

# CONSENSUAL ELECTIONS IN RURAL CHINA

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## ABSTRACT

In China's village elections, elected village cadres tend to provide public goods where voters have reached a pre-electoral consensus on whom to vote. Despite official enforcement of electoral contestation, a pattern of "consensual elections" has emerged in the Chinese countryside, as villagers have reached a consensus on certain competent candidates before the election, the candidates are elected in a non-competitive election, and voters nevertheless feel satisfied with their representatives. In the meantime, in the villages that have failed to reach a pre-electoral consensus, elections are often competitive and corrupt. Why do consensual elections emerge in rural China—but not in other contexts? Under what conditions is the consensus on competent candidates reached—and when do the villagers fail to reach such a consensus?

**KEY WORDS:** grassroots elections; rural politics; electoral corruption; democratic institutions in authoritarian regimes

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From the perspective of good governance—such as the provision of public goods—a competitive election is considered better than a non-competitive election. Competition will bring uncertainty of an electoral result. Each candidate, who assumes that she may have a chance to win, should outline her policy positions in a campaign to sway voters and win the election. Moreover, if the candidate is elected, then she will have an incentive to deliver on her proposed policies or to represent her constituents’ interests, because she will not be re-elected in a subsequent election if she fails to do so. In this way, electoral competition creates an incentive for each candidate to campaign. More importantly, elected leaders will be held accountable to the electorate through campaigning, because they are forced to make policy pledges during the campaign and will be sanctioned in future elections if they do not follow the pledges after elected.

The topic of village elections in China has acquired special attention in light of the limited political reforms introduced during the last three decades of the post-Mao era.<sup>1</sup> In 1980, 85 peasant households in Hezhai Village, Guangxi Province, participated in a landmark event: the first popular election for a Villagers’ Committee (VC) in China.<sup>2</sup> China’s authoritarian regime has since institutionalized the elections for VC members by establishing the Organic Law of Villagers’ Committees (hereafter the Organic Law) in 1987 and revising it in 1998. Article 14 of the revised Organic Law specified that each election ought to be *contested*. A contested election is one in which the number of candidates exceeds the seats available. However, contested elections are not always *competitive*. A competitive election is one in which the race between candidates is so close that one cannot easily predict who will win.

China’s authoritarian regime has hoped that the introduction and institutionalization of village elections will improve local governance by disciplining local officials and preventing massive

rural unrest.<sup>3</sup> Some empirical findings suggest the positive effects for which the regime has hoped: villages with elected cadres are more likely to have cadres that understand popular preferences;<sup>4</sup> elected cadres tend to be a “bridge” between non-elected officials and ordinary people;<sup>5</sup> and the implementation of village elections has arguably reduced the likelihood of mass uprisings.<sup>6</sup>

More than two decades ago, Gary W. Cox pointed to the importance of the size of the voting population. He suggested that elections with small electorates would more likely be corrupt because the constituencies would vote based on personal patronage, rather than on policy proposals, finding that before the early nineteenth century there had been “a sizable personal vote in the constituencies” in the British Parliamentary elections and the “politics of avoiding or of winning a contest often involved reliance on influence, patronage, and bribery.”<sup>7</sup> However, he argued, more and more candidates started stressing policy in their electoral campaigns in the mid-nineteenth century, when they had to appeal to the larger electorate along with the extension of the suffrage. Although Alexis de Tocqueville praised grassroots elections as deserving principal credit for the effective democratic government of America in the early nineteenth century,<sup>8</sup> studies of electoral corruption have found that the constituencies in elections with small-sized electorates tend to vote based on personal patronage and hence grassroots elections are prone to corruption. For example, Miriam A. Golden finds that there were institutional incentives in postwar Italy for the candidates to search for personal votes, which resulted in extensive political corruption and ineffective democratic government.<sup>9</sup>

This article argues that during official enforcement of electoral contestation, a pattern of “consensual elections” has emerged in rural China, as villagers have reached a consensus on certain competent candidates before the election, the candidates are elected in a non-competitive

election, and voters nevertheless feel satisfied with their representatives. In the meantime, in the villages that have failed to reach a pre-electoral consensus, elections are often competitive and corrupt. Why do consensual elections emerge? Under what conditions is the consensus on competent candidates reached—and when do the villagers fail to reach such a consensus?

A contested village election will be consensual if the village has the elite with the intention of serving the whole village. This article discusses three types of elites in rural China: political, economic, and social. They are respectively members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), entrepreneurs in rural industry, and leaders of kinship groups. They have an ability to provide public goods based on the resources they have: i.e., political authorities, economic resources, and social networks. Due to the resources, their commitment to the provision of public goods would be credible if they have intention to serve the whole village. In a small community like a Chinese village, residents can see who have intention to serve their village.

Consensual elections have emerged because of the small size of the electorate and the unique characteristics of the grassroots community. A Chinese village is so small a community that all the villagers know each other in person as they interact on a daily basis. The fact that candidates and voters know each other in person highlights a significant difference in grassroots elections from other elections with large constituencies. In an election with a large electorate, candidates will have an incentive to outline their policy positions in their campaigns to sway voters and win the election. Since it is hard for both candidates and voters to acquire personal information about each other, policy proposals that candidates state in their campaigns may change voters' information about the candidates. However, this mechanism does not work if candidates and voters know each other in person. Since it is easy for both candidates and voters to acquire personal information about each other, policy proposals that candidates state in their campaigns

will not change voters' information about the candidates. In contrast, reaching a consensus on electing certain competent candidates will be easy among the small-sized constituency. At the same time, if the constituency fails to reach a pre-electoral consensus, the elections will be prone to corruption. As the villagers interact with each other on a daily basis, it is easy for each candidate to figure out what private goods each voter wants. Thus, candidates can promise their favorite voters that they will provide these voters with private goods that will exclusively benefit them, instead of promising the whole constituency the provision of public goods that will benefit a larger group of the voters or the whole electorate.

In this article, the concept of consensual elections is derived from research in the Chinese countryside. The next three sections introduce examples of village elections in China, which illuminate unique features of grassroots elections. They show how the emergence of consensual elections may account for the pattern of the provision of, or failure to provide, public goods by VCs. Political, economic, and social elites in the villages affect abilities and incentives of the VCs to provide public goods in different ways through consensual elections. Moreover, exploring consensual elections may imply important insights on how differences in the level of economic development across villages impact these abilities and incentives for the provision of public goods. The incidents examined in these sections show that if the village has elites on whom voters can reach a consensus for their competent leadership, the village election will not be competitive but public goods will be provided. Note that this article does not claim that village elites always intend to serve as village leaders or provide public goods. Indeed, there are many cases where village cadres are corrupt,<sup>10</sup> where entrepreneurs are apathetic about village politics,<sup>11</sup> or where kinship leaders do not serve for the whole village but for their own kinship group.<sup>12</sup> However, this article argues that village elites will be in an advantageous position to

convince villagers of their competence in providing public goods *if* they profess to be interested in making a commitment to providing public goods. The last three sections explore the implications of consensual elections for the emergence of democracy in China, and conclude with discussions about the significance of this article's analysis in a comparative perspective.

### **Consensual Elections and Political Elites**

In addition to the VC, whose members are elected popularly, every Chinese village has another organization vested with the authority to make policy decisions: the Village Party Branch (VPB). The VC has three to seven seats while the VPB has three to five seats, but members may concurrently hold positions on both the VC and the VPB. The VPB members are not popularly elected but selected by the Party Assembly of the village. That is, they are either elected by the village's Party members or appointed by the Township Party Committee, the Party organization ranked one step up the hierarchy from the VPB. Even though VPB members are in principle *elected* by Party members, most of them are in practice *appointed* by the Township Party Committee, and Party members in a village do not have many real choices.

The VPB is generally more powerful than the VC though the Organic Law stipulates that the VC is the village's highest decision-making organization.<sup>13</sup> The legal basis of this distribution of power between the VPB and the VC is controversial Article 3 of the revised Organic Law, which affirms that the VPB should be the "leadership core" in the village.<sup>14</sup> However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to "lead" village politics without "meddling" in politics. Thus, in reality Article 3 gives the VPB room to meddle in the administration of the VC. Moreover, the VPB is in an advantageous position over the VC since the township government backs up the VPB through the Party hierarchy.

One of the important institutional features of China's village elections is that candidates do not run by themselves, but are nominated by villagers, village cadres (especially VPB members), or township cadres.<sup>15</sup> The rule of allowing villagers to nominate candidates is considered important to prevent Party officials from intervening in electoral results. However, John James Kennedy observes that in the 34 villages of Shaanxi province he studied, villagers tend to be satisfied with electoral processes and results when the VPB nominates candidates.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, the VPB sometimes nominates and supports non-Party members. Kennedy suggests: "Village party secretaries are a diverse lot, and many are indeed accountable to the villagers, though it may only be indirectly through candidate nominations."<sup>17</sup> To cite an example from the author's field interviews, in S Village, a wealthy industrialized village in Guangdong Province, the VPB supported incumbent Mr. Ye in the 2002 election, testifying his ability to promote industrialization of the village even though he was not a Party member.<sup>18</sup> This observation is puzzling, because VPB members are not popularly elected and they do not always have an incentive to nominate the candidates that the villagers would nominate or support.

Institutional features of China's village elections also allow VPB members themselves to become candidates in a village election. VPB members may become strong candidates when they run. They enjoy the position in which they can easily show the villagers their competence in providing public goods. For example, when interviewing VC chief of D Village in Hebei Province, who was elected in the last election, the author asked: "How was the last election for you? How did you appeal to villagers during the election?" He answered: "I did nothing during the last election. I felt that I did not have to be VC chief as I had already been Village Party Secretary [the VPB's leader]. But villagers nominated me for candidacy and I was elected."<sup>19</sup> His answer was puzzling because the candidate would usually lose the election if he does

nothing during an electoral campaign. However, according to two villagers in D Village, villagers were satisfied with his job when he was Village Party Secretary, and thus they had no reason to nominate someone else as a candidate for VC chief.<sup>20</sup>

The concept of consensual elections may suggest the following explanation to these observations. Suppose that the Village Party Secretary has an intention to serve the whole village. Then, the Village Party Secretary will have a strong incentive to nominate a candidate who has the ability and intention to provide public goods. An election will not be competitive but consensual because villagers can reach a pre-electoral consensus on electing the VPB-nominated candidate. Moreover, villagers will be satisfied with the electoral process and result since they know that the VPB-nominated candidate has the ability and intention to provide public goods.

A key aspect of this scenario is that the village already has a Village Party Secretary with the intention of serving the whole village. As long as the Village Party Secretary has such an intention, it is not difficult for the Village Party Secretary to find a competent leader and for villagers to know that the candidate has the intention and ability to provide public goods in a community where residents have daily interactions with each other. As a result, we would observe that the village has a consensual election and the elected VC provides public goods.

However, the VPB does not always nominate a competent candidate. If VPB cadres are corrupt, they will nominate their company for a village election. If villager-nominated candidates beat VPB-nominated candidates, VPB cadres will start to weaken the elected VC members' authority. Often the township government backs up the VPB's attempt since township officials also benefit from the VPB's corrupt practice. For example, in W Village of Shandong Province, after the Village Party Secretary was defeated in the 2002 election, the township

government declared that the VPB should be in charge of all the administrative responsibilities and the VC should simply follow the VPB's decisions. Then, the VPB cadres ignored the interests of the majority of villagers and made the decisions in favor of those with whom they have special personal relations when they decided on land expropriation—an issue in which villagers have high stakes.<sup>21</sup>

The example of W Village implies limitations of China's village elections for holding cadres and officials accountable to the electorate. The comparison of W Village with other cases discussed in this section suggests that the elected VC will provide public goods if and only if VPB cadres have intention to serve the whole village. It suggests that electoral contestation itself will not give cadres and officials an additional incentive to provide public goods. If the VPB cadres consider the whole village's interests, they will nominate a candidate capable of providing public goods and villagers will reach a pre-electoral consensus on electing the VPB-nominated candidate. However, if VPB cadres' interests are in conflict with elected VC members' interests, villagers cannot reach a consensus on electing the VPB-nominated candidate. Even if the villagers reach a consensus on electing someone other than the VPB-nominated candidate, there will be no way for villagers to check the abuse of power by village cadres since the VPB is a more powerful organization than the VC. Such village elections neither help the villagers monitor the VPB nor contain the village cadres' corruption.

### **Consensual Elections and Economic Elites**

In many industrialized wealthy villages, often located in the coastal regions, entrepreneurs have become VC chief through a village election *and* Village Party Secretary when they obtain membership of the Party.<sup>22</sup> Lang Youxing introduces two sayings, which one may often hear

now: “no one will listen to you if you are poor even if you are elected” and “if you don’t have money, you will not be elected.”<sup>23</sup> The elections that elect entrepreneurs to be VC members are often consensual. Villagers see entrepreneurs’ success in business and expect them to use their wealth to provide public goods. Entrepreneurs’ wealth makes their commitment to the provision of public goods credible.

There are many examples where entrepreneurs are elected to be VC members through consensual elections, public goods are provided, and villagers are satisfied with processes and results of elections. For example, in the 2002 election of H Village in Zhejiang Province, Mr. Yu promised to contribute 100,000 *yuan* out of his own pocket to spend 80,000 *yuan* on cleaning the village and 20,000 *yuan* on a donation to the village’s senior association.<sup>24</sup> In another example from the 2002 village elections of Zhejiang, in YJ Village Mr. Yang promised to spend 100,000 *yuan* out of his own pocket on remittance of the agricultural tax to the township government, so that villagers would not have to pay the agricultural tax, and donate his three-year salary to the village’s senior association.<sup>25</sup>

For another example, in F Village of Zhejiang Province, a wealthy village with a per capita income of 6,000 *yuan* in 2001, no one ran against incumbent Mr. Zhou in the 2002 election.<sup>26</sup> If competition is the criterion for success of an election, this election was a failure. However, if the criterion for a successful election is whether or not the elected VC chief provides public goods—or more generally is committed to good governance—this election was successful. Mr. Zhou was a successful entrepreneur and served as a VC member for more than twenty years. Villagers knew how he worked as a village cadre and more importantly, they knew that he had sufficient financial resources to provide public goods.

In Chinese villages, those who are thought to be competent at promoting local economic development and making economic decisions are called “competent leader” (*nengren*). Mr. Zhou is a competent leader in F Village. During the imperial period, Chinese villages had competent unofficial leaders, called rural gentry, who interpreted emperor’s policies in a way that would benefit the villagers.<sup>27</sup> In the present Chinese villages, successful entrepreneurs often play a similar role to what the rural gentry played during the imperial period.

For another example of an entrepreneur being a village’s competent leader, in G Village of Zhejiang province, villagers elected Mr. Shi, a then 36-year-old entrepreneur managing a successful apparel factory, to be VC chief in 1995. Originally, G Village was not as wealthy as surrounding affluent villages because of its unfavorable geographic conditions. However, since Mr. Shi became VC chief, he used his entrepreneurial talent to provide public goods. First, the village invested in infrastructure for attracting factories to the village and produced a lot of employment opportunities for villagers. Then, those factories paid corporate taxes to the village, so the village office had sufficient revenue for the provision of public goods. Now G Village is one of the wealthiest villages in Zhejiang, which is the province with the highest rural per capita income in the nation.<sup>28</sup>

Apparently, in industrialized villages the presence of an entrepreneur can start a virtuous cycle for providing public goods while elections are not competitive but consensual. Successful entrepreneurs may bring prosperity to the village by using their own wealth to provide public goods.<sup>29</sup> Once entrepreneurs have the intention of being a competent leader for the whole village, an election will be consensual because the entrepreneurs are attractive candidates for the voters of the whole electorate, and the public goods will be provided in the village. However, one should note that entrepreneurs do not always have a strong desire to seek office in rich

villages. Lily L. Tsai finds that entrepreneurs of rural industries in rich villages often think that being a village cadre for one or two terms would be good for building and developing connections, but after extending social networks the opportunity costs of serving as a village cadre would be too high to their business.<sup>30</sup> Thus, their best strategy would typically be to step down after one or two terms. In other words, entrepreneurs would have a stronger incentive to get elected to office for the first term but a weaker incentive to stay in office.

In agricultural villages, which usually do not have an entrepreneur, in contrast, villagers cannot find candidates attractive for the whole electorate, and hence an election will not be consensual but competitive. While a village will not have sufficient financial resources to provide public goods for the whole village, incumbent village cadres will have an incentive to distribute the village's scarce financial resources to their favorite group of villagers. Then, candidates in a competitive election will compete for buying votes. Moreover, even when villagers elect someone clean to be VC chief, to curb the existing corruption, if incumbent VPB cadres are corrupt, the elected VC chief will not be powerful enough to check the VPB cadres' corruption. Often elected VC members give up holding them accountable to the electorate and join the corrupt practice of the non-elected VPB members. For example, in C Village, a poor village of Inner Mongolia Province, though the elected VC chief promised to reveal the Village Party Secretary's embezzlement, he started enjoying the benefit from his embezzlement after he had been elected.<sup>31</sup>

The comparison of industrialized villages and agricultural villages suggests an explanation on how the difference in economic levels may influence the relationship between the VC and the VPB. Though the VPB is generally more powerful than the VC, there are a few exceptional cases where the elected VC appears more influential on the village's decision making process

than the VPB. For example, Guo Zhenglin and Thomas P. Bernstein find that in the villages of Guangdong Province, elected VC members have often been more influential than VPB members.<sup>32</sup> As discussed above, villagers have good reasons to elect economic elites to be VC cadres in rich villages. Then, non-elected Party cadres are likely to agree with the elected economic elite on village administration since the VC and the VPB share the common goal of local economic development. Thus, even in the cases where VC members seem influential on decision making, it does not imply that VPB members' preferences are disregarded in the decision making. This explanation conforms to the fact that Guo and Bernstein's cases are all from Guangdong, one of the richest provinces in China. Overall, benevolent elite governance by a competent leader such as an entrepreneur tends to emerge through a consensual election in wealthy industrialized villages, while corrupt competitive elections tend to occur in poor agricultural villages that do not have entrepreneurs.

### **Consensual Elections and Social Elites**

Kinship (*zongzu*) is an important element in people's daily lives, society, and politics in the Chinese countryside.<sup>33</sup> Previous studies have found that kinship groups in a village are often in conflict with each other, and hence villages with multiple kinship groups tend to have worse performance of village governance. For example, Tsai finds that villages with multiple lineage groups are less likely to provide public goods than villages with a single lineage group.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, competitive village elections often worsen the conflict between kinship groups. For example, Kennedy observes that villagers are less likely to be satisfied with the electoral process in multi-surname villages than in single-surname villages.<sup>35</sup> However, Xiao Tangbiao argues that in the 40 villages of Jiangxi Province he and his colleagues studied, kinship politics might

have a positive impact on the process of village elections.<sup>36</sup> Among the 40 villages, 25 observed the influence of kinship politics in the 1999 elections. Of those elections, he concludes, kinship politics had positive effects on the election in 18 villages, negative effects in 23 villages, and both positive and negative effects in 16 villages.

Even though villagers tend to be dissatisfied with the electoral process in multi-kinship villages, they are satisfied with the electoral process in at least some of the multi-kinship villages. In other words, there is *variation* in the degree of satisfaction that villagers have with the electoral process among multi-kinship villages while there is a *tendency* for a negative relationship between the multiplicity of kinship groups and the villagers' satisfaction with the electoral process. How is this variation related to consensual village elections?

In some villages elections have indeed exacerbated kinship rivalries.<sup>37</sup> For example, in one of the villages that Kennedy studied in Shaanxi Province, there was a long history of conflict between two major kinship groups, but the balance of power was maintained by assigning Village Party Secretary for one group and VC chief for the other group. However, in the first contested election, each group nominated a candidate as their representative, the election was intensely competitive, and the candidate from the same group as Village Party Secretary won the election. The elected VC chief used his status to enrich his own group and members of the other group were dissatisfied with the electoral process and outcome.<sup>38</sup> Kennedy concludes: "In northern China...multi-surname villages are more prevalent, and large lineage organizations within the village may attempt to use the elections to secure greater gains for their groups."<sup>39</sup>

In some other villages, however, kinship politics have had positive effects on elections. For example, in Y Village of Jiangxi Province, like the above discussed village, the balance of power was maintained by assigning Village Party Secretary to one kinship group and VC chief for the

other group before the first contested election in 1999. In the 1999 election, just as the election of the above discussed village, each group nominated candidate, the election was intensely competitive, and the candidate from the same group as Village Party Secretary won the election. However, the process after this was different in Y Village. Concerned that the electoral result might create a monopoly of power by a certain kinship group, Party Secretary of B Township, which Y Village belongs to, intervened in the electoral process. After discussing the matter with village cadres and kinship leaders, the Township Party Secretary decided to hold the election again, referring to the fact that the winner did not have a majority if invalid ballots were included. The reelection was scheduled for four days later and kinship leaders vigorously discussed this issue. The kinship leaders agreed that VC chief should be from the kinship group other than Village Party Secretary's, so that the balance of power between kinship groups would be maintained. They persuaded members of their kinship groups to vote for the candidate they agreed to elect. Thus, the reelection was not intensely competitive but consensual, a candidate from the group other than the Village Party Secretary's was elected, and villagers were satisfied with the electoral result.<sup>40</sup>

Various case studies suggest that a kinship leaders' agreement makes an election consensual and yet has positive effects on the electoral result. For example, Qiu Xinyou et al. claim that in Z Village of Jiangxi Province, Village Party Secretary and the kinship leaders carefully manipulated the electoral process to ensure that a competent leader would be elected.<sup>41</sup> Though this showed collusion among the elites and the election was consensual, the village had a competent leader as VC chief as a result of the election. In other two cases from Jiangxi, villagers identified those who would have an ability to provide public goods through their

observations of intra-kinship politics; and then, through discussions among kinship leaders, villagers reached a consensus about who would be suitable for the village leadership.<sup>42</sup>

The cases discussed here suggest that if kinship leaders are in conflict, an election tends to be competitive and corrupt, and public goods will not be provided. Conversely, if relations between kinship leaders are cooperative, an election tends to be consensual and clean, and public goods will be provided.

### **Consensual Elections and the Prospects for China's Democracy**

The previous sections suggest that China's contested village election will become consensual or corrupt depending on whether the village has the elites that have intention and ability to serve the whole village's interests. In a village community where voters and candidates know each other, if the village has a competent leader, either the elites will reach a consensus on her leadership and the whole villagers will follow the consensus, or the elites themselves will exercise the leadership in providing public goods. At the same time, under the condition that voters and candidates interact with each other frequently in their daily lives, the cost of buying votes is low, and if the village does not have a competent leader on whom the elites and the villagers could reach a consensus, electoral contestation will make the election competitive and provide a strong incentive for candidates to provide private goods to particular groups in the village.

This argument on consensual grassroots elections has important implications for the debates about the prospects for China's democratization. Though China's village elections are elections in the authoritarian regime, they have certain democratic features and many scholars and western non-governmental organizations have expected village elections to lead to democratization of the

whole nation.<sup>43</sup> However, studies have also found that since the institution of village elections is implemented under the authoritarian regime, non-elected Party officials exert influence over the elections. The implementation of village elections “often involves a struggle between villagers who demand improved accountability and township leaders who, initially at least, refuse to cede their authority to appoint village cadres.”<sup>44</sup> Moreover, non-elected Party officials at the township and county levels have many opportunities to take a strategy of “feigned compliance to resist holding village elections.”<sup>45</sup>

In nineteenth-century Britain, Cox argues, the extension of the suffrage changed candidates’ behavior in the parliamentary elections from searching for personal votes to stressing policy in their campaigns.<sup>46</sup> Up to this point, this article has dealt with the village elections in which the electorate is small enough for voters to know candidates personally. From the argument in the previous section that contested elections would be consensual or corrupt due to the small-sized electorates, one might infer that if each electorate is larger, contested elections will be competitive and candidates will campaign for their policy positions to appeal to broader sectors of the electorate. The expansion of elections to the township level may introduce to the Chinese political system elections in which policy based campaigning may determine a winner of an election.

Quite a few scholars have argued for introducing direct elections to the township level.<sup>47</sup> They have argued that township elections will mark an important step forward since voters will be able to directly elect cares of an *official* local government.<sup>48</sup> For the importance of the township level, Joseph Y. S. Cheng says:

After all, village committees are only grassroots autonomous organizations in the rural areas, whereas town and township governments execute policies from above, and are

responsible for the implementation of the economic plans and programs from the higher levels of government. They have their own budgets, and are in a position to impose various kinds of levies. In most cases, they also own and manage a number of enterprises whose profits and losses have a significant impact on the social services available at the town/township level.<sup>49</sup>

One of the biggest differences between village elections and township elections would be the significance of campaigning. Unlike in village elections, where the assumption that campaigning does not change the probability of winning an election is plausible, in township elections campaigning might change the probability of winning an election since it would be necessary to familiarize voters with the candidates.

A township is too big—with a population of 10,000-50,000—for all the voters to know the candidates personally. Township governments are one level above villages and the lowest level in the official hierarchy of the Chinese government. In 2003, there were 38,000 townships, and on average each township had about 26,000 residents and 18 villages.<sup>50</sup> If elections are introduced at the township level, it will be hard for voters to have personal information about candidates, and hence candidates will have an incentive to stress policy while voters may vote based on the candidates' proposed policies. Moreover, township governance is more complicated than village governance. Issues such as how to expend township revenue cannot be solved by reaching a consensus of the whole township, but they will be issues in electoral campaigns. Once candidates need to campaign to appeal to broader sectors of the electorate, they will need to organize for campaigning.

Experiments of electing a township head have already been carried out in some townships such as Buyun (in 1998 and 2001) and Nancheng (1998) in Sichuan Province, Dapeng (1999) in

Guangdong, and Yangji (2002) in Hubei.<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, once candidates were given opportunities to debate, they indeed formed organizations in Buyun Township: “Public debate was held in each of the ten villages and the township seat. Additional debates were held in the town seat on two country fair days. Furthermore, candidates not only had the opportunity to debate one another, they were also allowed to have their own ‘think tanks’ and ‘campaign teams,’ who helped design campaign tactics and mobilize votes.”<sup>52</sup> In contrast, Lianjiang Li suggests, the Nancheng Township election was not as successful as the Buyun Township election because candidates “had only one chance to speak to a small fraction of voters” in Nancheng.<sup>53</sup> In other words, the contested election in Buyun Township is not consensual but competitive and the candidates organized for campaigning in the competitive election.

The CCP leadership’s reactions to these elections have been mixed. Peng Zhen, then chair of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee, in 1987 expressed his support for extending village elections to the township and county levels.<sup>54</sup> In 1997, then President Jiang Zemin seemingly encouraged the extension of direct and democratic elections at the grassroots level; however, he later expressed his opposition to direct elections for township leaders in 2001.<sup>55</sup> Conversely, then Premier Zhu Rongji in 2000 said that he would like to see direct elections extended to higher levels as soon as possible.<sup>56</sup> Proponents of direct township elections have since then often quoted Zhu’s remark. The same split exists among intellectuals. Opponents caution that direct township elections are not in accordance with the Constitution or relevant laws—which stipulates the Party’s dictatorship—unless additional legal changes are made.<sup>57</sup> In contrast, proponents argue that the direct township elections are in accordance with the Constitution and the Party’s principle announced in Jiang’s remark at the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1997.<sup>58</sup>

Even if direct elections are introduced at the township level, the problem of how to hold non-elected Party cadres accountable to the villagers will never be solved. At the township level, non-elected Party Secretary or other members of the Party Committee are able to overturn decisions made by Township Chief. This problem will not be solved unless residents are allowed to elect the Township Party Secretary. This raises a big question. Will the CCP allow non-Party members to elect local Party officials? Many Chinese officials and intellectuals have said no to this question, because they rightly acknowledge that the Party is afraid of losing its control if it allows non-Party members to vote for Party cadres.

At the village level—and at the township level for some exceptional cases—the attempts to allow non-Party members to participate in the election for the post of Party Secretary have already started and been called the two-ballot system (*liang-piao zhi* or *liang tui yi xuan*).<sup>59</sup> Though there is variation in detailed procedures, the basic idea is to allow non-Party members to nominate candidates and while restricting voters in the final election into Party members. The central CCP leadership has seemingly supported this custom. For example, Hu Jintao, then Vice President, praised one of these attempts in Fengyang County of Anhui Province in 2000.<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, the two-ballot system to elect Party Secretary of the village level has apparently spread more quickly than the election of township chiefs. One of the earliest cases of the two-ballot system is reported from Daiyudian Village in Shanxi Province in 1991.<sup>61</sup> Then the two-ballot system was spread widely in the whole nation such as Longguang County in Guangdong (in 1998), Handan County in Hebei (1998), Fengyang County in Anhui (1999), Linyi County in Shanxi (1999), Guangshui County in Hubei (2001). Moreover, in some provinces such as Sichuan (1998) and Liaoning (2000), the provincial government even institutionalized the two-ballot system by issuing official documents.<sup>62</sup>

Nearly a decade ago G. Bingham Powell, Jr. pointed out that the conditions for elections to function as instruments of democracy are: (1) voters know who are responsible for making policy; and (2) they can vote these leaders, who are responsible for making policy, out of office.<sup>63</sup> China's village elections under its authoritarian regime satisfy the first condition, as voters know that the non-elected VPB (or Village Party Secretary) is more powerful—and hence responsible for policy making—than the elected VC (or VC chief). However, they do not satisfy the second condition, as the VPB cadres are not exposed to periodic evaluations by voters.

The pattern of consensual elections at the village level raises a different perspective from Powell's point. If all the eligible voters—including non-Party members—are allowed to vote for electing local Party leaders at the township level or above, Party cadres will be held accountable, but more importantly, the CCP's higher authorities may lose the control over local governments. This is arguably the biggest reason the CCP leadership has hesitated to introduce elections to the township level and higher levels, and tried to keep township-level elections at sporadic experiments. Once elections are introduced to the levels where voters and candidates do not know each other personally, candidates will compete and campaign to acquire votes from the wider electorate while forming a political organization for campaigning, which may compete with the local CCP organization. The emergence of a party-like political organization competing with the CCP is the worst scenario for the central leadership. Through contested elections being competitive, not only a candidate from a party-like organization but also a CCP candidate will be held accountable to the local electorate. Once local cadres are more accountable to the local electorate, they will be less accountable to higher authorities or the CCP organization. This will occur even if a CCP candidate is elected. Contested elections with large electorates will require

elected local cadres to effectively represent voters' interests and make it difficult for higher authorities to enforce unpopular policies.

As the initial step for the further extension of local elections, it might be useful to allow non-Party members to vote not only in primary elections—as some township has already introduced as experiment—but in the final election for the township Party Secretary even if candidates for the post are restricted to Party members. Then, under the condition of a larger demographic scale of townships, candidates for the Party Secretary will campaign for their policy positions to win the contested election. And yet, elections will not necessarily lead to an immediate formation of some competing party organization, a scenario that would threaten to undermine the CCP's authority.

Though there are still many objections to this institutional reform, it is important to think about some workable electoral institution in which candidates will have an incentive to campaign for policy positions within the constraints amenable to the CCP's primary goal of maintaining the authoritarian regime. China has already made significant headway in creating such an institution since its inception in Hezhai, Guangxi, in 1980. The question is where and when a contested election that holds candidates accountable for their policies will appear.

### **Grassroots Elections and the Emergence of Democracy in America**

Tocqueville argued that politics at the grassroots level were the foundation of American democracy. When he studied the township politics in New England in the early nineteenth century, the township on average numbered approximately two to three thousand residents.<sup>64</sup> Thus, in terms of the size of the population, the townships in New England in the nineteenth century were similar to the villages in China in the twenty-first century. More importantly, like a

current Chinese village, a New England township was a community wherein residents knew each other personally and interacted on a daily basis with one another. Tocqueville thought that the electoral institution at the township level was the key to understanding democracy in America.

The argument developed in this article shows different features of functions of grassroots elections from Tocqueville's view. In elections at the grassroots level, voters would vote on the basis of the candidate's personal abilities rather than her policy proposals. For example, in *Rhetoric*, Aristotle concluded that people made decisions based on assessments of personal character in democracy in Athenian small city-states, where citizens knew each other very well.<sup>65</sup> In Chinese village elections, voters might succeed in reaching a consensus on the winners of the elections because all the voters know the candidates in person. In the meantime, if voters fail to reach a pre-electoral consensus, grassroots elections might turn to being corrupt. In a small-sized electorate, voters would vote on the basis of personal patronage and candidates could easily figure out what private goods voters demand. In short, in an election with a small-sized electorate, voters could more easily reach a consensus on certain winners while candidates could provide private goods to their patronage voters with lower costs.

If elections with the candidates searching for personal votes are prone to corruption, then why did Tocqueville conclude that democracy at the community level made democracy in the whole nation? The difference of political regimes between the nineteenth century America and the twenty-first century China is the key to answer this question. Many studies have cited Tocqueville as an argument for the importance of social associations against governmental organizations.<sup>66</sup> As Robert T. Gannet, Jr. argues, however, Tocqueville's emphasis was on popular participation in political organizations, not in social organizations.<sup>67</sup> In other words, Tocqueville did not argue the importance of social associations, which "owe their birth and

development only to individual will,” but argued the importance of political associations “created by law under the names of townships, cities, and counties.”<sup>68</sup>

Tocqueville praised democracy in America in comparison to French political institutions: “In France, the tax collector of the state levies the taxes of the commune; in America, the tax collector of the township levies the tax of the state. Thus, among us [the French], the central government lends its agents to the township; in America, the township lends its officials to the government.”<sup>69</sup> In other words, in the nineteenth century America, decisions made by elected township representatives were not overturned by higher authorities; meanwhile, in the twenty-first century China, decisions made by elected VC representatives can be overturned by higher authorities or the village’s Party organization.

In brief, the comparison of China’s village elections in the twenty-first century with America’s township elections in the nineteenth century imply that democracy at the grassroots level does not make democracy work for the whole nation, but the democratic regime of the nation makes grassroots democracy work. The unique characteristics of a village community make it easy for voters to reach a consensus for competent candidates. At the same time, the institution of grassroots elections is prone to corruption because the cost of providing private goods is low in an election of a small community. For grassroots democracy to work, it is necessary for the electoral institution to be embedded in a large scale democratic regime where diverse interests can act as effective checks and balances.

## **Conclusion**

The politics of authoritarian rule have been overwhelmingly understudied, compared with the politics of democratic rule, though most human beings have lived under authoritarian regimes for

most of human history.<sup>70</sup> However, the literature on the politics of non-democracies has been growing recently.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, this set of research has departed from the traditional assumption that dictatorship is a political regime in which a single dictator rules without external constraint or influence. Recent studies focus on institutions typically associated with democracy, such as elections and legislatures, but frequently established in dictatorships. The analysis of this article fits into this growing body of literature concerned with democratic institutions in non-democratic regimes.

The concept of consensual elections highlights the phenomenon that in a small community under conditions of perfect information, electoral contestation does not give candidates an incentive to provide public goods to the whole electorate but creates an incentive to promise favorable treatment to only a subset of the electorate—in other words, giving an incentive to provide private goods. However, if the electorate has a competent leader, voters can reach a consensus on voting for the competent leader. In other words, the electoral institution introduced to Chinese villages has given an opportunity for well-intended competent leaders to serve the whole village following a pre-electoral consensus among voters.

The cases of village elections this article has examined show the following pattern. In the villages where the consensus by elites for good candidates exists, contested elections will not be competitive but consensual, and elected leaders will provide public goods. Party members, rural entrepreneurs, or kinship leaders are potential candidates for competent leaders in Chinese villages. Though these elites do not always have an intention to serve the villagers, *if* they have such an intention, the village will have a consensus on the village leadership and the elites will exercise their political, economic, and social ability to provide public goods.

The concept of consensual elections also helps give a consistent explanation on the optimistic and pessimistic views of China's village elections drawn from the previous case studies. The optimistic views suggest that village elections support elected cadres' legitimacy and strengthen the state's authority and capacity. Meanwhile, the pessimistic views suggest that village elections are not useful for villagers to vote incompetent, and often corrupt, candidates out of office. In a sense, the argument presented in this article sits in between these optimistic and pessimistic views, though it is closer to the pessimistic ones. The optimistic scenarios are often observed in the villages with competent leaders. In this kind of villages, villagers can easily reach a consensus on who should be elected, the contested elections are not competitive but consensual, the electoral institution gives political legitimacy to the elected cadres, public goods are provided, and villagers are satisfied with the electoral process and result. In contrast, the pessimistic scenarios are often observed in the villages without competent leaders. In this kind of villages, it is difficult for villagers to reach a consensus on who should be elected, the contested elections are not consensual but competitive, the electoral institution gives candidates a strong incentive to compete for distributing scarce economic resources to their favorite groups, competition for providing private goods occurs, and villagers are dissatisfied with the electoral process and result.

The CCP leadership and central officials often claim that elections should be introduced first to the village level where residents are familiar with the cadres and the politics because of their belief that voters should have a lot of information to make the right choice through an electoral institution. The founders of the American republic, and many of their contemporaries, shared this belief as well. For example, James Madison argued that people should have the "virtue and intelligence to select men of virtue and wisdom."<sup>72</sup> The argument of this article disagrees with

this claim. If voters and candidates have perfect information about each other, electoral contestation will negatively affect electoral outcomes unless voters have reached a pre-electoral consensus on the competent leadership. Under the condition of perfect information, candidates may easily find what private goods they should provide to each voter to buy their votes.

In contrast to the claim of perfect political information by the CCP leadership, studies of elections in democracy have found that voters make reasonable decisions even though people have very little information about politics.<sup>73</sup> This set of literature argues that voters make decisions on voting by trusting experts' statements, accepting consensus judgments, or connecting available information, but without systematically processing all the available information in making their judgments. In short, voters vote *as if* they were well informed based on limited information that is sufficient for them to vote rationally.

The argument in this article has an important implication for the empirical research that evaluates village elections in China and other grassroots elections in the world. One of the promises of democratic institutions, such as elections, is that it makes governments more responsive to public interests. Many of the empirical studies on China's village elections have positive evaluations when the contested election is competitive and negative evaluations when the election is not competitive. However, the argument in this article brings a different perspective on the evaluations of grassroots elections such as China's village elections. The concept of consensual elections helps explain the empirical observation that village cadres who provide public goods are often elected by consensual elections while those who are elected by competitive elections often provide private goods. At least the cases examined in this article suggest that competition is not a good criterion for evaluating the quality of elections if one

believes that successful elections make elected cadres serve the whole electorate by providing public goods.

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<sup>1</sup> For the most comprehensive empirical analysis on China's village elections, see Baogang He, *Rural Democracy in China: The Role of Village Elections* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed account of the first village election in Hezhai Village, see Xu Yong, *Xiangcun zhili yu Zhongguo zhengzhi* [Rural governance and Chinese politics] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2003), pp. 3-14.

<sup>3</sup> Lianjiang Li, "The Empowering Effect of Village Elections in China," *Asian Survey*, 43 (July/August 2003), 648-62; Lianjiang Li and Kevin J. O'Brien, "The Struggle over Village Elections," in Merle Goldman and Roderick MacFarquhar, eds., *The Paradox of China's Post-Mao Reforms* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 129-44; Kevin J. O'Brien, "Implementing Political Reform in China's Villages," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, 32 (July 1994), 33-59; Tianjian Shi, "Village Committee Elections in China: Institutional Tactics for Democracy," *World Politics*, 51 (April 1999), 385-412.

<sup>4</sup> Melanie Manion, "Electoral Connection in the Chinese Countryside," *American Political Science Review*, 90 (December 1996), 736-48; Wang Xu, "Grassroots Democracy in Rural China: Mutual Empowerment of the State and Society" [in Chinese], *Ershi-Yi Shiji* [Twenty-First Century], 40 (April 1997), 147-58.

<sup>5</sup> Bjorn Alpermann, "The Post-Election Administration of Chinese Villages," *China Journal*, 46 (July 2001), 45-67.

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- <sup>6</sup> Lianjiang Li, "Elections and Popular Resistance," *China Information*, 15(2) (2001), 1-19; Kevin J. O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, "Accommodating 'Democracy' in One-Party State: Introducing Village Elections in China," in Larry Diamond and Ramon H. Myers, eds., *Elections and Democracy in Greater China* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 101-25; Robert A. Pastor and Qingshan Tan, "The Meaning of China's Village Elections," in Diamond and Myers, pp. 126-48.
- <sup>7</sup> Gary W. Cox, *The Efficient Secret: The Cabinet and the Development of Political Parties in Victorian England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 169-70.
- <sup>8</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, [1835 & 1840] 2000).
- <sup>9</sup> Miriam A. Golden, "Electoral Connections: The Effects of the Personal Vote on Political Patronage, Bureaucracy and Legislation in Postwar Italy," *British Journal of Political Science*, 33 (April 2003), 189-212.
- <sup>10</sup> Xu Fuqun, "Solution to the two-organization conflict in villages: dancing with the same rhythm" [in Chinese], Paper presented at the Third Conference on Constructing Rural Grassroots Organizations, Chinese University of Hong Kong (November 2004).
- <sup>11</sup> Jean C. Oi and Scott Rozelle, "Elections and Power: The Locus of Decision-Making in Chinese Villages," in Diamond and Myers, pp. 149-75.
- <sup>12</sup> Lily L. Tsai, "Solidary Groups, Informal Accountability, and Local Public Goods Provision in Rural China," *American Political Science Review*, 101 (May 2007), 355-72.
- <sup>13</sup> For a detailed discussion about institutional features of the relationship between the VC and the VPB, see Jing Yuejin, *Dangdai Zhongguo nongcun "liangwei guanxi" de weiguan jiexi yu*

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*hongguan toushi* [Micro analyses and macro perspectives of the “two-organization” relationship in contemporary Chinese villages] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Liu Ya, *Jieti yu chonggou: xiandaihua jincheng zhong de “guojia-xiangcun shehui”* [Dismantlement and restructuring: “rural state-society relations” during modernization] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2004), ch. 4-5.

<sup>15</sup> Bai Gang, “Examining the construction of villagers’ self-government and the rule of law in China” [in Chinese], *Zhongguo Shehui Kexue*, 3 (1998), 88-107.

<sup>16</sup> John James Kennedy, “The Face of ‘Grassroots Democracy’ in Rural China: Real versus Cosmetic Election,” *Asian Survey*, 42 (May/June 2002), 456-82.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 478.

<sup>18</sup> Interview, Guangdong, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Interview, Hebei, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Interviews, Hebei, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Xu Fuqun, p. 38.

<sup>22</sup> Jude Howell, “Prospects for Village Self-Governance in China,” *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 25 (April 1998), 86-111; Jonathan Unger, *The Transformation of Rural China* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), ch. 7-8; Lang Youxing, “From economic elites to political administrators: China’s village elections and succession of the village leadership” [in Chinese] in Xu Yong, ed., *Zhongguo nongcun yanjiu 2002 nian juan* [China rural studies 2002] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2003), pp. 177-206.

<sup>23</sup> Lang, p. 177.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 191-92.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 188-90.

<sup>27</sup> Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), ch. 6; Shen Yansheng and Zhang Shouli, “Self-governance or administration: retrospection and foresight of China’s village governance” in Xu, pp. 11-15.

<sup>28</sup> Interviews, Zhejiang, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> Also see Kennedy, p. 474; Jean C. Oi, “Economic Development, Stability and Democratic Village Self-Governance,” in Maurice Brosseau, Suzanne Pepper, and Shu-ki Tsang, eds., *China Review 1996* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1996), p. 130.

<sup>30</sup> Lily L. Tsai, *Accountability without Democracy: Solidary Groups and Public Goods Provision in Rural China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ch. 7.

<sup>31</sup> Ako Tomoko, “Rights, interests and orders of China’s rural society seen from ‘ambiguity’ of ‘petitioning’: a case study of ‘petitioning’ in Chishi Village of Inner Mongolia” [in Chinese], in Xu, pp. 246-73.

<sup>32</sup> Guo Zhenglin and Thomas P. Bernstein, “The Impact of Elections on the Village Structure of Power: The Relations between the Village Committees and the Party Branches,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, 13 (May 2004), 257-75.

<sup>33</sup> For a review of the roles of kinships in China’s rural society and politics, see Xiao Tangbiao, ed., *Cunzhi zhong de zongzu: dui jiu ge cun de diaocha yu yanjiu* [Kinship groups in village governance: surveys and studies in nine villages] (Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian Chubanshe, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> Tsai, “Solidary Groups.”

<sup>35</sup> Kennedy, pp. 479-82.

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<sup>36</sup> Xiao Tangbiao, “Introduction” [in Chinese], in Xiao Tangbiao, ed., *Zongzu, xiangcun quanli yu xuanju: dui Jiangxi Sheng shi-er ge cunweihui xuanju de guancha yanjiu* [Kinships, village authorities and elections: observations and studies on twelve village elections in Jiangxi Province] (Xi’an: Xibei Daxue Chubanshe, 2002), pp. 3-34.

<sup>37</sup> There are reported cases where members of a smaller kinship group are assigned minor roles in village politics. For examples, see Dai Lichao, “An Observation of Gaoping Village’s Election” (in Chinese), in Li Lianjiang, Guo Zhenglin, and Xiao Tangbiao, eds., *Cunweihui xuanju guancha* [Observations of Village Elections] (Tianjin: Tianjin Renmin Chubanshe, 2001), pp. 44-112; Xiao Tangbiao, Qiu Xinyou, and Tang Xiaoteng, *Duwei shijiao zhong de cunmin zhixuan: dui shi-wu ge cunweihui xuanju de guancha yanjiu* [Village elections in various perspectives: observations and studies on fifteen village elections] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2001), pp. 188-218.

<sup>38</sup> Kennedy, p. 480.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 481.

<sup>40</sup> Tong Zhihui, *Xuanju shijian yu cunzhuang zhengzhi: cunzhuang shehui guanlian zhong de cunmin xuanju canyu* [Elections and village politics: village elections in social networks of village communities] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2004), ch. 2; Tong Zhihui and Yu Wenhua, “Township-Village Relations, Village’s Power Structures, and Elections: An Observation of the Village Election in You Village” (in Chinese), in Li et al., pp. 306-70.

<sup>41</sup> Qiu Xinyou, Qiu Guoliang, and Xiao Tangbiao, “The Kinship Factor in Elections: An Observation of Elections in Zhong Village” [in Chinese], in Xiao, *Zongzu, xiangcun quanli yu xuanju*, pp. 35-65.

<sup>42</sup> Xiao et al., pp. 188-247.

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<sup>43</sup> Sylvia Chan, "Research Notes on Villagers' Committee Election: Chinese Style Democracy," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 7 (November 1998), 507-21; Minxin Pei, "Creeping Democratization in China," *Journal of Democracy*, 6 (October 1995), 65-79. For the view skeptical about seeing village elections as a harbinger of China's democratization, see Kin-Sheun Louie, "Village Self-Governance and Democracy in China: An Evaluation," *Democratization*, 8 (Winter 2001), 134-54.

<sup>44</sup> Li and O'Brien, p. 143.

<sup>45</sup> Daniel Kelliher, "The Chinese Debate over Village Self-Governance," *China Journal*, 37 (January 1997), p. 84.

<sup>46</sup> Cox, pp. 169-70.

<sup>47</sup> For examples, Joseph Y. S. Cheng, "Direct Elections of Town and Township Heads in China: The Dapeng and Buyun Experiments," *China Information*, 15(1) (2001), 104-17; Baogang He and Youxing Lang, "China's First Direct Election of the Township Head: A Case Study of Buyun," *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 2 (May 2001), 1-22; Li Changping, *Wo xiang baixing shuo shihua* [I tell the truth to ordinary people] (Huhehaote: Yuanfang Chubanshe, 2003), pp. 102-17; Lianjiang Li, "The Politics of Introducing Direct Township Elections in China," *China Quarterly*, 171 (September 2002), 704-723; Melanie Manion, "Chinese Democratization in Perspective: Electorates and Selectorates at the Township Level," *China Quarterly* 163 (September, 2000), 764-82; Tony Saich and Xuedong Yang, "Innovation in China's Local Governance: Open Recommendation and Selection," *Pacific Affairs* 76 (Summer 2003), 185-208.

<sup>48</sup> The village level is not one of the official levels of the Chinese governmental hierarchy though officials and villagers both perceive the village level as part of the local government structure.

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<sup>49</sup> Cheng, p. 106.

<sup>50</sup> National Statistics Bureau, *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 2004* (China statistical yearbook 2004) (Beijing: Zhongguo Tongji Chubanshe, 2004). For simplicity, this article will use “township” to refer to both townships (*xiang*) and towns (*zhen*). Towns are generally more urbanized and industrialized than townships. In 2003, of the 38,000 “townships,” 19,600 were towns.

<sup>51</sup> Xu Yong and He Xuefeng, *Yangji shiyan: liang tui yi xuan shuji zhenzhang—qianru xiangcun shehui de shijian ji cechong xueshu jiaodu de jiedu* [The Yangji experiment: popular nomination and indirect election of the township party secretary and chief—an observation of the event in a rural society and its interpretation from scholarly perspectives] (Xi’an: Xibei Daxue Chubanshe, 2004); Zhang Jinming and Ma Shengkang, *Buyun zhixuan: Sichuan Sheng Suining Shi Shizhong Qu Buyun Xiang zhixuan shilu* [The Buyun direct election: a report on the direct election in Buyun Township, Shizhong County, Suining Prefecture, Sichuan Province] (Xi’an: Xibei Daxue Chubanshe, 2004).

<sup>52</sup> Lianjiang Li, “The Politics of Introducing Direct Township Elections,” p. 715.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 715.

<sup>54</sup> Li and O’Brien, pp. 131-32.

<sup>55</sup> Cheng, p. 104; Lianjiang Li, “The Politics of Introducing Direct Township Elections,” p. 704.

<sup>56</sup> *Renmin Ribao* [People’s Daily], Mar. 16, 2000.

<sup>57</sup> *Fazhi Ribao* [Legal Daily], Jan. 19, 1999.

<sup>58</sup> Du Runsheng, *Zhongguo nongcun zhidu bianqian* [Transition of China’s rural transitions] (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 2003), pp. 310-11; Li Changping, p. 302.

<sup>59</sup> Jing, ch. 3; Lianjiang Li, “The Two-Ballot System in Shanxi Province: Subjecting Village Party Secretaries to a Popular Vote,” *China Journal* 42 (July, 1999), 1-18; Liu, ch. 5.

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<sup>60</sup> Jing, pp. 98-99.

<sup>61</sup> Lianjiang Li, “The Two-Ballot System.”

<sup>62</sup> For the details of the cases of the two-ballot system, see Jing, pp. 88-90.

<sup>63</sup> G. Bingham Powell, Jr., *Elections as Instruments of Democracy: Majoritarian and Proportional Visions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), ch. 3.

<sup>64</sup> Tocqueville, pp. 58-61.

<sup>65</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (New York: Modern Libarary, 1954).

<sup>66</sup> For instances, Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); Theda Sckocpol, “The Tocqueville Problem: Civic Engagement in American Democracy,” *Social Science History* 21 (Winter 1997), 455-79.

<sup>67</sup> Robert T. Gannet, Jr., “Bowling Ninepins in Tocqueville’s Township,” *American Political Science Review* (February 2003), 1-16.

<sup>68</sup> Tocqueville, p. 180.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>70</sup> On this issue, see Barbara Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003), ch. 2.

<sup>71</sup> For instances, Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in the Age of Democratization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Ellen Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents, and Institutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005);

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Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>72</sup> Neal Riemer, *James Madison: Creating the American Constitution* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1986), p. 40.

<sup>73</sup> For instances, Arthur Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins, *The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What They Need to Know?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Samuel L. Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994).