

The Power-Sharing Struggle in
Chinese Village Elections

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in the Department of Political Science
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ABSTRACT

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After initiating the economic reform in 1978 and the subsequent political decentralization, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) largely lost its political control in rural areas. To regain the power, senior leaders of CCP decided to introduce local elections as a strategy to rebuild the legitimacy. After enforced all over the country, village elections did help ameliorate the local governance and prompt the provision of public goods. However, the unclear stipulation in the *Organic Law of Village Elections* simultaneously resulted in some institutional outcomes, leading to a power-sharing puzzle between local party branch and the elected village committee. Using the local public policy as an indicator, I will develop a formal model in this paper to explain this puzzle and argue that when facing unpopular policies, conflicts between local party secretary and village chief is in equilibrium. To maintain the stability in rural areas, government leaders in different provinces have put forward various solutions to deal with the conflict, including a political experiment, which was called “Qingxian Model” later, conducted in Qing County of Hebei Province. I argue in this paper that by resurrecting the Villager Representative Assembly, this political reform essentially reconcentrates the power on the party branch and sabotages the local democracy in the long run.

Key Words: Chinese Village Election Power-Sharing Puzzle

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Chapter One: Introduction

Accompanied with the high-speed economic growth and the continuously loose control of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in rural China, mass incidents came out all over the country from time to time, among which the “Wukan Incident”, or “Siege of Wukan”, drew a lot of attention. Began in September 2011, thousand villagers from Wukan Village, located in Guangdong Province, protested in front of the municipal government building and police office to express their indignation against the village leaders’ corruptions. This protest soon evolved into a severe clash between the police and protesters and finally resulted in a month-long confrontation. Simultaneously, incumbent village leaders were ousted out of village. In February 2012, according to the Organic Law of Village Committee, villagers in Wukan successively reelected members of Village Election Committee, Village Representative Assembly, and Village Committee in a completely free and competitive way. After that, elected village cadres continued appealing to the higher-level government until finally their requirements were accepted and former villager leaders were put in jail.

Despite the protest details of this incident, we can see that villagers in Wukan village can automatically conduct the village election well based on the legal provision even without any supervision from above, proving that after near thirty years’ development, the experiment of village self-governance in China has

generated a solid base of support and earned widespread recognition of local villagers.

Following the economic reforms initiated in China since 1978, the communal system and collectivization policies, originally serving as tools to control rural areas, collapsed gradually. Instead, family *per se* became the main unit of production, making villagers less dependent on the state. Besides, as the decision-making process largely decentralized, local cadres achieved greater discretion in determining local affairs, which made the central government harder to exert effective monitor on local cadres. Consequently, corruption and speculation were rampant over local areas, which stimulated villagers' great dissatisfaction. In this context, public policies, especially some unpopular policies such as grain procurement, tax collection, and birth control were even harder to enforce in villages due to the severer cadre-villager conflict.

In order to regain the power and legitimacy in rural areas, Chinese senior leaders, paradoxically to some degree, decided to gradually initiate the political reform at the local level after an intense argument between liberal and conservative factions. By endowing more autonomous rights to villagers to decide their own business, Chinese autocrats expected to maintain the stability and the smooth enforcement of public policies, especially unpopular ones. In 1982, China began to officially exert the grassroots self-governance in rural areas across the whole country. In 1988, with the enactment of the Organic Law of

Village Committee, villagers achieved the right to directly elect their government officials. (China Legal Publishing House, 2010) By this institutional design, the elected village committees are composed of three to seven members, including one village chief, with a three-year term and no term limits. All committee members are chosen by popular election, in which all adult villagers who satisfy the requirements have the right to vote and be voted. Regarding the nomination process, at the first stage of the reform, the upper-level government controlled the power to nominate candidates. In 1998, the revised Organic Law removed this qualification so that the provincial government can decide specific rules in their own convenience. (Martinez-Bravo et al 2011; Li & O'Brien 1999)

Actually, China is neither the first, nor the only country to conduct this partially local democratization in the world. Such local elections also existed in other authoritarian countries such as India, Brazil, and Indonesia previously. (Besley & Burgess 2002; Foster & Rosenzweig 2001; Olken 2010). Village elections in China proved to be effective in monitoring village leaders' governance and prompting the provision of public goods. Besides, proponents of this political reform also expect it to be the first step of further democratization, though until now there is still no clear sign of expansion of local democracy to a higher-level government.

Despite the contributions that Chinese village elections have made to the local governance and stability, problems also came out, among which the

power-sharing puzzle between the local party branch and the elected village committee is the most prominent one as there is no clear stipulations in legal provisions related to their power demarcation. According to the Regulation of CCP's Organization Work in Rural Area, the main responsibility of a party branch in village is to discuss and decide "important issues" related to local economic and social development (Zhongguofangzheng Press, 2004); While in terms of the Organic Law of Village Committee, "big issues" in village should be decided by autonomous organizations such as village committee, village assembly, and village representative assembly. In this sense, both organizations possess paralleled *de jure* power since it is hard to differentiate "important issues" and "big issues" in small villages. (Guo, 2001) However, this *de jure* power is endowed by different authorities. Based on a Leninist principle called democratic centralism* (Chinese People's Publishing House, 2012), the party branch in Chinese village is empowered by the upper-level party committee. The elected village committee, in contrast, is empowered by local electorates. In this sense, provided that village elections are competitive and fair, the party secretary will follow upper-level government's mandate, but village chief will be accountable to villagers. Consequently, this power-sharing puzzle and the accountability problem may lead to conflicts between village chief and party secretary.

* Due to this democratic centralism, once a new policy being suggested, the lower-level party branch can enjoy full discussion before the upper-level party committee makes the final decision. But once the decision is made, the low-level party branch will have no bargain space but fully accept and implement the policy.

Given this institutional deficiency on Chinese local governance, when will the conflict emerge between village chief and party secretary? Why does this conflict emerge? If there do exist different preferences, is there any incentive for certain player to defect for an agreement? In this paper, I will develop a pure strategic model to explain these research questions. I argue that as the village chief and party secretary are accountable to different authorities, they may possess different preferences towards certain public policies. When facing consistent policies, towards which villagers and upper-level government possess the same preference, both party secretary and village chief will prefer to enforce them. However, when dealing with contentious policies, towards which villagers' interest is largely deprived by the upper-level government, while party secretary still prefer to enforce them, village chief, on the contrary, tends to reject them. Both village chief and party secretary have no incentive to defect in these two situations as the outcomes in my model are in equilibrium.

Regarding this outcome, my next research question in this paper is how to deal with the conflict between village chief and party secretary. In practice, government leaders in different provinces have put forward various solutions. A simple solution is to merge the two sets personnel and let party secretary hold concurrent position of village chief. Besides, leaders of Qing County in Hebei Province designed a new method in 2002 and soon spread its use to the whole county. This political experiment was named "Qingxian Model" later by Chinese

scholars. To probe into its processing mechanism and practical outcome, I conducted a field study in Qing County in 2010 with three team members. We found that by resurrecting the power of Village Representative Assembly (VRA) nominally and assigning the party secretary to run for the president of VRA, the party branch in village regains its power over the village committee. Thus, we concluded that in the long run, the “Qingxian Model” would sabotage the local democracy in China.

In the following paper, I will first review some existing research works related to Chinese village elections. After that, I will lay out some background knowledge of Chinese village elections in the third section, and then elaborate the formal model based on political interactions between village chief and party secretary regarding different types of public policies in Section Four. In Section Five, I will discuss the “Qingxian Model” in detail as a solution to deal with the power-sharing puzzle between village chief and party secretary. A conclusion of the whole paper will come at the end.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

There are various research works focusing on China's local level self-autonomy issue since its initiation in 1982, most of which, however, were engaged in analyzing village elections, which were seen as the core content of the self-governance in rural China. Among these various studies, three questions are generally put forward and explained by scholars, namely incentives for Chinese central leaders to initiate popular elections at the local level, the competitiveness and fairness of the popular elections, and potential outcomes of such village elections.

Regarding the first question, scholars tend to explain it in a similar way that Chinese leaders mainly treat village elections as a strategy to regain the political power and legitimacy in rural areas. Based on abundant historical documents, Li and O'Brien (1999) argued explicitly that before the enactment of the Organic Law of Village Committee in 1988, contentions were widespread among Chinese senior leaders as well as the local officials. While the opponents were afraid that introducing local elections and endowing more autonomous rights to peasants may exacerbate the loose central-local and cadre-villager relations, the proponents, among whom two senior leaders, Peng Zhen and Bo Yibo stood out, believed that in the reform era, as the decision-making process was largely decentralized to local officials, it was harder to monitor local cadres' behavior.

Besides, as peasants became less dependent on the state, unpopular public policies would encounter more resistance from below. Consequently, initiating village elections will on one hand transfer the previously imperfect monitoring job to vernacular villagers, thus improving the quality of village leadership, and on the other hand mitigate the severe cadre-villager relations, thus making unpopular policies more acceptable. (O'Brien 1994, Kelliher 1997, Manion 1996, Li & O'Brien 2006, Tsai 2007). For me, I tend to agree with these scholars' analysis that virtually village elections just served as a tool for CCP to rebuild the support in rural areas.

In terms of questions related to the competitiveness and fairness of electoral process, the Carter Center, with the help of the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA), has contributed valuable research documents. Starting in 1997, the Carter Center has sent several research groups to different provinces in China, such as Yunnan, Guangdong, Fujian, Hebei, Hunan, and Heilongjiang, to observe the electoral process, collect data, and make relative analyses. Their observation and research basically cover the whole process of a village election, including the formulation of Village Election Committee and Village Representative Assembly, the primary nomination and the final election of candidates, the ballot casting, and the publication of electoral results. According to their evaluation report, there is a significant improvement in the standardization and quality of village elections with time passing. (The Carter

Center, 1998) Besides, most scholars tend to believe that initially local elections are uncompetitive, which was reflected in two aspects. First, based on original electoral procedures, the nomination process is conducted by the upper-level government rather than the general public, which largely weakens villagers' discretion in deciding their leaders. (Manion 1996) Second, previous local cadres were generally hostile to village elections for fear of losing their vested interests unless they were confident that they could still win out in competitive elections. To maintain their power, local cadres were engaged in manipulating the elections, either offering money to higher-level officials for support, or directly buy votes from villagers. (Li & O'Brien 1999, Wang 2009). However, some scholars point out that the competitiveness issue has largely been solved, especially after the revision of Organic Law of Village Committee in 1998, in which the nomination process has generally opened to all villagers. Besides, as villagers became more familiar and knowledgeable about democratic settings, they were more inclined to defend the electoral system by petitioning to a higher-level authority if local cadres violated regulations. (O'Brien 1996, Li & O'Brien 1995) Another set of papers move further to explain what factors may influence the competitiveness. O'Brien and Li (2000) maintained that relatively well off villages tend to have more competitive elections. While Shi (1999) and Epstein (1997) argued that villages with average wealth and median income were more likely to hold competitive elections. Besides, Oi and Rozelle (2000),

explained that it is the source of outcome, village's industrial structure and the participation of villagers in assemblies and representative assemblies that jointly determine the competitiveness of village elections.

The third research topic focused on potential political outcomes of village elections. First, one group of scholars probed into the possibility that village elections could contribute to the higher-level democratization (Pei 1995, Wang 1998, Shi 1999) and the development of civil society (Chan, 1998). Besides, by observing the experiment of township elections in several provinces, Li (2002) argued that the village elections might help initiate the further electoral reform, and the widespread attention from international community may press the local government to improve its human right record. However, some scholars questioned the significance of village elections and argued that the local democracy can only make peripheral contributions to China's democratization. (Louie, 2001) Besides, the second group of scholars focused more on whether village elections can prompt the amelioration of local governance and the accountability of local cadres. Manion (1994) argued that as the elected village chief will be more accountable to the villagers, state involvement will be less in local economy. However, in one of her later research works, Manion (1996) revised her argument. By observing the villager and local official's attitudes towards the state role in the local economy, she argued that village chief is simultaneously accountable to the upper-level government and local villagers.

Tsai (2002), and Brandt and Turner (2007) both demonstrated in their papers that openly elected leaders do respond to villager complaints for fear of being voted out of office. Mu and Zhang (2011) maintained that village chief could only respond to certain groups of villagers. They categorize China's villages into natural villages and administrative villages*, and argued that group identity influences the election results of village cadres, who in turn offers more targeted public goods to their own natural villages. Besides, they also maintain that elected village chief will show less favoritism in the allocations of public goods than unelected secretary, who tends to allocate more resources to her own ethnic group. Alpermann (2001) began to discuss the accountability issue of local cadres in the context of certain policies. He argued that when dealing with some contentious policies, such as the one-child policy and policies related to local economic development, party secretary still plays decisive role and village chief only acts as the "agents" of the party. However, Kennedy et al. (2004) opposed this argument by proving that competitive village elections will press elected leaders to be more accountable to villagers when making local land policies. Martinez-Bravo et al. (2011)'s paper further divided the state policies into congruent and incongruent policies and argued that as long as village chiefs possess certain discretion over the decision-making of these policies, they will

* The natural villages are formed spontaneously and naturally through a long time, mostly influenced by the geographic characteristics and living patterns; while the administrative villages are created by CCP in convenience of control, mostly bigger than the natural villages and composed by several adjacent natural villages.

tend to represent the villagers' interest in both popular and unpopular policies.

The scholars above have contributed valuable knowledge to this certain research field, but several arguments need to be further discussed and improved. First, though Chinese central leaders still mainly focus on maximizing the strategic effects of local elections, i.e. to maintain local stability and prompt the enforcement of state policies, the election, as a democratic setting, will spontaneously create some institutional effects. Given that village elections become more competitive and widespread with time passing, these institutional effects will further stand out. Thus when discussing political outcomes of such elections, we should not simply neglect the institutional effects. Second, previous research works mainly focus on the accountability issue of village chief, while the role party secretary plays in local affairs is largely ignored. Actually, party branch still possesses paralleled *de jure* and *de facto* power in local decision-making process, and nominally, party secretary is still the boss and "first hand" ("*Yibashou*" in Chinese) in village. (Oi & Rozelle 2000, Alpermann 2001) Consequently, we should take party secretary's preference, and most importantly the interactions between village chief and party secretary, into consideration. Finally, we must avoid the generalization problem during the research. As the Organic Law of Village Committee only provides an outline of village elections, different provinces can formulate different electoral rules based on their own reality. Thus, the concrete interactions between party secretary and

village chief may be largely influenced by peculiar formal and informal institutions.

In terms of the power-sharing puzzle between village chief and party secretary, though some scholars have mentioned this problem, few conduct deeper research. Guo and Bernstein (2004) argued that the conflict could arise because the foundation of their legitimacy and authority differs, and a possible solution is to merge these two institutions by asking party secretary to run for the post of village chief. Besides, He (2003) argued that the relation between the self-governing village and the upper-level government may also be in trouble. While the party secretary in villages serves as the agent of upper-level party branch, the elected village committee is not necessarily obedient to the upper-level authorities. Li (2002) further explained the two-committee conflict within the context of the relation between the party and villagers. He argued that the functions of these two committees are overlapped in terms of the village governance, resulting in a paradox that emphasizing the party leadership will paralyze the self-governance, while highlighting the self-governance will deteriorate the party leadership.

Regarding “Qingxian Model”, only a few scholars, all of whom are Chinese, focused on its function and implication. Among these research works, there do have some valuable pieces, such as Peng and Shangguan (2008)’s paper “the political participation after local election: an example of the villagers

representative assembly in ‘Qingxian Model’”, Wang (2009)’s paper “improving the village self-autonomy: the analysis of ‘Qingxian Model’”, Liu et al. (2010)’s paper “from grassroots democracy to the rule of law: a survey of Qing County’s villager self-autonomy”, and Lian et al. (2009)’s paper “get rid of the two-dimension dilemma in the authority delineation of party branch and village committee: a reconsideration of ‘Qingxian Model’”. However, the basic argument of these papers is similar. They all first describe causes and functions of “Qingxian Model” in detail and then basically affirm the positive influence of “Qingxian Model” on enhancing the party’s leadership, overcoming the existing conflict and protecting villagers’ rights. However, few of these studies have mentioned the institutional problem inside the “Qingxian Model” and the potential harm it can exert on Chinese local democracy.

Chapter Three: Background of Chinese Village Elections

Local leaders in China's administrative structure have always played a crucial role in enforcing state policies and fulfilling the well-being of local villagers due to the large geographic scope and the decentralization nature inherited since as early as the Mao era. (Cai & Treisman, 2006) Up to 2009, there have been 691,510 administrative villages in China, which widely distributed across the Chinese territory. Even though the village is not an official level of government, leaders at this level still serve as key political and economic actors in determining the fate of China's villagers.

During the collectivization era, the production team (shengchan dadui) was the only legal organization in local areas. Basically, all villagers and households in a certain area must be enrolled in a local production team. Though the size of production teams varied depending on the local population, their main responsibilities were the same, consisting of organizing team members to conduct collective economic activities, allocating local goods and compensations, and conducting political and ideological educations. (Oi, 1989) In such an organization simultaneously possessing the economic and political function, the power delineation was clear. The production team leader, who is almost always a party member, served a dualistic role. Towards the general team members, the team leader strictly controls the over-all power, most importantly the allocation

power of public resources. However, as the agent of upper-level communal officials, the team leader has to follow their command and finish the task mandated by them. In this sense, it is a perfect vertical power structure, in which the team leader is the gatekeeper of resources and opportunities for the team and its members, but also the executor and enforcer of mandated policies from above. Although local governments had already emerged before popular elections, they could seldom exert any leverage to the existing power structure as team leaders, who are also party cadres, still strictly held the general power, and government leaders in this system served only as the executor under the control of production team. Though there were elections of local party leaders, due to the “intra-party democracy” rule of CCP, villagers had no influence at all as the candidates were pre-selected by the upper-level party committee and the election was only open to party members. In this sense, we can see that this vertical power structure is adaptable to the collective economy pattern as it can maximize party cadres’ allocation and distribution power of public resources.

However, since Deng Xiaoping initiated the decollectivization reform in 1978, the social and economic changes have largely influenced the CCP governance in rural areas. First, after initiating the decollectivization reform, most original production teams became village small groups (*xiaozu*), a subordinate organization in villages retaining little economic power. Instead, the family *per se* became the unit of production and accounting, taking care of its resources

allocation, such as the grain, fertilizer, and harvest alone. Unlike the circumstances during collectivization era when rural households mainly depended on the sharing of public goods, villagers basically controlled their own fates after the reform, making them cherish more on private surplus and simultaneously became more resistant to unpopular policies mandated from above as these policies would deprive certain part of their private goods. This transformation therefore made unpopular policies harder to enforce in local areas. Since local cadres are the agents of central government, villagers would naturally express their anger to these cadres, which deteriorated the cadre-mass relations.

Besides, local party secretaries themselves also became less prestigious since the decollectivization reform. Age and corruption were two main problems. First, the aging problem of local cadres began to perplex CCP senior leaders as early as in 1970s. (Li & O'Brien, 1995) As there was no genuine limit on party cadres' tenure, most of them, who assumed the position since the foundation of new China, never stepped down. This problem became severer after the reform was initiated as these old "local emperors" who were armed with the Mao doctrines can hardly understand and keep up with the new development. As of 2001, there were 1,357,000 party branches in rural China with a total party membership of 29.5 million, but among these local branches, as many as 356,000 were experienced rectifications from 1994 to 2000 due to their weakness. (Guo &

Bernstein, 2004) Besides, the corruptive problem also became furious in local areas after decollectivization. Since CCP largely decentralized decisive power to local cadres to decide local affairs, party secretaries then possessed the final discretion on the surplus of public goods as long as they submitted the required amount of money and goods to higher-level authorities. In this situation, the high-speed economic development in local areas would create great incentives for these cadres to seek illegal rents without effective monitor from above, resulting in the large agency costs of central government.

Based on these realities, CCP senior leaders decided to introduce popular elections in rural areas in 1987 with the initiation of the Organic Law of Village Committee. The original purposes of holding local elections were on one hand letting villagers to decide their own leaders so that the popularly elected cadres could help enforce unpopular policies from above, and on the other hand transferring the monitoring responsibility on local cadres to vernacular villagers so that the corruptive activities can be effectively contained. Then with this political experiment, cadre-mass relations were expected to be mitigated and the provision of public goods was expected to be prompted. (The Carter Center, 1998)

However, as the 1987 Organic Law only provided the basic principles for the village elections without a specific stipulation on electoral process, every province produced its own electoral rules and measurements based on these

principles. In 1998, the revised version of the Organic Law was put forward with more detailed stipulations on the electoral process, but formal regulations on the whole electoral process were still absent and one continued to observe a great deal of variations across provinces. (Wang, 2008) According to the record of Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA), the first province to conduct province-wide village elections was Fujian in 1982, and the last province to conduct local elections was Yunnan in 2001. By the year of 2005, 98% of villages in China had initiated at least one election. (Wang, 2009)

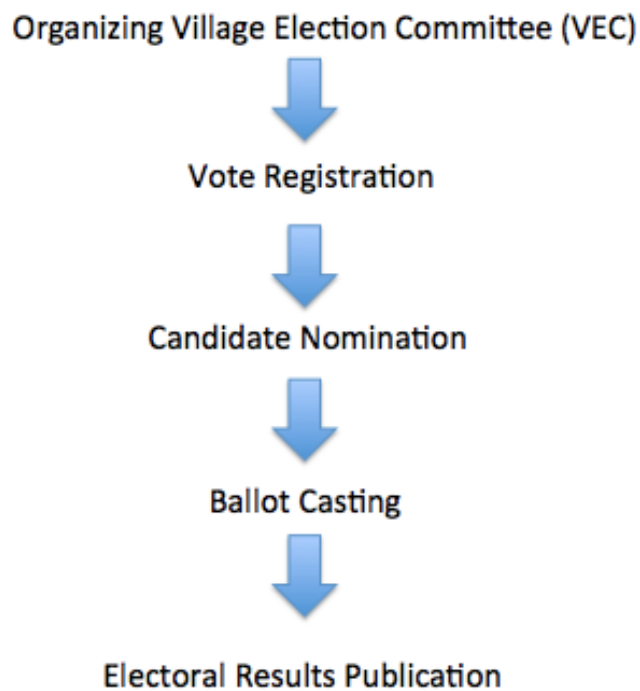


Figure 1: The Procedures of Chinese Village Election

There are five stages of a whole electoral process for Chinese village elections based on the stipulations of Organic Law, namely organizing Village Election Committee (VEC), voter registration, candidate nomination, ballot casting, and the publication of electoral results.

To start an election, the village must first organize a VEC. The VEC member should be nominated and elected by the Village Assembly (VA), Village Representative Assembly (VRA), and the Village Team (*cunmin xiaozu*). According to the “avoidance rule”, a VEC member should quit the committee if she or her relatives later becomes the candidate. (Article 12)

After the VEC has been organized, the committee should be in charge of the next step, voter registration. According to the Organic Law, all villagers whose age has past eighteen years possess the right to vote and to be voted, regardless of their ethnics, races, genders, occupations, family background, religious belief, education level, financial status, and residential length. The only exception is that the people who have been deprived of political rights cannot vote. (Article 13) When the vote registration is finished, the VEC should publish the voter list twenty days before the election day.

In terms of the candidate nomination, the Organic Law stipulates that the candidates should be nominated directly by registered voters. Besides, the candidate’s number should exceed the number of seats. (Article 15) In practice, different provinces develop their own nomination ways. Candidates can be

nominated by individual voters as well as by groups (group nomination). Besides, a voter can nominate others or himself (self nomination).

Then on the election day, all ballot should be cast anonymously and counted publically. Once the counting process is finished, the result must be published at once. (Article 15) For those who are disabled, a roving box should be applied. The election is valid only if more than half of registered voters come to vote. To win a position, the candidate must obtain more than half of valid votes. If two candidates running for the same position obtain the same number of votes, a run-off election should be held to determine the final result. (Article 15)

From the description of electoral rules above, we can see that if those rules are followed well, the elected village committee can be counted as a self-governance organization in Chinese rural area. However, as China is a party-state, in which Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the only incumbent party, the party branch in the village will also obtain certain discretion over local affairs in order to maintain the CCP control in rural areas. Though the CCP demands that members of the party branch should also be elected by the party members in village, the positions, in practice, are mostly assigned by the upper-level party organization, i.e., the villagers have no rights to decide the party branch member. Then what is the relation between the assigned party branch and elected village committee? At least in the Organic Law, there is no clear answer. According to Article 3, the party branch should take a leadership

role in supporting and protecting villagers' self-governance, while in Article 5, the law stipulates that the village committee should support and organize villagers to conduct economic activities, and take the responsibility for the local productive service. The potential power-sharing puzzle just lies in the unclear power demarcation above.

It is not hard to perceive the contradiction of the CCP's legislators. On one hand, pressed by the rural decollectivization and development, the central government has to endow more autonomous rights to villagers to keep the stability there, but on the other hand, the 800 million populations of peasants are always a big group of the potential revolts if the CCP losing the control, especially when the central elites are instructed by thousand times that it was the dependence on peasants that led to the CCP's victory in the civil war against the former KMT. Thus, this contradiction caused the unclear power delineation of party branches and village committees, which further led to the conflict between party cadres and village chiefs in practice. For party cadres, they are confused about the meaning to have elected VC as long as the party secretary still possesses the "core leadership". Elected village chiefs are also perplexed that if the leadership of the CCP must be adhered to, why bother initiating democratic elections in the first place. While for upper-level officials, what their concerned most are whether the elected VCs would fully carry out instructions from above in the same way as when party secretaries are in charge.

In the following section, I will develop a pure strategic model to explain how village elections influence the interactions between party secretary and village chief regarding different types of public policies.

Chapter Four: The Model and Supportive Evidences

China is a dominant-party state, in which the formal institutions of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and of the government are tightly intertwined from the center to the lowest level.

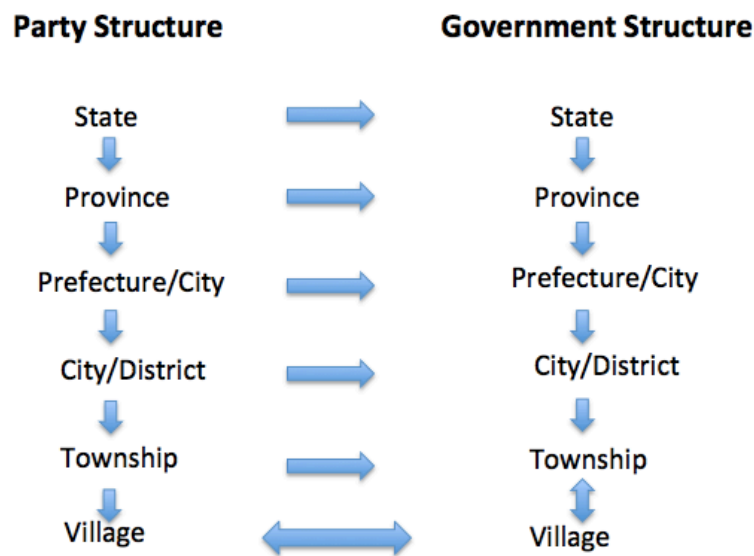


Figure 2: The Power Structure of Chinese Political Authorities after 1988 Organic Law

In Figure two, we can see that vertically, there are six-level party organizations and correspond governments, namely the state, province, city or prefecture, county, township, and village. Vertically, the upper-level authority leads the lower-level one, with only one exception, which is the relation between township-level government and village committee. According to the Organic Law of Village Committee, the township-level government can only offer “support,

help, and guidance” to the village committee’s work, but cannot intervene the village committee to run their own business. (Article 3) Besides, the village committee just needs to “help” township authority to conduct their work, without necessity to be governed by the upper-level government. In this sense, unlike relations between other vertical authorities, the village committee owns its own independence.

Horizontally, the party organization leads the administrative unit in each of the first five levels. The only exception also occurs at the lowest level between village committee and local party branch. Just as I have described above, relations between these two authorities are not well defined. Besides, the selection methods of members in these two authorities are totally different. Members in party branch are mostly assigned by the upper-level party organization, which means that the party branch in village will be accountable to upper-level authorities. As for members in the village committee, if we assume that the village election is free and competitive, they will be elected by eligible villagers, and according to the Organic Law, if more than one fifth of the voters jointly sign their names, they can propose to dismiss the irresponsible committee members with a justifiable reason. In this sense, the village committee is accountable to villagers. (Guo, 2004)

Then what are the main tasks for village officials? In China, village leaders basically have three responsibilities, namely the enforcement of state directives,

the fulfillment of township demands, and the provision of public goods. Traditionally, state policies include the birth control, land expropriation, and state tax collection. But with the abolition of agricultural tax in 2006, villagers' burden has been largely relieved. Regarding the requirements from township authorities, before the political decentralization in 1980s when villages were still under tightly control, the township government had the financial responsibility to fund the village public goods and services. In return, villages need to share a certain ratio of their revenue with township authorities. After the decentralization, nominally each level government has been responsible for funding and organizing public goods for citizens under their jurisdiction, and simultaneously keeps any revenues in excess of a preset amount they are required to deliver upwards. (Tsai, 2007) In reality, villages can hardly get any fund from above and have to mainly count on themselves to generate revenues because the state funds allocated to provinces have been "shared" by each level governments and when they come to the lowest level, nothing is barely left. Simultaneously, township governments lose the justifiable reason to share the revenues generated by village. Instead, they have to open some informal channel to fund their public expenditures. These informal institutions include the establishment of various levies, fees, and fines, which are generally called "extrabudgetary funds" as raising these funds do not need explicit authorization from above as long as they are not violating existing regulations. (Tsai, 2007)

However, these funds are extremely sensitive to the villagers who have largely earned their discretion of self-governance. (Li, 2002) The third responsibility, the provision of public goods and services such as roads, water, electricity, land allocation, and rural education, is relatively easy to understand. As village leaders, to enhance the local economic and social development is always their priority.

As I described in Chapter Three, before initiating village elections, party secretary possessed greater discretion on local affairs, and village chief only served as the executor to enforce party cadres' demands. Besides, as both party secretary and village chief were appointed by upper-level authorities, they must simultaneously follow mandates from above. In this institutional setting, there will be no obvious conflict between both village leaders and they will jointly enforce popular and unpopular policies mandated from above without any divergence. Sometimes they may use coercions to deal with the potential popular resistance on certain unpopular policy to protect their principals' interests.

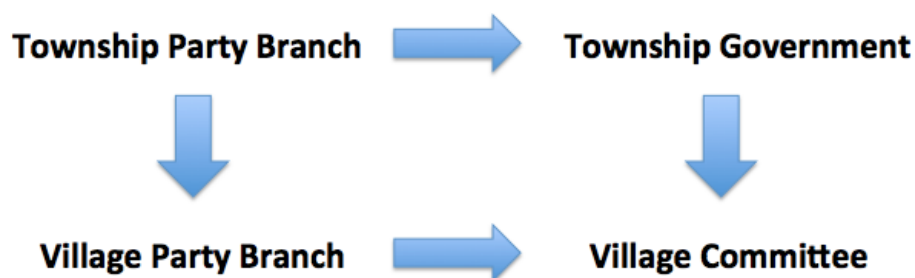


Figure 3: The Power Structure between Township and Village Authorities before 1988 Organic Law

Though this governance type can effectively prompt the delivery of public policies, it may also instigate villagers' dissatisfactions, and the accumulation of anger may finally result in the instability of local areas. Besides, as upper-level principals can hardly exert effective monitor on local cadres and villagers possess no right to do so, village leaders then have strong incentives to participate in illegal rent-seeking activities, which will sabotage the provision of public goods and generate great agency lost for upper-level authorities.

After 1988 Organic Law, the local governance pattern has been changed greatly since village chief and party secretary are accountable to different principals. Then, when facing the tasks above, will they have conflict policy preferences? If so, in what kind of specific public policy will they fight each other?

4.1 The Formal Model

I will develop two separate models to formulate interactions between party branch and village committee when dealing with two types of public policies, consistent policies and contentious policies. Basically, consistent policies mainly focus on the provision of certain public goods, such as the construction of modern roads, the advanced irrigation system, the establishment of rural schools, and the allocation of public lands. As villagers will generally benefit from this type of policies, the enforcement of such policies will be acceptable and welcome.

However, contentious policies, such as the birth control, the land expropriation, and the illegal levy of revenue from the township government, are relatively difficult to execute in rural areas they jeopardize villagers' interests.

In both models, there are two players, the village chief (VC), who represents the village committee, and the party secretary (PS) representing local party branch. Regarding both types of public policies, both players can choose to accept (A) and enforce them in village, or reject (R) and appeal to a higher-level office to protect the villagers' interests. For both players, I assume that:

(A). They both possess paralleled discretion over the decision-making process of certain policies;

(B). Institutional effect outweighs strategic effect, meaning that their preferences are determined by legal provisions and institutional settings rather than the expectations from upper-level authorities;

(C). Both players are rational players, caring only about their own interests;

(D). As both players have the same discretion, when they choose different actions, they will both have the same chance to win out.

In terms of the payoff, "a" denotes the benefits for both players if the outcome is consistent with their preferences; "w" denotes the punishment for the party secretary if her choice is inconsistent with her principal, i.e., the upper-level authorities; "x" denotes the cost for village chief if her action is inconsistent with villagers' interest; and "t" denotes the transaction cost in the circumstance when

player choose different actions. To better understand it, we can assume it to be the extra punishment on both players for the delay of the initiation of public policies resulting from conflict preferences between the village chief and the party secretary. Besides, we further assume that compared with benefits and punishments, the extra transaction cost “t” is relatively small. Below are the two models respectively.

4.1.1. Model 1: Pure Strategic Game on Consistent Policies

The concrete payoff for both players regarding different actions is shown in Figure 4. As this type of policies is mainly related to the provision and allocation of certain public goods, villagers will generally gain benefits. In this sense, both village chief and party secretary will tend to enforce such policies.

		PS	
		A	R
VC	A	a	$\frac{1}{2}a-t$
	R	$\frac{1}{2}a-(t+x)$	-X
		$\frac{1}{2}a-t$	-W

Figure 4: Pure Strategic Game on Consistent Public Policies

In this figure, when both players choose to accept, policies will surely be enforced and both players will gain the total benefit “a”. If one player chooses to accept while the other chooses to reject, certain policy will have half chance to be enforced and half chance to be tabled. Regardless of the result, as players in these two situations have different choices, transaction cost “t” will be added to both players. Besides, the player who chooses to reject the policies will assume an additional cost (“x” for village chief and “w” for party secretary) as their actions are controvert with their principals’ preferences. If both players choose to reject, policies will surely be tabled. In this situation, no profits will be distributed on either side. Besides, they all have to suffer from the punishment.

By solving this game, we can easily figure out that the only Nash Equilibrium is the situation in which both players choose to accept and enforce the public policies. This result is quite intuitive. For the party secretary, she will always prefer to follow upper-level mandates regardless of concrete policy types. In this particular situation, the provision of public goods and services will surely help maintain the stability in rural areas, which for CCP is the highest priority. For the village chief, although she also chooses to accept the policies, the motivation is not originated from upper-level authorities’ demand, but from villagers’ needs. In sum, there will be no conflict between the village chief and the party secretary when consistent policies are mandated from above.

4.1.2. Model 2: Pure Strategic Game on Contentious State Policies

In this model, this type of public policies must fulfill two requirements. First, there are divergent preferences between state villagers and upper-level governments. Enforcing such policies in villages will surely jeopardize villagers' interest. Second, elected village chiefs must possess certain discretion in the implementation process of such policies. With these qualifications, the one-child policy, land expropriation policy, and the illegal revenue levy from upper-level governments can perfectly fit into this type.

The one-child policy, initiated in 1979, regulates that each family could only have one child in order to control the birth fertility. However, this policy is strongly controversial to Chinese traditional thought, which is still popular nowadays in most Chinese rural areas. In this sense, the tension between the central authorities' demand of shrinking the fertility and villagers' will to have more children is still existing, even though there are some exemptions permitted by the state. For example in some area, if the first child is a girl, the family can have one more child, and if the couple are all single child of their parents, they can have at most two children. Under the pressure of this tension, village leaders, who possess certain discretion over the enforcement of birth control, can choose either to fulfill the mandate from above, or to be accountable to the villagers by helping them petition for more ratios.

The land expropriation policy is also under great debate in current China.

According to the Organic Law of China's Land (China Legal Publishing House, 2011), the upper-level government can expropriate certain amount of land in rural areas to satisfy modern use, including the public use such as the construction of national or provincial highways, and the private use such as the establishment of township enterprises. These activities will result in the permanent loss of farmland to villagers. (Cai 2003) Although strict limitations are imposed on this behavior by legal provisions, they are occasionally violated by the upper-level governments, which exacerbates villagers' hostility. Similar to the one-child policy, the village chief still possesses certain discretion to choose whether to follow the command above or delay the expropriation by lobbying upper-level government.

In terms of "extrabudgetary funds" that the township leaders collect from villages, just as I described above, are also extremely sensitive to villagers once they figure out the truth. As villagers can hardly gain any regular funds from above, they will cherish any coin they earn by their own hands. In this sense, village leaders are always under great pressure to help levy this illegal money in villages. Instead, the village chief can petition to the higher-level government to ask for the abolition of this informal extraction of revenue, thus defending villagers' interests.

		PS	
		A	R
A	$-X$ a	$\frac{1}{2}a - (t+x)$ $\frac{1}{2}a - (t+w)$	
VC	$\frac{1}{2}a - t$	a	
R	$\frac{1}{2}a - t$	$-W$	

Figure 5: Pure Strategic Game on Contentious Public Policies

The payoff of both players is shown in figure 5. In this game, the interactions between village chief and party secretary are surely zero-sum, meaning that the profits gained by one player will cause the equal value loss of the other. In this situation, when both players choose to accept and enforce certain policies, party secretary will achieve the total amount of profit “a”, while village chief will suffer the punishment exerted by villagers as the policy outcome contravenes villagers’ preference. Correspondingly, when both players choose to reject certain public policies, village chief will achieve the total amount of profits at the expense of party secretary’s loss. When the village chief chooses to accept the policies while the party secretary rejects them, both players will at first assume the punishment by their principals as neither of them follows principals’ preferences.

Besides, as both players have different actions, they both have half chance to win and half chance to lose during their fight, causing both of them to assume extra transaction costs. Finally, when village chief chooses to reject and party secretary chooses to accept, the punishment is avoided as both players stay with their principals' preferences. Since both players have the same chance to win, they will only possess half of their profit "a" plus the extra transaction cost.

Compared these two models, we may find that when state and villagers' preferences change, the payoff for both players are totally different. In this model, the situation that both players choose to accept the policies is no longer equilibrium as when public policies jeopardize villagers' interest, accepting them will be worse off for village chief. Instead, the only Nash Equilibrium in this game is the situation in which village chief rejects and party secretary accepts the policy.

4.2 The Implications of the Models

By developing two pure strategic models of interactions between villager chief and party secretary regarding two different types of state policies, we find two Nash Equilibra. When dealing with consistent public policies, both players will choose to accept. When dealing with contentious policies, party secretary chooses to accept while village chief chooses to refuse is the only stable situation.

This result perfectly answers the research questions I put forward at the

beginning of this paper. Since there exists power-sharing puzzle between village chief and party secretary, both organizations possess same discretion over the decision-making process of the enforcement of certain public policy. Conflicts between these two organizations will emerge only when state intends to impose certain unpopular policies at the expense of villagers' cost. In this situation, while party secretary chooses to follow the mandate above, elected village chief will be accountable to villagers by manipulating to delay the execution of such policies. This conflict, according to the second model, is stable as both players will be worse off if defecting to the other choice.

What can we learn from this analysis? What political outcomes will emerge by introducing popular elections in rural areas? First, if we believe that formal institutions do matter once put into effect, we should confirm that with the expansion and amelioration of Chinese village elections, village chief will tend to be more accountable to the general public for fear of being voted out of office. Regarding party secretaries in the local party branch, though they are not accountable to villagers, they still under the direct supervision of the general public, which means that villagers have the potential to lodge complaints to higher-level authorities if party secretary commits any malfeasance. If this happens, the party secretary's career may face severe challenge with the potential punishment from above. In this sense, when dealing with the consistent public policies, both party secretary and village chief will tend to accept and

enforce them in the village. At the same time, as the monitoring responsibility on local cadres has been transferred from upper-level authorities to villagers after village elections, villagers can exert more effective and direct supervision on local cadres' behavior, thus avoiding potential loss of profits by preventing potential embezzlement and corruptive activities from local cadres, which are quite normal in the era of communal system. To conclude, by studying the village leaders' interactions toward consistent public policies, we can see that village elections can effectively prompt the provision of public goods and services in villages.

In terms of the contentious policies, before initiating village elections, these unpopular were enforced coercively by upper-level government with no legal latitude for villagers to resist. In that situation, upper-level authorities will achieve their best preference at the expense of the loss of villagers. By introducing village elections, while the party secretary's preference remains unchanged, the village chief shifts her accountability to represent villagers below rather than simply following the mandate above. Therefore, the interactions and the subsequent payoffs of party secretary and village chief have totally changed. Though both players still maintain rewards from their principals, they have to assume an extra transaction cost due to the policy divergence. Based on this logic, we can infer that initiating village elections will exacerbate rather than mitigate the difficulty of the enforcement of unpopular public policies in village.

Then, if we further compare the two different local governance patterns before and after initiating village elections, we may find the CCP faces a dilemma. The original purpose of this political experiment is to mitigate the severe cadre-mass conflicts and to exert more effective monitor on local cadres in case of their corruptive activities and the subsequent agency lost for central government. Once putting village elections into effect, although the illegal rent-seeking has been largely mitigated, and cadre-mass relations are also ameliorated, some other problems came simultaneously. The conflicts have been transferred from former cadre-mass relations to two-committee relations between party secretary and village chief. Besides, village elections may result in those unpopular policies even harder to be enforced.

4.3 The Supportive Evidences of the Models

Based on the models I developed above, we have come to two intermediate conclusions. That is after initiating the village elections:

- (1) Regarding consistent public policies, village chief and party secretary will both tend to be more willing to accept and enforce such policies than before because the transfer of monitoring responsibility from upper-level authorities to villagers will exert more direct and effective supervision on villager leaders' behavior;*
- (2) Regarding contentious public policies, village chief and party secretary will*

tend to possess different preferences as they are accountable to different principals, which may result in the delay and dysfunction of such policies in village.

To prove whether the initiation of village elections result in the transformation of the execution of certain local polices, advanced quantitative research will surely provide us more solid evidences. However, data collection, especially for the record of sensitive topics, is always a severe obstacle for conducting research in an authoritarian state such as China. Even if researchers have enough funds, personal ties with officials in charge is also a necessary prerequisite. That may largely explain why most of previous research works on Chinese village elections are case studies instead of statistical research with large samples. Unfortunately, I cannot collect enough data related to my research questions above at the present, but there do exist several previous quantitative studies working on the accountability problems of Chinese village elections, which may well prove my models above.

The study I will describe in this paper was conduct by Shuna Wang and Yang Yao (2006). Their research mainly focuses on the impacts of village elections on the accountability of village committee, local fiscal sharing, and state taxation by collecting data from 48 villages in eight provinces for a time period from 1986 to 2002. They found that village elections in China substantially increase local public expenditures, and reduce administrative costs and revenues handed to

upper-level authorities. Besides, they found no significant influence of village elections on the state taxation. Though they did not emphasize the different types of public polices, the dependent variables in their model basically include all parameters I discussed above.

Table 1: Village Elections' Impact on Local Public Policies

Variables	Share of public expenditure		Share of administration costs		Share of income handed to township		Per capita tax	
	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8
Constant	15.67*** (1.52)	-11.77 (52.76)	24.75*** (1.31)	-14.71 (45.49)	26.34*** (1.51)	79.69 (53.25)	2.02*** (0.22)	-39.83*** (7.35)
Election dummy	4.21** (2.13)	4.87** (2.14)	-3.96** (1.83)	-2.79 (1.84)	-4.44** (2.12)	-4.31** (2.16)	-0.57* (0.31)	-0.48 (0.30)
Ln (population)		3.58 (7.48)		5.73 (6.44)		-7.88 (7.54)		5.46*** (1.04)
Ln (per capita income) (1000 yuan)		-1.65 (1.62)		2.14 (1.40)		-1.05 (1.64)		2.00*** (0.23)
Share of collective income in total income (%)		-0.14*** (0.05)		-0.14*** (0.04)		0.05 (0.05)		-0.00 (0.01)
Per capita land territory (mu)		0.55*** (0.15)		-0.43*** (0.13)		-0.12 (0.16)		0.01 (0.02)
Gini coefficient		0.27 (11.52)		0.74 (9.93)		11.05 (11.62)		3.01* (1.60)
Unemployment rate (%)		-0.46 (0.98)		-0.38 (0.85)		1.81* (0.99)		-0.20 (0.14)
Share of migrant workers (%)		0.03 (0.05)		-0.02 (0.05)		0.04 (0.05)		-0.00 (0.01)
Adjusted R ²	0.26	0.28	0.44	0.45	0.58	0.58	0.70	0.74

Source: Wang, 2006.

From the table above, we can see that the dependent variable “share of public expenditures”, which represents the provision of public goods and services I discussed above, is increasing significantly after the initiation of village elections. At the same time, the dependent variable “share of income handed to township”, which largely represents the township’s illegal revenue levy from village I talked before, is significantly decreasing after the elections. Both of them prove my models. In terms of the dependent variable “share of administration

cost”, which refers to the agency cost I discussed above, the decreasing tendency of administrative cost also proves that village elections significantly ameliorate the local governance. As for the state taxation, unlike the unpopular policies I stated above, village chief has little discretion on the execution of such policies because the tax rate has already been tightly fixed. Besides, since the agricultural tax, which was main source of state tax, has been abolished in 2006, the tax burden on villagers has been largely relieved. Thus, this variable can exert little influence on the local governance and interactions between village chief and party secretary.

Another research work conducted by Martinez-Bravo et al. (2011) also proved my models. Their study used the village-level data from 217 villages selected from 25 provinces for the time period from 1980 to 2005. Though this study did not directly point to the two-committee conflicts, we can still infer this conflict from their statistical results. First, by introducing a survey in the sample villages, they found that village elections have significantly increased the unilateral power of village chief and simultaneously decreased the discretion of the party secretary. Then, researchers of this study further probed into the village chief’s behavior by focusing on the management of public policies in villages. They categorized public policies by two parameters, namely whether certain policy is popular and whether village chief has discretion over certain policy. Using the data collected from these sample villages, they found that

regarding unpopular policies that village chiefs have decisive power, they tend to fulfill these policies based on villagers' rather than the upper-level authorities' preferences, which prove my second model that when dealing with contentious policies, the village chief tends to reject them. In terms of the popular policies that village chiefs have discretion, they maintained that village leaders also tend to make decisions in accordance with villagers' preference, which proves my first model above that village elections help intensify the monitor on village leaders and reduce agency costs. Besides, this study also introduced a third placebo group to test village chiefs' behavior on policies that they have no discretion, whether the policies are popular or not, and they found that there is no obvious change of policy preferences, proving that village chiefs can only exert influence on policies they have discretionary power.

Apart from the quantitative studies above, there are also some case studies directly discussing the two-committee conflicts. Guo and Bernstein (2004) discussed a case happened in Da'ao Village of Guangdong Province. The party secretary in this village sold a great amount of collectively owned land to the local private enterprises and embezzled the money earned from the land sale. Dissatisfied by the party secretary's corruptive activity, villagers, led by the village chief, urged the party secretary to submit the account book for check. However, the party secretary adamantly refused villagers' demand in case his corruption was exposed. Finally, the village chief lodged complaint to the

upper-level authorities to furiously expose the malfeasance of local party secretary. Pressed by local villagers' dissatisfaction, the upper-level party branch deprived the party secretary's position and charged him for his embezzlement.

Another case study was conducted by Li (2002) in Dongcun Village of Hunan Province. In this case, after the villagers realized that the township government levied an excessive fee related to children's education, which was essentially against the *Regulation Concerning Peasants' Fees and Labor* that designed by the State Council, they lodged a collective complaint to the township government under the leadership of the village chief. Without an acceptable answer from township leaders, the peaceful complaint soon became a violent protest. During the whole protest, the party secretary in Dongcun Village remained silent in his own home. This protest soon spread to another six villages located in the same county and finally drew the attention of provincial leaders. After the provincial government sent a special research team to the township, they quickly cancelled the illegal revenue extraction and dismissed the township governors.

Chapter Five: The Case Study, Qingxian Model

After discussing the interactions between village chief and party secretary, it is not hard to find that the power-sharing puzzle may cause great conflict between these two organizations, especially when they face unpopular policies mandated from above. Their conflict may cause the delay of the execution of certain policies, which may result in great negative effects on the local governance. For example, if villagers are unsatisfied with the local governance, they can lodge complaints to higher-level authorities, which may lead to instability in local areas. (Li & O'Brien 1996, Li 2002). Then here comes my second research question in this paper, which is how to solve the power-sharing conflict in Chinese local areas?

In fact, some institutional designers and academic scholars have already perceived this conflict and were engaged in some innovations to solve this problem. For example, in Guangdong Province, local CCP secretaries were required to run for the village chief in order to merge the personnel of these two committees and retake the village committee under CCP's control. Besides, in Shanxi Province, with the purpose of improving the legitimacy of the party secretary in the rural area, a two-ballot system was introduced. In this system, the upper-level party committee first selects some candidates eligible to run for the party secretary in a village. Then the villagers rule out the candidates they

don't like by election at the first run. After that, party members will then elect the secretary among the rest candidates at the second run. (Li, 1999)

“Qingxian Model” is another example to solve the power-sharing problem. In September 2002, leaders in Qing County of Hebei Province started to conduct this new experiment in selected 23 villages. Since the beginning of 2003, the new institution has been established around the county. Up to now, all 345 villages of the county have established Village Representative Assembly (VRA) and there are 6325 representatives in total.

5.1 The Basic Content and Mechanism of “Qingxian Model”

According to the official record, the standard definition of “Qingxian Model” is a new mechanism of self-autonomy in a rural area organized and led by the CCP. In this mechanism, the main specialty is to resurrect villagers representative assembly as a permanent political organization, and the power demarcation is that party branch possesses the top leadership, villagers representative assembly makes the decision, while village committee execute the concrete policy. (The Official Records of Qing County's Villages, 2009).

In this model, the resurrection of VRA is the main focus, but actually, the assembly is not innovative at all. According to the Organic Law of Village Committee, the villagers assembly (VA) is the top decision maker, and for those large administrative villages where the population are distributed relatively

dispersive, it is necessary to construct the VRA to execute the function of villagers assembly. The representative, who is normally recommended by every five to fifteen households, is responsible for discussing and deciding important issues related to village in regular representative meetings. (Article 25)

However, in reality, in most areas of Chinese villages, the VA and VRA have waned or even been suspended. In most areas, the VA and VRA meetings are only held no more than four times per year. (Oi & Rozelle, 2000) Thus their functions cannot be fulfilled. This phenomenon is largely due to the weak awareness of political conceptions of general villagers. Achieving their own land through China's economic reform, what villagers mostly concerned is their own economic status. In terms of the political power, they think it either belongs to the VC or belongs to the secretary, but not themselves.

Leaders in Qing County perceived the dysfunction of VA and VRA. After applying the "Qingxian Model", a detailed decision-making process on certain issues in each village becomes more complicated, at least nominally. In the first stage, a draft resolution is put forward by one of the following units: the party branch, the village committee, 1/10 of all villagers, or 1/3 of all representatives. After that, the party branch would examine the draft resolution and have preliminary comments on it. Then the joint meeting attended by all members from both party branch and village committee would be held to set the agenda for a subsequent discussion. Next the joint meeting attended by all members of

the party and of the two committees would scrutinize the draft. Then comes the most important part. The draft would be discussed and be voted in VRA where representatives have to affix their own stamps to assume the responsibility of decision-making. The content of the resolution would be publicized in the village, and would be executed by village committee who has the responsibility to report the result of execution to party branch, the representative conference, and finally, common villagers.

The “Qingxian Model” soon drew Chinese scholars’ attention and positive response after its initiation. For example, Xu Fuqun insists that this model is a hopeful approach for the solution to the conflict of the two committees. Cao Guoying concludes that “Qing Model” is an ideal choice in the consideration of limitations in reality. Wen Tiejun Points out that this model would not cost too much for reformation and therefore it is effective. Li Qiang also thinks that the model is both progressive and conservative and has taken the consideration of short term as well as long term objectives. Yu Jianrong himself speaks highly of this pattern, saying that the secretary of Qing County is so wise that he not only brings out solution to the paradox in the governance of village, but also brings out solution to problems that have a decisive effect on the vitality of CCP. (The Official Records of Qing County’s Villages, 2009)

5.2 The Case Study in Gengguantun Village

In order to examine the effectiveness of Qing County in practice, I developed a field study in Gengguantun Village of Qing County in July 2010, together with my three undergraduate classmates. During these eight-day field work, we audited the whole process of VRA meeting as observers, held a number of interviews with the secretary of the party branch, Pan Bingzhong, as well as other relevant officials in the village, and had conversations with representatives of villagers and party members. Meanwhile we were also interviewing general villagers in Gengguantun Village in order to learn more about their opinions concerned about the practice of “Qing Model”, the development of the village, the conflicts between the two committees.

5.2.1. Background of Gengguantun Village

Gengguantun Village is located in Qing County of Hebei Province. It is 0.5 km far from the downtown of Qing County and close to No.104 National Highway that provides the village with convenient transportation. It is also not far from Beijing, the capital of China, with only three hours’ driving distance. The geographical advantages have provided favorable conditions to the economic development of the village. Besides, the village is in the east of Mid-Hebei Plain where there are few mountains or hills. Climate conditions are also favorable. In 2007, the gross industrial output value is 35 million dollar, the yearly average

net income of villagers is 2000 dollar. It has become famous for prosperity and civilization among nearby areas. In 2005, the village built the first large-scale straw gasification station that was able to provide enough energy for cooking for the whole village. Many projects in the village have also won various rewards from upper-level authorities.

The secretary of party branch is Pan Bingzhong, who started to assume the position in 1994. He gave others an impression of efficiency and resolution. At the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s, the collective economy of the village was close to collapse because of a series of negative factors. At that time, Pan, who was a successful private entrepreneur then started to come into power and saved the collective economy through attracting investment and building factories. Though Pan had been emphasizing his selflessness during the interview, we found the opposite opinion when having conversations with general villagers. According to their description, Pan assumed the party branch position without giving up all his business, but instead remain to be the main shareholder of his enterprises. They believe many projects in the village are associated with Pan's business in a way after his came into power, in which he embezzled enormous illegal profits. Besides, villagers complained that Pan's life is quite luxurious.

In terms of the two-committee conflict, according to the official record of Qing County, the conflict between the elected village chief and the party

secretary was widespread across the whole county before initiating the “Qingxian Model”. In Gengguantun Village, the conflict was mainly between the party secretary, Mr. Pan, and the former village chief, Mr. Liu. As I described above, Pan collected great amount of money by selling collectively owned land and by embezzling public resources through his private enterprise. However, the former village chief Mr. Liu was just a general farmer who made a living by cultivating his own land. He was elected because of his righteous, laborious, and amiable characters. As Liu preferred to protect the arable land from the modern use, he was extremely against Pan’s idea of selling collective land. According to the villagers in Gengguantun Village, these two village leaders were seldom talking to each other. When participating village meetings, they often sat far from each other. When one of them launched a speech, the other would express nothing but indifference and disdain.

Liu also tried to lodge complaint to the upper-level government, but achieved nothing as Pan’s personal ties, constructed and intensified through countless and ceaseless briberies, were much stronger than his. Finally, Liu had to quit the position.

After Liu’s resignation, some villagers also expressed their dissatisfactions towards Pan’s malfeasance, but suffered grave consequences. Some villagers told me during secret interviews that once a villager burned Pan’s brand-new BMW car because Pan forcefully removed his home for the construction of new

apartments. After knowing the truth, Pan first hired some members of criminal syndicate to break one leg of this villager, and then accused the villager in the upper-level court for intentionally damaging his private goods. Finally, the villager was put in jail. Soon after that, Pan bought a new BMW car same to the former one.

5.2.2. The Application of “Qingxian Model” in Gengguantun Village

As the “pilot village” in Qing County, Gengguantun Village started to apply the “Qingxian Model” as early as its initiation. Though in many official conferences, Zhao Chaoying, the party secretary of Qing County and also the designer of “Qing Model”, has emphasized the positive effect of the resurrection of VRA on the removal of power-sharing conflict between village chief and party secretary, realities are much complicated. We noticed some phenomenon that both officials and scholars seldom pay attention to.

First, the practice of “Qingxian Model” indicates that the resurrection of VRA can effectively mitigate the two-committee conflict, but it also leads the power skewing lopsided to the party branch. During our interviews with common villagers, they all claim that there exists no conflict between the two committees and their heads. The leadership of the party branch on village committee is strong. The village chief in Gengguantun Village, Qi, also spoke highly of Pan’s role and ability in the interview. He said, “Without Secretary Pan there would not

have today's Gengguantun Village. It's just his personal capability."

However, the party branch and the secretary also become too powerful accompanied with the strengthening of party's leadership as well as the eliminating of the conflict. Firstly, the representative committee can not implement any effective oversight of the party branch. The 15th, July 2010 is the Political Discussion Day for all villages in Qing County when the president of VRA (it is Pan actually run as a concurrent post), representatives, members of the party branch, all officials of the village committee participated in discussions. There were six sections in total including first half year' report on work, first half year's report on finance, second half years' planning, democratic appraisal through democratic discussions, the speeches made by the township official, and the conclusion of the discussions made by the party secretary. When it was the turn of representatives to comment, some of them highly praised the work of leaders in the village, some of them emphasized that they could have democratic rights only because of the leadership of the party secretary. Some of them even cited Chairman Mao's poems to speak highly of the leadership of the party. Obviously, they said nothing substantive except flattery. After the discussion, the representatives and party members voted for the policy resolutions and signed their names. All decisions won a unanimous vote. In fact, according to representatives and village officials, since the establishment of VRA, all resolutions won a unanimous vote.

Secondly, the VRA and its representatives not only fail to implement any oversight of the party branch and its party secretary, Pan also makes use of the conference as a way to strengthen his power and influence in pursuit of his own interests. Here is an interview between a representative and us.

...

Interviewer: How's the frequency of the meeting of villagers assembly?

Representative: It's too frequent. We usually have meetings at night which last for 1 or 2 hours.

...

Interviewer: What do you often do during the meeting?

Representative: Villagers can have discussions with our representatives to find out solutions to some problems.

Interviewer: Does the smaller neighboring village also have such meetings?

Representative: Other villages never have meetings, if nothing happens. Gengguantun Village is just a model, and is the only model. Frankly speaking, what you have just seen is the most positive and brightest side of the village and you can only see this side.

...

Interviewer: Have there ever been big problems.

Representative: No, and we can solve small problems through negotiations.

Based on their words, when encountering some tough problems that party secretary can hardly solve through direct demand, people will seek the help with some informal institutions, such negotiations in clan's meetings or religious groups, rather than VA and VRA. In this sense, the VRA is just a form without any substance.

Moreover, based on our field study, the VRA in Gengguantun Village has not

become the channel and platform for villagers to participate and discuss local politics. Villagers are unclear of the selection process of villagers' representatives at all.

Interviewer: Do you know anything about villagers' representative?

Villager A: I am not one of them, and they are appointed by the party secretary.

Interviewer: They tell us they are elected.

Villager A: They just tell you the good things. In fact it's just like your school. The teacher will only appoint those who have good relation with him or her as class leaders. It's the same here. If you don't have good relation with the production team, you are not allowed to be a representative.

Interviewer: Are there any benefits of being representative?

Villager A: You can get paid.

...

Interviewer: What kind of people can be representatives?

Villager A: What kind of people? Flatterers can! You can tell that from their speeches. They never tell you the truth and in villagers' eyes they are just the minion.

Interviewer: But they are quite old, aren't they?

Villager A: Sure. At their ages, they can just get some money by flattering. You only need to flatter, then you get paid. Why do they only say something good? If they say something bad, they can get no money.

...

Interviewer: Have you ever voted for representatives?

Villager B: Yes, I have. And every time candidates are the same. They are those who have prestige and whose words matter.

...

Interviewer: Have you ever participated in the election?

Villager C: Yes.

Interviewer: Whom did you vote for?

Villager C: Those old people. Those who are now representatives will continue to be. We are too young to understand these affairs.

We can tell that villagers are not very keen on the election, partly because some of them have no idea on the political affairs of the village. More importantly, many villagers believe that the party secretary have intervened the elections. This strongly affects the legitimacy of the elections.

Besides, we also find out that representatives seldom have essential contact with common villagers, who also seldom call on representatives when facing problems. These records can reflect the situation very well.

...

Interviewer: Have you had any contacts with representatives?

Villager D: No.

Interviewer: Who is in charge of the informing if there are some events?

Villager D: Not representatives. The village committee will send their men to each house.

...

Interviewer: How do you think of the development in the village?

Villager D: It's very good. But we have no contacts with the village committee, and we cannot understand many policies. Many.

Interviewer: If you are not satisfied, how can you deal with it?

Villager D: If we are not satisfied, we can only be unsatisfied at home. No one would reflect the situation to higher rank and it is useless to do so. In other villagers there may be such actions, but not here at Gengguantun. We just follow the mainstream and do our own business quietly. We don't want to stir up trouble, and we don't care much about matters concerned about a lot of people either.

Besides, as far as we know, several years ago, some unsatisfied villagers did lodge complaints to higher-level authorities to complain about Pan's malfeasance, but came back with no good news. Instead, Pan threatened the villagers that if the "troublemakers" did not lodge complaint successfully, he would make reprisals on them one by one.

In conclusion, the resurrection of VRA in Gengguantun Village did help mitigate the two-committee conflict, but it also adds more power to the party secretary improperly. No effective oversight from the VRA of the party branch exists. What's more, the experience and practice in Gengguantun Village also suggest that the establishment of the VRA does not provide any platform or channel for villagers to participate in politics, as it is originally expected. The conflict between masses and cadres continue, while the harmony in the village is still far away. Then what goes wrong inside the "Qingxian Model"?

5.3. The Analysis of "Qingxian Model"

Different from other solutions, the institutional designers of Qing County mainly focus on the resurrection of the VRA. By setting the VRA as the hub of the model, the power-sharing puzzle between village chief and party secretary are largely solved. According to the Organic Law of Village Committee, the VRA is defined as the representative institution of the VA. While under the regulations of Qing County, the VRA is raised as a standing body whose missions are

discussing, policy-making and supervising through the meetings held once a month. Therefore, it is transformed into a real power from a nominal institution. At the same time, the designers of “Qingxian Model” created a new position called the president of the VRA and strongly encourage the party secretary in village to run for this position in order to keep the leadership of the CCP in local areas. In contrast, the village committee in the context of the new model is settled just as the executive administration of the VRA and the VA. Village chief in this sense must accept the legal leadership of these “democratic” institutions, which means to accept the leadership of CCP meanwhile.

We can also perceive the genuine purpose of the application of the “Qingxian Model” through speeches of the designer, party secretary Zhao of Qing County. Zhao points out that the innovative part of Qing Xian Pattern is that the secretary of the party branch is recommended to assume the president of VRA, who have the right to convene and preside over the conference. At the same time, those who could not successfully elected in the chairperson would also be required to resign the secretary position or be exempted by the party, so that the authority of the secretary of the party branch could be guaranteed in the village. During the process of decision-making, the secretary of the party branch, who is also the president of the VRA in reality, must do his job among representatives before they vote on any resolution that could direct the execution of the village committee. Besides, the party branch could also launch within the VRA an

impeachment of the village chief who disobeys these resolutions. Zhao argues that it is in this way that the leadership exerted by the party over the village committee could be ensured, that the conflict between the two committees as well as conflict between masses and cadres could be eliminated essentially, that villagers could finally be provided a channel and a platform for the participation in political affairs. What's more, Zhao is also optimistic on the positive effect of the new pattern on the atmosphere of the party in grassroots as well as the village. According to the introductions of local officials, 87% of the villages all over the Qing Xian County have secretaries of party branches who are also president of VRA at the same time. The representative conference has become the tool for the leadership of the party in villages.

Concretely speaking, the "Qingxian Model" reconstructs the power structure by a two-level vertical power system. The first vertical power delineation is between the VRA and village committee. As the VRA possesses the authority endowed by the law, the VRA should be the top decision maker in the village. In this sense, it is rational to put the village committee under the control of the VRA. Thus the village committee should be accountable to the VRA, and the VRA can exert its *de jure* power to override the decision made by village committee. The second vertical power delineation is between the party branch and the VRA. Originally, there shouldn't be a vertical system as their powers belong to different domains. The party branch's power is authorized by the upper-level

party system, while the VRA's power is authorized directly by the villagers. However, this model encourages the secretary of the village party branch to run for the presidency of the VRA; simultaneously, the party branch is required to enlarge party members among the VRA representatives. By these two measurements, the party branch successfully "steals" the *de facto* power of VRA. Thus through these two-level institutional change, the party branch of the CCP in villages successfully rebuilds the political power in its own hands.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

In this paper, I develop a pure strategic model to explain the interactions between Chinese village chief and party secretary after introducing popular village elections in 1980s. Based on two different types of public policies, consistent policies and contentious policies, both players will choose different actions. When dealing with consistent policies, both players will choose to accept and enforce them. However, when discussing contentious policies, while party secretary will continue to stay with the mandate from above, village chief will choose to reject them and instead prefer to be accountable to villagers' interest, which will lead to the conflict between village chief and party secretary. After comparing the *ex ante* and *ex post* payoff, introducing villages elections will help state to exert more direct and effective monitor on local cadres by transferring this responsibility to villagers. At the same time, however, village elections will not lead to better enforcement of unpopular policies in rural areas. Statistical evidences from previous research works prove the implications concluded from the models.

Regarding the two-committee conflict, there are two possible solutions theoretically. The first solution is to deprive party secretary's discretion over the decision-making process by weakening or even abolishing the party branch in villages, which makes unpopular public policies rejected directly by village

committees. Following this path, Chinese central leaders may gradually open the popular elections to the upper-level governments since no effective tools exist in rural areas to enforce the unpopular policies. Finally, this path may lead to the complete democratization of Mainland China.

However, in the current situation, this alternative seems relatively infeasible because Chinese Communist Party will by no means voluntarily relinquishes its political power. In this case, the other choice seems to be more acceptable by Chinese senior leaders. That is to weaken village chief's discretion and resurrect party secretary's control over local affairs. Several experiments have already been conducted in some provinces. In this paper, I mainly focus on the experiment conducted in Hebei Province with the name of "Qingxian Model". In this model, the party branch finally recaptures the top power by resurrecting the villagers representative assembly (VRA) as a permanent political organization, and then requires the secretary of party branch to run for the president of VRA. At the same time, CCP largely enlarges its membership among representatives of VRA to assure the majority advantage. Through this arrangement, party branch controlled the VRA and then further direct the village committee legally.

In terms of the application of "Qingxian Model", while some scholars praise it as a good innovation to reconstruct the power structure and solve the power-sharing problem between the party branch and village committee, I argue that it is rather a reverse of China's democratization. In fact, the original purpose

of the self-autonomy reform in rural China is to slightly relax the control of the CCP at the local level and let villagers decide their own business. But it still left a conservative “tail” in the Organic Law of Village Committee by alleging that the CCP still possesses the macro-level leadership in a village, which obscured the power delineation and led to the conflict between the secretary and the VC. In this sense, the “Qingxian Model” essentially contradicts Chinese political democratization in the long run.

What’s worse, the disadvantages of “Qingxian Model” have already emerged in villages of Qing County. After a field work in 2010 in Qing County, I found that the application of “Qingxian Model” potentially cultivates the corruptive spoil for secretaries in local level as they regain the discretion of the resources allocation. Besides, as the party branch firmly control the VRA, its resurrection soon lose the meaning but just serve as the tool for the secretary to acquire the legitimacy. During my interview of some general villages, they told me that representatives were already pre-selected by party branch and voting was no more than just a form. They had neither the ability, nor the motivation to contain party secretaries. In this sense, “Qingxian Model” and other similar innovations may exert long-term harm to China’s political reform and development in the long run.

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