

Central European University

The Causes and Effects of the Development of Semi-Competitive Elections at the Township Level in China since the 1990s

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Thesis submitted in fulfillment for the degree of PhD, Department of
Political Science, Central European University, Budapest, January 2008

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Summary

In the mid-1990s, China experienced its first cases of semi-competitive elections for major township officials. Since then, the new election practices have spread to many townships in many counties of a number of provinces. The positions open to the semi-competitive elections have been extended from township vice governors to township governors, and sometimes even township party secretaries. The number of cases increased from a dozen in the mid-1990s, to several hundred in the late 1990s, and to several thousand by the early 2000s. These developments have fueled expectations about an increase in the democratic elements in the political restructuring in China.

The spatial distribution of the township semi-competitive election deviates from expectations derived from general theory on the development of democratic institutions and activities. Rather than first appearing and spreading in economically more developed, urbanized, and industrialized coastal regions, most cases of semi-competitive elections took place in economically less-developed agricultural and rural regions. Why is this the case?

This research suggests that greater tensions between local authorities and residents in economically less-developed regions threaten the career development of local officials, in particular that of county party secretaries, whose top priorities since the late 1970s have changed from ensuring the dictatorship of the proletariat to promoting economic development and maintaining social stability.

In economically less-developed and agricultural hinterland regions, local residents are more sensitive to efforts by local authorities to extract resources from them. Furthermore, it is in these areas that local authorities are under more pressures to

extract resources from the local residents, thus exacerbating the tensions. Whereas in the more-developed regions the local authorities have economic resources to appease the disaffected, to ease tensions in the less-developed regions the leaders can only resort to political measures, one option being the semi-competitive elections. In order to defend or boost their career development, some local party officials, in particular county party secretaries who have nomenklatura power over the position of township mayor (and township party secretary) have introduced semi-competitive elections through which they concede some power of selection to the local residents.

By increasing the participation and the voice of the people in selecting local decision-makers, the semi-competitive elections help appease the disaffected among the population. However, the new election practices also produce some effects that the local officials do not support. They decrease, if not eliminate, the monopoly power of the county party secretaries over cadre promotion. They increase the autonomy of the township authorities vis-à-vis county authorities. They fuel confrontations between township mayors and township party secretaries. They help boost articulation and network building among local residents. Finally, they break down ideological taboos regarding the possibility and desirability of competitive elections for state authorities among the political elite. All of these factors are drivers behind forces for more political restructuring in China.

Acknowledgements

The past several years in the PhD program in comparative politics at Central European University (CEU) are unforgettable, in particular because the methodology for political science research at CEU is so different from that in China. This program gave me a precious opportunity to learn a new approach and to access a huge amount of different literature, from which I benefited enormously.

It is due to the help of many people that I was able to embark on this difficult yet fantastic academic journey. I am grateful to my professors and colleagues in the Department of Political Science at CEU, in particular to my supervisor Zsolt Enyedi who provided useful advice, carefully read my thesis, and commented in detail on the various chapters. I am also grateful to Maria Csanadi, at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, who first introduced me to CEU, helped me develop the research project, and carefully read and commented on the thesis. In addition, I benefited enormously from advice and/or discussions with Janos Kis, Nenad Dimitrijevic, Mihaly Laki, Gabor Toka, Tamas Meszerics, and many other professors.

In addition, my colleagues and friends in China contributed greatly to my PhD work. In particular, I owe a debt of gratitude to Professors Keping Yu, Zengke He, and Xuedong Yang at the China Center for Comparative Politics and Economics. They not only give me academic advice to develop my research, but they also provided substantial administrative support.

I also thank the hundreds of interviewees who frankly provided me with information in the field and also helped me coordinate my fieldwork. I especially appreciate the help from Madame Jingming Zhang, vice party-secretary in Ya'an prefecture in Sichuan; Mr. Tianzong Yang and Mr. Shijie Lei, division heads in the Organization Department of the Sichuan Provincial Party Committee; and Mr. Anlin Wang, the head of the research office of the Wuxi Prefecture Party Committee.

Last but not least, I am grateful to Nancy Hearst, librarian at the Fairbank Center at Harvard University, who help correct my English.

Statements

Statement 1

I hereby confirm that this thesis contains no materials accepted for any other degrees in any other institutions.

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Statement 2

I hereby confirm that the thesis contains no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the late 1980s, an increasing number of elections with competitive elements have been implemented at the village level in rural areas of China.¹ And since the mid-1990s, several cases of similar elections at the township level have been held.² By elections with competitive elements, I refer to multi-candidate elections in which the results to some extent are uncertain. Later in this text, I will refer to these elections as semi-competitive elections because although competitive elements exist in these procedures, there are no opposition parties and the electoral campaigns remain restricted to various extents.

Regardless, these elections differ significantly from traditional elections in socialist states that were primarily affirmative elections or plebiscite elections³ where the voters simply ratified the choices and selections made by the party⁴. Differences emerge in the sense that voters in these semi-competitive elections had some, though limited, choices of their own.

1.1 The literature on elections in China

The semi-competitive elections in China quickly attracted great intellectual interest. A number of research projects were conducted to study the emergence and spread of these events and their implications for the evolution of the Chinese political system.⁵

¹ Kevin J. O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, "Accommodating 'Democracy' in a One-Party-State: Introducing Village Elections in China," *China Quarterly*, No. 162 (June 2000), pp.465-489.

² Lianjiang Li, "The Politics of Introducing Township Elections in Rural China," *China Quarterly*, No.171 (September 2000), pp.704-723.

³ Everett M. Jacobs, "Soviet Local Elections: What They Are and What They Are Not," *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (July 1970), pp. .61-76

⁴ Jerome M. Gilson, "Soviet Elections as a Measure of Dissent: The Missing One Percent," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 62 (1968), pp. 814-826.

⁵ For knowledgeable reviews of the research on village elections in China, see Gunter Schubert, "Village Elections in the PRC: A Trojan Horse of Democracy?" Project Discussion Paper No. 19/2002, Institute for East Asian Studies/East Asian Politics, Gerhard-Mercator-University Duisburg. Also see Zhenglin Guo, "Guowai xuezhe shiye zhong de cunmin xuanju yu Zhongguo minzhu fazhan: Yanjiu zongshu" (Village Elections and the Development of Democracy in China as Understood by Foreign Scholars: A Literature Review), *Zhongguo nongcun guancha* (China Rural Survey), No.5 (2003).

Most researchers were interested in the reasons for the development of these procedures. Among the possible reasons for their emergence, the role of economic development was first examined. Kevin O'Brien (1994) suggested there was a greater likelihood that semi-competitive elections would be implemented in the wealthier villages.⁶ Hu Rong (2000), on the basis of case studies in Fujian province, reached a similar conclusion.⁷ They argued that people in wealthier regions are more active political participants and they are more able to think independently about political issues.

Nevertheless, other researchers have rejected the observation that a positive correlation exists between economic development and the implementation of semi-competitive elections. Jean C. Oi (1996), based on empirical research, finds a negative correlation between the level of economic development and the implementation of semi-competitive elections. Oi concludes that "high levels of economic development do not necessarily bring enthusiasm for implementing democratic reform."⁸ On the contrary, she maintains that there is an inverse relationship between the level of economic development and the implementation of semi-competitive elections.⁹

Shi Tianjian (1999),¹⁰ Jean C. Oi and Scott Rozelle (1999),¹¹ David Zweig (1997),¹² and Amy B. Epstein (1996)¹³ believe that there is a convex, rather than linear, relationship between economic development and the implementation of semi-competitive elections in Chinese villages: Starting at a low level, economic development leads to a higher probability of semi-competitive elections. Growing

⁶ Kevin J. O'Brien, "Implementing Political Reform in China's Villages," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 32 (July 1994), pp. 33-59.

⁷ Hu Rong, "Zhongguo de nongcun jingji fazhan yu cunmin weiyuanhui xuanju" (Economic Development in Chinese Rural Areas and Elections for Villagers Committees), *China 21* (Japan), No. 8 (2000).

⁸ Jean C. Oi, "Economic Development, Stability and Democratic Village Self-governance," in Maurice Brosseau, Suzanne Pepper and Shu-ki Tsang (eds.), *China Review 1996* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1996) pp.125-144.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁰ Tianjian Shi, "Economic Development and Village Elections in Rural China," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 8, No. 22 (1999), pp. 425-442.

¹¹ Jean C. Oi and Scott Rozelle, "Elections and Power: The Locus of Decision-Making in Chinese Villages," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 8, No. 22 (1999), pp. 513-539.

¹² David Zweig, *Freeing China's Farmers: Rural Restructuring in the Reform Era* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), p. 26..

¹³ Amy B. Epstein, "Village Elections in China: Experimenting with Democracy," in U.S. Congress, Joint Economic Committee (ed.), *China's Economic Future* (Washington DC, 1996).

prosperity, in contrast, after a certain point translates into a declining probability for semi-competitive elections.

Most of the authors who reject the “prosperity thesis” identify a crucial role played by specific actors, namely, the village party secretaries, in the implementation of semi-competitive elections. Shi Tianjian (1999), Jean C. Oi and Scott Rozelle (1999), David Zweig (1997), and Amy B. Epstein (1996), as well as others, argue that in mid-developed villages, party secretaries, on the one hand, lack the financial resources to win over the peasants, while, on the other hand, they are unable to “persuade” their superiors to manipulate the elections so as to secure their positions in power. Therefore, they have no choice but to allow the semi-competitive elections to take place.

In rich villages there is less motivation to implement true semi-competitive elections. The village heads can use their financial resources to “buy” their superiors, thus being able to manipulate the elections. At the same time, because of the economic success of the village, the village cadres, the township governments and the party branches all want to continue the non-competitive elections. And the villagers are ready to accept the results of non-competitive elections, as long as the clever village heads pay their duties and taxes to the state and redistribute the profits of the local collective economy by paying yearly bonuses to the villagers.¹⁴

Other researchers emphasize the leading role of national politicians. According to Yongnian Zheng (1998),¹⁵ and Kevin O’Brien and Lianjiang Li (2000),¹⁶ Communist leaders such as Deng Xiaoping, Peng Zhen, Bo Yibo, and Zhao Ziyang, and others were interested in promoting democracy. They were the ones who actually introduced the Law on Organizing Villagers Committees (Experimental) that required direct elections at the village level and that served as the legal basis for the development of semi-competitive elections at the village level¹⁷.

¹⁴ Shi, “Economic Development and Village Elections in Rural China,” p. 437.

¹⁵ Yongnian Zheng, “Zhongguo hui biande geng minzhu ma?” (Will China be More Democratic?), in *Liang'an jiceng xuanju yu zhengzhi shehui bianqian* (Grassroots Elections and Socio-Political Changes on the Two Sides of the Taiwan Strait), edited by Chen Mingtong and Zheng Yongnian. (Taipei: Yuedan chubanshe, 1998), pp.437-455.

¹⁶ Kevin J. O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, “Accommodating 'Democracy' in a One-Party-State: Introducing Village Elections in China,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 162 (June 2000), pp.465-489.

¹⁷ A villager committee usually consists of 5-10 villagers elected by the residents. A villager committee is supposed

Tianjian Shi (1999b), however, suggests that it was mid-level officials in the Ministry of Civil Affairs who were the driving force behind the spread of the village semi-competitive elections. He argues that these were the officials in charge of supervising the village elections. Initially, they were only interested in the implementation of the elections, and the subsequent recognition of their results, whatever they were. It was only after this was fairly secured that they started to pass down new regulations to eliminate the widespread manipulation of the elections by local and township cadres.¹⁸

Instead of stressing the importance of the elite, still other researchers seek an explanation for the spread of village elections in the political resistance by the peasants. For example, Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li (1996) examine the different manifestations of political resistance in rural China, distinguishing three groups: "policy-based resisters" (*diaomin*:刁民), "compliant villagers" (*shunmin*:顺民) and "recalcitrant" (*dingzihu*:钉子户) villagers. "Policy-based resisters" conceive of their relationship to the party and the state more and more in contractual terms of reciprocity. In other words, villagers obey the village officials if they are democratically elected; if not, the villagers are increasingly likely to take an antagonist approach toward the village authorities.¹⁹

Arguments of scholarly debates concerning the main consequences of the implementation of semi-competitive elections at the village level may be grouped along three dimensions: 1.) the impact on relations between villagers committees and village party organizations, 2.) the impact on the political orientation of the peasants, and 3.) the impact on relations between villagers and their superior township authorities.

to help the township authorities to implement governmental directives. But the villager committee doesn't have coercive state power. A villager committee's major function is to make decisions on distributing lands among the villagers and other collectively owned assets.

¹⁸ Tianjian Shi, "Village Committee Elections in China: Institutional Tactics for Democracy," *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (April 1999), pp. 385-412.

¹⁹ Li Lianjiang and Kevin O'Brien, "Villagers and Popular Resistance in Contemporary China," *Modern China*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (January 1996), pp. 28-61. See also Kevin O'Brien and Li Lianjiang, "The Politics of Lodging Complaints in Rural China," *China Quarterly*, No. 143 (September 1995), pp. 756-783.

1) With respect to the impact on the relationship between village party organizations (appointed by the upper levels) and the villagers committees (elected by the peasants), there are several differences of opinion among scholars. Oi and Rozelle (1999) find that in the more economically developed villages, the village party secretaries, regardless if there were semi-competitive elections for villagers committees or not, hold all decision-making powers. But in poor villages where the township authorities are not satisfied with the performance of the village party secretary, the elected villagers committees may be the center of decision-making power. This observation is partly confirmed by O'Brien (2001) who finds that in most villages, the party committees are more powerful than the villagers committees; and party committees always have the final say in political activities.²⁰ Baogang He and Youxing Lang, based on a survey on cases in Zhejiang province, reach a similar conclusion. They believe that the power of the village party committee is not eroded by the elections for villagers committee, even though there are cases where private entrepreneurs challenge the power of the village party secretaries.²¹

Alternatively, other researchers find that the villager committee elections pose a serious challenge to the leading role of the party organizations at the village level. Zhenglin Guo and Thomas P. Bernstein (2003) show how the elections challenge the traditional authority of the village party committees. Especially in cases when the village party secretary and/or the members of the village party committee do not take part in the elections as candidates for villagers committees, the villagers see the party organizations as having abandoned political leadership, or at least as having no self-confidence in winning the elections. Thus the authority of party organizations declines radically.²² Lianjiang Li (1999) and Gang Bai et al. (2001) find that the authority of the village party organizations is challenged by the villagers committees. This challenge is so serious that some local party committees, in order to restore the

²⁰ Kevin O'Brien, "Villagers, Elections, and Citizenship." Unpublished paper prepared for the "Conference on The Impact of Village Elections in China," Chinese University of Hong Kong, March 16-18, 2001.

²¹ He Baogang and Lang Youxing, *Xunzhao minzhu yu quanwei de pingheng* (Seeking the Balance between Democracy and Authority) (Shanghai: Huazhong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2002), p. 280.

²² Zhenglin Guo and Thomas P. Bernstein, "The Impact of Elections on the Village Structure of Power: The Relation Between the Village Committees and the Village Party Branches," *Journal of Contemporary China* (2003).

authority of the village party organizations, introduce non-party-member peasants to take part in the vote to select the village party secretaries.²³ Melanie Manion (1996) indirectly confirms this challenge. She finds that where elections were implemented, there was more mutual trust between the peasants and the village heads; there was less political distance between the peasants and the village heads; and the villagers had more interest in elections as well.²⁴ In other words, elected villagers committees were more inclined to confront those village party organizations that were appointed by the upper-level authorities.

2) As to the impact of village elections on the political culture of the village, Oi and Rozelle (1999) believe that village elections did not turn the peasants more interested in political rights. Peasants were not more interested in politics, nor did they become more interested in defending their rights because of the village elections. The maximum hope on the part of the peasants from the village elections was that more capable leaders would be elected as heads of the villagers committees and these leaders would help them make money.

Most researchers, however, find that village elections do have a positive effect on village political culture. Based on his investigations of twenty villages in a county in Jiangxi province county, Lianjiang Li (2003) finds that fair village elections stimulate a feeling of empowerment among the peasants. The peasants voted against the unaccountable cadres, and required their elected village cadres to boycott policies that did not protect their interests.²⁵

The changing political culture resulting from village elections are partly confirmed by He Qinglian (1997), and Xiao Tangbiao and He Xuefeng (2001) towards a politically more explicitly structured local community. He Qinglian finds that village hooligans become more active because the elections provide them with an

²³ Lianjiang Li, "The Two-Ballot System in Shanxi Province: Subjecting Village Party Secretaries to a Popular Vote," *The China Journal*, No. 42 (1999). Gang Bai et al, *Xuanju yu zhili: Zhongguo cunmin zizhi yanjiu* (Elections and eGovernance: Research on Villagers Governance in China) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001).

²⁴ Melanie Manion, "The Electoral Connection in the Chinese Countryside," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 90, No. 4 (1996), pp. 736-748. The results of the study are based on an evaluation of a survey in fifty-six villages in Anhui, Hunan, and Hebei provinces and Tianjin municipality.

²⁵ Lianjiang Li, "The Empowering Effect of Village Elections in China," *Asian Survey*, Vol.43, No.4 (July-August 2003), pp. 648-662.

opportunity to play a role in local politics.²⁶ Xiao Tangbiao and He Xuefeng found that clans and factions were stimulated by village elections. In villages that held elections, factions were able to split communities.²⁷

3) As to the impact on relations between village and township authorities or those at higher levels, researchers show that the elections gave the villagers committees a new political legitimacy. This new legitimacy can be used either to implement political directives from above or to oppose the township and county governments.

A nationwide survey jointly sponsored by the U.S.-based Carter Center and the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs shows that village elections helped to channel the resentment of local protests. As a result, village elections helped to ensure social stability in rural China. Local democracy functions as an important security valve to contain rural discontent that can otherwise radicalize to jeopardize party rule.²⁸

However, according to Lianjiang Li and Kevin O'Brien (1995), elected village heads, now equipped with democratic legitimacy, have developed a salient "conflict culture." Whenever they feel to be under unbearable pressure "from above," they play their positions as elected representatives of village interests against their duty to carry out higher government (party) guidelines and law. Consequently, township cadres usually ally with the village party secretaries to cope with this situation. However, their interventions very often provoke even greater resistance on the part of the villagers committees and the villagers.²⁹ As a result, some township cadres have demanded the implementation of elections for township governments, as in the first case of Buyun township in Sichuan province in late 1998 and in some other townships thereafter. This can mean that the new pressure will soon be widely felt at the

²⁶ He Qinglian, "Nongcun jiceng shehui difang eshili de xingqi" (The Rise of Hooligans at the Grassroots in Rural Areas) *The 21st Century*, Vol. 41 (June 1997), pp. 129-134.

²⁷ Xiao Tangbiao and He Xuefeng, *Cunweihui xuanju guancha* (Observations on Elections for Villagers Committees) (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2001).

²⁸ Robert A. Pastor and Qingshan Tan, "The Meaning of China's Village Elections," *China Quarterly*, No. 162 (June 2000), pp. 490-512.

²⁹ "Unless Beijing scraps village elections, it is unclear how the Center can reduce village-township tension without introducing democratic township elections, thus allowing the township to 'pass the buck' up yet one more level" (Li, "Elections and Popular Resistance in Rural China").

township level as well as the elections may move to the next higher level.³⁰

1.2 Theories on democratization

Though not explicitly cited by the authors, most of the above examinations of the spread of semi-competitive elections at the village level in China are conducted, either directly or indirectly, in the light of democratization theories.

The expectation for a more extensive implementation of semi-competitive elections in more economically developed villages is derived from modernization theory on democratization. Modernization theory maintains that there are certain economic and social conditions that enable the development of democracy. These include high industrialization, a fair amount of wealth, widespread literacy, and the prevalence of urban residence. According to Lipset, one of the leading theorists on modernization theory, “Perhaps the most widespread generalization linking political systems to other aspects of society has been that democracy is related to the state of economic development. Concretely, this means that the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy. From Aristotle down to the present, men have argued that only in a wealthy society in which relatively few citizens lived in real poverty could a situation exist in which the mass of the population could intelligently participate in politics and could develop the self-restraint necessary to avoid succumbing to the appeals of irresponsible demagogues.”³¹ The indices for economic development are: wealth, industrialization, urbanization, and education. Among them, the indices for wealth are per capita income, number of persons per motor vehicle and per physician, and the number of radios, telephones, and newspapers per thousand persons. Based on forty-eight cases, Lipset finds a strong positive correlation between economic development and democracy.

Following Lipset’s pioneering work, other researchers have confirmed his findings. Among them, John F. Helliwell (1992) uses cross-sectional and pooled data

³⁰ Gunter Schubert, “Village Elections in the PRC: A Trojan Horse of Democracy?” Project Discussion Paper No. 19 (2002).

³¹ Seymour Martin Lipset, “Some Social Requisites for Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 53, No.1 (Mar. 1959), p.75.

for up to 125 countries over the period from 1960 to 1985 to find that the effects of income on democracy are robust and positive.³² Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (2003) show that the effect of economic development on the probability of a transition to democracy in the hundred years between the mid-nineteenth century and World War II was substantial, and stronger than its effect on democratic stability. They also show that in more recent decades, some countries that developed but remained dictatorships would, after achieving \$12,000 per capita income, would be expected to democratize in as few as three years.³³

However, these views were challenged as being requisites for democratization. According to Adam Przeworski, Rustow Dankart, and others, these requisites are conditions for stable democracy rather than for democratization. In other words, democracies are stable at higher income levels, but economic development, as measured by per capita income, does not necessarily move a society toward democracy. On the contrary, in a non-democratic polity, economic development helps the regime stabilize and consolidate itself. Adam Przeworski claims, “while in countries where dictatorships emerged with lower incomes, subsequent development has no discernible effect, in those countries where dictatorships were established at higher income levels, subsequent development has an unambiguous and rather strong effect in making them more stable.”³⁴

Samuel Huntington (1991) combines the above two arguments (economic development has a positive impact on democratization and that economic development has a positive impact on sustaining non-democratic polities). He identifies five changes in the world that paved the way for the latest wave of transitions to democracy: 1) the deepening legitimacy problems of authoritarian governments unable to cope with military defeat and economic failure; 2) the burgeoning economies of many countries, which have raised living standards, levels of education, and urbanization, while also raising civic expectations and the ability to

³² John F. Helliwell, “Empirical Linkages between Democracy and Economic Growth” (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper No. 4066, 1992).

³³ Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, “Endogenous Democratization,” University of Chicago, July 17, 2003.

³⁴ Adam Przeworski, *Economic Development and Transitions to Democracy*. working paper, March 2004, p.14. available at: <http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/politics/faculty/przeworski/papers/transwp.pdf>

express them; 3) changes in religious institutions which have made them more prone to oppose governmental authoritarianism than to defend the status quo; 4) the push to promote human rights and democracy by external actors such as non-governmental organizations and the European Community; and 5) the "snowballing" or demonstration effects of democratization in other countries, enhanced by new international communications.³⁵

The second change (burgeoning economies) identified by Huntington is in line with conventional modernization theory. Nevertheless, his first change (deepening legitimacy problems) seems to be in line with Adam Przeworski. In this respect, he argues that since non-democratic polities do not gain legitimacy like democracies from political procedures, their only source of legitimacy is to increase the economic welfare of the citizenry. When economic development was no longer sustainable in many non-democratic polities in the 1970s and 1980s, the polities no longer had legitimacy and thus have no choice but to turn to democratization.

Another version of modernization theory emphasizes the effect of modernization in changing the role of culture. Through the changed culture that supports democracy, a modernized (or post-modern) society will grow into a democratic entity. Using data from the three waves of the World Values Surveys, which include 65 societies and 75 percent of the world's population, Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker (2000) find that, though some distinctive cultural traditions were persistent in economic development, modernization induced massive cultural change which led to shifts away from absolute norms and values toward values that were increasingly rational, tolerant, trusting, and participatory.³⁶ Inglehart and Baker argue that advanced industrial societies enjoyed an unprecedented existential security, which gave rise to an intergenerational shift toward post-materialist and post-modern values. They add that the publics in affluent societies place increasing emphasis on quality-of-life, environmental protection, and self-expression.³⁷ This new culture associated with

³⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991)

³⁶ Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker, "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 65 (2000), pp. 19-51.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

advanced industrial society increases the willingness and ability of the citizenry to access the political process, moving the society in the direction of democracy.

Another approach, which seems not to have been used to explain village elections in China, is the structural approach. In his pioneering work, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Barrington Moore Jr. finds that various class constellations explain why some major countries in the twentieth century ended up as parliamentary democracies, while others became fascist dictatorships. He argues that class structure, which was determined by the commercialization of agriculture in the early-modern period, largely determined the role of the state in society. In some instances, the process of the commercialization of agriculture produced a strong, independent bourgeoisie that was able to counteract the traditional power of the landed upper class and of the peasantry, and to alleviate the absolutist claims of the state.³⁸ In brief, according to this thesis, “No bourgeoisie, no democracy!”³⁹

In later contributions within the structural approach in democratization theory, Moore has been criticized for having ascribed too great a role to the bourgeoisie and for neglecting the historical importance of the working class in democratization.⁴⁰ Dietrich Rueschemeyer et al. make a wide-ranging empirical analysis of no less than thirty-eight cases from a variety of regions and time periods. Their thesis contends that capitalism created the structural conditions for democratization and it was the working class that brought it about. They see democratization as the imposition of reforms on a capitalist state, not as an automatic outcome from the development of capitalist relations of production. Without successful and self-conscious reformist strategies on the part of the subordinate classes, capitalist states will, in fact, almost inevitably be authoritarian.⁴¹

However, Dietrich Rueschemeyer et al.’s empirical analysis was heavily

³⁸ Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

³⁹ Ibid., p.418.

⁴⁰ G. Therborn, “The Rule of Capital and the Rise of Democracy,” *New Left Review*, No 103 (May-June 1977), pp.3-141.

⁴¹ Dietrich Rueschemeyer, E. Stephens, and J. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

criticized not least for mistaken interpretations of their own data.⁴² Ruth Berins Collier effectively criticizes their thesis about the decisive role of the working class. Collier investigated both historical and recent “episodes of democratization” in twenty-two different countries in Western Europe and Latin America. She concludes that, “The comparative analysis does not support the general proposition that working-class pressure is a decisive or even necessary, no less sufficient, factor in democratization, or that mass democracy is dependent on mass pressure.”⁴³

A third approach, which seems to have been applied by some researchers to explain the spreading of village elections in China, is a theory that emphasizes the role of the elite. This approach distinguishes two issues concerning democracy: the functional inquiry and the genetic inquiry. For the functional inquiry, “the question is not how a democratic system comes into existence,” ... “Rather, it is how a democracy, assumed to be already in existence, can best preserve or enhance its health and stability.”⁴⁴ For the genetic inquiry, the question is “how a democracy comes into being in the first place?”⁴⁵ The factors that keep a democracy stable may not be the factors that brought it into existence; therefore, explanations of democracy must distinguish between function and genesis.

According to Rustow Dunkwart, the process of democratization involves three phases: a preparatory phase, a decision phase, and a habituation phase. To illustrate his model, Dunkwart mainly examines the two cases of democratization in Sweden and Turkey.

A preparatory phase is a prolonged and inconclusive political struggle between well-entrenched forces, for which certain issues have profound meaning. In Sweden, the struggle was between farmers and the urban lower classes against bureaucrats, landowners, and industrialists; the issues were tariffs, taxation, military service, and

⁴² Th. Ertman, “Democracy and Dictatorship in Interwar Western Europe Revisited,” *World Politics*, Vol. 50 (April 1998), pp. 475-505.

⁴³ Ruth Berins Collier, *Paths Toward Democracy: The Working Class and Elites in Western Europe and South America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.167.

⁴⁴ Rustow Dunkwart, “Transition to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1970), p.339.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.340.

suffrage. In Turkey, the struggle was between rural farmers and heirs to the Kemalist bureaucracy; the issues were industrialization and agricultural development. In other cases (India and Lebanon, for example), economic factors played smaller roles.

The decision phase refers to “a deliberate decision on the part of political leaders to accept the existence of diversity in unity, and, to that end, to institutionalize some crucial aspect of democratic procedure.”⁴⁶ “The decision in favor of democracy results from the interplay of a number of forces. Since precise terms must be negotiated and heavy risks with regard to the future taken, a small circle of leaders is likely to play a disproportionate role”.⁴⁷ In Sweden, the “Great Compromise” of 1907 implemented universal suffrage together with a proportional representation system satisfactory neither to the existing elites nor to the emerging groups. The decision phase is contingent: enlightened elites may give in to popular demands without institutionalizing democratic forms.

The next phase is the “habituation phase”: those who initially opposed democratic reforms either die out or come to accept the new situation. “The transformation of the Swedish Conservative Party...vividly illustrates this point. After two decades those leaders who had grudgingly put up with democracy... retired or died... and were replaced by others who sincerely believed in it.”⁴⁸ In Turkey, “there is a remarkable change from the leadership of Ismet Inonu, who promoted democracy out of a sense of duty, and Adnan Menderes, who saw in it an unprecedented vehicle for his ambition, to younger leaders in each of their parties who understand democracy more fully and embrace it more wholeheartedly.”⁴⁹

Democracy as a contingent outcome of conflict or a contingent institutional outcome (Przeworski)⁵⁰ is echoed by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan. Linz and Stepan argue that the previous regime type and the leadership of the previous regime tell us what *paths* to democracy are available. They list a number of possible paths: reform

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.355.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.356.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.358.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.358.

⁵⁰ Adam Przeworski, “Democracy as a Contingent Outcome of Conflicts,” in Jon Elster and Ruge Slagstad (eds.), *Constitutionalism and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 59-80.

and rupture of the old regime as a result of elite-dissident pacts; defeat in war; interim government after the regime falls; hierarchically led military concedes power, and so forth. In broad terms, the authors hold out most hope for successful democratization and consolidation in authoritarian or mature post-totalitarian societies where transition is achieved by an elite-dissident pact. Post-totalitarian, totalitarian, and sultanistic regimes have decreasingly ability to foster a “lively civil society” to make this path available. For them, the best option may be a serious crisis that allows a transition to mature post-totalitarian rule, or some split amongst the elites.

Daron Acemogiu and James A. Robinson (2000) present an alternative path for democratization that is basically initiated and dominated by the decisions of the elite. They examine the extension of voting rights in the nineteenth century in Western societies, such as Great Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, and the United States, to argue that these political reforms can be viewed as strategic decisions made by the political elite to prevent widespread social unrest and revolution. They find that under the threat of revolution and social upheaval, the wealthy elite might want to extend the franchise, even though this implies giving up some of their wealth through higher taxation in the future.⁵¹

1.3 Problems in the existing literature on semi-competitive elections in China

The above three approaches are not equally applicable to the case of China with regard to the spread of semi-competitive elections.

Although the China case does not contradict modernization theory, it does demonstrate that it is doubtful that economic development is having an impact on China’s political system in ways we would expect. As shown in Section 1.1, there is not a simple positive correlation in the relationship between economic development and the spread of semi-competitive elections; rather the relationship is quite

⁵¹ Daron Acemogiu and James A. Robinson, “Why Did the West Extend the Franchise? Democracy, Inequality, and Growth in Historical Perspective,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* (November 2000), pp.1167-1199.

complicated.

There are also major difficulties in using the structural approach to explain the spread of semi-competitive elections in China. It is still debatable whether a bourgeoisie has emerged in China, not to mention the possibility of a working class trying to impose reform on a capitalist China. Given the fact that the semi-competitive elections since the 1980s were implemented almost entirely in rural areas that were dominated economically by small-household agriculture, it is highly doubtful that a bourgeoisie and a working class contributed to their spreading.

The third approach seems to have more explanatory power in the case of China. The significant role of the elite in promoting semi-competitive elections has been documented and reported by a number of researchers, including Amy B. Epstein (1996), David Zweig (1997), Jean C. Oi and Scott Rozelle (1999), Lianjiang Li (2000), Shi Tianjian (1999), Yongnian Zheng (1998), as well as others.

Moreover, there is an additional weakness in modernization theory and structural theory. In modernization and structural theory, democratization is the natural result of social processes. Thus, as Przeworski put it, “the outcome is uniquely determined by conditions, and history goes on without anyone ever doing anything.”⁵²

By applying the third approach, there exists the possibility of overcoming this weakness. According to Rustow, the creation of democracy is a dynamic process in the context of “a prolonged and inconclusive political struggle,” in which the choices and negotiations of “a small circle of leaders” play a particularly crucial role.⁵³ The task of understanding democratization is to trace and explain the process by which “choices are caught up in a continuous redefinition of actors’ perceptions of preferences and constraints.”⁵⁴

Although some of the existing literature notes and examines the role of the elite

⁵² Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 96.

⁵³ Dankwart Rustow, “Transition to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1970), pp. 352, 356

⁵⁴ Herbert Kitschelt, “Political Regime Change: Structural and Process-Driven Explanation,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol.86, No. 4 (1992), p. 1028.

in promoting the spread of semi-competitive elections in China, there are a number of problems in their explanations.

One of the major problems concerns the definition of the elite. In the literature on village elections, two groups of elite are examined: the central leadership and the village elite. Decisions made by the leadership at the center definitely have a substantial impact on the operation of the local authorities. Thus, leadership at the center definitely should be examined. However, the village elite were not, and could not be, the initiator of the village elections. According to Chinese nomenklatura,⁵⁵ the decision-making power to appoint and manage village cadres, including village party secretaries and village heads, belongs first to the township party secretaries and to the township party committees. Though officials at other levels have direct or indirect influence on the decisions of the township party secretaries in appointing and/or dismissing particular village cadres, it is the responsibility of the township party secretaries rather than anyone else to make appointments at the village level. Thus, the role of the village party secretaries is irrelevant in this respect (except if they have a feed-back to higher levels and they are interested in semi-free election).

Some of the literature examines the positive role of some mid-level officials, in particular officials in the Ministry of Civil Affairs.⁵⁶ Although the Ministry of Civil Affairs does have influence in terms of how the village elections are conducted, its responsibility is to supervise the elections to make sure they are in conformity with central regulations, rather than to organize the elections or to hold the cadres responsible. Moreover, if so-called mid-level officials at certain ministries or departments of the central authorities are important, it is more likely that the role those officials working in the Organization Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party is much more important in this respect. This is because among the central authorities it is mainly this department that has direct influence on the issue of nomenklatura responsibilities.

⁵⁵ The party jargon for it is: 党管干部, 下管一级; or *dang guan ganbu, xia guan yiji* (the party controls the cadres, and each party committee controls those cadres at the next lower level).

⁵⁶ Tianjian Shi, 1999b; and Anne F. Thurston, *Muddling Toward Democracy: Political Change in Grassroots China*, Peacework No.23 (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, August 1998)..

The second problem concerns the simplified and/or mistaken interpretation of the motivation and behavior of the elite. For example, Yongnian Zheng (1998), and Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li (2000) argue that some core party leaders, like Peng Zhen, Deng Xiaoping, Bo Yibo, and others, were pro-democracy, and they were the ones who promoted the semi-competitive village elections. This argument is simply not plausible within the Chinese party-state system. Actually, other works by some of the same above-mentioned authors note that these same central elite actually were obstacles to the development of democracy in China.

Some researchers associate the elite's democratic ideals with their experiences in studying and living in the West, either the United States or Western Europe, and/or their contacts with Western institutions, such as the Carter Center and the EU delegation in Beijing. This might be true for some mid-level central officials and for officials in major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and so forth, but certainly not for the hundreds of thousands of other officials throughout the country, especially those in rural areas where the overwhelming majority of semi-competitive elections have taken place.

There are also some methodological difficulties in the existing literature. One problem concerns the data. Most of the analysis is based on data collected from villages in one province⁵⁷ or even in one county.⁵⁸ Few are based on data from multiple provinces, to say nothing of different regions of the country, for instance, Northeast China, South China, and so on.

An additional problem involves confusion over the concept of elections. While some of the literature examines semi-competitive elections (e.g., Tianjian Shi, 1999), most of the literature examines direct elections (e.g., Lianjiang Li and Kevin O'Brien, 2000). As it is well-known, direct elections are not necessary competitive, especially under state-socialism where direct elections are mere affirmation rituals without providing any choice to the electors. Thus direct elections are not a solid source for

⁵⁷ Baogang He, "How Democratic are Village Elections in China?" presentation at the International Forum of Democratic Studies, Singapore, June 10, 2003.

⁵⁸ Li Lianjiang, "The Empowering Effect of Village Elections in China", in *Asian Survey* (43), 2003.

examining the possibility of democratization, however primitive, in China.

Furthermore, most of the literature only examines elections at the village level. With the emergence of semi-competitive election cases at the township level, it is imperative to examine the innovative election practice on the basis of new cases. The semi-competitive elections at the township level must be significantly different from those at the village level, on the ground that a township is legally a state authority with coercive force but a village is legally a “popular autonomous organization”⁵⁹. Much more is at stake on the township semi-competitive elections than on the village semi-competitive elections. However, the new election reforms at the township and/or higher levels are under-researched. This is partly because these new reforms at the township (and higher levels) are much more recent, but it is also because there is less data available because the authorities at the higher levels are much less accessible to researchers. This current research aims at contributing to the understanding on the semi-competitive elections at the township level, in particular their causes and consequences.

Based on the cases of the semi-competitive elections for the state officials, hypothesis derived from modernization theory would be tested, as having been tested by the studies on the village semi-competitive elections. This research would not test hypothesis derived from class struggle theory, because there is no organized class activities and class consciousness. This is because semi-free elections are held in a political system in which the communist party forbids any advocacy and/or agitation on the basis of classes. Hypothesis derived from elite theory would be tested because of the general big role of individual party and state major officials in shifting the direction of development in particular localities. This research seeks explanation from the existing theory and aims at enriching the theory as well.

Naturally, we should bear in mind that what we are examining is the development of the semi-competitive elections at localities *within* a country, while existing democratization theory developed from studying democratization at country level. The fact that we are trying to understand local elections doesn't exclude the

⁵⁹ See article 2 of Law of Organizing Villagers Committees, promulgated on November 4, 1998.

application of the hypothesis from existing democratization theory. Most of the existing researches on the village semi-competitive elections apply democratization theory and help improve our understanding. What should be done is to link the theory carefully to the specific Chinese case.

1.4 Agenda of the current research

By attempting to overcome the above-mentioned shortcomings in the existing literature, the goal of this study is to enhance our understanding of the development of semi-competitive elections in China.

As will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, the analysis in this research is based on cases of “semi-competitive elections” throughout China rather than vaguely defined “direct elections” within one or two provinces.

Before analyzing why it was possible to implement these elections in China and discussing what may follow, I will first examine the background to these semi-competitive elections, including their initiators, locations, timing, procedures, participants, results, predictability, and so forth. This background research will contribute to an understanding of the poorly researched township and county semi-competitive elections.

This research will then look at the economic, social, and political features of the townships where semi-competitive elections have been implemented and the possible choices available to the relevant actors, in an attempt to understand the reasons why these new election practices developed in certain areas.

Thereafter, I will investigate the consequences of these semi-competitive elections, which in a narrower sense concern the evolution of the power structure at local levels, and in a broader sense the sustainability of the new township elections and the evolution of Chinese political system.

In the conclusion, I will try to summarize the findings of this research, examine the possibility of the further development of the semi-competitive elections, and discuss the practical as well as the theoretical implications of the spread of

semi-competitive elections in China.

Chapter 2: Concepts, Cases, Data, and Methods

2.1 Concepts

This project will focus on Chinese township semi-competitive elections.

Semi-competitive elections are different from the free elections that we see in other countries. As mentioned in Chapter 1, there are no opposition parties in these elections and the campaigns are restricted. They are similar to the so-called multi-candidate elections that were held in some Eastern European countries under communism before 1989 and the former Soviet Union before 1991.⁶⁰ In these multi-candidate elections, although no opposition parties were allowed to participate, citizens could be nominated as candidates without the endorsement of the party committees. In these semi-competitive elections, self-nominated candidates and candidates nominated by groups of citizens competed with one another. The competition could be among party members, or among party members and non-party members.

China introduced the term multi-candidate elections at the beginning of the “reform and opening” era in the late 1970s. But in practice, these multi-candidate elections were different from those in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in the 1980s in that in China all the candidates were selected by the party.⁶¹ Citizens had no access to the nomination process. In fact, to ensure that the person favored by the party would be safely elected, the party deliberately selected as competitors people who were unknown to the public or people with an obvious low ability to be a viable competitor. The semi-competitive elections implemented since the 1970s are different from this kind of multi-candidate elections: no candidate is pre-selected by the party,

⁶⁰ For example, in 1985 the first multi-candidate elections were implemented in Hungary; in 1987, the first multi-candidate elections were permitted for local Soviets in the Soviet Union. However, in Hungary between 1985 and 1989 and in the Soviet Union between 1987 and 1991, the Communist Party monopolized the political processes and no opposition parties were allowed.

⁶¹ This is referred to as: 差额选举, or *cha'e xuanju* (elections in which there are more candidates than available positions).

or at least most candidates are not pre-selected by the party.

The township semi-competitive elections examined in this research are elections for the position of township governors. So far, there are no cases of semi-competitive elections for major positions at the prefectural, provincial, and central levels. A few cases of semi-competitive elections for county governors took place recently. These eleven cases of county⁶² semi-competitive elections will be referred to but will not be the basis of the analysis in this research.

Several interesting cases of semi-competitive elections for county-level people's congresses were recently reported.⁶³ However, they are not the focus of this project partly because there have only been a few such cases and partly because the people's congress still plays only a marginal role in the decision-making process at all levels, though in recent years there seems to have been a trend to increase the role of the people's congresses.⁶⁴

After the sixteenth party congress in 2002, a new practice⁶⁵ was implemented to appoint major cadres. To illustrate the new practice, let us take the position of a county party secretary as an example. Previously, the candidate was nominated and appointed by the prefecture party secretary. Now, the candidate for the county party secretary is still nominated by the prefecture party secretary, but he is appointed on the basis of the results of the voting by the plenary session of the prefecture party committee. Although this practice has been implemented in an increasing number of

⁶² There are about 2,200 counties in China. These eleven cases include: 湖北省襄樊市樊城区、老河口市 or Fancheng county and Laohekou county in Xiangfan prefecture in Hubei province in July 2004; 江苏省淮安市淮阴区、清河区 Huaiyin county and Qinghe county in Huaiyin prefecture in Jiangsu province in 2003; 江苏省南京市白下区、六合区 Baixia county and Liuhe county in Nanjing prefecture in Jiangsu in 2003; 江苏省常州市金坛市 Jintan county in Changzhou prefecture in Jiangsu in December 2003; 江苏省徐州市沛县 Pei county in Xuzhou prefecture in Jiangsu in December 2003; 江苏省宿迁市泗阳县 Siyang county in Suqian prefecture in Jiangsu in September 2004; 江苏省淮安市洪泽县、盱眙县 and Hongze county and Xuyi county in Huai'an prefecture in Jiangsu in September 2004.

⁶³ The most famous cases include: independent candidate Lifa Yao (姚立法) who won the election and served as an important representative for five years between 1998 and 2003 in Qianjiang county, Hubei province (湖北省潜江市); seven independent candidates who participated in the county people's congress elections in Shenzhen prefecture (深圳市) in early 2003; and two cases of independent candidates participating in the county people's congress elections in Beijing municipality in early 2003.

⁶⁴ According to the Chinese Constitution, the people's congress holds supreme authority. However, in practice, the people's congress is considered a "rubber stamp." It approves almost all proposals presented by the administration and party committees. The semi-competitive elections for the people's congress do seem to have had an impact on increasing the significance of this institution. This effect, however, is not the theme of this research.

⁶⁵ This is referred to as: *Piao jue zhi* (the system of making decisions through voting).

cases and has been extensively reported by the mass media, it is not the focus of this research because the voters are the candidate's superiors rather than ordinary citizens and because there is only one candidate for each position.

The party reformed the nomenklatura system in 1995, urging the party committees at all levels to widen their basis for selecting cadres. According to the regulations, authorities are encouraged to publicize job vacancies so that eligible people can apply for specific positions.⁶⁶ Previously superiors would only appoint people whom they knew in person. By publicizing the job vacancies and inviting people to apply, the number of candidates for each position increased. To select the applicants for specific positions, a written examination and interview are arranged, and the superiors appoint those with the best performance. This practice is valid for all positions, including division heads within local administrations, principals of elementary and/or high schools, and managers of state-owned enterprises, etc. Though it has brought some changes to the nomenklatura, it too is not the focus of this research since it is not based on elections.

Township semi-competitive elections are different from the village semi-competitive elections to elect villagers committees that have been extensively examined. Townships are the legal basic authorities in the Chinese political system, whereas villagers committees are "autonomous organizations of the masses."⁶⁷ In practice, township authorities have substantial power and responsibility over public safety, social and political stability, birth control, elementary education, infrastructure construction, taxation and fee collection, and the provision of other public goods.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ For details, see 党政领导干部选拔任用工作条例, or *Dangzheng lingdao ganbu xuanba renong gongzuo tiaoli* (Regulations on the Work of Selecting and Appointing Leaders and Cadres of Party and State Organizations). The regulations were promulgated and implemented in 1995 on an experimental basis, and were amended and institutionalized in 2002. The text is available on the Central Committee's Web site at www.people.com.cn.

⁶⁷ See Article 2 of the Law of Organizing Villagers Committees, effective November 4, 1998. The text of the law is available on the National People's Congress Web site at <http://www.npcnews.com.cn/gb/paper12/1/class001200006/hwz64679.htm>.

⁶⁸ Within the hierarchy of the Chinese political system, there are five levels of authority: the center; thirty-four provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities, and special administrative regions, including Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan that are not covered by this research; 332 prefectures; 2,860 counties; and 44,821 townships. The Chinese terms for prefecture and county are confusing. 地区 or *Diqu* (and 州 or *Zhou* and 盟 or *Meng* in the ethnic minority regions) is the usual term for prefecture, and 县 or *Xian* (and 旗 or *Qi* in the ethnic minority regions) refers to the county. Meanwhile, some *shi* are at the prefectural rank (地级市), while other *shi* are at the county rank (县级市). Some counties are called 区 or *qu*. In this research, these administrative entities will be referred to as prefectures and counties, despite the variations in Chinese. This corresponds with the administrative zoning

Villagers committees have much narrower responsibilities. The main responsibility of villagers committees is to distribute and redistribute collective property—arable land—among the villagers. Whereas the township authorities have coercive instruments, the villagers committees can only implement their programs by voluntary participation.⁶⁹

Along the hierarchy of the political system, thus far the township has been the only level to implement a considerable number of semi-competitive elections. Table 1 shows the distribution of township semi-competitive elections across the country.

Table 1. Cases of township semi-competitive elections in China*

Provinces, Autonomous Regions, and Municipalities	Number of townships	Number of townships with semi-competitive elections	Number of counties	Number of counties in which semi-competitive elections were held at the township level
Beijing	322	-**	18	-
Tianjin	239	-	18	-
Hebei	2202	-	172	-
Shanxi	1384	-	119	-
Inner Mongolia	1405	-	101	-
Liaoning	1551	-	100	-
Jilin	1026	-	60	-
Heilongjiang	1325	-	130	-
Shanghai	234	-	19	-
Jiangsu	1590	39	106	5(宿豫、沐阳、泗阳、高港、靖江)
Zhejiang	1610	1	88	1(长兴)
Anhui	1996	1	105	1(铜陵市狮子山区)
Fujian	1104	-	86	-
Jiangxi	1615	-	99	-
Shandong	1927	2	139	1(汶上)
Henan	2422	2	158	1(新蔡)
Hubei	1234	13	102	2(京山、咸宁咸安)

practices of the Ministry of Civil Affairs. See the statistics on the Ministry of Civil Affairs Web site at <http://www.xzqh.org.cn/yange/2002/tj.htm>.

⁶⁹ The relationships and interactions between the implementation of these various new practices concerning cadre appointments are obviously interesting, and will be discussed in a later part of this research.

Hunan	2583	-	122	-
Guangdong	1844	1	123	1(深圳)
Guangxi	1388	1	108	1(恭城)
Hainan	218	-	20	-
Chongqing	1347	-	40	-
Sichuan	5275	~2100	180	157
Guizhou	1539	1	87	1(清镇市)
Yunnan	1582	17	129	2(石屏、泸西)
Tibet	689	-	73	-
Shaanxi	1742	-	107	-
Gansu	1650	-	86	-
Ningxia	343	-	23	-
Qinghai	424	-	43	-
Xinjiang	1004	-	99	-
Total	44821	2168	2860	172

Note: *Excluding Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan.

**No reports.

Sources: Zhou Wenyi, Hu Guoqiang, and Dai Wen'an, "Jingxuan zhenzhang" (Competitively Elected Township Governors), *Zhejiang renda* (Zhejiang People's Congress), No. 7 (2004); "The Development of Semi-Competitive Elections at the Township Level in Sichuan Province since the mid-1990s," *China Perspectives*, No. 51 (January-February 2004); and the following links at http://www.xinhuanet.com/chinanews/2004-09/01/content_2783571.htm; http://www.hljtv.com/xinwen/news/shengwai_20031217_0002.htm; <http://www.phoenixtv.com/> Nov. 10, 2004; and <http://www.chinaelections.org/>.

Although most cases of township semi-competitive elections occurred in Sichuan province, the practice cannot be regarded as a one-province phenomenon. In addition to Sichuan province, Jiangsu, Hubei, and Yunnan each had more than ten cases. Even in those provinces with only one or two cases, the practice is meaningful because the actors experience similar political, ideological, and legal breakthroughs. The initiator of any case in any province must overcome similar political, ideological, and legal obstacles. The obstacles might be different in terms extent, but not in terms of type. This research is based on fieldwork across the country, even though the large N statistical study is based on cases in Sichuan province. The data and case selections will be discussed later.

2.2 Methods

To understand the causality for the spread of the semi-competitive township elections, several methods can be employed, e.g., a functionalist approach, a rational choice approach, and power theories; or structuralism and intentionalism. These approaches or theories differ with respect to the causal agents and causal mechanisms.

Functionalism is a macro theory in that it attributes the final causation to system-level attributes rather than to attributes of micro-level units such as individuals or meso-level units such as groups and organizations.⁷⁰

Rational choice theory is a micro-level theory. It assumes that individuals are the basic agents of social analysis and that the instrumental rationality of these individuals is the causal mechanism that produces events in the social world. Instrumental rationality is defined above all by the optimization of interests (Coleman and Fararo 1992; Kiser and Hechter 1991).⁷¹

Power theory works at a meso-level. It assumes that collective actors (e.g., social groups and organizations) are the key causal agents and that the exercised capacity (i.e., power) of these actors is the ultimate cause of social happenings.⁷²

As shown in Table 2, James Mahoney⁷³ highlights the differences among the functionalist, rational choice, and power theories.

Table 2. Functionalist, Rational Choice, and Power Theories

⁷⁰ Stuart McAnulla, 2005, "The Structure-Agency Debate and its Historiographical Utility," Available at <http://www.psa.ac.uk/cps/1998%5Cmcanulla.pdf>.

⁷¹ J.S. Coleman and T. Fararo, *Rational Choice Theory: Advocacy and Critique* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, Publications, 1992); Edgar Kiser and Michael Hechter, "The Role of General Theory in Comparative-Historical Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97 (1991), pp.1–30.

⁷² James Mahoney, "Tentative Answers to Questions about Causal Mechanisms," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, PA, August 28, 2003, p. 8.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 16.

	Functionalist Theory	Rational Choice Theory	Power Theory
Causal Agent	Social System	Individual	Collective Actor
Causal Mechanism	System Needs	Instrumental Rationality	Exercised Capacity

Like functionalism, structuralism gives primacy to structures. Scholars who approach social developments from a structuralist point of view explain political change by examining the development and interaction of structures. Individuals are reduced to negligible entities. In contrast, intentionalist or agency-centered accounts give explanatory primacy to agency in social dynamics. Intentionalist accounts, most notably some forms of rational choice theory, argue that structures exist only as an effect or aggregation of individual actions. As a result, structures are accorded no independent causal powers. The explanatory focus thus is on agency.⁷⁴

Structure-agency is also used on different occasions or by different authors as determinism-voluntarism, macro-micro, collectivism-individualism, objectivism-subjectivism, and holism-individualism.⁷⁵

Though structuralism might help us understand the overall evolution of a social phenomenon, it has its weaknesses. As Przeworski (1991: 96) puts it, “in this formulation the outcome is uniquely determined by conditions, and history goes on without anyone ever doing anything.”⁷⁶

However, structure should be taken into consideration when examining individuals’ decision-making processes and their consequences. As Giddens argues, structure and agency are mutually dependent and internally related. Structure only exists through agency and agents have “rules and resources” between them which will

⁷⁴ Stuart McAnulla, 2005, “The Structure-Agency Debate and its Historiographical Utility,” Available at <http://www.psa.ac.uk/cps/1998%5Cmcanulla.pdf>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

facilitate or constrain their actions. These actions can lead in turn to the reconstitution of the structure, defined as rules and resources, which will in turn affect future actions. Thus, there is a close interrelationship between structure and agency.⁷⁷ Colin Hay⁷⁸ and Bob Jessop⁷⁹ further argue that action only takes place within a pre-existing structured context that is strategically selective, that is, it favors certain strategies over others. Thus, the structures both enable and constrain. Actors are reflexive and formulate strategies on the basis of partial knowledge of the structures. The strategies that individuals or groups adopt will yield effects; some of these may be intended but there will always be unintended consequences as well.

Let us examine how these theories might be implemented as analytical methods for our research. From a functionalist or structuralist point of view, the Chinese political system or the local political system in China is the agent for introducing and promoting the township semi-competitive elections. From this approach, the introduction and spread of the elections result from the needs of the system. However, when operationalized, this approach encounters several serious problems. First, it is very difficult to identify and measure the needs of the Chinese political system, partly because the Chinese political system is in itself difficult to understand. Second, even if it is possible to identify and measure the needs of the Chinese political system to change and adjust, it is difficult to specify the needs for introducing and promoting the township semi-competitive elections. If the system's needs for township semi-competitive elections can be specified, it rules out any contingency and inevitably leads to determinism. This is because in light of this approach, individual citizens and officials are negligible. They are the tools of the political system and they merely follow the needs of the system. This is inconsistent with the fact that the cases of semi-competitive elections have been unevenly distributed spatially. Neighboring provinces, prefectures, counties, and townships under the same political system with similar economic and social conditions have experienced differences in

⁷⁷ Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1984).

⁷⁸ Colin Hay, "Structure and Agency," in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, ed. D. March and G. Stoker (London: Macmillan, 1995).

⁷⁹ Bob Jessop, *State Theory: Putting Capitalist States in their Place* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990).

implementation of semi-competitive elections. One may locality implement the innovative election practice, and a neighboring government may not; one place may implement the practice under one set of regulations, and the neighboring place may implement another set of regulations. In the development of the township semi-competitive elections, there has been much contingency and many differences resulting from various efforts by individuals. Thus, they cannot be explained by deterministic system needs.

Analytical chances from the perspective of power theory confront problems similar to those of the functionalist approach. In this approach the causal mechanism is the collective actors' capacity. In Chinese politics, in particular in Chinese local politics, there is only one organized collective actor—the party, or the local party organization. In most regions, the formal capacity of the local party organizations is usually quite similar. In the power theory approach, if the party organization in one place is motivated to implement electoral reforms, the party organization in another place with a similar capacity should implement the reforms as well. However, among the vast regions in which the power and capacity of the local party organizations have declined at a similar pace, only some of them have so far introduced and implemented township semi-competitive elections. In practice, elections are not held only where party power is declining, so it should not be assumed that elections naturally occur against the backdrop of declining power capacity.

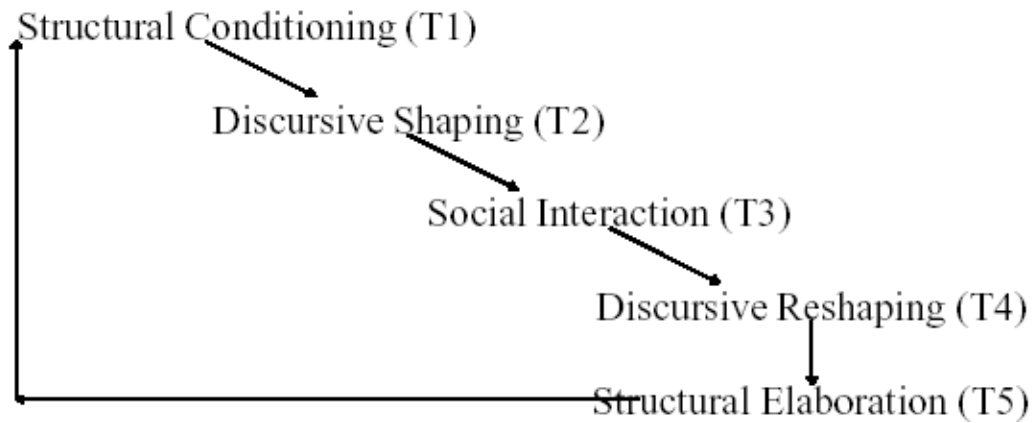
Actually, the contingency in the spread of the township semi-competitive elections points to the primacy of the individual as a driving agent. In particular, based on previous fieldwork, it is relatively simple to identify the crucial individuals who introduced the new election practices. This provides a useful opportunity to observe the rationale and behavior of those key decision-makers. We can even attempt to identify the payoffs, strategy sets, and preferences that allow for the calculation of the equilibrium behavior of the crucial individuals who introduce the township semi-competitive elections. Therefore, I follow the rational choice approach to examine the crucial individuals and their instrumental rationality in introducing the township semi-competitive elections.

Obviously, these individuals assess their initiatives under the constraints of the existing Chinese political structure. For example, as mentioned earlier, no one can choose to invite and/or form an opposition party. State officials have no power over electoral issues. Only party officials have an influence in changing the electoral regulations. In addition, there are different resources available to party and state officials in different regions. While some regions are rich in economic resources, officials in other regions have few economic resources to fulfill their responsibilities. On the other hand, there are also structural arrangements granting room for some actors to maneuver. For example, let us examine the degree of centralization of the nomenklatura authority within the Chinese system. The degree of centralization of the nomenklatura authority is defined according to the number of levels down that the given party organization supervises in the administrative hierarchy. Presently, in the Chinese case each party authority supervises the nomenklatura one level below in the administrative hierarchy. This can be defined as a relatively decentralized nomenklatura authority, which gives party authority at each level some autonomous decision-making power. Conversely, on the basis of some fieldwork, it is obvious that some of the consequences are unintended by the initiators. By examining the intended as well as the unintended consequences, we can have a better understanding of the sustainability of the township semi-competitive elections and their impact on the evolution of the Chinese political system. I will explore the structure that enables and constrains the actors who deal with electoral issues, and will examine the interaction between the structure and the actors.

In addition to studying the actors and the structure, I will also investigate the discourse in an attempt to further understand the development of township semi-competitive elections in China. As Laclau and Mouffe argue, it is through “discourse that people understand their positions in life and shape society and political activity. We are only able to explain and understand a political process if we can

describe the discourse within which it is occurring.”⁸⁰ Stuart McAnulla demonstrates the dynamics among structure, agency, and discourse, as shown in Figure 1.⁸¹

Figure 1. A Combined Three-Part Cycle of Change



In the cycle, structural conditioning means systemic properties or aggregate consequences of past actions that shape social situations and endow people with interests. Action will always be pre-dated by forms of social conditioning.

Social interaction means interaction in which agents whilst socially conditioned also express their own irreducible emergent powers relating to intentionality, rationality, personal psychology, and consciousness or unconsciousness. These powers mean that, whilst agents are socially conditioned, they are never determined.

Structural elaboration means the elaboration that modifies structural properties in part in line with the intention of the actors but in large part in the form of unintended consequences emerging from the conflicts and concessions among the different groups.⁸²

In a sense, we can conceive of discourse as the move in between structure and agency. Social interaction (under the circumstances of political transformation) will initially transform the discursive context, as actors discursively articulate proposed changes in particular social conditions. Subsequently, the structural context will be

⁸⁰ E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985).

⁸¹ McAnulla, “The Structure-Agency Debate and its Historiographical Utility,” p. 11.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.7.

altered in both intended and unintended ways as a consequence of social interaction.⁸³

The change in the discourse on semi-competitive election and its implications have been under-researched. In the past two decades, the political discourse has been constantly changing: shifting the focus from class struggle to economic development in the late 1970s; to reform and opening, the Four Cardinal Principles,⁸⁴ and the primary stage of socialism in the early 1980s; to anti-bourgeois spiritual pollution in the mid-1980s; to building socialism with Chinese characteristics in the late 1980s; to combating peaceful evolution (to capitalism) in the late 1980s until the early 1990s; to constructing the rule of law since the early 1990s; to constructing a socialist market economy after 1992; to re-affirming the primary stage of socialism and re-affirming the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the mid-1990s; to the “three represents”⁸⁵ in the early 2000s; and to constructing a harmonious society in the mid-2000s. As has been noted and confirmed by most Sinologists throughout the world, the change in the discourse is both a result of the structural change and an instrument for promoting further structural change. The above-mentioned discourses are macro-level discourses demonstrating the overall program of the ruling party. As to the specific issue of the discourse on township semi-competitive elections, there has been insufficient research on whether there have been any changes. This research will attempt to examine the relevant discourse to enhance our understanding of the township semi-competitive elections.

In sum, the goal of this research is to conduct positive research by examining the driving forces behind the introduction of the township semi-competitive elections in China. It will not deal with the normative issues.

⁸³ Ibid., p.11. Stuart McAnulla points out on the same page that the context may be reproduced rather than transformed. In his model it is also quite possible that while social interaction may transform the discursive context, the structural context may in fact be reproduced according to the particular successes and failures of the strategies adopted by the actors.

⁸⁴ The “four cardinal principles” maintain that China should adhere to: socialism; reform and opening; the leadership of the party; and the guidance of Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought.

⁸⁵ The “three represents” maintain that the Chinese Communist Party should be the representative of the advanced productive forces, the representative of the advanced culture, and the representative of the interests of the vast majority of the people. The “three represents” have been interpreted by most observers to be the CCP’s efforts to accommodate the new social strata emerging from the development of the market economy, including the private entrepreneurs.

Therefore, the task of this research is to find correlations, and to propose theories or hypotheses, to explain the correlations.⁸⁶ According to James Mahoney, there are three ways through which a hypothesis can be developed: proposition derivation, knowledge integration, and outcome explanation. Proposition derivation entails the use of untested postulates to logically derive hypotheses that can be tested (Merton 1949; Friedman 1953; Homans 1967; Stinchcombe 1993).⁸⁷ Knowledge integration works backwards from an existing set of propositions that have already been tested and empirically supported to a set of postulates. Outcome explanation refers to the theoretical practice of logically deducing particular historical outcomes or events from a set of postulates. The strategy of proposition derivation is very similar to how formal modelers view the purpose of theory, that is, one of logically deducing testable propositions from premises. Knowledge integration is more useful to statistical researchers, who often discover that many heterogeneous variables are related to an outcome, but lack a means of understanding why this is true. The strategy of outcome explanations is best suited for case studies and small-N researchers, who often seek to explain particular outcomes.⁸⁸

This research will attempt to employ the strategies of knowledge integration and outcome explanation to develop hypotheses. As to the strategy of knowledge integration, I refer to two large N studies to test hypotheses derived from existing democratization theory, in particular modernization theory. As to the strategy of outcome explanation, I refer to a small N study in which the questions of why and how individuals have introduced the township semi-competitive elections are closely and carefully examined.

⁸⁶ As Friedman argues, “the ultimate goal of a positive science is the development of a ‘theory’ or ‘hypothesis’ that yields valid and meaningful (i.e., not truistic) predictions about phenomena not yet observed” (Milton Friedman, “The Methodology of Positive Economics,” in *Essays in Positive Economics* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1953]).

⁸⁷ Merton, R., 1949, *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Free Press, Glencoe, Ill. Milton Friedman, 1953, “The Methodology of Positive Economics”, in *Essays in Positive Economics*, Chicago: University of Chicago. Homans, G., 1967, *The Nature of Social Science*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World. Arthur L. Stinchcombe, “The Conditions of Fruitfulness of Theorizing about Mechanism in Social Science,” in *Social Theory and Social Policy: Essays in Honor of James S. Coleman*, ed. by Aage B. Sorensen and Seymour Spilerman (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), pp. 23-41.

⁸⁸ James Mahoney, “Tentative Answer to Questions about Causal Mechanisms,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, PA, August 28, 2003.

In addition, to conduct positive research through some form of rational choice approach involves interpretation. As Bates and Weingast argue, most game theorists fail to acknowledge that their approach requires a complete political anthropology. It requires detailed knowledge of the values of the individuals; of the expectations that the individuals have of each other's reactions; and of the ways in which these expectations have been shaped by history. It often requires detailed and fine-grained knowledge of the precise features of the institutions within which the individuals make choices and devise political strategies. To construct a coherent and valid rational choice account, one must "soak and pole" and acquire much the same depth of understanding as that achieved by those who offer "thick" descriptions.⁸⁹

To achieve the requirements of political anthropology, I will attempt to make the accounts of the values and expectations of the decision-makers in charge of electoral issues and the features of the institutions that constrain their choices as detailed as I possibly can. Chapter 3, in particular, will demonstrate this research's political anthropology enterprise.

2.3 Data and Case Selection

The data consist of personal experiences, interviews, party archives, and statistics.

Many of my insights about the structural context within which decision-makers formulate their strategies, the discourse through which they articulate their strategies, and the values and expectations of the decision-makers come from my several years of experience within the party institute where I have been working since 1996. This party institute—the China Center for Comparative Politics and Economics—is a part of the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau that is attached to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. By working at this institute, I have had the chance to closely observe the structure, the discourse, the values, etc. that prevail

⁸⁹ Robert H. Bates and Barry R. Weingast, 1996, "Rationality and Interpretation: The Politics of Transition." Russell Sage Foundation, New York. (Russell Sage Working Paper no. 105).

in the political system. This experience has granted me access to both central and local authorities, and has helped me understand the messages contained in interviews, party archives, and official speeches.

Interviews are one of the main sources of the data. In recent years, I have managed to conduct more than 300 interviews with officials at different levels and with ordinary citizens. On average, the interviews lasted 1.5 hours, ranging from 30 minutes to 3 hours. In addition to the fieldwork in the localities, I also interviewed cadres at central institutions, thus allowing a better national overview of the township semi-competitive elections. In addition, because of my involvement in other research projects on political change in China,⁹⁰ I was able to conduct a number of interviews with party and governmental organizations. Although these interviews were not directly targeted on the subject of the development of semi-competitive elections at the township level, they provided important and useful information regarding the structure, discourse, and values and strategies of the various actors.

In order to gather as much information as possible, I used detailed questionnaires during the interviews. For different interviewees, whether s/he was a ordinary citizen, a township state official, a township party official, a county state official, or a county party official, I used different questionnaires. A sample of the questionnaires can be found in Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter.⁹¹ These dozens of questions can be grouped in the following three categories: 1) what were the semi-competitive elections? 2) why did particular townships implement the semi-competitive elections? 3) what have been the changes as a result of the semi-competitive elections?⁹²

⁹⁰ They include: 1) a joint project with Maria Csanadi, "A Comparative Study on the Transformation of the Party-state at the County and Prefecture Levels in China," that comprised fieldwork in Changzhi county and Wuxiang county within Changzhi prefecture in Shanxi province; Yucheng county and Mingshan county within Ya'an prefecture in Sichuan province; and Yixing county and Jiangyin county within Wuxi prefecture in Jiangsu province. 2) a project on "Innovation and Excellence in Local Governance in China," directed by Professor Keping Yu (director of the China Center for Comparative Politics and Economics). I was one of the nine research fellows on the research team. For fieldwork I visited Shizhong county in Suining prefecture in Sichuan province, Pingchang county in Bazhong prefecture in Sichuan province, Guiyang municipality in Guizhou province, and Jinping county in Honghe prefecture in Yunnan province. 3) a project on "A Comparative Study of Political Reform at the Township and County Levels," directed by Jingben Rong (editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Comparative Economic and Social Systems*). I was one of four research fellows on the research team. I conducted fieldwork in Xinmi county in Henan province, and Wuxi prefecture in Jiangsu province.

⁹¹ This sample was for township officials. Different questionnaires were used for the different positions of the interviewees. Each questionnaire consisted of about 60-90 questions.

⁹² These questionnaires were written with detailed guidance from Maria Csanadi, Institute of Economics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

I made considerable efforts to collect archives, regulations, and announcements issued by the central and local authorities. The procedures for holding the elections are usually included in these documents. I also tried to collect and examine speeches by leaders at different levels to ordinary cadres for mobilizing support for the implementation of the township semi-competitive elections. These documents carry the message about the aims, values, constraints, and strategies of the particular actors who were in charge of the electoral issues.

The statistics are available in the statistical yearbooks. At the county level and above, each locality has a Bureau of Statistics. In each prefecture the Bureau of Statistics compiles and publishes an annual statistical yearbook. The prefecture-level statistical yearbook contains data for all the townships and counties within the prefecture.

The small N investigation is based on data collected from townships grouped by whether or not they have implemented semi-free elections. Accordingly, the following categories describe the four types of townships:

- 1). The earliest cases of township semi-competitive elections that were repeated in the following election cycles;
- 2). Townships that have recently implemented semi-competitive elections;
- 3). Townships that implemented new election practices at some point but then discontinued them thereafter;
- 4). Townships that never implemented any new electoral practices.

Appendix 2 shows the localities (3 provinces, 5 prefectures, 5 counties, and 12 townships) and the administrative positions (6 positions) of the interviewees. The cases include all of the above four types of townships. In addition, there were interviews with central party-state authorities in Beijing and other scholars who have conducted research on this topic. In total, there were about 100 interviews.⁹³

⁹³ These 100 interviews focused only on township semi-competitive elections. The previously mentioned several hundred interviews covered not only the semi-competitive elections, but also more general issues as well the operations of the party-state political process.

While the small N study is based on nationwide cases, the large N studies is based on a random selection of cases in Sichuan province since it is in Sichuan where there have been many township semi-competitive elections, providing the basis for the large N studies.

There is more than one analytical unit. Since it is usually the party committee at the county level and above that decides whether or not to implement semi-competitive elections in particular townships under its supervision, the county and prefecture may also be a predictor.

One large N investigation, involving 256 cases, was conducted with the township as the analytical unit. The other large N study, with 157 cases, was conducted with the county as the analytical unit. Chapters 4 and 5 consider the two large N studies.

Appendix 1 to chapter 2:

Questionnaire for Township Interviews

On the interactions between the township and county authorities:

1. From where did you receive the directive about the new election practice? Party or government?
2. Did you argue with the county?
3. Whom did you approach?
4. What were your arguments?
5. Did your arguments work?
6. Did the county allow for any compromises?
7. What were the compromises?

On the interactions between townships:

8. Did you consult with other townships on this issue?
9. What were their opinions?
10. Did other townships implement semi-competitive elections?
11. If no, why not?
12. Why did you implement semi-competitive elections?
13. What are the main differences between your township and those that did not implement the elections?

For the township party secretary:

14. Did you assist the county in carrying out the elections?
15. How did you provide assistance?
16. Did you participate in choosing the peasant representatives?
17. In what way?
18. What do you think are the main purposes of the elections?
19. Did you make efforts to solve the problems?
20. Were those efforts efficient?
21. Why did you not continue?
22. What do you expect the consequences of the competitive elections will be?
23. Do you think the relationship between you and the township governor or vice-governor will change?
24. In what way?
25. Do you think the relationship between you and the people will change?
26. In what way?
27. Do you think the relationship between the township governor and the people will change?
28. In what way?
29. Do you think the relationship between the township and county will change?
30. In what way?
31. Who will benefit? In what ways?
32. Who will lose? In what ways?
33. Are there any dangers? What kind?

For the township governor:

34. Were you or would you be one of the candidates?
35. What do you think were the reasons why you won or would win the election?
36. How many years had you been working in this township or in other townships?
37. In what post?
38. How often did you contact county officials when you were in your previous post?
39. With whom did you previously have contact?
40. How many electors did you know before the vote?
41. Was there any campaign?
42. Did you promise anything to the officials in your speeches?
43. What were the promises?
44. Did you promise anything to the peasants in your speeches?
45. What were the promises?
46. What would be your priorities as a new governor?
47. What kinds of advantages, if any, do you think you will have as a governor elected in this way?
48. What kinds of disadvantages, if any, do you think you will have as a governor elected in this way?
49. Do you expect to be promoted within your township?
50. Can you guess where you might be promoted?
51. Who or what organization might promote you?

52. What do you expect to be doing after three years?
53. Will there be another election like this one or an even more competitive election?
54. If not, why?
55. If yes, will you seek to be re-elected?
56. Why?

For the loser:

57. What did you do before you took part in the election?
58. Why did you take part in the election?
59. How did you take part in it?
60. Were you nominated by yourself or by a group of peasants?
61. Do you know of any other cases like yours?
62. Did you know the electors before the election?
63. If not, how did you think you would win?
64. If yes, how did you know them?
65. What do you think were the reasons why you didn't win?
66. What do you think were the reasons why the winner won?
67. Was there any campaign?
68. How did you manage it?
69. Did you promise anything to the officials in your speeches?
70. What were your promises?
71. Did you promise anything to the peasants in your speeches?
72. What were the promises?
73. Do you think the election was fair and transparent?
74. If not, what were the main problems?
75. Do you expect a similar election to take place after three years?
76. If yes, why?
77. If not, why?
78. Will you take part in it again?
79. Why?
80. Why not?

Regarding townships that did not implement semi-competitive elections:

81. Did the county intend to implement such an election in this township?
82. If not, why not?
83. If yes, then what happened?
84. Why do you think it's not appropriate or unnecessary to implement such elections here?
85. To whom in the county did you express your opinion?
86. How did you convince them not to implement the elections here?
87. What do you think were the reasons why that township was chosen to implement an election?
88. What do you think are the main purposes of the directive?
89. Do you expect the original goals will be achieved?
90. If not, why?
91. Did you make any efforts?

92. What were they?
93. Were they efficient?
94. Did other townships make similar efforts?
95. Why were the efforts not effective in those townships?
96. Do you expect a similar election will be implemented in this township after three years?
97. Why?
98. Why not?
99. What will you do then?
100. Who will benefit from it? What kinds of benefits?
101. Who will lose from it? What kinds of losses?
102. Are there any dangers? What kinds of dangers?

Appendix 2 to chapter:

Table: Sites and Positions of Interviewees

positions sites	Organization department	Party committee	Govern -ment	Township party secretary	Township governor	Citizen
Suining Prefecture in Sichuan	1	1	1			3
Shizhong county	4					
Buyun township					2*	9
Guihua township				1	1	
Xinqiao township				1	2*	
Baoshi township				1	1	5
Dongchan township				1	1	
Yongxing township				1	1	
Ya'an prefecture in Sichuan	4	1				
Yucheng county	2	1	1			
Bifengxia township				1	1	
Nanbu county in Nanchong prefecture in Sichuan	4					1
Beiyuan township				1	1	
Panlong township				1	1	
Bazhong prefecture in Sichuan	3					
Nanjiang county	2	1				
Nanjiang township				1	1	
Shenzhen prefecture in Guangdong	1		1			3
Dapeng township	2				1**	
Wuxi prefecture in Jiangsu		1	4			

Yixing county		1				
Zhangzhu township					1	

Note: The numbers in the table represent the number of interviewees in a given position. 2* represents the incumbent township governor and his competitor in the elections in Buyun township and Xinqiao township respectively. 1** is a vice-governor in Dapeng township.

Chapter 3: Township Semi-Competitive Elections

In the mid-1990s, several cases of semi-competitive elections were introduced in Sichuan province. Since then, there have been more than 2,000 cases of such elections. Also, the practice spread from Sichuan to more than ten provinces, in particular to Yunnan, Hubei, and Jiangsu provinces.

In order to understand what is at stake or what might be affected by a township semi-competitive election, we need to know how much authority a township has and how a township semi-competitive election is conducted.

As discussed in previous chapters, on the one hand, an actor's preference is shaped or constrained by the institution and the situation; on the other hand, the institution and/or the situation may be changed by the action(s) taken by the actor. In order to understand a change, we need to identify the crucial actors and to understand the institutions and/or situations under which an actor makes decisions and upon which the actor's choices or actions might have an effect.

In this chapter, I will try to identify who are the main actors in introducing and promoting the township semi-competitive elections, to present the institutions and situations under which the various actors might carry out the new electoral practices, and to narrate the changed process of conducting elections in some townships in China. By so doing, this chapter will hopefully establish a basis for further analysis in later chapters on the causes and consequences of the township semi-competitive elections.

3.1 What is a township and how much authority does a township have?

A brief review of the history of the township as a level of authority will help us understand the position of the township government. The township was basically a

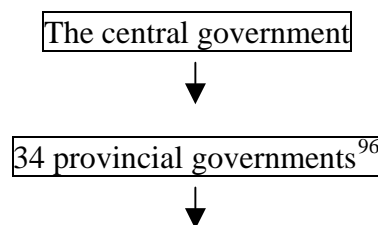
geographical concept before 1949. It is quite new as a level of authority. However, once it was established in the current Chinese political system, it became well entrenched. The hierarchy of the Chinese state changed several times since 1949. Regional governments (each of which supervised several provinces) existed in the early years of the People's Republic, but they were abolished in mid-1950s. Prefecture governments began to be established in the late 1950s, but they did not achieve significant power until the late 1980s.⁹⁴

The township authority gained great power in the late 1950s when Mao launched the Great Leap Forward campaign, during which more economic decision-making powers were delegated to this level. The efforts to re-centralize in the early 1960s were reversed during the Cultural Revolution, after which decentralization of the levels of authority was a permanent feature of the Chinese political system (Maria Csanadi, 2002). The township as a level of authority was adopted in the 1982 Constitution.

3.1.1 The decision-making power and responsibilities of the township from the perspective of the Chinese political hierarchy

The township authority is the lowest level in the hierarchy of the Chinese political system (see Figure 2)⁹⁵.

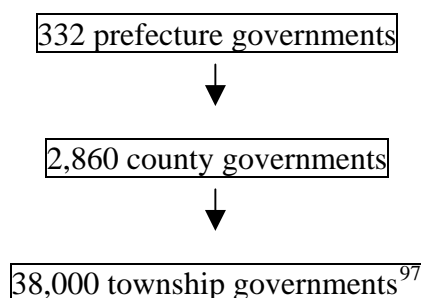
Figure 2. Hierarchy of the Chinese Political System



⁹⁴ The county and the province are deeply entrenched in Chinese history. They have survived for some 2,000 years throughout all of the dynasties.

⁹⁵ The data for the upper levels are from 2002. See the statistics on the Web page of the Ministry of Civil Affairs at <http://www.xzqh.org.cn/yange/2002/tj.htm>. Since the administrations below the prefectural level are always being reshuffled, the number of county and township governments often changes.

⁹⁶ Including Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, which are not covered by this research.



According to Article 61 of the *Organization Law on People's Congresses and People's Governments at the Local Levels in the People's Republic of China*⁹⁸ (referred to hereafter as 'Organization Law for Local Governments'), a township government is supposed to fulfill seven major tasks,⁹⁹ among which the first and most important is to implement the directives and tasks assigned by the upper levels.

An examination of the organizational structure of a township government will reveal information about its authority. A township government consists of a number of bureaus or offices that manage the seven tasks in various areas. There are usually 15-20 bureaus and offices in a township government.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ These are data for the end of 2004. The number of county governments increased from around 2,200 in the early 1990s to about 2,800 at present. The number of township governments decreased from more than 50,000 in the early 1990s to less than 40,000 at the end of 2004.

⁹⁸ Announced by Xinhua News Agency on October 27, 2004, see http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2004-10/28/content_2147270_3.htm.

⁹⁹ The seven tasks include:

1) To implement the resolutions of the people's congress at the township level and the resolutions and directives issued by the state administrations at the upper levels; and to issue resolutions and directives.

2) To implement the economic and social development plan; to fulfill the budget within the administrative region; to manage the economy, education, scientific development, cultural issues, health care, and sports; and to manage financial, civil affairs, public safety, legal, birth control, etc. administration within the administrative region.

3) To protect the socialist state-owned assets and collective assets; to protect the citizens' private assets that are legally obtained; to maintain social order; and to protect the citizens' human rights, democratic rights, and other rights.

4) To protect the legal rights of all economic organizations;

5) To protect the rights of the ethnic minorities, and to respect the customs of the ethnic minorities;

6) To ensure that women have political rights, work rights, and other rights equal to those of men;

7) To carry out other tasks that are required by the people's governments at the upper levels.

¹⁰⁰ One case is Dingshu township in Yixing county in Wuxi prefecture in Jiangsu province. See this township's Web site at www.dingshu.gov.cn (in Chinese). All the townships that I visited (more than thirty) have a similar structure. In Dingshu township, there are the following eighteen bureaus or offices:

- 1) Office of party and political affairs,
- 2) Office of organization and personnel,
- 3) Office of propaganda,
- 4) Office of discipline inspection,
- 5) Agricultural office,
- 6) Economy and trade office,
- 7) Social affairs (education, health care, sports, disaster relief, etc.) office,
- 8) Office of public utility construction,

The staff in a township authority usually include two types of people: 30-40 cadres who are lifetime state employees; and about 100 contract workers who are employed by the individual township governments and whose salaries and benefits are paid by the extra-budgetary and/or off-budgetary revenues of the townships.¹⁰¹

A township is composed of villages, which legally are not a government level, but rather popular autonomous organizations of villagers.¹⁰² A township government has much more power than a villagers committee. A villagers committee does not have any specific offices. The number of staff is usually less than ten, all of whom are peasants who work only part-time for the committee.

The following table (Table 3) summarizes some of the differences between a township government and a villager committee.

Table 3. Differences between a Township Government and a Villagers Committee

	The township government	The villagers committee
Legal position	A level of authority	Citizens' self-governing association
Power over	Wide range of issues, including political issues, administration, state, economy, culture, education, public safety, and other social affairs	Limited range of issues: to allocate the collective assets of the villagers (for example, the arable lands)
Means of enforcement	Coercion and persuasion	Persuasion only
Complexity of the organization	Complicated, composed of about twenty individual offices	Simple, no specific offices

-
- 9) Office of economic management,
 - 10) Office of public safety,
 - 11) Office of finance,
 - 12) Office of legal action,
 - 13) Operational office of the people's congress,
 - 14) Youth league committee,
 - 15) Women's federation,
 - 16) Trade union,
 - 17) Office to facilitate birth control,
 - 18) Office of social security.

¹⁰¹ The number of cadres in a township government is stipulated by the provincial government under the guiding principles of the central government. It varies according to the population of the township, but there are no more than 50 cadres. The number of contract workers in a township government can vary much more than the number of cadres, ranging from 50 to 200. Sometimes, a township government employs a number of temporary workers to handle specific issues such as birth control. In such cases, the number of staff can be expanded to over 300.

¹⁰² According to Article 2 of the *Organization Law of Villagers Committees in the People's Republic of China*, "villagers committees are popular autonomous organizations at the grassroots through which villagers carry out self-management, self-education, and self-service." The major role of the villagers committees is to "help provide public utilities," to "help solve disputes within the communities and help maintain public safety," and to "forward the villagers' comments, demands, and suggestions to the people's governments." Their role is to help the township governments in carrying out their responsibilities (Article 4).

Staff	More than 150 full-time employees	Less than ten part-time employees
Funding	Budgetary revenue (taxes and subsidies from the upper levels), extra-budgetary revenue (fees and income from the TVEs), and off-budgetary revenue (unwarranted fees and fines imposed on residents): relatively stable, and of a considerable amount	Revenues from the collectives assets: unstable and very limited
Population	On average, 20,000	On average, 1,000

A township government has much less power than a county government.

According to Article 59 of the *Organization Law on People's Congresses and People's Governments at the Local Levels in the People's Republic of China*,¹⁰³ a county government has ten major responsibilities and powers.¹⁰⁴

Compared to a township government, a county government legally has three more responsibilities and powers, which are to lead the subordinate administrations and governments at the lower levels (i.e., the township governments); to change or revoke inappropriate directives and decisions issued by the subordinate administrations and/or the township governments; and to appoint, train, assess, and reward or punish government staff according to the regulations.

With respect to the organizational structure, the county government is much more complicated than the township government. Usually, a county government

¹⁰³ Announced by Xinhua News Agency on October 27, 2004; see http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2004-10/28/content_2147270_3.htm

¹⁰⁴ These ten responsibilities and tasks are:

- 1) To implement the resolutions made by the county people's congress and its standing committee; to implement the decisions and directives made by the state administrations at the upper levels; to take administrative measures; and to issue decisions and directives.
- 2) To lead the subordinate administrations and governments at the lower levels (i.e., the township governments).
- 3) To change or revoke inappropriate directives and decisions issued by subordinate administrations and/or township governments.
- 4) To appoint, train, assess, and reward or punish government staff according to the regulations.
- 5) To implement the economic and social development plan; to implement the budget; to manage the economy, education, scientific development, cultural development, health care, and sports; to protect the environment and resources; and to manage urban construction, financial, civil affairs, public safety, ethnic minorities, legal, auditing, birth control, and so on administrations within the administrative region.
- 6) To protect the socialist state-owned assets and collective assets; to protect the citizens' private assets that have been legally obtained; to maintain social order; and to protect the citizens' human rights, democratic rights, and other rights.
- 7) To protect the legal rights of all economic organizations.
- 8) To protect the rights of the ethnic minorities, and to respect the customs of the ethnic minorities.
- 9) To ensure that the political rights and work rights of women are equal to those of men; and to ensure that women have the right to marry based on their own free will.
- 10) To carry out other tasks that are proposed by the state organs at the upper levels.

consists of more than seventy administrations.¹⁰⁵ There are no statistics on the number of staff in the county governments, but it varies significantly among counties. On average, the number of staff is about 10,000 (for a population of 500,000).¹⁰⁶

As shown in the figure of Appendix 1 to this chapter, the township government does not directly control the administrations (for example, the land, administration, civil affairs, etc.) located in the township, though the township government has some influence over them (see broken line, arrow 1). These administrations at the township level are subordinate to the administrative arms of the county government (see solid line, arrow 2 and 3). But the administrations at the county level are only guided, rather than controlled, by their counterparts at the upper levels (see broken line, arrow 4).

Table 4 attempts to summarize some of the commonalities and differences between a township government and a county government

Table 4. Differences between Township and County Governments

Common features		Township government	County government
	Legal position	A level of authority	A level of authority
	Extent of power	Over wide range of issues	Over wide range of issues
	Means of enforcement	Coercion and persuasion	Coercion and persuasion
	Sources of funds	Budgetary, extra-budgetary, and off-budgetary revenues	Budgetary, extra-budgetary, and off-budgetary revenues

¹⁰⁵ For example, Yixing county government—the superior of the above-mentioned Dingshu township government—has 75 administrations. They include: the general office of the party, the general office of the people's congress, the general office of the administration, the general office of the people's political consultative conference, the development and reform bureau, the discipline inspection bureau, the organization bureau, the propaganda bureau, the price bureau, the economic and trade bureau, the financial bureau, the construction bureau, the foreign economic affairs bureau, the industrial and business association, the office of legal affairs, the education bureau, the bureau of science and technology, the bureau of grain, the environmental protection bureau, the quarantine bureau, the personnel bureau, the labor security bureau, the bureau of ethnic affairs, the birth control bureau, the bureau for certificates, the sports bureau, the bureau of agriculture and forestry, the state tax bureau, the archive bureau, the party school, the land administration bureau, the electricity provision bureau, the health care bureau, the auditing bureau, the bureau for retired cadres, the bureau of climate observation, the office for tackling air raids, the trade union, the procuratorate, the courts, the technology inspection bureau, the youth league, the office for housing reform, the bureau of public safety, the science association, the local tax bureau, the bureau for pharmaceutical inspections, the bureau for managing industry and commerce, the post office bureau, the bureau of telecommunications, the statistical bureau, the customs service, the women federation, the bureau of culture, the working committee of the party organs, the para-military bureau, the bureau for mobile communications, the bureau of civil affairs, the bureau of irrigation, the *Yixing daily*, the agriculture and industry commission, the bureau for unified communication, the tourism bureau, the production safety inspection bureau, the democracy development commission, the transportation bureau, the writers association, the procurement and sales cooperative, the association of the disabled, the office of county history, the logistic bureau for the administration, the bureau of law, the housing funds management bureau, the salt administration, the people's bank, the association of overseas Chinese, the tobacco bureau, the bureau of appeals. See www.yixing.gov.cn.

¹⁰⁶ This number is based on the statistics on the number of employees whose salaries and benefits are paid by the government and the number of high school and elementary teachers (their salaries and benefits are paid by the county budgets). The equation is: governmental staff=employment supported by county budget-teachers.

Differences	Relationship with administration	Guidance	Direct control
	Number of administrations	About 15-20	More than 70
	Number of Staff	About 150	About 10,000
	Population	About 20,000	About 500,000

As shown above, the township is a level of authority with strong state power. Participation, transparency, and responsiveness stimulated by the semi-competitive elections are thereby brought to the attention of state authorities. Thus these elections represent a substantial step forward in terms of political development, especially light of the fact that in the 1990s there was a stream of thought that maintained that the village elections represented democratization of social organizations, but they had nothing to do with state organizations, nor were they likely to spread to higher levels (Zheng Yongnian, 1997).¹⁰⁷

Knowing that the township is the lowest level of authority in the Chinese political system, we should not overestimate the significance of the semi-competitive elections at the township level and the room for related actors to maneuver. Although the township semi-competitive elections are a substantial change that had some impact on power relations, the Chinese political system as a whole would not be fundamentally changed by them, as we will see in Chapter 4. Moreover, the township semi-competitive elections have been introduced under the auspices of the Chinese party-state system. The overall system has not changed. The actors related to the township semi-competitive elections made the decision to introduce and promote them under the constraints of the logic of the system. We will see these constraints more clearly later.

Fiscal revenues and expenditures are good indicators of the importance of each level of authority. Unfortunately, no standard statistics are available regarding the amount of revenues and expenditures that each level receives and spends throughout

¹⁰⁷ Zheng Yongnian, "Difang minzhu, guojia jianshe yu Zhongguo zhengzhi fazhan moshi: Dui Zhongguo zhengzhi minzhuhua de xianshi guji" (Local Democracy, State-building, and the Chinese Model of Political Development: A Realistic Assessment of Political Democratization in China), *Dangdai Zhongguo Yanjiu* (Modern China Studies), Vol. 57, No. 2 (1997).

the country; the data only appear cumulated to the county level. The following two tables reveal the share of each local level in the total local revenues and expenditures in Shandong province in the 1990s. Recent empirical research on intergovernmental fiscal relations shows that the provincial and prefectural governments extracted more resources from the lower levels in the 2000s than they did in the 1990s. But the share of expenditures did not change significantly (Li Keping, 李克平, 2003). Therefore, the two tables are still valid to demonstrate the relative importance of each level of local authority.

Table 5. Share of Revenue at Each Local Level of Authority in Shandong Province, 1994-1998 (%)¹⁰⁸

Years	Provincial Level	Prefectural Level	County Level	Township Level
1994	14.3	29.3	32.5	23.8
1995	13.3	29.9	33.7	23.1
1996	13.4	29.4	33.6	23.7
1997	13.0	29.5	33.9	23.6
1998	12.2	31.1	33.0	23.6

Sources: *Shandong Fiscal Statistics 1979-1997*, pp. 178-181; *Shandong Fiscal Statistics 1999*, p. 494.

Table 6. Share of Expenditures at Each Local Level of Authority in Shandong Province, 1994-1998 (%)¹⁰⁹

Years	Provincial Level	Prefectural Level	County Level	Township Level
1994	15.8	26.5	37.5	20.1
1995	16.6	27.3	38.0	18.1
1996	16.1	27.8	37.6	18.4
1997	15.4	28.1	37.4	19.0
1998	15.8	28.3	37.0	18.9

Sources: *Shandong Fiscal Statistics 1979-1997*, pp. 204-207; *Shandong Fiscal Statistics 1999*, p. 495.

¹⁰⁸ See Fan Liming (樊丽明), Li Qiyun (李齐云), et al., 中国地方财政运行分析 *Zhongguo difang caizheng yunxing fenxi* (Analysis of the Operation of Local Finance in China) (Beijing: Economic Science Press, 2001), p.49.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

As shown in the above two tables, the township government collects approximately one-fourth of the total revenue of the four local levels, and spends about one-fifth of the total expenditures of the four local levels. The township government is a very important level, which exerts a great influence on the people's lives.

3.1.2 The township's decision-making powers and responsibilities from the perspective of intergovernmental relations

In Section 3.1.1, there was some discussion about the relationship among authorities at different levels. By examining these relations more systematically, we can grasp a better understanding of what a township is and more insight into the meaning of the semi-competitive elections at the township level.

Intergovernmental relations in China are characterized by the following:

First, there is no clearly-defined distribution of responsibility and power among the different levels. The upper-level governments can assign any kind of task to the lower levels. Meanwhile, all the tasks assigned by the upper-level governments are compulsory.¹¹⁰

The legal provisions on the responsibilities and powers of governments are unclear. Although Articles 59 and 61 of the *Organizational Law for the Local People's Congresses and Governments* regulate governmental functions at every level, they generally simply require that local governments "implement the national economy and social development plan and budget, supervise the administrative work of the

¹¹⁰ Unlike in the Chinese case, Germany, Hungary, and India have a clear distribution of responsibilities and power among governmental levels. The upper-level governments cannot always assign tasks to the lower-level governments; for example, expenditures associated with high school education cannot be rolled down to the township governments.

In Germany and Hungary, the laws clearly regulate responsibilities and related decision-making powers of the local governments. Those related laws and provisions are so clear that governments at every level clearly know their responsibilities and decision-making powers with respect to such issues as kindergartens, elementary schools, high schools, technical institutes, parks, libraries, old-age homes for the elderly, education and living assistance for the handicapped, construction and maintenance of roads and water supply and drainage systems. The distribution of responsibilities and powers among governments in India is less clear, compared with that in Germany and Hungary. Although the distribution between the central government and the states is relatively clear in India, the distribution among lower-level governments are less clear. Some states may have a relatively clear distribution, whereas other states do not.

local administrative district including economic, education, science, cultural, health, physical training, environmental and resource protection, urban and rural construction, financial, civil administration, public security, minority affairs, judiciary, supervisory, and family planning work and so on.” The wording is in general terms with few details.

Second, in China the upper governments can transfer all of their responsibilities to the lower governments without limitation, and this process may eventually end at the lowest village or town government. Item 1 of Article 59 of the *Organizational Law for the Local People’s Congresses and Governments* regulates that province, prefecture, and county governments should implement the resolutions made by the people’s congress and its standing committee at the same level, and implement the decisions and orders from the upper-level national administration; item 1 of Article 61 also regulates that the village and town governments should implement the resolutions made by the people’s congress at the same level and implement the decisions and orders from the upper-level national administration.¹¹¹ The organizational law for villagers committee also regulates that villagers committee should accept the directives and guidance of township governments and assist in their work.¹¹² These laws guarantee the transfer of all the tasks from the upper governments to the lower governments, all the way down to the township governments.¹¹³

Third, in China all of the tasks rolled down from the upper levels are compulsory. Nothing is optional. Since the law has no specific provision on limits on the transfer of responsibility from upper governments to lower governments and the law also requires that lower governments implement the decision and orders and complete the

¹¹¹ See the related articles in the *Organizational Law for the Local People’s Congress and Governments* publicized on October 27, 2004.

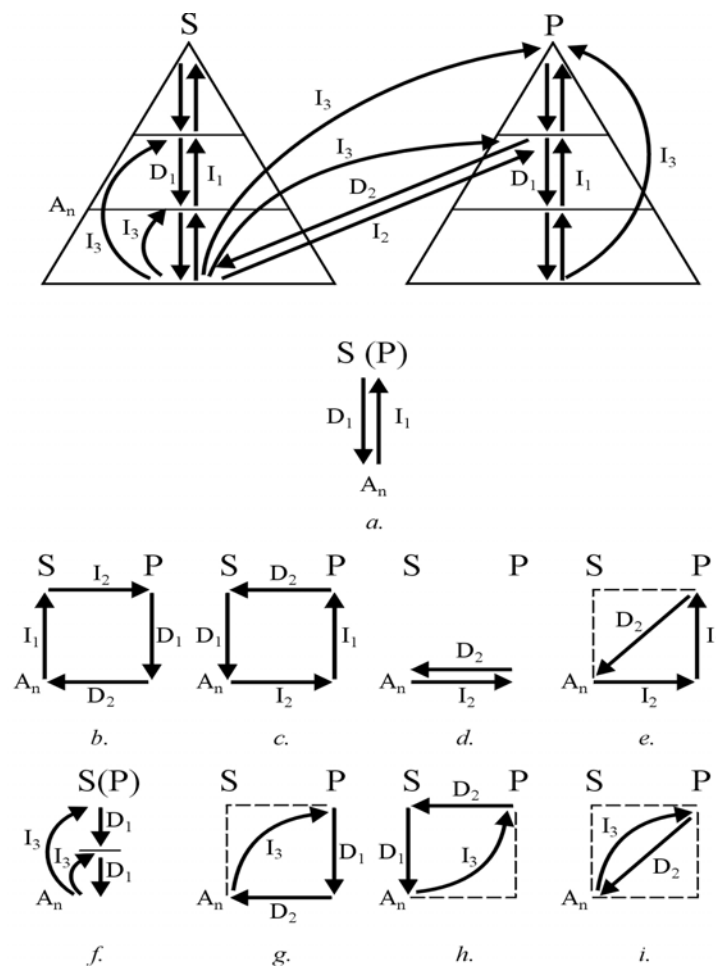
¹¹² See Article 4 of the *Organization Law for Villagers Committees* publicized on November 7, 1998.

¹¹³ Unlike Chinese intergovernmental relations, in Germany, Hungary, and India some responsibilities may not be transferred to lower governments. As to what kinds of responsibilities belong to which levels or what kinds do not, the law has clear provisions. For example, Hungarian law has a very clear provision on the distribution of responsibility for education, in which preschool and elementary education are the responsibility of the village and town governments, and not the county government; whereas high school, technical institution, and education for the handicapped are the responsibility of the county government and the village and town governments have no responsibility in this regard. The county government has no right to transfer its responsibility to the village and town governments. In Karnataka in India, it is clearly regulated that the Gram Panchayat (the village government) is only obliged to provide road construction, public utilities, clean water, drainage, garbage collection, construction of elementary schools, and school uniforms for students.

tasks transferred from upper governments, all the responsibilities assigned to the lower levels are compulsory.¹¹⁴

In China there is also another channel to transfer responsibilities: the party system. In the Chinese political system, governments at every level are under the guidance of the CCP committee of the same level. The following figure taken from Csanadi (2006) shows the party's supremacy over the state and its rich means of controlling and supervising the state.

Figure 3: Party-state Power Network



Key: S State (non-party) hierarchy

P Party hierarchy

¹¹⁴ Not every responsibility for the local governments in Germany, Hungary, or India is compulsory; some are optional, which means the local government can decide based on its own practical situation whether or not to carry out some projects. The law has very clear provisions whether any project is compulsory. For example, in Hungary, preschool and elementary education are the compulsory obligations of village and town governments, whereas the libraries, cultural centers, and cinemas are optional.

- A_n Decision maker (actors) at the nth level of the structure
- D₁ Direction of intra-hierarchy dependence
- D₂ Direction of cross-hierarchy dependence
- I₁ Path of intra-hierarchy interest promotion
- I₂ Path of cross-hierarchy interest promotion
- I₃ Direction of feedback

One of the organizing principles of the CCP is that the lower levels should obey the upper levels. So the task of the upper-level governments can be submitted to the party committee and become a resolution of the Party; or the tasks of the upper-level governments can become a resolution of the party committee at the same level. Such a resolution is transferred to the lower party committees and then to the lower governments through the lower party committees, and eventually to the village and town governments and to the villagers committee.¹¹⁵

This unique institutional feature in China poses a series of very serious problems. First, upper governments can arbitrarily exploit lower governments to the level of the township. Although such exploitation might not always take place, there is no institutional guarantee that would prevent the upper governments from arbitrarily exploiting the lower governments to the township level.

Second, it causes a serious distortion in the actions of the local governments, in particular the townships. Since it is impossible to complete all of the tasks, the township authorities, especially those in the economically underdeveloped regions, are either driven to mobilize and/or extract recourses from the residents (or the private sector), which causes serious controversies between the residents and the local governments, or the township authorities are driven to deceive the upper governments by reporting false data, or the township authorities are driven to take both actions at the same time.

Other problems are also evident. Since the decision-making institution is strictly top down, there is little participation by local residents. Nor is there much transparency during the decision-making process. Furthermore, the local governments do not have to respond to the local people's needs. As a result, corruption is rampant.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ According to some scholarly interpretations, Chinese institutions are high-pressure institutions. This is due to the legal and political sources of these institutions.

Such a situation does not exist in Germany, Hungary, or India. In these countries, it is often the case even that the ruling party of the upper governments is different from the ruling party of the lower governments. A transfer of responsibility is basically impossible. Even if the ruling party of the upper and lower governments is the same and the transfer from one level to another is accepted by both parties, it is still illegal.

¹¹⁶ As we will see in Chapter 4, overloaded township authorities become heavy burdens on their superiors, driving the leadership at the upper levels in some regions to try other ways, including holding the semi-competitive elections, to help solve the problems.

Also, as we will see in Chapter 5, the township semi-competitive elections have had some impact on the relations between the townships and the authorities at the upper levels. Semi-competitively elected township

3.2 How much discretion does a township mayor (party secretary, or vice-mayor) have?

In addition to some understanding of the authority of a township government, we need to know how much discretion a township mayor (or vice-mayor or party secretary) have within the township, since most of the semi-competitive elections at the township level are for these major positions in the township.

According to Article 62 of the *Organizational Law for the People's Congresses and People's Governments at the Local Levels in the People's Republic of China*,¹¹⁷ the township mayor is responsible for the operation of the township government. But this regulation does not mean that the township mayor handles each and every issue. There are other major players surrounding the township mayor, as shown in the figure of Appendix 2. Actually, the township mayor shares discretion with the township party secretary and the township vice-mayors.¹¹⁸ In addition, his/her discretion is constrained by the authorities at the upper levels as well.

First, the township mayor's discretion is constrained by the township party

mayors tend to reject an indefinite rolling down of responsibilities from the upper levels. They also tend to be more responsive to the needs of the township residents.

¹¹⁷ Announced by Xinhua News Agency on October 27, 2004. See http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2004-10/28/content_2147270_3.htm

¹¹⁸ The following is a detailed division of labor among party and governmental leaders in Dingshu township. See <http://www.dingshu.gov.cn/2.htm> for more details (June 20, 2005). The major cadres in Dingshu township were as follows:

1. Shao Yaqu (邵亚群): Party secretary; directing party issues; in charge of issues related to the people's congress, discipline inspection, and cadres.
2. Mei Zhonghua (梅中华): Vice party secretary, mayor; facilitating comrade Shao Yaqu in the handling of party issues; in charge of governmental issues; directing economic issues, fiscal issues, and the industrial zone.
3. Tang Cheng (唐承): Vice party secretary, vice-mayor; in charge of the daily operations of the government; in charge of the industrial economy.
4. Lu Shaohong (卢少宏): Vice party secretary, vice-mayor; in charge of the daily operations of the government; in charge of township planning and public safety.
5. Miu Jihua (缪季华): Vice party secretary; assisting comrade Shao Yaqu in handling cadre issues.
6. Yuan Lihua (袁立群): Vice-mayor; in charge of education, health care, and birth control.
7. Jiang Guorong (蒋国荣): Vice-mayor; in charge of commerce and civil affairs.
8. Zhou Quanrong (周泉荣): Vice-mayor; in charge of agriculture.
9. Xu Bocheng (许伯诚): Vice-mayor; in charge of public safety.
10. Xue Qiang (薛强): Assistant mayor; assisting vice-mayors Tang Cheng and Xu Bocheng.

secretary. The political system in China is a party-state system in which the government is under the leadership of the party. This tenet of the leadership of the party is written into the Constitution, and repeated in countless party and state archives on a daily basis. But interestingly enough, the *Organizational Law for Local Governments* does not address the role of the party committees, and officially grants the final power on governmental issues to the position of township mayor. It thus leaves room, though limited, for different understandings on the role of particular party committees in particular authorities. More importantly, it creates a battleground for the two positions to struggle for more power.¹¹⁹

Presently, the prevailing division of labor between the two positions is that the township party secretary is in charge of party affairs and the township mayor is in charge of governmental affairs. To ensure the final authority of the party secretary, the township mayor is always the vice party secretary on the township party committee.¹²⁰ As we will see later, this arrangement has been challenged by the introduction of the semi-competitive elections, since the nomination is open to the public and it is possible for non-party people to participate and win the elections.

3.3 How is a township mayor appointed?

Let us now examine how an individual is appointed to the position of township mayor (and party secretary and vice-mayor).

There is no special law on how to organize the elections for administrative positions. These elections are regulated by articles 20, 21, 22, 23, and 24 of the *Organizational Law for Local Governments*.

According to these articles, the township mayor should be elected by the township people's congress with an absolute majority in a voting by secret ballot.

¹¹⁹ As we will see later, the semi-competitive elections affect the power struggles between the two positions.

¹²⁰ The dominant understanding at present is that the leadership of the party is embodied and secured in the fact that each governmental organization (including the township government) is led by the party secretary of that organization. The minority understanding is that the leadership of the party is secure when some levels, say the center and the provincial levels, are led by party committees. Thus, there is no need for all authorities to be led by the party committees.

Candidates for the township mayor should be nominated by the presidium of the township people's congress or jointly nominated by at least ten members of the township people's congress. The election for township mayor may be single-candidate or multi-candidate (elections for vice-mayors must be multi-candidate, according to the same articles).

Thus the township people's congress plays a central role in electing the township mayor. According to the *Election Law for the National People's Congress and the People's Congresses at the Local Levels* (referred to hereafter as the *Election Law for the People's Congresses*), a township people's congress has about fifty-five members.¹²¹ Article 29 of the law stipulates that candidates be nominated by political parties, people's associations, and/or be jointly nominated by at least ten residents. Article 36 stipulates that the voting should be by secret ballot. Article 41 says that an election is effective only if the turnout is over 50 percent, and that only when a candidate receives more than half of the "yes" votes can he/she take the position of representative.

Neither the *Organizational Law for Local Governments* nor the *Election Law for the People's Congresses* includes any regulation about campaigns. In fact, there is no campaign at all in the elections, be it single-candidate elections or multi-candidate elections, because all the elections are coordinated by the party.

As is well known, all appointments of the party and state organizations (including the state-owned enterprises, trade unions, youth league, women associations, and so on) are actually made by the party, in particular the nomenklatura system of the party.

Chinese nomenklatura power is distributed along the political hierarchy, as crystallized in the party jargon, *Dang guan ganbu, xia guan yi ji* (the party manages the cadres; each party organ manages those cadres at the immediate lower level). To

¹²¹ This number is based on the average population of a township (which is about 20,000) and the regulation in Article 6 of the *Election Law for the People's Congresses*. Article 6 of the law states that the standard number of representatives is 40. One representative is added for each additional 1,500 residents. For townships with more than 130,000 residents, the number of representatives cannot exceed 130. For townships with less than 2,000 people, the number may be less than 40. Naturally, it is very rare for a township to have a population of less than 2,000.

be more specific, the Politburo appoints the officials at the rank of minister and provincial governor (e.g., members of the standing committee of the provincial party committee). The provincial party committee appoints officials at the rank of prefecture head (e.g., members of the standing committee of the prefecture party committee). The prefecture party committee appoints officials at the rank of county mayor (e.g., members of the standing committee of the county party committee). And the county party committee appoints officials at the rank of township mayor (e.g., members of the township party committee). However, the county committee does not meet daily. It is the standing committee (or executive committee) of the county party committee that takes up daily operations and makes day-to-day decisions. The standing committee of a county party committee is usually composed of thirteen members (in some cases, eleven; in other cases, fifteen). Each member is in charge of specific issues.¹²²

¹²² The following is a typical example of the power distribution within the standing committee of a county committee. Junchun county (in Huanggang prefecture, Hubei province, 湖北省黄冈市蕲春县) party committee announced the distribution of responsibilities among the members of its standing committee on December 26, 2003 as follows:

1. Party secretary Li Ruzhi (李儒志): to look after the overall job of the county party committee.
2. Party vice-secretary Xiong Changjiang (熊长江): to look after the overall job of the county government; in charge of economic issues.
3. Party vice-secretary Chen Youlai (陈友来): in charge of propaganda, ideology, education, health care, culture, science, poverty alleviation, rural issues, and urban development.
4. Party vice-secretary Xia Chunming (夏春明): in charge of nomenklatura, the united front, mass organizations, offices attached to the county party committee, the people's petition process, industries, private enterprises, railways, attracting FDI, communication with the people's congress, the people's political consultative conference, and the military affairs office.
5. Party vice-secretary, and secretary of the discipline commission Wang Songlin (汪松林): in charge of party discipline, the police, prosecution, the courts, and birth control.
6. Member of the standing committee, standing vice-mayor Wang Jifang (王继芳): to help comrade Xiong Changjiang look after the daily operations of the county government.
7. Member of the standing committee, head of the organization department Wang Jijia (王基家): to direct the daily operations of the organization department, and to help comrade Xia Chunming look after industrial development and attracting FDI.
8. Member of the standing committee, head of the general office attached to the county party committee Chen Yuexin (陈跃新): to direct the general office, in charge of policy research, to help comrade Xia Chunming look after the offices of the county party committee, and the people's petition process.
9. Member of the standing committee, political commissar of the people's military affairs office He Jian (贺建): to direct the people's military affairs.
10. Member of the standing committee, head of the department of the united front, chairperson of the trade union Tian Wenguo (田文国): to direct the united front, trade unions, and attract FDI.
11. Member of the standing committee Hu Baiqi (胡百齐): to help comrade Chen Youlai look after rural issues and urban development.
12. Member of the standing committee, secretary for legal enforcement, head of the police Hong Zengxie (洪增协): to direct the legal enforcement commission, and the police office.
13. Member of the standing committee, head of the department of propaganda You Aifeng (尤爱凤): to direct the department of propaganda, to assist comrade Chen Youlai to direct education, culture, and health care, and to assist comrade Wang Songlin to direct birth control.

The crucial step in the election process is that the party controls the nominations. In the example of the position of township mayor, as demonstrated above, it is the county party committee that makes the decision about who should be candidate(s). The county party committee orders the township party committee to forward the name(s) of the candidates(s) to the presidium of the township people's congress.

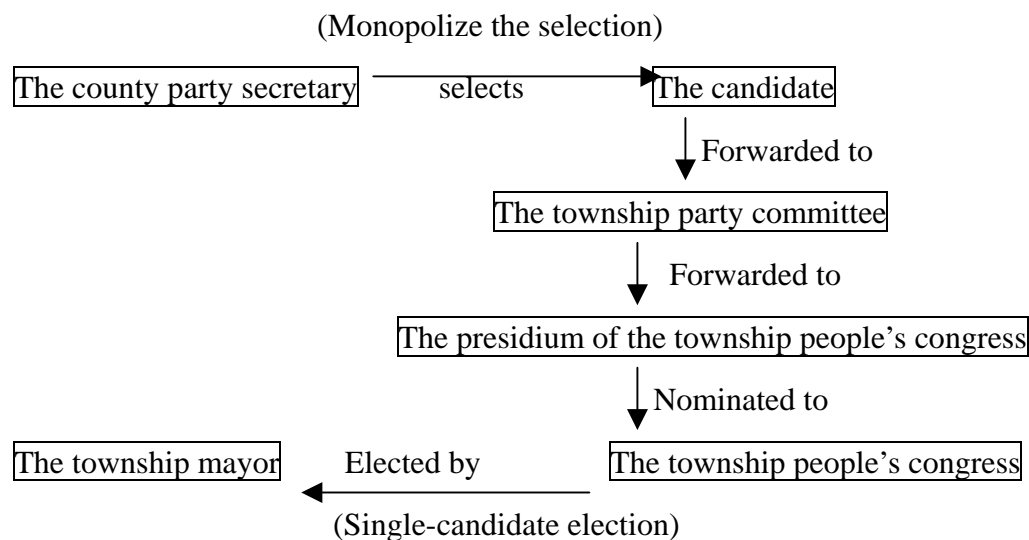
From the typical case of Junchun county (see note 29), we can see that three officials decide the nomenklatura issue: the party secretary (as shown by item 1 in note 29), the party vice-secretary who is in charge of cadre issues (as shown by item 4 in note 29), and the head of the organization department of the party committee (as shown by item 7 in note 29). However, their powers are not uniform. Actually, the county party secretary plays the central role: he/she proposes the candidate(s) and he/she makes the final selection when there is more than one candidate. The vice-secretary and the head of the organization department only comment on the eligibility of the proposed candidates.

The *Organizational Law for Local Governments* regulates that elections for township mayor can be either single-candidate or multi-candidate. In practice, few elections are multi-candidate. Since the township party committee has great influence over the township people's congress, members of the township people's congress usually do not nominate alternative candidates to the candidate nominated by the presidium of the congress (the one that is decided by the county party committee, and forwarded to the presidium through the township party committee), though the members have the right to do so according to the *Organizational Law of the Local Governments*.

The following figure shows the way in which a particular person is appointed to the position of township mayor:

For the *Zhonggong Junchun xianwei guanyu xianwei changwei chengyuan fengong de tongzhi* (The Announcement of the Junchun County Committee of the CCP on the Division of Labor among the Members of the Standing Committee of the County Party Committee), see <http://www.7chun.cn/news/view.asp?NewsID=295&classID=4>

Figure 4: The roadmap of appointing a township mayor



We will soon see how this way of appointing an individual to the position of township mayor was changed by the semi-competitive elections. A new process, with new participants, alternatives, etc., emerged with the introduction of the new electoral practices. However, as we will also see, the new process, participants, and alternatives are constrained by the existing institutions.

3.4 What are the semi-competitive elections for township mayors?

3.4.1 Changes in the appointment process

Figure 4 shows the roadmap of appointing an individual cadre to the position of township mayor. The major change brought about by the semi-competitive elections involved the selection of candidates. Formerly the county party secretary selected the candidate from a group of cadres whom he/she knew in person; now the party

secretary approves (accepts) the winner of a primary election as a candidate. Candidacy in the primary election is open to the public, thus it extends far beyond the small circle of the county party secretary's acquaintances. The electoral college in the primary election is also different from the township people's congress. It consists of far more electors than in the township people's congress.

As stipulated by the election regulations (Li Fan, 2003),¹²³ and confirmed by my fieldwork, people can compete as candidates in three ways: 1) they are nominated by the party; 2) they are self-nominated; or 3) they are nominated by groups of citizens.¹²⁴

The electoral college is usually composed of a group of voters, including a few (5-10) cadres from the county authority, all members of the township people's congress, all township government staff, all village main cadres (village party secretary, head of the villagers committee), and some resident representatives who are basically elected by the villagers in the last round of elections for villagers committee. The number of electors in an electoral college varies greatly in different townships, ranging from 100 to 10,000. In most cases, an electoral college consists of about 200-300 people.

After the primary candidates are voted by the electoral college, usually the candidate who receives the most votes is automatically accepted by the county party committee as the formal and final candidate to be passed to the township party committee, and through it to the township people's congress, to be elected to the given position.¹²⁵

There have been cases when the county party committee forwarded two primary candidates who received more votes than the others to the township people's congress.

¹²³ Li Fan, *Sheng feng gui lai: Wo suo jingli de Buyun xiangzhang zhixuan* (The Direct Election for Township Mayor at Buyun that I Experienced) (Xi'an: Xibei University Press., April 2003).

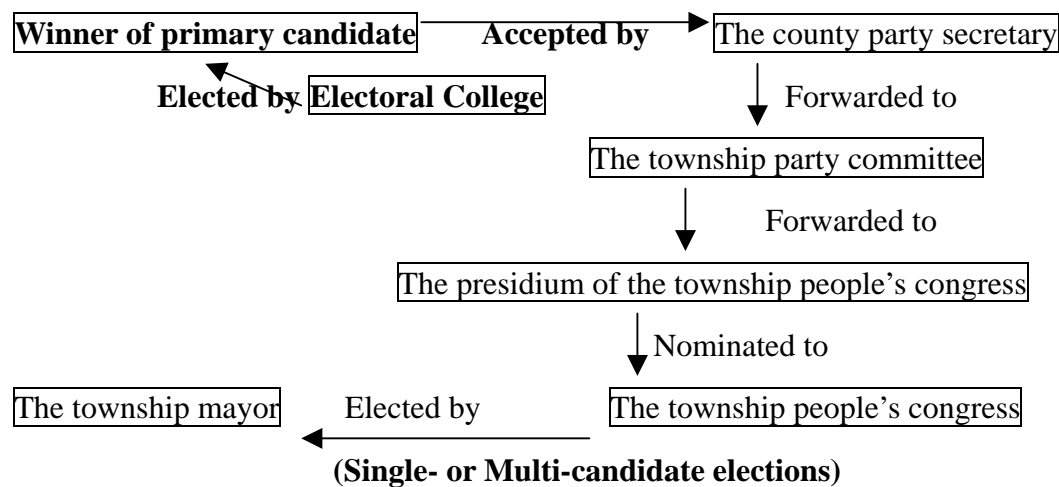
¹²⁴ Obviously, "self-nomination" is not the only way of being nominated since the local authorities encouraged primary candidates to be nominated by both non-party temporary groups of residents, and by the individuals themselves. But in fact, due to the underdevelopment of the civil society or the horizontal connections among the people, cases of primary candidates being nominated by groups of residents are rare. "Self-nomination" turns out to be the dominant way of nominating primary candidates.

¹²⁵ See the regulations on township semi-competitive elections issued by the organization department of Ya'an prefecture party committee (Document No.27, Sept. 13, 2001), by the Nanbu county party committee (Document No.64, Nov.12, 2001), by the Bazhong prefecture party committee (Document No.44, Nov.20, 2001), and by the Shizhong county party committee (Document No.51, May 12, 1998).

In these cases, the election in the township people's congress is no longer uniformly single-candidate.

The following Figure 5 shows the new roadmap of the process of electing an individual to the position of township mayor.

Figure 5: The changed roadmap of appointing a township mayor with semi-competitive election



Comparing Figures 4 and 5, it is clear that the major changes are during the first and last step of the appointment process (shown in bold). The other parts of the appointment process remain the same.

Here we can also see the institutional and situational constraints on the local actors' strategies. As will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, it is basically the county party secretary who initiates the new election practices. For him/her, the institution by which a formal candidate should be forwarded by the county party committee to the township party committee and then to the township people's congress is provided by the decision-making procedure within the party-state institutional structure. Also, the institution by which a township mayor should be elected by the township people's congress is provided by the *Organizational Law of the Local Governments*. Local leaders have to obey (comply with) these rules while initiating any reform of local elections. The only remaining feasible strategy seems to

be to add a contested primary election that provides alternatives for the local residents.

Meanwhile, after the semi-competitive primary elections were introduced, the unchanged parts of the appointment process were only preserved in form, but they were changed in essence. This is because, with the semi-competitive primary elections, the inputs forwarded to the unchanged parts of the appointment process changed dramatically, thus significantly changing the results of the procedure. I will later examine in more detail both the changed inputs and the results brought about by the semi-competitive primary elections.

There is an additional feature resulting from the strategy taken under the existing institutional and situational constraints, which is that the semi-competitive election practice has been experimental, evolutionary, and has taken many different forms in different places.

Most researchers look at the new township election practices without noting the appointment process in the Chinese political system, thus they do not see the unchanged parts. Therefore, they confound the township semi-competitive elections with the typical elections that are held in other countries.

Not only international political observers like IRI¹²⁶ but also academic researchers do not fully grasp the characteristics of the appointment process when they examine the new township elections in China. This is overwhelming both in the case of foreign literature (Joseph Y. Cheng, 2001;¹²⁷ He Baogang and Lang Youxing, 2001;¹²⁸ Li Lianjiang, 2002¹²⁹) and Chinese literature (e.g. Shi Weimin, 2000;¹³⁰ Deng Ke, 2002;¹³¹ Li Fan, 2003;¹³² Huang Weiping and Zou Shubin, 2003;¹³³ Liu

¹²⁶ See <http://www.iri.org/pub.asp?id=7676767682> for "First Direct Election Conducted at the Township Level," February 3, 2000.

¹²⁷ Joseph Y. Cheng, Joseph Y., "Direct Elections of Town and Township Heads in China: The Dapeng and Buyun Experiments," *China Information*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2001), pp. 104-137.

¹²⁸ He Baogang and Lang Youxing, "China's First Direct Election of the Township Head: A Case Study of Buyun," *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (May 2001), pp. 4-5.

¹²⁹ Li Lianjiang, "The Politics of Introducing Township Elections in Rural China," *The China Quarterly*, No. 171 (2002), pp. 711-730.

¹³⁰ Shi Weimin, *Gongxuan yu zhixuan: Xiangzhen renda xuanju zhidu yanjiu* (Open Elections and Direct Elections: Elections of the Township People's Congress) (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2000).

¹³¹ Deng Ke, "Yangji zhen shiyan: Haitui zhixuan shuji zhenzhang houxuanren" (Experiment at Yangji Township: Open and Direct Election of the Candidates for Township Party Secretary and Mayor), *Nanfang Weekend*, September 19, 2002.

¹³² Li Fan, *Chengfeng guilai: Wo suo jingli de Buyun zhixuan* (The Direct Election in Buyun that I Experienced)

Yawei, 2004;¹³⁴ Tong Zhihui, 2004;¹³⁵ Tang Zhongying and Zeng Xinyuan, 2004;¹³⁶ and Wang Yongcheng, 2005¹³⁷). These scholars do not realize that the new township elections are a part of the appointment process, and that the new election does not change the other parts of the process. Although some domestic analysts (see especially Deng Ke, 2002; Li Fan, 2003; Huang Weiping and Zou Shubin, 2003; Tong Zhihui, 2004; Wang Yongcheng, 2005) record and discuss the important role played by the county and township party committees, even these works seem not to realize that the elections are a part of the usual appointment process. Very few works examine the new election practices under the institutional framework of the nomenklatura. Tony Saich and Yang Xuedong (2003)¹³⁸ are among the few.

Neglecting the nomenklatura structure under which the new township elections are conducted leads to several misunderstandings of the development of these elections and their impact. I will discuss these consequences later. Here I will just mention one major problem: researchers neglect many reform cases because most of them only focus on those elections in which the primary elections involve all the township voters.

As described above, a real meaningful election¹³⁹ is a primary election with open nomination and voting by an electoral college. A primary election involving all citizens above 18 years old (referred to as a “direct election” by most researchers) is actually only a specific case with regard to the electoral college. In a direct election the electoral college consists of all the adult residents instead of only part of them.

(Xi'an: Northwestern University Press, 2003).

¹³³ Huang Weiping and Zou Shubin, *Xianzhengzhang xuanju fangshi gaige* (Reform of the Elections for Township Mayors: Case Studies) (Beijing: Social Sciences Documentation Press, 2003).

¹³⁴ Liu Yawei, “Jianjinshi minzhu: Zhongguo xianxiang de zhijie xuanju” (Incremental Democracy: Direct Elections at County and Township Levels in China), translated by Yuan Fangcheng and Liu Hongxia, at <http://www.world-china.org/04/0404060201.htm>.

¹³⁵ Tong Zhihui, “Yangji shiyan: Liangtui yixuan shuji zhenzhang” (Experiment at Yangji Township: Three Votings for Township Party Secretary and Mayor), in *Yangji shiyan* (Experiment at Yangji), ed. by Xu Yong and He Xuefeng (Xi'an: Northwestern University Press, 2004).

¹³⁶ Tang Zhongying and Zeng Xinyuan, “Xianji fanweinei zhixuan xiangzhengzhang yinqi de sikao” (On Directly Electing Township Mayors within a County), at <http://www.world-china.org/04/0404101302.htm>.

¹³⁷ Wang Yongcheng, “Shilun Zhongguo zhengzhi fazhan jincheng zhong de xiangzhengzhang xuanju zhidu gaige” (On Reforming Elections for Township Mayors in the Process of Political Development in China), at <http://www.chinaelections.org/readnews.asp?newsid={BCC4CCBF-C7FA-4B68-BEAD-4A2C8A0794B1}>

¹³⁸ Tony Saich and Xuedong Yang, “Selecting Within the Rules: Institutional Innovation in China's Governance,” paper prepared for the conference on Local Government Comparisons in India and China, January 2003.

¹³⁹ In the sense that there is more participation and it is less manipulated, and more importantly it provides alternatives and allows for a campaign, which will be discussed in more detail in a later stage of this research.

However, the results of the “direct election” must also be approved or accepted by the county party committee, to be forwarded to the township party committee and to the presidium of the township people’s congress.

Probably because “direct election” is mistakenly viewed as an election for township mayor without the interim party intervention, and because the electoral college is so unusual in the local elections in Western countries, a township primary election with an electoral college easily escapes the researchers’ observation. The English-language literature examines very few cases of semi-competitive elections at the township level.¹⁴⁰ Hundreds of other cases of semi-competitive elections with various degrees of participation and openness are neglected. That is one of the reasons why so far there has been no large N study on the township semi-competitive elections in China.

This research will follow the line that is employed in some Chinese literature (Shi Weimin, 2000; Huang Weiping and Zou Shubin, 2003; Wang Yongcheng, 2005), i.e., to examine not only the “direct elections,” but also those elections with contestation among competitors in the electoral colleges of the townships.¹⁴¹ I will take the inclusiveness of the electoral college as an indicator of the intensity of the competition in the township semi-competitive elections, with the “direct election” at one extreme of the spectrum of intensity and the former practice without a primary election at the other.

3.4.2 New participants

However, not all citizens can take part in the competition for township mayor. The elections are constrained, except in some cases, by the fact that the competitors have to be cadres¹⁴² of the party and state apparatus. This means that ordinary citizens

¹⁴⁰ These are the direct election cases of Buyun township mayor, Yangji township mayor, and Dapeng township mayor.

¹⁴¹ The party jargon circulating in the mass media on this new election practice is referred to as “*gong tui gong xuan*” (open nomination, open election).

¹⁴² In China, people working for the authorities are categorized as cadres (*ganbu*). Cadres in the county and township authorities are those people whose salaries are covered by the state budget. All other people outside the these authorities are categorized as ordinary citizens (*laobaixing*).

do not have access to the nomination.

In most semi-competitive elections for township mayor, it is regulated that only cadres in the county authority, township authority, and “three positions” at the village level can participate in competing for the position of township mayor. The “three positions” at the village level refer to the head of the villagers committee, the village party secretary, and the village accountant. They are not paid out of the state budget, but rather they receive some subsidies from the township’s extra- and/or off-budgetary funds. They are not formal cadres in the Chinese context. However, they are the most important links between the ordinary residents in the villages and the township authorities. Therefore, they are considered quasi-cadres.

The constraints on the identity of the candidates reflect the overall institutional and situational constraints. There are at least two factors that prevent the candidacy from being accessible to all citizens. One is technical. Township mayors are public servants in legal terms, thus they are paid by the state budget. A township mayor would still work in the party and state apparatus even after he serves his term. To open the candidacy to all citizens means a change in the institution of state staff recruitment, which cannot be done by local party and state officials. The other factor probably is political. Those who work within the party and state apparatus, regardless of their party membership,¹⁴³ are politically less risky than those who have been outside of the party and state apparatus.

There are variants in the regulations regarding which cadres are allowed to participate in competition for what positions. For example, in Shizhong county in Suining prefecture (with the exception of the case of the “direct election” in Buyun township), in Nanbu county in Nanchong prefecture, and in Bazhong prefecture, only the township vice-mayors and cadres of this rank were allowed to compete for the position of township mayor. Ordinary cadres were only allowed to compete for the position of township vice-mayor. This is in line with the usual way of promoting cadres within the system. A position at a particular rank can only be taken up by a person who is at the same rank or one level lower. Promotion is strictly hierarchical.

¹⁴³ Actually, a large proportion of the people working in the party and state apparatus are not party members.

But there are exceptions to this. In Ya'an prefecture, no rank requirements were imposed on the candidates for the township positions. Any cadre was allowed to nominate himself/herself as a primary candidate for any township position. In the Buyun township elections, even ordinary citizens could be nominated as primary candidates for the position of township mayor. In these cases, the semi-competitive elections broke down the hierarchy at the local levels.

In spite of the above-mentioned restrictions, the semi-competitive elections bring in new candidates and new electors.

As stated above, in the former appointment process, the county party committee, in particular, the county party secretary, monopolizes the nomination process. He/she selects the candidates for township mayor from only those whom he/she knows in person. People whom the county party secretary does not know are simply excluded from being able to be elected to township mayor.

Moreover, the county party secretary usually selects the candidates from those party members working in the county and township authorities. Those working in other institutions (e.g., schools or enterprises) and in other occupations have little access to the candidacy. Those who are working at the county and township authorities but are non-party members are not nominated either.¹⁴⁴

Most importantly, the county party secretary selects only one candidate for each position of township mayor. For the three positions of township vice-mayor, the county party secretary usually selects four candidates for the township people's congress to elect. There is almost no choice in the elections in the township people's congress.

With the semi-competitive elections in the townships, candidacy is accessible to a much wider group of people. The immediate impact of introducing the new election procedures is that many people can participate in the competition for candidacy. The following tables show that quite a few primary candidates run for each position,

¹⁴⁴ Non-party members working in the county and township authorities can be nominated as candidates for township vice-mayors. But this nomination is based on the unwritten rule of having a non-party member at each authority to demonstrate that the Communist Party is sharing power with others. This vice-mayor is usually in charge of marginal issues, e.g., cultural issues (naturally, cultural issues are very important at, say, the national and provincial levels of the system, but they are not that important at the township levels).

which was impossible when the candidates were solely selected by the county party secretary.

Table 7. Number of Self-nominated Primary Candidates for Township Vice-mayor in the 2002 Elections in Shizhong County (Suining Prefecture, Sichuan Province, 四川省遂宁市市中区)

Township	Bao Shi 保石	Heng Shan 横山	Fen Shui 分水	Guan Ying 观音	Xinqiao 新桥	MaJia 马家	SanJia 三家	Lian Hua 莲花	HeSha 河沙	BuYun 步云
Number of primary candidates	25	34	28	34	35	44	26	31	32	7
Positions open to semi-competitive elections	1 vice-mayor	1 vice-mayor	1 vice-mayor	1 vice-mayor	1 vice-mayor	1 vice-mayor	1 vice-mayor	1 vice-mayor	1 vice-mayor	1 mayor

Source: Organization Department of Suining county party committee.

Table 8. Number of Primary Candidates in the Township Semi-Competitive Elections in Nanbu County (四川省南充市南部县)

Position of township mayor opened to semi-competitive elections	Primary candidates for mayor	Position of township vice-mayor opened to semi-competitive elections	Primary candidates for vice-mayor
43	235	201	433

Source: Compiled by the author according to *Collected Materials on Semi-Competitive Elections of Candidates for Township Mayors and Vice-mayors in Nanbu County (Nanbuxian xiangzhengzhang houxuanren gongkai jingzheng ziliao huibian)* by the Organization Department of Nanbu county party committee, Nov. 2001.

Table 9. Number of Primary Candidates in the Township Semi-Competitive Elections in

Bazhong Prefecture

Position Locality	Township mayor		Township vice-mayor	
	Number of positions	Number of primary candidates	Number of positions	Number of primary candidates
Bazhong prefecture	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
The three experimental townships	3	6	8	13
Among them, Nanjiang township 南江	n.a.	n.a.	3	7

Note: By the end of January 2002, semi-competitive elections had been carried out only in some of the townships in Bazhong. In some counties within the prefecture, for example, in Nanjiang county, the experiment had been completed in only three townships. Therefore, the statistics in the above table are incomplete. According to cadres in Bazhong, all positions in all 285 townships within the prefecture were elected in a semi-competitive manner in 2002, which was confirmed by the provincial party officials.

Source: Edited by the author according to related reports by the local authorities in Bazhong.¹⁴⁵

No detailed statistics on this issue are available for Ya'an prefecture. The overall picture is that all main positions in the township—mayors, vice-mayors, party secretaries, and party vice-secretaries—were open to semi-competitive elections in all of the 175 townships within the prefecture in 2002. The total number of positions was 1,040.¹⁴⁶ There were 2,103 primary candidates who were self-nominated.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Source: Author's interviews in Bazhong prefecture.

¹⁴⁶ Statistics on the number of positions in the townships of Ya'an prefecture were not available. The figures in the text were calculated by the author based on a typical case whereby there is one mayor, two vice-mayors, one party secretary, and three party vice-secretaries (the township mayor is definitely one of the vice-secretaries) in each township.

¹⁴⁷ See Document No.36 issued by the Organization Department of Ya'an prefecture party committee on Dec.25, 2001 (*Zhonggong Ya'an shiwei zuzhibu 2001 nian zuzhi gongzuo zongjie*).

In cases when too many primary candidates were nominated by self-nomination, a written exam was held by the election commission to reduce the number of candidates who then had to give an oral speech on their programs and to defend their programs in front of the enlarged electoral college. For example, in Suining, as shown in Table 7, with the exception of Buyun township, on average there were more than thirty persons competing for each position in the township. Therefore, the election commission organized a written exam. The first six primary

The township semi-competitive elections not only bring more candidates, but also involve more electors. Before the introduction of the semi-competitive elections, people other than the county party secretary, the vice-party secretary who is in charge of nomenklatura, and the head of the organization department of the county party committee did not have any say in selecting the candidates. By introducing the semi-competitive elections, various groups of people can participate in the election through the framework of the electoral college.

As described above, the electoral college is usually a group of voters, including a few (5-10) cadres from the county authority, all members of the township people's congress, all township government staff, all main village cadres (village party secretaries, village commissioners), and some resident representatives. The electoral college usually consists of about 200-300 people. In some cases, the electoral college extends to involving all the residents in the township.¹⁴⁸

Participation in the primary election as members of the electoral college is different from voting in the township people's congress during the last stage of the appointment process. In the last stage of the election, the township people's congress votes for or against the candidate selected by the county party committee. According to party jargon, the township people's congress votes for or against the will of the party committee.¹⁴⁹ However, in the primary election, electors vote for or against basically self-nominated candidates. In this process, the county party committee does not have a definite say about who should be a candidate. Electors have room to express their voices through their votes. Actually, in the case that the county party

candidates who received the best scores could go on to the next step. The questions asked on the exams basically concerned the central authority's policy on rural issues, related laws and regulations, agriculture and economic development, and so on (summarized by the author based on copies of three exams obtained through fieldwork in Shizhong county, Suining prefecture, and Nanbu county, Nanchong prefecture).

The Nanbu county authority also organized such exams. Their purpose was not to reduce the number of candidates, but rather to ensure that the candidates had a basic knowledge about political and economic life in the rural areas. However, a written exam was not held in the other regions. In Ya'an and Bazhong prefectures, pre-selection through written exams was considered unnecessary (author's interviews in Ya'an and Bazhong prefectures).

¹⁴⁸ They are: Buyun and Qingshen township in Sichuan, Yangji township in Hubei, Dapeng township in Guangdong, and seven townships in Shipin county in Yunnan. Such cases are also referred to as township direct elections.

¹⁴⁹ In Chinese party jargon in Chinese, it is 组织意图.

secretary selects the final candidate from the two primary candidates who win the most ballots, the electors help the county party committee to identify the best candidate. In the case that the county party secretary accepts the primary candidate who wins the most ballots as the final candidate, the will of the electors in the primary election becomes the will of the county party committee.

By introducing the electoral college, more people have a say in selecting their township mayors. Thus, the candidates will have to try to accommodate the interests and preferences of the people while competing for their votes. As has been demonstrated, not all residents can be included in the electoral college. Basically only those already working within the party and state apparatus and/or those closely associated with the authorities are members of the electoral college. Voting rights are not based citizens' assets or taxes, as it was in most Western European countries before universal suffrage was introduced (Jiang Jinsong, 1998).¹⁵⁰ However, the reasoning for restricting the voting rights seems to be the same. As citizens with assets and/or taxpayers were seen as having the capacity to make wise political judgment and responsible political choices in modern western European countries, local people attached or associated with the authorities are considered to have the same capacity in China. It is on the basis of this reasoning that voting rights in the electoral college for the township semi-competitive elections are restricted to the local party and state staff and residents who are associated with the local authorities.¹⁵¹ Nonetheless, the extensiveness of the voting rights, or the inclusiveness of the electoral college, is experimental rather than fixed by law. It also differs across townships. As we have seen, there are a few cases in which the electoral college includes all the adult residents in a particular township.

3.4.3 The new campaign

In the former practice of township elections, there was no campaign. Technically, because the election was single-candidate, there was no need to launch a campaign.

¹⁵⁰ Jiang Jinsong, *Yihui zhi mu* (Mother of the Parliament) (Beijing: Chinese Democracy and Rule of Law Press, 1998).

¹⁵¹ Obtained from interviews in Sichuan.

Politically, because the candidacy embodied the will of the party, as referred to above, even in the multi-candidate elections for township vice-mayors, launching a campaign represents a challenge to the party's authority. Therefore, campaigns are discouraged by the party.

However, in the semi-competitive township elections, as the primary elections become multi-candidate elections and serve as a tool to help the party identify the best candidate, the campaigns have become more important.

Campaigns for the semi-competitive township elections are nevertheless constrained by a number of factors.

First, though it is possible for an individual to organize a rally to disseminate his/her advocacy, it is unlikely for him/her to do so, since so far only the party can call for a rally.

Second, advertisements cannot be freely posted, not only because the advertisement might carry information against the party, but also because of the bad memories on the abuse of big-character posters during the Cultural Revolution.

Third, any opposition party is forbidden. There are no campaigns backed by parties opposing one another, or, in other words, there are no campaigns backed by formal and permanent organizations.

How, then, can the competitive candidates manage a campaign under these constraints? The interviewees report that the dominant way of conducting a campaign is to mobilize personal contacts.

Typically, a primary candidate makes use of the clan, or family ties, and other connections (such as colleagues, schoolmates, friends, and so forth) to access members of the electoral college. Through such middlemen, he/she invites the electors to dinner during which he/she disseminates his/her program and solicits support. Some primary candidates give the electors gifts.¹⁵² But to give cash is considered bribery, so it is forbidden. In a township in Sichuan, an interviewee said:

“A couple of days before the voting, all the heads of the villagers committees and

¹⁵² The gifts are usually cigarettes, tea, wine, etc.

the village party secretaries in the eleven villages within this township were invited to a dinner given by the cousin of a candidate. Afterwards, each of them was given some cigarettes.”

In most cases, the election commission does not organize debates among the candidates. Thus, the candidates do not confront each other. But there is still a chance for them to meet the electors. Usually, before the electors vote, each primary candidate is required to give a speech about his/her program and to defend his/her program in front of the electoral college. Formerly, there were no interactions between candidates and electors, and very often, the electors would vote for candidates about whom they knew nothing.

Campaigns during the township semi-competitive elections are similar to those during the village semi-competitive elections that have been extensively examined. According to Xiao Tangbiao (2003),¹⁵³ Xiao Tangbiao (2001),¹⁵⁴ Wang Zhenyao et al. (2000: 253, 269),¹⁵⁵ and Zhu Qiuxia (1998),¹⁵⁶ the clan plays an increasing role in the village elections. Clans are so efficient in promoting the popularity of particular candidates that the township party committee has to take the preference of the clans into consideration when it nominates candidates for village positions.

In the village semi-competitive elections, cases of bribing voters and the intervention of the secret societies have also been reported (Wu Chongqing, 2001;¹⁵⁷ He Xuefeng, 2003¹⁵⁸). In the township semi-competitive elections, no such cases have been officially reported so far. But interviews show that indeed bribery has occurred.

¹⁵³ Xiao Tangbiao (肖唐镖), “Zongzu zai cunzhi quanli fenpei yu yunxing zhong de yingxiang fenxi” (The Influence of the Family on the Distribution and Operation of Power for Village Governance), at http://www.cngdsz.net/discourse/article_print.asp?articleid=1346 (2003).

¹⁵⁴ Xiao Tangbiao (肖唐镖), “Cunweihui xuanju zhong de zongzu yinsu” (The Role of the Family in Village Elections), in *Cunmin zizhi luncong* (On Village Self-government), ed. by Zhang Mingliang (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2001).

¹⁵⁵ Wang Zhenyao (王振耀), Bai Gang (白钢), and Wang Zhongtian (王仲田), *Zhongguo cunmin zizhi qianyan* (Latest Developments in Village Self-government in China) (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2000).

¹⁵⁶ Zhu Qiuxia (朱秋霞), “Jiazu, wangluo jiazu, he jiazu wangluo zai cunzhuang quanli fenpei zhong de zuoyong” (The Role of the Family, Network Family, and Family Network in Village Power Distribution), *Zhongguo shehui kexue jikan* (China Social Sciences Quarterly) (Hong Kong), No. 23 (1998).

¹⁵⁷ Wu Chongqing (吴重庆), “Cunmin zizhi de bentu ziyuan” (Local Resources in Village Self-government), *Nanfang zhoubao* (Southern Weekend), May 10, 2001, p.13.

¹⁵⁸ He Xuefeng (贺雪峰), “Xiangcun xuanju zhong de paixi yu paixing” (Factions in Village Elections), at <http://www.law-times.net/index.asp>.

It is not always the case that the campaign is “quiet” and “underground.” In some township semi-competitive elections, e.g., the case of the Buyun election for the township mayor at the end of 1998 and in early 1999, debates were organized; posters were displayed; and radio and television were used by the candidates to disseminate their programs.

In the case of Buyun, two non-party member candidates¹⁵⁹ and one party member candidate¹⁶⁰ competed for the residents’ ballots. The township election commission decided to organize debates. But the debates were new not only to the organizers, but to the candidates and voters as well. Therefore, the township election commission drafted some debate rules and then called on the three candidates to negotiate the rules. After several rounds of discussion, all the candidates reached a consensus and signed the rules.

According to their consensus, thirteen debates were organized: eleven debates were conducted in eleven villages; and two debates were conducted in the township market where residents from the surrounding villages bought and sold food and other consumer products.

On December 28 and 29, 1999, the three candidates were allowed to conduct a campaign according to their own discretion. Candidate Tan Xiaoqiu organized a team of motorcycles that traveled to villages to seek support from the residents. Candidate Zhou organized a team of bicycles, and together with his friends he traveled to some villages to give speeches and to seek support. Candidate Cai Ronghui went to the elementary school to give a speech to the children. He hoped that they would ask their parents to vote for him.

The candidates were allowed to hang up posters and to use the radio and television according to the regulations. But these means were not employed by the candidates, basically due to a lack of experience.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ They were Zhou Xingyi—a middle school teacher-- and Cai Ronghui—the head of the villagers committee in the ninth village within Buyun township.

¹⁶⁰ He was Tan Xiaoqiu—the current vice-mayor of Buyun township.

¹⁶¹ The restricted campaigns in the township semi-competitive elections are similar to the local election campaigns in Taiwan between 1950 and the early 1980s.

Before 1986 when the then opposition party--the Democratic Progressive Party--was formed, the political structure in Taiwan was similar to that on mainland China. The Guomindang (KMT) (the Nationalist Party)

3.4.4 New alternatives

What alternatives does the township semi-competitive election provide? Or does the township semi-competitive election provide any alternatives at all?

Let us examine the identities of the candidates (primary candidates in the primary elections) and their programs.

In the Buyun township semi-competitive elections, fifteen primary candidates participated in the election for township mayor. Tables 10 and 11 show their identities.

Table 10. Party Membership of the Fifteen Primary Candidates

Party members	Non-party members
9	6

Source: Li Fan, *Buyun xuanju de guocheng he fenxi*.

Table 11. Occupations of the Fifteen Primary Candidates

Township cadres	School teachers	Private entrepreneurs	Workers (at private enterprises)	Peasants
5	4	3	1	2

monopolized the political process. In regard to the local elections, from 1950 on township mayors, county mayors, county congresses, and provincial congresses were open to direct election with multi-candidates, in which the candidates nominated by the KMT competed with the *Dangwai* (the non-party member) candidates. The campaigns were also limited by the lack of freedom of speech and association (Li Xiaofeng, “Jin bainian Taiwan minzhu yundong gaiyao” [An Outline on the Democratic Movement in Taiwan over the Past Century]). Interestingly, campaigns in the then local elections in Taiwan are similar to the semi-competitive township elections in mainland China since the late 1990s. A large amount of literature on the local elections in Taiwan in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s details the campaigns. According to this literature (e.g., Chen Yangde, “Biandong zhong de Taiwan difang zhengzhi” [Local Politics in Changing Taiwan], Ph.D. Thesis, Institute of Political Science, Taiwan National Chengchi University, 1988; Luo Congqin (罗聪钦), “Xuanju maipiao yu zijin huishou—Yi gonggong gongcheng wei li” [Buying Ballots in Elections and Getting Back the Funds: The Case of Infrastructure Projects], MA Thesis, Department of Administration and Management, Taiwan Shih Hsin University, 2002; Zhao Yongmao (赵永茂), “Taiwan difang heidao zhi xingcheng beijing jiqi yu xuanju zhi guanxi” (The Background for the Formation of the Mafia in Taiwan and its Relation to Elections), *Lilun yu zhengce* (Theory and Policy) (Taipei), Vol. 7, No. 2 (2000); Chen Mingtong (陈明通), “Weiquan zhengti xia Taiwan difang zhengzhi jingying de liudong: 1945-1986” [The Flow of Local Elite in Taiwan under the Authoritarian Regime: 1945-1986], Ph.D. Thesis, Institute of Political Science, Taiwan University, 1990), the campaigns were conducted by the following means:

- 1) Mobilizing non-organized social connections, such as geographical, family, and personal connections.
- 2) Organizing gatherings and rallies for particular candidates.
- 3) Organizing debates.
- 4) Buying ballots.
- 5) Distributing leaflets, pamphlets, and posters.
- 6) Using the mafia to threaten particular candidates and their supporters.

Among the above six means, it seems that in the township semi-competitive elections in mainland China, the first means is extensively used, and the other means are employed by candidates to varying extents. Restrictions on campaigns for local elections are also found in democracies. For example, in elections for the Panchayat positions in India, although a candidate can join a party, he/she is not allowed to use the party symbol or party slogan during the campaign. The candidates' platforms can only focus on local issues. There cannot be any debates about state and federal issues.

Source: Li Fan, *Buyun xuanju de guocheng he fenxi*.

Had it not been the semi-competitive elections, the residents would have had no choice but to accept a party member who had been working in the party-state apparatus for years as the only candidate for township mayor.

In addition to the differences in party membership and occupation, the platforms of each of the competing candidates also differed.

An examination of the documents from the debates among the candidates for the township elections reveals that the candidates diverged on at least the following issues:

- 1) Taxes and fees imposed on trade of agricultural products at the township market;
- 2) Road construction;
- 3) Pollution and environmental protection;
- 4) Provision of drinking water;
- 5) Cadre corruption;
- 6) Waste at government banquets;
- 7) Education at the township level;
- 8) Economic development of the township.

The competing candidates supplied different answers to questions on the above issues. The differences ranged from participation and transparency in the decision-making process to fund-raising and monitoring.

For example, in a semi-competitive election in a township in Ya'an prefecture in 2001, three candidates—a governmental official, a private entrepreneur, and a peasant—typically proposed three different programs on the issue of building a road to connect a village with the center of the township. Besides other differences, the candidates also proposed different sources of funding. The governmental official's program mainly relied on subsidies from the upper levels. The private entrepreneur promised to donate money from his enterprise. The peasant proposed asking for

subsidies from the upper levels and for donations from entrepreneurs, as well as asking for contributions from all the residents as well.

However, the competitors did not diverge in their responses concerning national issues.¹⁶² No candidate proposed any alternative on issues that are supposed to be decided at the upper levels. They only diverged on how to achieve specific tasks. Few candidates questioned the appropriateness (or desirability) of those particular tasks.

Other cases also show that there were no alternatives on national issues emerging from the semi-competitive township elections. This was the case either because residents had no interest in national politics in the local elections, or because the authority forbids proposing alternatives (for example, alternatives to Marxism-Leninism, to the leadership of Communist Party, etc.), or because the above-mentioned two possibilities reinforce each other.¹⁶³

3.4.5 Losers and winners in the semi-competitive elections

3.4.5.1 To what extent did non-party-member candidates win the elections?

According to the statistics of the Organization Department of the Sichuan Provincial Party Committee, among the winners in the township semi-competitive elections in 2002, 93.3 percent were party members, and 6.7 percent were non-party members.¹⁶⁴ The semi-competitive elections significantly increased the number and proportion of non-party-members among the decision-makers at the township level.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² For example, so far none of the candidates touched any of the following topics: 1) Macro-economic policy; 2) Religion; 3) Ethnic minorities; 4) National defense; 5) International relations.

¹⁶³ Therefore, this is similar to the local elections in Taiwan before the first opposition party was formed in 1986. During those local elections, no candidate could challenge the authoritarian ideology and institution including:

- 1) The absolute authority of Sun Yat-Sen-ism (ideology);
- 2) The supreme authority of the leadership of the Guomindang, in particular Chiang Kaishek and his son Chiang Chingkuo, the chairpersons of the Guomindang;
- 3) The reunification of China;
- 4) The embargo on communication between residents in mainland China and residents in Taiwan;
- 5) Martial law that restricted freedom of speech and freedom of association, which was implemented in the 1940s.

However, the local elections under these constraints were still very dynamic. The alternatives basically concerned the redistribution of economic interests at the local levels, similar to the alternatives in the semi-competitive elections in townships in mainland China today. In other words, the township semi-competitive elections provide alternatives for low-level politics.

¹⁶⁴ Li Shan, "Gongtui gongxuan rang youxiu ganbu zoushang qiantai" (Open Nominations and Open Elections Promote Good Cadres), at <http://news.jschina.com.cn>, September 24, 2004.

¹⁶⁵ For cadres at the township and higher levels, the nomenklatura has a special quota for non-party members. Among the leadership positions in the government, there is one but only one quota given to a non-party member. Here we are talking about non-party member cadres in addition to the special nomenklatura quota.

Compared to at the village level, the proportion of non-party member winners was much smaller. The semi-competitive elections in the villages were introduced in the late 1980s and early 1990s. During the past decades, about five rounds of semi-competitive elections have been carried out in an increasing number of villages. Non-party-member residents are winning more and more village positions.

Table 12. Proportion of Non-party Members among Heads of Villagers Committees

	1984	1987	1995	1999
Shandong(山东) ¹⁶⁶	1%	5%	n.a.	24.8%
Shandong Zaozhuang(山东枣庄) ¹⁶⁷	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	70.5%
Guangdong(广东) ¹⁶⁸	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	47%
Hebei Longhua(河北隆化) ¹⁶⁹	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	42.8%
Hunan Xiangtan (湖南湘潭) ¹⁷⁰	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	15%

Note: n.a.=Not Available. For sources of the data, see footnotes 73, 74, 75, 76, 77.

In light of developments in the villages regarding the implementation of semi-competitive elections over time, it is fairly likely that an increasing number of non-party-member people will take leadership positions in townships with the implementation of the township semi-competitive elections over time. If this is indeed the case, then the institution in which the township government works under the leadership of the township party committee will be significantly changed.

3.4.5.2 To what extent do unexpected party member candidates win the elections?

In the Chinese nomenklatura, there are three types of party cadres: major incumbent cadres,¹⁷¹ cadres on the waiting list to be promoted (or reserve cadres),¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ He Jiadong, "Dangzheng fenkai zai tan" (Separating the Party and the State Revisited), at <http://www.bokee.com/new/display/84356.html>, August 15, 2006.

¹⁶⁷ He Jiadong, "Dangzheng fenkai zai tan" (Separating the Party and the State Revisited), at <http://www.bokee.com/new/display/84356.html>, August 15, 2006.

¹⁶⁸ Lun Wenren, "Nongcun quanli jigou de zhiduhua tiaozheng" (The Institutional Change in the Power Structure in the Rural Areas), at <http://www.600ml.net/shehuixue/nongcunyanjiu/20060121/22163.html>, January 21, 2006..

¹⁶⁹ Lun Wenren, "Nongcun quanli jigou de zhiduhua tiaozheng" (The Institutional Change in the Power Structure in the Rural Areas), at <http://www.600ml.net/shehuixue/nongcunyanjiu/20060121/22163.html>, January 21, 2006.

¹⁷⁰ Yu Jianrong, "Minzhuzhi yu Zhongguo xiangtu shehui" (Democracy and Chinese Rural Society), at <http://column.bokee.com/71095.html>, April 28, 2005.

¹⁷¹ In Chinese party jargon, they are "现职领导干部".

and ordinary cadres. The second type of cadres (the reserve cadres) merit our special attention. These cadres are selected by the party committee on the basis of their political loyalty, political skills, and political capacity. Before introducing the semi-competitive elections, only those who already had been selected as reserve cadres had the opportunity to be appointed to major positions in the township authority. By introducing semi-competitive elections, ordinary cadres began to have more of a chance to take up the major positions in the township authority.

According to statistics of the Organization Department of the Sichuan Provincial Party Committee, among the winners in the township semi-competitive elections in 2002, 70 percent were incumbent cadres and reserve cadres, and 30 percent were ordinary cadres.¹⁷³ These 30 percent “unexpected winners” changed the landscape of cadre promotion quite significantly.

3.4.5.3 How many votes do the winners and losers receive? Or what is the winners’ margin of victory over the losers?

No data are available on the average percentage of votes obtained by the winners and losers in any county or prefecture where there have been a considerable number of cases of township semi-competitive elections. The following are the percentages of votes obtained by the different candidates in the Buyun township semi-competitive elections in 1998 and 2001.¹⁷⁴

Table 13. Candidates and the Amount of Votes They Received in the 1998 Buyun Township Election

	Tan Xiaoqiu (谭晓秋)	Cai Ronghui (蔡荣辉)	Zhou Xingyi (周兴义)
1998 election	50.9%	31.99%	16.03%

Source: Zhang Jinming, “Buyun xiangzhang zhixuan de beijing, guocheng he xiaoguo” (The Background, Process, and Effect of the Direct Election for Buyun

¹⁷² In Chinese party jargon, they are “后备干部.”

¹⁷³ Li Shan, “Gongtui gongxuan rang youxiu ganbu zoushang qantai” (Open Nominations and Open Elections Promote Good Cadres), at <http://news.jschina.com.cn>, September 24, 2004.

¹⁷⁴ Similar to the above situation, the *Dangwai* (or non-party-member) candidates in Taiwan before the 1980s received a substantial percentage of the votes in the local semi-competitive elections. For example, in the local elections in 1977, the non-Guomindang party-member candidates received 30 percent of the total votes.

Township Mayor) (2003).

Table 14. Candidates and the Amount of Votes They Received in the 2001 Buyun Township Election

	Tan Xiaoqiu (谭晓秋)	Tan Zhibin (谭志斌)
2002 election	52.9%	46.3%

Source: Tian Xiaohong, “Zai xianfa tizhi nei jinxing zhengzhi tizhi de chengxuxing gaige” (Restructuring the Political System by Reforming the Procedures under the Existing Constitution) (2003) at <http://www.world-china.org/03/0302082901.htm>.

As has been shown above, although there were some restrictions in the township semi-competitive elections, the voters began to have choices among different candidates with alternative programs. These elections differ significantly from traditional elections in China and in other socialist systems, such as the Soviet Union where there were non-competitive single-candidate elections. These no-choice elections served to inculcate allegiance to the regime (Rose and Mossawir, 1967)¹⁷⁵ and to undermine any inclination toward dissent among the population (Guy Hermet, 1978).¹⁷⁶ The main theme in the election is unanimity (Rasma Karklins, 1986).¹⁷⁷ The citizenry’s involvement in these elections fosters the habits of compliance and instills a perception of the leadership’s omnipotence (Almond and Powell, 1984).¹⁷⁸ The township semi-competitive elections seem to promote the representation of the township leadership. Through the process of the semi-competitive elections, the local residents’ interests and preferences are articulated and aggregated. These elections are new to the Chinese political system.

3.5 When and where were the first cases of semi-competitive elections?

¹⁷⁵ Richard Rose and Harve Mossawir, “Voting and Elections: A Functional Analysis,” *Political Studies*, Vol. 15 (1967), pp. 173-201.

¹⁷⁶ Guy Hermet, “State-Controlled Elections: A Framework,” in Guy Hermet, Richard Rose, and Alain Rouquie, eds., *Elections Without Choice* (New York: John Wiley, 1978).

¹⁷⁷ Rasma Karklins, “Soviet Elections Revisited: Voter Abstention in Noncompetitive Voting,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol.80, No.2 (1986), pp. 449-470.

¹⁷⁸ Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., eds., *Comparative Politics Today: A World View*, 3d ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984).

How widely did the new practices spread?

The first cases of township semi-competitive elections took place in 1995-96 in Sichuan province. In some ten townships in Bazhong prefecture in Sichuan province, semi-competitive elections were organized to elect vice-mayors.¹⁷⁹

In 1998-99, the number of cases of township semi-competitive election increased to about 300. Positions open to semi-competitive elections included township mayor and township party secretary. Cases also spread to other counties, prefectures, and provinces,¹⁸⁰ including Henan and Guangdong.

In 2001-2, the number of cases of semi-competitive elections increased enormously in Sichuan province. According to statistics provided by a provincial party organ, 40 percent of the townships, meaning more than 2,000 townships, implemented semi-competitive elections. Elections were held for the positions of township vice-mayor, township mayor, township party vice-secretary, and township party secretary. The total number of leadership positions in the township governments in Sichuan amounted to 16,000.¹⁸¹ According to the same statistics, one-third of the positions—about 5,000 township governors and vice-governors—were competitively elected.¹⁸²

By 2001-2, there were well-known cases in provinces other than Sichuan. For example, there was a semi-competitive election for party secretary in Yangji township (in Jingshan county in Jingmen prefecture of Hubei province).¹⁸³ Other less-publicized cases include: twelve cases for township mayor in Xianning prefecture in Hubei province,¹⁸⁴ one case for township mayor in Gongcheng township (in Gongcheng Yao nationality autonomous county in Guangxi Zhuang nationality autonomous region),¹⁸⁵ one case for township mayor in Qing township (in Guiyang

¹⁷⁹ Source: Author's interview with Sichuan provincial party officials in early 2002 in Chengdu.

¹⁸⁰ Source: Author's interview with Sichuan provincial party officials in early 2002 in Chengdu. For cases in Mianyang prefecture, also see Shi Weimin, *Zhixuan yu gongxuan* (Open Elections and Direct Elections) (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2000).

¹⁸¹ Generally, a township government has one governor and two vice-governors; in cases of townships with large populations, there may be three vice-governors.

¹⁸² The statistics were not publicly announced. The source is my interview with Sichuan provincial party officials in early 2002 in Chengdu.

¹⁸³ Numerous Chinese reports on this case are available. One of the easiest to access is at www.ccrs.org.cn.

¹⁸⁴ See www.zaobao.com.sg, February 28, 2003.

¹⁸⁵ See www.xinhuanet.com: *China Tries Direct Election at Township Level*, April 8, 2002.

prefecture in Guizhou province),¹⁸⁶ and another in a township in a county in Jilin province.¹⁸⁷

After 2002, some new cases occurred in a number of provinces. There was one case in Zhejiang province in 2004. In 2004 and 2005, semi-competitive elections were organized in two townships in Chongqing municipality. In 2004, seven townships in Shiping county and ten townships in Luxi county (in Honghe prefecture in Yunnan province) held semi-competitive elections. In 2003-5, thirty-nine townships in various counties in Jiangsu province implemented semi-competitive elections.¹⁸⁸

There may be some additional cases as well. Since the township semi-competitive elections are an innovation in the party-state, and are not widely accepted within the system,¹⁸⁹ it is in the interest of some localities to conceal the elections both from the higher levels and from the public. Even if they did not purposely conceal them, it is still likely that some cases of semi-competitive elections remain unknown to the public due to two factors. One reason is that as information is forwarded through the administrative levels, a critical stance of different levels to the semi-competitive elections may gradually destroy the innovative elements. The other factor is that the center and/or the 31 provinces have to deal with tens of thousands of townships, and they have to deal with tens of thousands of issues. Therefore, as long as a new practice does not greatly shake the system or engender a great impact on the society, it may remain unknown to the public.¹⁹⁰ Thus, although the above report might provide an approximate picture about the spread of the township semi-competitive elections across China, there may well be more cases in other

¹⁸⁶ Source: Author's interview with Guiyang prefecture people's congress on March 21, 2002.

¹⁸⁷ Source: Author's interview in late April 2002 in Beijing. Interviewee did not provide details about what county, what township, and for what position the semi-competitive election was implemented.

¹⁸⁸ Source: See the following: http://www.xinhuanet.com/chinanews/2004-09/01/content_2783571.htm; http://www.hljtv.com/xinwen/news/shengwai_20031217_0002.htm; <http://www.phoenixtv.com/>, November 10, 2004; <http://www.chinaelections.org/>.

¹⁸⁹ One example of its controversial status: in the summer of 2002, the Central Committee of the party issued a directive (Document No. 12) warning the localities to comply with the traditional way of carrying out elections in townships by the end of the year.

¹⁹⁰ There were cases of semi-competitive elections in the early years but they remain unknown to the public. For example, fieldwork found that in Lingshan township in Pingchang county in Bazhong prefecture, the township party secretary was directly elected by the party members living in that township. (The prevailing practice at the time was that the township party secretary was elected by party member representatives.) This occurred earlier than the case in Yangji in Hubei. However, while the Yangji case has already been widely publicized, the Lingshan election remains unknown.

places.

3.6 Who initiated the reform?

As the semi-competitive elections are new to the Chinese political system, it is important to identify who were the initiators. If the initiators can be identified correctly, we will be better able to examine their incentives in undertaking this reform, and to study their strategies, constraints, and the consequences of the reform. This will allow to better understand the development of this new election practice. Many researchers have been trying to identify the initiators. As discussed in the introduction, some believe they were initiated by the Chinese revolutionary leadership; others believe that they were initiated by middle-level officials in the central authority. However, this research presents a different finding.

3.6.1 No social and/or political movements emanating from the civil society aimed at promoting competitive elections

There are no organized social and/or political movements in China today promoting competitive elections. Under the current regime that restricts associations, no such organized movement is possible. There is no advocacy for competitive elections in the mass media. There have been some academic papers expressing the necessity to have elections with competitive elements, but they remain few in number. Moreover, these few papers have been published in journals with limited audiences. There was a popular movement in the late 1980s urging competitive elections, but it disappeared shortly after the 1989 events in Beijing.

During my hundreds of interviews, no citizens reported that he/she made any efforts to demand competitive elections, either by visiting, phoning, or writing letters to party officials. Nor was there any official who reported that he/she was asked by any citizen through visits, phone calls, or letters to carry out competitive elections.

3.6.2 The central authority's mild objection to the semi-competitive elections

The central authority is negative about the semi-competitive elections, not to mention initiating any new election practices. The center's immediate reaction to the Buyun case of a semi-competitive election in late 1998 and early 1999 was to issue Document No. 12 in July 2002. Issued by the General Office of the Central Committee of the party, it said that the center had noticed some new ways of carrying out elections, which had some inappropriate elements. The document ordered the localities to comply with the established way of handling elections for township heads in 2002. The elections were to be carried out according to the established laws and regulations.

However, the center did not strictly forbid the possibility of implementing new election practices. There was no political and ideological assault on the township semi-competitive elections. Nor was there any harsh criticism of the new practices. The new election practices as a package were not rejected outright. The wording was that there were some inappropriate elements. The center's mild objection to this election reform allowed room for the local officials to maneuver. The reason why and the implications of the center's mild objection will be discussed in later chapters.

The center's attitudes toward the village elections have been different from those to the township elections. As noted by many scholars (Li Lianjiang, He Baogang, Kevin O'Brien, Zheng Yongnian, etc.), some renowned Communist revolutionaries, such as Peng Zhen were active in advocating semi-competitive elections at the village level. These high-ranking aged revolutionaries played a significant role in promoting the village semi-competitive elections. But these people had faded from the scene by the late 1980s before the village semi-competitive elections had spread substantially. In the late 1990s, the Ministry of Civil Affairs was active in promoting the village semi-competitive elections (Anne Thurston, Shi Tianjian, Melanie Manion). But the Ministry of Civil Affairs only has power over village organizations. It does not have any say about elections at the township level and above.

3.6.3 The central role of the party secretaries in the localities in initiating the township semi-competitive elections

The nomenklatura system in China allowed the party secretaries in the localities to play a central role in initiating the semi-competitive elections. As mentioned above, the distribution of nomenklatura power is in accord with the principle of *dang guan ganbu xia guan yi ji* (the party supervises the officials, each party organ supervises the officials at the next lower level). The figure of Appendix 3 to this chapter shows how nomenklatura power is distributed.

In this system, the center makes the general regulations about cadre promotions and dismissals that should be followed by all levels. The provincial and prefecture party committees can either make more specific regulations for the county and township party committees to follow, or they can let the county and township committees implement the general regulations issued by the center.

Thus, under this power distribution and under the circumstances that the center does not have any incentive, only provincial, prefecture, and county party committees could possibly initiate the township semi-competitive elections. In particular, the provincial, prefecture, and county party secretaries were the key initiators.

The provincial, prefecture, and county mayors could not be the initiators. They do not have the power over nomenklatura issues. Madame Zhang Jinming,¹⁹¹ who initiated the Buyun semi-competitive election in 1998, told me during my interview with her: “In 1996, I began to have the idea of changing the procedure of how a township cadre should be selected and appointed. But I was then the mayor of the county. I didn’t have decision-making power over cadre issues, so I could do nothing.”¹⁹²

Also a township party secretary cannot initiate semi-competitive elections, even if he/she wishes to, because he/she does not have nomenklatura power over the major township positions. One example was the abortive effort by a township party secretary in Chongqing municipality to introduce a semi-competitive election in 2003. Mr. Wei Shengduo (魏胜多), the party secretary of Pingbai township, Chengkou

¹⁹¹ She is now the vice-secretary of the Ya’an prefecture party committee.

¹⁹² Interview with Madame Zhang in late 2001 in Suining prefecture, Sichuan province. At the time, she was a vice-mayor of the prefecture.

county, Chongqing municipality (重庆市城口区坪坝镇), initiated semi-competitive elections for the positions of township mayor and township party secretary. The reform was stopped just before the voters cast their ballots. Mr. Wei Shengduo was immediately dismissed from his position as township party secretary.¹⁹³ According to an official report, the dismissal was based on the grounds that the county party committee should make the decision about how a township election is conducted, thus Mr. Wei had violated the power of the county party committee.¹⁹⁴ Actually, not long after this event, within Chongqing municipality there were some cases of semi-competitive elections in other townships.

3.6.4 Evidence from the development of village semi-competitive elections

The central role of the party secretary is also evident in the spread of the semi-competitive elections in the villages. Since a villagers committee is officially a people's organization instead of an authority, its immediate superior—the township party committee—does not have, or is not supposed to have, concrete nomenklatura power over the village cadres like the authorities at the upper levels have over their subordinates. Nevertheless, the township party committee has substantial influence over how an election should be conducted in the villages within the particular township, and who are the preferred candidates for the village positions. Without the consent and support of the township party committee, in particular, the township party secretary, efforts to promote the village semi-competitive elections to more regions would have encountered enormous difficulties, especially when the efforts came from the state instead of the party. This is why the majority villages in China have not yet implemented semi-competitive elections, even though the Ministry of Civil Affairs has called for semi-competitive elections in villages throughout the country and the village autonomy law requires semi-competitive elections in villages. There is a misunderstanding among many people about the village semi-competitive elections in China. Many believe that if not 100 percent, then at least an overwhelming majority

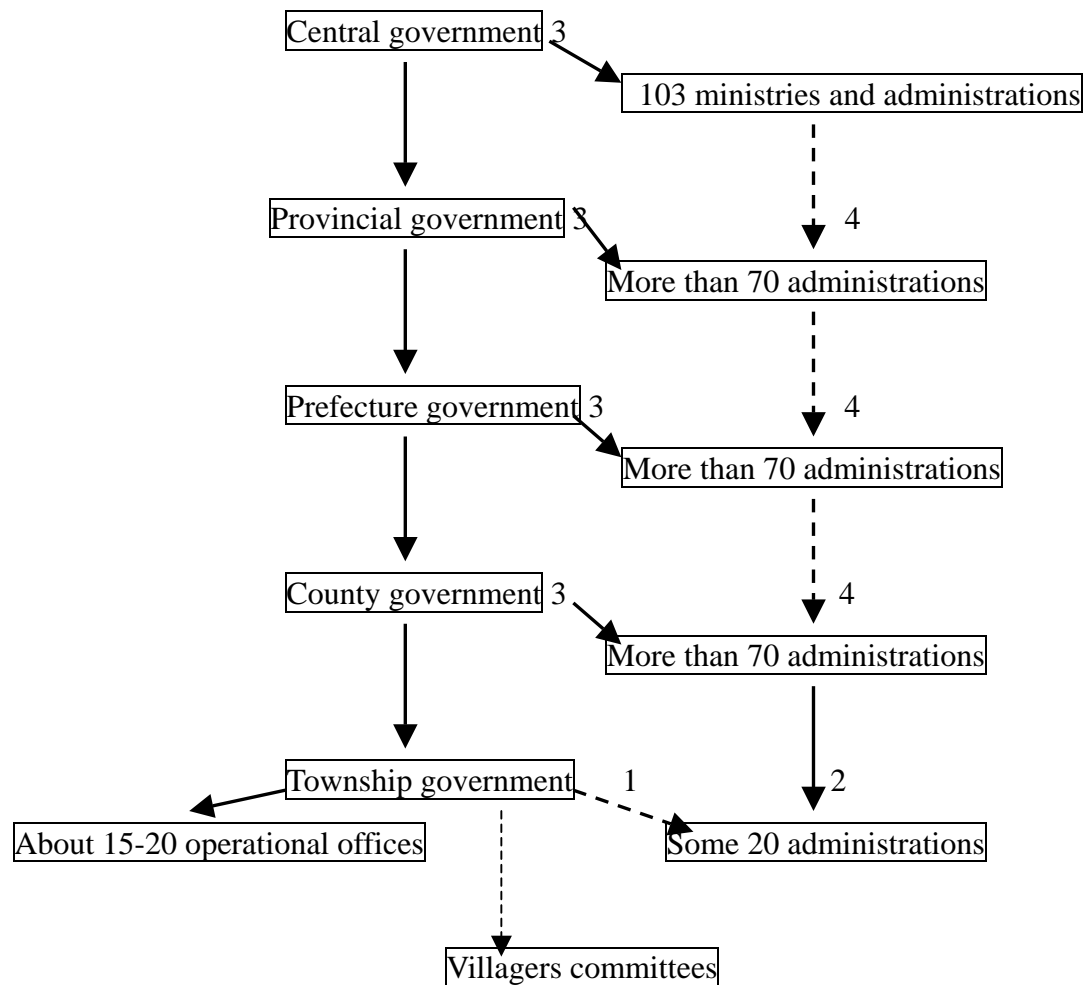
¹⁹³ Tang Jianguang, 2004 "Yunnan honghezhou da guimo shixing zhixuan tuijin xiangzhen tizhi gaige," at China News Weekly, issue 43, 2004.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with party officials in Chongqing in November 2005.

of villages in China, have implemented semi-competitive elections because the *Organization Law on Villagers Committees* passed in the late 1980s requires semi-competitive elections. But actually, only a small proportion of the villages have carried out such elections. No statistics are available about how widely the semi-competitive elections have spread in the villages. The most radical estimation reports that 30 percent of the villages have implemented semi-competitive elections. A conservative estimation reports that only 10 percent of the villages (Li Lianjiang, 2003). A detailed discussion on why and how the misunderstanding about the village semi-competitive elections has emerged is an interesting topic, but it is beyond the scope of this paper.

Appendix 1 to chapter 3:

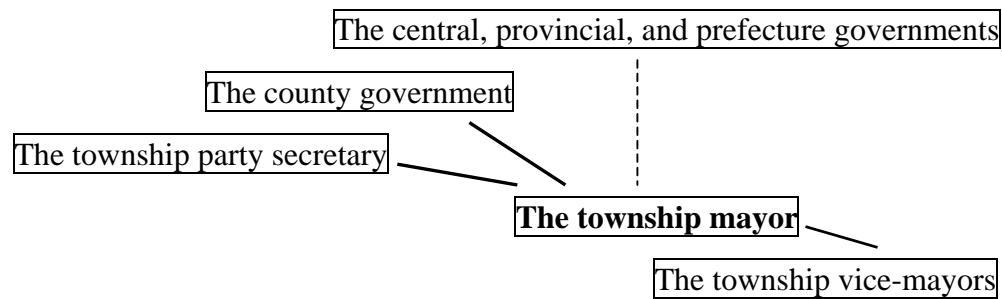
Figure: Differences between the township and the county authorities



Note: Solid line means direct control and supervision, broken line means guidance instead of control and supervision.

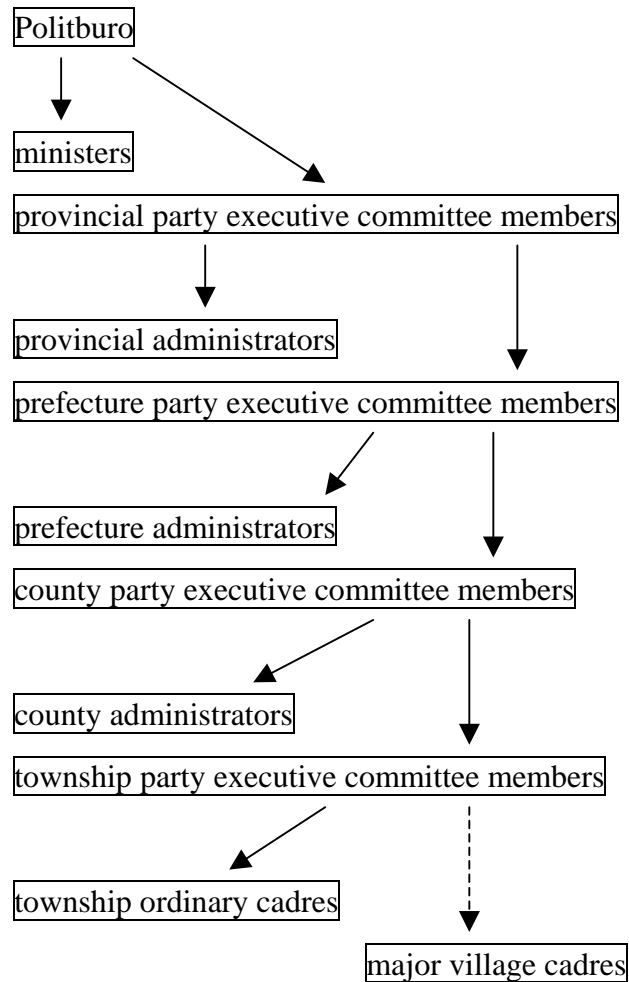
Appendix 2 to chapter 3:

Figure: Main Actors Constraining the Township Mayor



Note: Broken line means indirect constraint; solid line means direct constraint; the bold solid line linking the county government and the township party secretary with the township mayor means that the former has a strong constraint on the latter.

Appendix 3 to chapter 3:

Figure: Chinese Nomenklatura System: *Dang guan ganbu, xia guan yi ji*

Notes: Solid line=concrete control over promoting and dismissing particular officials.

Broken line=township authority is encouraged to lead the work of promoting the major village cadres and to look after the major village cadres.

Chapter 4: Why are There Semi-Competitive Elections at the Township Level?

In this chapter, I will first try to test the hypothesis derived from existing theories, in particular modernization theory, to see if and to what extent the township semi-competitive elections are in line with the theory. As was shown in Chapter 3, the main promoters of the new elections were the local party secretaries, in particular the county and prefecture party secretaries, who undertook to initiate the electoral reform. In this chapter, I will examine what motivated them to do this. I then will examine if there is any structural background for the presence and persistence of these motivations, which is related to the sustainability of the township semi-competitive elections in the future. Both my statistical findings and the fieldwork support the notion that the local officials launched the semi-competitive elections as a way to alleviate the social tensions and to mobilize additional resources for local development in the less-developed areas. Contrary to the prediction of modernization theory, self-interested local officials undertook the democratic experiments in China in less well-off localities instead of affluent areas.

4.1 Testing modernization theory

Although the existing theory explains democratization at the state level, it cannot be directly applied to the semi-competitive elections at local levels. What we can do is to test the extended implications of the theory. For example, one major inference from modernization theory is that those economically more developed, more industrialized, and more urbanized regions or localities would have more cases of semi-competitive elections.

I try to test these implications with data collected from Sichuan province where a considerable number of township semi-competitive elections have been implemented.

Although, as shown in Chapter 2, some other provinces, for instance Yunnan, Hubei, Jiangsu, Anhui etc., conducted dozens of township semi-competitive elections, the new election practices are most widespread in Sichuan province. However, within Sichuan province, the cases are not evenly distributed among prefectures, counties, and townships. In some prefectures and/or counties, most townships carried out semi-competitive elections. In other prefectures and/or counties, only a few townships carried out semi-competitive elections. Yet in still other counties, no townships carried out semi-competitive elections.

Moreover, the intensity of the competition in the elections varied across townships as well. The competitiveness of the elections was much more intense in some townships than it was in other townships within the province. For example, in some cases, all adult residents were allowed to compete for the position of township mayor; in other cases, only those who were at the rank of township vice-mayor were allowed to compete for the position of township mayor. In terms of the electoral college, in some cases, it consisted of a large proportion of the residents; in other cases, it consisted of only a few residents. In many cases, the voting was weighted, that is, the weight of county officials was disproportional to their number.

In this chapter we shall analyze county and township data. The county data cover all 130 counties in Sichuan province. Within these counties, various proportions of the townships implemented semi-competitive election. The township data cover all 174 townships in eight counties within Ya'an prefecture where all the townships carried out semi-competitive elections. The data are attached to this chapter.

To carry out the analysis, I constructed two sets of scores to assign values to the dependent variable—the extent of competitiveness (or quality) of the township semi-competitive election. In cases where the analytical unit is the county, the score ranges from 0 to 6, where “0” means no semi-competitive elections and “6” means that competition is very intense and widespread. The score is constructed on the basis

of the following dimensions:

- A. Inclusiveness of the electoral college,
- B. Weight of the officials' votes vs. the residents' votes
- C. Eligibility requirements for competitors (or primary candidates)
- D. Proportion of townships that implemented semi-competitive elections within the county.

Table 15 shows how a county receives a score in terms of their township semi-competitive elections.

Table 15. Scores of Counties with regard to Township Semi-Competitive Elections

Value	Candidacy requirements	Inclusiveness of the electoral college	Weight of officials' votes vs. residents' votes	Proportion of cases within the county
0	-	-	-	0
1	Strict	Low	-	Less than 30%
2	Strict	Low	60% vs. 40%	Around 30%
3	Strict	Low	40% vs. 60%	Around 30%
4	Strict	Low	0% vs. 100%	Around 30%
5	Strict	Low	0% vs. 100%	100%
6	Loose	High	0% vs. 100%	100%

Note: In the weighted voting, 40% and 60% are the most important thresholds. Among all the county documents on election regulations that I have read, there are only these two thresholds. This is probably because the electoral college would be considered meaningless both by the residents and the officials if the residents' votes came to less than 40%. If the residents' votes came to more than 60%, cautious officials would fear that the competition would get out of control. In cases where the residents' votes came to 100% and the county official votes came to 0%, the votes are not weighted voting and there is equal voting.

Within a particular county, 30% is the most important threshold for the indicator of the share of cases. This is because the provincial party committee in the summer of 2001 issued a party document concerning the forthcoming election at the township level, suggesting that each county select one-third of its townships to implement semi-competitive elections. It turned out that most counties either selected 30% of the townships to implement the new election practices, or implemented them in all the townships within the county. Some counties did not carry out the semi-competitive elections at all. A few counties implemented the elections in one or two townships (around 10% of the townships within a county).

In cases where the analytical unit is the township, the score again measures the competitiveness of the elections in the township, but it ranges from 1 to 3. Table 16 shows how a township in Ya'an prefecture received its score.

Table 16. Scores for Townships in regard to Semi-Competitive Elections

Value	Candidacy requirements	Inclusiveness of the electoral college
1	Strict	Low
2	Loose	Low
3	Loose	High

Note: In Ya'an prefecture, all the townships conducted semi-competitive elections. Meanwhile, there was equal voting, i.e., the votes of all voters counted equally.

Information about the election rules in different counties and the distribution of cases across the province came from the Organization Department (or Nomenklatura Department) of the Sichuan Provincial Party Committee of the CCP. Information about the election rules in different townships across Ya'an prefecture came from the Organization Department (or Nomenklatura Department) of the Ya'an Prefecture Party Committee of the CCP.

The independent variables include:

- 1) GDP per capita
- 2) Share of industry in GDP
- 3) Share of non-agricultural population
- 4) Annual GDP growth rate

The purpose of the selection of the above dependent variables is to gauge the impact of economic development on the quality or competitiveness of the elections. GDP per capita shows the level of economic development. The share of industry in GDP measures the extent of industrialization. The share of the non-agricultural population aims at measuring the level of urbanization. Modernization theory believes that advances in economic development, industrialization, and urbanization lead to democratization. Thus, these indicators are chosen as independent variables to test modernization theory.

The reason for taking the annual GDP growth rate as an independent variable is because, regardless of the level of economic development, there may be a correlation

between the speed of economic development and political change. For example, faster economic development may decrease the motivation for both the civil society and those in power to initiate political restructuring, on the grounds that faster economic development gives legitimacy to the dominant regime (Huntington, *The Third Wave*). Slow economic development, especially when the nation as a whole and the neighboring regions are enjoying fast growth, may well stimulate political unrest in particular places. It would thus forge the possibility and necessity of making political change (Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*).

The indicators for a citizen's level of education and the development of civil society are not on the list of independent variables. The reason is that data on these indicators are not available. I tried but failed to collect related data. At best, I found out that in 2001 each township had on average eleven registered NGOs. This data can hardly be applied to the analysis, not just because it is an estimate, but also because in China many NGOs operate informally without formal registration. In addition, different NGOs have different memberships, different activities, and different influences etc. Thus, assessing the development of civil society cannot merely rely on the number of registered NGOs.

Data are also unavailable on the level of education in particular localities. To assess the level of education is not a part of the routine operations of the local statistical bureau. However, in China it is clear that people in the urban and industrialized areas have much better access to education than those in the rural and agricultural areas. The level of education is strongly related to the levels of urbanization and industrialization. Therefore, the relationship between level of education and the spread of township semi-competitive elections can, to some extent, be captured by the indicators for industrialization and urbanization.

The independent variables are from the 2001 *Sichuan Province Statistical Yearbook*, put out by the Sichuan Provincial Statistical Bureau (Beijing: National Statistics Press, 2002) and the 2001 *Ya'an Prefecture Statistical Yearbook* (put out by the Ya'an Prefecture Statistics Bureau (Yucheng: Ya'an Factory of Printing, 2002), one year before implementation of the semi-competitive elections.

4.1.1 Analyzing the quality of the elections at the county level

In analyzing the impact of county-level economic characteristics on the quality of township elections, in particular in counties in Sichuan, I find that GDP growth rate per se does not exert a systematic influence on the quality of the elections (at the significance level of 0.05).

However, the correlation between the dependent variable and GDP per capita, the share of the non-agricultural population, and the share of industry in GDP is significant (at the level of 0.05). This suggests that these variables exert a systematic influence on the dependent variable, the quality of township-level elections, in particular in counties in Sichuan.

The correlation can be expressed through the following regression equation: $y = -0.81*a + 0.3*b + 0.18*c$, where “y” stands for the “standardized competitiveness of township semi-competitive elections”, “a” stands for the “standardized GDP per capita,” “b” stands for the “standardized share of non-agricultural population,” and “c” stands for the “standardized share of industry in GDP.” A detailed statistical analysis result is available in the annex to this research.

The R Square for the equation is 0.288, while $P = 0.039$.

The results show that in economically less-developed counties, more township semi-competitive elections were conducted, and the competitiveness of these elections was higher. This result is in direct contradiction with a main implication of modernization theory. Though the results also show that the spread of township semi-competitive elections was positively correlated with the share of industry in GDP (in other words, industrialization) and the share of the non-agricultural population (i.e., urbanization), which is in line with modernization theory, the R square for these two explanatory factors is only 0.049, in other words, these two factors have negligible explanatory power.

Equally importantly, the R square for the three variables, including GDP per capita, is 0.288, which means that much of the variance in the dependent variable remains unexplained.

4.1.2 Analyzing the quality of township elections in Ya'an prefecture

Again, here I regress an indicator on the quality of the township elections on a battery of economic variables for individual townships in Ya'an prefecture. As the results show, correlation between the dependent variable and GDP per capita is not significant (at the level of 0.05). However, the correlation between the dependent variable and the share of industry in GDP is significant (at the level of 0.05). The coefficient is 0.19. The R-square for it is 0.035.

The results show that when examining data at the township level, the intensity of the competition in the township elections is not significantly correlated with any of the economic variables, except for the share of industry in GDP. Even though the share of industry in GDP is positively correlated with the implementation of township semi-competitive elections, the variance is mainly not explained by the independent variables.

To sum up, at worst, the development of township semi-competitive elections contradicts the inferences of modernization theory; at best, the development of township semi-competitive elections is only extremely weakly explained by modernization theory.

4.2 Reasons, as reported by the interviewees

While collecting the statistical data, I also interviewed a number of party and

state officials at all levels, from the center down to the villages, and a number of local residents. The interviews were done in Beijing, Sichuan province, Jiangsu province, Shanxi province, Guangdong province, and Fujian province. The purpose of the interviews in the other provinces was to control for the interviews in Sichuan province. The reasons reported here mostly came from officials in the Sichuan provincial authority and officials and local residents in nine townships, four counties, and two prefectures in Sichuan province.¹⁹⁵ The interview data provide strong clues about why the level of economic development at the county level seems to have a negative effect on the competitiveness of township-level elections.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the promoters of township semi-competitive elections were county party committees and/or prefecture party committees, especially the party secretaries, who have agenda-setting power for the local party committees. The county and/or prefecture party committees presented the reform ideas, designed the operational procedures for the primary elections, and organized and supervised each step of the primary elections. They were the ones who confirmed the results of the primary elections and concluded the final elections. In other words, the entire process was led, regulated, and monitored directly by the county and/or prefecture party committees. The openness and intensity of the competition, the number of townships allowed to participate in the semi-competitive elections, and the spread of the semi-competitive elections to the township level were all decided by the county and/or prefecture party committees. It is the task of the county party committee, or in some cases, that of its immediate superior, to decide on how to appoint cadres to township positions, provided the method of appointment does not violate the respective principles set down by the party Central Committee. Therefore, the reasons for the development of the township semi-competitive elections should first and foremost be found in an examination of the motivations of the county and/or prefecture party committees.

The significance of the county and prefecture authorities was reinforced by field

For details on the several hundred interviews, see the discussion of the data in Chapter 2.

data suggesting that none of the semi-competitive elections were launched due to demands from ordinary citizens.¹⁹⁶ Instead, my fieldwork revealed that cadres at different county and prefecture authorities reported disparate motivations. Some of them overlapped. The following categorization by no means suggests that a particular motivation drove the elections in a particular place. It only means that the particular motivation was more prominent than others in a given place.

First, in all the counties and prefectures the author visited, the local cadres reported that the implementation of the competitive elections was aimed at enforcing the people's voting rights as stipulated by the PRC Constitution. Though the reform increased the transparency of the system and the people's participation in the political process -- and we may believe that the organizers of the elections may have been partially motivated by the enforcement of people's rights -- this motivation does not shed light on the restrictions, setbacks, or reversals in the electoral reform.¹⁹⁷

As for other reasons driving the township-level elections, an interview on December 29, 2001 with Madame Zhang Jingmin -- the former party secretary of Shizhong county in Suining prefecture who initiated the first cases of township competitive elections in 1998 -- revealed another direct mechanism motivating electoral reform:

"Shortly after I was promoted to the position of county party secretary, corruption cases in Xinqiao township and Baoshi township involving cadres embezzling money collected from peasants were revealed. The peasants' trust in the cadres and the township governments was in jeopardy. I was then determined to initiate

¹⁹⁶ In the twenty-one interviews with ordinary residents in townships where semi-competitive elections had been implemented, in response to the question "do you hope that township governors and vice-governors will be elected in a free and competitive way?," seventeen interviewees answered "yes"; four interviewees answered that they "do not have a clear idea about it"; and no one answered "no." In response to the question "did you require that cadres at any level phone, or give any oral or written message, to implement the free and competitive election in your township?" no interviewee answered "yes"; and all twenty-one interviewees answered "no." In the sixty-one interviews with cadres, in answer to the question "did any ordinary citizens ask you by phone, or through any oral or written message, to implement the free and competitive elections in the township?" no interviewee answered "yes," and all sixty-one interviewees answered "no."

¹⁹⁷ See Chapter 3 for the restrictions on candidacy, setbacks in development, and the reversal of competition.

the reform experiments--to implement semi-competitive elections for governor of Baoshi township and for party secretary of Xinqiao township--in order to win back the people's trust in and support for the township authorities.”¹⁹⁸

Madame Zhang's account confirms a story told by an earlier interviewee in the county. In an interview in September 2001, in Shizhong county, a county vice-governor told the author that after the corruption cases in Xinqiao and Baoshi townships were revealed, the peasants reacted strongly against the township cadres. The peasants refused to pay their taxes and refused to make any contributions to projects initiated by the township authorities. The authorities in these two townships could hardly do their jobs.¹⁹⁹ The county party committee envisaged that, through the implementation of the semi-competitive elections, the peasants would become involved in choosing the leadership and therefore would accept a new leadership elected through more direct and/or indirect peasant participation.

In Bazhong prefecture, a similar political crisis was caused by financial problems at the township level that seemed to be the driving force behind the semi-competitive elections. Cadres in Bazhong prefecture complained fiercely--albeit hopelessly--about the huge amount of debt of the township authorities and the villages.²⁰⁰ According to an account published in a magazine issued by the prefecture authority, in one region within the prefecture, the township debt to peasants amounted to 112 percent of the township revenues in 2000.²⁰¹ According to the same report, “since village authorities and township authorities never repaid the debt, the authorities were losing respect. The peasants considered the township authorities liars. Creditors came everyday demanding payments. The cadres in the townships and villages were also frustrated: they did not receive their salaries for months, and they could not focus on

¹⁹⁸ Based on author's interview. Also see Lianjiang Li, “The Politics of Introducing Direct Township Elections in China,” *The China Quarterly*, No.171 (Sept.2002), p.710.

¹⁹⁹ Based on author's interview.

²⁰⁰ Based on author's interviews in Bazhong prefecture.

²⁰¹ Wen Wu, “Dui tiexi pian qu xiangcun zhaiwu qingkuang de diaocha ji sikao” (Investigation and Reflection on the Rural Authorities' Debts in Tiexi Region), *Jinri bazhong* (Today's Bazhong), No. 12 (2001), p.42.

their jobs because they were constantly harassed by creditors. Many cadres quit their jobs and migrated to other regions.”²⁰²

In response to the problems caused by the grave financial crisis, the Bazhong prefecture authority saw the township semi-competitive elections as a way of solving the problems. As stated in party archival material,²⁰³ the prefecture and county authorities hoped that the competitive elections would produce township cadres who were capable of handling the problems, who were trusted by the peasants, and who were willing to work in the rural areas.

In Nanbu county, the township semi-competitive elections seemed to result from two pressures. One was that the incidence of peasant protest against township cadres had increased in 1990s. Cadres in the county reported that groups of peasants went to the higher levels complaining of the misery imposed on them by the township cadres. In some cases, the peasants organized sit-ins in front of the county party committee office building, demanding that the county authorities dismiss some of the township cadres.²⁰⁴ Peasant resentment also reached above the county level. In 1996, the township people’s congresses, which typically rubber-stamped the township cadres nominated by the county, rejected four out of the fourteen candidates nominated by the county party committee. This behavior was unprecedented.²⁰⁵ Semi-competitive elections in which the peasants and ordinary cadres had a greater say in the appointment of the major township cadres were seen as a way to ease these resentments.

The other driving force behind the elections was to increase the township authorities’ ability to raise extra-budgetary funds for investment. Raising

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ “Xiangcun huanjie xuanju gongzuo zongjie” (Summary of the Election Work in the Rural Areas), by the Bazhong prefecture party committee, Dec.20, 2001.

²⁰⁴ Based on the author’s interviews in Nanbu county. Detailed information on the dates, frequency, and scale of the complaints and demonstrations was not provided.

²⁰⁵ Based on the author’s interview.

extra-budgetary funds was imperative, especially in the case of major investment projects launched by the county authority. On October 6, 1997, the Nanbu county authority had decided to build a power station. The costs were estimated to amount to 650 million RMB, which was an enormous sum for a county in western China. The county authority apparently did not have sufficient resources for the project. Meanwhile, since this was not a project included on the state economic development plan, there was no chance of receiving support from the higher levels. The authority thus had to rely on “internal” resources, i.e., strict quotas on the townships to mobilize extra-budgetary funds for the project. The county party secretary interpreted the situation in the following way: “In Nanbu county, economic life in the 1990s changed a lot. The market has been playing an increasing role. Under this circumstance, the township authorities need cadres with new talents, new mindsets, and new skills to solve the problems facing us.”²⁰⁶ The semi-competitive elections fit well with these aims. This was confirmed by an interview with the vice-director of the Organization Department of the Nanbu county party committee. “With the change in economic life, cadres appointed in the traditional way could not accommodate the new situation. They generally were too old, and with old mentalities; they typically were good at accumulating *guanxi* (connections) with higher-ranking officials rather than at dealing with the market. Moreover, promotion based on *guanxi* negatively affected the initiative of other cadres.”²⁰⁷ Therefore, it was time to change the way of appointing cadres. And the township semi-competitive elections were considered a viable alternative.

In Ya’an prefecture, the motivation for increasing the township authorities’ ability to raise extra-budgetary funds was even more evident, because there was little resentment from the peasants as there was in the other sites and raising extra-budgetary funds seemed to be the sole driving force behind the elections.

²⁰⁶ “Fu Wenchao tongzhi zai quanxian xiangzhen huanjie xuanju gongzuo huiyi shang de jianghua” (Comrade Fu Wenchao’s Speech at the Meeting on Township Election Work), printed by the General Office of the Nanbu county party committee, October 26, 1998.

²⁰⁷ Based on the author’s interview.

The initiator of the reform project—Mr. Wei Hong, then party secretary of Ya'an prefecture party committee—explained: “We expected that the ordinary citizens’ political enthusiasm and participation brought about by the reform (of competitive elections in the townships) would engender positive achievements for (economic and social) development in the rural areas, which is what the party has been hoping for for years.”²⁰⁸

One of the top priorities in Ya'an prefecture was to greatly improve the infrastructure in the rural areas. However, in Ya'an prefecture, the township, county, and prefecture authorities were all short of resources. Unless officials could mobilize extra-resources from outside of the party-state structure, there was no hope of achieving the goal of rapid infrastructural development. However, the leadership appointed by the higher levels did not have any initiative to raise funds. Those in other positions, who would have an initiative, had little chance of being promoted due to the closed nature of the cadre appointments. Moreover, the authorities were alienated from the citizens. Therefore, both in Ya'an prefecture and partly in Nanbu county, ambitious investment projects, confronted with the dearth of financing, drove county and prefecture authorities to implement township semi-competitive elections in order to involve the citizens both in the process and in the contribution of resources.²⁰⁹

To attract resources from the private sector or to fight against the corruption that would impede the inflow of resources was also one of the strong drivers behind implementing the semi-competitive election in Xinqiao and Baoshi townships in 1998.

²⁰⁸ Propaganda Department of Ya'an Prefecture Party Committee, “Wei Hong tongzhi zai quanshi xiangcun huanjie gongtui gongxuan xinwen xuanchuan gongzuo huiyi shang de jianghua” (Comrade Wei Hong’s Speech at the Meeting of News Reporting Works on Competitive Elections in the Rural Areas), November 19, 2001.

²⁰⁹ During my fieldwork, I could not find the exact mechanism by which the cadres who emerged from the semi-competitive elections were able to obtain extra resources from the peasants. This is an intriguing aspect of the township semi-competitive elections. I provide the account on the link between the semi-competitive elections and obtaining extra funds with hesitation because of a lack of knowledge about how it operated exactly. Nevertheless, since the party archives frequently refer to it and the interviewed cadres often mentioned it, I find it difficult to neglect this link. I believe it merits deeper empirical work.

As Madame Zhang Jinming said:

“Two specific corruption cases were disclosed in the townships. A Japanese investor wished to start an investment project in the two townships. He transferred some money to the township authorities to prepare the basic infrastructure. But the money was embezzled. Nothing was done for the project. The Japanese investor was very angry and refused to make any further investment there. I thought about the grave situation. I believed that there must be some reform of the cadre appointment system that can place honest people in decision-making positions and to maintain their integrity. We need well-behaved cadres to nurture an environment conducive to attracting investment.”

The interdependence of the lack of available resources and the semi-competitive elections was also underscored in another interview. According to local cadres, the immediate result of the semi-competitive elections in Baoshi township in 1998 was that the cadres enjoyed the peasants’ full cooperation in collecting taxes. When conditions improved, future semi-free elections were more constrained. We can argue that in 2001, when a new round of elections took place, the deep crisis was partially relieved, leading the county authority to implement the township semi-competitive elections with less intensity and openness.

A similar noteworthy case occurred in Shenzhen prefecture in Guangdong province. A township semi-competitive election was initiated in 1998 in the prefecture but it was halted in 2001. The author’s interviews in Shenzhen found that the semi-competitive election in Dapeng township within the prefecture was not aimed at any concrete problems.²¹⁰ It was, according to local cadres and citizens, more like a political show. Therefore, when the issue of township semi-competitive elections

²¹⁰ Based on the author’s interviews in Shenzhen. In Shenzhen, the author did not hear any reports of peasant demonstrations, or other forms of complaints about the township authorities, etc. The township authorities in this prefecture not only did not collect taxes from the peasants, but instead gave subsidies to most of the peasants from the huge township revenues derived from the industrial and commercial activities operating within the township. However, the author does not mean to imply that no problems existed in Dapeng township. Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of the operations of the township authority, there was at that time no particular problem that needed to be solved through competitive elections.

became controversial (as embodied in Document No.12),²¹¹ the local cadres disbanded the new practice. In other words, in places where no crisis emerged, when the township semi-competitive elections were vulnerable to critique, they were discontinued.

In contrast, Sichuan province, even when facing the same Document No. 12 issued by the central authority to discourage the implementation of the township semi-competitive elections, not only did not halt the reform initiated in the mid-1990s, but instead greatly escalated the scope of the township elections. The escalation, according to cadres at the provincial level, was basically due to the fact that tensions between township authorities and residents were much greater in Sichuan than in other provinces. Implementation of the semi-competitive elections at the township level was badly needed, even though it remained controversial among cadres at the central level.²¹² Indeed, townships in Sichuan faced a very deep crisis: the county and township authorities had been accumulating huge deficits²¹³ the peasants had increasingly protested against the authorities in one way or the other;²¹⁴ and both peasants and cadres had been yearning for investment and rapid economic development.²¹⁵ All of these factors, among others, lay bare and exasperated the inefficiencies of the township authorities, therefore providing a foundation for a change with respect to the township semi-competitive elections in Sichuan.

²¹¹ As mentioned above, this document was issued by the center in order to restrict the development of township competitive elections.

²¹² Based on the author's interview. In Autumn 2001, the Sichuan provincial party committee organized a special meeting to discuss the issue of the forthcoming township elections at the end of the year. The meeting concluded with the issuance of a document that urged each county within the province (except for those in ethnic minority regions) to select at least one-third of its townships to implement semi-competitive elections.

²¹³ There are no official statistics on the deficits in the localities, since according to Chinese regulations the localities are not allowed to cover their expenditures with deficits. However, the deficits were de facto constantly used by localities. Numerous reports directly told or indirectly hinted to the public about the existence of huge deficits accumulated by the localities. But no one is sure about the exact picture. However, data obtained during fieldwork for the author's joint project with Maria Csanadi, "A Comparative Study on the Transformation of the Party-state at the County and Prefecture Levels in China," shows that the financial crises in the rural areas of Sichuan were more grave than they were in the other two provinces—Shanxi and Jiangsu.

²¹⁴ In all of the counties and prefectures the author visited, there were cases of peasants suing the township authorities. Another form of protest was the constant migration of peasants, especially the younger generations, to the urban areas or to other provinces.

²¹⁵ This was apparent during most of the interviews.

Actually, the interview findings seem to confirm the findings from large N studies. As we have seen in Section 4.1, in economically more-developed regions, there were fewer cases of semi-competitive elections and/or the competitiveness of such elections was less intense. In the economically less-developed places, there were more cases of semi-competitive elections, and/or the competitiveness of the elections was greater.

In fact, in Sichuan province, within Chengdu prefecture, capital of the province,²¹⁶ the township and county authorities were facing many fewer difficulties in raising revenues to cover their expenditures. The peasants also had more chances to make a living due to the economic boom in and close to the provincial capital. As a consequence, tensions in the areas near Chengdu and in some other prosperous cities were less than those in the remote and relatively underdeveloped areas. In such an environment, the higher authorities did not bother too much to monitor the township cadres' behavior. This picture matches the picture that a much larger proportion of the townships in remote and relatively underdeveloped prefectures implemented semi-competitive elections and a much smaller proportion of townships in Chengdu and similarly prosperous prefectures implemented the reforms.²¹⁷ In other words, the uneven regional distribution of crises and tensions was parallel to the uneven regional distribution of the township semi-competitive elections.

4.3 How social problems and economic underdevelopment translate into election reform

The conducting of elections is a political decision. Due to the fact that it is the party apparatus at the different levels that deals with and thus is sensitive to the

²¹⁶ The economically most prosperous area in the province.

²¹⁷ Ya'an prefecture and Bazhong prefecture where 100 percent of the townships had implemented semi-competitive elections happened to be in the relatively underdeveloped regions in Sichuan. Chengdu prefecture where probably less than 10 percent of the townships had implemented semi-competitive elections was the most prosperous region in the province. However, quantitative analysis on the overall picture across the province has not been conducted due to the lack of data.

political tensions and social problems (see Chapter 3 and M. Csanadi, 2006), the key actor to translate the local social and economic problems into a political decision is the county or prefecture party secretary who is in charge of the nomenklatura issue over the township leadership positions.

Fieldwork reveals that initiating a cautious electoral reform is considered by the key actor to be a means of being promoted—or at least of staying out of trouble caused by social tensions. It is known to all, and confirmed by my interviews with party secretaries, mayors, and cadres working in the organization departments of the party committees, that the current criteria for promoting a cadre in China is basically composed of two important elements: his/her performance with respect to economic growth, and his/her performance with respect to maintaining social and political stability.

Different regions have different portfolios of resources, which endow different tools for local leaders to maximize their performance in the eyes of the higher authorities. In economically developed regions, the local authorities have sufficient revenue to generate investment, especially in infrastructure and city renovations that not only stimulates economic growth, but also makes the economic achievements of the particular local leaders even more apparent to the eyes of visiting national leaders. These regions are usually coastal regions with better access to FDI, resulting from their better geographical accessibility to international economic activities and their tradition of trading with the outside world over the past two centuries. In these regions, major leaders focus on selecting investment projects and attracting FDI in order to increase their opportunities of being promoted.

However, in economically underdeveloped regions, local finance is usually in deficit. Even with the help of fiscal transfers from the upper levels, the local authorities can hardly ensure such basic expenditures as salaries to governmental and party staff, not to mention having sufficient resources to renovate cities and/or carry

out infrastructural investment projects. To promote economic development, cadres in the underdeveloped areas have to rely on the willing contributions of the residents or from non-party actors or those who are not part of the state hierarchy. In some cases, initiating political restructuring is the only means available to the local leaders to increase their revenue-generating capacity and thus to improve their achievements in economic development.

Moreover, in economically underdeveloped regions, tensions between local residents and the authorities are greater due to a number of reasons. For example, residents are dissatisfied because the local authorities can hardly provide any public goods. Also, because the local residents do not have many opportunities to increase their economic welfare through initiating new businesses, they are more sensitive to the local authorities' efforts to extract resources from them. Similar amounts of taxes and levies imposed on residents in different regions result in different reactions. In the economically developed regions, residents hardly care about such extractions because the local levies typically constitute only a small share of their income. But in less-developed regions, the residents are highly dissatisfied and may even resist imposition of the taxes and levies. Similarly, the same amount of resources involved in the local cadres' embezzlement and/or other forms of corruption cause different reactions in different regions. In economically more-developed regions, the residents focus on their own business opportunities more than on the corruption of local cadres. In less-developed regions, because the residents do not have many opportunities to develop their own businesses, they generally focus on whether the cadres are spending appropriately. In other words, the residents' resentment toward the local authorities in economically less-developed regions is in general higher than it is in the more-developed regions. Tensions are higher. Those cadres who lack economic resources have to seek other ways, e.g., political restructuring, to ease the tensions.

Not all cadres consider political restructuring as a means of mobilizing economic resources out of the party-state hierarchy and/or of maintaining social and political

stability under the circumstances of high tensions. Moreover, different local leaders have different understandings of the concept of political restructuring. To maintain stability, some tend to frequently resort to the police, whereas others might think about increasing participation and transparency in the political process. By political restructuring, some might think of increasing party and state intervention into the economic and social lives of the residents, whereas others might resort to decreasing party and state responsibility in managing economic and social affairs. Thus, in less-developed regions, most cadres who are motivated to seek promotions are inclined to carry out political change. But not all cadres can or will take such action. Actually, only those cadres with broader horizons, visions, and imaginations are willing to take the initiative to increase participation and transparency. Naturally, there are few such cadres.

Those few who do undertake electoral reforms have to make accurate calculations about the costs and benefits of such initiatives. Reform of the electoral procedures may or may not lead to social and political stability. But reform of the electoral procedures is inescapably a deviation from existing nomenklatura practices, which may lead to objections from within the party and state apparatus on the grounds of ideology and/or on the pragmatic grounds of preserving the monopoly power of the party. It is also a reform that will reduce the personal power of the reformers themselves.²¹⁸ Only in cases where the expected benefit from reforming the electoral procedures is greater than the cost of introducing such reforms will the party officials in charge of nomenklatura take the initiative to introduce semi-competitive elections.

This explains why the pilot townships selected by the county or prefecture party secretary to implement semi-competitive elections are usually relatively less populated, less tense, and more isolated townships in certain counties. The less populated townships are easier to manage, especially if things get out of control. Fewer tensions means there is a smaller risk of the residents becoming agitated, so as

²¹⁸ Chapter 5 will analyze this in more detail.

to ensure that the semi-competitive elections do not increase tensions. The relative isolation of the test sites decreases the chances of the elections being publicized in case there are unfavorable outcomes.

The cautious political calculations also explain why the electoral reforms have been moderate. Radical changes in the election procedures would cause objections from the initiator's colleagues and superiors. Mild changes are at least tolerated, if not appreciated, by most of the stakeholders in the system. For example, the most radical Buyun case where the electoral college did not include county officials but included all the adult residents in the township in 1998 was highly acclaimed by most mass media and academia, but it also invited criticism from a few newspapers.²¹⁹ Most mild cases in which some county officials and only a proportion of the local residents participate in the nomination process do not encounter any objections or criticism.

Reform also may imply a decrease in the personal power of the promoter.²²⁰ However, if he/she wins more promotion opportunities by improving political and social stability through introducing the township semi-competitive elections, he/she will ultimately benefit. Thus an old party secretary who has little chance of being promoted simply because of age usually would have little incentive to carry out the reform. But those relatively young and ambitious officials²²¹ with a higher possibility of being promoted are more likely to take the initiative. They engage in such actions based on a trade-off: the expectation of obtaining more power by sacrificing some power in their current position. In exchange for decreasing his/her power, he/she expects to obtain more power in the near future after being promoted to a higher level. Thus it is not accidental that in addition to being more flexible and

²¹⁹ Cha Qingjiu (查清久), "Democracy is Not Allowed to Surpass the Laws (民主不允许超越法律)," *Fazhi ribao* (法制日报), January 15, 1999. The article accused the Buyun township election reform of violating the Chinese Constitution, which stipulates that a township mayor should be elected by the township people's congress.

²²⁰ For the election reform's effects in diluting the power of the county party secretary, see Chapter 5 for a related analysis.

²²¹ Age has been an absolute and objective standard in the political life of Chinese officials since the 1990s. At the county and prefecture levels, those who are over 55 of age have no chance of being promoted, since, on the one hand, they must retire by age 60, and, on the other hand, the tenure is typically five years. At the provincial level, the age limit for promotion is 60. At the Politburo and State Council levels, the mandatory retirement age is 65.

receptive to possible changes in general, the initiators of the township semi-competitive elections were far younger than the average age of cadres at the same rank. Table 17 shows the ages of the initiators in those most widely discussed cases when they introduced the reform, and the average ages of county and prefecture party secretaries in general.

Table 17. Initiators' Ages and the Average Ages of County and Prefecture Party Secretaries

	Party secretary	Average Age*	Individual's Age	Location	Year	Individual Initiator
Level	County	50	41	Sichuan	1998	Zhang Jinming ²²² 张锦明
			43	Sichuan	1998	Meng Guang'an ²²³ 孟光安
			41	Yunnan	2004	Zhang Biwei ²²⁴ 张碧伟
			45	Hubei	2002	Cao Liming ²²⁵ 曹立明
			41	Guangdong	1998	Qiu Qiuhua ²²⁶ 邱秋华
	Prefecture	55	47	Sichuan	2001	Wei Hong ²²⁷ 魏宏
			46	Jiangsu	2003	Qiu He ²²⁸ 仇和
			53	Yunnan	2005	Luo Chongmin ²²⁹ 罗崇敏

Note: *The average ages are estimated by the author. There are no public data on the average ages of county and prefecture party secretaries. The Organization Department of the Central Committee of the CCP publicizes related statistics irregularly. For example, in the *People's Daily* of March 6, 2004, the Organization Department released some statistics on the average age of the county and prefecture leadership. The county and prefecture leadership consists of not only county and prefecture party secretaries but also officials within both the party and the state apparatus. The party secretary is usually, though not necessarily, the most senior among the members of the leadership. The average age of the county leadership in 2004 was 43.1; around 20 percent of the members of the leadership were over age 50. The average age of the prefecture leadership in 2004

²²² Initiator of the Buyun township (步云乡) semi-competitive elections in Shizhong county (市中区), Suining prefecture (遂宁市), Sichuan province in 1998. The Buyun case is one of the first two cases in China in which all adult township residents cast votes to elect the township mayor on a competitive basis.

²²³ Initiator of the Nancheng township (南城乡) semi-competitive elections in Qingshen county (青神县), Meishan prefecture (眉山市), Sichuan province in 1998. In addition to Buyun, the Nancheng case was the other first case in China in which all adult township residents cast votes to elect the township mayor on a competitive basis.

²²⁴ Initiator of the semi-competitive elections in all townships in Shiping county (石屏县), Honghe prefecture (红河州), Yunnan province in 2004. The Shiping case was the first case in Yunnan province, as well as the first case in China in which all townships in the county carried out semi-competitive elections in which all residents cast votes.

²²⁵ Initiator of the first township semi-competitive election (湖北省京山县杨集镇) in Hubei province.

²²⁶ Initiator of the first township semi-competitive election in (广东省深圳市大鹏镇) Guangdong province. Mr. Qiu was then head of the Organization Department of the county party committee.

²²⁷ Initiator of the first case in China in which all the townships within a prefecture (四川省雅安市) carried out semi-competitive elections.

²²⁸ Initiator of the first case of township semi-competitive elections (江苏省宿迁市) in Jiangsu province.

²²⁹ Initiator of the first case in which all townships within a prefecture (云南省红河州) carried out semi-competitive elections in Yunnan province.

was 49.1; around 25 percent of the members of the leadership were over age 55. Usually, if not always, the party secretaries are the most senior people in the leadership.

To be sure, as a deliberated nomenklatura policy of the party, the average age of the leadership has been declining since the 1990s. The average age in the mid-2000s is two to three years younger than that it was in the late 1990s. The average age in this project was from the late 1990s.

Interestingly, most of the initiators of the widely discussed cases were promoted a few years after they introduced the semi-competitive township elections, whereas their colleagues stayed in the same positions or in other positions at the same levels. Table 18 indicates the promotions of the initiators.

Table 18. Career Development of the Initiators after Introducing New Election Practices

	Position when introducing the reform	Positions to which they were promoted
Zhang Jinming	County party secretary	Prefecture vice-governor; then head of the Organization Department, prefecture party committee; then prefecture vice-party secretary
Meng Guang'an	County party secretary	Prefecture vice-governor
Cao Liming	County party secretary	Prefecture vice-governor; then prefecture party secretary
Qiu Qihua	Head of the Organization Department, county party committee	County vice-party secretary
Wei Hong	Prefecture party secretary	Head of the Organization Department, provincial party committee
Qiu He	Prefecture party secretary	Provincial vice-governor

Note: Initiators Zhang Biwei and Luo Chongmin in Yunnan province stayed in the same position, probably because 2006 is too close to 2004 and 2005 when they first introduced the new election practices. It takes time for the initiative to be appreciated by the higher levels within the province.

For some party secretaries, staying longer in one's current position is a sufficient incentive for initiating a semi-competitive election. In places where social and political stability are threatened due to the people's strong resentment against the local authorities, party leaders might be dismissed if political stability collapses. They are thus pressured to try alternative measures to preserve social and political order. A

semi-competitive election may be a viable policy option.

The introduction of semi-competitive elections also helps the party officials shift responsibility. With more and more corruption and other wrongdoings being uncovered by the media and the higher authorities, local party secretaries are increasingly being held responsible for appointing corrupt officials or wrongdoers. Since the late 1990s, more and more provinces have developed regulations to punish party officials who have recommended (nominated) cadres who are corrupt or commit grave errors.²³⁰ The regulations were a response to the people's resentment of the increasing number of corruption cases and wrongdoings by local state and party officials. By introducing the semi-competitive elections, the county party secretary can escape blame by arguing that the cadres were selected by the local officials and residents through an open process. By shifting responsibility, the officials can either stay longer in their current positions or even be promoted. Here again, this logic is likely to be more prevalent in areas where social tensions are high and resources are scarce.

4.4 The structure under which local party officials make self-interested calculations

As analyzed above, the township semi-competitive elections were introduced by party secretaries in the relatively poor regions. Compared to the party officials in the more affluent regions, these party officials have fewer resources to promote economic development. Meanwhile, they have greater trouble to ensure social and political stability, which are the two basic criteria in contemporary China upon which officials are promoted or can stay longer in their current positions of power. The

²³⁰ See "Yong ren shicha zhui jiu tuijianzhe de zeren" (Holding Responsible Those who Recommend the Wrong Cadres), *Guangzhou Daily*, March 19, 2004.

semi-competitive elections are seen as an instrument for local officials to mobilize resources within and outside the party-state power network and to ease the tensions between the local authority and the people.

Regional disparities and the resulting regional differences in financing the operations of local state and party organizations for the provision of public goods and for extracting resources from the people beyond the uniform taxation, etc, are the specific conditions leading to an official's decision to introduce semi-competitive elections. As long as the regional disparities persist and deepen, pressures on the local party secretaries to introduce semi-competitive elections will grow. Unfortunately, or fortunately, it is just this case in China.

4.4.1 Major regional differences prevail while all regions share the same responsibilities

The regional economic disparities are enormous and persistent in China. Among others, the GDP per capita in different provinces and different prefectures clearly shows the major differences among regions. Table 19 reveals the GDP and GDP per capita in various provinces in 2004. While the GDP per capita in Guizhou was 4,215 Chinese yuan, the GDP per capita in Shanghai was 55,307 Chinese yuan, a tenfold difference. Figure 6 shows the differences in GDP per capita among prefectures in 2000.

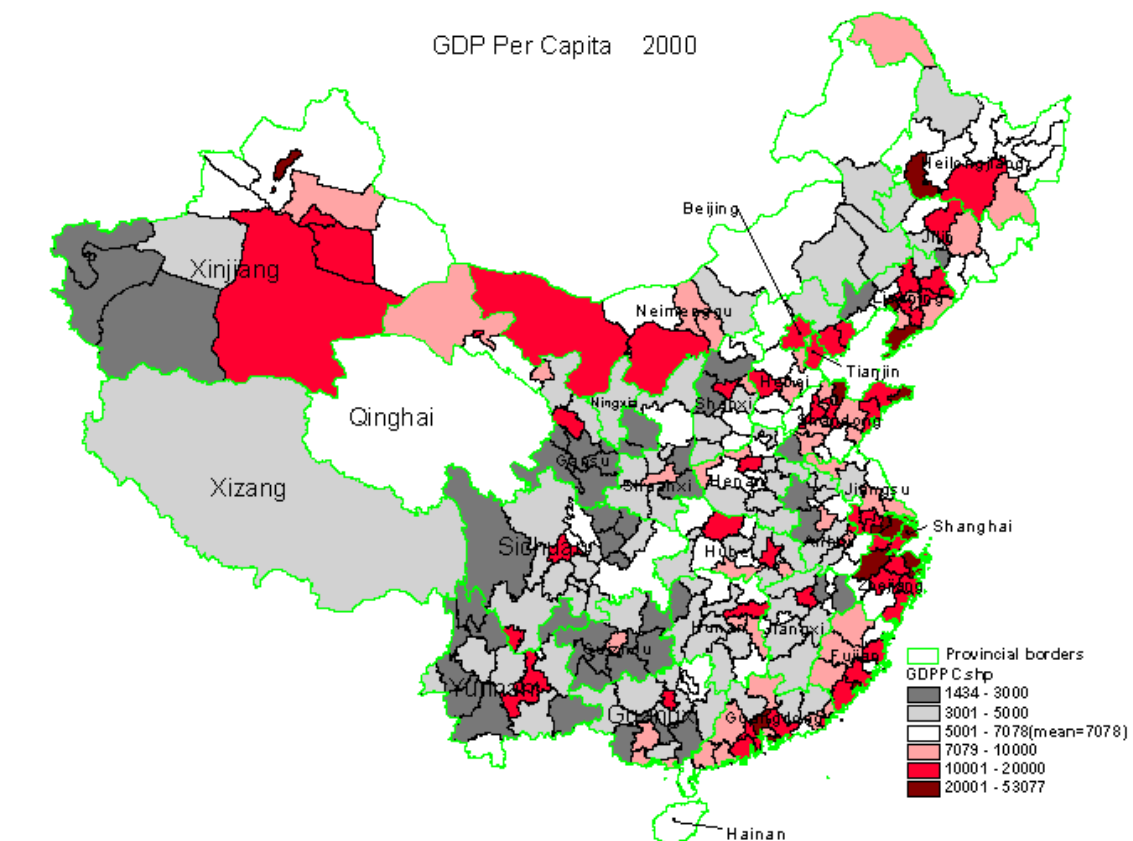
Table 19. Provincial GDP and GDP per capita in 2004

Province	Gross Regional Product (million Chinese yuan)	Per Capita Gross Regional Product (yuan/person)	Provinces	Gross Regional Product (million Chinese yuan)	Per Capita Gross Regional Product (yuan/person)
Beijing	4283.31	37058	Henan	8815.09	9470
Tianjin	2931.88	31550	Hubei	6309.92	10500
Hebei	8768.79	12918	Hunan	5612.26	9117
Shanxi	3042.41	9150	Guangdong	16039.46	19707
Inner	2712.08	11305	Guangxi	3320.10	7196

Mongolia					
			Hainan	769.36	9450
Liaoning	6872.65	16297			
Jilin	2958.21	10932	Chongqing	2665.39	9608
	5303.00	13897	Sichuan	6556.01	8113
Heilongjiang			Guizhou	1591.90	4215
Shanghai	7450.27	55307	Yunnan	2959.48	6733
Jiangsu	15403.16	20705	Tibet	211.54	7779
Zhejiang	11243.00	23942			
Anhui	4812.68	7768	Shaanxi	2883.51	7757
Fujian	6053.14	17218	Gansu	1558.93	5970
Jiangxi	3495.94	8189	Qinghai	465.73	8606
Shandong	15490.73	16925	Ningxia	460.35	7880
			Xinjiang	2200.15	11199

Note: Data are available on the National Statistical Bureau's Web site. See <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2005/html/C0311e.htm>

Figure 6. Differences in GDP per capita among prefectures in 2000



Note: The figure was drawn by Professor Carsten Herrmann-Pillath and his research team at the University of Witten/Herdecke on the basis of data issued by the Chinese National Statistical Bureau. See

<http://wga.dmz.uni-wh.de/wiwi/file/gdppc00pref/gdppc.gif>

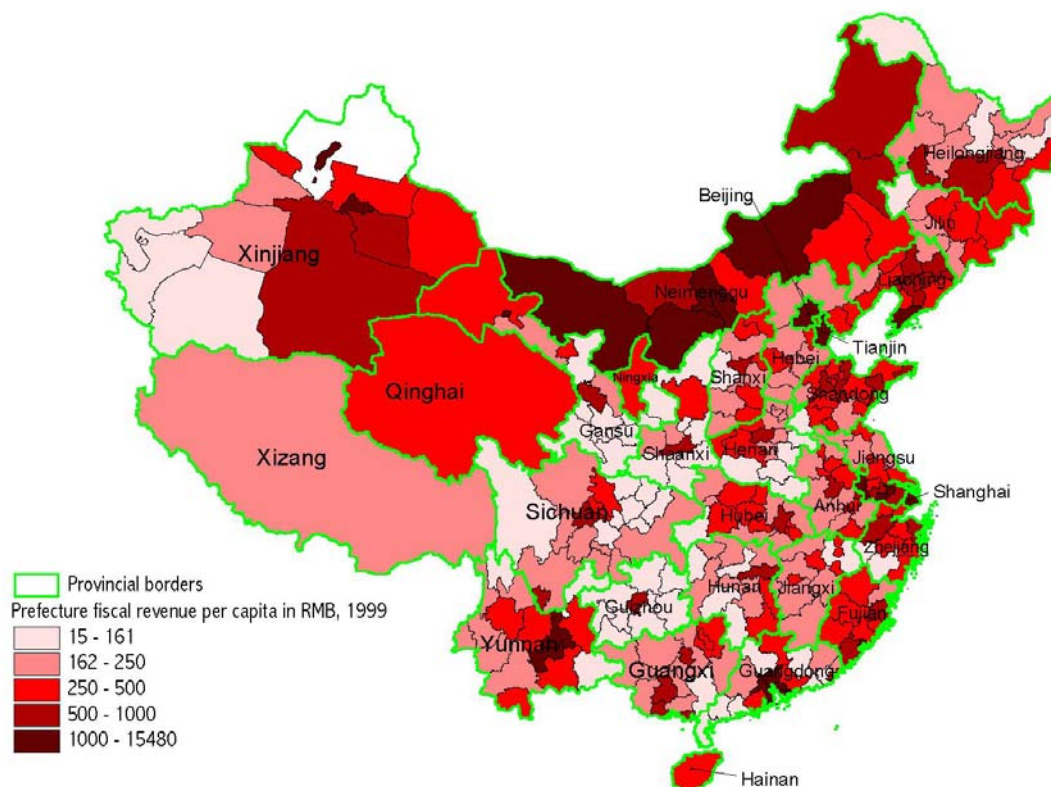
The regions (provinces, prefectures, counties, and townships) not only differ in terms of GDP per capita. They also differ in terms of industrialization, urbanization, etc. as well. These differences result in, among other things, different financial capacities in different localities. Figure 7 shows the differences in fiscal revenue per capita among the provinces in 1999. Figure 8 shows the differences in fiscal revenue per capita among the prefectures in 1999. Both these differences are striking, with the differences among the prefectures greater than the differences among the provinces.

Figure 7. Differences in fiscal revenue among provinces in 1999 (yuan)



<http://wga.dmz.uni-wh.de/wiwi/file/fisrevpc99prov/r32.jpg>

Figure 8. Differences in fiscal revenue among prefectures in 1999 (yuan)



<http://wga.dmz.uni-wh.de/wiwi/file/fisrevpc99pref/p11.jpg>

From the above, we can see that the financial capacity varies enormously among the different regions in China. Taking the provinces as a comparison, we see that the province with the most fiscal revenue has nearly ten times the amount of fiscal revenue than the province with the least fiscal revenue (Figure 7). Taking the prefectures as a comparison, we see that the prefecture with the most revenue has almost 100 times more revenue than the prefecture with the least fiscal revenue (Figure 8). Although we do not have figures and tables for the differences among counties and townships, it is well known that the differences among counties and townships are much greater than the differences among prefectures and provinces.

However, each region (province, prefecture, county, and/or township) has the same responsibility. Among others, each authority must pay a standard salary to all governmental staff (including school teachers whose salaries are covered by the state budget). In China, it is not the central authority that pays all governmental staff. Rather, it is each local authority that pays the governmental staff at that particular authority at a standard wage rate settled by the central authority (Christine Wong).²³¹ Under the circumstance of the vast differences in financial capacity, there is no wonder that in many regions governmental officials are inadequately paid. No official data are available about the financial difficulties that local authorities are encountering in China. Furthermore, officially, the local authorities are not allowed to have deficits. But according to investigation conducted by one of the central authority's think-tanks—the Development Research Center under the State Council--35.6 percent of the counties have accumulated major deficits (Li Peng, 2004). Many townships have accumulated huge deficits as well.²³²

Due to the large differences in financial capacity, the decision-makers in the different regions cannot resort to the same economic instruments to promote economic development. Decision-makers in the rich regions have many more economic resources at their disposal, whereas those in the poor regions hardly have any surplus economic resources. Second, the decision-makers in the different regions face different pressures to extract resources from the local residents beyond the official budgetary practices. Those in the rich regions do not need to extract extra-budgetary and/or off-budgetary revenue from the local residents,²³³ whereas those in the poor regions rely heavily on extra- and off-budgetary revenues extracted from the local

²³¹ Christine Wong and Deepak Bhattasali, *Zhongguo guojia fazhan yu difang caizheng* (China: National Development and Sub-national Finance) (Beijing: CITIC Publishing House, 2003). Intergovernmental fiscal relations are regarded as financial federalism. See Yingyi Qian and Gerard Roland, "Federalism and the Soft Budget Constraint," *American Economic Review* (October 1997).

²³² Li Peng, "Zhongguo difang zhengfu zhaiwu fengxian chengwei touhao weixie chuyu shikong bianyuan" (Local Governments' Debts Become Top Threat, Almost Out of Control), Xinhua News Agency, February 23, 2004.

²³³ My interviews with officials and businessmen in Wuxi prefecture, Jiangsu province, and Wenzhou prefecture, Zhejiang province, reveal that local governments not only implement the tax law in a very loose way but also return some of the taxes to the firms.

residents, sometimes through illegal means.²³⁴ Third, the position of a given administrative unit affects its capacity to extract resources from higher levels. Fourth, the marginal utility of the same amount of money extracted by local authorities in different regions is different to local residents. Whereas, say, 100 Chinese yuan is nothing to residents in rich regions, the same 100 Chinese yuan may be one-fourth of a resident's annual income in the very poor regions. In other words, the authorities in the poor regions are under more pressure to obtain resources through unwarranted ways from people who are more sensitive to extractions. Tensions in such regions are therefore higher than those in the relatively rich regions. For the decision-makers, in particular the party secretaries, in the relatively poor and problematic regions who wish to stay longer in their current positions or even to be promoted, it becomes an increasingly appealing strategy to introduce semi-competitive elections as a political rather than as a economic instrument to ease tensions and to activate economic cooperation between the authority and the local people.

4.4.2 Reasons for the persistence of the regional differences

There are a number of reasons for the regional disparities. As a vast land, historically modern China has never had equal development among its different regions since the mid-nineteenth century. Today's regional disparities are partly a continuation of the unequal development over the past 170 years. Moreover, the regional disparities have been exacerbated by a number of institutional arrangements under socialism since 1949. Those institutional arrangements exacerbating the regional disparities include, but are not limited to, the following factors:

- 1) The widening gap between the urban and rural areas. As any other developing country, China has a dual economy in which a modern urban sector is embedded in a

²³⁴ Many local governments extract resources from residents illegally. See "Urgent Directive on Prohibiting Collecting Illegal Taxes and Fees on Peasants," issued by the Ministry of Agriculture on July 6, 2004.

traditional rural agricultural sector (W.A. Lewis, 1979).²³⁵ There is a widening gap between the urban and rural areas. However, the gap was exacerbated by the Stalinist planned economy in which resources were deliberately shifted to the urban areas through forced deployment (state procurement). By artificially cutting the prices of agricultural products and raising the prices of industrial products (the price scissors), by forcefully transporting agricultural products to the urban areas, and by other accompanying measures (*hukou*, the industrial safety net, and health care), industries have been developed in the urban areas at the expense of stagnation and recession in the rural areas. The developed urban areas are surrounded by vast, under-developed rural areas (Zhao Hailin, 2006).²³⁶ After the implementation of the reform and opening policy in the late 1970s, the gap between the urban and rural areas has widened. On the one hand, the political and administrative institutions (*hukou*, state procurement, etc.) that divide the urban and rural areas persisted. On the other hand, the urban areas gained great momentum to develop as a consequence of the reform and opening policy. Whereas the coastal provinces developed quickly, central and western China are considered by the party and state as agricultural areas whose mission is to provide sufficient grain and other agricultural products to the industrial coastal provinces. These regions have been developing much more slowly (Shi Yishao, 2006²³⁷; Yang Dali, 1997²³⁸).

2) The regions vary in terms of their access to FDI and the world market. FDI and access to the world market have been one of the major momentums behind the economic development in China. Those regions with more FDI and better access to the world market have developed much more rapidly than those regions without such access. However, not all regions are equally successful in attracting FDI or have equal access to the world market. The coastal provinces, because of their advantageous

²³⁵ W. A. Lewis, "The Dual Economy Revisited," Manchester School (1979).

²³⁶ Zhao Hailin, "Zhongguo nongmin de shengcun he renquan zhuangkuang" (Chinese Peasants' Living Conditions and the Human Rights Situation), in *Bright Observation*, July 11, 2006, available at <http://www.chinaelections.org/NewsInfo.asp?NewsID=93036>

²³⁷ Shi Yishao, "Chengxiang yitihua de lilun yu shijian: Huimou yu pingxi" (Reviewing Urban-Rural Integration), *Journal of City Planning* (2006).

²³⁸ Yang Dali, *Beyond Beijing: Liberalization and the Regions in China* (London: Routledge, 1997).

geographical locations, have much better access to the world market than the hinterland provinces. Also, because the coastal provinces are home to most overseas Chinese and the bulk of FDI in China consists of investment from overseas Chinese firms, the coastal provinces receive far more FDI than the other parts of China. The differences in access to FDI and access to the world markets will continue to have an impact on the regional disparities in China for a long period of time.

3) The policy of “letting some of the people to get rich first” further deepened the regional disparities. The strategy for Deng Xiaoping, the architect of the reform and opening in China, was to first create special economic zones and to introduce a market economy in the coastal provinces. With the resources, manpower, new technology, new capital, new management skills, etc. flooding into these regions, these regions developed incredibly quickly.²³⁹ With the introduction of a market economy throughout China, the special economic zones have not enjoyed special preferential treatment since the late 1990s. However, they still enjoy the economies of scale that have been achieved through the rapid development over the past two decades. The special economic zones and their neighboring regions will continue to develop at a faster pace than regions in other parts of China. Due to this fact, income disparities are growing between the coastal and other regions, within the coastal regions, within prefectures within counties, among urban and rural workers, and within cities among *hukou* and migrant workers, etc.

4) Political inequalities among regions forge different bargaining capacities in the different regions.²⁴⁰ In China, the political importance of regions at the same administrative rank actually varies quite substantially. For example, some provincial

²³⁹ For example, in Shenzhen municipality, one of the first and largest special economic zones, the annual growth rate between 1979 and 2005 was 25 percent. See “‘Shenzhen sudu’ fang man, zhuzhong jingji fazhan zhiliang” (Shenzhen Speed Slows Down, Focusing on the Quality of Economic Development),” on NanFang Net, August 4, 2006.

²⁴⁰ See the theoretical background for these inequalities within the party-state and their consequences for the self-reproduction and self-destruction of the system in M. Csanádi, *Self-Consuming Evolutions: A Model on the Structure, Self-reproduction, Self-destruction and Transformation of Party-states, tested on the Romanian, Hungarian and Chinese Cases* (Budapest: Hungarian Academic Press, 2006), pp. 22-62.

party secretaries are members of the Politburo, whereas most provincial party secretaries are not;²⁴¹ some prefecture party secretaries are members of the executive committee (the Standing Committee) of the provincial party committee, whereas others are not; some county party secretaries are members of the executive committee of the prefecture party committee, whereas others are not; some township party secretaries are members of the executive committee of the county party committee, whereas others are not. The unequal political positions of regions at the same rank forges an unequal bargaining capacity among them. Those provinces with short-cuts to the power center have a greater bargaining capacity with respect to the central authority, both in terms of resource attraction and resisting intervention, e.g. extractions, influencing decisions, and preparing for unavoidable decisions (Csanadi, 2006). They receive more resources when the center (or authorities at the upper levels) distributes resources to authorities at lower levels within the party-state network. A local decision-maker's membership on the executive committee of the party committee at the upper levels is one of the institutions that forges a built-in inequality within the party-state network (Csanadi, 2006). According to Maria Csanadi, the other institutions include the local decision-maker's chance of being invited to ministerial sessions, his/her possibility of being consulted in formulation of the five-year plan, the possibility of his/her unit being closely monitored by the State Statistical Bureau, etc. (Csanadi, 2006). All these institutional arrangements give more privileges to some over others.

5) The distribution of resources within the system of the planning commission (currently called the Reform and Development Commission) allows the rich become richer. In 1994, a fiscal reform package was implemented. Since then, fiscal revenue has been centralized to the central authority, with the center holding more and more resources. Resources are distributed to the lower levels along two basic lines: the line of the fiscal bureau, and the line of the National Development and Reform

²⁴¹ In 2006, among the thirty-one provinces, the provincial party secretaries of Beijing, Guangdong, Hubei, Shanghai, Xinjiang, and Zhejiang were members of the Politburo.

Commission (NDRC). Distribution through the line of the fiscal bureau aims at equalizing the fiscal capacity among regions. But the revenue transfers are inefficient and insufficient (Christine Wong, date, page number). Meanwhile, project-oriented distribution, along the line of the NDRC, highly favors the relatively developed regions. According to NDRC rules, only if a locality can raise 30 percent of the funds for a particular project will the planning commission grant the remaining 70 percent to the locality. Therefore, the richer a region is, the more funds it will receive from the planning commission.²⁴²

6) The 1990s also witnessed an eruption of localities lobbying the central authorities. Each province, each prefecture, and even some counties rented and bought office buildings in Beijing to establish a liaison office for the locality. Each liaison office established lobbying groups for its locality, and/or facilitated decision-makers from the locality to lobby in Beijing. The resource-rich localities were more successful in lobbying and thus gained more in terms of the distribution of resources. The activities of the liaison offices have been so prominent that the State Council has had to make official efforts to control their activities.²⁴³

The already large regional disparities have been exacerbated in recent years. The gaps between the rural and urban areas have been widening as well.²⁴⁴ The disparities and gaps are so large and serious that the party and state have placed the highest priority on tackling them. The latest program launched by the present leadership is “Balanced Development” and “Constructing a Harmonious Society,”²⁴⁵ one major part of which is to alleviate the regional disparities and to narrow the income gaps. Nevertheless, the factors inducing the regional disparities and income gap continue to exist. At worse, the regional disparities and income gaps will continue to widen; at best, they

²⁴² Based on interviews with officials in the Development and Reform Commission in Sichuan province, in Wuxi prefecture in Jiangsu province, and in Changzhi prefecture in Shanxi province in 2002.

²⁴³ See, “Xinjingbao: Zhengdun zhujingban guanjianzai shenpin chengxu gongkai” (New Capital Newspaper: The Core in Restructuring the Local Governments’ Liaison Offices in Beijing is to Open the Administration Process), available at: <http://opinion.people.com.cn/GB/4774041.html>, September 4, 2006.

²⁴⁴ See Xi Si, “Diqu chengxiang chaju rengzai kuoda” (Regional Disparities and the Urban-Rural Gap are Widening Still), *Caijing shibao* (Financial Times), March 6, 2005.

²⁴⁵ The 6th plenary meeting of the 16th party congress of the CCP was held in Beijing in October 2006. One major output of the meeting was the resolution on “Constructing a Socialist Harmonious Society”; the entire text is available at <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1026/4932440.html>.

will continue to exist as they are today. The pressures on the decision-makers in the different regions to resort to different instruments to remain in power and/or to be promoted will increase, or at the very least will persist.

In sum, the overall political, economic, social, and ideological changes are conducive to the spread and acceptance of the idea and the practice of semi-competitive elections both among the citizens and those in power. The specific conditions inducing local party officials in charge of nomenklatura to introduce semi-competitive elections include the vast disparity in available resources on the one hand and the CCP-imposed uniform set of responsibilities for all local governments on the other hand. Given the enormous strains in resources and high social tensions in many localities, it can be expected that the semi-competitive elections will spread to more regions across China and to higher levels. During my interviews, some officials predicted with confidence that more townships will implement semi-competitive election and similar election practices will at least spread to county level in the future.

However, the spread of the semi-competitive elections to more townships and to county level will not follow a linear progression. Inevitably, there will be setbacks, due to the gradual acceptance of values, institutions, human rights practices, rule of law, the market economy, privatization, etc. (see the Appendix for the events, debates, setbacks that these incoming values, institutions, and practices have experienced). Similar to the changing acceptance of the market economy, privatization, human rights, etc., the township semi-competitive elections are at a stage of being attacked by some officials, but meanwhile they are spreading to more regions. Though it is premature to say that the semi-competitive elections will definitely be legitimized politically, it is reasonable to expect, on the basis of the experience of the changing acceptance of other values and institutions, that the new election practices will gradually be more accepted in China.

As analyzed above, we found that the first cases of township semi-competitive

elections took place in the relatively poor regions. There is more of a likelihood that the new election practices will spread in the poor regions rather than in the rich regions. This contradicts the implications of modernization theory which maintains that the economically more developed regions will first hold competitive, participatory, and open elections. We further found that individual county and prefecture party secretaries played a crucial role in introducing the township semi-competitive elections. Their motivation for introducing the new practices was to win promotions or to maintain their current positions. Because the regions they govern are politically and socially problematic due to economic underdevelopment and the lack of a sufficient bargaining position within the party-state network, they have to find alternative ways to meet the party's nomenklatura criteria, i.e., to promote economic development and to maintain social and political stability. Introducing elections with more participation, competition, and openness is one such option that has been taken up by an increasing number of county and prefecture party secretaries. The structures under which the local party secretaries make daily decisions persist. The vastly different regions in China will continue to develop at different paces. Some regions will develop much more slowly than other regions, due to more difficulties in maintaining social and political stability under the current political structure. Local party secretaries will continue to face pressures to try out new reforms, including introducing semi-competitive elections.

4.5 The changing systemic background against which the township semi-competitive elections have been introduced

The officials have initiated and introduced the semi-competitive elections against a backdrop of a rapid and vast systemic change, which seems to be compatible with contested elections.

4.5.1 Change in the economic system

It is well known that the Chinese economy is no longer a planning economy dominated by state ownership and administrative coordination (Kornai, *Socialist System*). With the reform and opening of the past two decades, the Chinese economy has become highly privatized and marketized. State-owned enterprises are contributing less and less to the gross domestic product (GDP). The state sector's share in GDP decreased from more than 90 percent in the late 1970s to less than 40 percent in 2003 (Ding Maozhan, 2005).²⁴⁶ Previously, prices were determined or controlled by the state. But since the mid-1990s, most prices have been determined by the market. Although the prices of a few goods or services, such as oil, natural gas, railway transportation etc. are still determined by the state, they are affected by the prices in the global market and the prices of substitution goods and services that are market-determined (Lin Yifu et al, 2002).²⁴⁷ In addition, except for grain, oil, and a few other strategic goods, the instrument of quantity quotas imposed on the remaining state-owned enterprises was abolished. In the 11th five-year plan issued in 2005, unlike in the previous five-year plans, there are no longer any quantity quotas. Even the Chinese word for “plan” has been changed from “*jihua*” – with a strong administrative connotation -- to “*guihua*” (or outline) that is more neutral-sounding.²⁴⁸ In addition, the Chinese economy is greatly integrated into the world economic system. The role of international trade increased from 8.9 percent of GDP in the late 1970s to 70 percent of GDP in 2004 (Zhang Xuhong and Pang Jin, 2005).²⁴⁹ Furthermore, China's biggest trading partners are market economies and democracies, such as the United States, Japan, Germany, UK, and France. China continues to open its doors to foreign direct investment. Since the late 1970s, increasing amounts of foreign capital have been flowing into China. In 2003, China,

²⁴⁶ Ding Maozhan, “Jia qi minying jingji tengfei de zhidian” (Private Sector Takes Off), in *People's Forum*, No. 10 (2005), available at <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper85/15907/1406052.html>.

²⁴⁷ Dual-track pricing that started in the early 1980s gradually disappeared in the mid-1990s. See Lin Yifu, Cai Fang, and Li Zhou, *Zhongguo de qiji: Fazhan zhanlue yu jingji gaige* (The China Miracle: Development Strategy and Economic Reform) (Shanghai: People's Publishing House, 2002).

²⁴⁸ See the 10th five-year plan, and the 11th five-year outline at: <http://gov.people.com.cn/GB/46728/53739/>

²⁴⁹ Zhang Xuhong and Pang Jin, “Waimao yicundu kuaisu shangsheng xianxiang toudi” (On Swiftly Increasing Dependence on Foreign Trade), *Jingji cankao bao* (Newspaper for Economic Reference), August 20, 2005.

surpassing the United States, attracted the greatest amount of FDI in the world (UN, 2004).²⁵⁰

The marketization, privatization, and globalization of the economy have greatly transformed relations between the authorities and citizens. Rather than the citizens' individual welfare under the full control of the state as it was before, the state presently relies on the citizens' contributions to continue its operations. In order to promote economic development, instead of redeploying resources forcefully as they did before, the authorities have to comply with both domestically and internationally recognized market rules.

4.5.2 Change in the political structure and the ideological configuration

There has not only been change in the economic institutions in China. The political structure has also undergone change as well. First, the power relations within the party-state are much more decentralized than they were two decades ago. Much of the decision-making power has been delegated to the lower levels. Responsibilities concerning education, health care, social security, environmental protection, economic development, public safety, etc. have been gradually but continuously decentralized to the lower levels (Susan Shirk, 1993).²⁵¹ China was always a relatively decentralized party-state compared to the other party-states in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Csanádi, 2006).²⁵² But there have been two additional waves of decentralization in China. One wave was in the mid-1980s when the fiscal reform package “*fen zhao chi fan*” was implemented. The other was in the mid-1990s when another fiscal reform package decentralizing expenditure responsibility and decision-making power took place (Christine Wong and Deepak Bhattasali, 2003).²⁵³

²⁵⁰ United Nations, *Annual Report on World Investment* (2004).

²⁵¹ Susan Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

²⁵² M. Csanádi, *Self-Consuming Evolutions: A Model on the Structure, Self-reproduction, Self-destruction and Transformation of Party-states, tested on the Romanian, Hungarian and Chinese Cases* (Budapest: Hungarian Academic Press, 2006).

²⁵³ Christine Wong and Deepak Bhattasali, *Zhongguo guojia fazhan yu difang caizheng* (China: National

While the lower levels have gained more decision-making power vis-à-vis the upper levels, the society has gained more autonomy vis-à-vis the state. Compared to two decades ago, the society is much less dominated by the state. The *hukou* system (the residence registration system) has been greatly weakened and loosened, thereby allowing migration to increase. People are able to move freely from one part of the country to another. Since housing, education, health care, etc. have been commercialized, the state no longer dominates access, and thus the state has much less power over the people's ordinary lives. The fact that the society has gained more autonomy also is reflected in the fact that the number of non-governmental organizations has increased substantially since the 1990s. By the end of 2005, it was estimated that there were about 3 million civil society organizations in China, equivalent to the number of Communist Party organs across the country (Yu Keping, 2006).²⁵⁴

The legal system has changed enormously as well. In the early 1980s, the courts were dominated by the judges and the prosecutors who were appointed by the party committees. Lawyers played a negligible role. In addition, law firms were state-owned. Since the 1990s, however, more elements of a UK-US legal practice have been introduced to the Chinese legal system. Lawyers play an increasingly important role. Court verdicts are highly influenced, if not determined, by the debates between the lawyers and prosecutors. Moreover, most law firms were detached from the state in the 1990s. Since then, the profession of lawyer has become basically independent (Cui Li, 2006).²⁵⁵ Other important changes in the legal system include the introduction of the administrative procedure law in 1990 that allows individuals to sue state organizations, the abolition of "presumption of guilt" and the introduction of "presumption of innocence" in 1996, the installment of an article to protect private

Development and Sub-national Finance) (Beijing: CITIC Publishing House, 2003).

²⁵⁴ Yu Keping, *Minzhu yu tuoluo* (Democracy and the Top) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2006), pp.206-209.

²⁵⁵ Cui Li, "Lushi fa shinian yongtandiao" (Revisiting the Law on Lawyers after Ten Years of Implementation), *China Youth Daily*, May 13, 2006.

property and an article to protect human rights into the constitution in 2004.

Accompanying the economic and political changes, the ideology has also been changing. Economic reform and political evolution led to striking inconsistencies between the classical socialist ideology and real life. The classical socialist ideology is decreasingly convincing. The party and state have tried to accommodate new elements into the official ideology. The installment of human rights protection and private property protection into the constitution clearly shows that the official ideology has been trying to accommodate such universal values as human rights. The present program of “constructing a harmonious society” (建设和谐社会) vigorously launched by the latest leadership shows that some traditional Chinese values, such as the Confucian value of a harmonious society which was abandoned by the classical socialist ideology in the 1960s and 1970s, have been revived in the current official ideology. The latest approach advocated by the leadership on the political, economic, and social agendas is “human-centered” (以人为本). Many values that were considered counter-revolutionary two decades ago are now a part of the official ideology. The official ideology has thus been transformed from being solely composed of classical socialism to becoming a combination of classical socialism, traditional Chinese cultural values, and universal values (Yu Keping, 2005).²⁵⁶

4.5.3 Changes in social life

Social life styles have diversified greatly over the past two decades. Personality, which was formerly a pejorative word, is frenetically pursued by the people, especially the young generation (Wang Bin, 2003).²⁵⁷ While some people have turned to Western life styles, others have tried to revive traditional Chinese life style. Although the majority of Chinese are non-religious, Buddhism, Christianity, and

²⁵⁶ Yu Keping, “Guannian de pengzhuang yu shehui de jinbu” (The Conflict of Ideas and Social Progress), *Marxism and Reality*, No. 3 (2005).

²⁵⁷ Wang Bin, “Cong jiegou dao zhenghe: 20 nian lai dazhong wenhua yingxiang xia de qingnian wenhua shanbian” (The Changing Youth Culture Under the Influence of Popular Culture in the Past Twenty Years), *Journal of Guangxi Youth Leaders College*, Vol.13, No.5 (2005).

Islam are attracting an increasing number of followers and practitioners.²⁵⁸ Though most Chinese are not aware of environmental protection and the role of women, both the environmental protection movement²⁵⁹ and the feminist movement²⁶⁰ have gained momentum in China. Ethics and morality have been diversified. Whereas sex was criticized for being bourgeois before the 1980s, the 1990s witnessed a sexual liberation in China. Different sexual orientations are tolerated and viewed as part of the individual's personal life that is not to be regulated by the state (Pan Suimin, 2005).²⁶¹ People may convert to different ethics or moralities. The party and the state have been retreating from intervention into the people's daily lives. When people over the age of 35 talk about the heroism of the party figures and/or the disastrous Cultural Revolution, their counterparts who are ten years younger look at them with confusion. The younger generation is not interested in such things and has not been much exposed to similar discussions. Changes are so rapid that regular generational differences can be found in age differences of 10-15 years.

The system is undergoing a change whereby more and more elements of Stalinism are fading out at an accelerated speed. The monolith of the system is breaking down. Competitive elections, in which different interests are being contesting and aggregated on a supposedly open and free platform, are in accordance with and must be facilitated by the current systemic change in China.

Appendix: The changing acceptance of values, institutions, and practices in China since the late 1970s

²⁵⁸ It has been estimated by anonymous researchers that China has about 60 million Christians and 40 million Muslims. See <http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/Content/no110/1/14435.shtml>.

²⁵⁹ Dale Wen, "Environmental Protection Movement in China," *Shi shaoshuren fuqilai de gaige* (The Reform that Makes the Minority People Rich) (International Forum on Globalization, 2005).

²⁶⁰ See *White Book on Gender Equality and Women Development in China* (Beijing: News Office, State Council, August 24, 2006).

²⁶¹ Pan Suimin, *Dangdai Zhongguoren de xingxingwei yu xingguanxi* (Sexual Behavior and Relations in Contemporary China) (Beijing: Social Sciences Documentation Press, 2005).

Value, institution, or practice	Taboo, perceived as anti-socialist, bourgeois, or counter-revolutionary	Some cases appeared	Being questioned, but continued to spread in practice	Politically legitimized	Consolidated or later development
Market economy	Before the early 1980s	Market institutions were introduced in the Special Economic Zones and the neighboring regions in the early 1980s	Market institutions attacked and supported on the ideological battlefield and among those in power. Meanwhile, an increasing number of regions and sectors introduced market institutions during the 1980s	Early 1992 by the movement launched by Deng Xiaoping's tour to Southern China. The market economy was formally accepted as a party program by the 14 th party congress in that year.	The market economy was written into the constitution as a fundamental economic institution in China in 1993.
Township and village enterprises (TVEs)	Before the late 1970s	First TVEs appeared in the early 1980s	Attacked by provincial officials as "digging the wall of socialism"; meanwhile promoted by local governments that did not have SOEs but were thirsty for resources	No particular party meeting or party document announced the legitimacy of the TVEs. The TVEs were just treated by everyone as a positive element in Chinese socialism in the late 1980s	Began to be privatized in the 1990s
Privatization	Before the early 1990s	First cases of privatizing TVEs appeared in 1991. First cases of privatizing SOEs appeared in 1993	Fiercely attacked by provincial officials and some officials in Beijing, but promoted by township and county governments that could no longer afford the losses of the TVEs and SOEs	3 rd plenary session of the 14 th party congress in the mid-1990s decides to "grasp the big (SOEs), let go of the small"	In the early 2000s, almost all TVEs disappear. During 2002-2004, privatization was attacked by many as a process of embezzlement of state assets. Still, the number of SOEs declined.
Human rights	Before the late 1980s	A Chinese concept of	Attacked and defended during	1998: "presumption of	--

		human rights was developed by the party in the early 1990s	some human rights legal cases, and in debates in the legal system during the 1990s	innocence” is announced. 2003: “protection of human rights” is written into the Constitution.	
Demonstrations	Before the early 1990s	Some cases appeared in the early 1990s. Faced arrest by the police	Neither attacks on or support of demonstrations. But in the localities, demonstrations of different scales occurred daily; the police were called in only in cases of violence. The localities have been becoming used to them since the mid-1990s	--	--

Chapter 5: What Are the Consequences of Introducing the Township Semi-Competitive Elections?

It is believed that democracy has both value in itself and instrumental value. It is legitimate to expect that the township semi-competitive elections will have similar consequences, as the elections increase competition, participation, transparency, and probably accountability in the political process at the local levels.

5.1 Impact on economic development

It is believed that democracy facilitates economic development because it helps to forge accountability, transparency, and stability that are conducive to both investment and consumption, promoting economic development.

I attempt to conduct an analysis on the basis of the cases used in Chapter 4. The data are from 2003, one year after the township semi-competitive elections were carried out. The variables are the same as those in Chapter 4. But in the current case, the intensity of the competition is an independent variable; the other variables are the annual GDP growth rate, share of industry in GDP, GDP per capita, budget deficit/GDP, and share of the non-agricultural population. The purpose is to see if the semi-competitive elections have any effect on economic activities.

The units under analysis are the county and township. I applied the SPSS tool to analyze the data. For details about the data and the results of the analysis, see the annexe to this research.

In cases where the county is the unit of analysis, the results show that, the correlation

between the intensity of competition in the elections and the dependent variables such as the share of industry in GDP, GDP per capita, and the share of non-agricultural population is not significant (at the level of 0.05). However, the correlation between the intensity of the competition in the elections and such dependent variables as the annual GDP growth rate and the budget deficit/GDP is significant (at the level of 0.05).

The correlation between the intensity of the competition in the elections and the annual GDP growth rate can be expressed by the following equation: $y = -0.37x + 0.29x^2$, where y stands for the “standardized economic growth rate,” and x stands for the “standardized intensity of competition in elections”. The R square for the equation is 0.169. The result shows that the implementation of semi-competitive elections seems to help promote economic development, though economic development should largely be explained by other factors.

The correlation between the intensity of competition in elections and the budget deficit/GDP can be expressed by the following equation: $y = -0.23x + 0.24x^2$, where y stands for the “standardized budget deficit”, and x stands for the “standardized intensity of competition in elections.” The R-square for the equation is 0.087. The result shows clearly that the implementation of semi-competitive election seems to exacerbate financial difficulties, though the change in the financial situation should be largely explained by other factors.

In cases where the unit of analysis is the township, the results show that the correlation between the intensity of competition in the elections and the budget deficit/GDP is not significant (at the level of 0.05); and the correlation between the intensity of competition in the elections and the other dependent variables is significant (at the level of 0.05).

The correlation between the intensity of competition in the elections and the budget

deficit/GDP can be expressed by the following equation: $y = -0.23x$, where y stands for the “budget deficit/GDP,” and x stands for the “standardized intensity of competition in the elections.” The R-square for this equation is 0.052. The equation shows that the semi-competitive elections have a very weak but positive impact on the financial situation of a township.

In other words, at the township level, the implementation of semi-competitive elections has little impact on most economic indicators. When the unit of analysis is the county, the data show that the implementation of township semi-competitive elections has a positive impact on economic development. But when the analytical unit is the township, however, the data show no significant relation between the implementation of semi-competitive elections and economic development. As to the relation between elections and the local authorities’ financial situation, the results from analysis of county and township data are contradictory. Whereas the implementation of semi-competitive elections has a negative impact on the financial situation when the analytical unit is the county, the elections have a positive impact on the financial situation when the unit of analysis is the township. In other words, the existing data cannot prove any definitive impact of semi-competitive elections on economic development.

However, since the analysis is based on data from about twenty months after the implementation of semi-competitive elections, the time span may be too short for the impact to be felt. In addition, the semi-competitive elections have been newly introduced. They might have a different impact when the practice becomes further entrenched in the political process. Therefore, the above observations about the semi-competitive elections’ impact on economic activities and/or the economic situation can only address the short-term impact of the implementation of township semi-competitive elections. This also applies to the following analysis on the other impacts of the elections, i.e., all of the impacts in question are short-term effects of the implementation of township semi-competitive elections at their starting stage.

5.2 Impact on the distribution of power at the local levels

Competitive elections are supposed to restructure the political regime into which they have been introduced. It is believed that democracy improves the authority's accountability to the citizens, increases transparency and participation in the political process, and breaks down the political monopoly by certain political organizations. Since the semi-competitive elections increase participation and transparency, and provide alternatives to the local people, we need to examine to what extent the new electoral practices have changed the political process. By studying a number of cases with and without township semi-competitive elections, we find that these elections are changing the distribution of local power, in particular at the township and county levels.

5.2.1 Diffusing the county party committee's nomenklatura power

First, the semi-competitive elections seem to be changing the party's control over party and state personnel.

As discussed above, in townships with a traditional way of conducting elections, the nomenklatura power over township leadership positions is solely held by the county party committee, in particular the county party secretary. But in townships where semi-competitive elections have been implemented for leadership positions, the county party committee's nomenklatura over the township positions remains, since the township officials and local residents are involved in the enlarged electoral college that decides or forges, though to a limited extent, the choice of candidates for the township leadership positions, even though the centralized power of the county party committee's standing committee in making the appointments for township positions

was partially decentralized to cadres at the lower levels and even to some of the residents. In other words, the county party committee's nomenklatura responsibility over the township positions has been partially diffused.²⁶²

This diffusion of the county party committee's nomenklatura power is highlighted by a summary made by local party officials on the effect of the semi-competitive elections:

“The traditional practice is ‘to select cadres from a small group of people’²⁶³ by a small group of people’²⁶⁴; the new practice is to ‘select cadres from a large number of people’²⁶⁵ by a large number of people’.²⁶⁶

The extent of the diffusion depends on the inclusiveness of the electoral college and the requirements for candidacy. The more residents there are included in the electoral college, the more diffused is the county party committee's nomenklatura power over the township. The looser the requirements are for candidacy, the more diffused is the county party committee's nomenklatura power. But the extent of diffusion is still controlled by the county party secretary who can decide the inclusiveness of the electoral college and the requirements for candidacy.

Interestingly, the diffusion of the county party committee's nomenklatura power over the township leadership has a side-effect on the township party committee's nomenklatura power over the village positions. In the townships where the semi-competitive elections were implemented, village elections were organized in a freer and more open manner, although not all free village elections were subordinate to townships where semi-free elections were carried out. That is, township authorities

²⁶² Therefore, it is a bit weakened. This is similar to the case in the economic field, when the party committees began to consult more with the workers before appointing the management for particular SOEs in the late 1980s.

²⁶³ The small group of people who are known in person by the party secretaries.

²⁶⁴ The small group of people who are members of the party executive committee.

²⁶⁵ Since the candidacy is open to the public instead of only to the acquaintances of the county party secretaries.

²⁶⁶ Because a large number of township officials and local residents are involved in the process of selecting candidates. In Chinese, this is “过去是 ‘由少数人在少数人中选人’，现在是 ‘由多数人在多数人中选人’。”

intervened less in the village elections. In townships that followed the traditional way of holding elections for township leadership positions, township party committees always had a preemptive list of names of who should be elected as heads of the villager committees. In townships where semi-competitive elections for township leadership positions had been carried out, the township party committees usually did not try to make such a preemptive list, showing that the township party committees' nomenklatura over the village non-party positions had been withdrawn. In some villages where township semi-free elections were held, the positions of party secretary were open to competitive elections, in which not only ordinary party members but also some non-party residents could be involved in the voting. In these cases, the township party committees' nomenklatura over the village party positions was also withdrawn. In some other villages, the withdrawal was conducted in a more radical way. After the heads of the villagers committees were elected in a free and open way, in the case that the elected heads were party members, they were automatically appointed as village party secretaries; in the case that they were not party members, they would be asked to join the party and then they were appointed as party secretaries.²⁶⁷

5.2.2 De-personalizing the relationship between county party secretary and the leadership positions in the township

Traditionally, with the county party secretary's concentration of nomenklatura power over the leadership positions in the township, as described in Chapter 3, the relations between the county party secretary and the township party secretaries and the township governors under his/her supervision was highly personalized. Before a township party secretary and/or mayor were appointed, he/she needed to approach the

²⁶⁷ In Ya'an prefecture, the prefecture party committee suggested inviting the heads of the villagers committees who were not yet party members to join the party. However, changes in the township party committees' nomenklatura over village positions were not the unique consequence of the township competitive elections. In many places, both inside and outside of Sichuan province, the free village elections had already greatly weakened the township party committees' nomenklatura over village positions. The role played by the township semi-competitive elections in this respect was to facilitate the weakening or withdrawal of the township party committees' nomenklatura over village positions.

county party secretary. Until he/she developed a credible loyalty to the county party secretary, s/he had no chance of being appointed to a leadership position in the township. Therefore, the township party secretary and/or mayor not only had to be loyal to the party-state system but also had to be personally loyal to the county party secretary. In the early years of the establishment of the party-state, it was basically the county party secretary who used his/her subordinates' loyalty to the system to develop personal loyalty to him/herself. During the years after the reform and opening, with the declining appeal of the traditional ideology and the decreasing role of the ideology in contributing to the cohesion of the system, it seems that it is more likely for the township party secretary and/or mayor's loyalty to the system to be ensured through their personal loyalty to their superior, i.e., the county party secretary.

The personalization of power forms a hotbed for corruption. In recent years, an increasing number of cases of corruption by county party secretaries have been revealed. The disciplinary section of the party and the prosecution of the state ascribe the corruption to the "over-concentration of the power" of the party secretaries.²⁶⁸ In some cases, the county party secretary receives a substantial amount of money by selling township and other positions. Table 20 lists the disclosed cases of corruption by county party secretaries in recent years.

Table 20 Disclosed Major Corruption Cases by County Party Secretaries, 2002-2006

Name of the party secretary	Name of the County, Province	Crime	Money involved (USD)	Verdict	Source of Information
Du Baoqian	Lushi, Henan	Bribery	80,000	14 years in prison	30/12/2002, China News Agency
Ye Kunlan	Guangze, Fujian	Bribery	300,000	20 years in prison	27/12/2002, China News Agency
Chen Genfu	Xianju, Zhejiang	Bribery	n.a.	10 years in prison	22/12/2002, China News Agency
Huang Fuyin	Wenyuan, Guangdong	Bribery	70,000	13 years in prison	18/7/2002, China News Agency
Wang Dipo	Hen	Bribery	250,000	n.a.	30/7/2003, China

²⁶⁸ Ye Dewu and Xiao Jie, "Xin xingshi xia zhiwu fazui de tedian, yuanyin ji tiaozheng cuoshi" (The Characteristics and Causes of Criminal Officials under the New Situations and the Correction Measures), 2006, at www.hicourt.gov.cn.

					News Agency
Wang Zhongxing	Chongyang, Hubei	Bribery	25,000	8 years in prison	4/9/2003, China News Agency
Peng Bangyou	Fushun, Sichuan	Bribery	n.a.	13 years in prison	12/9/2003, Sichuan Daily
Zhu Yingqiu	Shuangfeng, Hunan	Bribery	450,000	17 years in prison	30/8/2004, Xinhua Net
Li Gang	Suiling, Heilongjiang	Bribery	350,000	life in prison	23/11/2004, people.com.cn
Li Bin	Cangwu, Guangxi	Bribery	65,000	8 years in prison	5/7/2004, China News Agency
Wu Guanghua	Lingao, Hainan	Bribery	200,000	n.a.	16/9/2005, South Metropolitan
Yang Yupei	Yingshan, Sichuan	Bribery	700,000	17 years in prison	26/09/2005, Xinhua Net
Luo Xianping	Cangxi, Sichuan	Bribery	55,000	10 years in prison	27/5/2006, West Metropolitan
Chen Jiarong	Pengzhou, Sichuan	Bribery	n.a.	n.a.	3/7/2006, Legal Daily
Tian Yufei	Jianwei, Sichuan	Bribery	4 million	Commuted death penalty	13/7/2006, Xinhua Net
Yan Tiancai	Tuoketuo, Inner-Mongolia	Bribery	400,000	20 years in prison	14/7/2006, Xinhua Net

Before 2000, there were few cases of corruption by major county officials. The increasing number of cases of corruption in recent years has ignited the people's resentment against the party, eroding the legitimacy of party rule. The party has thus called for a reform of the over-concentration of power and to de-personalize power relations.

By introducing semi-competitive elections, the relationship between the county party secretary and the major township officials to some extent has been de-personalized. Under the new electoral practices, since the nomination is open to the public, candidacy is no longer monopolized by the county party secretary. Since the county party secretary has to accept the candidate who wins the majority of votes of the electoral college (basically composed of township party and government staff and

township residents), or can select formal candidates only from those two or three pre-candidates who receive most votes of the electoral college, the process of selecting candidates is no longer monopolized by the county party secretary. A local person who hopes to receive a leadership position in the township no longer relies solely on personal relations with the county party secretary.

Does the de-personalization of power relations go so far as to prevent corruption? It is too early to make a definite assessment, partly because the de-personalization in the process of appointing cadres does not exclude the possibility of developing personal ties between the county party secretary and the major township officials after they get their positions. Also, the money they previously gave to the party secretary can now go to the members of the township electoral body.. However, thus far in all the cases of implementing township semi-competitive elections, no cases of corruption in the system of appointments have been revealed.

But de-personalization of the power relations did raise hopes that corruption would be eliminated. Actually, some interviews show that exactly because of its possible effects on curbing corruption the center has some positive attitudes toward the township semi-competitive elections. But the center is still hesitant. On the one hand, by allowing local people to participate more in the local political process, the party loses some direct power over the people. But, on the other hand, the center is still not able to control the local leaders sufficiently and thus cautiously values a reform that will increase control from below. The center hopes that through this process leaders will be installed who are less corrupt, who waste fewer resources, and who do less harm to party legitimacy. In this regard, the semi-free elections are a gain for the center, since party legitimacy may be restored or even increased in places where local semi-competitive elections have been implemented. Therefore, as a result for the center, the township semi-competitive elections might be both a win and a loss, which makes the center hesitant to either openly encourage the development of the semi-competitive elections or to forcefully forbid their development.

5.2.3 Changing relations between the township party secretary and the township governor

The relationship between the party committee and the government at the same level is usually that the government works under the leadership of the party committee. The preamble to the current constitution of the People's Republic of China says that "both the victory in China's New-Democratic Revolution and the successes in its socialist cause have been achieved by the Chinese people of all nationalities, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China," and "the basic task of the nation in the years to come is to concentrate its efforts on socialist modernization, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China."²⁶⁹ Though the legal efficacy of these words in the preamble is disputable from a purely legal point of view, it is perceived in China that the leadership of the Communist Party is constitutionally stipulated. This perception is reinforced by the numerous political movements that accept the leadership of the party and the dominance of the party in the daily political process. This perception extends to the point that the people believe that each state organization at each level should be led by the party organ in the organization or at the same level. In the case of the township authority, it means that in each township authority there should be a township party committee that leads the township government. In other words, the township government works under the leadership of the township party committee. In practical terms, the township governor works under the leadership of the township party secretary, i.e., the township governor is subordinate to the township party secretary.

In townships where semi-competitive elections are held, the relations between the township party secretary and the township governor seem to be undergoing some

²⁶⁹ See the complete text of the Constitution on the official government Web site at http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2004-03/15/content_1367387.htm

change. No interviewees reported any cases of significant conflict between the township governor and the township party secretary in places where semi-competitive elections had been implemented. Nor has any official investigation revealed any significant conflicts. However, a few county party officials reported that the township governors who emerged from the semi-competitive elections “were generally more self-confident.” Meanwhile, “township party secretaries showed more respect to them.” “In a few cases, competitively elected township governors pursued more power, leading to disputes with the township party secretaries.”²⁷⁰ This is because the township governor now has a mandate from his/her peers and the local residents. Thus, the governor’s power is derived not only from the county party committee, the superior of the township governor and the township party secretary, but also from the local people.

The disputes between the party secretary and the governor due to the stronger position of the governor because of the semi-competitive elections are not unprecedented. With the implementation of semi-competitive elections at the village level since the late 1980s, there have been an increasing number of serious conflicts between village party secretaries and village heads. In some extreme cases, the village party secretary has hired thugs to kill the head of the villagers committee (Guo Zhenglin, 2001).²⁷¹ The conflicts between the two village positions began to be a major issue extensively examined by state and party establishments. The Ministry of Civil Affairs, which supervises village issues, has organized seminars and conferences on the conflicts. The Organization Department of the Central Committee of the CCP is particularly concerned about the conflicts and has organized research on the topic. This is also a major topic extensively examined by academia. All the major research institutes on rural governance have conducted research projects on the conflicts between the two

²⁷⁰ Author’s interview: L-Sichuan-4. These changes, especially the conflicts between party positions and non-party positions, were common at the village level when competitive elections were first introduced to the villages in the 1990s. Numerous reports on such conflicts at the village level are available.

²⁷¹ Guo Zhenglin, “Cunmin zhixuan hou de cunweihui yu dangzhibu: Xianzhuang yu tiaoshi” (The Villagers Committee and Village Party Committee after the Villagers’ Direct Elections: Current Situation and Adjustment), 2001, at www.chinaelections.org.

village positions: the Institute of Agricultural Policy under the Ministry of Agriculture, the Department of Rural Development under the Development Research Center of the State Council, the Institute of Rural Development under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the China Center for Comparative Politics and Economics under the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, and a number of similar institutes attached to universities. One solution to the conflicts is to introduce semi-competitive elections for the village party secretary and to involve non-party member residents in the elections (Jing Yuejin, 2002),²⁷² so as to allow the party secretary also to receive a mandate from the local residents, similar to that of the village head. This practice began Guangshui prefecture in Hubei province, and has now spread across the country.

At the township level, we find similar developments. In Suining, Dazhou, Ya'an prefectures where the first cases of township semi-competitive elections were introduced in the late 1990s, a few townships also introduced semi-competitive elections for the position of party secretary. In electing the township party secretaries, non-party member residents participated at the pre-election stage, and the elections were contested among several candidates. The first case of such a township semi-competitive election for party secretary was in Lingshan township in Pingchang county, Dazhou prefecture, Sichuan province.²⁷³ However, since the conflicts between the two major township positions in places with semi-competitive elections for the township governors were not as severe as those at the village level, it is not clear to what extent the spread of semi-competitive elections from state positions to party positions is a result of the conflicts. What we can see is that at the township level emerging power conflicts between those in leading party and state positions as a result of the semi-free elections and the solutions to these conflicts mirror those at the

²⁷² In Chinese, this is called “两票制” (two votes—the voting of party members and the non-party members vs. sole voting by party members). See Jing Yuejin, “Liang piao zhi: Zuzhi jishu yu xuanju moshi” (Two Votes: Organizational Technique and Electoral Model), 2002, at www.chinaelections.org.

²⁷³ It was 四川省达州市平昌县灵山镇党员直选乡党委书记. This case won the third round of the “Awards for Local Governance Innovation” granted by the China Center for Comparative Politics and Economics in early 2006.

village level, reflecting a reshaping of power relations.

5.2.3 Reshaping intergovernmental relations, especially between township and county authorities

The township semi-competitive elections seem to be reshaping relations between county authorities and township authorities, though there are differing assessments of this by cadres. Interviewees in Ya'an prefecture and Shizhong county (within Suining prefecture) believed that the semi-competitive elections at the township level did not change the relationship between the county and township authorities. In contrast, cadres in Nanbu county stated that the township semi-competitive elections had changed the relationship between the county and the townships. Especially in 1998, when the "county party did not monitor the elections sufficiently," "a proportion of the cadres elected in the township semi-competitive elections were passive about complying with the directives from the county."²⁷⁴ Interviewees at the provincial level confirmed that, after implementation of the semi-competitive elections in the townships, the "county authorities' power over the township authorities decreased, whereas the township authorities gained more autonomy."²⁷⁵

The fact that the township governments were less compliant with the county authority is reflected in the change in the election regulation between the late 1990s and early 2000s in Nanbu county, Sichuan province. In the mid-1990s, Nanbu county began to implement semi-competitive elections in the townships under its jurisdiction. In the 1995 and 1998 township elections, the regulation was such that, in the weighted voting in the electoral college, the township authority staff and residents counted 60 percent and the county officials counted 40 percent. In the 2001 township elections, the regulation was changed: the township authority staff and residents counted 40 percent and the county officials counted 60 percent. The changed regulation aims at

²⁷⁴ Author's interview: L-Sichuan-51.

²⁷⁵ Author's interview: L-Sichuan-86.

strengthening the county's supervision over the townships. The reason for the change is that, according to the thinking of the county party officials, the cadres elected in townships semi-competitive elections without sufficient supervision from the county authority began to be too autonomous.

Actually, the decreasing compliance of the township authority is a natural result of the diffusion of the county party committee's nomenklatura power over the township leadership positions and the bestowal of the people's mandate for the township officials. The careers of the major township officials rely less on the county authority and more on the township residents. When there is a conflict between a directive from the county authority and the interests of the township residents, they have to strike a balance. If formerly they sided with the county authority without any hesitation, they now have second thoughts. They might not side with the residents because of other constraining elements in the system that will be discussed later. But they are less likely to actively and fiercely pursue the agenda of the county authority..

In other townships with semi-competitive elections, we did not see as clear an effect of the townships' decreasing compliance with the county as we did in the case of Nanbu county. Probably this is because the township semi-competitive elections in Nanbu started early on and had been carried out consecutively for three rounds, unlike other cases where they only recently began and there has only been one round. The effect has unfolded in Nanbu, but it is still up in the air in other places. If the new election practices continue for several rounds, and the effect unfolds similarly in more regions, pressure to change the hierarchical intergovernmental relations may grow.

As shown at Chapter 3, in the Chinese party-state hierarchy, two pillars ensure that the lower levels are subject to the will of the upper levels. One is the political pillar. Since almost all major governmental officials at all levels are party members,²⁷⁶ the strictly

²⁷⁶ Actually, in the government at each level there is usually a vice-governor who is a non-CCP member. He/she is most likely from one of the so-called democratic parties. In exceptional cases he/she may be a non-party person. It

hierarchical party discipline efficiently ensures top-down governance along the state hierarchy. The “strictly hierarchical party discipline” concept is reflected in the CCP charter: 1) individuals should comply with the organizations; 2) the minority should comply with the majority; 3) the lower levels should comply with the upper levels; and 4) the entire party should comply with the Central Committee. Under these disciplinary requirements, state organizations headed by party members are surely subject to the direction of the upper levels.

Another pillar is the legal pillar. The *Law of Organizing People’s Congresses and Government at All Local Levels* is the only law that contains some articles dealing with intergovernmental relations at the local levels. Articles 59 and 62 stipulate the responsibility of the local levels and the relations among the local levels; the relations among levels are such that the “upper levels shall abolish inappropriate directives issued by the lower levels” and the “lower levels are obliged to enforce the directives from the upper levels.” These articles make sure that the lower levels are under the full control of the upper levels.

In terms of the relations between the county and township authorities, they can be characterized as follows: 1) there is no law that provides a clear division of labor between the authorities at the different levels; 2) the county always uses political and legal tools to take power from and to shift responsibilities to the township; 3) the county is incapable of governing the land without delegating some power to the township; and 4) the township is incapable of fulfilling all the responsibilities shifted from the county due to its limited resources. Thus, there is constant bargaining between the county and the township authorities regarding the division of powers and responsibilities.

With the implementation of the township semi-competitive elections, because of the diffusion of the county party committee’s nomenklatura power and the

is well known that all the democratic parties in China operate under the leadership of the CCP.

depersonalization of the power between the county party secretary and the major township officials, the political pillar that ensures the compliance of the township authority toward the county authority seems to be weakening, though so far we are not exactly sure to what extent it has been weakened. Also, because the major township officials have a mandate from the local residents, in other words because of the introduction of the voice of the local residents to check the performance of the major township officials, the township authority has a larger bargaining capacity. Moreover, with the increasing participation of the local residents, the fluid or constant changing distributions of power and responsibility between the township and the county are unacceptable. The township might want to stabilize its decision-making powers and responsibilities and to stabilize its relations with the county.

Actually, the reason given by some officials as to why the semi-competitive elections have not been implemented suggest that the township would gain more autonomy from the county. A number of my conversations with local party officials in places without township semi-competitive elections went as follows:

“Why it is inappropriate to implement contested elections in the townships of your county?”

“Contested elections in the townships would violate the rule that requires that the party control appointment and management of cadre issues. In addition, contested elections in the township would negatively affect the township’s compliance with us. We would thus not be able to fulfill the directives assigned by our superiors.”

A similar reason was given by officials working in a central authority in Beijing: “Implementation of contested elections at the local levels would make the local levels too powerful. The upper levels would lose control over the lower levels. If so, the entire nation and state would disintegrate, similar to what happened in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.”

The fact that the semi-competitive elections have an impact on intergovernmental relations has already manifested itself at the village level. With the implementation of the village semi-competitive elections, the relations between the township and the village changed (Xu Yong, 1997).²⁷⁷ According to most research results on the changed relations between the townships and the villages due to the semi-competitive elections, the townships' influence over the villages has sharply declined.

The changing relations between the township and the county have a different implication than the changing relations between the village and the township. A village, or a villagers committee, is in legal terms a people's autonomous organization. It is not a state organization, though it is linked to the state organizations in terms of receiving funds and implementing directives from the townships. However, the village-level party organization is linked to the party hierarchy in the same way as at the upper levels. A villagers committee does not have coercive power and does not have the right to impose taxes. The changing relations between the township and the village thus do not affect the party-state as a whole. However, the township is the basic level of the state hierarchy. It is a state organization with coercive means to impose obligatory programs on the residents within its boundaries. The changing relations between the township and the county thus have significant implications. A number of scholars make a distinction between village contested elections and similar elections at the upper levels. They believe that the village semi-competitive elections represent a development in social democracy, which is positive but will not lead to democratization of the political system. Political democratization will only materialize when the state begins to democratize (Zheng Yongnian, 1997).²⁷⁸

5.2.4 Checking the unfolding of the above effects by the unchanged parts of the system

²⁷⁷ Xu Yong, "Lun xiangzhen guanli yu cunmin zizhi de youji xianjie" (On Harmonizing Township and Village Elections), *Journal of Central China Normal University*, No. 1 (1997).

²⁷⁸ Zheng Yongnian, "Difang minzhu, guojia jianshe yu Zhongguo zhengzhi fazhan moshi" (Local Democracy, State Building, and the Chinese Political Development Model), *Modern China Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (1997).

We have discussed the effects of introducing township semi-competitive elections on the county party committee's nomenklatura power, the relation between the party and the state at the township level, and intergovernmental relations between the county and the township. These effects are largely checked by the unchanged parts of the political system.

Probably the most powerful factor checking the possible impacts is the unchanged parts of the nomenklatura—in Chinese terminology, cadre management--system. Appointments are only one of the party committees' four major jobs concerning cadre responsibility. The semi-competitive elections at the township level changed the county party committees' way of making appointments for township positions. However, the following three powers over township cadres did not change:

- Reviewing the cadres' activities: (the county shall see if and how well the assigned tasks have been achieved by the township cadres)
- Transfer of cadres: (the county shall transfer a cadre from one position to another when necessary)
- Demotion of cadres (the county shall dismiss a township cadre when it finds him/her to be inappropriate for the position)

For each position at the township level, the county party committee has a list of tasks that each cadre is required to fulfill. This list of tasks also stipulates the rewards²⁷⁹ and punishments.²⁸⁰ In all of the sites that this author visited, the county party committees without exception gave the township positions enormous tasks,²⁸¹ which

²⁷⁹ In cases when tasks are fulfilled.

²⁸⁰ In cases when tasks are not fulfilled.

²⁸¹ For example, tasks assigned to a township vice-governor in Nanbu county included: to plant a certain number of acres of grains, cotton, or oil-bearing crops; forestation; infrastructure construction for roads, irrigation etc.; to prevent production accidents from occurring; to collect a certain amount of taxes, to raise a certain amount of funds; to develop a certain amount of TVEs; environmental protection; birth control; civil affairs; religion; education; public safety; See *Nanbuxian fuxiangzhenzhang niandu fenguan gongzuo mubiao zeren shu* (Goals Must Be Achieved for Each Township Vice-governor in Nanbu County) (Nanbu county government, 1999).

greatly reduced the room for the competitively elected cadres to maneuver. This makes it especially difficult for the elected cadres to refrain themselves from intervening into the peasants' economic and political lives, even if they intend to stay away.

The transfer of cadres (rotation) also greatly impedes the unfolding of the impact of the township competitive elections. The rotation of cadres is an important part of the cadre management system in China.²⁸² With it, the county party committee has the right to and actually must constantly transfer cadres from one position to another. In the places where this author visited, cases of competitively elected township cadres being shifted to other positions were reported.²⁸³ Consequently, by removing the elected cadres from their constituents, the possible impacts of the township semi-competitive elections may be limited.

Cadre demotion is a veto power held by the county party committees over the semi-competitive-elected township cadres. In fieldwork sites for this research project, no demotions of competitively elected township cadres had thus far been reported. However, at the village level in other provinces, many cases of township party committees dismissing the freely elected heads of villagers committees have been reported.²⁸⁴ Similarly, the competitively-elected township governors and party secretaries were subject to the same demotions, which served as a strong constraint on the unfolding of the possible impacts.

²⁸² The cadre exchange program in China is not a contingent operation. Instead it is an institutionalized routine operation. It has deep roots in the long history of imperial China. The exchange of cadres by constantly changing them from one place to another was supposed to prevent cadres from forming strong personal power networks. After 1949, the Chinese party-state continued this practice.

²⁸³ For example, the governor in Baoshi township who was competitively elected was transferred to the position of party secretary in another township after serving in the position of Baoshi township governor for only the first of his three-year term.

²⁸⁴ For example, in Qianjiang county in Hubei province, according to a local resident's investigation, 187 (thus 56.8 percent) of the freely elected heads of the villagers committees were "illegally" dismissed by the township authorities (since according to the written law on relations between the township and village authorities, the township authorities do not have the right to appoint and/or dismiss village cadres. However, in practice, most township authorities did have this right through the practice of nomenklatura) in 1999-2001. Later, the provincial authority conducted a similar investigation of the same county. The investigation concluded that 119 (thus 36.28 percent) of the heads of the villagers committees were dismissed "without engaging in proper legal procedures." See Li Yong, "Qianjiang anliu" (Dark Wave in Qianjiang), *Caijing* (Business), No. 22 (2002).

The second important factor apart from the remaining cadre responsibilities that prevented the elections from having an impact might be that the organizations were attached to the township authorities but in the meanwhile they were under the direct supervision of the county authorities.²⁸⁵ Since these organizations were still under the direct supervision of the county authority, the competitively elected township vice-governors, governors, party vice-secretaries, and party secretaries had limited power over them.²⁸⁶ Thus, their room to maneuver was further limited, blocking the possible impact of the elections.

5.3 Impact of the semi-free elections on relations between the authorities and the people (local society)

The township semi-competitive elections have had an impact on relations between the township authority and the local residents. Interviewees used explicit words to describe the changes brought about by the implementation of the new election practices.

The interviewees reported, “When the residents’ participation in selecting cadres increased, tensions between cadres and residents declined, and relations between cadres and residents became more harmonious.”²⁸⁷ One of the reasons for this effect is that the appointment process was no longer a black-box process. With the participation of more residents and local officials, the election results became more

²⁸⁵ For example, the agricultural office, financial office, industry office, youth league office, etc. are attached to the township authority, but the personnel issues and the main activities of these offices are supervised by the corresponding offices subordinate to the county authority. The township party committee and government only have an influence on their routine operations.

²⁸⁶ For example, this was the case in Buyun township. The competitively elected governor could do little to those organizations attached to Buyun township but under the supervision of the Shizhong county authority. See Zhang Jingmin, “Wo dui Buyun zhixuan yiji xiangguan wenti de sikao” (My Reflections on the Direct Election in Buyun Township and Related Issues), Working Paper, January 21, 2001.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

accepted by them. Even if those candidates favored by some residents did not win the pre-election, the residents were less hostile to the person who did win.

Second, the township authorities were more motivated and under more pressure to increase transparency of governmental affairs.²⁸⁸ This is because corruption is one of the major complaints of the residents; and one of the major appeals to governments is to increase the transparency of the local political process. As a result, more candidates began to include transparency on their electoral platforms. Those who wished to be reelected needed to increase the transparency during their tenures in office.

Third, some interviewees said that, in a few cases, “cadres who emerged from the semi-competitive elections paid more attention to the citizens’ and ordinary cadres’ wishes. In some cases, when tasks assigned by the upper levels were in conflict with the residents’ interests, the cadres would side with the residents.”²⁸⁹

These changes were probably caused by the fact that in the semi-competitive elections a cadre’s chances of being promoted to township leadership positions were greatly influenced by the residents and ordinary cadres. In many townships, competition to win the votes of the electors was intense. Precise data on how many cases with unexpected results—in local cadres’ words, “winners previously unknown to the party committees emerging from polls”²⁹⁰—occurred are not available. An estimation in Ya’an prefecture is that 20-30 percent of the winners were those who were previously unknown to the standing committees of the county party committees. An estimation by cadres at the provincial level is that one-third of the winners were those not previously known to the organizations holding cadre responsibility over the township positions. These unexpected winners encouraged more cadres to respect their colleagues and residents. On the other hand, the unexpected election outcomes also shocked some of the cadres who formerly only followed directives from higher levels.

²⁸⁸ Author’s interview: L-Sichuan-3.

²⁸⁹ Author’s interview: L-Sichuan-87.

²⁹⁰ In Chinese, it is “从票箱里出来赢家” (*Cong piaoxiang li chulai de yingjia*).

In Ya'an prefecture, the party secretaries in two townships decided against nominating themselves as primary candidates after calculating that they would not win enough votes of the residents and ordinary cadres. By doing this, they in fact lost the opportunity to hold their positions for a second term. The decision of the township cadres not to compete and the fact that they were willing to forgo their leadership positions because of the elections were unprecedented.²⁹¹

Unexpected winners in township competitive elections were only one of the ways through which the cadres' behavior was influenced. Less dramatic election outcomes could also have an impact. For example, when a winner did not get an expected number of votes, he/she would have to rethink his/her policies. This was the case in the Buyun township semi-competitive election in 2001. During the election, the people had already taken it for granted that the incumbent township governor would win the election. The incumbent township governor was in such an advantageous position compared to his rival that some cadres, including the incumbent himself, thought that it would not be considered a success if he received less than 70 percent of the votes.²⁹² He was the superior of his competitor, a staff member in the land administration under the township government. He was not only more resourceful than his competitor in material terms, but also psychologically. During the six debates in front of the residents in the bazaar, it had been clear that he was much more popular. However, the results of the vote surprised the expectations of many people. The incumbent received less than 51 percent of the ballots. His apparently chanceless rival got more than 49 percent of the votes. Among the 5,000 ballots, the difference between the two candidates was less than 100 votes.²⁹³ Cadres at the county level believed that over the past three years, the incumbent in many cases had not paid enough attention to the residents' opinions when making decisions. Also, some of his policies were implemented with little transparency. This alienated him from a large

²⁹¹ In the words of local cadres, it was an "earthquake" among the cadres in the prefecture. Source: Author's interview: L-Sichuan-41.

²⁹² I was in the township with some county party officials observing the election on the day of the voting. I took the opportunity to interview county officials, township officials, and township residents.

²⁹³ On December 31, 2001, the author witnessed the voting and the counting of the ballots.

proportion of the residents. Votes for his rival were actually protest votes against the incumbent.²⁹⁴ This protest almost made him lose his position.

Therefore, not only the unexpected outcomes but the expected results matter as well. As long as there is competition among the different candidates and the voters have choices, the township cadres have to put more weight on the residents' opinions when making decisions. They seemed inclined to seek a new balance between compliance with the authorities at the higher levels and respect for the residents' interests. The balancing point has moved a little in the direction of the residents with the implementation of the township semi-competitive elections.

5.4 Impact on the development of civil society

In the following section I try to determine whether the introduction of the new election practices in the townships had any impact on the development of civil society. However, I did not find any concrete evidence of an impact. No officials reported any links between the introduction of the semi-competitive elections and the growth of non-governmental organizations. In my interviews, none of the residents could link any NGO development with the introduction of the new election practices. In Ya'an prefecture, Sichuan province, the local officials reported that on average, the number of registered NGOs in each township increased from around ten in the late 1990s to around sixty in 2004. But it seems that the growth of the NGOs was basically due to economic activities. There are no links between the growth in the number of NGOs and the introduction of the semi-competitive elections.

²⁹⁴ Author's interviews with cadres in the Shizhong county authority: L-Sichuan-6, 7, 8. In the township, during interviews peasants expressed strong resentment of some of the incumbent's policies and how they had been implemented with little transparency. (Author's interview: L-Sichuan-15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21). However, some of the policies in fact were not under the control of the incumbent. They were independent directives from the upper levels.

Nor did I find clear link between the implementation of the elections and the rise of an awareness of civil and political rights among the people. I did not find any evidence that people began to be more active in soliciting voting rights after they became involved in the semi-competitive elections. Neither did I find that people in townships with elections were more inclined to defend their voting rights than people in townships without such elections.

However, the procedures for semi-competitive elections seemed to stimulate social networking. During the elections, each competitor tried to mobilize social networks with which to establish links, for example, clan networks, alumni networks, business networks, village or township networks, common career networks, and professional associations, etc. The elections increased activities within and among the networks, strengthening the existing social networks. In some cases, they revived some networks that had existed in history but were disrupted by the current regime. For example, historically clan networks were an indispensable part of the people's lives. But this tradition was destroyed during Mao's Cultural Revolution. Today, these networks have gradually been revived due to a number of reasons. In a few cases, it was the competitors for township positions who brought together the first gatherings of the leading members of the clan networks after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976.

Actually, at the village level, the revitalization of some social networks by the semi-competitive elections is clearer. Candidates competing for the positions of head of the villagers committee and village party secretary extensively utilized the existing social networks, including the clan networks, to mobilize support. Xiao Tangbiao has recorded details on the way, scale, and results of mobilizing the clan networks for the village semi-competitive elections in Jiangxi province. On the basis of these cases, one can see that the social networks were strongly activated by the electoral activities

(Xiao Tangbiao, 2004).²⁹⁵

For the purpose of promoting popularity or acceptance among the residents and the local officials who are members of the electoral college, the competitors also try to build social networks for mobilizing support. Since the campaigns are limited, the networks must work in a low-profile manner, and they usually cease to function after the election is over. Therefore, they are temporary networks rather than long-lasting ones.

Considering that the social networks are some form of social capital, these observations may complement the ideas of Putnam. In his *Making Democracy Work*, Robert Putnam clearly finds that social capital is vital for a well-functioning (efficient) democracy. He examines the positive impact of the introduction of a democratic regional authority on the changing ethos of the elite in Southern Italy with thin social capital. But Putnam seems not to note that the democratic practices themselves might promote the development of social capital. In the basis of the Chinese cases of village and township semi-competitive elections, it may be premature to conclude that social capital is vital to the functioning of a democracy. However, it might be fair to argue that democratic operations will help facilitate the growth of social capital.

5.5 Impact on the attitudes of the party and state elite

Although it seems to have had an unclear and mild impact on the society, the introduction of the township semi-competitive elections does seem to have had a larger and more explicit impact on the party and the state.

5.5.1 Developing support among party and state staff for the semi-competitive elections

²⁹⁵ Xiao Tangbiao, “Nongcun jiceng zizhi yu minzhu shijian zhong de zongzu wenti” (The Issue of Clans in Grassroots Autonomy and Democracy in Villages), 2004, at www.chinaelections.org.

Whereas only some of the township residents are involved in the semi-competitive elections and understand their implications, almost all the party and state staff are familiar with the elections. Those who are not familiar with the county party secretary in person have an opportunity to become known to him/her through the implementation of the election reforms. Those minority local elite who already have connections with the people in power not only have to win the support of the party secretary but also have to win popularity among their peers and local residents as well. They thus have to change their behavior and develop new strategies that will accommodate the interests of their peers and local residents.

When interviewees were asked “what if the semi-competitive election practices were to be abolished?” they very often answered that apart from other consequences, though “ordinary residents might not say a word, those working in the party and state organizations would strongly oppose such an abolition because by eliminating the practice many opportunities for career development would vanish.”

Whereas the semi-competitive elections in some townships seem not to have had an impact on the views of the residents in neighboring townships that do not yet have such elections, the practice seems to have a great impact on the views of party and government staff in neighboring townships. During my visit to townships without semi-competitive elections in Sichuan province, resident interviewees talked about the possibility and desirability of township semi-competitive elections even though they seemingly had little understanding of them. But during our conversations, the party and state staff interviewees showed a strong desire to implement similar practices in their townships.

The different reactions between the residents and the party and state staff are probably due to three reasons. First, the new election practices influence the personal welfare of the party and state staff more than they influence the welfare of ordinary residents due

the obvious impact of the practices on their career development. Second, the party and state staff have a better understanding than the ordinary residents of the issue of semi-competitive elections due to their better education and because they are better trained in the political process. Third, information about the semi-competitive elections might circulate more widely among party and state staff than among local residents due to their better access to government information.

That the implementation of the township semi-competitive elections nurture support among party and state staff is also reflected in the fact that the staffs' attitudes toward the semi-free elections are radically different before and after such elections are implemented. As I was told by the interviewees, before a semi-competitive election was carried out, there were always quite a few party and state officials who had great doubts about the new election practices. But after implementation, these same officials no longer saw the practice as "impossible," "unnecessary," and/or "problematic."

5.5.2 Promoting party links with citizens

One of the outcomes of the implementation of the township semi-competitive elections is that more activists have surfaced during the process. This is especially important for the party in that it is now in a position to recruit effectively. The nominees, or the candidates, regardless of whether they win or lose the elections, are political activists and talented public actors. They would have remained unknown to both the public and the party had it not been for the open nomination and the electoral competition. The party can then recruit those candidates who were not yet party members, thus contributing to improving the party membership, especially in the rural areas.

A party official at the provincial level who handles the issues of finding, reviewing, and training cadres told me:

“For example in county A in central Sichuan, we needed to make forty appointments at the township level. We held semi-competitive elections. More than 300 people nominated themselves as candidates. Had it not been for the semi-competitive elections, the local party organizations would not have known them, except for a few who were already known to the party. These people have political ambitions. In cases where they are not yet party members, the party organizations will try to recruit them.”

The number of party members has increased in the past decades. But party members in rural areas have been declining whereas party members in urban areas have been increasing significantly. Because of the party’s declining ideological appeal and its increasing bureaucratic alienation from the public, fewer young people are eager to join the party. Thus the party organizations are “aging.”

The implementation of the semi-competitive elections provides both an opportunity for the party to identify potential activists and for the ordinary people to re-discover the openness and attractiveness of the party. In the townships with semi-competitive elections that I visited, the local party officials said that for the first time in years the number of young people joining the party had increased.

The implementation of the semi-competitive elections has also had a great impact on the morality of the party organs. While traditionally Communist Party organs fear competitive elections and it is indeed the case for the vast majority of party organs at all levels across China today, the party organs in those counties with semi-competitive elections seem to have acquired a self-confidence from organizing and participating in competitive elections.

A typical comment by a party official in a township that has held semi-competitive elections was as follows:

“You see, most of the winners are those favored by the party. Or, in other words, most of the results of the competition are within the expectations of the party. This means that the party we observes public opinion, and has the support of the people. Indeed, there are some cases in which those candidates favored by the party lose the election. But this is quite OK. The world doesn’t just collapse. Life goes on as usual and everything is in order. Nothing gets out of control.”

But when I talked to a party official in a township that had never held a semi-competitive election, a typical response was:

“Oh, no, competitive elections should not be carried out unless the Central Committee calls for them. What if a party member loses the election? What if the one favored by the party loses the election? The leadership of the party would be in great danger. Social order would be shaken.”

Some of the interviewees in places that had held township semi-competitive elections believe that if competitive elections were to be suddenly implemented throughout the country for whatever reasons, their party organizations would perform much better than those in places without any experience of semi-competitive elections. They believe that the Communist Party organizations in their localities would have the most likelihood of surviving competition from competitors.²⁹⁶

In order to organize semi-competitive elections well, the party committees and their organization departments have to do more authentic public polling on each of the potential candidates so as to develop appropriate strategies to deal with this contingency. In the process, the links between the local party organs and the party members and the relations between the local party organs and the people are strengthened. The party organs also become familiar with the campaign strategy and

²⁹⁶ It should be noted that no interviewees used the word “opposition.”

the social networking through which each competitor tries to mobilize support and to promote popularity.

In places without semi-competitive elections, local party organs develop another set of knowledge and skills. Since their job is to enforce the will of the party secretaries from top down rather than to discover the wishes of the local residents from bottom up, they do not have the skills and talents to accommodate the interests of the residents; instead they have to persuade, cheat, or even force the local residents to accept the candidates proposed to their superiors. We found that party organs in places with and without township semi-competitive election began to deviate in terms of ethos, orientation, knowledge, and skills, though it is too early to conclude how far this deviation will go in the future.

The implementation of township semi-competitive elections not only leads to differences among party organs in various localities with regard to their attitudes toward the competitive elections but also leads to differences in understanding and implementing some of the major principles of the party.

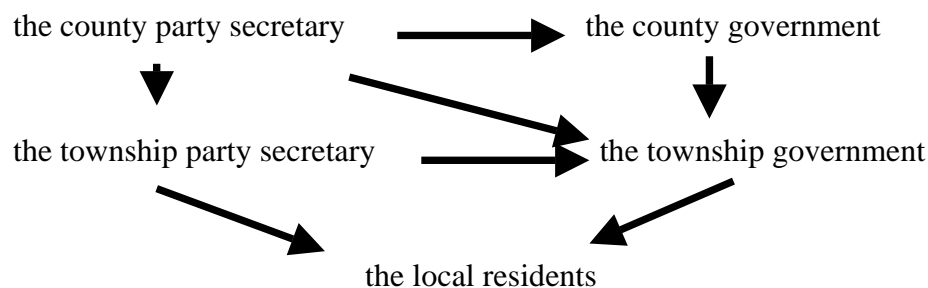
For example, one of the major principles of the party is what we refer to as “*dang guan ganbu*” (the party manages the cadres). The dominant practice under guidance of this principle is that individual cadres should be identified by the party and recommended (a euphemism for “imposed”) to the people. But in Sichuan province, when I asked how one could ensure that “the party manages the cadres” while implementing the township semi-competitive elections, some officials in the organization departments of the county and prefecture party committees argued that: “I believe, if the party controls the election regulations, sets the criteria about what is a good cadre, monitors the elections to ensure they are clean and fair, then the party will manage the cadre issue well. The cadres elected under these conditions will serve the people well, which is actually the goal of the party, and in turn it would ensure that the people support the party.”

Here, a differences in understanding of the same principle is clear. Whereas most party officials believe that “the party manages the cadres” means that the party should select and appoint particular individuals as cadres, some party officials with experience of township semi-competitive elections believe that the principle means that the party should enforce the correct regulations so that the party can appoint the right individuals selected by the residents under the correct regulations as cadres. Whereas the dominant understanding is individual-centered, the new understanding is regulation-centered (procedural). However, how far this divergence will go and what its implication will be are not yet clear at the present stage.

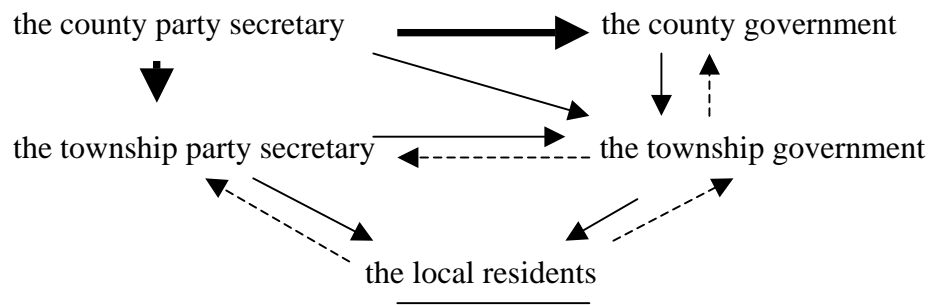
Figure 9 summarizes the above impacts of the township semi-competitive elections on the power structure at and below the county level in China

Figure 9. Power relations at the county and township levels before and after the implementation of township semi-competitive elections

A. Power relations at and below the county level before implementation of township semi-competitive elections



B. Power relations at the county and township levels after implementation of township semi-competitive elections:



Note: The solid arrow means the former enforces its program on the latter and the latter should comply with the former;

The thickness of the line indicates the magnitude of the power;

The broken arrow means the former has some capacity, though weak, to oppose the latter, or the voice of the former is heard by the latter, or the former has some constraint over the latter;

The solid line under “the local residents” indicates horizontal links.

5.6 Impacts on the discourse (ideology) of the party and state

In addition to its impacts on political institutions, attitudes, and power structures in the localities, the implementation of township semi-competitive elections also has a nationwide impact, especially on party and state discourse.

One major effect is that the elections break the taboo against discussing competitive elections for party and state positions. They also dispel the so-far widely held notion among Chinese about the impossibility of promoting competitive elections at the upper levels.

On January 15, 1999, *Nanfang Daily* (Southern Daily) published a detailed report about the semi-competitive elections in Buyun township in Shizhong county in Suining prefecture of Sichuan province, one of the first cases of such elections in

1998-99. It was the first such report in the mass media since the 1949 Communist takeover of power. The case was soon reported in other influential media, including *China Daily* (the official state newspaper) on February 3, 1999 and China Central TV (the official state television station), on February 26, 1999.

The report immediately dispelled speculation that it would be impossible for the semi-competitive elections to be implemented at the township and upper levels. But a township semi-competitive election in Guangdong province that had been held in 1999 was cancelled for 2002. There was then wide discussion about whether these elections were sustainable. With the spread of the practice in Sichuan in 2002, in Jiangsu in 2003, in Yunnan in 2004 and 2005, these discussions faded away. The present discussion attempts to answer the following questions:

To which other provinces will the township semi-competitive elections spread next?

At what speed will the practice spread?

How inclusive will the electoral college be?

What restrictions on the election campaigns will be changed? And, more importantly,

When will the first case of semi-competitive election at the county level with a significantly large electoral college be implemented across the country?

The township semi-competitive elections were endorsed by some parts of the central authority. They have been praised by most think-tanks affiliated with the State Council and the Central Committee of the party. Fellows at the Institute of Political Science²⁹⁷ and the Institute of Rural Development²⁹⁸ attached to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a major think-tank of the State Council, have carried out important research on them and have drawn positive conclusions. This is also the case

²⁹⁷ For example, senior fellow Bai Gang and colleague Shi Weimin did extensive research on the elections, and they came to view the development positively. See their works, for example, Shi Weimin, *Gongxuan yu zhixuan* (Open Elections and Direct Elections) (Beijing: Chinese Social Sciences Press, 2000).

²⁹⁸ For example, senior fellow Dang Guoying has conducted research on the elections, with positive conclusions.

for fellows at the Central Party School and the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau. These two think-tanks attached to the Central Committee of the Party have jointly organized a program called “China Local Government Innovation Awards.” The program assesses the innovative projects of local governments once every two years and grants awards to those projects judged to be outstanding. In the first round of awards in 2002, a case of semi-competitive elections for township governor was granted an award. In the second round in 2004, a case of semi-competitive elections for township governor with the involvement of all adult residents (the Buyun case) was granted an award. In the third round in 2006, a case of semi-competitive elections for township party secretary was granted an award.

However, there have also been reactions from the central authority doubting the desirability of the spread of the township semi-competitive elections. One was in the summer of 2001, when the General Office of the Central Committee of CCP passed “Document No. 12” to the local authorities, a directive formulated by the National People’s Congress that is believed by many people to discourage experimentation with township semi-competitive elections.²⁹⁹ However, the document did not stop the spread of the township semi-competitive elections. Instead, the election practices spread widely across Sichuan, Jiangsu, and Yunnan in 2002 and the following years.

The other major reaction was from the National People’s Congress in 2006. Since the end of 2006, a new round of elections for township governors have been organized across the country. The central party’s official journal *Seeking Truth* (August issue, 2006) published an article that criticized the direct elections for township governor. The article was written by Sheng Huaren, one of the nineteen vice chairpersons and the general secretary of the National People’s Congress. The article was interpreted by many to be a message of discouragement by the center against the further

²⁹⁹ The text does not use strong words against the township semi-competitive elections. It simply states that “recently some localities carried out township elections for township governors by bypassing the township people’s congress. In the coming elections at the end of the year and early next year, we urge the localities to organize elections by conforming to the existing laws and regulations.”

development of the township semi-competitive elections.

It should be noted that these latter reactions did not reject the township semi-competitive elections outright. The competition itself was not targeted; the only dimension that was targeted as a point of concern was the expansion of the electoral college to involve all local residents, thus marginalizing the local people's congresses. Obviously, a local people's congress composed of about forty persons is much easier to manage (by the party and/or the upper levels) than an electoral college composed of, say, 10,000 residents. Such a concern might arise from the desire to maintain the existing organization law for local governments that ensures the crucial role of the local people's congresses, at least formally. But the local party organs, if they really want to, can still promote the township semi-competitive elections by arguing that the electoral college only selects the formal candidate, whose name is then passed on to the local people's congress. Thus formally, it is still the local people's congress that elects and appoints the township governor. This is exactly the argument made by the local party organs in Sichuan, Jiangsu, and Yunnan after circulation of Document No. 12 in 2001.

Therefore, it is still unclear whether this latest article questioning the township semi-competitive elections will confine the spread of the new election practices. I will present some speculation in the concluding chapter. Suffice it to say here that the township semi-competitive elections have provoked debates and various reactions at the national level.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 What are the township semi-competitive elections? Why did they occur? What are the consequences?

In the mid-1990s, China witnessed the first cases of semi-competitive elections for major township officials. Since then, the new election practices have spread to more townships, from one county to another, and from Sichuan province to Guangdong, Hubei, Zhejiang, Shandong, and Yunnan provinces. Positions open to semi-competitive elections have been extended from the township vice-governor up to the township governor and in increasing cases up to the township party secretary. The number of cases has increased from a dozen in the mid-1990s, to several hundred in the late 1990s, and to several thousand in the early 2000s. These developments have fueled expectations about an increase in the democratic elements in the political restructuring in China.

The township semi-competitive election is a traditional election complemented by an open and competitive pre-election process through which the county party committee accepts the winner of the voting by the electoral college as a formal candidate. The campaign, though allowed, is constrained. There is no opposition party in China. In the multi-candidate elections, the competition is among party members or among party members and non-party members. Although there is a unified, centrally imposed regulation on how an election should be carried out, this regulation is rather abstract and offers few details. The local party committee has some autonomous power in formulating the details. It also has room to maneuver in implementing the regulations, due to its nomenklatura discretion over township officials. The various counties have implemented different regulations for their respective semi-competitive elections.

Therefore, the requirements for candidacy, the inclusiveness of the electoral college, the campaign strategies, and the intensity of the competition vary among locality.

The spatial distribution of the township semi-competitive elections falsifies the expectations derived from the general theory on the development of democratic institutions and activities. Based on such a theory, competitive elections should have first appeared and spread in the economically more developed, urbanized, and industrialized coastal regions. But in reality most cases occurred in the economically less-developed, agricultural, and rural provinces, for example, Sichuan, Hubei, Yunnan, etc., or in less-developed, agricultural, and rural regions within the coastal provinces, for example, Suqian prefecture in Jiangsu province.

Research results also falsify the role of civil society in promoting the development of semi-competitive elections in the townships. No ordinary citizens or citizens' organizations have confronted the authority, demanding the introduction of the semi-competitive elections. Instead, ordinary citizens have been passive participants in the development of the new election practices. It was those county and prefecture party secretaries who were in charge of the nomenklatura power over the major township positions who actively introduced the semi-competitive elections. Why would they introduce a democratic procedure that might reduce their power?

Research results suggest that the party leaders did not introduce the semi-competitive elections for the sake of democracy, but rather to restore cohesion and stability in those locations where alternative measures were scarce. Naturally, this is not without an element of self-interest: to win promotions or to avoid being demoted seem to be important motivating factors behind the initiation of the elections.

Promotion criteria in China have changed since the late 1970s. The dictatorship of the proletariat is no longer the only criteria for promotion; it is not even the main criteria, though it is certainly still one of the criteria. The more important criteria for

promoting cadres is their performance in promoting economic development and maintaining social stability, even at the price of undermining the dictatorship of the proletariat and its associated ideology.

In the various regions, officials have varying resources and encounter different challenges to promote economic development and maintain social and political stability. In the economically developed and industrialized coastal regions, on the one hand, local people have more opportunities to become wealthy, thus they are less disturbed by the misbehavior of the local authorities, if at all. On the other hand, the local authorities have more financial resources in these regions. By using the relatively rich resources, the local party officials can demonstrate their performance to win promotions. Meanwhile, the local authorities in these rich regions are less pressured to extract resources from individual citizens beyond the routine budgetary requirements. But in the economically less-developed and agricultural hinterland regions, the same motivations meet different conditions. On the one hand, the local people have few opportunities to make money, thus they are sensitive to the local authorities' efforts to extract further resources from them and are sensitive to the corruption of the local officials. The local people's resentment or dissatisfaction toward the local authority is much more widespread and extensive than it is in the economically dynamic regions. Tensions between local residents and local authorities are greater. On the other hand, because of the low level of economic development, the local authorities have many fewer financial resources. Thus, they have fewer opportunities to win promotions by completing large-scale investment projects. Moreover, the positions of party and state officials can be jeopardized by the occasional demonstrations and other forms of social turmoil within their jurisdictions. Meanwhile, the central leadership of the party and the state is increasingly concerned about social and political stability, and thus puts increasing pressure on the local officials to ensure stability. Those who successfully deal with potential instabilities will be promoted. Those who cannot control the local situations will be punished, or demoted. The only chance to show their performance in terms of in economic

development is to mobilize resources out of the state sector through some sort of political restructuring. Evidence shows that only when the county party leaders win in this respect are they likely to be willing to pay the costs of yielding some power to their colleagues and the residents under their governance.

This is exactly the purpose of the township semi-competitive elections. The motivations of the initiators of the elections were to use the semi-free elections as an instrument: 1) to ease social and political tensions by giving local residents a voice in the local political process, in particular a voice in selecting local officials; 2) to slow down, if not stop, the further accumulation of the residents' resentment against the authority by increasing their checking and monitoring of township officials; 3) to mobilize resources or attract contributions from out of the party-state network by granting a voice to those who have resources in the private sector; and 4) to recruit talent that has the skills and knowledge to manage politics under the new social and economic environment. By preserving social and political stability in potentially instable regions, and/or by nurturing a more transparent business environment and mobilizing resources out of the state sector, party officials who initiate township semi-competitive elections are able to remain longer in their current positions or even may be promoted to higher positions that would give them more power.

Therefore, the introduction and spread of the township semi-competitive elections is neither the natural result of economic development, as would be derived from modernization theory; nor is it the result of any movement launched by civil society organizations, as would be expected on the basis of the Latin American and Southern Europe experiences; nor is the result of any class struggle imposed on a capitalist state, as described by Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992) based on the experience of democratization in Western Europe in the nineteenth century. It is the result of certain party officials' rational calculations of the personal benefits and costs that might be accrued to them by initiating township semi-competitive elections. When the party officials in charge of the nomenklatura expect to gain more power

through being promoted or to prevent a total loss of power by being demoted from their positions, they initiate semi-competitive elections, even though the elections may result in a temporary or partial decrease in their power.

Whether or not the expectations of the initiator of the new election practices materialize, the township semi-competitive elections yield important side-effects with respect to the internal as well as the external power distribution in the localities such as the power distribution in the relationship between the party and the state, the party-state and society, the lower and higher levels, and gradual adaptation while withdrawing power.

First, the nomenklatura power of the county party committee, in particular the county party secretary, has become diffused with the introduction of the semi-competitive elections. The county party committee, in particular the county party secretary, no longer monopolizes the nomination and selection processes for the major township positions. Nominations are open to the public. The selection procedure involves a large number of governmental staff and even ordinary residents. Although the county party secretary still has great influence, he/she no longer can monopolize the entire process.

Parallel to the diffusion of the nomenklatura power, the relationship between the county party secretary and the major township officials has been relaxed, since the county party secretary is to some extent removed from the nomination and selection process of the major township officials. Thus, the formerly highly personalized relations between subordinates and superiors that formed a hotbed for corruption and eroded the legitimacy of the system have been de-personalized. The effects of the de-personalization of power relations and its possible effects on curbing corruption also seem to be one of the major reasons why the center does not block the new electoral practices.

The new electoral practices seem to affect relations between party and state positions, in particular relations between the township party secretary and the township governor. The township governor struggles with the township party secretary for more power on the basis of his/her legitimacy from receiving a mandate from the people rather than being an imposed appointment by the party secretaries. The rising tensions between these two positions in some places have led to the introduction of semi-competitive elections for the position of township party secretary as well.

Intergovernmental relations, in particular the relationships between the township and county government, are also affected by the implementation of the township semi-competitive elections. Although there has not yet been any case of confrontation between the county and township governments following the semi-competitive elections, semi-competitively elected township governments seem to be less compliant with their superior county government. This seems to be a natural result of the increased constraints on the residents involving in the voting, the diffusion of the county party committee's nomenklatura power over township positions, and the decreasing personalization of relations between county party officials and township officials.

There are also explicit changes in the relationship between the local authority and local society. In places where township semi-competitive elections have been implemented, the township governments are under more pressure to put the issue of transparency on their agendas; the township party organs seem to be more attentive to the people's preferences since they will lose face if their favored candidates lose the elections, or win the elections by an unexpectedly low margin.

The township semi-competitive elections do not yet seem to have promoted civil society organizations. However, apparently horizontal links among the people have been strengthened through the social networking stimulated by the implementation of the elections. During the campaigns, the various candidates attempt to mobilize the

existing social networks, such as clans, alumni networks, etc., and some social networks that have been dormant for years have been re-activated by the campaigns.

Although only a few million residents—a very small proportion of the Chinese population—are involved in and thus know about the semi-competitive township elections, the new election practices are widely known among party and state officials. This is partly due to the fact that officials have better access to information and that officials are more concerned about preserving social and political stability as well as implementing institutional changes that might affect their careers. Although many of the local residents who are involved in the new election practices are still skeptical about the sustainability and significance of the township semi-competitive elections, local party and state elite, especially in those regions that have carried out such elections, acknowledge the inevitability of the development of the semi-competitive elections, and they are trying to adapt to them.

Although limited to townships in a few provinces, the township semi-competitive elections have also had a nationwide impact. First, they eliminated the taboo of the early 1990s against introducing semi-competitive elections into the state authority. At the time, they were thought to be impossible, undesirable, and politically incorrect. But the implementation immediately relieved the doubts, worries, reservations, and fears. Some cases have been widely publicized and are well known across China and even throughout the world. Most mass media and academic research have reported on these cases in a positive and nurturing tone, even as there still are a few articles that doubt desirability and/or correctness of these election cases. The only significant disputes about the development of such semi-competitive elections seem to be taking place in the people's congress system. Some lawmakers accuse the township semi-competitive elections of violating existing law. The debates have been mild, however, without reaching any definite conclusions about either banning or promoting the development of such electoral practices, thus indicating the central authority's open attitudes toward such developments.

Last but not least, the local party still has the capacity, though decreased, to intervene. Through party membership, state laws, nomenklatura responsibility, cadre transfers, demotions, etc. it is still possible for the party to block, hinder, or slow down the unfolding of the impact of the semi-competitive elections. Thus, the political change brought about by the township semi-competitive elections may be evolutionary instead of revolutionary.

6.2 What might happen next?

The semi-competitive elections can take one of three directions in the future. One is that the semi-competitive elections will not spread to more places or to higher levels. Another possibility is that the semi-competitive elections will be entirely banned. The third possibility is that the elections will further spread to more places and to higher levels, leading to more significant political restructuring in China.

The first possibility seems not to be very likely. China has been undergoing constant economic and political change almost three decades. Experience shows that most institutions are transitional. No major institutional innovations will remain at a certain form or stage without further development. Some new practices or institutions will develop and be consolidated. Others might disappear in later years. Similarly, it is unlikely that the semi-competitive elections, as an important institutional innovation, will remain at their current stage. Actually, the development of the semi-competitive elections has been dynamic over the past fifteen years. They were first implemented at the village level in the late 1980s, and then spread to the township level in the late 1990s. Some primitive forms of semi-competitive elections were even implemented in a few counties in the mid-2000s. The semi-competitive elections were first implemented in a few townships, and the spread to thousands of townships. They

were implemented in one province, and then spread to several provinces. Therefore, we have witnessed both their horizontal and vertical development.

In addition, the township semi-competitive elections are not centrally planned. They are local initiatives. They were introduced by the local leadership to tackle economic development problems and social and political stability challenges. The economic situation and the problem of stability in the localities will continue to undergo constant change, thus there is little probability that the semi-competitive elections will remain at their current stage.

The second possibility – the entire abolition of such elections -- is not very likely either. This is mainly because the systemic background against which the semi-competitive elections have developed is not represented by the consolidation of the Stalinist system but rather by the transformation of the system. The Stalinist system has been gradually disintegrating for more than two decades, and it is being transformed into a system characterized by a market economy, private ownership, free trade, integration with the world community, individual responsibilities and rights, etc. According to a general understanding, the semi-competitive elections are compatible with this new transformed system. It is hardly imaginable that the semi-competitive elections that have already developed so far will be completely cancelled.

On the contrary, by my observation, the third possibility is the most likely. As mentioned above, China has been undergoing significant systemic change over the past more than two decades. These changes favor the spread of semi-competitive elections in China. Contested elections that help aggregate the people's preferences are in line with the trends in the economic, political, ideological, and social changes. Contested elections cannot emerge, let alone survive, in a monolithic system. Contested elections can only prevail in a diversified society. Moreover, contestation and diversity reinforce one another. Therefore, the township semi-competitive elections are expected to spread to wider regions across China, and to the upper levels,

even if they will encounter assaults from some various parts of the society. The overall environment is conducive to the spread and acceptance of the idea of contested elections both among the people and the decision-makers.

6.3 What are the practical and theoretical implications?

6.3.1 The practical implications of the semi-competitive elections

With the introduction and spread of semi-competitive election in the townships, more Chinese people have the chance to participate in the political process, in particular at the local levels. Different interests have a platform to interact with one another. As a result, the township party and state organizations have become more responsive to the local people. The party-state relations and intergovernmental relations, in particular at the township and county levels, have been reshuffled.

The idea and practice of contested elections are being accepted by the Chinese Communist Party and are being accommodated into the Chinese political system. It is no longer a question of whether or not competitive elections are possible in China. It is only a question of how the competitive elections will develop in China: at what speed, by whom, in what years, in which places, under what economic and social conditions, at which levels, with or without violence, etc.

The institution of a market economy, the practice of privatization, and the idea of human rights were all first considered to be anti-socialist and/or counter-revolutionary but they were all later accepted as indispensable parts of Chinese economic and political life. There is a considerable likelihood for the practice and institution of contested elections, formerly viewed as heretical, to be accommodated as an indispensable part of the Chinese political system. As the cases of township

semi-competitive elections have been introduced and implemented, the Chinese party and state officials and ordinary residents have become more open to both their positive and negative impacts. They are more open to constructive dialogues on this issue. How a productive dialogue will be managed is both a challenge and an opportunity for those international as well as domestic actors who are trying to promote the dissemination and acceptance of the new electoral procedures in China.

Internationally, the economic changes in China are well known, but the ideological and political restructuring are not as well understood. The spread of the semi-competitive elections in the townships indicates that China is undergoing ideological and political adjustments. The likelihood of greater changes, embodied in and stimulated by the spread of contested elections, should not be ignored.

6.3.2 The theoretical implications of the semi-competitive elections

Theoretically, the development of township semi-competitive elections in China presents more questions than it solves.

China surprised the world when it put an end to the planned economy and successfully developed a market economy under the leadership of the Communist Party. China will probably surprise the world again with the development of competitive elections in many regions and at local and substantial levels under the leadership of the Communist Party. Though China is not the first communist state to introduce semi-competitive elections, China seems to be the first communist state that will be able to live with semi-competitive elections. Semi-competitive elections were introduced in communist Hungary in the mid-1980s and in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. However, the Hungarian party-state and the Soviet Union did not last for long after their introduction. Although the semi-competitive elections might not be the major reason for their collapse, they were part of the process of transformation in both countries. In China, the semi-competitive elections were introduced in the

mid-1990s, but the basic political structure in China is still operating today and will probably continue to operate in the foreseeable future with a wider spread of the contested elections. The question of how this is possible in China exceeds the scope of this current research, but it is a very interesting practical and theoretical issue.

The fact that the first cases of township semi-competitive elections were implemented in the rural, agricultural, less-educated, and underdeveloped regions in China seems to contradict general expectations derived from most theories on political development. Most theories tend to predict that competitive elections will first develop in urban, industrial, educated, and developed areas. However, the development of the semi-competitive elections in townships in China still might not be adequate to challenge the existing theories because 1) the semi-competitive elections themselves are still at a primitive stage; 2) the semi-competitive elections are still not fully entrenched in the Chinese political system; 3) the semi-competitive elections are still only being implemented at the local levels; and 4) China is at a beginning stage of industrialization and economic modernization. However, the surprising origins of the new electoral experiments (areas with less cohesion and less political and social stability) show that existing theories are inadequate to explain the development of the elections in China.

Since the few initiators of the semi-competitive elections in the townships can be clearly identified, we have an opportunity to observe why particular officials initiate the reform. It turns out that the officials' personal interests resulting from introducing such elections seem to be the main incentive. Traditional approaches such as viewing political development as a result of class struggle or viewing it as the natural result of economic and social development are inadequate. There has been no serious class struggle in China over the past two decades. Meanwhile, the economic and social development does not explain the origins of the first cases or the mechanisms leading to the introduction and implementation of the first cases of contested elections.

The semi-competitive elections were perceived by local officials to be an instrument to ease tensions between the authorities and the residents and the elections did have an effect on mobilizing the residents' support for the local authorities. It is unprecedented in the history of the People's Republic of China that party officials have had such a perception and have been willing to experiment with this perception.

The unbalanced development of township semi-competitive elections seems also to be evidence of the trade-off between legitimacy from the process and legitimacy from economic performance. Almost all the cases of township semi-competitive election have occurred in economically underdeveloped regions with high social and political tensions. The authorities have had few means to promote economic development. Meanwhile, the social and political tensions have eroded the legitimacy of the authorities. The local authorities needed to attempt such reforms in order to increase their legitimacy. However, in economically developed regions, the local authorities have sufficient resources to sustain rapid economic growth. On the one hand, the operations of the local authorities rely less on the willing support of the residents. On the other hand, the local people are less dissatisfied with the local authorities. The legitimacy in these regions still holds. There thus seems to be no need to undertake any reform that concedes more political power and/or grants political rights to the residents.

In sum, the development of the semi-competitive elections in Chinese townships is both practically and theoretically a significant new event. It is not directly related to modernization, or to any social movements that would underscore modernization theory. Instead, on the one hand, it is directly connected to the transformation of the system and the disintegration of the party-state network as a local alternative response to economic, social and political instability. On the other hand, the semi-free elections have a strong impact on the reshaping of power relations both within the party-state network and among the network and those outside of it and thereby inciting adaptive

drives. As part of the process of economic and political transformation, the future of the elections is foreseeable. However, the examination of their development in this research is as experimental as the development itself. Hopefully, this research will draw more attention to these elections, and related issues can be explored in the near future.

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