

Village Elections: Emergence of a Democratic Political Culture or Reinforcement of a Repressive Regime?

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China's ethnic and geographic diversity makes the task of examining the implementation of national policy nearly impossible. As more than 70% of the population lives outside urban areas, narrowing the field to rural governance does not whittle down the subject matter to any great degree. However, the vastness of the topic is precisely why it is so vital to developing a coherent understanding of the country – knowing how a majority of the Chinese population interacts with local government sheds a great deal of light on the status of political reform in China today.

Many of the problems plaguing Chinese rural governance have been around longer than the People's Republic itself. Corrupt local officials, unfair taxes, the absence of the rule of law – all are issues that predate the communist party-state. However, for the past 20 years the central government has been attempting to institute what (if successful) could amount to a veritable revolution in the governance of China's some 900,000 villages. The passage of both the 1987 and 1998 Organic Law of Village Committees gave villagers, on paper, a good amount of decision-making capability with regard to local matters. While a great deal of literature exists addressing the systems and procedures by which these committees are elected, scholars have devoted less attention to the day-to-day interactions the committee has with other actors in rural politics. Careful analysis of these interactions is needed to truly understand not only how village elections have changed rural governance, but also how they have not.

By looking at the institution of village elections, the difference between the legal and actual roles of various actors in rural politics, and the difficulties surrounding the

issue of self-determination in a predominately Tibetan Administrative Village in Yunnan, the author hopes to illustrate that, despite making marked improvements to its systems of rural governance, China's countryside remains a long way from developing the beginnings of a democratic political culture. In many cases, it seems that the elections themselves have done little to ameliorate many of the problems plaguing rural areas – much more is needed to truly empower China's peasants.

The Birth of Village Elections – A slowly tightening grasp, or political reform?

Decollectivization in the late 1970s and early 1980s drastically changed the roles of many local leaders. Villages were supposed to become more self-governing, while the townships were told to play a “supporting” role. Across the country, these adjustments were far from uniform. In some areas, cadres continued to control village life as they had before, despite the fact that the rural reorganization permitted peasants to farm their land as they wished and sell their goods on the newly developed open market. In other areas, former brigade-level leaders simply left their jobs in search of the wealth that Reform Era economic policy encouraged, leaving the villages with a lawless political vacuum. This crisis of rural leadership soon became apparent to provincial and central level officials, who qualified upward of 40% of China's villages as “paralyzed” or “partially paralyzed,” or in other words, “ignoring government orders to pay taxes, limit the number of their children and hand over grain.”¹ Clearly, something had to be done to reign in the villages and rid them of corrupt officials.

¹ Pomfret, John. “In Rural China, Democracy Not All it Seems; Few Villages Escape Party Control.” The Washington Post. Aug 26 2000: A1.

Some felt that elections were the answer – a means of legitimizing local leaders while pulling villages back to the party line.

The leading reformer of the time, Premier Zhao Ziyang, did not agree, fearing that the institution of village elections would cause the government to lose control of rural reform. Though he supported the idea of introducing elections for intellectuals and workers in urban areas, he opposed the idea of elections in rural areas.² Democratic activists and liberal-leaning intellectuals also opposed the proposed reform, believing “not only that such an attempt would be impossible but also that it would help the regime perpetuate its authoritarian rule.”³ Most national leaders joined Zhao in his opposition – hardliners feared political reform as a rule, and younger, more liberal party members felt it would only solidify the CCP’s monopoly of power. These fears were perhaps well-founded. Peng Zhen, then Chairman of the National People’s Congress and a true-blood Marxist, recognized the potential for elections to reintroduce the “mass-line” into local politics. As Tianjian Shi observes, “he also genuinely believed that by implementing some reform, one could in fact strengthen the existing political structure of the PRC.”⁴ This belief propelled him to strenuously fight to persuade the NPC Standing Committee that the draft law offered the cure for what ailed the Chinese countryside. However, despite his best efforts, it met defeat during its first presentation in 1986. Only months before his retirement, in 1987, his hard work paid off and the draft was passed, sanctioning the election of village

² Shi, Tianjian. “Village Committee Elections in China: Institutional Tactics for Democracy. *World Politics*. 51.3. (1999) 385-412.

³ Shi, 387.

⁴ Shi, 392.

committees by popular vote.⁵

The passage of the 1987 Organic Law tasked the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) to formulate guidelines for the elections and cooperate with local and provincial level officials to facilitate implementation. In a country with virtually no exposure to even the most basic principles behind free and fair elections, the assignment would prove enormous. The 1987 Law was designated experimental, meaning that local level officials could ignore the guidelines without repercussions. They had many reasons for attempting to roadblock reform – they were the ones who were liable to lose power should elections be instituted successfully. Gadsden and Thurston observe that, “While the active support of township and county level officials was essential to successful village elections, these were the same officials whose power was most likely to be undermined by village reform.”⁶ Further, many local officials feared, similar to national level leaders, that elections would not quell, but stoke rural unrest. Implementation was delayed further by the fact that post-decollectivization reforms had not been uniformly executed. In some areas, village committees were already a fixture of local governments. In many others, village committees had yet to be organized by the time the Law was enacted; thus, in provinces like Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan, and Yunnan, villages continued to be governed at the township level and did not hold elections at all.⁷

The most daunting hurdles were not logistical however, but intellectual. The

⁵ Shi, 393.

⁶ IRI report, 8.

⁷ IRI report, 8.

MCA faced its most difficult task in educating officials on the essentials of “free and fair” elections, as even such basic concepts as open competition, one man, one vote, the secret ballot and electoral transparency were completely unknown to them.⁸ The MCA eventually introduced basic criteria for democratic elections at the village level insisting that the chairman, vice-chairman and members of the village committee be directly elected, that the number of candidates exceed the number of positions, that voting be conducted by secret ballot, and that the winning candidate receive more than half the votes.⁹ Today, where elections have been carried out according to MCA guidelines, they have brought a degree of uncertainty to village leadership, which some scholars see as the essence of democracy: in Shandong province, turnover has reached 30 percent, and reports in another province have been as high as 70 percent.¹⁰ By 1997, after a decade of trial-and-error, it was estimated that as much as 90 percent of China’s villages had participated in village elections. The vast majority of those elections, however, were not in accordance with MCA guidelines. According to the MCA, only 1/3 of villages fulfilled the requirements for free and fair elections, while other observers have placed the estimate as low as 10 percent.¹¹ In another survey, taken nationwide in 1990, 74.6 percent of villagers reported that village elections were held in their towns, though only 37.1 percent qualified those elections as semi-competitive.¹² Three years later, the same respondents reported that 75.8 percent of them had participated in village elections, of which 51.6 percent were

⁸ IRI report, 8.

⁹ IRI report, 8.

¹⁰ Shi, 386.

¹¹ IRI Report, 9.

¹² That is, that there were more candidates than seats.

semi-competitive. Thus, while elections themselves did not become very much more widespread, they did become more competitive over time, a sign that practice does make perfect to some extent.

The experience gleaned from roughly a decade of experimentation was put to use during the drafting of the 1998 Organic Law, which made village elections mandatory and made a number of revisions in an effort to standardize elections throughout the country. It is much more explicit in its provisions concerning village autonomy, election procedure, and oversight of village government. Where the 1987 Law stipulated that the township government should provide “guidance, support and help” to the village committee, the new law insists that the township should not “intervene in matters within the legal limits of village self-governance.”¹³ It also goes further in its attempts to pare down township and party authority than did its predecessor, mentioning specifically that “no organization or individual may appoint, designate or dismiss village committee members.”¹⁴ The new version also establishes election commissions, requires the use of secret ballots, and includes measures intended to ensure a greater amount of information transparency among its provisions.

While much in the lawbooks has changed, not all of it has resulted in change in the countryside. In the PRC, much of what exists on paper is not implemented or enforced, or is done so sporadically, creating confusion and conflict as local leaders and villagers scramble to protect their interests. In many areas, peasants have seen very little tangible evidence of the reforms they were promised.

¹³ 1998 Organic Law of Village Committees, Article Four.

¹⁴ 1998 Law, Article Eleven.

The Structure of Rural Governance: An Introduction

The township replaced the commune as the most immediate level of the party-state government with the dismantling of the People's Communes in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Production Brigades became "villages," and transformed into autonomous bodies governed by village committees, theoretically unhindered by township involvement. This constituted a fairly significant power shift, as township officials previously had unrestricted control over village resources. The relationship between leaders at the township and village levels thus was often strained, as each attempted to adjust to the change in responsibility.

In the wake of decollectivization, several organizations emerged as the pillars of local governance: the local party branch, the township government, the village assembly, the village representative assembly, the village committee, and in areas divided into administrative villages, the natural village ('*zirancun*') head.¹⁵ In a much less formal way, villagers themselves have also emerged as crucial, if irregular, participants in local governance.

At the end of the Mao era, the role of the Party in village life was by no means evident. After years of destructive campaigns and thoughtless policies, the countryside was as scarred as the CCP's image. As Thurston and Gadsden observe, "the legal autonomy granted to village committees following the collapse of communes

¹⁵ IRI Report, 5.

theoretically usurped much of the limited power remaining in the party's hands."¹⁶ The introduction of the village committee into local politics engendered debate as to how the power sharing would take place – would the committee operate under the party's "leadership," or simply have its "support?"¹⁷ The relationship remains undefined – the 1998 Organic Law leaves the issue unresolved, saying only that at local levels the party should act in line with the party's charter and act as the "leadership nucleus."¹⁸ The absence of assigned responsibility leaves the relationship between the village committee and the local party branch beset with ambiguities and often antagonistic.

The responsibilities and powers afforded the village assembly, in contrast, are explicitly defined in the Organic Law, and are an important part of the "four democracies" at the village level.¹⁹ Comprised of representatives of two-thirds of the villages households or a majority of those villagers over 18, the assembly has the power to decide how to raise money for schools and other "public welfare undertakings," decide how to spend collective funds, and weigh in on "other matters that involve the interests of the villagers." Significantly, it also has the power to "appraise the performance of [committee] members" and veto their decisions when they run contrary to the wishes of the assembly.²⁰ It thus acts as a supervisory body of sorts and, in theory, should act as a safeguard against renegade committees, ensuring

¹⁶ IRI Report, 6.

¹⁷ IRI Report, 6.

¹⁸ 1998 Organic Law

¹⁹ The "four democracies" at the village level are identified as: democratic elections, democratic management, democratic decision-making and democratic supervision.

²⁰ 1998 Organic Law.

that their actions do not stray too far from popular opinion.

Because the size of villages varies considerably (ranging in size from fewer than 500 to upward of 4000 people), many came to consider the village representative assembly as a more realistic body for decision-making in populated areas. The system of member selection differs from place to place. In some areas, members are appointed; in others, the representative assembly consists largely of heads or deputy-heads of ‘natural villages’ (*zirancun*), who may ‘represent’ as many as a few hundred people. According to Thurston and Gadsden, the majority of representative assemblies include members of the village committee and delegates from other local organizations (such as the local Women’s Federation) and representatives of the elderly.

The village committee, led by the village head (*cunzhan*), occupies a gray area – its role is always dual and at times contradictory. The committee is theoretically supposed to execute the decisions of the representative assembly, technically the more democratic of the two bodies. Thus, it is clearly intended to represent and act upon the interests of the villagers. However, it is also responsible for maintaining social order, publicizing government decisions, ensuring those decisions are followed, and “convey[ing] the villagers’ opinions and demands and mak[ing] suggestions to the people’s government.”²¹ Hence, the issue of accountability often comes into play – at the end of the day, to whom does the village committee answer?

The most immediate form of leadership in rural areas lies in the person of the

²¹ 1998 Organic Law.

natural village head, otherwise known as the '*shezhan*.' He holds responsibility for many of the day-to-day operations of the natural village – everything from assigning pastureland to reconciling villager differences. The procedures for selecting the *shezhan* differ from village to village: in some, an election is held every 3 years, while in others, families simply rotate every year. For many, the natural village head is the most significant authority figure, as he/she is the most visible and effects day-to-day life to a much greater degree. In interviews in Jisha village, most villagers simply assumed that, even when referring to the '*cunzhan*', the question pertained to the natural village head.

The villagers themselves have also become an increasingly important factor in rural politics. Given the power to vote committee members in and out of office, they have begun to recognize some of the benefits of self-governance, and in some areas have demonstrated an increasing willingness to protest when they perceive that “rights” are being denied them. This aggressiveness has made local, provincial and national leaders sit up and take notice, illustrating the degree to which villagers have thrust themselves into debates over rural policy. Unfortunately, this is not the case in every area. In many villages, voting is still simply an orchestrated event that has little to no bearing on the villagers’ willingness or their ability to actively take part in local politics.

A Case Study: Have elections made a difference in Jisha Village?

Elections have undoubtedly improved peasants’ ability to self-govern. However, many barriers still exist preventing the institution of a viable democratic political

culture at the village level.

Many of these barriers are unfortunately very much intact in Jisha Village, one of twelve natural villages in Tuanjie Administrative Village in Deqing Prefecture, Yunnan. Jisha is fairly typical of villages in Deqing Prefecture: it is entirely ethnically Tibetan in an area in which the vast majority of residents are also Tibetan, its economy is largely based on agriculture, and the majority of its residents seem to live on a subsistence level, or not far above.²²

Though their experience with village elections is relatively short (elections were first held in 2001), villagers seem to understand the basics of the process, if not the spirit behind them. In interviews, all spoke easily of the qualities they looked for in village heads (intelligence and a “consideration for others”), told stories about disingenuous village heads and explained why those heads were not reelected. However, the low education levels of its residents and the scourge of corruption in local officials prevent its local elections from establishing truly autonomous village committees that are responsible only to the voters who put them in power. The following represent just a sampling of these problems.

Accountability: To whom does the village committee answer?

One obstacle to true self-governance lies in the lingering confusion as to who the village committee is intended to serve. The committee still lacks definition as a representative body – in many areas, it is not clear to whom the committee is accountable. In Tuanjie Administrative Village in Yunnan Province, the

²² Deqing Prefecture itself is 80% subsidized, and is one of the poorest prefectures in Yunnan.

Administrative Village committee acts a consultative body, providing the Township government with information on an ‘as-requested’ basis. It meets at the behest of the Township government, and does not set its own agenda. Situations such as these have earned the village elections system the moniker of “consultative authoritarianism” – the village committee acts more as an advisory panel than a representative, decision-making body.²³ The money flow further confuses the issue of accountability. In Tuanjie Administrative Village, both the village head and the party secretary are technically on the Township’s payroll. In fact, the Administrative Village Committee as a body has no independent income of its own – taxes and other potential forms of income go to the Township’s pockets, making it difficult for the Administrative Village to organize independent projects without Township funds, and, hence, approval.

Another factor that renders the situation even more complex is the CCP’s use of elections as a recruiting tool. Kevin O’Brien notes that, “village elections can be a way to prevent a multi-party system from coming in by drawing good people into the party and getting rid of the hacks who are hurting the party’s image...In the short term, you don’t have to have a liberal bone in your body to support village elections.”²⁴ The arrangement benefits both ends – the party is eager for new blood, especially in the form of the so-called rural “capable men” who so often win popular support in the elections.²⁵ These men (they are overwhelmingly male) usually display higher

²³ Pomfret, “Democracy not All it Seems.”

²⁴ Pomfret, “Democracy not all it seems.”

²⁵ He, Baogang. “Village elections, village power structure, and rural governance in Zhejiang.” *American Asian Review*. 20:3. p. 55-90. Proquest Online.

education levels than their predecessors and are frequently part of the rural economic elite – in He’s survey of village heads in Zhejiang province, 18 percent were managers of village enterprises, private entrepreneurs or businessmen. Baogang He asserts that, “Based on the belief that a wealthy person is more ready to look after public affairs, local leaders take pains to train the businessman to become a politician.”²⁶ Among the 111 village heads He surveyed, 77.5 percent were communist, “owed to the efforts of township and village party organizations to encourage communist members to run for the posts, to take the noncommunist village heads into the party, or to train them with the aim to take them in at later stages.”²⁷ There is no shortage of desire to join – membership entails inclusion into the political elite, bringing with it endless networking and business opportunities and the possibility of promotion to higher posts. CCP membership, or even simply receiving undue aid from township or county officials during the election process, would clearly compromise a committee member’s ability to represent his constituents, particularly in situations in which the villagers and the officials are at odds.

Information Transparency: It’s easy to ‘misunderestimate’ its importance

Each villager I interviewed in Jisha described him or herself and the majority of family members as illiterate. While there were reports of villagers who could read (usually with great difficulty), there were no more than a handful of villagers comfortable with the written word. Clearly, this complicates the matter of information dissemination. In Jisha, villagers said that they received information from their

²⁶ He, 4.

²⁷ He, 5.

'*shezhan*,'²⁸ from a book of pertinent government policy that had been distributed some time before, and through word of mouth. Unfortunately, very few residents are literate, and those that have even limited ability to read do so with great difficulty. Further, the area is overwhelmingly Tibetan – only those who have a good deal of interaction with outsiders (either due to education or business) speak Mandarin with any fluency. Thus, the book is not a great help. One former '*shezhan*,' said that she could memorize important information from meetings, so her illiteracy was not a great impediment. In fact, virtually everyone interviewed from that area agreed that illiteracy was not a problem when it came to their involvement with village government. Still, it does prevent many of the 1998 Law's provisions from being carried through correctly. For example, illiterate villagers are unable to fill out their ballots themselves, thereby preventing them from enjoying the anonymity of the secret ballot.

The inability to read also creates a dependency that translates into vulnerability in certain situations. For example, villagers constantly depend upon oral summaries of written contracts or law, rendering them susceptible to manipulation. In 2002, a real-estate development company (ushered in by township government officials) came to Jisha, seeking to buy the rights to virtually all of the land in sight, including the mountains that the villagers consider to be sacred. The terms of the contract were presented orally, and, after signing, the villagers discovered that the written terms largely contradicted the oral terms. While the contract was eventually invalidated, it

²⁸ Natural Village Head

was a harsh demonstration of the enormous disadvantages illiteracy creates.

Women are especially subject to this type of manipulation as they are overwhelmingly uneducated and have less contact with people from outside the village. Not only do they not speak Mandarin very well (if at all), but they also have little experience with the procedures behind politics or business deals. Familiarity with this disadvantage gives outsiders (including the township government) a significant amount of power. For instance, knowing that if a meeting is announced at the last minute the audience will be overwhelmingly female (and thus easier to persuade) is a valuable tool. This tactic was used in Jisha when Township officials wanted to ensure the signing of the contract with the real estate developers. At that meeting, not only were the terms of the contract absent, but the contract itself was presented by the Township, not by the company. The presence of villagers with more experience in business dealings with the outside could have perhaps jeopardized the deal. As such, the Township made every effort to ensure that it would be difficult for them to attend the signing.

Another byproduct of the lack of accurate information is the rumor mill that substitutes suspicions for unknowns. Because villagers have so little access to the information necessary to make decisions, they often spread rumors that have little to no basis in fact, rendering collective decision-making nearly impossible. While villagers in Jisha were discussing whether or not to allow a non-governmental organization in to the village to do poverty alleviation work, any villager who changed his opinion, or began to warm to the idea over time, was accused of having

accepted money from the NGO – lack of familiarity with the procedures and a lack of access to information prevented them from discussing the issue in a productive way.

The Administrative Village System: There must be a better way...

The system of administrative villages often impedes enfranchisement and fair representation. Used predominately in sparsely populated areas, it is frequently a logistical disaster. A 1983 attempt to institute the committees failed because the task of redrawing the boundaries of Yunnan's natural villages proved too great.²⁹ In some areas, small villages were combined and put under the control of one village committee, while other, larger natural villages were carved into two village committees, resulting in total confusion: "Village committee authority and jurisdiction were poorly defined, few villagers wanted to serve on the committees, and local governance was ineffective."³⁰ Thus, elections were abandoned and the management of village affairs fell to the townships.

The administrative village system is no more suitable now than it was before. From Jisha Village, the natural village serving as village committee headquarters requires an hour and a half walk. On election day, or for any administrative village meeting, families can typically only afford to send one family member to vote or to attend, as their work does not allow everyone a 3 hour round trip. The family representative may not necessarily be the most knowledgeable family member or have any awareness of village issues; he or she is sent simply for convenience's sake. The inconvenience also means that the elderly and infirmed cannot make the trip unless

²⁹ IRI Report, 27.

³⁰ IRI Report, 27.

they have access to a vehicle (in areas where cars or motorcycles can pass).

Further, the election system as it stands favors larger natural villages over smaller ones, meaning that representation is not equal. Natural villages with larger populations have a greater likelihood of electing their candidates. This places smaller villages at a significant disadvantage in certain areas. For example, the administrative village holds responsibility for distributing certain types of resources. As need far exceeds supply, interpersonal relationships (or '*guanxi*') play an important role in resource dispersal. Thus, a lack of representation on the village committee could be a serious liability.

The same holds true in areas where family clans still play an important role in village life. As Gadsden and Thurston observe, "in areas where lineage organizations are traditionally strong...elections provide an opportunity for the revival of clan loyalties and conflicts." Majority rule almost guarantees that, in areas dominated by a single clan, members of the dominant clan will hold all offices. This means that the minority is underrepresented, if represented at all. However, some scholars believe that, as elections evolve and become more sophisticated, campaigns may alleviate the problem – "the current limits on campaigns make it difficult to get to know candidates and their ideas, a reason...why clans and factions tend to dominate elections."³¹

Prescriptions

First, though they are not the fast-track to the development of democratic political

³¹ IRI Report, 20.

culture, evidence does show that practice makes perfect in the case of village elections – the elections procedure itself improves, as do residents’ understanding of how the procedure impacts their ability to influence local leaders. Though some national leaders feel that “democracy breeds chaos,” stonewalling reform would undoubtedly only stoke the fires of rural unrest and widen the deepening gulf between the central government and rural residents.

Second, more provisions need to be made for the illiterate, both to safeguard them from manipulation and to improve their ability to fully participate in a fair way. Whether by using photos on ballots or more and better illustrated posters demonstrating the voting process or explaining government policy, a more sustained effort would ensure that no information is lost for want of someone to read it. Further, the “barefoot lawyers” program should be expanded and further publicized, so that affordable, independent legal representation is available to villagers who either need representation or simply an explanation of a law relevant to their situation.

Third, the administrative village system needs to be changed to ensure that all natural villages are given equal representation, regardless of size. Each natural village should be allowed to elect one representative to sit on the village committee, ensuring that no village loses out because its population is not large enough. In addition, the administrative village committee needs to have its own budget to execute projects independent of the township – it should not need township supervision, funding or approval.

Fourth, training programs should be expanded from simply elections

commissions and observers to newly elected village committee members – while these projects exist in some areas, they need to be made mandatory, or at least be made to grow over time. If elected leaders are not made to understand the principles behind democratic systems, a democratic political culture will not emerge.

Conclusions: Do Elections a Democratic Political Culture Make?

The institution of village elections on a nation-wide level has left a great deal of positive change in its wake. In areas where elections are standardized and a well-entrenched feature of rural governance, “villagers have started to recognize that they have a right to participate in political decision-making, and elections introduce them to notions of choice, open competition, government accountability, financial transparency and embryonic conceptions of human rights.”³² Furthermore, villagers in many areas have become demonstrably more aggressive both in their demands and the methods they are choosing to communicate them. Public Security Bureau reports indicate a steep increase in the number of “mass group incidents” – 268% from 1993 to 1999.³³ These incidents have not only become more frequent but also better organized – one officer reportedly complained that local protestors now show up “havng already raised funds for petition drives, hired lawyers and invited news reporters” to the event.³⁴ While the protests are not necessarily related to or caused by local elections, they can certainly be taken as evidence of an increasing willingness to

³² IRI Report, 13.

³³ Tanner, Murray Scot. “China Rethinks Unrest.” *The Washington Quarterly*. 27:3 pp. 137-156.

³⁴ Tanner, 141.

speak out against perceived wrongs.

Still, as Gadsden and Thurston state rather bluntly, “nothing suggests that most people in the Chinese countryside have even the most rudimentary understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of the democratic process.”³⁵ Rights, as many Chinese understand them, still seem to be perceived as privileges granted by above, rather than something inherent in all individuals. Despite the fact that villagers are taking advantage of the democratic process and demonstrating a deeper understanding for it, the concept of leadership, on the village level or otherwise, still strays far from what most would consider democratic. There is no truly conclusive evidence that leaders, elected or no, feel responsible to the people under their jurisdiction, which is perhaps the cornerstone of a democratic system.³⁶

In many areas, the reform has remained cosmetic in nature, limited solely to the highly orchestrated voting day procedures. Most village committees are still subject to intense supervision from the township and have little to no room for independent decision-making. There is even evidence of a significant number of elected officials acting as “local emperors,” abusing the privileges their position affords.

These realities prevent one from concluding that the institution of village elections constitutes the establishment of a democratic political culture, particularly in areas similar to Tuanjie Administrative Village. Again, the size of the Chinese countryside prevents the synthesis of any far-reaching conclusions, but more evidence

³⁵ IRI Report, 19.

³⁶ There are certain case studies that indicate otherwise, but most (that I have seen) are based on statements from the leaders themselves rather than observations of their actions on a day-to-day basis.

than not points not to a budding democratic political culture, but the beginnings of a comprehensive understanding of the voting process. The two are not synonymous.