could do whatever they wanted (Interview 49).

Sixiang and his OLT Faction of course did not want to surrender to their opponents. The OLT Faction took two strategies as counterattack. On the one hand, they took advantage of the formal institutional stipulation that the VPB should act as the "leading core" in village governance and opposed the New Faction occupied VC's threatening motions, such as auditing previous village financial accounts. In Sixiang's words, "fortunately, the law stipulates that the VPB is the leading core and all important issues must be decided by the VC and VPB together. That's why Jiamao and his men failed to achieve their evil intentions" (Interview 49). On the other hand, members of the OLT Faction intentionally picked quarrels and created troubles so as to make the New Faction occupied VC difficult to carry out its normal work and thus damage its reputation. For example, when the VC under Jiamao's leadership organized the collective mechanized cultivation (in B village, during seedtime the VC usually hires machines to cultivate all farmland in the village for all villagers. This is much more efficient for individual household cultivation), some core members of the OLT Faction claimed that their farmland had not been done satisfactorily and insisted that their farmland should be cultivated again. When Jiamao refused their request, they even forced the cultivator to stop and claim compensation on the spot. This made Jiamao's work almost impossible to carry on until the township officials intervened in the end (Interview 50). Some OLT Faction members also kept going to the VC office, complaining about the VC work

done by Jiamao and his men. Some even went to Jiamao's house after getting drunk, abusing him (Interview 50 and 53).

Such factional struggle and conflict made the village governance almost impossible to function properly and village work came to deadlock nearly at all times. A Xinjia Township official talked about how B village's governance became malfunctioned and paralyzed with the VC (occupied by the New Faction) and the VPB (occupied by the OLT Faction) fighting each soon other after the 1999 election:

After Jiamao and his men became VC cadres of B village in 1999, the quarrels and fights between Jiamao's men and Sixiang's men were endless. Jiamao's VC and Sixiang's VPB could not work together at all. As long as Jiamao and Sixiang were both in the office, there would be quarrels. Jiamao's faction was eager to dig up so-called "corrupt" practices committed by Sixiang and the village old cadres before, while Sixiang and his men of course tried his best to prevent such efforts against them. Sixiang's suggestions and working plans were always opposed by Jiamao and vice versa. You can imagine how difficult it was for the two factions to collaborate to get work done. Without our government's intervention, village affairs could not have been carried out with the two factions fighting each other all day (Interview 11).

After direct VC elections, such factional struggles between VCs and VPBs have taken place in numerous Chinese villages. As one writer has commented: "No one can exactly say, since successfully carrying out democratic elections, how many previously peaceful villages have disappointingly fallen into unrest caused by factional struggles." He asks perplexedly: "Is this the democracy that villagers really want" (Zhu 2004: 111)? In Xinjia Township, according to a township government official, about one third of villages have experienced this kind of "unstable" situation due to severe factional conflicts after direct elections (Interview 3). In one township of another county in Yantai City, the factional conflicts between VCs and VPBs were so severe that a total of 57 VC chairs and members in that township signed a letter to the central government in 2000

saying that VPB secretaries had prevented them from carrying out their duties by failing to relinquish the village seal or by denying them access to village financing accounts. One was “brutally beaten up” by the Party secretary’s associates for complaining to country authorities. This issue aroused the Central government’s attention and was reported by the central media (Cui 2001; Jakobsen 2004:107). In another village in Shanxi Province, the conflict between the elected VC chair and the VPB secretary had been so severe that the VPB secretary murdered the VC chair (Li 2001).

VC-VPB conflict in the post-election village governance of B village, as in many other villages elsewhere, is actually the extension of the factional contest in the VC elections. The factional rivalry triggered by direct VC elections continues to manifest itself often in the form of VC-VPB conflict in the post-election governance. As the clientelist theorist Lande has pointed out: “the divisive aspects of factionalism must not be overlooked. One of the aims of each faction is to bring benefits to its leaders and adherents. To do so, it must defeat efforts of rival factions to do the same. The losers in such zero-sum games are likely be resentful, to hope for a turn-about in which they can ‘put down’ their opponents as they have been put down themselves. This leads to the related subject of feuding” (Lande 1977: xxxii).

In B village’s first direct VC election, although the OLT Faction was defeated by the New Faction, its core members still stayed in the VPB that was not subject to popular election and was supposed to “lead” the VC filled by the New Faction. If the vote-soliciting based on factional competition created village division, the post-election governance led to a further deterioration in the division and factional conflict. And because of the division and conflict, village administration has worsened rather than improved. For more than a year until Sixiang resigned the VPB secretary in July 2000, Jiamao and Sixiang refused to talk to each other, let alone cooperate with each other (Interview 55). The conflict between the VC headed by Jiamao and the VPB led by Sixiang temporarily ceased in July 2000, when Xinjia Township government (Party committee) reshuffled B village’s VPB. In that reshuffle, Sixiang resigned his post as

VPB secretary and stepped down.²⁵ Qu Jiawan, who was a laid-off staff of Xinjia Township government,²⁶ was appointed as new VPB secretary of B village, while Jiamao was appointed VPB deputy secretary. The new VPB personnel appointed by the Xinjia Township government were as follows: Qu Jiawan (secretary), Qu Jiamao (deputy secretary and also VC chair), Qu Jialing (member) and Qu Jiabo (member).

After the VPB reshuffle, the VC-VPB conflict in the village government became much less severe due to three reasons. First of all, there was no personal resentment between Jiamao and the new secretary, Jiawan. Jiawan had worked outside the village for many years before returning to assume the post of the VPB secretary and had no close connection to either faction (Interview 55). And Jiawan used to be Jiamao's student when he was a pupil in primary school. This personal connection facilitated the two's cooperation to some extent as to show respect to one's teacher is considered to be a virtue in China. Second, according to some villagers, Jiawan was not an aggressive character and was inclined to avoid conflicts (Interview 3 and 55). Thirdly, after the reshuffle, Jiamao concurrently held both the position of VPB deputy secretary and that of the VC chair, which seemed to have eased the VC-VPB conflict.²⁷

Again, as stated previously, two years later Jiazhi (core member of the OLT Faction) ousted Jiamao in the 2002 VC election and started his collaboration with the VPB (headed by Jiawan). (Jiamao remained on the VPB until the next reshuffle—in theory an election by Party members in the village—but was marginalized in village affairs, and indeed preferred to withdraw.) During Jiazhi's tenure, the “VC-VPB relationship” is

²⁵ As for the reason for Sixiang's resignation, there were two versions: according to Sixiang himself, it was because he was “fed up” with working with Jiamao and also he had reached the retiring age to get pension by the year 2000 (Interview 49). But according to Jiamao (Interview 50) and another villager interviewee (Interview 42), Sixiang resigned because on the one hand he felt he had no longer been able to “commit corruption” and on the other he resigned to act as a “string-puller” behind the curtain. No matter what is the reason, it seems one thing is clear that even after Sixiang's resignation, he has remained to be the leader of the OLT Faction (Interview 50, 53 and 55).

²⁶ Jiawan had previously worked as a staff for Xinjia Township for ten years. He was appointed as the VPB secretary of B village in 2000 partly because he was just laid off with the government redundancy and needed a new job (Interview 3).

²⁷ Note that if following the concurrent office holding method, Jiamao, who was a Party member and elected VC chair, was supposed to concurrently hold the VPB secretary post rather than the VPB deputy secretary post. This demonstrates that the township government did not trust Jiamao to implement government policies and tasks. But to make Jiamao VPB deputy secretary also demonstrates the township government's pragmatism in dealing with him after his election. It was an attempt to bring him under Party control and perhaps even co-opt him into the system.

considered by the township government leaders to have been quite “stable” and “satisfactory” (Interviews 2 and 3). This is because the VPB secretary, Jiawan, chose to side with Jiazhi and therefore the factional struggle failed to take place in the form of the VC-VPB conflict.

However, following the 2004 VC election, the situation changed again. The New Faction, as discussed in Chapter four, won the positions of VC chair (Sixu) and deputy VC chair (Sichun). The incumbent VC deputy chair, Sifa (also core member of the OLT Faction), secured his seat in the VC, but only won the position of VC member in this election (see Chapter 4). Interestingly, in the subsequent VPB reshuffle, Sifa replaced Jiawan and was appointed VPB secretary by the Xinjia Township government.²⁸ This created a very complicated web of relationships. As a VC member, Sifa should be subordinate to the VC chair and deputy chair; however, as VPB secretary, he became the “first hand” of the village and was supposed to lead VC. Note that Sifa (the OLT Faction) had hotly competed with Sixu and Sichun (the New Faction) in the 2004 electoral campaign, in which they had verbally attacked and even insulted each other. Though I do not have much information on the running of village governance after the 2004 election, I do suspect that the “two-committee relationship” very likely descended into conflict and factional struggle again.

“Democratic” supervision?

Villagers’ financing small team

The villagers’ financing small team (VFST) is a specially designed institution supposed to empower villagers to supervise village cadres’ financing activities in order to practise “democratic supervision”. In theory, the VFST is supposed to be an *independent* institution in village governance overseeing village financing to make sure public funds are spent sensibly and reasonably. The “Measures for Implementing the PRC VC

²⁸ Sifa, as Jiazhi’s ally, is favoured by township government due to his record of obeying government’s arrangements.

Organic Law in Shandong” (the 2000 Measures) stipulate that: “the villagers general meeting (VGM) recommends and selects 3-5 villagers to form a villagers’ financing small team (VFST). The VFST conducts audits and supervises village financial accounts and it is responsible to the VGM. ... Every item of VC expenditure must be recorded in the village accounts only after audit by the VFST. The VFST should audit the village accounts at least once a month” (Article 26). In 2004, a central government document further specified that VFST members be selected by and responsible to either the VGM or the VRA. The VFST is entitled to veto unreasonable expenditures and where disputes arise, the issue concerned should be referred to the VGM or VRA for discussion and decision (Zhonggong zhongyang bangongting and Guowuyuan bangongting 2004).

B village’s VFST members were elected from among villagers’ representatives by a ballot of those representatives. The three representatives with the most votes were elected VFST members. But again, what the VFST *should be* in theory is one thing, but what it *actually is* in reality is another. In B village, the VFST cannot be a real independent overseeing institution; rather, the behaviour of the VFST members are also strongly influenced by clientelism and factional considerations. For example, one VFST member during Jiazhi’s tenure as VC chair, Siyi, described his job to me:

We VFST members meet at village office once a month, usually on the evening of 25th. The village accountant and treasurer will join us and show us the month’s expenditure receipts one by one. Our job is to check whether a specific sum of money has been spent properly. Actually I do find many problematic expenditures when carrying out my duties. But my opinion is no use at all. Even when I pointed out the problems and refused to endorse certain spending, it is still reimbursed. For example, I once noticed that there was an incredibly large sum of money spent on entertainment within a single month. I raised my doubts about it. Jiazhi [the VC chair] and Jiawan [the secretary] explained that more money had been spent on entertainment that month because there had been a number of inspections called by the township officials for various different purposes. I refused to accept that excuse and insisted that the village collective should not reimburse

the unreasonable extra part of the spending. But this ended up with no clear resolution. No one has ever mentioned it again. Since it is the township government that keeps the village accounts, we VFST members have no idea how the account has been recorded. Things have been always like that. Another problem for the VFST is that some VFST members do their jobs out of their personal and factional considerations. They either keep silent for fear of offending the village cadres or side with them because they belong to their faction (Interview 54).

As far as B village is concerned, there are the following problems affecting the functioning of the VFST. First of all, VFST members have no opportunity to check the village account book. It is Xinja Township government that keeps the account books of each village and nobody can check without the township government's permission. All VFST members can do is to judge whether a sum of money is spent properly or not. But how the village account book has been recorded is not known to them. Second, the VFST stamp is kept by the village treasurer (a position concurrently held by VC member) rather than the VFST members. According to the regulations (Zhonggong Longkou shiwei zuzhibu 2002: 58), if VFST members approve an expenditure receipt, they should stamp the receipt; if they think the expenditure is unacceptable, they can reject it by refusing to stamp the receipt. No expenditure receipt should be recorded in the village accounts without bearing the stamp. This stamp, which is called "special democratic financing stamp" (*minzhu licai zhuanzhang*), however, is kept by the VC member. Hence, VFST members suspect that the stamp bearer, who is a VC cadre himself, may be likely to secretly abuse his access to the stamp (if he secretly stamps a receipt rejected by VFST, VFST members can hardly find out since they cannot check account book at all). Third, according to Siyi, an excessive amount of public funds has been spent on entertainment, which indicates that village cadres are likely to abuse their power. Fourth, the VFST's opinions and objections have constantly been ignored by both village cadres and township government. For example, it was quite common that when receipts were rejected by the VFST the matter was not resolved. According to the Longkou regulations (Zhonggong Longkou shiwei zuzhibu 2002: 59), receipts rejected

by the VFST should be explained and justified by VC and VPB cadres. If the VFST still finds them unsatisfactory, it should be discussed and decided on by the VGM or VRA. In reality, receipts rejected by VFST can be approved easily with the township government's agreement. Last but not least, the VFST members' behaviour is in fact strongly affected by clientelism and factionalism. Some VFST members are willing to endorse expenditures simply because they are the clients of the village cadres and are obliged to support their patrons. Some members, such as Siyi, are intentionally faultfinding because they belong to the village cadres' rival faction. Jiazhi's comment may help to further support this. Strongly disagreeing Siyi's view, Jiazhi expressed his anger over the behaviour of "certain" VFST members:

I think certain persons in the VFST just intentionally make trouble, rather than do their jobs. Siyi is this kind of troublemaker. He is a remote relative of Jiaxian [a core member of the New Faction]. And because Jiaxian was ousted by us (in 2002 VC election), he bears a grudge against us and kept making trouble after being elected a VFST member. He always rebuked us for absolutely normal village expenditures. For instance, the village water pump had a fault and we paid the technician 200 *yuan* to change a new part. But Siyi accused us of misusing the collective money, claiming that the part should cost no more than 50 *yuan*. He also accused us of abusing village entertainment budget. It is normal for every village to spend some money on entertaining higher level officials who make inspection visits to the village. It is out of the consideration of both courtesy and, more importantly, the village's benefits. If we don't show our hospitality to please them, how can we ask their support and favour in our village work? You know, Jiamao and Sifa also spent quite a lot of money on entertainment during their tenure. Siyi was a member of the VFST at that time as well and because of his close relationship with Sifa, he had never raised any doubts then (Interview 47).

The VFST's intended function of independent supervision cannot be achieved in reality largely because it is composed of persons who are constrained by their clientelist and factional relationships. On the one hand, if VFST members are clients of the village

cadres, how can they supervise their patrons? On the other hand, if VFST members intentionally refuse to cooperate with village cadres by vetoing even reasonable expenditures simply because the cadres are their factional rivals, how can village cadres operate effectively? Clientelism has made the VFST either a rubber stamp or a tool in factional struggles. As one Chinese scholar has commented: “we have to doubt whether, in a face to face village community, the VFST, which is also subject to the influences of factional and clan relationships, can truly do its job openly, fairly and justly” (Lu 2005: 17). He further points out that, as the formal regulations fail to offer provisions to discipline VFST members who fail to perform their duties properly, the function of the VFST is subject to the personal relationships among its members (Ibid.). And this is largely the root of its malfunction. Another Chinese scholar, Dang Guoying, expresses similar doubts. He asks: “what if the members of the overseeing institution act in collusion with the village cadres? Under such circumstances, how can the overseeing institution be supervised” (Dang 2004)?

Transparency in village affairs

Transparency in village affairs (*cunwu gongkai*) is a measure to make village affairs open to villagers so as to empower villagers to have the “right to know” and to supervise village cadres and the process of village governance (Yin 2004: 52-62). The revised Organic Law stipulates that transparency in village affairs must be carried out by the VC and that all village affairs that affect villagers’ interests, including village financial statement, management of the collective economy, family planning implementation and allocation of housing plots, must be open to the villagers. And also, the VC should “guarantee the genuineness of any materials made public and the content be subject to villagers’ enquiry” (see Articles 19 and 22). At the local level, the 2000 Measures contained a similar stipulation requiring transparency in village affairs (Article 24 and 25).

According to the guidance handbook published by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA), village affair transparency can be carried out in four forms: “village affairs publicity

boards” (*cunwu gongkai lan*), village internal broadcasting, leaflets and village general meeting (VGM) or villagers’ representative assembly (VRA) (Minzhengbu jiceng zhengquan he shequ jianshe si 2004). In B village, as in many villages elsewhere in rural China,²⁹ the most common and institutionalized form of publicizing village affairs to villagers is using “village affairs publicity boards”, although, only occasionally, village internal broadcasting, leaflets or VRA may be used to publicizing some information (Interviews 24, 35 and 44). As far as village affair transparency is concerned, the Longkou authorities also only focus on the form of publicity boards, stating that “all village affairs concerned by villagers or affecting villagers’ interests, should be publicized on village affairs publicity boards and subject to villagers’ supervision” (Zhonggong longkou shiwei zuzhi bu 2002: 61-64).

In practice, even use of the publicity boards (*gongkai lan*), which is the only institutionalized form for publishing information on village affairs, is under-used. The village affairs publicity boards of B village are located outside the VC/VPB office. It is actually the wall of a house, and information on village affairs that should be public knowledge ought to be posted up there. But, in fact, according to most of my interviewees, except for a poster of the village accounts statement that was posted up monthly, little else has ever appeared on the board.³⁰ This was confirmed by my three fieldwork trips to B village, during which I found only monthly statements of the village accounts posted on the board. And even this was very vague and even confusing. It was merely a form containing several items and showing both income and expenditures from each. For example, in terms of expenditures, under an item called “management fees” it showed that a significant sum of money had been spent in a certain month. However the form did not detail how the money had been spent. Similarly, the “other expenditures” item also contained quite significant sums. I asked a Xinjia Township government leader what “other expenditures” meant on the statement. And he replied that it meant

²⁹ For example, according to a survey carried out in Sichuan Province in 2005, in more than 50,000 villages of the province, there were 98.3% villages had village affair publicity board as their *only* form of village affairs publicity. See Wang (2005).

³⁰ Some interviewees said that they had never bothered to see the village publicity board (Interview 21, 24, 42, 45 and 46).

“expenditures that did not fit in the categories specifically listed on the form” (Interview 1). This leader gave me no examples of such “other expenditures”, only saying that “different villages have different situations”. It is clear that such form of village affair transparency makes it difficult for ordinary villagers even to understand what is happening let alone to “supervise” village affairs. I asked one villager interviewee whether he would read the posted village account statement every month. He replied: “I have never bothered to look at it. And even if I did, I would not be able to make sense of it. They are just tricks played by the cadres. We ordinary villagers are not interested in that stuff” (Interview 42). Another villager commented:

Villagers cannot understand the village account poster at all. You know, it only shows such things as how much is spent on “administration fees”, how much is spent on “entertainment fees”. From the poster you have no way of knowing exactly how the money was spent. What’s more, it is very easy to cook the books, isn’t it? So the overwhelming majority of villagers are not concerned about the posted account at all. Even if someone has doubts, could they really go to check and audit the village accounts? No one would like to offend those cadres (Interview 30).

Despite the situation in B village, the official statistics, however, have always shown the situation in a very optimistic light. For example, according to the figure of the MoCA, by 2003, “transparency in village affairs has been implemented in 95 per cent of villages” across the country with “more than 60 per cent up to standard” (Jiang 2003: 10). Likewise, the official figure released by Shandong Province is also encouraging. According to the 2004 figures, there were a total of 86,699 VCs in Shandong, of which 95.5 per cent (82,837) had carried out village affairs transparency. And among the VCs that had implemented village affair transparency, 77.4 per cent (64,144) were considered by the Shandong authorities as “satisfactory” and 20.4 per cent (16,902) were classified as “acceptable” (*yi ban*) and only 2.2 per cent (1,791) were considered “bad” (*cha*) (Wang 2004). But contrary to such optimistic official statistics, some in-depth investigations have revealed that what happens in B village is no exception but

is found in other localities across the country (Bernstein 2006; Gou 2007; He 2007; Song 2002: 89-94; Yin 2004: 52-62). For instance, a qualitative investigation of the first village self-governance demonstration county, Laixi³¹, shows that village affairs transparency in its villages had been largely “formalistic” (Yin 2004: 52-62). Yin argues that two reasons have led to this formalistic implementation. First, village cadres would not make village affairs open because they tend to seek improper benefits or commit corruption by taking advantage of their power. Second, township officials tend to connive at village cadres’ misbehaviour in exchange for their cooperation in carrying out some rigid government tasks. Third, and more importantly, although ordinary villagers are supposed to participate and oversee the implementation of village affair transparency, they, as vulnerable people, in fact cannot “afford to offend their village cadres” if they challenge them on related issues because in a village community cadres are still able to make an individual villager’s life “difficult” if they want to (Ibid.: 57-60). This analysis, I believe, is compatible with my clientelist explanation of the situation in B village.

The recall and impeachment of VC cadres

The revised Organic Law bestows on villagers the right to recall and impeach incumbent VC cadres in whom they have lost confidence. Article 16 of the Organic Law stipulates,

If more than one fifth of eligible voters in a village jointly sign a proposal to recall VC members then this can be processed. Reasons for the recall should be put forward. The targeted VC member is entitled to make a defence. The VC should convene a villagers’ meeting without delay to vote on the recall proposal. The recall proposal can only be passed with the support of more than half the eligible voters in the village.

This is another institution for empowering ordinary villagers to “democratically”

³¹ Like Longkou County, Laixi County also locates in Shandong peninsula. Laixi is one of the counties of another eastern coastal city of Shandong Province: Qingdao. In 1990, the MoCA picked Laixi County as the first national demonstration county for villagers’ self-governance.

supervise elected VC cadres. Nationwide, although there have been a few reported cases of villagers successfully using this power and recalling their incumbent VC cadres (Wang 2002: 103; Xiao 2002b: 89-90), this does not seem to be widely used. For example, Yantai city has a total of 6572 administrative villages. However, since the implementation of the revised Organic Law in 1998, there has not been a single reported case of the recall of VC cadres (Interview 56).

Why is this clause not practical? First, villagers have little incentive to participate in actions against village cadres. With the absence of organizational support from a voluntary sector or partisan organizations, it is very difficult to mobilize villagers to participate into such activities. Most importantly, collective action is undermined by particularistic clientelist ties. In this context, ordinary villagers today still try to avoid offending their village cadres for fear of retaliation.

Second, the township government would not support such actions. To convene a villagers' meeting to recall a VC cadre is as inconvenient for these officials as to hold a village electoral meeting. If the incumbent VC cadres are satisfactory to the township government, it has no incentive at all to recall them even if villagers want to. However, if the incumbent VC members are in fact unsatisfactory to the township government, it still can use other methods to get things done—as I will discuss in the next chapter. And if villagers are mobilized to recall their VC cadres without the township government's involvement, it would mean a failure of government control and so the township would not let it happen (Interview 3).

Third, the stipulation on recalling and impeaching VC cadres is vague and flawed. For example, according to the revised Organic Law (Article 16), it is the VC that convenes the villagers' meeting if a recall proposal made. But it is inconceivable that VC cadres would convene a meeting, the purpose of which is to oust themselves (Li 2005; Xiao 2002b: 79-80).

The villagers' representative assembly (VRA)

The institutional status of VRA

As have discussed briefly in Chapter 2, the VRA is actually a substitute for the unpractical institution, the VGM. Although in theory the VGM is supposed to be the supreme institution for decision-making in a village and all important village issues should be discussed and decided by it, in fact it is simply impractical in reality. Considered to be a form of “direct democracy” (Oi and Rozelle 2000: 515; Zhong 2003: 168), the VGM largely fails to function in practice for two key reasons. First, it is very difficult to convene a VGM. Villagers are no longer been tied up on the farmland as they were during the commune era. Instead, they are engaged with various businesses, and may be working far away from their villages as migrant workers, or doing private businesses outside their village all year round. This makes it almost impossible to arrange a time to gather the legally-required number of villagers for the VGM. In addition, in many Chinese village communities, it is difficult to find a proper meeting hall to accommodate a VGM. Second, the size of the VGM makes it difficult to hold a meaningful discussion of village affairs. A VGM in Chinese villages might mean several hundreds to over a thousand people gathering together. Such a big size is too difficult to carry through meaningful discussion (Chen 2000: 156-160; Wang and Bai 1996: 130-131).

Because of the impracticality of holding regular VGMs, the VRA, has been created and utilized as a representative body in most Chinese villages. Article 21 of the revised Organic Law stipulates: “in villages that are relatively populous or where villagers are scattered over a wide area, people can elect villagers' representatives. Convened by the VC, the villagers' representative assembly discusses and makes decisions on the issues as authorized by the village general meeting (VGM). Villagers' representatives can be elected by two methods, either one for each 5 to 15 households or to several from within each villagers' small group [*cunmin xiaozu*].”

The VRA as a formal village institution was created together with the implementation of direct VC election in B village (and other villages in Xinjia Township) in 1999. B village has a total of 20 villagers' representatives. But the election of the representatives was carried out in a rather informal way compared to the VC elections. The election of the VRA followed shortly after the VC election and was organized by the newly elected VC cadres. B village has four villagers' small groups and each group was to produce five representatives. The newly elected VC would instruct a few persons to take a roving ballot box to each household and each household (not each member of the household) could select five villagers within its villagers' small group as representatives. The five villagers who got the highest number of votes within a villagers' small group would become the representatives of the villagers' small group (Interviews 47, 50 and 55).

According to the Longkou regulations (Longkoushi nongcun "liangwei" huanjie xuanju gongzuo lingdao xiaozu bangongshi 2004), the VRAs are authorized the following rights:

- to decide the level of compensation that villagers can be paid for undertaking collective duties;
- to decide on how the income from the village collective economy is spent;
- to decide on how the village public funds are raised and spent—for example to decide whether establishing village-owned schools or building village roads;
- to endorse contracts relating to the village collective economy, village public construction as well as villagers' contracts with village collective;
- to work out plans for the use of plots of land for housing and family planning;
- to appraise and supervise the work of VC members as well as to discuss and decide proposals for punishing VC cadres wrongdoings;
- to create and amend rules and regulations for villagers' self-governance;
- to elect the village accountant and members of the VFST;

- to repeal or change any improper decisions made by the VC.

The rights of the VRA, however, must be “authorized” by the VGM according to the revised Organic Law (Article 21). In Xinjia Township, the authorization ceremony was held as the last stage of the VC electoral meeting and, according to my personal observation of the VC elections in B village on November 29, 2004, it was conducted largely in a formalistic way without substantial meaning to most villagers. After the electoral meeting finally produced a new session of VC cadres, the township official who presided the meeting then carry on with the authorization ceremony by announcing to villagers:

According to the stipulation of the Organic Law, all important issues affecting villagers interests should be referred by the VC to the VGM for discussing and resolution. However, being realistic about rural conditions, it is very difficult to hold a VGM with lawful attending figure and also it would be very inconvenient to discuss issues at the VGM, which would do harm to villagers’ interests. Therefore, the Organic Law stipulates that the VGM can authorize the VRA to discuss and decide on some key village issues. In order to occupy your time as little as possible, we would like to hold the authorization ceremony today. Now let’s take a vote for it. We need to complete two steps: first, villagers take a vote on whether to hold the authorization ceremony today; second, villagers take a vote on the authorized contents.

The form of the vote for the authorization was conducted by a show of hands. The content of what the VRA is authorized to do (the above-mentioned nine items) had been prepared by the government in advance and were actually not a matter of villagers’ concern. All the words and procedures of the authorization ceremony have been written in advance in the government operational manual (Longkouxian nongcun "liangwei" huanjie xuanju gongzuo lingdao xiaozu bangongshi 2004) and the township official who

presided over the electoral meeting simply read it through quickly.³² According to my personal observation, few villagers were serious about the authorization ceremony, let alone tried to make sense of what the exact meaning of each authorized item. Many villagers did not bother to raise their hands when the presiding township official asked them if they “agreed”, “disagreed” or “abstained” on the question of whether or not to give the VRA authorization—note that villagers voted once on the whole raft of VRA powers, not on each one separately. The township officials apparently did not care that the villagers were paying no attention. They went through the formalities as quickly as possible and ended the ritual by announcing with relief “it has passed unanimously”.³³

In addition to B village, I also observed VC elections in 14 other villages in Xinjia Township in 2004, and in 12 of them the authorization ceremony procedures was conducted in exactly the same way. In two cases, the township cadres even simply gave up the authorization ceremony because it rained, which made the villagers extremely impatient.

The authorization ceremony process for VRAs is not taken at all seriously by either township officials or villagers. It is not initiated by villagers or the VGM but arranged by the local government in a top-down style. Villagers are still largely passive participants. All these formalities or rituals have to be done simply because these “democratic” rules are designed by higher-up authorities rather than peoples’ own initiative.

The malfunctioning of the VRA in practice

Despite the central government’s continuing efforts to emphasize the VRA’s functions as a representative organ of the villagers and a crucial body for “democratic” decision-making and supervision over the village governance (Zhonggong zhongyang bangongting and Guowuyuan bangongting 2004), in most villages across rural China,

³² Personal observation of 8th session of VC electoral meeting of B village. 2004-11-29.

³³ Ibid.

the VRA is either rarely convened and utilized, or it is held as a formality in a meaningless fashion used merely as a legitimizing body to rubber stamp the decisions already made by the village cadres or the higher ups (Cao 2006; Zhong 2003: 169). Only in some villages where there is strong pressure from the higher authorities to make the VRA work and sufficient support and cooperation from the VPB, may the VRA probably be able to play a meaningful role in village governance (For such examples, see Lawrence 1994; Oi and Rozelle 2000: 516-519). As far as B village is concerned, the role of the VRA has been largely that of a rubber-stamp. Institutional deficiencies and informal clientelist influences are perhaps two most important factors that account for the mere formality of the VRA in reality.

Institutional deficiencies

Institutionally speaking, the VRA system has two major deficiencies, which contribute to its malfunction in reality. First, although the most important responsibilities of the VRA is to make decisions on crucial village affairs and supervise and check VC's work (Longkoushi nongcun "liangwei" huanjie xuanju gongzuo lingdao xiaozu bangongshi 2004), the VRA has to be convened and presided by the VC. The revised Organic Law stipulates that "the VRA is convened by the VC to discuss and decide issues authorized by the VGM" (Article 21). In addition, the Longkou government regulations further stipulate that "the VRA is convened and presided by the VC under the leadership of the VPB" (Zhonggong Longkou shiwei zuzhibu 2002: 12). In practice, this makes the VRA subordinate to the VC and the VPB. This is rather as if a cabinet convenes and presides over the Parliament in the UK. Although the Longkou regulations stipulate that the VRA must be convened at least once a quarter or "with the proposal of either the VC and the VPB or more than one third of village representatives" (ibid.). In fact the VRA in B village has failed to meet so regularly (Interviews 50, 53 and 54). When to convene it largely depends on the will of the village cadres and the requirement of the township government. So, as Chen has pointed out: if the VRA is convened and chaired by the VC, which means the VRA does not have its own leader, the VC chair actually becomes the de facto VRA leader. Therefore in case the village cadres foresee that to convene the

VRA may cause trouble or be counter to their interests, they will simply refuse to convene it (Chen 2000: 163; 178-179). In B village, under most circumstances the VRA is called by village cadres at the request of the township government to pass on government instructions (Interviews 47 and 50). Therefore, the VRA is not at all an independent standing body that has detailed and specific work procedures to carry out its function of so-called democratic decision-making and supervision. Such institutional arrangement simply enables township officials and village cadres to set the agenda or manipulate the VRA.

Another key institutional deficiency causing the VRA's malfunction is that the working and maintaining of such an organization is not economically feasible to the overwhelming majority of villages. Although the VRA is supposed to play a crucial and long standing role as the locus of both decision-making and supervision in the village governance, its institutional design is largely impractical for the village community, at least economically speaking. According the local regulations, VRA representatives are obliged to perform a number of duties in relation to village governance, such as participating in VRA meetings regularly, discussing and deciding on various important village affairs, soliciting their constituents' opinion and requirements, supervising and appraising the VC's performance, and so on (Longkoushi nongcun "liangwei" huanjie xuanju gongzuo lingdao xiaozu bangongshi 2004; also see Article 9 of the Shandong Measures). However, acting as a VRA representative is almost an unpaid job. In B village, a VRA representative is paid only 5 *yuan* for attending a meeting (this is "compensation for lose of working time", *wugong butie*)³⁴, while in a lot of villages elsewhere VRA representatives do not receive any payment at all because of their village's poor economic situation (Oi and Rozelle 2000: 522). Therefore, the time and energy spent on being a VRA representative outweighs the material benefits gained, particularly in (even relatively economically developed areas of) rural China where people's economic situation is still poor. As a result, the representatives are not serious

³⁴ In most of the villages of Xinjia Township, the compensation standard for VRA representatives is 5 *yuan* for attending each meeting. In only a few wealthy villages, the standard is 10 *yuan* (Interview 3).

about their job and many of them often miss the VRA meetings (Interviews 3, 50 and 55), let alone take time to study or sufficiently investigate important village affairs (if there are some) as required by the regulations. The multiple and crucial functions that the VRA is supposed to perform in theory are not attainable in practice.

The influence of clientelism

As indicated previously, in principle, the VRA is an independent body in village governance that is supposed to have supervisory and decision-making powers, and representatives must represent the interests of their fellow villagers. In practice, however, because the VRA is convened and chaired by the village cadres who have already reached a consensus beforehand on solving the particular problems facing the village,³⁵ VRA representatives are only expected to approve or rubber-stamp the decisions that have already been made. The VRA representatives are well aware of this informal rule and are unwilling to raise divergent opinions in meetings so as to offend the village cadres who are their patrons (or potential patrons). The VRA representatives, the same to ordinary villagers, are also dependent upon the goodwill of the village cadres and the township officials to get access to various clientelist benefits. Therefore, showing deference and avoiding “making trouble” is one of the ways to win favour with the cadres (Unger 2000). As one VRA representative commented:

The VRA meeting is completely useless. It's merely formalistic. They [the village cadres] would not tell you the content of the meeting until it starts. Under most circumstances, the [VPB] secretary simply announces the tasks assigned by the government or the decisions having been made by the village cadres. After the announcement, the secretary would ask “so, does anyone of you have any different opinion on it?” Usually no one responds. Then the secretary would say immediately, “OK, since there is no objection, this issue is then determined! The meeting is over and you are dismissed!” The typical thinking of the representatives is this: since it is no use at all to object to the cadres’

³⁵ According to the Longkou County regulation, unless the VC and VPB having reached a consensus on the plan of solving the particular problems facing the village, the VRA should not be convened. See Zhonggong longkou shiwei zuzhibu (2002): 12-13.

decision, as long as others agree, I agree. Furthermore, even if I oppose the cadres' decision in the interests of the village collective, I cannot directly benefit. However, if I offend the cadres or anyone else, I am the one to be hated by those persons. You know, in a small village, people deal with each other so frequently that your life won't be easy if you make enemies, particularly if you offend cadres and able persons. So, why not be a "nice" person (Interview 45)?

Thus VRA representatives also tend to behave like clients, not offending the village cadres, showing deference to them, giving them "face" and most importantly, avoiding speaking out publicly against them in the VRA meetings. The village cadres, in exchange, can make use of the resources under their control to buy off the VRA representatives. For example, the village cadres of B village would spend the collective funds on distributing "Spring Festival goods" to the VRA representatives each year before the Spring Festival, while ordinary villagers, even the poor and vulnerable ones who were most in need, were denied such benefits (Interviews 48 and 49). Similarly, in villages elsewhere, it is also reported that village cadres offer particularistic benefits to VRA representatives, such as eating and drinking, decreasing their levies, or increasing their allowances (He 2003). In short, the VRA representatives' dependence upon the village cadres has largely made the VRA toothless.

Due to both institutional deficiencies and the informal clientelist system, the VRA has largely failed to function as a representative organization and embody so-called "democratic" village governance. On the one hand, the VRA meetings were rarely convened. For example, from 2002 to 2005 (during Jiazhi's tenure as VC chair) only a total of seven VRA meetings were convened in B village. On the other hand, if the village cadres and township officials did bother to convene a VRA meeting, it was to a large degree used to legitimize (rubber stamp) the decisions already made by the cadres and to facilitate the implementation. For instance, according to B village's VRA meeting

minute³⁶, almost all the issues discussed in the VRA meetings were “passed unanimously”.

Interestingly, the exception was a decision on one issue, which was passed with 3 abstentions (see B village VRA meeting minute 13/3/2005). This issue was about whether the village collective should lower the rent for Qu Jiaqi, a villager who leased a collective-owned building for his hennery business. Qu Jiaqi had signed a 15 year contract with the village collective, under which he was obliged to pay 90,000 *yuan* a year to rent the collective-owned building. However, in 2005, 8 years after the fulfilling the contract, he asked the village collective to lower the rent from 90,000 to 65,000 in the remaining seven years, claiming that he could not afford the original rent any more due to the serious loss of his hennery business caused by bird flu. The issue was referred to the VRA by the village cadres. Three VRA representatives showed their disapproval by abstention. According to my villager interviewees, these three representatives were all members of the New Faction, while Qu Jiaqi belonged to the OLT Faction (Interviews 28 and 42). In this rare case, it seems that factional conflict sometime can also manifest in the VRA.

Conclusion

As far as post-election village governance is concerned, the formal institutions supposed to embody the “villagers’ self-governance” or the so-called “village democracy” have largely failed to function properly. The failure is caused not only by the confusion, self-contradiction and deficiency of formal institutions but also by the factional or clientelist struggles, which are largely the extension of the factional/clientelist contest triggered by the VC elections. First of all, after the direct VC elections, the VC-VPB relationship became very tense and problematic. Although the formal rules still confirmed the VPB’s status as the “leading core”, a clear institutional division of duties

³⁶ The meeting minute of B village is a hand-written notebook distributed by Xinjia Township government to record the content of each meeting held in B village. During my fieldwork in B village in 2004, I was able to get access to it.

and power between the VPB and the VC was absent (and under the existing system, a clear division between the two organizations is almost impossible). Therefore, the confusion and self-contraction of the formal institutions further contributes to severe factional conflict, which often manifests itself in tense VC-VPB relation in village governance.

Second, the institutional arrangements for the “democratic supervision” are either undermined by clientelism/factionalism or simply not exercisable in reality. The VFST, whose function is supposed to be to oversee the village financial affairs *independently*, cannot work properly due to institutional deficiency, factional conflict and the clientelist influence. Although it is supposed to make village affairs subject to the villagers’ supervision, regulations on transparency in village affairs is only carried out in a formalistic way by the village cadres to satisfy formal rules. Likewise, the regulations on villagers’ rights to recall and impeach VC cadres is not implemented largely due to impracticality and the constraints of clientelism. .

Finally, the VRA, which is supposed to be a representative organ of “democratic” decision-making and supervision in village governance, to a great extent only functions as a rubber stamp for decisions that have already been made by the village cadres or local state officials. The unrealistic institutional arrangements of the VRA system are the reason for its failure. But more importantly, it is the VRA representatives’ clientelist dependence upon the village cadres that makes the VRA lose its supposed independence and become toothless.

The case of B village has shown that the so-called villagers’ “self-governance” or the institutional arrangements of “village democracy” have largely failed to function in reality or functions only with distorted formalities serving to satisfy the *letter* of the various rules and regulations. All these formal institutions are actually arranged *for* the people by a top-down government rather than initiated *by* the people in a way of genuine self-governance. Furthermore, the formal institutional arrangements for

“self-governance or “village democracy” have been undermined by informal clientelism within the village community and failed to function. Therefore, from the local state’s perspective, measures need to be taken to fix the malfunctioning village governance and guarantee its proper operation within the wider top-down system. In next chapter, I will discuss how local state officials have tackled the malfunctioning village governance and managed to retain the state’s authoritarian dominance after the introduction of direct VC elections and self-governance.

7 The local state's sustained control of village governance

In the previous chapter, I have shown that so-called village self-governance has failed to function as set out in the Organic Law. The institutions of village self-governance have either failed to be implemented or have been distorted largely due to institutional impracticality, factionalism, and clientelism. Unless this is tackled, village administration may become either paralyzed or villages may become less willing to cooperate with state authorities and implement unpopular state policies (Zhong 2003: 181-182). Local state officials, however, have not been bound by the institutions of self-governance or so-called grassroots “democracy” in reality. Instead they have taken actions to wrest back control of village administration.

Some scholars who take the authoritarian approach have argued that the post-election village governance has been still under the authoritarian control of the local state. These scholars have been well aware that the wider political structure of China is still authoritarian in nature and the state has to maintain its control over villages so as to have its various policies enforced effectively. So, they argue that with the implementation of direct VC elections and villagers' self-governance, the local state has still been able to exert its authoritarian control over villages largely because local state officials simply can choose to neglect or violate the formal rules and institutions on villagers' self-governance—a policy that is often difficult for higher level authorities to assess or supervise (Alpermann 2001; Bernstein 2006; Louie 2001; Mao 1998; Zhong 2003: 169-182). Although, based on my following analysis on B village, I would agree with these scholars' view that the post-election village governance is still under local state's dominance and control, I will demonstrate in this chapter that local state officials, rather than simply violating the formal rules and institutions on villagers' self-governance, wrest back control of village governance by using both formal

institutional control and, notably, informal clientelist control.

This chapter will discuss how the township government continues to control and dominate village administration following the introduction of direct VC elections. Three measures that ensure the local state's continuing control over village politics will be examined in detail. The first section will concentrate on the village guarantee cadre system, through which township officials directly intervene in village governance. The second section will explore how the township government directly controls village finance. Going beyond these two formal institutional constraints, in the third section, I will focus on the informal but no less powerful method employed by local state officials to ensure village cadres' compliance—clientelist control. In the end, this chapter concludes that as a result of using both formal and informal/clientelist methods, the township government actually retains its dominance over village governance. Villagers' "self-governance" or village "democracy" is far from real.

The village guarantee cadre system

The introduction of village guarantee cadre system

The village guarantee cadre system actually dates back to the commune era, when it was one of the major methods by which commune authorities monitored the activities of brigades and teams (it was called the "brigade guarantee cadre" system at that time). Under that system, a commune cadre, in addition to his or her duties, was usually assigned one subordinate brigade for which he or she took responsibility. A guarantee cadre paid regular inspection visits to his/her guaranteed brigade to ensure that commune policies were effectively implemented (Burns 1988: 48; Potter and Potter 1990: 25). Since the collapse of the commune system, the guarantee cadre system has persisted, however. When a township government assigns a government cadre to "guarantee" and assist a village's work, it is called "guaranteeing" a village (*baocun*), and when the government assigns a few cadres or sets up a special agency to coordinate

and manage the work of several villages in an area, this is called “area management” (*guan pian*) or “district management” (*guanli qu*) (Wang 1996). This system is still been widely employed by township governments across rural China to guarantee the effective control of villages affairs (Alpermann 2001; Zhao 2006).

The village guarantee cadre system is used in Xinjia Township. Under this system, all 28 villages in Xinjia Township are divided into four areas with each area composed of seven villages. Every village is assigned a village guarantee cadre and every area is assigned an area management director (*pian zhang*). All the village guarantee cadres and area directors are township government officials. In Xinjia Township, the village guarantee cadres are usually ordinary township cadres, while the positions of the area directors are assumed by the township leaders. For the four district directors of Xinjia Township, two are the deputy township mayors and the other two are the township Party committee members. To be a village guarantee cadre or area director is usually township officials’ concurrent posts rather than their main official job.

The main purpose of assigning village guarantee cadres is to strengthen the supervision and vertical management of village governance through the direct penetration of administrative power. The village guarantee cadre system constitutes an effective administrative channel between the township government and the village community. Even before direct VC elections, the village guarantee cadre system was a necessary method for township government to carry out management. But since the introduction of direct VC elections, government officials have realized that they have to rely much more on this system to discipline village cadres, mobilize villagers and even directly intervene village government (Interviews 1 and 2). Since 1999 (shortly after the first round of direct village elections), the village guarantee cadre system has been stressed repeatedly and paid greater attention by Longkou County government. This system, also called “the work of guaranteeing villages and staying at grassroots units” (*baocun dundian gongzuo*) or “the front line working method” (*yixian gongsuo fa*), is regarded as a “crucial measure” to “suit the new situation” after direct village elections

(Zhonggong Longkou shiwei, Longkoushi renmin zhengfu 2002: 1; Zhonggong Longkou shiwei banggongshi 2004: 1; Zhonggong Longkou shiwei zuzhibu 2006: 1-2).

Under this system, the Xinjia Township officials have become fully involved in all village matters, which means, in the words of the Longkou government document, village guarantee cadres “participate in the whole course of village government” (Zhonggong Longkou shiwei bangongshi 2004: 2). There are a number of tasks and requirements for village guarantee cadres. First of all, they are required to penetrate into village communities and “offer services” to villagers directly. According to the 2004 Longkou government document, “three fixeds and one open” must be applied in the village guarantee work, which are “fixed person, fixed time, fixed venue and doing work openly” (See 1-2). “Fixed person” means there must be a village guarantee cadre appointed in every village; “fixed time” means village guarantee cadres must have specific working time in their guaranteed villages. For example, Xinjia Township government stipulates that village guarantee cadres must work at their guarantee villages for at least four days a week and during special periods, such as farming busy time or emergent affairs happening, village guarantee cadres must stay in their villages day and night (Zhonggong Xinjiazhen dangwei bangongshi 2002). Fixed venue means village guarantee cadres must have fixed office in their guaranteed villages. “One open” means information like village guarantee cadre’s name, post, duties, working disciplines, working time, working place and contact methods must be open to villagers so as to facilitate villagers’ contact and problem solving. Going deep into village communities, village guarantee cadres are required to directly offer villagers guidance and service on various issues of their life. To use the terms of the Longkou government, “the village guarantee cadre’s office of each village should become the window of serving villagers. Village guarantee cadres should work on the spot, directly handling the affairs that the masses need them to do” (Ibid.: 2). Unlike village cadres, village guarantee cadres, who are township government officials, are considered to be more intelligent and better equipped with market information, and more knowledgeable about laws and policies and are therefore considered to be in a better position than village cadres to serve

villagers and get things done.

Second, village guarantee cadres are required to guide, supervise and directly get involved and participate in village governance. According to the regulations, they must participate “the whole course” of village level decision-making and management, attending each relevant meeting held at village level (including meetings of VC, VPB, VRA, VGM and so on). Before making decisions on village affairs, village guarantee cadres must censor the content of the affairs concerned according to laws, policies and relevant regulations of the government, directing village cadres to report and ask for instructions from responsible township government departments; in the course of the decision-making, village guarantee cadres must guide village cadres to go through stipulated procedures and processes; after decisions have been made, village guarantee cadres must supervise and guarantee the implementation of the decisions (Ibid.). In the words of the Xinjia Township government, village guarantee cadres must “ask for instructions [from the township government] in advance, participate the course of decision-making, and oversee implementations afterwards” (Zhonggong Xinjiazhen dangwei; Xinjiazhen zhengfu 2004). As discussed in Chapter 6, after direct VC elections, factional and clientelist conflicts, particularly conflicts between the VC and the VPB, have made the village administration increasingly problematic and even undermined its proper functioning. Village guarantee cadres therefore can intervene, mediate and even assume the duties of village leaders whenever necessary. For example, during my field visit in 2004, there were three villages in Xinjia Township that had village guarantee cadres directly act as VPB secretaries due to the “incompetence” of the village cadres (Interview 3).

Finally, and also most importantly, village guarantee cadres must assure that government tasks and targets are fulfilled in their guaranteed villages. Stability, economic development as well as family planning are the three most crucial issues for government (Zhong 2003: 132; Interviews 1 and 3). Apart from these three issues, there are also various government tasks, targets or assigned quotas for tasks like land

expropriation, tree planting, environmental protection, subscriptions to newspapers and periodicals, enrolment in collective health insurance schemes and so on. These government tasks are often quantified with specific numerical targets and assigned to each village. The village guarantee cadres are responsible for assuring that those government targets are met in their guaranteed villages (Xinjiashen dangzheng bangongshi 2002).

As local state officials, village guarantee cadres' performances are directly evaluated by their superiors within the "pressurized system" (Rong 1998). The evaluation, however, is mainly based on the implementation and achievement of government tasks. The result of evaluation is linked directly with village guarantee cadres' career achievements, which may affect both their promotion and income. For example, to evaluate village guarantee cadres' performance, the Xinjia Township set up a quantified evaluation system based on the achievement of government targets. Any village guarantee cadres who fail to achieve government targets or whose guarantee villages encounter serious problems (such as a production accident, villagers' lodging collective complaints to higher-level government or other affairs that bring "disgrace" on the township government) will lose both his/her qualification for award of a merit for work performance in that year and 50 percent of his/her annual bonus.³⁷ Meanwhile, he/she will also be demoted or politically punished due to his/her incompetence (Xinjiashen dangzheng bangongshi 2002).³⁸

The village guarantee cadre system facilitates the local state's penetration into village communities and actually attempts to strengthen the state's control of village governance. As a result, the distinction between "self-governance affairs" and "official (state) affairs" is blurred. The Organic Law defines the content of VC's self-governance mainly as managing public affairs, undertaking village welfare, mediating disputes

³⁷ All cadres are awarded merits as 'xianjin' if their work performance has been at a good level across a range of indicators. Village guarantee cadres are assessed on the indicators relating to their village as well as on other aspects of their work.

³⁸ Some scholars have discussed cadre evaluation systems in Chinese county and township/town governments but not in relation to village guarantee cadres. See Whiting (2001), Edin (2003) and Zhong (2003).

among villagers, reflecting the villagers' opinions and demands to the government, and managing village collective economy and properties (Articles 2 and 5). However, all these issues, which in theory should fall into the scope of self-governance, are under the control of the state as official affairs through the village guarantee cadre system.

B village's guarantee cadre

The village guarantee cadre of B village is Wang Shixian. Shixian is in his 40s. He has been working in Xinjia Township government for more than 20 years since he was recruited as a government official through the civil servant examinations in the early 1980s. He is one of the few officials who have worked in Xinjia Township for such a long time. Shixian's official position in Xinjia Township government is Finance and Trade Assistant, whose duty is supposedly to assist the township mayor in handling issues related to financing and trade. However, Shixian told me that actually this post was just a nominal one and he usually had few affairs to "assist" with. Without his village guarantee job, he would be very likely to idle away most of his time in his government office. Shixian was appointed as village guarantee cadre of B village in 2000. He has an office in B village. On the wall outside his office hangs a sign showing his name, post (village guarantee cadre), ID photo as well as his mobile phone number. According to his normal working schedule, Shixian usually goes to B village to work twice a week (Monday and Thursday mornings). But actually he keeps close contact with B village and if there are issues that need his attention, he is expected to appear at any time.

As the village guarantee cadre, Shixian takes "full responsibility" for his village's governance on behalf of the township government. He is fully involved in all village matters, particularly supervising and directing village cadres to complete the tasks and targets assigned by the township government. In fact, the scope of the work and administrative tasks assigned by the local state are very broad: checking women of childbearing age regularly to ensure that they are practicing family planning, collecting taxes and fees from villagers, developing the village economy, helping villagers prevent

infectious diseases (such as SARS and bird flu), requisitioning village farmland, constructing and improving village communal facilities (like paving or repairing village roads, improving environmental sanitation and planting trees) and so on (Interview 55; also see the meeting minute of B village). All these state tasks are assigned to the village cadres of B village through Shixian, who also must take the lead in doing these government tasks in B village. To complete these government tasks, Shixian needs the cooperation of the village cadres, who are still largely treated as “implementing arms” of the local state (Zhong 2003: 158-182).

In addition to government tasks, however, village affairs that should belong to the sphere of “self-governance” and the duties of VC cadres, such as managing village collective assets, providing village public services, spending money on village public issues, can only be done with the approval of Shixian. Shixian described his job as village guarantee cadre:

As village guarantee cadre, I am responsible for the work of my guarantee village. I was assigned to B village by the [township] government and I work on behalf of the government. To put it simply, as a village guarantee cadre, my job is to discipline, supervise and lead village cadres to do their work properly, particularly to make sure the tasks assigned from above be completed. After direct village elections, some village cadres, especially some elected VC cadres, thought that villagers’ self-governance meant that they could do whatever they wanted, ignoring the leadership of the government. This is ridiculous. If that’s the case, how could the government carry out its policies at village level? If the government policies from above could not be implemented in villages, how could we township officials answer to the higher up governments (Interview 55)?

If Shixian conceives his village guarantee job as “to discipline, supervise and lead village cadres to do their jobs properly”, he clearly acts as the most powerful boss of the village. And there is no clear division of responsibility at all between the village

guarantee cadre and the village leaders. Just as Jiamao commented on the relation between the village cadres and the township government: “self-governance just stays on paper and is for lip-service only. In face, every little move initiated by the village cadres must get the approval from the village guarantee cadres and the township government” (Interview 50).

Village guarantee cadre system: fixing the disconnection between the local state and the village community

As discussed previously, along with the implementation of direct VC elections and villagers’ self-governance, the problems with village administration have been more acute, while, the local state realizes that its capacity to implement state policies and accomplish state tasks is further reduced at the village level (Zhong 2003: 158-182). As Zhao argues, there has been a “disconnection” between local state and village communities (Zhao 2006). On the one hand, in the perception of the local state officials at least, direct VC elections have led to frequent changes of village cadre teams and serious factional conflicts, which have had negative effects on village governance. As have discussed in Chapter 6, before direct VC elections were introduced, village cadres (both VC and VPB cadres) had been appointed by the township government, which had enabled the government to keep a “stable” (*wending*) village leading team. Though village cadres are not formally government officials, they have played the role of foot soldiers of local state, implementing many government tasks and policies (Zhong 2003: 159). Work experience and appropriate skills are actually crucial if village cadres are to implement these government tasks and policies satisfactorily. It may take a long time for newly-elected cadres to get familiar with all aspects of village governance. As the case of B village has shown, the direct VC elections have led to frequent changes of village cadres—there have been changes in the composition of the VC approximately every three years—and for the township officials this means repeatedly having to deal with new and inexperienced village leaders. This is a contrast with the situation before direct elections, when leaders were sometimes in place for decades. A Xinjia government official once complained to me, “Because many newly-elected VC cadres have no work

experience and lack appropriate skills as village cadres and know nothing about their jobs, we village guarantee cadres have to make great efforts to train them on how to do their jobs. But when they are only just becoming familiar with their jobs, there will be a new round of elections and the cadres may change again” (Interview 10). As a result of this, village guarantee cadres are seen as necessary to the “normal” operation of village governance by training and supervising “unstable” (*bu wending*) village cadre teams.

At the same time, the malfunctioning of the “democratic” or self-governance institutions makes the village guarantee cadres’ intervention and arbitration indispensable. As I have examined in the previous chapter, since the introduction of direct village elections, village “self-governance” institutions have been either seriously influenced by clientelism and factionalism or have not been implemented at all so that the village management has been in a state of malfunction. The conflicts between the VC and the VPB, the factional struggles within the VFST as well as the clientelist behaviour of the VRA representatives, have all put the village administration at risk of paralysis. The malfunctioning of village administration can seriously damage the capacity of the local state to implement state policies. As a result, it tries to more frequently intervene, arbitrate and even directly get involved in village governance than it did before direct VC elections were introduced so as to maintain its policy-implementation capacity.

The village guarantee cadre system is actually an effort made by the local state aiming to re-confirm its top-down administrative control over villages and fix the “disconnection” between the township government and villages after direct village elections (Zhao 2006; Zhong 2003: 158-182). Almost all the state policies and government tasks have been delivered down to the villages through this system, with the local state retaining dominance over the village governance. Although according to the revised Organic Law, the relationship between the township government and the villages is supposed to be “guidance” rather than leadership (Article 4), in the eyes of the village cadres, the village guarantee cadres who are the agents of the township government, are their *de facto* bosses (He 2002a).

Direct control over village finance

The dual proxy management system

During the first decade reform in 1980s, village level administration had enjoyed relatively independent finances—both village accounts and village collective money was directly managed by village cadres (Zhao 2006: 77). Throughout rural China, since 1990, the degree of control by township governments over village-level finances has constantly increased. Initially “single proxy management” was introduced in middle 1990s, whereby the township government only took charge of village account ledgers and did not directly manage cash.

In the late 1990s, particularly following the introduction of villagers’ self-governance, the “single proxy management” developed into the widespread use of “dual proxy management” (*shuang dai guan*), whereby both account ledgers and cash were put under the “proxy management” of the township governments, who therefore assumed full control over village finances (Cui 2005; Wu 2002: 144-146; Zhao 2006). In Shandong province, for example, dual proxy management had been applied in 60 per cent of townships across the province by 1998 (Zhonggong shandong shengwei zhengce yanjiushi 1998). In Xinjia Township, soon after the first direct VC elections in 1999, this system was extended to all its 28 villages (Interview 2). In B village, for instance, after Jiamao was elected as VC chair in 1999, he found he was unable to see the previous village accounts because all account ledgers had been taken over by the township government just before he started to work as VC chair. Jiamao’s request to check the previous village account ledgers was refused by the township government officials (Interview 50 and 53). It was not only the ledgers, but also the village collective funds that were taken over by the township government. As the elected VC chair, whenever he used village collective money, Jiamao had to report to and get approval from the township government (Interview 50).

Under the dual proxy management system, both village account ledgers and village collective funds are managed by the township government. The Economic Management Station (*jingji guanli zhan*) of Xinjia Township government sets up a special file for each village's accounts and is responsible for the "unified management" (*tongyi guanli*) of the accounting ledgers as well as the related economic documents of each village. The accountant of each village must go to the Economic Management Station to make accounts at the end of each month. The receipts or invoices submitted by the village accountant and cashier are subject to the scrutiny and audit of the Economic Management Station (Xinjia zhen remin zhengfu 2003).

Meanwhile, village collective funds (cash) are also kept and managed by the Economic Management Station. In order to control daily expenditures, Xinjia Township government only allows each village to retain some petty cash each month for daily use. Villages with less than 500 people, 501-1000 people and more than 1000 can retain 1,000 *yuan*, 2,000 *yuan* and 3,000 *yuan* respectively. If more money is needed, the village must apply from the township government and can only withdrew money after getting approval. Sums under 5,000 *yuan* can be withdrawn only with the endorsement of area management director; sums over 5,000 *yuan* can be withdrawn only with the signature of township mayor. The Economic Management Station is responsible for the supervision of village funds and villages that are found violate these rules will face punishment like being forbidden to get money from the township government (Xinjia zhen renmin zhengfu 2003).

The purpose of this system is to manage and supervise village economic affairs through top-down administrative effort. The main reasons given by the township government for doing so were the "chaotic" management of village finances and the presence of financial loopholes, which aroused discontent among villagers. According to Xinjia Township's officials, the advantages of this system are that: 1) it lessens confusion over village finance for villagers and standardizes the management of it; 2) it reduces

disputes among village cadres and villagers; and 3) it enables them to control unreasonable expenditures and reduce village cadres' opportunities for corruption (Interviews 1 and 3; also see Zhao 2006).

However, the dual proxy management system, which puts village finance under strict control of the township government, seems to contradict the principle of villagers' self-governance. Article 5 of the Organic Law specifically stipulates that it is the VC that "manages lands and other properties that belong to the village collective". Even the Party secretary of Xinjia Township admitted, "strictly speaking, this way [the dual proxy management] does not accord with the spirit of the Organic Law, which is supposed to let villagers to manage their own affairs by themselves." "But", he added, "if we really let village cadres manage things by themselves without the government's strict control, it would be a shambles" (Interview 3).

In fact, the township government also adopted a subtle tactic to take over village finance without boldly violating the Organic Law and villagers' self-governance policy: the township government's proxy management of village finance was claimed to have had the mandate of each subordinate village. According to the Xinjia Township government leaders, the township government's proxy management was "approved and authorized" by each village's VRA and the VC chair of each village had signed an instrument of authorization to commission the township government's dual proxy management of village finance (Interviews 1 and 3). Claiming to have the villages' "authorization", the township government can not only realize its control over village finance but also avoid being accused of violating the Organic Law and villagers' self-governance policy. However, I failed to get any substantial evidence on how such "authorization" was conducted. I asked Jiamao if it was the VRA's decision to authorize the township government to direct control B village's finance. He told me: "Both the village account and the collective money were taken over by the township government shortly before I became VC Chair in 1999. As far as I know, no such authorization took place in our village at all" (Interview 50).

Controlling village cadres' pay

In addition to directly controlling the village purse, the township government also decides on village cadres' level of pay. In fact, since village cadres are not formally state employees, they are not on the state payroll. However, because key village cadres, including both the VPB and VC cadres, as indicated earlier, do invest considerable time, energy and responsibility in their jobs—in the majority of villages in Xinjia Township, village cadres virtually work on full time (Interviews 1 and 3)—they are paid in the form of a “stipend” or “compensation” for doing their village work. But instead of being financed by the state finance, village cadres' pay comes from the village collective purse, namely, from fees collected from the villagers, income from village-owned enterprises, payments from letting village land or properties, and so forth.

According to the Organic Law, it should be the VGM that “discusses and decides on” “the number of persons who are entitled to claim the compensation and the compensation standards” (Article 19). As indicated previously, since it is not easy to convene the VGM regularly, the VGM (when convening for the VC elections) empowers the VRA to discuss and decide some crucial issues, the first of which is “the number of persons who are entitled to claim the compensation and the compensation standards” (Longkoushi nongcun liangwei huanjie xuanju gongzuo lingdao xiaozu bangongshi 2004: 48). Thus, according to the law, it is clear that, as the village cadre's pay comes from the village collective purse, it therefore should be decided by the village collective (either by the VGM or the VRA).

But contrary to the law, it is the township government rather than the village collective that has the final authority over the financial compensation (salary) of village officials. So how is the monetary compensation of the village cadres decided and worked out by the township government? According to one Xinjia Township official, the decision is made on the basis of the strength of the village collective economy and the performance of the VC cadres as evaluated by the township:

Village cadres' pay mainly depends on two factors. One is the economic level of the village collective concerned. In other words, if the village collective concerned has a heavy purse, the cadres of that village may accordingly enjoy higher pay; otherwise, they may only have a basic or even poor payment. The other factor is the performance of a village cadre, namely, whether the village cadre is able to fulfill his/her duties satisfactorily, particularly, to carry out the tasks assigned by the government. The village cadres' pay is not made monthly. Rather, at the end of each year, the village cadres first need to make a request to the township government, setting out how much pay they think they deserve and it is up to the township leaders to judge and decide how much each village cadres truly deserves based on the two factors before finally paying them (Interview 13).

Thus the amount of monetary compensation for village cadres is not decided by the villagers who contribute the money but rather by the township government. This system has a twofold advantage for the local state. On the one hand, it is said to prevent the possible abuse of collective funds by village officials (Interview 3); on the other, since village cadres' pay is based on their "performance" in fulfilling government tasks and is ultimately judged by the township government, it increases village cadres' incentives to do the local government's bidding and therefore strengthens the township government's control.

Ensuring obedience through clientelist control

The village guarantee cadre system and the financial control system are two formal administrative institutions created and used by the local state to repair the township-village "disconnection" and to retain control over the post election village governance. However, these formal institutional arrangements, although appear to be quite controlling, may still have limitations. From the perspective of the township

government, they provide no guarantee of the elected village cadres' active cooperation with the township government particularly in implementing unpopular government policies. They take no account of the fact that the township government constantly need the village cadres to work overtime without proper compensation to faithfully carry out government tasks. Under the self-governance policy and the Organic Law, the township government has no legal basis to treat the elected village cadres as its "legs" or implementing arms. Village cadres, especially VC cadres are not obliged, in terms of formal rules and institutions, to respond to the township government as actively as before, and some may even choose to defy or resist government's tasks that they dislike or which are unpopular with their followers (Li and O'Brien 1996; O'Brien 1996). Therefore to ensure effective control over village governance and village cadres and to remedy the inadequacies of the formal institutions, local state officials have reinforced their power through informal clientelist relations with village cadres. Just as the theory of clientelism suggest, patron-client relationships often appear as addenda to institutions whose deficiencies and inadequacies they remedy (Lande 1977: xxi-xxii). The relationship between the local state officials and the village cadres is exactly such a case in point. In order to deploy clientelist controls over village cadres, local officials have used four methods: cultivation of good relations, benefit/patronage exchange, intimidation, and mediation of factional conflicts.

The cultivation of good relations

As theories of clientelism have pointed out, although the very purpose of the patron-client associations is the exchange of instrumental benefits for both parties, sentiment or affection is often invested and created in the patron-client relationship, which, in turn, can strengthen such relationship (Scott 1972b: 94-95; 99). In the Chinese context, while *guanxi* relations are instrumental, affection or sentiment (*ganqing*) is considered to be an indispensable to them (Fried 1953; Gold, Guthrie, and Wank 2002a: 7-8; Kipnis 2002). Kipnis, for instance, states that "practices of *guanxi* production rely on strategic and more or less successful attempts to generate *ganqing* and manipulate obligations" (Kipnis 2002: 28). Accordingly, the government officials of the Xinjia

Township do have paid special attention to cultivate sentiment (*peiyang ganqing*) or cultivate good relations (*peiyang guanxi*) with the village officials in daily intercourse so as to “manipulate obligations” in time of need. As the mayor of the Xinjia Township told me:

Following the introduction of direct elections, it has become quite difficult for us to discipline village cadres. We have lost the power to sack incompetent VC cadres or those who dare to resist doing government work. In order to make them obedient and work actively for the government, we government officials have depended more on personal friendships or sentiment. We cannot expect their cooperation or obedience by simply ordering them around now. We need to make friends and cultivate sentiment (*peiyang guanqing*) with them so that they would work for us actively for the sake of giving us face. We treat VPB cadres the same way. Though we still can remove an unsatisfactory VPB secretary or member, it is usually not easy to find an ideal replacement. You know, human beings are creatures with sentiment. Personal friendship and sentiment with the village cadres have become more and more crucial for us to gain village cadres’ cooperation (Interview 2).

My field observations in Xinjia Township in 2004 and 2005 also confirmed this. The township government officials seem to pay special attention to establishing and developing good relationship with village cadres in daily life. For example, the township officials would attend weddings, funerals or other important occasions relating to village cadres’ families; they would visit village cadres who are sick and take them with gifts; they also often dine, drink with and entertain village cadres. Through these sorts of social intercourse, the township officials are able to generate sentiment and create close relationships with village cadres. On the basis of close personal relationships and sentiments, the township officials can expect the village cadres to be more responsive and obedient.

Village cadres are also willing or eager to associate with the township officials through

patron-client relationships, and become clients. On the one hand, associating with township officials can add to their prestige, reputation and authority in the village community; on the other hand, and most importantly, they do expect to gain benefits from it. As discussed previously, the village cadres are not people who seek offices because they merely have noble ideas about “doing good and substantial things for the villagers and to lead the masses get rich together” (Interview 50). Even though they are usually considered to be village elites, who may be better off than their average fellow villagers, they are still in need of protection, valuable goods and opportunities as well as help of different kinds in their lives. Township officials are clearly aware of this and are willing to offer village cadres “carrots” in exchange for their obedience (Wu 2002: 129-130).

Benefit/patronage exchange

As Scott suggests, one of the qualities of patron-client ties, is that they are “diffuse, ‘whole-person’ relationships rather than explicit, impersonal-contract bonds” (Scott 1972: 95). Namely, once a patron-client relationship is created, the benefits or services exchanged between the two parties may be very diffused. So what kinds of benefits/patronage do the local state officials (the patrons) offer the village cadres (their clients) in B village? The answer is very varied and diffused ones. However, generally speaking, these benefits offered by the state officials can be divided into two main categories.

First, the township officials can connive in village cadres’ efforts at gaining improper benefits by taking advantage of their public positions. I have mentioned previously that the village cadres tend to get private benefits from their posts, for example from excessively dining, drinking and entertaining on public money, embezzling public finances and other corrupt acts or misdemeanours. The government officials can choose to turn a blind eye to these things if they want to. For example, during Jiazhi’s tenure, money spent on entertainment had been considered “excessive” by the villagers’ financing small team (Interview 53). Though the members of the villagers’ financing

small team had refused to endorse many receipts relating to village cadres' entertainment, the expenditure was finally accepted and entered into the village accounts by the township government (Interview 53). It is also said that Sifa has occupied a collective-owned workshop for private use without paying money to the village collective for a long time, but the township officials simply chose to ignore it (Interview 37 and 38). According to another source, Jiawan had claimed reimbursement many times from the village public fund in the name of traveling on village business. However, it was found out later that a lot of the money he claimed had been spent on private travel rather than public business. When this was reported to the township officials concerned, they did nothing about it (Interview 50).

Second, in addition to conniving in village cadres' improper gains from their posts, township officials are also able to offer various advantages and privileges. The scope of these advantages and privileges is very broad. It may include helping arrange jobs for village cadres' family members, favouring them (and their relatives, friends or clients) in legal and administrative processes such as applying for various business licenses, supporting their private-owned businesses (for example by giving them tax breaks or offering them government contracts), and so on. The government may be unable (or unwilling) to offer such benefits to all villagers, but its officials can always favour a few people if they want to. For example, in Xinjia Township government, a number of government posts are filled by the children of village cadres. The Xinjia Township deputy Party secretary commented: "Many village cadres have worked very hard for the government under difficult circumstances. You know, their work is very tough but their pay is usually not good. The government does need to reward them for their hard work. So when there are vacancies in the government, we of course will give prior consideration to village cadres' family members or kin" (Interview 1). The mayor of Xinjia Township put it more frankly: "We do need to try our best to solve some practical difficulties for village cadres so as to enhance their enthusiasm of working for the government" (Interview 2). There is also a telling example from B village. After Sixu was elected the VC chair in 2004, the township officials who dealt with him knew that

he did a transportation business. So the government officials since then, by making use of their connections and resources, have introduced quite some business for Sixu in order to make him obliged to the government. In return, Sixu is said to have been very responsive and cooperative with the government (Interview 35 and 50).

These various special benefits offered by government officials are far from unappealing to the village cadres. Like their fellow villagers, village cadres also face various “practical difficulties” in their own life and are largely dependent upon the goodwill of local state officials to get access to various resources and scarce opportunities so as to make their own life better (Unger 2002: 143-146). And government officials are happy to offer them these particularistic benefits (patronage) as long as they are willing to follow their lead.

The use of sanctions

As Scott indicates, in a patron-client bond, there is also a degree of coercion involved. Particularly, as he points out, “a patron in a strong position is more likely to employ sanctions—threats to punish the client or to withdraw benefits he currently enjoys” and “the use of sanctions indicates a higher order of power than the use of inducements” (Scott 1972b: 100). As far as the Chinese local state officials are concerned, they are actually patrons in a very strong position when dealing with those village cadres because, as pointed out earlier, the local state officials’ services and benefits are vital and, more importantly, they actually monopolize a broad range of governmental powers, which are wielded in a discretionary way by them. All these have made village cadres vulnerable and therefore largely dependent to their government patrons. As a result, local state officials are very likely to punish or threaten to punish indocile village cadres through sanctions.

For instance, I once asked the Party secretary of Xinjia Township how the government dealt with elected VC cadres who refused to cooperate with or even confront the government. The secretary said, “Although we cannot simply dismiss them according to

the law, it is not difficult for us to find other methods to discipline those who dare to confront the government. For example, we can go to check their accounts if the person or their family runs their own business. Once we find evidence of tax evasion, we will hold their pigtail” (Interview 3).

Here, power intimidation or sanctions are applied by the government to punish those elected VC cadres, who may defy the township government. Though the township government has lost the power to appoint or dismiss VC cadres, but it retains significant other powers over many aspects of village cadres’ (and ordinary villagers’) lives. Activities like applying for a license for doing business, applying for a residence permit or marriage registration, paying taxes and registering household registration are all under the control of local government. In democratic countries, maybe there are also many bureaucratic local government powers, but the difference is that the checks and balances on such power are largely absent in China. With such widespread discretionary state power, it is not difficult for state officials to intimidate or punish those defiant troublemakers.

Mediation of factional conflicts

As discussed in Chapter 6, with the implementation of direct VC elections and villagers’ self-governance, factional conflicts in B village have been so acute as to seriously undermine the normal function of the village administration. However, township officials, who act as patrons of the rival leaders of both factions, are able to use their control of resources and patronage power to effectively mediate factional conflicts and make sure factionalism within the village community is under control and rival factions cooperate for the implementation of crucial state policies. Just as the clientelist theory has suggested, in a complex vertical patron-client structure, rival patrons with separate followings (or competing factional leaders) may still be linked as clients to a same higher-level patron, who can engage his subordinate clients in coordinated activities to pursue the interests of the whole network (Nathan 1973: 42-45; Scott 1972b: 104). As far as B village is concerned, core members of both factions are keen to establish

clientelist relations with the township officials to secure special favours, or at least, avoid confrontation with them. As Shixian, the village guarantee cadre of B village, said, “although rival factional members may fight fiercely with each other in the village, few would choose to confront us government officials. Usually, members of both sides are well aware that to cooperation with, rather than confront the government, is the wise choice for them. You know, as the village guarantee cadre, I often need to mediate in factional conflicts and let village cadres of both factions work together to get the work down” (Interview 55).

Although B village is rent by factionalism after the implementation of the direct VC elections and villagers’ self-governance, the local state officials, who sit on top of the village clientelist/factionalist networks, can still keep the competing factions under control and direct the coordinated activities of rival factional members for the village government and the implementation of the state tasks and policies. This is similar to what Lerman found in Taiwanese local politics during 1970s, which he calls a “boss machine” system. Under this system, the national elite, acting as the boss and sitting on the top of the local factional system, skillfully kept the local factions under control by using its control over resources to induce rival local faction leaders to join the machine (Lerman 1977).

As discussed in Chapter 6, factional conflicts after direct VC elections are very likely to manifest themselves in the form of a tense VC-VPB relation, which has posed a serious problem for village governance. To some scholars, this seems to be an embarrassment that has no easy solution under the existing institutional context. For example, based on their recent empirical study of 12 villages in Anhui Province, Qingshan Tan and Xin Qiushui, predicts that “if our data reveal a pattern, and if villagers’ committees continue to gain popularity among villagers and village Party branches try to hold on to power, we may be observing a trend of rising tensions between the two village organizations spreading throughout the countryside. There is no easy way to solve this problem, particularly in the light of a lack of formal rules defining the role and function of village

Party branches” (Tan and Xin 2007: 597). However, the rising tensions between VCs and VPBs, which is difficult to solve from scholars’ perspective, in fact have been largely eased by local state officials through deploying clientelism. Despite the lack of formal rules to coordinate the operation of the two village bodies, with the addendum of informal clientelism, local state officials, as powerful patrons, can still acquire compliance and coordination from members of both village bodies (or members of both factions) who, although in conflict with each other, may all act as clients of the local state officials. This is why the tensions between VCs and VPBs in post-election village governance is largely under control by the local state and do not seem to be “rising”. According to the estimated national figures in 2002, there were only 5% to 10% villages throughout China that had overtly tense VC-VPB relations (Guo 2002: 106). Similarly, in Xinjia Township, for example, although township officials admitted in general that after direct elections VC-VPB relations were potentially problematic, according to them, the villages that had overtly tense VC-VPB relations in Xinjia Township were “very limited” and even in these “very limited” number of villages, contradictions and conflicts between the two bodies could be mediated and solved with township officials’ “intensive work” (Interviews 1 and 3). Here, without referring to clientelism or patron-client relationships between local state officials and village (both VC and VPB) cadres (or competing village faction members), it would be difficult to understand why the predicted rising tensions between VCs and VPBs are largely eased in reality.

In short, by skillfully employing their powers of patronage, the local state officials have been able to add another informal but powerful constraint and control over village cadres. On the part of the village cadres, being clients of the local state officials is also an appealing strategy for the protection and promotion of their own interests. In other word, they have been very likely to choose to serve the local state officials, namely their patrons, of their own accord.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how, largely in order to remedy the problems caused by the villagers' self-governance policy and fix the "disconnection" between the township government and the village community, local state officials have managed to retain control over and dominate village governance. By stressing and relying on the village guarantee cadre system, the local state extends its administrative controls down to the village community so as to fully involve in and take control of village governance. Under the village guarantee cadre system, the village guarantee cadre, who acts as a government agent, is the *de facto* boss of the village. Through the system of "dual proxy management" and the direct control of village cadres' pay, the local state further tightens up its administrative control over the village cadres and the village government.

Despite the local state's efforts to retain its administrative control over the village government, such formal intervention and control is insufficient to guarantee the obedience and active cooperation of the village cadres (particularly the elected VC cadres) after the implementation of villagers' self-governance. Therefore, informal clientelism is employed by the local state officials as what Lande calls an "addendum" (Lande 1977: xxi) to the formal administrative control to make the village cadres (and the village government) responsive, cooperative and coordinated in implementing the state tasks. As indicated above, it seems that since the introduction of villagers' self-governance, the Xinjia Township officials have relied to a greater extent than before on the informal clientelist system to further put village cadres (particularly the elected VC cadres) under their control. "Self-governance" or "village democracy" has been to a large degree supplanted by the top-down administrative structure that is further supplemented by and intertwined with the vertical patron-client structure. The supposed "self-governance" is largely nominal in practice. As one Chinese researcher has observed: in terms of villagers' self-governance, there are "wide discrepancies between theoretical assumptions and actual operations" (Zhao 2006: 74).

Although the administrative and clientelist control of the local state runs counter to the supposed logic of villagers' self-governance (village democracy), such control is consistent with and fits in the general authoritarian political structure of the Chinese state. The village governmental administration has long functioned as a policy-implementing arm of the Chinese state at various levels and village cadres have been treated and perceived of foot soldiers of the state in implementing policies from above in rural China (Zhong 2003: 158-182). It remains so even after the implementation of the direct VC elections and villagers' self-governance. In other words, although village governance is defined as "self-governance", within the existing Chinese political structure it remains a (semi-)administrative unit for implementing state policies and tasks. As Wu points out, as a matter of fact, the VC's "administrative functions actually have overwhelmed its 'self-governing functions' and the VC virtually becomes a subordinate agency of the township government or a semi-regime organization" (Wu 2002: 149). Without effective higher level government control, villagers' self-governance may result in a "disconnection" between the local state and the village level, which may reduce the state's policy-implementation capacity. Local state officials, who are shaped and driven by a "pressurized system" due to the wider authoritarian political environment, have no choices but to exert varied forms of control (formal/administrative or informal/clientelist) over the village administration and village cadres so as to guarantee the implementation of state policies, especially unpopular ones such as family planning or tax collecting. Such control has re-confirmed the top-down authoritarian state's penetration into the village community.

Under such circumstances, the elected VC, although supposed to be a self-governing organization, cannot operate independently without the intervention of the local state's administrative power. The strong administrative power intertwined with informal clientelist structure enables the local state to retain its control over the village organizations and implement its policies successfully. The village cadres, even though being elected directly through "free and fair" elections, cannot bargain with the local

state on behalf of the whole village community since they themselves are largely clients dependent to the local state officials, who are actually patrons in a strong position.

From the perspective of democracy, “democratization” has in fact been overwhelmed and supplanted by the “administratization” in the village community. However, in terms of community management, administratization and clientelism seem to be not only efficient but also inevitable. The current “villagers’ self-governance” as well as its impractical institutional designs has either remained unimplemented or caused “disputes over trifles”. This is why some people, especially those local government officials who are familiar with the whole operation, call self-governance an “utter show” (Luo 2006; interview 11 and 19).

It is clear that the local state’s efforts to intervene, control and manage village affairs go against the spirit of the Organic Law and the supposed democratic principles of villagers’ self-governance. But the reason is in part that the Organic Law and the villagers’ self-governance system are themselves problematic. This is why the local government has to ostensibly carry out self-governance on the one hand but basically depend on the combination of its formal administrative power and informal clientelism to control village affairs and administration on the other.

8 Conclusion

Village elections and self-governance, as one of the most eye-catching political reforms undertaken in contemporary China, have attracted much attention both domestically and internationally. Particularly in the past decade, scholarly work on this topic, often discussed under the rubric “Chinese grassroots/village democracy”, or “democracy, Chinese style”, is booming. While these academic efforts have contributed to the understanding of such political reform in rural China, solid and intensive investigation to reveal the working of informal rules in village community has been largely lacking. But as far as Chinese village politics is concerned, without fully understanding and taking into account the operation of informal clientelist networks, analysts may risk drawing inaccurate conclusions.

Based on an in-depth case study of B village, this thesis argues that clientelism remains an important underlying phenomenon in contemporary Chinese village politics. Despite being formally “democratic”, both the village elections and post-election governance are heavily influenced by clientelist networks that have helped to reaffirm the domination of local state in the village community. The findings of this thesis defy the prevailing optimism about so-called “village/grassroots democracy”, which holds that direct village elections and villagers’ self-governance in village China are approaching a real liberal-democratic direction and may even significantly contribute to the further democratization of the authoritarian party-state in China. This thesis also reveals what the authoritarian model fails to explain: why and how the local state can still exert authoritarian control upon village affairs while “free and fair” village elections and “self-governance” are implemented. It shows that, relying largely on informal clientelist control, the Chinese local state retain capacity to successfully control “democracy” and “democratically” elected cadres.

Village elections: “free and fair” or subject to clientelist control?

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 have discussed direct village elections in B village by focusing on three categories of key actors respectively: the voters, the candidates and the local state officials. They reveal that these three types of key actors under examination fit well in a clientelist structure. Ordinary voters/villagers still largely need and depend on patrons for access to scarce resources today. To enhance their security and maximize their opportunities, ordinary villagers, aware of the informal rules of the clientelist system, are willing to behave like clients by creating and cultivating relations with potential patrons around them. The villagers' dependence on their patrons' scarce resources make them largely subject to the patrons' control and reduces their freedom to elect village cadres. In village elections, villagers' votes are therefore to a large degree captured by clientelist networks.

Candidates in village elections most commonly arise from the village elite who are usually in the position of village patrons or middlemen. As patrons or middlemen, they combine and are able to offer their fellow villagers various scarce resources, like skills, knowledge, wealth, job opportunities, or, perhaps more importantly, useful outside connections. Taking advantage of the patronage resources and the clientelist networks, candidates are therefore relatively free to demand villagers' votes. Direct village elections have produced competition between candidates, as we have seen in B village. However, such competition has triggered a factional contest based on different clientelist affiliations. In B village, elections have largely become factional contests based on opposing clientelist networks rather than optional policies, issues or platforms.

Local state officials, who are supposed to implement and facilitate the village electoral policy, actually exert strong influence upon the election results. As the policy implementers of higher-level authorities, local state officials have to rely on the “right”

village cadres to implement, facilitate and enforce various state policies (especially those unpopular ones) in each village community. It is therefore crucial for local state officials to get the “right” person elected. Even the so-called “free and fair” village elections cannot evade intervention and influence by the local state. Local officials, who are also in an ideal position as powerful patrons, are able to make use of clientelist exchange with village elites so as to strongly influence village elections and get their favoured results.

In sum, as long as the clientelist structure remains, actors’ behaviour and strategies largely continue to follow the clientelist line. As the case of B village shows, the village elections, although in terms of laws and regulations are “free and fair”, are actually still subject to the control of the patron-client networks.

Village governance: self-governance or overwhelmed by the administrative-clientelist dominance

It is held, particularly by those taking the liberal-democratic approach, that the directly elected VC has real power and autonomy, and therefore can make a substantial difference to villagers’ lives in the post-election village governance (Li 2003; O’Brien 2001; O’Brien and Li 2000; Wang 1997). For example, O’Brien believes that “[villagers’] committees have broad powers and limited but real autonomy from the township governments that sit above them” and they “control things people care about” (O’Brien 2001: 416). However, what I have found in B village challenges this view.

In chapters 6 and 7 that focus on the post-election governance, this thesis has revealed that the so-called “democratic” institutions designed for villagers’ self-governance have failed to function properly. Above all, in terms of village governance, the elected VC at best can only share power with, if not be completely subject to, the VPB, which is still largely appointed by and responsive to the local party-state. Power sharing, however, is

very likely to be problematic due to the personal or factional conflicts between members of the two bodies. Consequently, the malfunction of the power sharing or cooperation system justifies the intervention of the local state. Although institutions designed to deliver for “democratic” supervision, “democratic” decision making or so called “checks and balances” in village governance, they have either not been implemented (for example the villagers’ right to recall or impeach the incumbent cadres) or have malfunctioned due to the factional conflicts (such as the villagers’ financing small team) and clientelist control (such as the villagers’ representative assembly).

In fact, villagers’ self-governance or village “democracy” has failed to function in reality (although some formal institutions are put in place to satisfy the letter of relevant laws and regulations) and the post-election village governance has remained under the control of the local state. This thesis shows that, through the formal institutions (the village guarantee cadre system and the system for controlling village finance), local state administrative power has managed to penetrate into the village community and exert significant authoritarian influence over village affairs. Rather than self-governing, village governance is still dominated by the authoritarian local state. Villagers’ self-governance is far from real. As Bernstein correctly points out, “even when village elections work well, the power of elected village committees is limited because they necessarily function within an authoritarian political environment that is not structured to respond to the demands of constituents. Solutions to problems of the greatest concern that face rural China are largely beyond the capacity of village committees to solve” (Bernstein 2006: 30). Likewise, Shen argues that although VCs are claimed to have most direct effect on villagers’ life, in reality the principal function of VCs is to implement the higher-level authorities’ administrative directives (Shen 2003a). This view is particularly typical among those taking authoritarian approach. Although I am more sympathetic to this view than to the “liberal-democratic” one, my analysis does not stop here.

This thesis further reveals that after the implementation of direct VC elections and

policy to promote self-governance, the local state's formal institutional mechanisms are legally constrained and may not be sufficient to guarantee a compliant and responsive village regime, without which the local state is not able to accomplish its tasks. However, by relying on the informal power and resources under their control, local state officials are able to act as patrons and take advantage of clientelism to strengthen their control over members of the village elite, especially directly elected village cadres. These village cadres then tend to behave much more like clients of the local state than representatives of the villagers' interests. As a result, the village self-governance has been infiltrated and subverted by the local state's informal control.

“Grassroots democracy”?

As reviewed in Chapter one, mainstream wisdom (e.g. liberal-democratic approach and the developmentalist approach) generally takes direct village elections and so-called self-governance in present rural China as a move toward “democracy”, although a number of different “democracy” related terms are used in their study, including “grassroots democracy”, “village democracy”, “village electoral democracy”, and “village democratic elections”. These mainstream scholars may realize the limit of such “grassroots democracy”, however, it does not prevent them from optimistically arguing that “village democracy” may grow bottom-up and even herald China's unique path toward democratization. Unfortunately, although widely using democracy theories to explore this topic, few have made serious efforts to clarify theoretically why village elections and governance in China should be considered (grassroots) “democracy”. The careless use of the term “democracy” in the study of contemporary rural China may lead to an incorrect understanding of both the nature of Chinese village politics and “democracy” itself.

As Cohen defines, “Democracy is that system of community government in which, by and large, the members of a community participate, or may participate, directly or

indirectly, in the making of decisions which affect them all” (Cohen 1971: 7). In terms of the “community” where democracy functions, Cohen further clarifies:

In reflecting upon the communities in which democracy can subsist, it is most important that one not focus exclusively upon national states. These are very important communities, and we are understandably very much interested in the way democracy functions in them. But a satisfactory theory of democracy must be applicable to a range of community types and sizes far exceeding national states. Communities of greatly different kinds and sizes may be governed democratically (Cohen 1971: 6).

As far as China is concerned, it is obvious that, at the national state level, democracy as a system of government does not exist at all. The question raised here, however, is whether the system of government in Chinese village communities can be referred to as “village democracy”? According to Cohen’s definition, if the term “village democracy” is employed, it should mean that in a specific village community there must be a system of government in which the villagers “participate, or may participate, directly or indirectly, in the making of decisions which affect them all”. Unfortunately, as the case of B village indicates, such a system of government in fact does not really exist in the village community at all. At best, the villagers are allowed to directly elect a few VC members among very limited candidates. Even such supposedly “free and fair” elections are largely subject to informal clientelist control. In terms of village governance, the case of B village shows that it is not the villagers who participate “in the making of decisions which affect them all” but still the local state which dominates and controls the village government through both formal/administrative institutions and informal/clientelist ones. In short, the system of government in the Chinese village community is still nothing but an authoritarian one, which is a governing form *for* rather than *by* the people (Cao 2005; Murphy 2006). It is therefore mistaken to take it as genuine “village democracy”. Obviously, if the system of village government is not democracy at all, the liberal-democratic approach and the developmentalist approach, both of which have attempted to examine Chinese village elections and governance by

applying democracy theories, may lose their analytical teeth.

Even if accepting that such “village democracy” is not really democracy at all, one may still argue that direct village elections and the rules and practices of self-governance may help promote the realization of democracy in a process of democratization. As Howell puts it: “Whilst it is easy to criticize the standard of the elections and the motives of the Chinese government, it is important nevertheless to think more strategically about how these new structures and practices could play a role in furthering democratic values and ideals within China.” Li shares similar view, argues that the practices of village elections and villagers self-governance may “gradually cultivate peasants’ democratic consciousness and make them realize the importance of democracy, which can further develop their democratic values and lead to more in-depth development of democracy as well as wider institutional change” (Li 2002: 6). Such a view is actually widely echoed among many China scholars. I defy such a viewpoint, arguing that this fake “village democracy” may have more negative effects than positive ones on the prospects for democratization.

In terms of village governance, as indicated earlier, village elections have triggered and aggravated conflicts within the B village community, as manifest through clientelist/factional struggles. Such internal clientelist/factional struggles further manifest themselves in the process of post-election governance. The so-called “democratic” governance has been so problematic that the village administration cannot function without the authoritarian intervention and control from authorities outside the village community. In addition, the changing of village cadres along with village elections has made the village administrative team subject to frequent change of personnel, which has led to inefficiency in the management of village affairs and the state policy implementation.

If such growing problems in village administration are the price that has to be paid for the wider democratization of China or the enhancement of Chinese peasants’

“democratic values and ideals”, it may be well worth it. However, can such institutional design for “village democracy” really have any substantial effects on China’s democratization as mainstream scholars have optimistically suggested? I doubt it. If democracy is really intended to be practiced and developed in smaller scale in China, there can be no worse places than Chinese village communities.

First of all, it is not realistic to create a set of such complicated “democratic” mechanism in a village community that has very limited resources. In order to install a “democratic” system in village communities, numerous details must be attended to. In terms of “free and fair” village elections, each stage is required to be conducted in a strict and standardized way: election workers must be trained; voting booths should be made and secret voting must be guaranteed; election records should be kept carefully; specific rules for vote soliciting or campaigning also need to be worked out carefully. In terms of village democratic governance, VC, villagers’ representative assembly (VRA), villagers’ financing small team (VFST) as well as various VC subcommittees are required to be created; personnel of these institutions must be paid; a complex and detailed working regulations must be worked out for the so-called “checks and balances” among VC, VPB, VFST and VRA, so on and so forth. To establish and sustain such a set of “democratic” system obviously requires an enormous amount of time, efforts, and resources. As government system, a complicated and elaborately designed democratic mechanism perhaps is desirable and necessary in a community of a much larger scale (for example city, county or at least at township level) with relatively more resources. However, in a Chinese village community where resources are extremely limited, a complicated machinery like that can only be found unrealistic and unsustainable at least at China’s current level of development.

Secondly, Chinese villages communities (or VCs) are more of administrative units than voluntary autonomous organizations. According to the law, the township/town government is the most basic level of government and at the village level the VC is considered to be a “grassroots mass autonomous organization”. However, in fact the VC

is not a free association that villagers can voluntarily form. It can only be established on an administrative basis defined by the local government. What is more, the VC actually plays a role as a policy implementing arm of the higher level government, whose most important function is to carry out various assigned administrative tasks from above, like collecting tax, enforcing family planning policy measures, maintaining social stability, protecting environment and so on. As long as the authoritarian government structure (pressurized system) remains unchanged, the local state will seek ways of putting village cadres under its control so as to get state policies implemented. As Alpermann has found in his research, the directly elected VCs in practice “are treated like line-organs of the Chinese government and have to carry out orders from above” (Alpermann 2001: 46). The so-called village democracy cannot at all resist the infringement imposed upon villagers by the outside authoritarian system. The survival and development of local democracy must be matched with necessary outside environment, composed of an independent legal system, rule of law, a democratic and transparent government and so on. This is to say, local government and its officials actually are just the composition of the whole party-state authoritarian machine which should be blamed for the embarrassment of grassroots democracy in rural China. As long as the authoritarian nature of Chinese party-state remains, the predicament is unlikely to be broken. Even in terms of village affairs which are supposed to be done through “self-governance”, particularly with the collapse of the collective economy, there have been fewer and fewer things that actually require “self-governance”. Some community public affairs like repairing the village streets, raising fund primary school, managing the village sanitation and so on are almost all dependent on the direction, support and organization of the local state. As Shen correctly points out: “the major advantage of the people’s self-governance is that the people are able to do their own things by themselves. Theoretically speaking, this is irreproachable.” However, “within an excessively small community, many people’s own affairs usually can not be done or be conducted appropriately (Shen 2004: part 2)”.

Thirdly, Chinese village communities, as peasant societies in other developing countries,

are heavily influenced by clientelism. A Chinese village community is largely a face-to-face society where villagers are bound together by dense personal relationships and networks and a broad commitment to one another in time of need. The greater insecurity and inequality brought by decollectivization and marketization has made it more necessary for villagers to cultivate and rely on patron-client relationship to make life better. As a result, clientelism or a clientelist system is predominant in village China and the village regime is largely manipulated by a few village patrons. With clientelist control dominant, so-called “village democracy” or any specially designed “democratic” institutions can only be used to serve the appearance rather the substance of democracy. As Hong suggests, the essence of democracy, namely, the villagers’ awareness and appreciation of democratic ideas and principles, is actually absent in Chinese village politics despite the highly stylised election procedure (Hong 2006: 31). The appearance of “village democracy” may look dazzling, but the essence of village government is still nothing but authoritarian rule underpinned by a clientelist system, namely, just like the old wine in a new bottle.

The mainstream view often holds that, no matter how many flaws and disadvantages there are, village democracy should be considered a positive thing any way. By democratic participation, Chinese farmers can learn democracy, practise democracy in democratic process and improve political efficacy. They even optimistically announce that village democracy will become “an irresistible force to reconstitute the state from below” (Wang 1997: 1440). I argue that on the evidence from B village, this is unlikely. Rather than having been encouraged or inspired, villagers in B village have apparently become more cynical about such “democracy” bestowed from above over time through three rounds of elections and increasingly voted on clientelist line. To villagers of B village, such “democracy” not only has had very little effect on their everyday life, but also has been likely to embarrass them and even damage part of their social networks (for example, when being solicited for votes by two different factions; for details, see Chapter 3). In addition, when the elected VC cadres failed to deliver their public promises, when they are still responsive to the township government instead of the

villagers whom they are supposed to represent, and when all the most important issues in village governance are still decided by the township government despite of such village democracy, how could villagers get excited and remain a feeling of “higher level of political efficacy” (Li 2003) or the benefits of democracy? On the contrary, the malfunctioning of such “village democracy” has largely failed to improve people’s enthusiasm or other conditions that democracy needs. Particularly, clientelism, in perverting the formal democratic institutions, may even lead to people’s loss of faith in democratic systems, further entrench clientelism and authoritarianism and in this way prevent democratisation.

It is far beyond the capacity of this thesis to discuss what the prospect and approaches of China’s democratization would be. Nonetheless, it is suggested that without the further liberalization and democratization of China’s general political structure, democracy in local level will have little chance to survive. As far as political reform in rural China is concerned, it probably would be more important to give and guarantee Chinese peasants greater political freedom (particularly the freedom of association) than “grassroots democracy”. Only when the atomizing peasants are able to get incorporated by various horizontal voluntary social organizations and groups, which are based on common socio-economic interests and are truly independent from the state administrative control, can peasants have much more bargaining power when dealing with the state. And perhaps only based on this can the Chinese civil society develop and democratization happen. Village elections and self-governance, which are by and large formalistic within current Chinese political structure and are described by Louie as an “odd kind of administration” (Louie 2001: 151), do not even empower villagers to bargain with the local state, let alone “restructure” the whole political system. Rather, the operation and running of various “democratic” institutions within village China is in fact a “losing proposition”.

An authoritarian system supplemented with informal clientelist structure

As the case of B village has indicated, despite the “free and fair” VC elections and the institutions for self-governance (or “village democracy”), the context of the village community in which different actors find themselves remains authoritarian. In other words, although the formal institutions of village government may look “democratic”, the nature of the village politics is still authoritarian. The Chinese party-state designed and implemented such a system at the village level largely to increase mass support for the Party, to consolidate the current regime and to enhance its international image, as well as to improve policy implementation (Kelliher 1997; O'Brien and Li 2000). So-called self-governance or “grassroots democracy” is best considered a supplement rather than a substitute for the party-state’s authoritarian control. In this sense, authoritarian approach appears a more appropriate perspective in terms of the state-society relationship in rural China than the liberal-democratic one although it overstates the authoritarian and coercive aspect of state power. In this thesis I have shown that there has been a partial retreat and decline in some of the local state’s formal institutional controls over the village. But I have also attempted to illuminate the state’s continuing efforts to retain authoritarian control by taking advantage of informal clientelist structure on the other hand.

The generalization drawn from this case study of a single village in a province in economically developed eastern coastal China must, of course, be treated with caution and remain tentative. The nature of the qualitative case study based on an individual case and the huge regional variation across the vast territory of China raise the possibility of over-generalization from the above findings. Nonetheless, I believe the macro-structural features that underpin clientelism remain not only in B village but also in the vast rural China. Namely, as long as the authoritarian political structure prevails; the voluntary horizontal associations are not allowed; a basic social security system is

absent; prominent inequalities exist among people and a rule of law is weakly developed, vertical clientelist patterns of dependence and domination may persist in rural China. Oi's verdict that "village politics in China is best described as clientelist" (Oi 1989: 7) is still relevant today. Therefore, I believe, without fully revealing and understanding how such invisible clientelist networks work in village China, it is difficult to fully understand how authoritarianism has adapted to accommodate village elections. And it is also foreseeable that clientelism, as a pattern of state-peasant interaction through which the authoritarian state exerts control at the grassroots level and individual peasants participate in the political process to seek their particularistic interests, will persist in rural China. However, it is worth noting that, although clientelism may widely exist in rural China, the forms and degree of it can vary in different villages with different characteristics. In a given village, factors such as lineage structure, village economic structure, villager migration, local state capacity as well as village history can all play a role in shaping the form and degree of clientelism in the given village community. As a result, how clientelism influences the process of village elections and governance may also vary. What forms and degree clientelism takes and how clientelism manifests itself and shapes the process of village elections and governance in other villages and other places of rural China can be a topic for further study.

Clientelism, developmentalism and Chinese rural society under transition

Apart from above findings, this thesis also attempts to add some tentative suggestions on the development of clientelism in contemporary rural China. The very definition of clientelism points towards poverty of the clients. Literature on clientelism has indicated that it is a feature disproportionately of poor countries or peasant (rural) societies (e.g., Lande 1977; Lemarchand 1977; Powell 1970; Scott 1972b; Silverman 1967). Clientelist theorists, such as Scott and Powell, suggest that peasants, who live at subsistence level

and lack effective safety nets, are risk-averse and hence would actively engage in clientelist exchange with those patrons, with whom they are personally familiar. As far as China is concerned, clientelism has been considered an important feature of traditional Chinese rural society before communism (Duara 1988). However, after rural China came under communist rule after 1949, when Chinese peasants have no longer been living at subsistence level and have had basic collective safety nets under the collective system, clientelism, according to Oi (1989), persisted because of the very structural characteristics of the communist system, including a scarcity of goods, a centralized distribution system, and unequal access to and personalized control over allocation of goods and opportunities. This underpinned peasants' dependence on local cadres and therefore encouraged the prevalence of clientelism. Based on her observation of rural China till the late 1980s, Oi further argues that, although the post-1978 reforms transformed the rural economy and resulted in significant economic development in rural China, the nature of village politics was still clientelist as long as "the state remains only semicommitted to a market economy, maintains a hierarchy of prices, and does not solve the problem of scarcity" (1989: 226).

After two more decades of reform, the above conditions that Oi has identified as the underpinnings of clientelism in rural China have largely changed. The Chinese party-state has committed itself to the market economy and largely abandoned the hierarchy of prices. The problem of scarcity at least may not be a prominent phenomenon in some affluent villages. But as found in B village, which is a quite affluent village in the developed eastern coastal area of China, clientelism remains to be pervasive and continues to shape village politics. This seems to indicate that, in contrast to the conventional clientelist theory, poverty and scarcity *per se* may not necessarily be the basis of or the reason for clientelism.

This is why I believe that the developmentalist approach has failed to interpret Chinese village elections and governance properly because economic development alone may not necessarily eliminate the unequal social relations between clients and patrons. In

other words, clientelism may remain an influential institution and shape village politics in Chinese villages regardless of their economic development level or villagers' income per capita. As the contradicting evidence obtained from the developmentalist literature has revealed, "free and fair" elections or formal "democratic" institutions can be implemented in villages with varied economic development level. The key point is, however, as long as informal clientelism is present and plays a role of "brake", "free and fair" elections or the so-called "village democracy" can be subject to and compatible with the authoritarian control of the Chinese party-state.

We may hypothesize that, even though Chinese rural dwellers are generally better off and are no longer concerned about subsistence, as long as the factors, including income inequality (wealth gap), absence of social security nets, personalized use of public power and lack of the rule of law, exist, clientelism may adapt and manifest itself. How clientelism in rural China evolves with continuing urbanization and durative economic and political reform may still be open-ended questions

Appendix 1: Interviewee List

1. Xinjia Township deputy party secretary—2/3/2004, 30/11/2004
2. Xinjia Township mayor—3/3/2004, 14/11/2004
3. Xinjia Township Party secretary—7/4/2004, 20/11/2004, 10/11/2005
4. Xinjia Township official—24/3/2004
5. Xinjia Township official—29/2/2004
6. Xinjia Township official—16/4/2004
7. Xinjia Township official—20/4/2004
8. Xinjia Township official—25/4/2004
9. Xinjia Township official—29/4/2004, 13/11/2005
10. Xinjia Township official—2/5/2004
11. Xinjia Township official—3/5/2004
12. Xinjia Township official—5/5/2004
13. Xinjia Township official—14/11/2004, 9/11/2005
14. Xinjia Township official—18/11/2004
15. Xinjia Township official—20/11/2004
16. Xinjia Township official—26/11/2004
17. Xinjia Township official—2/12/2004
18. Xinjia Township official—10/12/2004
19. Xinjia Township official—26/12/2004
20. B village villager—1/4/2004
21. B village villager—5/4/2004
22. B village villager—9/4/2004
23. B village villager—11/4/2004
24. B village villager—14/4/2004
25. B village villager—16/4/2004
26. B village villager—17/4/2004
27. B village villager—18/4/2004

28. B village villager—20/4/2004
29. B village villager—21/4/2004
30. B village villager—23/4/2004
31. B village villager—25/4/2004
32. B village villager—28/4/2004
33. B Village villager---2/5/2004
34. B village villager—13/11/2004, 12/12/2004
35. B village villager—16/11/2004
36. B village villager—19/11/2004
37. B village villager—22/11/2004
38. B village villager—27/11/2004
39. B village villager—2/12/2004
40. B village villager—6/12/2004
41. B village villager—10/12/2004
42. B village villager—16/12/2004
43. B village villager—20/12/2004
44. B village villager—25/12/2004
45. B village villager—4/1/2005
46. B village villager—6/1/2005
47. Qu Jiazhi (VC chair of B village: May 2002- November 2004)—8/3/2004, 4/12/2004
48. Qu Jiawan (VPB secretary of B village: July 2000 to January 2005)—8/3/2004, 3/12/2004
49. Qu Sixiang (VPB secretary of B village: 1970s to July 2000)—12/3/2004
50. Qu Jiamao (VC chair of B village: May 1999 to May 2002)—20/3/2004, 29/3/2004, 30/11/2004
51. Qu Jiaji (VC member of B village: May 1999 to May 2002 and May 2002 to November 2004; VPB member: January 2005 till now)—20/3/2004, 6/12/2004
52. Qu Sifa (VC deputy chair: May 2002 to November 2004; VC member: November 2004 till now; VPB secretary January 2005 till now.)—22/3/2004

53. Qu Jiaxian (VC deputy chair: May 1999 to May 2002)—14/4/2004, 30/11/2004
54. Qu Siyi (B village villager and member of villagers' financing small team of B village)—23/3/2004
55. Wang Shixian (Xinjia Township official and B village guarantee cadre)—24/3/2004, 2/5/2004, 3/1/2005, 12/11/2005
56. Yantai City government official—4/5/2004, 16/11/2005
57. VC chair of C village of Xinjia Township—11/4/2004, 28/11/2005
58. VC chair of Z village of Xinjia Township—30/11/2004
59. Villager of T village of Xinjia Township—26/12/2004

Appendix 2: Organic Law of the Villagers' Committee of the People's Republic of China (Provisional)

(Adopted at the 23rd Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Sixth National People's Congress on November 24, 1987, and promulgated by Order No. 59 of the President of the People's Republic of China on November 24, 1987 for trial implementation as of June 1, 1988)

Article 1. This Law is formulated in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China with a view to ensuring self-governance by the villagers in the countryside, who will administer their own affairs in accordance with the law, and promoting socialist democracy at the grassroots level, socialist material development, and the building of an advanced socialist culture and ideology in the rural areas.

Article 2. The villagers' committee shall be the primary mass organization of self-governance, in which the villagers manage their own affairs, educate themselves, and serve their own needs. It shall manage the public affairs and public welfare services of the village, mediate disputes among the villagers, help maintain public order, and convey the villages' opinions and demands and make suggestions to the people's government.

Article 3. The people's government of a township, a nationality township or a town shall give guidance, support and help to the villagers committees in their work. The villagers committees, on their part, shall assist the above people's government in its work.

Article 4. The villagers committee shall support and organize the villagers in co-operative economic undertakings in various forms, such as those for production, supply and marketing, credit or consumption, provide services and coordination for production in the village, and promote the development of socialist production and construction and the socialist commodity economy in the countryside.

The villagers committee shall respect the decision-making power of collective

economic organizations in conducting their economic activities independently as prescribed by law, and safeguard the lawful right of property and other lawful rights and interests of collective economic organizations, villagers, households operating under contract, associated households or partnerships.

The villagers committee shall, in accordance with the law, administer affairs concerning the land and other property owned collectively by the villagers and disseminate knowledge among the villagers about a rational utilization of the natural resources and the protection and improvement of the ecological environment.

Article 5. The villagers committee shall publicize the Constitution and the laws, regulations and state policies among the villagers; persuade them to perform their obligations as prescribed by law and to take good care of public property; safeguard the villagers' lawful rights and interests; promote unity and mutual assistance with other villages; and carry out various forms of activities conducive to the building of an advanced socialist culture and ideology.

Article 6. In villages where people from more than one nationality live, the villagers committees shall persuade the villagers to enhance the unity, mutual assistance and mutual respect between different nationalities.

Article 7. Villagers committees shall be established on the basis of the distribution of the villagers and the sizes of the population and on the principle of facilitating self-governance by the masses.

Villagers committees shall generally be established in natural villages; several natural villages may jointly establish a villagers committee; a large natural village may establish several villagers committees.

The establishment or dissolution of a villagers committee or a readjustment in the area governed by it shall be proposed by the people's government of a township, a nationality township or a town and reported to a people's government at the county level for approval after it is discussed and agreed to by a villagers assembly.

Article 8. A villagers committee shall be composed of 3-7 members, including the chair, the deputy-chair (deputy-chairs) and the members.

The members of a villagers committee shall include an appropriate number of

women. In villages where people from more than one nationality live, they shall include a member or members from the nationality or nationalities with a smaller population.

Members of a villagers committee shall not be divorced from production and may be provided with appropriate subsidies in certain circumstances.

Article 9. The chair, deputy-chair or deputy-chairs and members of a villagers committee shall be elected directly by the villagers. The term of office for a villagers committee shall be three years, and its members may continue to hold office when reelected.

Any villager who has reached the age of 18 shall have the right to elect and stand for election, regardless of his ethnic status, race, sex, occupation, family background, religious belief, education, property status and length of residence, with the exception of persons who have been deprived of political rights in accordance with the law.

Article 10. The villagers assembly shall be composed of villagers at or above the age of 18.

The villagers assembly may be attended by villagers at or above the age of 18 or by a representative or representatives of each household.

When necessary, representatives of enterprises, institutions and mass organizations located in the village may be invited to attend the assembly.

Decisions of the villagers assembly shall be made by a simple majority, either of the villagers at or above the age of 18 or of the representatives of the households.

Article 11. The villagers committee shall be responsible to the villagers assembly and report on its work to the latter.

The villagers assembly shall be convened and presided over by the villagers committee. When proposed by over one-fifth of the villagers, the villagers assembly shall be convened. When matters involving the interests of all the villagers arise, the villagers committee shall refer them to the villagers assembly for decision through discussion.

The villagers assembly shall have the power to recall members of the villagers committee and hold a by-election.

Article 12. In making decisions, a villagers committee shall apply the principle

whereby the minority is subordinate to the majority.

In its work the villagers committee shall persist in the mass line, give full play to democracy, carefully heed dissenting opinions and shall not resort to coercion and commandism or retaliation.

Article 13. Members of a villagers committee shall observe the Constitution, the laws, regulations and state policies, be fair in handling affairs and serve the villagers warmheartedly.

Article 14. The villagers committee shall, when necessary, establish sub-committees for people's mediation, public security, public health and other matters. Members of the villagers committee may concurrently be members of the sub-committees.

The villagers committee of a village with a small population may dispense with the sub-committees; instead, members of the villagers committee shall have a division of responsibilities with respect to people's mediation, public security, public health and other work.

Article 15. The villagers committee may set up villagers groups, the heads of which shall be elected at group meetings.

Article 16. Rules and regulations for a village and villagers pledges shall be drawn up by the villagers assembly through discussion, reported to the people's government of a township, nationality township or town for the record, and implemented under the supervision of the villagers committee.

The rules and regulations for a village and villagers pledges shall not contravene the Constitution, the laws or the regulations.

Article 17. The funds needed by the villagers committee for managing public affairs and public welfare services of the village shall be decided on by the villagers assembly through discussion and may be raised from local economic organizations and the villagers.

The accounts of revenues and expenditures shall be made public regularly for supervision by the villagers and local economic organizations.

Article 18. Persons who have been deprived of political rights in accordance with

the law shall be included in villagers groups. The villagers committee shall exercise supervision over them and give them ideological education and help.

Article 19. Personnel of government organs, mass organizations, units of the armed forces, and enterprises and institutions owned by the whole people, which are located in the countryside, shall not join the organizations of the villagers committees; personnel of collectively-owned enterprises and institutions that are not run by the villages may not join the organizations of the villagers committees. However, all the above personnel shall abide by the rules and regulations for the villages and the villagers pledges. When the villagers committees of the villages where these units are located discuss problems related to them and their presence becomes necessary, these units shall send representatives to the meetings.

Article 20. The standing committees of the people's congresses of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government shall, in accordance with this Law and in the light of their local conditions, define the steps and formulate the measures for the implementation of this Law.

Article 21. Provisional implementation of this Law shall begin as of June 1, 1988.

Appendix 3: Organic Law of the Villagers Committee of the People's Republic of China

(Adopted at the 5th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Ninth National People's Congress on November 4, 1998)

Article 1 This Law is enacted in accordance with the Constitution with a view to ensuring self-governance by the villagers in the countryside, who will administer their own affairs according to law, developing democracy at the grassroots level in the countryside, and promoting the building of a socialist countryside which is materially and ethically advanced.

Article 2 The villagers committee is the primary mass organization of self-governance, in which the villagers manage their own affairs, educate themselves and serve their own needs. The villagers committee applies democratic elections, democratic decision-making, democratic management and democratic supervision.

The villagers committee shall manage the public affairs and public welfare undertakings of the village, mediate disputes among the villagers, help maintain public order, and convey the villagers' opinions and demands and make suggestions to the people's government.

Article 3 The primary organization of the Communist Party of China in the countryside shall carry out its work in accordance with the Constitution of the Communist Party of China, playing its role as a leading nucleus; and, in accordance with the Constitution and laws, support the villagers and ensure that they carry out self-governance activities and exercise their democratic rights directly.

Article 4 The people's government of a township, a nationality township or a town shall guide, support and help the villagers committees in their work, but may not interfere with the affairs that lawfully fall within the scope of the villagers self-governance.

The villagers committees, on their part, shall assist the said people's government in its work.

Article 5 The villagers committee shall support the villagers and assist them in their efforts to set up various forms of co-operative and other economic undertakings in accordance with law, provide services and coordination for production in the village, and promote the development of rural production and construction and the socialist market economy.

The villagers committee shall respect the decision-making power of the collective economic organizations in conducting their economic activities independently according to law, safeguard the dual operation system characterized by the combination of centralized operation with decentralized operation on the basis of operation by households under a contract, and ensure the lawful property right and other lawful rights and interests of the collective economic organizations, villagers, households operating under a contract, associated households, and partnerships.

The villagers committee shall, in accordance with the provisions of laws, administer the affairs concerning the land and other property owned collectively by the peasants of the village and disseminate knowledge among the villagers about rational utilization of the natural resources and protection and improvement of the ecological environment.

Article 6 The villagers committee shall publicize the Constitution, laws, regulations and State policies among the villagers; help them understand the importance of performing their obligation as proscribed by law and cherishing public property and encourage them to do so; safeguard the villagers' lawful rights and interests; develop culture and education, and disseminate scientific and technological knowledge among the villagers; promote unity and mutual assistance between villages; and carry out various forms of activities for the building of advanced socialist ethics.

Article 7 In a village where people from more than one ethnic group live, the villagers committee shall help the villagers understand the importance of enhancing unity, mutual respect and mutual assistance among the ethnic groups and give them guidance in this respect.

Article 8 The villagers committee shall be established on the basis of the residential areas of the villagers and the size of the population and on the principle of facilitating

self-governance by the masses.

The establishment or dissolution of a villagers committee or a readjustment in the area governed by it shall be proposed by the people's government of a township, a nationality township or a town and submitted to a people's government at the county level for approval after it is discussed and agreed to by a villagers assembly.

Article 9 A villagers committee shall be composed of three to seven members, including the chair, the deputy-chair (deputy-chairs) and the members.

The members of a villagers committee shall include an appropriate number of women. In a village where people from more than one ethnic group live, they shall include a member or members from the ethnic group or groups with a smaller population. Members of a villagers committee shall not be divorced from production but may be provided with appropriate subsidies, where necessary.

Article 10 A villagers committee may, on the basis of the residential areas of the villagers, establish a number of villagers groups, the leaders of which shall be elected at the meetings of the groups.

Article 11 The chair, deputy-chair(s) and members of a villagers committee shall be elected directly by the villagers. No organization or individual may designate, appoint or replace any member of a villagers committee.

The term of office for a villagers committee is three years; a new committee shall be elected at the expiration of the three years without delay. Members of a villagers committee may continue to hold office when reelected.

Article 12 Any villager who has reached the age of 18 shall have the right to elect and stand for election, regardless of his ethnic status, race, sex, occupation, family background, religious belief, education, property status and length of residence, with the exception of persons who have been deprived of political rights in accordance with law.

The name list of the villagers who have the right to elect and stand for election shall be made public 20 days prior to the date of election.

Article 13 Election of a villagers committee shall be presided over by a villagers electoral committee. Members of the electoral committee shall be elected by a villagers assembly or by all the villagers groups.

Article 14 For election of a villagers committee, the villagers who have the right to elect in the village shall nominate candidates directly.

The number of candidates shall be greater than the number of persons to be elected.

The election of a villagers committee shall be valid if more than half of the villagers who have the right to elect cast their votes; a candidate shall be elected only if he wins more than half of the votes cast by the villagers.

The election shall be by secret ballot and open vote-counting; the outcome of the election shall be announced on the spot. During election, booths shall be installed for voters to write their ballots in private.

Specific electoral measures shall be prescribed by the standing committees of the people's congresses of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government.

Article 15 If a person, by threatening, bribing, forging ballots or other illegitimate means, interferes with the villagers in the exercise of their rights to elect and to stand for election, thus disrupting the election of a villagers committee, the villagers shall have the right to report against him to the people's congress, the people's government of the township, nationality township or town, or to the standing committee of the people's congress and the people's government at the county level or the competent department under the latter, which shall be responsible for investigating the matter and handling it in accordance with law. If a person is elected by threatening, bribing, forging ballots or other illegitimate means, his election shall be invalid.

Article 16 If more than one-fifth of eligible voters in a village jointly sign a proposal to recall VC members then this can be processed. Reasons for the recall should be put forward. The targeted VC members are entitled to make a defence. The VC should convene a villagers' meeting without delay to vote on the recall proposal. The recall proposal can only be passed with the support of more than half the eligible voters in the village.

Article 17 A villagers assembly shall be composed of villagers at or above the age of 18 in a village.

The villagers assembly shall be convened with a simple majority participation of the villagers at or above the age of 18 or with the participation of the representatives from at least two-thirds of the households in the village, and every decision shall be adopted by a simple majority vote of the villagers present. When necessary, representatives of the enterprises, institutions and mass organizations located in the village may be invited to attend the villagers assembly without the right to vote.

Article 18 The villagers committee shall be responsible to the villagers assembly and report on its work to the latter. The villagers assembly shall deliberate on the work report of the villagers committee every year and appraise the performance of its members.

The villagers assembly shall be convened by the villagers committee. When proposed by one-tenth of the villagers, the villagers assembly shall be convened. Article 19 When the following matters that involve the interests of the villagers arise, the villagers committee shall refer them to the villagers assembly for decision through discussion before dealing with them:

(1) measures for pooling funds for the township, and the percentage of the funds raised by the village to be retained and used by it;

(2) the number of persons who enjoy subsidies for work delayed and the rates for such subsidies;

(3) use of the profits gained by the collective economic organizations of the village;

(4) proposals for raising funds for running schools, building roads and managing other public welfare undertakings in the village;

(5) decision on projects to be launched by the collective economic organizations of the village and the contracts proposed for the projects as well as contracts proposed for building public welfare undertakings in the village;

(6) villagers' proposals for operation under a contract;

(7) proposals for the use of house sites; and

(8) other matters that involve the interests of the villagers and on which the villagers assembly considers it necessary to make decisions through discussion.

Article 20 A villagers assembly may formulate and revise the villagers charter of self-governance, rules and regulations for the village and villagers pledges, and submit them to the people's government of the township, nationality township or town for the record.

No villagers charter of self-governance, rules and regulations for the village, villagers pledges or matters decided through discussion by a villagers assembly or by representatives of villagers may contravene the Constitution, laws, regulations, or State policies, or contain such contents as infringing upon villagers' rights of the person, their democratic rights or lawful property rights.

Article 21 In a village with a larger population or with the inhabitants scattered here and there, villagers representatives may be elected, and the villagers committee shall convene a meeting of the villagers representatives to decide on matters through discussion with the authorization of the villagers assembly. One villagers representative shall be elected by every five to fifteen households, or a certain

number of villagers representatives shall be elected by all the villagers groups.

Article 22 The villagers committee shall apply the system of open administration of village affairs.

The villagers committee shall accept supervision by the villagers through publicizing the following matters without delay, of which the matters involving financial affairs shall be publicized every six months at least:

- (1) matters decided on through discussion by the villagers assembly as provided for in Article 19 of this Law, and implementation of the decisions;
- (2) plans for implementing the State policy for family planning;
- (3) handing out of relief funds and goods; and
- (4) collection of charges for the supply of water and electricity, and other matters that involve the interests of the villagers and that all the villagers are concerned about.

The villagers committee shall guarantee the truthfulness of what is publicized and subject itself to inquiry by the villagers. Where a villagers committee fails to publicize the matters as is required to without delay or if the matters it publicizes are not true to facts, the villagers shall have the right to report the matter to the people's government of

the township, nationality township or town or the people's government at the county level and the competent departments under it, which shall be responsible for investigation and verification and order that the matters be publicized; where unlawful acts are verified through investigation, the members concerned shall bear the responsibility according to law.

Article 23 The villagers committee and its members shall observe the Constitution, laws, regulations and State policies, and they shall be impartial in handling affairs, honest in performing their duties and warmhearted in serving the villagers.

Article 24 In making decisions, a villagers committee shall apply the principle whereby the minority is subordinate to the majority.

In its work the villagers committee shall adhere to the mass line, give full play to democracy, carefully heed dissenting opinions, and unremittingly exercise persuasion; it may not resort to coercion, commandism or retaliation.

Article 25 A villagers committee shall, when necessary, establish sub-committees for people's mediation, public security, public health, etc. Members of the villagers committee may concurrently be members of the sub-committees. The villagers committee of a village with a small population may dispense with the sub-committees; instead, members of the villagers committee shall have a division of responsibilities with respect to people's mediation, public security, public health, etc.

Article 26 A villagers committee shall assist the relevant departments in giving ideological education and help to and exercising supervision over the villagers who have been deprived of political rights in accordance with law.

Article 27 Members of government departments, public organizations, units of the armed forces, and enterprises and institutions owned by the whole people, which are located in the countryside, shall not join organizations of the villagers committees; members of collectively-owned entities that are not run by the villages may choose not to join the organizations of the villagers committees. However, all of them shall abide by the rules and regulations for the villages and the villagers pledges related to them. When the villagers committees, villagers assemblies or villagers representatives of the villages, where these units are located, discuss and deal with problems related to the

units, they shall solve the problems through consultation with them.

Article 28 The local people's congresses at all levels and the standing committees of the local people's congresses at or above the county level shall see that this Law is implemented within their administrative regions and guarantee that the villagers exercise their right of self- government in accordance with law.

Article 29 The standing committees of the people's congresses of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government may, in accordance with this Law and in light of the conditions in their own administrative regions, formulate measures for the implementation of this Law.

Article 30 This Law shall go into effect as of the date of promulgation. The Organic Law of the Villagers Committees of the People's Republic of China (for Trial Implementation) shall be annulled at the same time.

Appendix 4: VC election results of B village in 1999, 2002 and 2004

Table A: The 1999 VC election result (election Date: 29/04/1999)

Name	Position Won	Gender	Age	Previous Position	Political Affiliation	Education Level	Total Number of Voters	Number of Voters casting votes	Participation Rate	Electoral Results			
										Chair Votes	Deputy Chair Votes	Member Votes	Total Votes
Qu Jiamao	VC Chair	Male	49		Communist Party Member	High School	700	691	98.7%	219	215	77	511
Qu Jiaxian	VC Deputy Chair	Male	48			Primary School	700	691	98.7%	212	212	78	502
Qu Jiaji	VC Member	Male	35			Junior Middle School	700	691	98.7%	16	76	345	437

Source: Xinjia Township government: VC elections report sheets (1999).

Table B: The 2002 VC election result (election date: 03/04/2002)

Name	Position Won	Gender	Age	Previous Position	Political Affiliation	Education Level	Total Number of Voters	Number of Voters casting votes	Participation Rate	Electoral Results			
										Chair Votes	Deputy Chair Votes	Member Votes	Total Votes
Qu Jiazhi	VC Chair	Male	66		Communist Party Member	Primary School	693	681	97.8%	256	124	63	443
Qu Sifa	VC Deputy Chair	Male	53		Communist Party Member	Primary School	693	681	97.8%	99	243	194	536
Qu Jiaji	VC Member	Male	38	VC Member		Junior Middle School	693	681	97.8%	173	167	189	529

Source: Xinjia Township government: VC elections report sheets (2002).

Table C: The 2004 VC election result (election date: 30/11/2004)

Name	Position Won	Gender	Age	Previous Position	Political Affiliation	Education Level	Total Number of Voters	Number of Voters casting votes	Participation Rate	Electoral Results			
										Chair Votes	Deputy Chair Votes	Member Votes	Total Votes
Qu Sixu	VC Chair	Male	38			Junior Middle School	706	704	99.7%	348	33	54	435
Qu Sichun	VC Deputy Chair	Male	42			Junior Middle School	706	704	99.7%	16	344	76	436
Qu Sifa	VC Member	Male	55	VC Deputy Chair	Communist Party Member	Junior Middle School	706	704	99.7%	304	50	80	434

Source: Xinjia Township government: VC elections report sheets (2004)

Bibliography

- Abramson, P. R., and J. H. Aldrich. 1982. The Decline of Electoral Participation in America. *American Political Science Review* 76 (3): 502-521.
- Alpermann, Bjorn. 2001. The Post-election Administration of Chinese Villages. *The China Journal* (46): 45-67.
- Bai, Shazhou. 2006. *Chongxin Shenshi Zhongguo Nongcun De Jiceng Xuanju He Cunmin Zizhi (Reappraisal of Grassroots Elections and Villagers' Self-governance in Rural China)* 2000 [cited 15 June 2006]. Available from <http://www.chinayj.net/StubArticle.asp?issue=000409&total=71>.
- Bai, Yihua. 1995. *Zhongguo jiceng zhengquan de gaige yu tansuo (The reform and exploration of the Chinese grassroots regime)*. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe.
- Bailey, F. G. 1969. *Stratagems and Spoils: A Social Anthropology of Politics*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Bernstein, Thomas P. 2006. Village Democracy and Its Limits. *Asien* (99): 29-41.
- Bernstein, Thomas P., and Xiaobo Liu. 2003. *Taxation without representation in contemporary rural China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Boissevain, Jeremy. 1977. Factions, Parties, and politics in a Maltese village. In *Friends, followers, and factions*, edited by S. W. Schmidt, L. Guasti, C. H. Lande and J. C. Scott. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- Bosco, Joseph. 1992. Taiwan Factions: Guanxi, Patronage, and the State in Local Politics. *Ethnology* 31 (2): 157-184.
- Brandtstadter, Susanne, and Gunter Schubert. 2005. Democratic Thought and Practice in Rural China. *Democratization* 12 (5): 801-891.
- Burns, John P. 1988. *Political Participation in Rural China*. Berkeley: University of

California Press.

- Cai, Dingjian. 1989. Tuijin nongcun de minzhu jianshe (Advancing Democratic Construction in the Countryside). *Zhengzhi yu falu (Politics and Law)*: 14-20.
- Campbell, A., G. Gurin, and W. E. Miller. 1954. *The Voter Decides*. Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson and Company.
- Cao, Guoying. 2006. Jianquan cunmin daibiaohui zhidu shi nongmin duti weiquan zhiben (Improving VRA system is a crucial way for peasants' maintenance of their farmland property right). *Xiangzhen Luntan (Township Forum)* (293): 15-16.
- Cao, Jinqing. 2005. *China Along the Yellow River*. Translated by N. Harman and H. Ruhua. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Chan, Anita, Richard Madsen, and Jonathan Unger. 1992. *Chen Village under Mao and Deng*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Chen, C. S., and C. P. Ridley. 1969. *Rural people's communes in Lien-chiang*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.
- Chen, zhemin, ed. 2000. *Cunmin zizhi de lilun yu shijian (The theory and practise of villagers' self-government)*. Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe.
- Cheng, Changxing 2001. Cunji zhaodaifei guanli touxi (Analysis on village-level entertainment expenditure). *Nongcun caiwu kuaiji (Rural finance and accounting)* (01): 18-20.
- Cheng, Gang. 2005. Quxiao nongyeshu hou nongmin qita fudan jiazhong (Peasants' other burdens are increasing after the abolishment of the agricultural taxes). *Zhongguo qingnian bao (The Chinese youth)*, 26 December, 3.
- Cheng, Tongshun. 2000. *Dangdai zhongguo nongcun zhengzhi fazhan yanjiu (Study on contemporary Chinese rural politics)*. Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe.
- Cohen, Carl. 1971. *Democracy*. New York: The free press.
- Cui, Shixin. 2001. Cungan weihe yao cizhi? (Why did Village Cadres Have to Resign?). *Renmin ribao (People's Daily)*, 21 March, 9.

- Cui, Zhongkui. 2005. Cunweihui zhuanggao "cuncai xiangguan" (VC sues township government for managing village finance). *Xiangzhen Luntan (Township Forum)* (265): 16-17.
- Dang, Guoying. *Nongcun minzhu shijian yeyao kaolu chengben (Practising democracy in countryside also need to consider cost)* 2004 [cited 08/09/2005. Available from <http://www.chinaelections.org/readnews.asp?newsid={6B6F8327-FE20-4C19-B344-1E8B7C183AA9}>].
- Dang, Guoying. 2005. Yu nongmin pengyou yiqi sikao (Think Together with Peasant Friends). *Xiangzhen Luntan (Township Forum)* (241): 6-9.
- Duara, Prasenjit. 1988. *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Edin, Maria. 2000. Jiceng ganbu de zhengzhi jiji jizhi (The Political Incentives of Local Cadres in the PRC). *Hong Kong Journal of Social Sciences* (17): 45-66.
- Edin, Maria. 2003. State Capacity and Local Agent Control in China: CCP Cadre Management from a Township Perspective *The China Quarterly* (173): 35-52.
- Fan, Yu. 1998a. Cunweihui xuanju weifa xu jiuzheng (Law-breaking activities in village elections must be corrected). *Gaige neican (Internal Reference on Reform)* (22): 14-15.
- Fan, Yu. 1998b. Cunweihui zuzhi fa xiuding zhong de si da zhenglun wenti (The Four Controversial Questions in the Course of Revising Organic Law.). *Zhongguo shehui bao (The China society)*, November 18.
- Fan, Yu. 1998c. Weile yiwan nongmin de minzhu quanli:'cunweihui zuzhi fa chutai de qianqian houhou' (For the Political Rights of Hundreds of Millions Peasants:The Process of the Organic Law's Formation). *Zhongguo shehui bao (The China society)*, 5 November 1998.

- Finkel, S. E. 1985. Reciprocal Effects of Participation and Political Efficacy: A Panel Analysis *American Journal of Political Science* 29 (4): 891-913.
- Flybjerg, Bent. 2006. Five Misunderstandings About Case Study Research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 12 (2): 219-245.
- Foster, George M. 1963. the dyadic contract in Tzintzuntzan, II: Patron-client relationship. *American anthropologist* 65 (6): 1280-1294.
- Foster, M. George. 1961. The Dyadic Contract: A Model for the Social Structure of a Mexican Peasant Village. *American Anthropologist* 63 (6): 1173-1192.
- Fried, Morton H. 1953. *Fabric of Chinese Society: A Study of the Social Life of a Chinese County Seat* New York: Praeger.
- Friedman, Edward. 2006. Learning About a Chinese Village in a Lennist-Party Authoritarian State *Journal of Contemporary China* 15 (47): 369-384.
- Gallin, Bernard. 1969. Political factionalism and its impact on Chinese village social organization in Taiwan. In *Local-level politics : social and cultural perspectives*, edited by M. J. Swartz. London: University of London Press Ltd.
- Gold, Thomas, Doug Guthrie, and David Wank. 2002a. An Introduction to the Study of Guanxi. In *Social Connections in China: Institutions, Culture, and the Changing Nature of Guanxi*, edited by T. Gold, D. Guthrie and D. Wank. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gold, Thomas, Doug Guthrie, and David Wank, eds. 2002b. *social connections in China: Institutions, culture, and the changing nature of Guanxi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gong, Ting. 1994. *The Politics of Corruption in Contemporary China: An Analysis of Policy Outcomes*. Westport: Praeger.
- Gou, Kerang. 2007. *Guanyu jianquan cunwu gongkai minzhu guanli yunxing jizhi de sikao (Reflection on improving the system of village affair publicity and democratic management)* 30/4/2007 2007 [cited 14 June 2007]. Available

from http://www.chinarural.org/news_show.aspx?cols=1946&ID=38609.

- Guo, Zhenglin. 2002. Cunmin zhixuan hou de cunweihui yu dangzhibu: xianzhuang yu tiaoshi (VC and VPB after direct village election: current situation and the adjustment). In *Zhongguo jiceng minzhu fazhan baogao:2000-2001 (Report on the development of China's grassroots democracy)*, edited by L. Fan. Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe.
- Guo, Zhenglin. 2006. *Dangdai Zhongguo Nongmin Zhengzhi Canyu de Chengdu, Dongji Ji Shehui Xiaoying (The Degree, Incentives and Social Effects of Contemporary Chinese Peasant's Political Participation)* 2003 [cited 16 October 2006]. Available from http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk_wzdetails.asp?id=3687.
- Guo, Zhenglin, and Thomas P. Bernstein. 2004. The Impact of Elections on the Village Structure of Power: the relations between the village committees and the Party branch. *Journal of Contemporary China* 13 (39): 257-275.
- Guo, Zhenglin, and Xiaopin Tong. 2006. *Guangzhou Shi Cunmin Zizhi Fazhan Baogao (A Report on the Development of Villagers' Self-government in Guangzhou)* 2006 [cited 16 October 2006]. Available from http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk_wzdetails.asp?id=1714.
- Guowuyuan bangongting (Office of the State Department). 2006. Guanyu zuohao qingli huajie xiangcun zhaiwu gongzuo de yijian (Opinion on properly carrying out the work of clearing and solving township and village debts) (18/10/2006).
- Han, Jun, and Dan Luo. 2007. *Zhongguo nongcun weisheng diaocha (China rural health survey)*. Shanghai: Shanghai yuandong chubanshe.
- He, Haibo. 2002a. Guojia zhili shijiao zhong de cunmin weiyuanhui (Village committee from the perspective of state governance). In *Wusheng de geming: cunmin zhixuan de lishi, xianshi he weilai (The quiet revolution: history, reality and future of villagers' direct elections)*, edited by Y. Liu. Xi'an: Xibei

daxue chubanshe.

- He, Xuefeng. 2002b. *Zaoyu xuanju de xiangcun shehui: Jinmen shi disijie cunweihui xuanju guancha (The rural society encountering elections: observation of the fourth session VC elections in Jinmen City)*. Xi'an: Xibei daxue chubanshe.
- He, Xuefeng. 2005. *Cunji zhili zhong de cunmin daibiao: guanyu cunmin daibiao huiyi zhidu xiaoneng de taolun (Villagers' representatives in village government: discussion on the efficiency of the VRA system)* 2003 [cited August 21 2005]. Available from [http:// www.ccrs.org.cn](http://www.ccrs.org.cn).
- He, Xuefeng, Yi Wu, and Zhihui Tong. 2006. *Cunzhuang xuanju yanjiu: tiaowang zhuanxingqi xiangcun shehui xingzhi de chuankou---zhongguo nongcun cunmin weiyuanhui xuanju wenti zongshu (Village Election Study: A Window for Viewing the Nature of Rural Society under Transition---Review on VC Election study of China)* 2001 [cited 12 April 2006]. Available from <http://www.chinaelections.org/NewsInfo.asp?NewsID=78738>.
- He, Zhiling. 2007. *Dangqian cunwu gongkai minzhu guanli mianlin xianzhuang wenti ji duici sikao (Problems and recommendations on current village affair publicity and democratic management)* 30/4/2007 2007 [cited 14 June 2007]. Available from http://www.chinarural.org/news_show.aspx?cols=1946&ID=38602.
- Ho, David. 1976. On the concept of face. *American Journal of Sociology* 81 (4): 867-884.
- Hong, Zhaohui. 2006. Three disconnects and China's rural election: A case study of Hailian Village. *Communist and post-communist studies* (39): 25-37.
- Hsu, F. L. K. 1963. *Clan, Caste, and Club*. Princeton: Van Nostrand.
- Hu, Rong. 2001. *Lixing xuanze yu zhidu shishi: zhongguo nongcun cunmin weiyuanhui xuanju de ge'an yanjiu (The Rational Choices and Institutional implementation: Case Study of VC Elections in Rural China)*. Shanghai: Shanghai yuandong chubanshe.

- Hu, Rong. 2005. Economic development and the implementation of village elections in rural China. *Journal of Contemporary China* 14 (44): 427-444.
- Hussain, Athar. 1994. Social Security in Present-Day China and Its Reform. *The American Economic Review* 84 (2): 276-280.
- Hwang, Kwang-kuo. 1987. Face and Favor: The Chinese Power Gameq. *American Journal of Sociology* 92 (4): 944-974.
- Jacobs, J. Bruce. 1979. A Preliminary Model of Particularistic Ties in Chinese Political Alliances: Kan-ch'ing and Kuan-hsi in a Rural Taiwanese Township. *The China Quarterly* (78): 237-273.
- Jakobsen, Linda. 2004. Local Governance: Village and Township Direct Elections. In *Governance in China*, edited by J. Howell. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Jiang, Jie. 2003. Cunwu gongkai yao maixinbu (Village affair publicity should step forward). *Renmin bibao (People's Daily)*, 16/6/2003, p. 10.
- Jiang, Zemin. 1998. Quanmian tuijin congcun gaige, kaichuang woguo nongye he nongcun gongzuo xin jumian: zai Anhui kaocha gongzuo shi de jianghua (Promoting rural reform comprehensively and creating a new phase for our country's agriculture and rural work: speach during inspection in Anhui). *Renmin Ribao (Pople's Daliy)*, 5 Oct. 1998, 1.
- Jing, Tihua. 2006. *2005-2006 nian: zhongguo quyu jingji fazhan baogao (2005-2006: A Report for the Economic Development in China's Different Areas)*. Beijing: Shehui kexu wenxian chubanshe.
- Kelliher, Daniel. 1997. The Chinese Debate over Village Self-Government. *The China Journal* (37): 63-86.
- Kennedy, John James. 2002. The Face of "Grassroots Democracy" in Rural China. *Asian Survey* 42 (3): 456-482.
- Kenny, Michael. 1960. Patterns of patronage in Spain. *Anthropological Quarterly* (33): 14-23.

- Kipnis, Andrew. 1994. (Re)Inventing Li: Koutou and Subjectification in Rural Shandong. In *Body, subject, and power in China*, edited by T. Barlow and A. Zito. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kipnis, Andrew. 2002. Practises of guanxi production and practises of ganqing avoidance. In *social connections in China: Institutions, culture, and the changing nature of Guanxi*, edited by T. Gold, D. Guthrie and D. Wank. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kipnis, Andrew B. 1996. the language of gifts: managing guanxi in a north China village. *Modern China* 22 (3): 285-314.
- Kipnis, Andrew B. 1997. *Producing guanxi: sentiment, self, and subculture in a north china village*. Durham: Duke Univerity Press.
- Lampton, David M., ed. 1987. *Policy Implementation in Post-Mao China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lande, Carl H. 1977. The Dyadic Basis of Clientelism. In *Friends, Followers, and Factions* edited by S. W. Schmidt, L. Guasti, C. H. Lande and J. C. Scott. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- Lawrence, Susan V. 1994. Democracy, Chinese Style. *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* (32): 61-68.
- Lemarchand, Rene. 1977. Political Clientelism and Ethnicity in Tropical Africa: Competing Solidarities in Nation-Building. In *Friends, Followers, and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism*, edited by S. W. Schmidt, J. C. Scott, C. Lande and L. Guasti. California: University of California Press.
- Lerman, Arthur J. 1977. National Elite and Local Politian in Taiwan. *The American Political Science Review* 71 (4): 1406-1422.
- Li, Fan. 2002. 2000-2001 nian zhongguo jiceng minzhu de xin fazhan: cunji minzhu (The New Development of China's Grassroots Democracy in 2000-2001: Village Democracy). In *Zhongguo jiceng minzhu fazhan baogao: 2000-2001 (Report on Development of China's Grassroots Democracy: 2000-2001)*,

- edited by L. Fan. Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe.
- Li, Lianjiang. 2003. The Empowering Effect of Village Elections in China. *Asian Survey* 43 (4): 648-662.
- Li, Lianjiang, and Kevin J. O'Brien. 1996. Villager and Popular Resistance in Contemporary China. *Modern China* 22 (1): 28-61.
- Li, Runwen. 2005. Shiqu minxin de cunganbu weihe nanyi banmian (Why is it difficult to recall village cadres who have lost people's confidence). *Xiangzhen Luntan (Township Forum)* (273): 6-7.
- Li, Xiling. 2001. Fansi Mazhai cun Zhuren bei sha an (Reflecting the case of the murder of the VC chair of Mazhai village). *Xiangzhen Luntan (Township Forum)* (163): 7-9.
- Li, Xueju. 1994. *Zhongguo chengxiang jiceng zhengquan jianshe gongzuo yanjiu (Research on Construction of Grassroots Governance in Urban and Rural China)*. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe.
- Li, Xuetian, and Yumin Zhao. 2005. "Nongmin wenhua suzhi di, buhui minzhu" de guandian yinggai jiaozheng (*The Viewpoint that Peasants' Educational Quality is Too Low to Have Democracy Should Be Corrected*) 2004 [cited 4 June 2005]. Available from <http://www.ccrs.org.cn/newsgl/ReadNews.asp?NewsID=6909&BigClassName=&BigClassID=1&SmallClassID=1&SmallClassName=村民自治&SpecialID=0>.
- Ling, Zhijun. 1997. *Lishi bu zai paihuai: renmin gongshe zai zhongguo de xingqi he shibai (The history no longer wandering: the origin and failure of people's commune in China)*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe.
- Liu, Fang. 2006. 190 wan chiqing songli fei jinu cunmin (Villagers are irritated by 1.9 million yuan spent on dining, drinking and gift giving). *Zhongguo qingnian bao (Chinese Youth)*, 18 June, 5.
- Liu, Jianhua. 2003. 230 wan jukuan "mai" cungan (To "buy" village office for two

- million and three hundred thousand yuan). *Renmin Ribao (people's daily)*, August 21, 5.
- Liu, Xiaobo. 1997. The Politics of Peasant Burden in Reform China. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 25 (1): 1-10.
- Liu, Yawei. 2002. Guanyu cunji zhixuan de bianlun (On the debate of direct Village elections). In *Wusheng de geming: cunmin zhixuan de lishi, xianshi he weilai (The quiet revolution: history, reality and future of villagers' direct elections)*, edited by Y. Liu. Xi'an: Xibei daxue chubanshe.
- Liu, Yuanli, Kebin Rao, and Shanlian Hu. 2002. *People's Republic of China: Toward Establishing A Rural Health Protection System*. Manila: Asian Development Bank.
- Liu, Zhenwei. 1994. *Nongmin yu nongcun zuzhi jianshe (Peasants and Rural Organization Construction)*. Guiyang: Guiyang renmin chubanshe.
- Longkou shiwei zuzhibu (Organization Department of CCP Longkou Committee). 2002. Longkoushi guanyu di qi jie cunweihui huanjie xuanju gongzuo de qingkuang huibao (Work report on the seventh session of VC elections of Longkou City),
- Longkoushi diqijie cunweihui huanjie xuanju gongzuo lingdao xiaozu bangongshi (Leading Team Office for the Seventh Session VC Election work of Longkou County). 2002. Longkoushi diqijie cunmin weiyuanhui huanjie xuanju caozuo guicheng (Operation Manual for the Seventh Session VC Election of Longkou County), (2/2002).
- Longkoushi nongcun "liangwei" huanjie xuanju gongzuo lingdao xiaozu bangongshi (Leading Team Office for Rural "Two Committees" Election work of Longkou County). 2004. Longkoushi dibajie cunmin weiyuanhui huanjie xuanju caozuo geicheng (Operation Manual for the Eighth Session VC Election of Longkou County), (10/2004).
- Louie, Kin-Sheun. 2001. Village Self-Governance and Democracy in China: An

- Evaluation. *Democratization* 8 (4): 134-135.
- Lu, Fuying. 2005. Cunwu jiandu yiran renzhong daoyuan (Supervision of village affairs still has a long way to go). *Xiangzhen Luntan (Township Forum)* (256): 17.
- Lu, Xiaobo. 2000. *Cadres and Corruption: The Organizational Involution of the Chinese Communist Party*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Luo, Zhiyuan. 2006. Xiaochu fengjian sixiang wenhua dui nongcun jiceng zuzhi de yingxiang (Eliminating the influence of feudal mentality over rural grassroots organizations). *Shehui zhuyi yanjiu (Studies in Socialism)* (4): 26-30.
- Ma, Changshan. 1994. Cunmin zizhi zuzhi jianshe de shidai yiyi jiqi shijian fancha (The epoch-making significance and the imperfect practice of building villagers' self-government organizations). *Zhengzhi yu falu* (2): 19-20.
- Manion, Melanie. 2006. Democracy, community, trust: the impact of elections in rural China. *Comparative Political Studies* 39 (3): 301-324.
- Mao, Dan. 1998. Xiangcun Zuzhihua He Cunmin Minzhu: Zhejiang Xiaoshanshi Jianshanxia Cun Diaocha (The Village Organization and Villager's Democracy: An Investigation of Jianshanxia Village of Xiaoshan City in Zhejiang Province). *Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Jikan (Chinese Social Sciences Quarterly)* (22).
- Ministry of Civil Affairs of the PRC. 2007. *Guanyu Zuohao 2004 Nian Cunmin Weiyuanhui Huanjie Xuanju Gongzuo De Tongzhi (A Circular on Properly Carrying Out the Task of 2004 Village Committee Elections)* 2004 [cited 4 March 2007]. Available from <http://www.chinaelections.org/NewsInfo.asp?NewsID=24234>.
- Minzhengbu jiceng zhengquan he shequ jianshe si (Grassroots-Level Regime and Community Construction Department, Ministry of Civil Affairs). 2004. *Cunwu gongkai (Village Affair Transparency)*. Beijing: Fangzheng chubanshe.

- Murphy, Rachel. 2002. *How Migrant Labor Is Changing Rural China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Murphy, Rachel. 2005. A Chinese Ethnography of Rural state. In *China Along the Yellow River*, edited by J. Cao. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Murphy, Rachel. 2006. Citizenship Education in Rural China: The Dispositional and Technical Training of Cadres and Farmers. In *Chinese Citizenship: Views from the Margin*, edited by V. L. Fong and R. Murphy. London and New York: Routledge.
- Nathan, Andrew J. 1973. A Factionalism Model for the CCP Politics. *The China Quarterly* (53): 34-66.
- Nicholas, Ralph W. 1977. Factions: a comparative Analysis. In *Friends, followers, and factions*, edited by S. W. Schmidt, L. Guasti, C. H. Lande and J. C. Scott. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- O'Brien, Kevin J. 1994. Implementing Political Reform in China's Villages. *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* (32): 33-59.
- O'Brien, Kevin J. 1996. Rightful Resistance. *World Politics* 49 (1): 51-55.
- O'Brien, Kevin J. 2001. Villagers, Elections, and Citizenship in Contemporary China. *Modern China* 27 (4): 407-435.
- O'Brien, Kevin J., and Lianjiang Li. 1995. The Politics of Lodging Complaints in Rural China. *The China Quarterly* (143): 756-783.
- O'Brien, Kevin J., and Lianjiang Li. 1999. Selective Policy Implementation in Rural China. *Comparative Politics*: 167-186.
- O'Brien, Kevin J., and Lianjiang Li. 2000. Accommodating "Democracy" in a One-Party State: Introducing Village Elections in China. *The China Quarterly* (162): 465-489.
- Oi, Jean. 1999a. Two Decades of Rural Reform in China: An Overview and Assessment. *China Quarterly* (159): 616-628.
- Oi, Jean C. 1989. *State and Peasant in Contemporary China: the political economy*

- of village government*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Oi, Jean C. 1996. Economic Development, Stability and Democratic Village Self-governance. In *China Review 1996* edited by M. Brosseau, S. Pepper and T. Shu-ki. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.
- Oi, Jean C. 1999b. *Rural China Takes off: Institutional Foundations of Economic Reform*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Oi, Jean C., and Scott Rozelle. 2000. Elections and Power: The Locus of Decision-Making in Chinese Villages. *The China Quarterly* (162): 513-539.
- Pastor, Robert A. , and Qingshan Tan. 2000. The Meaning of China's Village Elections. *The China Quarterly* (162): 490-512.
- Pei, Minxin. 1995. Creeping Democratization in China. *Journal of Democracy* 6 (4): 65-79.
- Piattoni, Simona. 2001. Clientelism, Interests, and Democratic Representation. In *Clientelism, Interests, and Democratic Representation*, edited by S. Piattoni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pitt-Rivers, J. A. 1954. *The people of Sierra*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Potter, Sulamith H., and Jack M. Potter. 1990. *China's Peasants: The Anthropology of a Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Powell, John Duncan. 1970. Peasant Society and Clientelist Politics. *The American Political Science Review* 64 (2): 411-425.
- Rong, Jingben, et al. 1998. *Cong yalixing tizhi xiang minzhu hezuo tizhi de zhuanbian: xian xiang liangji zhengzhi tizhi gaige (Transformation from the Pressurized System to the Democratic System of Cooperation: Reform of the Political System at the County and Township/town Levels)*. Beijing: Zhongyang Bianyi Chubanshe.
- Rouquie, Alain. 1978. Clientelist control and authoritarian contexts. In *Elections without choice*, edited by G. Hermet, R. Rose and A. Rouquie. London and

Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD.

Scott, James C. 1972a. *Comparative political corruption*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.

Scott, James C. 1972b. Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia. *The American Political Science Review* 66 (1): 91-113.

Shandongsheng Renmin zhengfu banggongting (Office of Shandong Province People's Government). 2001. Guanyu zuohao di qi jie cunmin weiyuanhui huanjie xuanju gongzuo de tongzhi (Circular on Preparing for the Seventh Session VC elections of the Province),

Shelley, Becky. 2000. Political Globalisation and the Politics of International Non-governmental Organizations: The Case of Village Democracy in China. *Australia Journal of Political Science* 35 (2): 225-238.

Shen, Yansheng. 2003. *Guanyu cunmin zizhi ji cunmin zhizhi yanjiu de pingshu* (Review on Villagers' Self-Government and Its Research) 2003a [cited 14 July' 2003]. Available from <http://www.chinayj.net/StubArticle.asp?issue=030211&total=81>.

Shen, Yansheng. 2004. *Zhongguo xiangzhi de huigu yu zhanwang* (Retrospect and Prospect of China's Township Governance) 2003b [cited 24 May 2004]. Available from <http://www.ccrs.org.cn/NEWSgl/ReadNews.asp?NewsID=2741>.

Shen, Yansheng. 2006. *Cunzheng Chuyi* (On Village Government) 2004 [cited 5 July 2006]. Available from http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/webmanager/wkfiles/3597_1_paper.doc.

Shi, Tianjian. 1999a. Economic Development and Village Elections in Rural China. *Journal of Contemporary China* 8 (22).

Shi, Tianjian. 1999b. Village Committee Elections in China: Institutional Tactics for Democracy. *World Politics* 51: 385-412.

Silverman, Sydel F. 1965. Patronage and community-nation relationships in central

- Italy. *Ethnology* 4 (2):172-189.
- Silverman, Sydel F. 1967. The Community-Nation Mediator in Traditional Central Italy. In *Peasant Society: A Reader*, edited by J. M. Porter, M. N. Diaz and G. M. Foster. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Song, Yaowu. 2002. *Cunmin zizhi de lilun yu shijian (The theory and practise of villagers' self-government)*. Ji'nan: Shandong daxue chuban she.
- Spiro, Melford E. 1969. Factionalism and Politics in Village Burma. In *Local-Level Politics*, edited by M. J. Swartz. London: University of London Press.
- Tan, Qingshan. 2004. Building institutional rules and procedures: village election in China. *Policy Sciences* 37 (1): 1-22.
- Tan, Qingshan, and Qiushui Xin. 2007. Village Election and Governance: Do Villagers Care? *Journal of Contemporary China* 16 (53).
- Tang, Jinsu. 1992. Woguo cunweihui jianshe zhuangkuang yu zhanwang (Current Conditions and Prospects for Construction of Our Country's Villagers' Committees). *Shehui zhuyi yanjiu (Studies in Socialism)* (6): 38-46.
- Thurston, Anne F. 1998. *Muddling Toward Democracy*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace.
- Tong, Zhihui. 2006. *Nongmin xuanju canyu zhong de jingying dongyuan (Elite mobilization in the process of peasants' electoral participation)* 2003 [cited 12 May 2006]. Available from <http://www.ccrs.org.cn/NEWSgl/ReadNews.asp?NewsID=1783>
- Tsai, Lily Lee 2002. Cadres, temple and lineage institutions, and governance in rural China. *The China Journal* (48): 1-27.
- Unger, Jonathan. 2000. Power, patronage, and Protest in Rural China. In *China briefing 2000: the continuing transformation*, edited by T. White. New York, London: M. E. Sharpe, Inc.
- Unger, Jonathan. 2002. *The Transformation of Rural China*. New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc.

- Wang, Jinhong. 2002. Nongcun cunji zhili de fazhan (Development of Village Level Governance in Countryside). In *Zhongguo jiceng minzhu fazhan baogao: 2000-2001 (Report on Development of China's Grassroots Democracy: 2000-2001)*, edited by F. Li. Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe.
- Wang, Jinhong. 2005. *Fazhan nongcun jiceng minzhu bixu paoqi "lanhan luoji" (To Develop Rural Grassroots Democracy We Must Abandon the "Sluggard Logic")* 2005a [cited 5 February 2005]. Available from <http://www.ccrs.org.cn/ccrs01//NEWSgl/ReadNews.asp?NewsID=10262&BigClassID=1&SmallClassID=1&SpecialID=0>.
- Wang, Rongwu. 1996. Guanli qu ganbu he cun ganbu de hudong guocheng yu xingwei (The interactive process and behavior between administrative region cadres and village cadres). *Shehuixue yanjiu (Sociological Studies)* (3).
- Wang, Shujun. 2007. Qianghua jiandu, shazhu dangzheng jiguan "shechifeng" (Intensifying supervision to put a brake on the "luxurious wind" in Party and governmental institutions). *Renmin ribao (the people's daily)*, 06 June, 5.
- Wang, Xu'en. 2005b. Cunwu gongkai yinggai jianchi xingshi duoyanghua he neirong guifanhua (Village affair publicity should adhere to varied forms and standardized content). *Xiangzhen Luntan (Township Forum)* (265): 19.
- Wang, Xu. 1997. Mutual Empowerment of State and Peasantry: Grassroots Democracy in Rural China. *World Development* 25 (9): 1431-1442.
- Wang, Xu. 2003. *Mutual empowerment of state and peasantry : village self-government in rural China*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- Wang, Zaishui. 2004. Yixiang zuishou qunzhong huanying de hao zhidu: Shandongsheng cunwu gongkai he minzhu guanli zhidu jianshe xunli (The most popular system among the masses: a review of the system of village affair publicity and democratic management of Shandong Province). *Xiangzhen Luntan (Township Forum)* (233): 43-46.
- Wang, Zhengyao. 1998. Village Committees: the Basis for China's Democratization.

- In *Cooperative and Collective in China's Rural Development*, edited by E. B. Vermeer, F. N. Pieke and W. L. Chong. New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- Wang, Zhengyao, and Yihua Bai, eds. 1996. *Xiangzhen zhengquan ji cunweihui jianshe (The construction of the township government and the VCs)*. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe.
- Wang, Zhenyao, and Jisu Tang. 1994. *zhongguo nongcun cunmin weiyuanhui huanjie xuanju zhidu (The election system of villagers' committee in rural China)*. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe.
- White, Tyrene. 1992. Reforming the Countryside. *Current History* 91 (566):273-277.
- Whiting, Susan H. 2001. *Wealth in Rural China: the Political Economy of Institutional Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wilson, Scott. 2002. Face, Norms, and Instrumentality. In *Social Connections in China: Institutions, Culture, and the Changing Nature of Guanxi*, edited by T. Gold, D. Guthrie and D. Wank. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wolf, E. R. 1956. Aspects of group relations in a complex society: Mexico. *Amercian anthropologist* 58 (6): 1065-1078.
- Wu, Guimin. 1995. Zhongguo congcun jiceng minzhu zai gaige zhong fayu chengzhang (Chinese rural grassroots democracy is growing and developing in the course of reform). *Zhongguo shehui bao (Chinese Society)*, 13 July 1995, 3.
- Wu, Licai. 2002. Xiang cun guanxi yu jiceng minzhu. In *Zhongguo jiceng minzhu fazhan baogao 2000-2001 (Report on the development of Chinese grassroots democracy)*, edited by F. Li. Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe.
- Xiang, Jiquan. 2002. Shiji zhi chu de xiangcun minzhu: 2000-2001 niandu zhongguo cunmin zizhi de fazhan (The rural democracy at the beginning of new century: the development of China's villager's self-government during 2000-2001). In *Zhongguo jiceng minzhu fazhan baogao: 2000-2001 (A report on the development of China's grassroots democracy)*, edited by F. Li. Beijing:

Dongfang chubanshe.

- Xiao, Lihui. 2002a. Cunmin zhizhi zai zhongguo de yuanqi he fazhan (The origin and development of villagers' self-government in China). In *Wusheng de geming: cunmin zhixuan de lishi xianshi he weilai (The quiet revolution: the history, reality and future of villagers' direct elections)*, edited by Y. Liu. Xi'an: Xibei daxue chubanshe.
- Xiao, Lihui. 2002b. Cunweihui xuanju de xin fazhan (New development of VC elections). In *Zhongguo jiceng minzhu fazhan baogao: 2000-2001*, edited by L. Fan. Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe.
- Xiao, Lihui. 2006. *Cunmin canyu cunji zhixuan de dongyin kaocha (Investigation on the incentives of villagers' participating direct village elections)* 2003 [cited 12 August 2006]. Available from <http://www.chinaelections.org/NewsInfo.asp?NewsID=16313>.
- Xin, Xiangyang. 1993. Dangdai zhongguo nongcun minzhu lungang (Contemporary Chinese Village Democracy). *Xuexi yu tansuo (Study and Exporation)* (1).
- Xinjia zhen renmin zhengfu (Xinjia Township People's Government). 2003. Xinjia zhen cunji caiwu guifanhua guanli shishi xize (Regulation for standardized management of village level finance of Xinjia Township government), (11/2/2003).
- Xinjiazhen huanjie xuanju gongzuo lingdao xiaozu (Leading Team for Election Work of Xinjia Township). 2002. Xinjiazhen cunji huanjie xuanju xuanchuan tigang (Publicity Outline for VC Elections of Xinjia Township), (10/2002).
- Xinjiazhen renmin zhengfu (Xinjia Township People's Government). 2003. Xinjiazhen cunji caiwu guifanhua guanli shishi xize (Regulation for standardized management of village level finance of Xinjia Township government), (11/2/2003).
- Xu, Fuqun, and Lang Zhou. 2001. Yangjiabo cun "liangwei" guanxi wenti diaocha (An Investigation on the "Two-Committee" Relationship of Yangjiabo

- Village). In *Cunmin zizhi luncong (Forum for Villagers' Self-government)*, edited by Zhang Mingliang. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe.
- Yan, Yunxiang. 1992. The Impact of Rural Reform on Economic and Social Stratification in a Chinese Village. *The Australian Journal of Chinese affairs* (27): 1-23.
- Yan, Yunxiang. 1996a. The Culture of Guanxi in a North China Village. *The China Journal* (35): 1-25.
- Yan, Yunxiang. 1996b. *The Flow of Gifts: Reciprocity and Social Networks in a Chinese Village*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Yang, Liang. 2006. *Xuejie zhuanjia zonglun "quxiao nongye shui" (Academic specialists talk about the "abolishment of agricultural taxes")* 2006 [cited 11 November 2006]. Available from http://www.gmw.cn/01gmrb/2006-03/15/content_388857.htm.
- Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. 1994. *Gifts, favors and banquets: the art of social relationships in China*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Yang, Xuejun, and Xinmin Sun. 1989. Lishun xiang zhengfu yu cunmin weiyuanhui zhijian de guanxi (Rationalize relations between township governments and villagers' committees). In *Shijian yu sikao (Practise and Reflection)*, edited by Zhongguo jiceng zhengquan jianshe yanjiu hui. Shenyang: Liaoning daxue chubanshe.
- Yin, Huansan. 2004. *Cunmin zizhi mianlin de shehui jiaodian wenti touxi (An Analysis on the Social Focused Issues that Villagers' Self-Government Confronts)*. Ji'nan: Shandong renmin chubanshe
- Yin, Robert K. 2003. *Case study research: design and methods*. Third ed. California: Sage Publication.
- Yu, Liedong. 2002. Shengji guanche 'cunweihui zuzhi fa' fagui bijiao yu fenxi (Comparison and Analysis of the Implementation of Organic Law in Provincial Level). In *Zhongguo jiceng minzhu fazhan baogao:2000-2001 (A*

- report on the development of China's grassroots democracy*), edited by L. Fan. Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe.
- Zhang, Hong. 2001. Quxiao cunji zhaodaifei zhong cunzai de wenti ji duice (Problems and solutions in abolishing village level entertainment fees). *Nongcun caiwu kuaiji (Rural finance and accounting)* (9): 23-24.
- Zhang, Letian. 1998. *Gaobie lixiang: renmin gongshe zhidu yanjiu (Say Goodbye to Ideal: Study on People's Common System)*. Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe.
- Zhang, Li. 2003. Cun ganbu liangyue chihe sanwan duo (Village cadres spent more than thirty thousand yuan dining and drinking in two months). *Huashang bao (Chinese business)*, 29 September, 3.
- Zhang, Yong. 2006. Gongwu Jiedaifei naru caizheng yusuan shi diyibu (The first step is to bring the official reception expenditure into government financial budget). *21 shiji jingji baodao (21 century economic report)*, 27 November.
- Zhao, Shukai. 2006. Township-Village Relations: Disconnection in the Midst of Control. *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* 39 (2): 74-93.
- Zhong, Yang. 2000. Village Democracy in China: The Case of Southern Jiangsu Province. In *Taiwan and Mainland China: Democratization, Political Participation and Economic Development in the 1990s*, edited by T. J. Bellows. New York: Center of Asian Studies, St. John's University.
- Zhong, Yang. 2003. *Local government and politics in China*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc.
- Zhonggong Longkou shiwei bangongshi (CCP Longkou County Committee Office). 2004. Guanyu jinyibu wanshan he luoshi nongcun "yixian gongzuo fa" tuijin jinguan gongzuo zhongxin xiayi de shishi yijian (Opinion on further perfecting and implementing "frontline working methods" in countryside and promoting the downwardness of the focus of government work), (12/2/2004).
- Zhonggong Longkou shiwei zuzhibu (Organization Department of CCP Longkou

City Committee). 2002. *Longkoushi cunji guifan hua guanli gongzuo shishi xize* (The detailed implementary rules for village level standardized management job of Longkou County).

zhonggong Longkou shiwei zuzhibu (Organization Department of CCP Longkou Committee). 2006. *Shishi "yixian gongzuofa" quanmian cujin nongcun wending he fazhan* (Carrying out the "frontline working methods" to promote the rural stability and development) 2004 [cited 24 July 2006]. Available from <http://www.lkdj.gov.cn/file/ydaj.htm>

Zhonggong Longkou shiwei; Longkoushi renmin zhengfu (CCP Longkou County Committee and Longkou County People's Government). 2002. *Guanyu jixu kaizhan bumen (danwei) he jiguan ganbu baocun dundian gongzuo de yijian* (The Opinion on Carrying on the Village Guarantee work by Government Departments (Units) and Cadres, (20/3/2002).

Zhonggong Shandong shengwei zhengce yanjiushi (Policy study department of the CCP Shandong Province Committee). 1998. *Shandong sheng nongcun zhidu jianshe qingkuang diaocha* (Investigation on rural institutional construction of Shandong Province). *Dangjian yanjiu* (The Party construction study) (5): 26.

Zhonggong Shandong shengwei; Shandongsheng renmin zhengfu (CCP Shandong Province Committee and People's Government of Shandong Province). 1999. *Guanyu jinyibu jiaqiang he gaijin yi dangzhibu wei hexin de cun ji zuzhi jianshe de yijian* (Suggestion on Further Strengthening and Improving the Construction of Village Level Organization with the VPB as the Core), (19 November 1999).

Zhonggong Xinjia Zhen weiyuanhui (CCP Xinjia Township committee). 1999. *Xinjia zhen di liu jie cunweihui huanjie xuanju gongzuo zongjie* (Work summary for the sixth session of VC elections in Xinjia Township), (26/5/1999).

Zhonggong Xinjia zhen weiyuanhui (CCP Xinjia Township committee). 1999. *Xinjia Zhen di liujie cunmin weiyuanhui huanjie xuanju gongzuo shishi fangan*

(Work Plan for the Sixth Session of VC Elections of Xinjia Township),
Zhonggong xinjiazhen dangwei; Xinjiazhen zhengfu (CCP Xinjia Township
Committee; Xinjia Township Government). 2002. Shenru modi, guangfan
xuanchuan, jingxin zuzhi, yifacaozuo: zhashi gaohao cunweihui huanjie
xuanju shidian gongzuo (Finding out the Real Situation, Propagating broadly,
Organizing Carefully and Operating According to Law: to Make a Good Pilot
Work of VC Elections),

zhonggong xinjiazhen dangwei; Xinjiazhen zhengfu (CCP Xinjia Township
Committee; Xinjia Township government). 2004. Guanyu cunji 10 xiang
zhongda qingshi baogao shixiang he shiqian baogao, shizhong canyu, shiyou
jiandu luoshi gongzuo chengxu de zanxing guiding (Temporary regulations
on the 10 crucial issues at village level that must ask for intructions and the
working processures of asking for instructions in advance, participating in the
process and overseeing the implementation afterwards), (11/3/2004).

Zhonggong Xinjiazhen dangzheng banggongshi (CCP Xinjia Township Party
Committee Office). 2002. Xinjiazhen zhupian baocun gongzuo zanxing
guiding (Contemporary regulations on the work of guaranteeing areas and
villages), (12/2/2002).

Zhonggong Xinjiazhen weiyuanhui (CCP Xinjia Township committee). 2001.
Xinjiazhen di qijie cunmin weiyuanhui huanjie xuanju gongzuo shishi fang'an
(Work Plan for the Seventh Session of VC Elections of Xinjia Township),
(28/12/2001).

Zhonggong Xinjiazhen weiyuanhui(CCP Xinjia Township committee). 1999. Xinjia
Zhen di liujie cunmin weiyuanhui huanjie xuanju gongzuo shishi fang'an
(Work Plan for the Sixth Session of VC Elections of Xinjia Township),

Zhonggong xinjiazhen weiyuanhui; Xinjiazhen zhengfu (CCP Xinjia Township
Committee; Xinjia Township Government). 2002. Shenru modi, guangfan
xuanchuan, jingxin zuzhi, yifacaozuo: zhashi gaohao cunweihui huanjie

xuanju shidian gongzuo (Finding out the Real Situation, Propagating broadly, Organizing Carefully and Operating According to Law: to Make a Good Pilot Work of VC Elections),

Zhonggong zhongyang (CCP Central Committee). 1994. Guanyu jiaqiang nongcun jiceng zuzhi jianshe de tongzhi (Circular on Strengthening the Organizational Construction at Rural Grassroots Level (5/11/1994)).

Zhonggong Zhongyang bangongting; Guowuyuan bangongting (CCP Central Committee Office; State Department Office). 2002. Guanyu jinyibu zuohao cunmin weiyuanhui huanjie xuanju gongzuo de tongzhi (Notice on further doing a good job in the next round of VC elections), (14/07/2002).

Zhonggong zhongyang bangongting; Guowuyuan bangongting (CCP Central Committee Office; State Department Office). 2004. Guanyu jianquan he wanshang cunwu gongkai he minzhu guanli zhidu de yijian (Opinion on ameliorating the system of village affair publicity and democratic management),

Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guojia tongjiju (National Statistics Bureau of the People's Republic of China). 2006. *Zhonghua renmin gonghezuo 2004 nian guomin jingji he shehui fazhan tongji gongbao (Statistical Report for the 2004 National Economy and Social Development of the People's Republic of China)* 2005 [cited 18 September 2006]. Available from http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjgb/ndtjgb/qgndtjgb/t20050228_402231854.htm.

Zhonghua renmin gongheguo minzheng bu (Ministry of Civil Affairs of the PRC). 1994. Quanguo nongcun cunmin zizhi shifan huodong zhidao gangyao (Guidelines for Villagers' Self-Government Activities throughout the Country), (28/2/1994).

Zhonghua renmin gongheguo minzhengbu (Ministry of Civil Affairs of the PRC). 1990. Guanyu zai quanguo nongcun kaizhan cunmin zizhi shifan guodong de tongzhi (Circular on Launching Demonstration of Villagers Self-Government

Nationwide), (26/9/1990).

Zhu, Ling. 2004. *Huicun jishi: caogen minzhu yu qianguize de boyi* (Narrative of Hui Village: the game between grassroots democracy and informal rules).

Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe.

Zweig, David. 1989. *Agrarian Radicalism in China, 1968-1981*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Zweig, David, and Chung Siu Fung. 2007. Elections, Democratic Values, and Economic Development in Rural China. *Journal of Contemporary China* 16 (50): 25-45.