

1: Have Village Elections Democratized Rural China? | Essay Example

Village elections in China provide some key insights into contemporary China, such as the meaningfulness of elections, the increasing role of entrepreneurs in elections and in the continuingly dominant Party, and the continuing male domination of the process.

Village democracy shrugs in rural China 22 July Author: However, the Party retains strong influence over village deliberations and politics through village party committees. As China opened up and marketisation surged ahead, the former three-tier institutional structure – team, brigade and commune – proved untenable for meeting the needs of rural society in the face of rapid economic and socio-political changes. It was an attempt by the party-state to rein in control on rural society – where the majority of the population still resided, in the s, in over one million villages – given its inevitable retreat due to gradual marketisation. The initial phase of elections in the early s was unsatisfactory in terms of democratic criteria: There was strong resistance to organic law by the Organisation Department of the CCP and local town and village party cadres. Mid-level officials in the Ministry of Civil Affairs MoCA , however, adopted a two-pronged approach to implementing elections. First, they pushed for elections to be implemented, regardless of imperfections, and then later fine-tuned them to meet democratic criteria and procedures. Meanwhile, with the support of reformers at the centre, MoCA officials were able to work with international organisations, including the Ford Foundation and the Carter Center, to learn more about holding democratic elections. After 10 years of implementation, the organic law on village elections was revised and made permanent in November . Although implementing elections has generally been successful , some problems have also emerged. Irregularities in elections such vote-buying and bribery are common. In some villages, rich men, triad secret societies members or individuals strong lineage or clan predominate over elections and village committees. Rural protests over issues such as land sales and compensation from cadres and petitions to the central government in Beijing are still rampant, as corruption and the arbitrariness of local cadres remain serious problems in an era of reform. Yet, some studies show spillover effects from implementing the organic law. Elites in the central government have openly stated their objections to Western style liberal democracy. By early , the prospect of a linear progression to democracy had evaporated. Since the Jiang Zemin era, the principle of yijiantiao – the holding of concurrent appointment by the village party branch secretary – has become the norm in Chinese villages. The organic law formally affirmed and declared the dominant role of the village party secretary and party branch as the core leadership institution in rural society. VCs are thus mostly led by the village party secretary, who is also likely to be the elected leader. Pro-democracy protests – with public assemblies in over a dozen Chinese cities – in early were inspired by and named after the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia. The Chinese government took swift action in dealing with the protesters. Shortly afterward, the collaboration between MoCA and the Carter Center on election watch and exchange was also halted. The Chinese government is fully aware of the implications of colour revolution and liberal ideology which could be anathema to its continual rule. For the moment, electoral participation in village elections serves the clear purpose to improve village governance. And democracy is seen as a means for better economic development and stability. The autonomy of village self-rule is granted, but within the parameters of party-state control.

2: Village democracy shrugs in rural China | East Asia Forum

Elections in China are based on a hierarchical electoral system, whereby local People's Congresses are directly elected, and all higher levels of People's Congresses up to the National People's Congress, the national legislature, are indirectly elected by the People's Congress of the level immediately below.

Since the law came into effect the following year, efforts to implement it have been largely driven by popular grassroots demands. And, while the law has the potential to increase the accountability of local leaders and establish meaningful democratic reform, its implementation is moving ahead only slowly. The Organic Law applies to rural villages ranging from a couple of hundred to a couple of thousand residents. The Organic Law does call on committees to help the township government carry out its work. Needless to say, the working of the system varies widely among villages. Why would an authoritarian regime promote grass-roots democratic reform? Under the law, all adult registered villagers have the rights to vote and to stand for office. Remaining realistic about what can be achieved under the new system, villagers fortunate enough to participate in elections seek to rid themselves of corrupt, biased, and incompetent leaders, but generally do not go so far as to vote for candidates who openly oppose the state. The Organic Law has encountered opposition, especially from township officials who are inclined to prevent elections unless the appointed party cadre—“for whom this is his or her first contested election”—is likely to be returned to office, or unless there has been a collapse in the workings of village government. Demands by ordinary villagers have done much to stop township officials and local opposition from thwarting elections. Residents of a village in Hebei in northern China withheld their taxes and fees to protest the corrupt mismanagement of the township appointees. Even the local police could not pressure the recalcitrant villagers to pay up. The township party secretary resorted to calling an election only after two reshufflings of the village leadership had failed to appease the residents. The election resulted in a new leadership team that had the confidence of the local population, that investigated financial irregularities, and that sought to promote economic development. There are numerous accounts of villagers lodging complaints at the county—and sometimes higher—level concerning violations of the Organic Law. Increasingly, township officials are recognizing that failing to permit free elections produces a flood of complaints and the risk of collective action. To win popular support, local leaders are more open to advocacy and more motivated to implement state policies impartially and use legal means to secure funds for public projects. Greater community provision of the funds and labor needed for development projects has resulted, as have material benefits for the community such as schools, roads, and running water. In two remote villages in Fujian, for example, newly elected committee members raised funds and mobilized labor to complete a fifteen-kilometer road that had been started and abandoned on three occasions under township direction. After free elections were held, the new leadership team collected nearly 40,000 yuan, with which they promptly rebuilt the school. Overall, popular desire for development is increasingly driving village governance reforms from the ground up. This restructuring is not recognized at the national level, but it has been put into practical effect in some villages: Even though grassroots democratic reform in China is occurring only at the village level and not spreading to township leadership elections, it is changing the relationship between village and township officials. Restructuring of local governments has not occurred on a national scale and the process is apt to remain a torturous one. But rural-based democratic reforms are likely to continue building momentum. Views expressed are not necessarily those of Carnegie Council.

3: Village Elections in China | Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Finally, village elections have resulted in positive changes in the village power structure. Prior to the implementation of elections, the village branch of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was the most important de-

Get Full Essay Get access to this section to get all help you need with your essay and educational issues. Essay Sample In order to fully evaluate whether or not village elections have fully democratized rural China, I will begin by looking at why they were initially set up. I will then look at any problems that have occurred whilst implementing village elections, in order to finally conclude whether they have resulted in a democratized rural China. Village elections have evolved from the now defunct commune system, under the commune system only very indirect participation from the village communities was permitted. At this point the villages were being run by dirt emperors who employed thugs to extort money from farmers. Village elections were thought of at that point in order to put them back under party and state control. The law arrived out of a need to establish a more accountable, responsive structure that would relate to village level and ultimately its aim was to result in a more democratic rural China. One of the main problems with this law was that although it meant that there was a clearer legal basis in place for elections in the villages, the law did not however make village elections compulsory. Another problem with the Organic Law was vagueness of it; election procedures were not made clear and were interpreted ambiguously. Most importantly the law did not state that voting in village elections was to be conducted by secret ballot. The Organic Law was intended to cover all rural villages, this meant that even the smallest of villages with populations of less than a hundred, would also enter in to the democratic election process. Once these committees had been set-up the villagers would then be able to voice their opinions on issues affecting them. Critics of the Chinese government have suggested that the introduction of the Organic Law by the Chinese government was actually just an effort to eradicate their poor image with regards to human rights issues. In the Chinese government decided to revise the Organic Law in the hope of making it more democratic. They made four main changes to the law. In order to assess whether or not rural China has become democratized through village elections, it is vital to review the electoral process in place. Villagers in rural China now directly nominate and vote for members on the committees, they are also involved in practical administrative issues and candidates standing for election to committees are under no obligation to be members of the Chinese Communist Party and they do not have to be approved by the party before standing. It can be argued that in many ways village elections have helped democratize villages. In theory many of the procedures for standing for election and indeed for voting in elections seem democratic. Under the law, all adult registered villagers over the age of 18 have the rights to vote and to stand for office. Villagers who are able to vote tend to try and vote against corrupt, incompetent candidates, this is what you would expect and can be seen as a good indicator of democracy – the right to vote for who ever you want. Villagers do have rights and they do seem to have some power also, in some instances it has been the villagers who have decided to hold an election by demanding this from the township officials. They have been able to do this by giving the township officials ultimatums, they either hold an election or the villagers will refuse to abide by the family planning social policy or the grain procurement policy. The fact that the villagers are able to yield an element of power over the township officials may suggest a more democratic country than is true. In fact it is difficult to even know exactly how many people are voting in village elections. Any independent studies indicate that at best the percentage voting is Although candidates for election do not have to be approved by the CCP it is unlikely that a candidate who is standing for election and who openly opposes the state will get elected. Corruption and intimidation are things that must be looked at when looking at Chinese politics and village elections are no different. Apparently the CCP have no involvement in the selection of candidates. However there is evidence to the contrary in the village of Liubu in Hebei. In this example during the run up to the election party officials disconnected a public address system. By doing this they were able to prevent a potential candidate from talking to the villagers and revealing the amount of debt that the village was in. This candidate was then offered a handheld microphone but the government authorities confiscated this from the speaker. Another example of the unfairness surrounding the village elections is that some

township officials actively try to prevent elections. They do this unless the present candidate village cadre is likely to be re-elected or unless there has been a total breakdown of law and order within the village. In townships the opposition to free voting can be great, this is mainly due to the fact that the village committees elected democratically result in a loss of power to them. Although in the Organic Law was changed and the elections have become more fair and open, the CCP still have a village branch which is not elected and this still seems to be at the centre of the village. It also makes you question how important and influential the village committees will ever be because in the end the CCP still has overall control. This restructuring is not recognized at the national level, but it has been put into practical effect in some villages: Even though grassroots democratic reform in China is occurring only at the village level and not spreading to township leadership elections, it is changing the relationship between village and township officials. It is important that villagers feel that their vote is secret and confidential, a way of ensuring this would be to allow villagers to vote in individual booths or separate rooms, this would increase the number of villagers voting honestly and without fearing intimidation. Another way to improve democracy within villages is to focus on the electoral process being used and also to ensure that local officials are all following the same guidelines and are fully trained. One of the main problems with village elections seems to stem from the fact that they work extremely well in some villages and terribly in others. In some villages elections are held using secret balloting, primaries and open nomination for village committee posts. In other villages townships and counties have moved to stop farmers from exercising their right to choose village leaders. These are all ways that the village elections in China could be improved, if these ideas are implemented then it is likely that some time in the future we will be able to say that village elections have truly democratized China. More essays like this:

March 16, Postelection Statement on China Village Elections, March 16, (PDF) At the invitation of the government of the People's Republic of China, The Carter Center sent a delegation to observe village elections in China from March ,

How, if at all, do these elections affect power relations among various groups, class strata, and nascent or even actual classes in the Chinese countryside? Inside and outside of the villages, who makes decisions about how the village will evolve or develop? The Village Committee and Village Leader are entrusted with managing the public affairs of the village. This includes managing any collective enterprises including land the use of which is most frequently subcontracted out to villagers , building and repairing roads, maintaining public security, administering family planning issues, and helping the village to develop economically, socially, and environmentally. As self-governing institutions, they receive little direct support from the state. As a result, in poor villages they have few resources while in richer villages they have considerably more. This helps to account for both the continuing anger against corrupt cadres who steal from the villages and the more recent increase in vote-buying as candidates vie to control these positions. Much energy has been focused on analyzing the degree to which these elections are fair and competitive, i. While this is certainly important, the key issues regarding democracy are much deeper than this. Village elections in China provide some key insights into contemporary China, such as the meaningfulness of elections, the increasing role of entrepreneurs in elections and in the continually dominant Party, and the continuing male domination of the process. How meaningful are elections? Many village elections are pro-forma. In some cases, there is no real competition and the results are known by all in advance. In others, the elections are "managed. This is in line with the position stated by many analysts and officials in documents about village elections concerning "the low quality of the voters. To accomplish this, the Party Secretary ran in and won both the primary and final election for Village Leader by a large majority, while "arranging" for the prior Village Leader, who had good business connections and was a member of the largest family lineage in the village, to be elected Deputy Village Leader. This meant "persuading" the two top vote getters in the primary election for Deputy Village Leader to drop out largely by arranging other positions for them. However, this "management" seemed to provoke a protest vote, as the Party Secretary received considerably fewer votes, in the final election than in the primary while his competitor and the competitor for Deputy Village Leader each increased their votes many fold from the primary. But some elections are competitive. Almost everyone in Pingshanan Village shares the same lineage. In , after the incumbent village Party Secretary was alleged to have manipulated the primary election, the Township Party Secretary the next level above the village intervened to force a new primary. In that second primary, the incumbent village Party Secretary withdrew from the race for Village Leader after coming in behind his cousin, a wealthy Party member and team leader who had offered to serve as Village Leader without pay and was eventually elected with no meaningful challenger. In Damoling, the competition occurred in the final election with two relatively wealthy entrepreneurs competing for Village Leader. Li, lived in the village and was a member of the Village Committee. The other, while still officially registered as a village resident, worked outside the village. The election was run in a most scrupulous fashion. The candidates each gave a brief speech, with Mr. Li making more specific promises to advance the economic development of the village. Proxy votes were limited, and the ballots were publicly counted twice with township cadres assuring the objectivity of the process and with Public Security officials available in case of any disturbances. Li won the election with about two thirds of the vote. But a competitive election in one cycle does not mean that there will be a competitive or even functioning election the next cycle. In Pingshanan, the entrepreneur who had been elected Village Leader in had subsequently become Party Secretary in line with the Party policy of having the same person hold both positions where possible. Having helped to accomplish a number of key goals for the village, some of which was facilitated by donations of his own funds, he was re-elected as Village Leader in without any competition. The change in Damoling was even more extreme. After the election, it was beset with contradictions. Li was accused of trying to manipulate village finances. Although under his leadership the Village Committee offices were renovated and its courtyard paved and one

road was built largely with higher level government financing, his other promises were not -- including resolving the water problem, creating a commercial vegetable growing venture, and building another road. As a result, the Deputy Village Leader decided to challenge Mr. Li in the election and received some 90 percent of the votes. But since the Deputy Village Leader was also the brother-in-law of the new Party Secretary, who himself had problems working with Mr. Li. Consequently the election was declared void although there is nothing in the national village election law about this. As a result, incumbents remain in power until the issue is resolved, meaning that the village is politically paralyzed. In short, there are many cases of well organized and scrupulously well run elections. Some meet all these criteria but are still neither competitive nor meaningful. Some, although fewer, are truly competitive.

The Role of Entrepreneurs, the Newly Wealthy, and the Party

The role of the newly wealthy in village government is increasing. This is clear anecdotally, statistically, and as a logical outcome of Party policy. For example, the Village Leader elected in Pingshanan was a truck driver. However, unable to sustain himself on the salary of a Village Leader, which was often paid months late, he quit the position and left to seek work in a nearby city. Overall, in the five villages I visited in Henan in , 80 percent of the Village Leaders and a significant portion of the Village Committee members were entrepreneurs or newly wealthy. This is in line with Party policies to increase the number of entrepreneurs, the newly wealthy, and those with economic skills nengren or "able people" in Chinese in village leadership. This reflects what Gramsci called a hegemonic view that the wealthy are skilled, virtuous, and deserving of the leadership of society, a view that is shared by the dominant group, which profits from it, and a dominated group, which does not. Within this context, even those Village Leaders who use their own resources to help villages, as did several Village Leaders I met, reinforce this hegemony as it becomes apparent that the village will progress only by reliance on the generosity of the newly rich. But the election of newcomers or entrepreneurs does not threaten Party leadership. In coordination with that, the Party has been advocating recruiting entrepreneurs and non-Party members who are elected as Village Leaders into the Party. Consequently, after the most recent round of elections, 66 percent of Village Committee members and 78 percent of Village Leaders were Party members.

A Male-Dominated Process

The continuing male domination of the power structure in rural China should not be a surprise. Multiple factors contribute to it: Although there are counter trends, both in the cities and -- as market forces draw young men and women out of the villages and undermine the traditional male-dominated family structure -- at the village level. All the Village Leaders I met in Henan were male. Nationally only some percent of Village Leaders are women and only some 18 percent of Village Committee members are women. Since Village Committees frequently only have three to five members, this means that many Committees lack any women despite a provision in the Organic Law on Village Committees that each Committee have an "appropriate number" of women. This does not always translate into significant authority or respect. After the meal, we found out that since his wife was away for the day, he had asked the female member of the Village Committee to come to cook the dinner but not join the discussion.

Conclusions and Implications for Democracy in China

The most obvious conclusions to be drawn are that the local election process continues to be largely under the control of the male-dominated Party with an increasing role for entrepreneurs and the newly wealthy. At present, village elections are likely to reinforce the power of the rural new rich who are creating networks throughout the political and economic structure as their relatives take positions in the government and Party township, county and municipal structures. While these elections do create what the Chinese have called "sprouts" of some form of democracy in local social structures, they are very contradictory phenomena. But competitive elections seem more the exception than the rule and, where they do exist, they are far from institutionalized. On the other, they also allow the Party-state to legitimate itself by maintaining Party leadership through a popular rather than top-down process. To the extent that elections have created some of the procedural elements of democracy, it is still unclear whether these can provide a basis for meaningful democracy in light of several factors. They will play a key role in the continuing transformation of the Party, its role and its policies. Will they play a role in advocating for democracy, as suggested by many Western theories, or will they be content to create or support non-democratic structures that meet their needs as suggested in Chile, Brazil, Honduras, and perhaps the United States and China as well? Where, then, does this all lead? This suggests a situation of continuing

struggle and contradictions influencing, among other things, village self-government, and potentially leading to further integration of the elites at the expense of ordinary villagers, none of which bodes well for a bottom-up form of democracy with significant input into major decisions from the majority. However, even if elections move up to higher levels, if this occurs within a context of an increasingly polarized society with an increasingly powerless, unorganized, and depoliticized majority, the degree to which meaningful democratization, as opposed to voting per se, or voting to choose among candidates of competing elites, must be questioned. Are there any prospects for greater meaningful democratic input for the poor and unorganized, the original base of the Chinese Revolution, or should the fact that their standard of living has generally increased significantly since the beginning of the reforms under Deng Xiaoping be adequate? Achieving a bottom up form of democracy would have to come from a movement from the bottom, although links to higher-ups in the Party would facilitate such a development. At present there are few indicators that this is likely. However, there are democratic innovations, including spontaneous self-governing organizations at the lowest levels in the countryside in Nanjing and public input into township level budgeting in Wenling City in Jiangsu Province. But these processes are not institutionalized. Each has and still requires individual sponsors in the township Party and state structure. There are pro-democracy elements among the dissident intellectuals. Some lawyers defend political dissidents and injured workers. Perhaps more significant are those who signed Charter 08, which included demands, among other things, for election of public officials at all levels, freedom to form independent groups, and freedom of assembly and expression, along with protection of private property. Moreover it is unclear how much the Charter actually supports bottom-up democracy at the economic and political levels. But without even such limited developments, as in many other societies, voting even more so in local elections only and voting to choose from within the elites, is unlikely to provide a true opening for input from the majority in a society in which they are marginalized at the structural level. He has also been involved in progressive movements on domestic and international issues since the s.

5: Observing Village Elections in China China Village Elections Program

Dr. Liu Yawei, Associate Director, The Carter Center's China Village Elections Project [Full text of testimony] Dr. Anne Thurston, Associate Professor of China Studies, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University.

The protests in Taishi have been closely watched. Direct elections of local officials by almost a million villages across the country have in recent years been widely welcomed as a possible first step towards a multi-party state. They were seen as the single most important political change in a period when China has otherwise devoted itself almost entirely to economic development. But the arrest of dozens of villagers and their legal advisers since the launch of a petition in July to dismiss the director of the Taishi village committee have gained nationwide attention, with many concluding that the government is no more serious about grassroots democracy than any other sort of political reform. A popular web forum was closed down after it provided coverage and debate on the continuing confrontation between village residents - who accused Chen Jingshen of corruption involving a huge land deal - and regional officials and police who resisted their attempts to remove him and hold new elections. The lawyer who helped the villagers with their claim has reportedly been arrested, and a political activist involved in the dispute reportedly beaten up. But then up to 1, police raided the village and acted like gangsters, using water hoses on the farmers and arresting 48 local inhabitants, including old women. Some of those held have since been released, but only, it seems, after agreeing to withdraw their demands for a fresh election, Ms Hou told the BBC News website. Lots of non-Party members were being elected and the Communist Party felt threatened," she said. Ms Hou believes this has led to a major change of official policy, with provincial governments now being told that non-Party members should not be encouraged to participate in village elections, and that Party committees should ultimately control the elected village committees.

Grassroots democracy The government began direct village elections in , soon after the dismantling of the collectivist commune system. Local elections have increased but may be limited in their influence. Every village in China - homes to some million voters - is now required to hold direct elections every three years for a new village committee, with powers to decide on such vital issues as land and property rights. The immediate aim of this scheme was to relieve tensions and help maintain social and political order at a time of unprecedented economic reform. That need has become more urgent than ever in the past few years, as protests and other outbreaks of social unrest have been reported in thousands of villages across China. Disputes over land grabs by officials are the most common cause. Village elections have been growing more competitive and the use of the secret ballot is not uncommon, according to Robert Benewick, a research professor at the University of Sussex University who has studied the subject closely. But whether the elections are genuinely democratic, or are likely to lead to a higher level of democracy, is open to debate. Some say they are often rigged, with Communist Party officials tending to retain real power at all levels, despite the trappings of democratic safeguards. Former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping was quoted in as saying there would be national elections in 50 years - by Why, ask some more cynical observers, is China starting with its poorest people, when its usual excuse for not introducing democracy is that most Chinese are still too backward and uneducated for elections? And just last month, the current Premier, Wen Jiabao, suggested to visiting British Prime Minister Tony Blair that the village elections would be extended to the next level - township administrations - in the next few years. But few if, any countries, have succeeded in introducing meaningful democracy from the bottom up. And why, ask some more cynical observers, is China starting with its poorest people, when its usual excuse for not introducing democracy is that most Chinese are still too backward and uneducated for elections? Others point out that it may not matter much anyway since villages are becoming less important at a time when vast numbers of Chinese are moving to the cities. What China really needs is political reform at higher levels, in the view of Ying Shang, a post-graduate researcher at Harvard University.

6: Village Elections in China -- Democracy or Façade? | New Politics

village elections in china roundtable before the congressional-executive commission on china one hundred seventh congress second session july 8,

Newspaper Articles Executive Summary: Robert Pastor, a Carter Center Fellow and expert on elections, to observe the village electoral process in Fujian and Hebei provinces. The delegation also held discussions with officials in Beijing on election issues and on future areas of cooperation between The Carter Center and China. Despite problems, the village elections are important, first, because the election law mandates the basic norms of a democratic process - secret ballot, direct election, multiple candidates, public count, 3-year fixed term - and the Ministry of Civil Affairs is trying hard to implement these norms throughout the country. Second, as each village repeats the process, China widens and deepens its technical capacity to hold elections. Third, the government is open to exchanging views as to the best way to implement the election rules, and the delegation offered 14 specific suggestions on ways to improve the process, including by standardizing the rules and employing a county- or province-wide civic education program. Robert Pastor, a Carter Center Fellow and expert on elections, to observe all the stages of the village electoral process in Fujian and Hebei provinces. The team also held discussions with officials in Beijing on election issues and on possible future areas of cooperation between The Carter Center and China. Included in the delegation were the following election experts and China specialists: Anne Thurston, an independent scholar of China. Our delegation also benefitted from the experience and knowledge of Dr. The main purpose of our mission was to observe and assess village elections and to offer ideas to the Ministry of Civil Affairs MOCA on ways the process could be improved. Several of us have observed other village elections or interviewed village officials in China - Thurston in Jilin and Anhui provinces in January and in Sichuan and Shanxi provinces in November ; Pastor in Zouping County, Shandong Province in July ; and Choate in Gansu Province in March and in interviews in many villages. On this mission, half of the delegation monitored four villages in Hebei Province, and the other half saw the complete electoral process - through nomination, vote, and counting? We also have been briefed or have interviewed others who have visited village elections. In a country of about 1 million villages, one should be cautious before generalizing from the small number of cases that we observed. In those villages which we saw and heard about, the basic norms of a democratic election have been conveyed and are being implemented, albeit with considerable variation among villages and provinces. MOCA, which is responsible for conducting elections, had made real progress in a relatively short time. We suggest that MOCA officials should consider concentrating on two tasks in the next stage: The Carter Center and China: Pastor received an invitation from Mr. Wang Zhenyao, the Director of Basic-Level Governance in the Ministry of Civil Affairs, to organize a delegation "to assess the electoral process and to advise us on ways it could be improved. In our experience monitoring other elections, we often hear that each country feels its experience is unique and of no relevance to others, but we have found that the patterns that connect each case are often more compelling than the differences. Elections are not synonymous with democracy, but democracy is not possible without them. Successful elections can provide a framework for peaceful, stable political change; flawed elections can provoke instability. While most people focus on the political dimension of elections and campaigns, the technical dimension is at least as important. Conducting an election is a very complicated administrative exercise that is very difficult for a poor, developing country to do without considerable practice, assistance, and experience. This technical dimension is most relevant for the case of China. In a country as vast and populous as China, the process of teaching villagers how to conduct a legitimate election is exceedingly difficult. Evaluating an electoral process is not as difficult as conducting an election, but it does require a systematic approach. The Carter Center relies on a survey form see Appendix B that permits us to draw some generalizations from the various polling sites visited. The following observations are based on our analysis of each of the stages of the electoral process. Similarities and Differences In the late s, the communal system in the countryside broke down, and farmers began to produce for their families in what would become known as the "household responsibility system. In the s, the government established Village Committees and decided to

permit direct elections to fill the positions. The Village Committee includes three to seven members headed by a Chair. All the members are elected to a three-year term. The Committee reports to the Representative Assembly, which is composed of people from the village, selected by village small groups. Village elections are administered by an Election Leadership Committee selected by the Village Committees and Representative Assemblies. Villages generally range in size from 1, to 2, people. Mary Brown Bullock and Graham Bullock for two full days of election monitoring. The two teams witnessed two different ways of voting, which, nonetheless, shared some fundamental similarities. The most important difference was the organization of the voting and counting. In Hebei, the whole village gathered together in one mass meeting whereas in Fujian, people arrived at the polling station as individuals. In Hebei, everyone brought a chair and sat in small village groups. The Township Election Chief led the meeting in a very organized and precise way: The voting was completed very quickly. The counting process was just as quick. Although there were some problems with ensuring a completely secret ballot, we believe these can be corrected easily, by allowing some space between the voting booths. On the whole, the process proved extremely efficient and well organized, and generated high levels of participation. An added advantage was that the entire village listened to the candidates speeches, learned how to vote, and followed the process that morning through the counting and the announcement of results. In Fujian, voting took place over the course of nearly a whole day in one or several polling stations, each of which contained a single voting booth. Each station had additional instructions on how to vote, and photos of each of the candidates were posted. The process of candidate nomination and primary voting also differed in the two provinces. In Fujian, provincial law now provides for a single uniform method of candidate nomination, whereby any group of five or more persons can nominate candidates by signing a form provided by the Election Committee. The village Representative Assembly then votes in an indirect primary by secret ballot to select two final candidates for Village Committee Chair, and three to six candidates for Village Committee members. In Hebei, on the other hand, several different methods for nominating candidates are used, including by Representative Assembly, party branch, or by 10 or more persons. In contrast to the indirect primaries in Fujian, Hebei had direct elections in the primaries, which were conducted in large village meetings similar to those for the final election described above. There were also some differences regarding proxy votes. Fujian did not allow proxies; Hebei did. Fujian used absentee ballots, but because of the short time between the primary and the elections, ballots were mailed before the final candidates were chosen. Roving ballot boxes were used in some villages in both provinces, but differently and with problems in implementation. Aside from these differences, there were many similarities between the elections in the two provinces, including the fact that elections generally went well. In the villages we visited, the Election Leadership Committees were chaired by the village party secretaries. Also in Fujian, there were instances of primary candidates occupying seats on the Election Committee, and resigning these positions only after winning the primary, just 2 days before the final Village Committee election. All the villages posted registration lists, and followed the procedures for announcing and publicizing candidates. Villages in both provinces utilized local cable or closed circuit radio systems to give Village Committee candidates a chance to air their views and positions. In Hebei, at the large village meetings, candidates also gave speeches to the gathered villagers. In all the villages we visited, election officials were well-trained and seemed to understand both the technical details of the process as well as the underlying rationale. The party secretary and members played important roles in all of the villages, both on the Election Committee, and in overall guidance of village affairs. In all but one of the elections we observed, there were multiple candidates for the contested positions. A good number of people used the space provided on the ballots for write-ins. Voter participation in all the villages was, on average, above 90 percent of registered voters. In five of the six villages that we examined most closely in the two provinces, the elections offered the villagers a choice, and three villages voted the incumbent chairs out of office. In Fuo Ying Zi Village in Hebei, the Village Chair lost the primary and tried a write-in comeback for the general election, but he lost that as well. The new leader was an entrepreneur. In Yan Ying Zi village in Hebei, although the party appeared very strong, the campaign for Village Chair was very competitive, and the incumbent, who also was the party secretary, lost. The final election pitted a former party secretary against a young entrepreneur. He was correct, although it took two rounds of elections for him

to be declared winner. The election was very close, and in the first round, write-ins prevented either from getting 50 percent. In the one village that did not have a secret ballot, there was no primary and little competition in the final election. A party leader won by a margin of 1, to 3. The party secretary, also a Chen, had been nominated during the primary but explained that he already was too busy and wanted to give younger villagers a chance. The incumbent won by a landslide votes to Competition in this village was lively, and one of the candidates for the Village Committee, who had lost the previous election by a single vote, had spent three years campaigning to win the villagers trust and support. While he won the highest number of votes in the primary, he came in second in the final election. Because none of the candidates for village committee won a majority, however, a runoff will be held. In a decade, the program has made real progress. The three-year term limit allows the people to replace their leaders, thereby establishing a bond of accountability. Those principles are understood in the villages that we observed - even in the one in Hebei where the secrecy of the voting was not adequately protected as people marked their ballots while seated next to each other. Ministry officials noted that many of their most important innovations? More important, the officials were always prepared to acknowledge their mistakes. Elections also made possible the return of a genuine sense of community that was lost during decades of turmoil. We had some concerns with the process. One senior election official conceded that with 1 million villages, about half did not conduct the elections in accordance with the above principles. However, with the exception of the one village in Hebei in which the voting had occurred in the open, we did not see any serious violations of the secret ballot. Questions can be raised about the fact that the Communist Party Branch ran all the Village Election Committees, but one senior official said that if there was any violation of the law, the party official would be removed. The Ministry of Civil Affairs made it very clear that "local party organizations must not select or nominate candidates [and] they must respect the selection made by villagers. We conclude that the village elections we saw demonstrate a remarkably high level of technical proficiency, and the elections, according to many of the people whom we met, have improved the lives of villagers in many ways. The leaders are more accountable; we could see that clearly as the voters replaced Village Chairs who had not fulfilled their promises.

7: The Empowering Effect of Village Elections in China on JSTOR

This study considers the institutional evolution and progress of village elections in China. China's dramatic economic growth in less than 30 years is the result of economic reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the late s, and thus has lifted more than million people out of poverty.

As the experiments evolved, the Ministry set out four principles as essential to a democratic election: Elections were to take place every three years, though timing was not standardized, either nation-wide or within a single province. Hence elections within a single province, or a single county, could be spread out over several months. In fact, the question of who has responsibility for drafting which regulations remains unsettled, which has often allowed Party offices at various levels to usurp leadership that by law belongs to the government. Not surprisingly, then, implementation of the experimental law on village elections varied widely. Short of a massive, well-financed survey, the Chinese countryside is too large and diverse for any realistic assessment, even by the Ministry. Local officials are not ordinarily comfortable reporting failures, and opposition to village elections is strongest among the county and township officials responsible for reporting. Chinese scholars who have studied village elections have estimated that no more than percent of village elections have been conducted according to democratic standards, though the Ministry of Civil Affairs reports that elections have technically been held in almost all villages. A few provinces, such as Yunnan, did not even begin experimenting with village elections until after the passage of the law moving elections from the experimental to the mandated stage. In particular, the relationship that many presume between economic development and the evolution of democracy is complicated, at best. The single most important factor governing the introduction of village level elections seems to be the degree of attention from higher-level officials committed to making the process work. Aside from those places where elections were initiated by the villagers themselves, most villages and townships have needed an outside boost from higher level authorities to get the process underway. There is nothing intuitively obvious about how to organize and administer basic level elections, especially in a country without experience in democratic procedures, where some of the authorities charged with implementation of elections are also most opposed to them. Procedures have to be taught. At present, proper training is essential to the success of village level elections, and such training must generally come from higher levels. The multiplier effect of training the trainers is vital to the spread of democratic elections. While no direct correlation between economic development and the introduction of village democracy can be discerned, the relationship is not unimportant. In a common formulation, one provincial level official charged with promoting elections within his province pointed out that the peasants first must reach a modicum of economic comfort - good housing, sufficient food, enough clothes to wear - before their thoughts will turn to improving their lives politically. What does seem to make a difference once elections have been introduced is the nature of ownership and economic control in villages. Democratic procedures seem to have a greater likelihood of success in more pluralistic villages, that is, villages where neither economic nor political power is overly concentrated and where villagers are engaged in a multiplicity of associations - religious, political, economic, social and familial. Thus villages where wealth is created by many entrepreneurs are more likely to have competitive elections than villages where enterprises are ostensibly collectively owned but managed by one person or a small group of people. Many villages are electing their most prosperous members to lead them, but in company towns, where flourishing community enterprises are controlled by a handful of people, the liberal use of patronage limits voter choice and corrupts the democratic process. In this sense, not the level of economic development but the nature of economic ownership and control exerts a profound influence on the nature of village level democracy. Two examples suggest the differences between such villages and the implications for democratic governance. As this town has become rich, so have the villages around it. In , when Wang was running for re-election as village chief, income from collectively-owned enterprises totaled some eight million yuan. Villagers were benefiting greatly from collective ownership. Each year, a portion of the collective profits went into a special bank account to be distributed to villagers as bonuses at Chinese New Year. In , the pay out was 1, yuan per person. In , everyone

over 60 years old was receiving 70 yuan a month in retirement benefits. Collective profits had also been used to build a kindergarten, to pay for health insurance and to set up training courses for farmers who wanted to leave the land to work in industry. As well as being one of the wealthiest men in the village, Wang Weidong was also the most powerful. He had been appointed village Party secretary in and was also on the economic management board of the collective enterprises. His challenger in the election was a year-old middle school graduate and a candidate for Party membership. He was one of the few farmers left in the village. The Party and government, township and village-level officials were working so closely together to orchestrate the election that the divisions of responsibility had disappeared. Some villagers gathered in the school yard to vote viewed the possibility of Wang being voted out of office as preposterous, bursting into gales of laughter at the suggestion. The voters knew they were better off since he had come to power. Whether they liked him was not the question. They were grateful that he had taken such good care of them. And despite the fact that the trappings of a competitive election were present, the reality was different. No viable competitor could have gotten on the ballot. But the villagers could certainly be forgiven for concluding that money buys power. Guanjiang had become prosperous largely through the cultivation of mushrooms that were shipped as high-priced delicacies both throughout China and to many places abroad. The raising of mushrooms was a private enterprise, and the houses of the most prosperous families had several rooms devoted to their cultivation. Average per capita income was 2, yuan a year. Collective enterprise was a small part of village activities. Some vegetable plots were collectively farmed, and chickens and ducks were collectively raised. Yearly income from collective activities amounted to some , yuan. Village finances had become transparent with the introduction of village elections. Expenditures of the village committee were publicly posted, and the village accountant periodically made a fuller report to the village representative assembly. Many traditional folk customs were being revived as economic development progressed. Villagers consulted the local geomancer, the fengshui master, when constructing new homes, and the local temple had been one of the first buildings to be restored. Clan temples, too, were under renovation. Power in the village was relatively dispersed. The Party branch secretary was not on the village committee, and the competition for leadership was balanced. The distribution of the popular vote on election day suggested that competition was genuine, and no single person or organization held a preponderance of power. There were two major clans in the village, however, and a member of the dominant one was elected village head. But the committee also contained credible representation from the lesser clan. Leadership in Guanjiang Village had long since passed from the old collective cadres to a new entrepreneurial elite. Wealth and power continued to be linked. The head of the Party branch was one of the richest men in the village, and so were members of the village committee. But control over village resources did not appear to be the way to get and keep power, as had been true in Wugang village. There was no patronage in Guanjiang - or none that was obvious. To say that Guanjiang was a civil society in the making is perhaps an exaggeration, but the villagers had a multiplicity of associations - religious, political, economic and familial - that together made up a community and mediated against the excesses of power that were characteristic of the Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolution. One could argue about the relative power of the Party, the representative assembly and the village committee, but the balance among them ensures that no single political institution can gain full control. No local emperor is likely to arise in Guanjiang. While Guanjiang Village may serve as an example of democratic leadership at the village level, the fact remains that the power of the village committee is limited indeed. Township authorities, both Party and government, are constantly tempted to interfere in village affairs. What difference, then, do village elections make? First, in those admittedly still limited areas where elections have been carried out according to the principles set forth by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, rural people are being given choices they did not have before. They have a real voice in selecting their leaders, and power is being transferred peacefully and without political upheaval. Communities that broke down with the collapse of the communes are being rebuilt. In all of the several dozen rural elections that I have observed, villagers behaved exactly as democratic theory says they would. They clearly understood their own interests and voted in accordance with them. Issues were local and immediate - how to improve the village road, whether to use village funds to build a new foot bridge across an irrigation canal, how to get better access to stalls at the county market town, how

to introduce new cash crops, how to improve the village school. The average age of the men being elected and they were overwhelmingly men - representation by women was minuscule was declining. A new generation, better educated and more entrepreneurial, was assuming leadership. While the newly-elected leaders were not always the richest men in the village because those in wholehearted pursuit of their fortunes could not afford the time to lead, they were invariably comparatively well-off, and they promised to share their know-how with their neighbors. Party members simply had more experience and better connections with the higher-level officials who could help with the access and permissions so necessary to the functioning of village life. But a substantial minority somewhere between percent nationwide were not Party members. Indeed, in some places, the Party was using village elections as a recruiting tool, inviting newly-elected leaders to join the Party. Village elections thus also sometimes serve to re-legitimate the Party, drawing into its ranks younger, more entrepreneurial, more popular leaders. Second, participation in elections is giving villagers at least a rudimentary understanding of the democratic process. It helps villagers to understand that they have a right to participate in political decision-making, and it introduces them to notions of choice, open competition, government accountability, financial transparency and basic conceptions of human rights. Third, village elections are giving villagers a new sense of empowerment. Armed with the laws and regulations governing village life, rural people have taken their grievances to higher levels, demanding that their local authorities act in accordance with the law. Indeed, so frequent were such public demonstrations in that opponents of village democracy cited them as sources of instability, proof that democracy causes chaos. Some reformers believe that the process of democratization would already have been pushed to higher levels were it not for the outpouring of public protest over local officials who had failed to implement national policies. Fourth, with a new sense of empowerment, villagers are employing the logic of democratic election of village committee members to push for democratization at other levels as well. The Party has been one object of their efforts. Most persuasively, villagers have argued that if members of the village committee, as representatives of the village, must be democratically selected in competitive elections, then Party branch leaders, as leaders of the people, should be similarly elected. Such arguments have sometimes borne fruit. In the first round of balloting, either the village as a whole or members of the representative assembly cast votes for the person they would like to see as Party branch secretary. The branch then makes the final decision. The argument is that a Party branch secretary who has not been chosen by the people would lose so much face as to be unable to serve. Similar arguments are being made for the selection of township level leaders. While villages have ostensibly been granted autonomous self-governance as a result of de-collectivization, everyone knows that the township, as the lowest level of government, continues to exercise considerable control over villages. If people have the right to elect those responsible for governance at the village level, some are arguing, they should also be able to choose officials at the township level.

8: BBC NEWS | Asia-Pacific | China village democracy skin deep

Village elections, as a policy response to developmental problems in rural China in the s, were not designed to promote democracy in China. The process of village elections, however, has served as a new form of cooperation between the state and the peasantry over the last decade. To understand.

9: Elections in China - Wikipedia

Experiments in governance. Many claims are made about the potential impact on China s democratization of the election of village committees there.

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