

Patrons, clients and secretaries: governance in Chinese villages

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By Lincoln E. Davidson *

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My name is Wang Dalin; I was born and bred in Caijiawa. Although Caijiawa Village is in Miyun County, east of Beijing, before 2003 most people in the village only had a bit more than a mu of land to scrape by on. The average income was just 3000 RMB. As for me, I've done construction, run a shipping company, opened a brickyard. Before I became party secretary, I ran seven or eight companies, with assets upwards of 100 million RMB.¹

Around 2000, all the villages around us started developing their agricultural industries. One after another they all got rich. In 2003, the village party members had me go visit the township party committee, hiding from me that they wanted me to go in hopes that I'd become Caijiawa Village's party branch secretary. At the time, all I could think was: "I won't do it. I don't have to worry about feeding and clothing myself, why should I give myself a hard time by taking this on?"

When it came time to choose new leaders, they picked me. The township and village cadres all went to work on convincing me. Wherever I went, they would follow along; whenever I sat down to eat, they'd join me. Finally, their display of confidence in me moved me.

On August 22, 2003, I reported to work. On August 23, I took out 8 million RMB from the bank and paid off the village government's debt. At the time, I figured that since I'd accepted the secretaryship, I should think of a way to increase my popularity and get everyone to support me.²

As interesting as it is, the preceding passage raises more questions about life in contemporary China than it answers. In a country led by a Communist Party that still ascribes to the principles of Marxism-Leninism, how did one individual amass a personal wealth of 100 million RMB in a village where the average yearly income was just 3000 RMB? Why was that same individual chosen by the Chinese Communist Party to represent the party and lead his village? If all of the township and village cadres had so much confidence in him that they followed him around for days just to get him to accept the offered position, why did he feel the need to spend 8 million RMB (1.3 million USD) of his own money to "increase [his] popularity?"

Unfortunately, the answers to these questions are not included in the above account. However, these questions—and the lack of corresponding answers—hint at a number of other questions about rural governance and party-state-society relations that remain unanswered by the

¹ In 2015, 100 RMB ≈ 16 USD. 1 mu = 666 square meters = 0.165 acres.

² This passage is an excerpt from Qiu Bing, *Chinese Village Party Branch Secretaries: The Voices of 100 of China's Grassroots Cadres* (*Zhongguo cunzhishu: 100 wei zhongguo zui jiceng ganbu de shengyin*), (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 2012), 6 (translated by the author).

English-language literature on contemporary China. Who rules in the villages? How do they rule? Whom do they represent? Is there "good governance" in the villages?³ Under what conditions is there "good governance" and under what conditions does governance break down? How do villagers respond when that happens?

In short: What is going on in rural China?

The People's Republic of China is a vast country, with incredible diversity from region to region. In explaining this diversity, Chinese people often talk about how one village might speak a certain dialect, while another village just a *li* or two down the road speaks a totally different dialect, completely incomprehensible to the residents of the first village. Chinese regional diversity goes beyond language, however, spreading to culture, ethnicity, resource endowment, level of industrialization, economic development and—most frustrating for the political scientist, although perhaps not for the anthropologist—implementation of central policy. Answering the question of contemporary rural China in a comprehensive manner that addresses all of this diversity while preserving both internal and external validity requires a book-length treatment drawing on large-*n* survey data, numerous long-term ethnographic studies of a representative sample of villages and an exhaustive review of both the Chinese- and English-language literature on rural China. Regardless of whether such a study is or is not possible, it is certainly beyond the scope of this paper.⁴ However, this paper does seek to point towards a possible answer to some of these questions and propose a framework for future research.

The government of the People's Republic of China is structured like an ideal bureaucracy; the central government oversees central ministries and provincial governments,

³ And what constitutes "good governance?" Effective delivery of public goods? Economic development? Responsiveness to villager demands?

⁴ With regard to the feasibility of such a comprehensive study, I believe it is possible; *The Transformation of Governance in Rural China: Market, Finance, and Political Authority* by An Chen (2015) gets close to the ideal.

provincial governments oversee provincial ministries and city governments, and so on down to the township. In Leninist fashion, parallel to this structure the Chinese Communist Party bureaucracy monitors, leads and controls action at every level. These bureaucratic structures are composed of nested principal-agent relationships that naturally present their own set of agency problems.

At the lowest level of government, the village, the situation is different. The Chinese state legally ends at the township, while the party bureaucracy continues downward, with a party branch in each village, which is made up of all the party members in the village and led by a village party branch committee headed by a party branch secretary. Unlike his superior in the township party committee, the village party branch secretary cannot simply appoint the government apparatus that he oversees. Since the 1998 passage of the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees, villagers have been self-governing, electing representatives from among themselves to enact the law and administer the village government. This would seem to place the village party branch secretary right in the middle of a multiple-principals problem. Whom should he be accountable to: the township party committee or the villagers' committee (and, by extension, his fellow villagers)?

This is only a classic multiple-principals problem at surface examination, however. A formal institutional mechanism holds the village party branch secretary accountable to the township party committee, which has the power to appoint him, extend his tenure, remove him from his position and determine his compensation. His "constituents" —the villagers—have no such formal control mechanisms. They can petition higher levels of government for redress of grievances, to have village-level decisions overturned and the like—and there are many cases where gross violations of the law by village party branch secretaries have forced villagers to

resort to such measures—but doing so is costly and a far from ideal method of agent control.⁵ The high cost of control makes the party branch secretary’s relationship with his village principal very different from his relationship with his township principal, which more closely resembles a classic principal-agent relationship. Within the village, formal institutions grant the party branch secretary an excessive amount of discretion and the villagers almost no tools for enforcing compliance. Yet the party branch secretary still needs to manage his relationship with his constituents in a way that maximizes the political space in which he can operate and ensures that his other agent, the township party committee, sees him “serving the people” and “playing [his] role as a leading nucleus.”⁶ How, then, does the village party branch secretary “correct” the deficiencies of the formal institutional arrangement he must work within to ensure a healthy relationship with his constituents?

The work environment of the party branch secretary is very similar to that of the “street-level bureaucrats” described by Michael Lipsky.⁷ Working on the front lines of social services, street-level bureaucrats must deploy chronically-limited institutional resources to meet perpetually-increasing demand for services, while navigating goal expectations from superiors that tend to be ambiguous or internally conflicting.⁸ The clients of street-level bureaucrats tend to be non-voluntary and have minimal power to control their bureaucratic interlocutors, and it is next to impossible for the street-level bureaucrat’s superiors to accurately measure the extent to which his work contributes to organizational goals.⁹ To handle the indeterminacy of their position, street-level bureaucrats adopt coping mechanisms such as routinization, rationing,

⁵ Chen Guidi and Wu Chuntao, *Will the Boat Sink the Water? The Life of China's Peasants* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007).

⁶ The definition of the party branch secretary's role provided in the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees.

⁷ Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service* (New York: Russell Sage, 1980).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 29-53.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 40-70.

client control and resource husbanding; very frequently, these coping mechanisms are “contrary to an agency’s policy but actually basic to its survival.”¹⁰

Party branch secretaries face a similar situation. With “a thousand threads above and a single needle below” (*shangmian qian tiao xian, xiamian yi gen zhen* 上面千条线，下面一根针), they must choose how to employ their time, money and political capital, prioritizing implementation of some higher-level policies over others. At the same time, the “single needle” must choose between a thousand different potential places to enter the fabric and begin sewing: because resources are limited, not every villager can receive an equal share of the party branch secretary’s time and attention, nor (perhaps more critically for villagers) can every rural resident share equally in the spoils he has to distribute.

In this paper, I seek to identify the “coping mechanism” that party branch secretaries adopt in response to the contradictions and deficiencies of the formal institutional arrangement of street-level work in the Chinese countryside. To do so, I draw on my observations of and conversations with the vice party branch secretary of a village outside of Suzhou, China, research on village politics and society made by other scholars and reports on village party branch secretaries in the Chinese media. This paper makes no claims to present a universal picture of village politics across China, nor does it attempt to present a perfect account of politics in any one village. Rather, it seeks to begin a conversation about rural Chinese politics in the 21st century that has been largely missing from English-language studies of China in the last decade and a half. In doing so, I hope to begin to address a significant lacuna in the literature on rural China, which has primarily focused on issues related to outmigration and the implementation of villagers’ committee elections. This is an important conversation to have. As we seek to explain

¹⁰ Ibid., 81-156.

how the Chinese people understand their relationship with the Chinese Communist Party in the reform era, we cannot ignore rural China. For China's 700 million rural residents, the way in which they encounter both the party and the Chinese state is through the intermediary of the village party branch secretary. Understanding this relationship is key to answering broader questions about party-state and party/state-society relations in contemporary China.

At the same time, this paper highlights the importance of disaggregating the local state into its constituent actors in order to achieve an accurate understanding of rural Chinese life. Many valuable studies of rural Chinese politics are limited by a tendency to refer to "local officials" or "village cadres" as a unit of analysis, combining actors who operate within different institutional frameworks under a single label.¹¹ For the majority of village leaders, who are democratically elected by village residents, this is not an issue, as formal institutions of accountability link them to both the township government and the people of the village. The members of the village party branch committee, on the other hand, have no formal institutions holding them directly accountable to the village. Reducing actors who are accountable to either village residents or township authorities—and most importantly, reducing the village party branch secretary and the director of the Villagers' Committee—to the singular label "village leaders" risks misinterpreting the incentives local state actors respond to in governing villages. Finally, it should be emphasized that, while the dramatic, rarely-occurring aspects of governance—protests, parades, elections and the like—make for a more exciting paper than the "mundane, everyday interactions between citizens and the state ... we need a better

¹¹ See, for example, Zhang et al. 2012; Göbel 2011; Kung, Cai and Sun 2009; Michelson 2008; Cai 2003; Edin 2003a; Cai 2000; O'Brien and Li 1999. While some of these studies recognize that failure to distinguish between village party cadres and other village cadres is a limitation, most do not.

understanding of the rules and norms structuring the daily give-and-take between citizens and officials on ordinary issues” to have a true and complete picture of political life.¹²

The paper begins with discussion of a village in Eastern China where I spent several weeks in July and August 2014. While I was in the village to interview farmers, returned migrant workers, factory owners and government officials with the goal of gaining a better understanding of economic development in rural China, I spent a significant amount of time observing and speaking with the vice secretary of the village party branch committee, a 35-year old man named Jin Xiang. What I learned from these observations and conversations, which I report in the following section, was both far more interesting and seemed far more crucial for understanding contemporary rural China than property rights, crop specialization or enterprise management (although all of these factors are deeply involved in the life of China’s rural residents). In my short time observing Jin Xiang, it was clear that he was simultaneously navigating two very different worlds, each with distinct moral and political systems that engendered unique behavioral logics.

To unpack my observations of Secretary Jin, I review the scholarly literature on bureaucratic politics and clientelist theory. I identify ways in which these elements elucidate the pressures on village party branch secretaries and the resources they have for resisting these pressures, then propose a two-tiered model for analyzing the relationship between a party branch secretary and the township government above him and village below him.

Xingyi Village

¹² Lily L. Tsai, “The Struggle for Village Public Goods Provision: Informal Institutions of Accountability in Rural China,” in *Grassroots Political Reform in Contemporary China*, ed. Elizabeth J. Perry and Merle Goldman, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 148.

Born in 1979, Xingyi Village Party Branch Vice Secretary Jin Xiang is a child of the reform era. While he remembers helping his parents plant rice and rapeseed on 5 mu of land (around 0.8 acres, or 3333 square meters) and raise fish in a 5 mu pond as a teenager in the 1990s, for most of his adult life he has made a living in the active market for off-farm employment and entrepreneurial opportunity that has characterized southern Jiangsu province since the start of reform and opening. After returning to Xingyi Village from military service in December 2000, he worked as the personal driver for a local businessman, then as a truck driver for a nearby purification plant.¹³

Xingyi Village (苏州市吴江区汾湖开发区金家坝镇星谊村) is a village of just over 1000 residents located between Suzhou and Shanghai in southern Jiangsu province.¹⁴ Since the late 1990s, Xingyi's primary economic activity has been shrimp aquaculture; today, 3,650 mu of village land are devoted to shrimp ponds, while only 1,355 mu are used for rice cultivation and 150 mu for industrial activities.¹⁵ The average household income for the township in which Xingyi is located is much higher than the national average for rural residents.

Prior to discharging from the PLA, Jin Xiang joined the Chinese Communist Party, and when the opportunity to serve as the village party branch committee member in charge of agricultural affairs presented itself in 2004, he took it. Noticing a need for basic inputs for raising shrimp—villagers had to travel to the next town over to purchase shrimp fodder, chemicals for the pond water and medicine for the shrimp—he organized a cooperative of local shrimp-

¹³ Purification plant (*jinghuachang* 净化厂) refers to any kind of plant involved in water purification, environmental purification or the production of implements for environmental purification systems. In Wujiang District, where Xingyi Village is located, there are several thousand purification plants producing a wide range of purification system implements. One plant near Xingyi Village I toured designs, produces and constructs "clean rooms" and laboratories for chemical companies located throughout southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America.

¹⁴ Because many village residents spend much of the year living and working in other parts of the country, the actual population of the village is difficult to estimate.

¹⁵ 1 mu = 666 square meters = 0.165 acres

farming households. In exchange for a 2000 RMB annual fee, the cooperative would provide households shrimp fodder and chemicals. Since 2004, the cooperative has grown in both membership and the services it provides to members, and today includes 86 households throughout the area around Xingyi Village and produces 25 million RMB worth of shrimp annually.

In 2007, Jin Xiang managed to attract a 2.3 million RMB investment from a Gansu entrepreneur to build a refrigeration facility in the village. Ice produced in the facility is provided to cooperative members to help them maintain the freshness of their shrimp on the way to market. Jin Xiang also uses the facility to freeze and store shrimp he has purchased from villagers until the Spring Festival, when prices increase with rising demand.¹⁶ The refrigeration facility also sells ice and rents out refrigerator space to local private enterprises and other area farmers who are not part of the cooperative, and has been very profitable. Since opening, the facility has installed machines that sort and separate shrimp according to size so that they can offer customers a specific size. During the weeks I spent in Xingyi Village, several new refrigerator units were under construction that would effectively double the capacity of the facility.

Jin Xiang found another gap in the market when he observed that the quality of shrimp produced was declining each year. In 2012, almost all of the shrimp fry that the cooperative's members had purchased contracted a disease and died early in the growing season. Because it had happened to nearly all of the farmers, Jin Xiang believed the issue was with the company

¹⁶ Ice is essential in keeping the shrimp alive as they make their way overnight to markets throughout eastern China. After shrimp are taken from the ponds, they are immediately dunked in a bath of ice water to shock them and slow down their metabolisms, and the trucks transporting the live shrimp are filled with ice water to ensure more shrimp remain alive by the time they reach market. The shrimp are harvested in the evening (between 5:00pm and 9:00pm) and transported to the market overnight so that they have the longest amount possible at the market while it is open and the shrimp are still alive (generally, the shrimp can survive for up to two days in ice water after being pulled out of the pond).

that sold them the fry rather than the farmers' practices. He helped the villagers lobby the company for recompense, but when that was not forthcoming, he compensated all the villagers out of his own pocket and sought out another company to sell them shrimp fry. Speaking to China Central Television's "Zhifujing" ("Get Rich Record" 致富经) program, one villager explained the situation in the following way: "One pond alone cost tens of thousands of RMB, but he just said, 'I'll take care of it.' That allowed us to stop worrying."¹⁷

At the time, many thought Jin Xiang was foolish for spending his own money to help out the villagers, but according to him, this was a business opportunity. While he was only providing shrimp fry for a few dozen farmers, they all had friends and family who he believed would be more willing to trust him and purchase shrimp fry from him in the future because of what he'd done. In fact, because many of the shrimp fry provided to farmers throughout Wujiang District that year had contracted diseases and died, there was a marked need for a new source of fry throughout the region. By eating the loss and providing shrimp fry to the villagers in the cooperative, Jin Xiang strengthened the patron-client relationship by both taking advantage of a severe material need and offering material support to clients without a stated expectation of reciprocation through political support.¹⁸

The following year (2013), Jin and one of the most successful shrimp farmers in the cooperative together invested 1.5 million RMB to build a facility for transitioning shrimp fry imported from Hawaii from saltwater to freshwater (*yumiao chang* 育苗厂, "fry cultivation facility").¹⁹ By selling "transitioned" shrimp fry to farmers (both cooperative members and non-

¹⁷ Zhifujing, *The Wealth That Trust Brings* (*xinren dailai de caifu*), (May 26, 2014; Beijing, China: CCTV-7), online video. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_OspwO2j4E).

¹⁸ Auyero, "From the client's point(s) of view;" Javier Auyero, "The Logic of Clientelism;" Scott, "Patron-Client Politics," 99.

¹⁹ Jin invested 900,000 RMB while his business partner (surnamed Mei) invested 600,000. Mei contracts one of the largest plots of land in the village and last year achieved profits of 23,000 RMB per mu of pond (in comparison, the

members), the cultivation facility has returned very high profits. In the first year of operation, it took in 2 million RMB, a 33% return on initial investment.

According to Jin Xiang, the most important service the cooperative provides to its members is assistance marketing the shrimp. Most of the shrimp are sold to small private entrepreneurs who transport them to wet markets in cities throughout eastern China. Jin Xiang and his managers locate buyers in the markets and coordinate harvesting and shipping between the cooperative members and the buyers. They also scout out shrimp farmers throughout Wujiang District, purchase shrimp directly from them and sell them to buyers in the cities who want more product than cooperative members can provide. Because they are familiar with the product and with shrimp cultivation, buyers trust him and his managers to guarantee the quality of the shrimp. Jin Xiang has also worked in the last year to "modernize" the marketing process. In June 2014, he negotiated a deal with a Beijing supermarket chain to purchase 200,000 RMB worth of shrimp each year.²⁰ During my time in Xingyi Village, he was finalizing plans for a shrimp brand ("Jin Farms Baidui Shrimp" *jinnong baiduixia* 金农白对虾) that would include specially-designed branded packaging materials and billboard placements throughout Wujiang District.

While the official legal representative of the cooperative is the Xingyi Village party branch secretary, the day-to-day management is handled by Jin Xiang and his managers, who are his close friends.²¹ Jin Xiang's day is divided between his work for the village and his work for

average farmer in the cooperative earns between 7,000 and 8,000 per mu). Mei also works as a manager at a purification plant in nearby Jinjiaba Township. According to Mei, the secret of his success is not using pesticides in his ponds.

²⁰ According to Jin Xiang, the supermarket normally only purchases from providers who can supply at least 2 million RMB of product, but he was able to bank on his and the cooperative members' status as "peasants" (*nongmin* 农民) to have this lowered.

²¹ Jin Xiang's two direct subordinates were both schoolmates of his; one was in the same PLA unit as Jin.

the cooperative, although he claims that his work for the cooperative is part of his work for the village because it is aimed at developing the village's agricultural economy and helping villagers "get rich."²² Typically, Jin Xiang spends the morning in the village office, doing what paperwork needs to be done and assisting villagers who come to the village office with problems in need of a resolution. In the afternoon, he returns to the refrigeration facility to oversee any work that is being done there or meet with visiting businessmen or government officials. During the harvest season—for shrimp, the middle of July through the beginning of October—he and his managers typically spend each evening overseeing villagers harvesting shrimp and loading them on trucks for delivery to market. After they finish (around nine o'clock), they go together to a restaurant in Jinjiaba Township to have dinner and tally up the day's harvest and profits.

Jin Xiang, through the cooperative and his position as a vice party branch secretary, has managed to take over shrimp production in Xingyi Village, successfully converting it to a vertically-integrated monopoly. He sells the villagers (his clients) all the inputs, oversees their production process and manages the marketing of the outputs. The only part of the process he does not provide is labor inputs, which is left to the villagers. Despite his near-complete control over economic resources in the village, villagers I spoke with seemed highly satisfied with the state of affairs, expressing admiration for his ability to make money and help others do so.

When disputes did arise between Jin Xiang and his clients, he was able to resolve them by alternately appealing to his authority as patron and his authority as a party-state official. For example, one evening a whole load of shrimp arrived at the refrigeration facility already

²² During my time in the village, Jin Xiang told a visiting township bureau head that the ideology guiding the cooperative is "Communism, socialism, capitalism. Making everyone wealthy is our base. If the villages are wealthy then the environment will be beautiful, and if that happens the country will be strong" (共产主义、社会主义、资本主义。让大家富起来是我们的基础。农村富，环境美丽，国家就强大).

deceased because of problems with the truck transporting them.²³ Jin Xiang informed the villager whose pond the shrimp came from that he'd only be able to give him half the normal price of 18 RMB per catty for the shrimp. The villager, upset at the possibility of taking a loss on the 4,000 catties (around 2,400 kg) he'd harvested, began arguing with Jin Xiang and demanding a higher price. Jin Xiang fell back on his role as the impartial, fair cadre, insisting that it was his responsibility to deal fairly with all villagers and that if he offered a higher price than the shrimp were worth to this villager, others would expect the same thing. In general, however, disputes were rare and villagers were strongly supportive of Jin Xiang in my private conversations with them.

Of course, not everyone in the village benefits from the lucrative shrimp cultivation business that Jin Xiang has worked to develop. Only about one in three villagers cultivate shrimp; the remainder are either employed in local enterprises or in temporary work somewhere else (generally in construction or manufacturing). Young people in their 20s were conspicuously absent from the village; Jin Xiang and his fellow cooperative managers (all in their mid-30s) were the youngest people around, and all the shrimp farmers were above 40. Because arable land in the village is a finite resource and contracted out to households for several years at a time, young people finishing school and coming of age are faced with limited economic prospects in the village despite the relative prosperity of people their parents' and grandparents' age. Those young people who were close with Jin Xiang (for example, his fellow managers) were able to secure employment in the village, but others were forced to look elsewhere.

Despite how favorably the villagers I spoke with viewed Jin Xiang, township and district officials seemed to have mixed views of him. A township bureau vice-director who visited the

²³ There had been problems with the motor that kept the water flowing through the truck's tanks, aerating it and enabling the shrimp to breathe.

village to review Jin Xiang's work spoke highly of him, while the director of the district sanitation bureau was critical of him during a private interview with me. The director seemed to be jealous of Jin Xiang's success. While he criticized the fact that Jin Xiang had not opened an online store to market the cooperative's produce and said that not doing so showed a lack of entrepreneurial sense, when I asked him why he didn't step down from his government position and open up such a business, he demurred, saying that he didn't have a feel for business. He told me that Jin Xiang had offered to hire him as a consultant for his business, but he was not interested because he did not think Jin Xiang had entrepreneurial thinking.

Jin Xiang's control of economic opportunities in the village has enabled him to gain the support of the villagers who benefited from the wealth the cooperative generated, which in turn put him in a strong bargaining position vis-à-vis the government above him. While his initial appointment as vice party branch secretary was unrelated to his control of economic resources in Xingyi Village, his consolidation of factors of production essential to the main economic activity of the village (such as the fry cultivation facility) under his personal control has enabled him to distribute material benefits to villagers, establishing a clientelist network within the village. Of course, he is still embedded in the bureaucratic hierarchy of the Chinese Communist Party and must be responsive to the constraints imposed by that position. However, the mutual exchange of material benefits for political support presumably expands his autonomy with regards to both the villagers and the government above him. To further explore the unique logic of the party branch secretary's relationships with the bureaucracy above him, I turn to the theoretical literature on bureaucratic politics.

Bureaucracy

Most scholars of bureaucracy have approached the topic from the angle of principal-agent theory. The principal-agent model involves a hierarchical relationship between an actor with political authority (the principal) and another actor (the agent) to whom the principal has delegated some authority and discretion in decision-making.²⁴ The preferences of principal and agent differ, with the agent interested in minimizing costly effort and the principal preferring a high level of agent compliance with directives. The principal-agent relationship is marked by an information asymmetry; only the agent knows the true amount of effort he commits to a given task assigned by his principal. The agent also has a monopoly on information about local conditions. Information asymmetries and interest conflicts between principals and agents impose inefficiencies (“agency costs”) on organizations.

The primary debate among scholars of principal-agent theory regards how best to constrain the actions of agents. The traditional model, rooted in organizational economics, assumes that agents are rational utility-maximizers. According to this model, proper institutional design (incentives and sanctions) can constrain the actions of agents and improve rates of compliance, mitigating agency costs.²⁵ Studies in the leadership model, on the other hand, argue that agents’ actions cannot be entirely explained by rational choice according to structures of incentive and sanction.²⁶

²⁴ The following formulation of principal-agent theory is based on Wilson 1991; Gruber 1988; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Miller 1992; Downs 1967; Miller 2005; Niskanen 1971.

²⁵ Gary J. Miller, "The Political Evolution of Principal-Agent Models," *Annual Review of Political Science* 8 (2005).; D. Roderick Kiewiet and Mathew D. McCubbins, *The Logic of Delegation: Congressional Parties and the Appropriations Process* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).; Judith E. Gruber, *Controlling Bureaucracies: Dilemmas in Democratic Governance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).; William A. Niskanen, *Bureaucracy and Representative Government* (New York: Aldine-Atherton, 1971).

²⁶ Marissa Martino Golden, *What Motivates Bureaucrats? Politics and Administration During the Reagan Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).; Gary J. Miller, *Managerial Dilemmas: The Political Economy of Hierarchy* (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 1992).; James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).; Lipsky, *Street Level Bureaucracy*.; Anthony Downs, *Inside Bureaucracy* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1967).

Gary J. Miller presents a comprehensive critique of the traditional principal-agent model, demonstrating at length that the collective action problems the principal-agent relationship is designed to overcome inevitably reappear within the model.²⁷ Miller argues that it is not possible to design a perfectly efficient contract. Even the piece-rate system, in which workers are paid based on output rather than time spent on the job, is still inefficient: while it incentivizes workers to increase output, when workers increase their production managers attempt to lower the rate at which workers are reimbursed. This leads workers to strategically produce at a fixed level of output below their maximum output and creates the same kind of prisoners' dilemma that hierarchal organization was created to overcome, as individual workers have an incentive to break the "quota" they have negotiated among themselves.²⁸ Workers will also engage in "effort bargaining" with management, dragging their feet and sabotaging work to raise the piece-rate.

Miller examines case studies from numerous firms across several industries to back up his *prima facie* argument and demonstrate how "there will be efficiency gains to be realized by those managers who seek the benefits of a cooperative solution to a social dilemma—by means outside of incentive design and market discipline," such as psychological and political inducements.²⁹ A long-term relationship between principal and agent creates the context for cooperation. Over the course of a long-term relationship, principals can create a shared knowledge of mutually compatible expectations and intentions by "symbolic gestures of unity," such as denying managerial privileges like a separate dining room or facilitating a high level of internal promotions.³⁰ Miller advocates a "political economy of hierarchy" in which principals

²⁷ Miller, *Managerial Dilemmas*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 105-18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

communicate with and learn from their agents, build a reputation of trustworthiness and signal commitment with constitutional constraints on their power.³¹

Developing agents' perception of their role as an agent may also be an effective way of increasing compliance.³² Golden shows that compliance with administration priorities among federal agencies during the Reagan administration was the result of both self-interested response to incentives and career bureaucrats' role perception. Extreme micromanagement of agency affairs by Reagan's political appointees that left careerists out of the loop and a recalibrated incentive structure that aligned bureaucrats' self-interest with compliance worked in tandem with bureaucrats' perception of their role as a civil servant and subordinate to the president to promote responsiveness. In cases of resistance, bureaucrats were responding to their agency setting, in which they were socialized to certain professional norms and political preferences. While Golden argues that incentives and institutional controls can be effective in promoting bureaucratic compliance, she demonstrates that this is only part of the picture. "Cultivating careerists' role perception, exercising leadership, and capitalizing on the socializing forces at work in federal agencies ... potentially enable [presidents] to strike a better balance between their desire for responsiveness and the polity's need for deliberative democracy."³³

If one of the primary sources of agency costs is the difference between the preferences of the principal and the agent, agency costs could be reduced by using emotional or ideological methods to align agent interests with those of the principal, in addition to redesigning incentive structures.³⁴ "Goal consensus" within a bureaucracy reduces conflicts, enhances the power of top-level officials and makes organizations more efficient. If there is a high level of goal

³¹ Ibid., 216-33.

³² Golden, *What Motivates Bureaucrats?*

³³ Golden, *What Motivates Bureaucrats?*, 14.

³⁴ Downs, *Inside Bureaucracy*.

consensus, “top-level officials can retain the same quality and quantity of output as before, but reduce the controls, reports, and other performance checks.”³⁵ Downs argues that high goal consensus can be secured through selective recruitment of new members whose private goal are very similar to the organization’s and through indoctrination of new members to align their private goals with those of top-level officials. Both of these objectives are best accomplished through the application of ideology.³⁶ Wilson similarly argues that “a sense of mission, a commitment to craftsmanship, or a belief in professional norms ... will keep unobserved workers from abusing their discretion.”³⁷

Bureaucrats in the People’s Republic of China are disciplined to use their discretionary power to enact the wishes of the central state by a number of methods typical of bureaucracy around the world, such as remuneration based on performance; their principal’s control over appointment, dismissal and promotion; and cultivation of role perception based on the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party that enhances agent compliance.³⁸ Yet noncompliance with

³⁵ Ibid., 223.

³⁶ Downs 1967, 223-36. Downs defines a “bureaucratic ideology” as “a verbal image of that portion of the good society relevant to the functions of the particular bureau concerned, plus the chief means of constructing that portion” (237).

³⁷ Wilson, *Bureaucracy*, 175.

³⁸ Arif Dirlik, “Mao Zedong in contemporary Chinese official discourse and history,” *China Perspectives* 2 (2012).; Yongnian Zheng, *The Chinese Communist Party as Organizational Emperor: Culture, reproduction and transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2010).; Frank N. Pieke, *The Good Communist: Elite Training and State Building in Today’s China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).; Alan P. L. Liu, “Rebirth and Secularization of the Central Party School in China,” *The China Journal* 62 (Jul. 2009).; Hansheng Wang and Yige Wang, “Target Management Responsibility System: The Practical Logic of Local Party-State in Rural China (Mubiao guanli zerenzhi: noncun jiceng zhengquan de shijian luoji),” *Shehuixue Yanjiu* (Feb. 2009).; David Shambaugh, “Training China’s Political Elite: The Party School System,” *The China Quarterly* 196 (Dec. 2008).; Susan H. Whiting, “The Cadre Evaluation System at the Grass Roots: The Paradox of Party Rule,” in *Holding China Together: Diversity and National Integration in the Post-Deng Era*, ed. Barry J. Naughton and Dali L. Yang (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).; Maria Edin, “Remaking the Communist Party-State: The Cadre Responsibility System at the Local Level in China,” *China: An International Journal* 1, no. 1 (Mar. 2003).; Maria Edin, “State Capacity and Local Agent Control in China: CCP Cadre Management from a Township Perspective,” *The China Quarterly* 173 (Mar. 2003).; Susan H. Whiting, *Power and Wealth in Rural China: The Political Economy of Institutional Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).; Yongshun Cai, “Between State and Peasant: Local Cadres and Statistical Reporting in Rural China,” *China Quarterly* 163 (Sep. 2000).; Kevin J. O’Brien and Lianjiang Li, “Selective Policy Implementation in Rural China,” *Comparative Politics* 31, no. 3 (Jan. 1999).;

higher-level directives is a significant and common problem for Chinese central planners, particularly in the Chinese countryside, where agency problems are compounded because “the mountains are high and the emperor far away” (山高皇帝远). Furthermore, after even a short time spent observing the way in which a party branch secretary interacts with his fellow villagers, it is clear that his behavior is not governed solely by a bureaucratic logic. Instead, his interactions with his “constituents” appear to adhere to the logic of political clientelism.

Political Clientelism

Clientelism is a close personal relationship continuing over an extended period of time between two actors of differing status that involves the exchange of benefits on the part of the higher-status actor (the patron) for political support from the lower-status actor (the client). The literature on clientelism outlines four key variables for identifying and measuring clientelism: contingency, intimate relationships, hierarchy and iteration.³⁹

The benefits conferred by the patron on the client are contingent on reciprocal political support by the client. This is a key variable for distinguishing clientelism from other political strategies also based on material redistribution: the criterion for delivery of the promised benefit by the patron is the delivery of political support by the client.⁴⁰ The benefits exchanged may not be “equivalent” in any meaningful sense of the word. Because the patron by definition has more wealth and power, the client almost always is the recipient of a disproportionate share of the

³⁹ Allen Hicken, "Clientelism," *Annual Review of Political Science* 14 (2011): 289-310.

⁴⁰ James A. Robinson and Thierry Verdier, "The Political Economy of Clientelism," *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 115, no. 2 (2013): 262-63.; Susan C. Stokes, "Political Clientelism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Charles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 604-06.; John Duncan Powell, "Peasant Society and Clientelist Politics," *The American Political Science Review* 64, no. 2 (1970): 412.; Anna Grzymala-Busse, "Beyond Clientelism: Incumbent State Capture and State Formation," *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 4 (2008).; James C. Scott, "Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia," *The American Political Science Review* 66, no. 1 (1972), 99.

tangible benefits of a relationship.⁴¹ However, as the political support delivered by the client may be essential to the patron's maintenance of his position of dominance, it is often the case that, viewed from a distance, the lion's share of the benefits exchanged in a clientelist relationship flow from the client to the patron. Early formulations of clientelism were based on an assumption that patrons have a monopoly on material goods critical to the very survival of the potential client, such as land, food or security,⁴² but contemporary comparative analyses have presented a complex picture of a wide range of benefits that patrons provide to clients, including employment opportunities and access to (or assistance accessing) public services.⁴³

Intimate relations between two actors are the foundation of a patron-client relationship.⁴⁴ Trust and affection undergird this "instrumental friendship," which is conceptualized by both patron and client as a fictive kinship tie, for example, as between father and son or elder and younger brother.⁴⁵ The personal nature of this relationship means that the tie binding patrons and clients is "diffuse" and able to respond flexibly to the needs of changing circumstances.⁴⁶ While many scholars have conceptualized patron-client relationships as almost contractual in nature,⁴⁷

⁴¹ Carl H. Landé, "The Dyadic Basis of Clientelism," in *Friends, Followers, and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism*, ed. Steffen W. Schmidt, Laura Guasti, Carl H. Landé and James C. Scott (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977): xxvii-xxviii.

⁴² Scott, "Patron-Client Politics," 93.; Powell, "Peasant Society," 411-13.

⁴³ Robinson and Verdier, "The Political Economy of Clientelism.;" Judith Chubb, *Patronage, Power, and Poverty in Southern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).; Allen Hicken and Joel W. Simmons, "The Personal Vote and Efficacy of Education Spending," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 1 (2008).; Nicolas van de Walle, "Meet the new boss, same as the old boss? The evolution of political clientelism in Africa," in *Patrons, Clients and Policies*, ed. Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴⁴ S. N. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger, *Patrons, clients and friends: Interpersonal relations and the structure of trust in society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).; Landé, "The Dyadic Basis of Clientelism," xiii-xiv.; Scott, "Patron-Client Politics," 94-95.; Powell, "Peasant Society."

⁴⁵ Scott, "Patron-Client Politics," 94.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴⁷ Stokes ("Political Clientelism") defines clientelism in almost explicitly contractual terms: "the proffering of material goods in return for electoral support, where the criterion of distribution that the patron uses is simply: did you (will you) support me?" See also Robinson and Verdier, "The Political Economy of Clientelism;" Valeria Brusco, Marcelo Nazareno, and Susan C. Stokes, "Vote buying in Argentina," *Latin American Research Review* 39, no. 2 (2004).; and Susan C. Stokes, "Perverse Accountability: A Formal Model of Machine Politics With Evidence From Argentina," *American Political Science Review* 99, no. 3 (2005).

Scott sees the nebulous nature of patron-client ties as quite different from the kind of explicit exchange that characterizes relations between contracting parties.⁴⁸ More recent formulations of clientelism deemphasize the personal nature of the dyadic patron-client relationship, instead accentuating ways in which clients are connected to patrons through one or more brokers.⁴⁹ Yet these “broker” relationships can be understood as a network or chain of patron-client relationships, stretching all the way “from the peasant to the President” in some cases, and intimate relations remain important at each level.⁵⁰

Patron-client relations are hierarchical, involving actors of unequal socioeconomic or political status.⁵¹ The benefits exchanged by patron and client are asymmetric to the degree of difference between their respective statuses; patrons provide a clearly defined benefit to their clients, while the client has only his much more nebulous “support” to offer in return.⁵² Of course, this is not to say that the patron is not the dominant actor in the relationship. Early studies of clientelism tended to emphasize the patron-client power differential, arguing that “affiliating with a patron is neither a purely coerced decision nor is it the result of unrestricted choice.”⁵³ In the view of Scott, patrons are typically monopolists for a resource, such as food or arable land, which the client critically needs as a matter of survival.⁵⁴ According to this view, the power

⁴⁸ See also Luis Roniger, *Hierarchy and Trust in Modern Mexico and Brazil* (New York: Prager, 1990), 3-4.

⁴⁹ Wolfgang Muno, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Clientelism," Paper presented at the workshop Neopatrimonialism in Various World Regions," German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Aug. 23, 2010.; Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson, *Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).; Stokes, "Political Clientelism."

⁵⁰ Powell, "Peasant Society," 418.

⁵¹ Scott, "Patron-Client Politics," 93-94.; Powell, "Peasant Society," 412.

⁵² Landé, "The Dyadic Basis of Clientelism," xxvii-xxviii.; René Lemarchand, "Political Clientelism and Ethnicity in Tropical Africa: Competing Solidarities in Nation-Building," in *Friends, Followers, and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism*, ed. Steffen W. Schmidt, Laura Guasti, Carl H. Landé and James C. Scott (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 103-07.; Scott, "Patron-Client Politics," 93-94.; Powell, "Peasant Society," 412.

⁵³ Scott "Patron-Client Politics," 94. See also Schmidt et al., *Friends, Followers, and Factions*.

⁵⁴ Scott, "Patron-Client Politics."

differential is a defining characteristic of clientelist relationships, which exist somewhere along a continuum between being purely coercive and truly voluntary.

Powell agrees that patrons are often “gatekeepers” to critical resources, but argues contra Scott that patron-client ties “are different from other ties ... such as relationships based on coercion, authority, manipulation, and so forth. Such elements may be present in the patron-client pattern, but if they come to be dominant, the tie is no longer a patron-client relationship.”⁵⁵ In deemphasizing the power relations inherent to patron-client ties, this view focuses instead on the contingent nature of the relationship. Recent treatments of clientelism have generally aligned themselves with this view. According to Stokes, analyses that see the power differential as a central part of the patron-client relationship will emphasize norms in explaining “the paradox of clientelism”—that the clientelist relationship “is both voluntary and, from the less-powerful member’s vantage point, exploitative.”⁵⁶ Analyses that focus on contingency, on the other hand, will emphasize self-interest.

The norms school argues that “community values and rituals” spawn “mutual expectations” and “norms of reciprocity,” which create a “sense of debt or obligation on the client’s part.”⁵⁷ In this view, patron-client ties are based not simply on the logic of “reciprocal advantage, but on some *principle of affinity* which supplies a social logic to the network.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Powell, “Peasant Society.”

⁵⁶ Stokes, “Political Clientelism,” 608. The shift away from power relations and towards contingency may also reflect the general trend among scholars who have revived interest in clientelism in the first decade of the 21st century to focus their analyses on the role of clientelism in democratic systems. Early studies of clientelism (such as Schmidt et al. 1977), on the other hand, were examining it primarily as a phenomenon of premodern and nondemocratic settings.

⁵⁷ Scott, “Patron-Client Politics,” 94.; In addition to the “norm of reciprocity,” Landé (1977, xvii) also highlights the “norm of personal loyalty,” which requires an individual to continue to support an ally who is of diminishing usefulness to him, even at the cost of giving up potentially better alliances.

⁵⁸ Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 158, emphasis added.

These norms have the dual effect of ameliorating moral hazard problems that might arise and holding the dyad together even when it might be more advantageous for the client to exit.⁵⁹

The self-interest school argues that it is not norms of reciprocity that hold patron-client dyads together, but a rational calculation on the part of the client that non-compliance (failing to deliver political support for the patron) will result in benefits being cut off.⁶⁰ In situations when ballots are not secret, monitoring compliance is relatively easy for patrons.⁶¹ However, it is more often the case that patrons have incomplete knowledge of client compliance. According to Gallego, as long as election results are common knowledge, repeated plays of a clientelist exchange (a vote from the client for a benefit from the patron) will discipline clients to support the patron and create an incentive for the patron to continue to provide benefits to his clients.⁶²

It may be the case, however, that clients themselves do not understand clientelism as a kind of rational exchange. Clients' submersion in the functional processes of clientelist exchange may in fact be such "that a spectatorial point of view on the 'exchange' is precluded;"⁶³ instead, for clients, the political support they provide their patrons may not be seen as a distinct act of reciprocation for some benefit provided them, but "an element within an everyday network of relationships."⁶⁴ According to this view, the lack of a third party to which patrons and clients can

⁵⁹ Robinson and Verdier, "The Political Economy of Clientelism," 263.

⁶⁰ Stokes, "Political Clientelism;" Stokes, "Perverse Accountability;" Brusco et al., "Vote buying in Argentina."

⁶¹ Even something as seemingly innocuous as the amount of time a voter spends in the voting booth may be a signal about his voting behaviors. For example, if voters may vote a "straight party ticket" by simply checking a single box or pulling a lever, deviation from the party line is signaled by remaining in the voting booth for an extended period of time to vote for individual candidates, some of whom may not be from the party of the voter's patron. See Chandra 2007, 89-90.

⁶² Jorge Gallego, "Self-enforcing clientelism," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* (2014).

⁶³ Javier Auyero, "From the client's point(s) of view': How poor people perceive and evaluate political clientelism," *Theory and Society* 28 (1999): 309.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 312.; Or, as Auyero states unequivocally in another paper, "no strong evidence exists of a quid pro quo exchange" (Auyero 2000, 58).

appeal to enforce their claims against each other makes the personal nature of the clientelist relationship its most essential element.⁶⁵

Both the norms school and the self-interest school emphasize the importance of the fourth key variable of clientelist relationships: iteration. The logic behind the function of iteration differs depending on the perspective of the analyst, however. Those in the self-interest school argue that repeated plays of clientelist games discipline patrons and clients to choose the Pareto-optimal outcome.⁶⁶ The norms school critiques this view as too reliant on rational choice:

It is not in the boisterous—and often pathetic—distribution of food packages before a political rally or election, but in the abiding ties, in the enduring webs of relations that politicians establish with their “clients” and in the—sometimes shared (although not cooperatively constructed)—array of cultural representations.⁶⁷

Clientelist relationships are by definition ongoing processes rather than one time exchanges. As the relationship progresses, the benefits patrons and clients provide to each other reinforce the “norms of reciprocity” that hold them together.⁶⁸ By allowing patrons and clients to monitor each others’ past actions, iteration creates mutual expectations about the continuity and durability of the relationship, leading to a long-term equilibrium.⁶⁹

While iteration can create the norms that enforce clientelist relations over an extended period of time, it is less clear what provides the initial catalyst for a clientelist relationship between two actors. Even if clientelist relationships are widespread and commonly accepted in a society, the exchanges involved are often formally criminalized as a form of corruption. While

⁶⁵ Ibid., 314.

⁶⁶ Gallego, "Self-enforcing clientelism;" Stokes, "Political Clientelism;" Stokes, "Perverse Accountability;" Brusco et al., "Vote buying in Argentina."

⁶⁷ Auyero, "From the client's point(s) of view," 327.

⁶⁸ Eisenstadt and Roniger, *Patrons, clients and friends.*; Scott, "Patron-Client Politics."

⁶⁹ Kitschelt and Wilkinson, *Patrons, Clients, and Policies*, 14-19.

trust between patron and client accumulates as the clientelist exchange iterates, what is the source of the trust that overcomes the risk of proposing a potentially illegal exchange with another person? In cases where incomplete knowledge of how the opposite party will behave inhibits the formation of a clientelist relationship, ethnicity can be a signal of reliable compliance.⁷⁰ Affective ties rising from a shared history between the patron and client, such as having come from the same place, gone to school together or being distant relatives, may serve a similar purpose.⁷¹ A contractual relationship in which both parties' risk is minimized may lay the groundwork for the trust and affection necessary for a subsequent clientelist relationship.⁷² In some cases, potential patrons may simply "go out on a limb" and offer material support to a potential client unaccompanied by a stated expectation of reciprocation through political support; this show of good will may be all that it takes to initiate a clientelist relationship.⁷³ Finally, it may be the case that coercion or severe material need play a role in triggering a clientelist relationship.⁷⁴

An expectation that clientelism is a premodern social and political institution that would gradually disappear over the course of modernization pervades the early literature.⁷⁵ Other scholars envisioned clientelism adapting to modernity by embedding in new state and market institutions.⁷⁶ Faced with clientelism's resilience, scholars focused on analyzing exactly how

⁷⁰ Kanchan Chandra, "Counting heads: a theory of voter and elite behavior in patronage democracies," in *Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*, ed. Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁷¹ Scott, "Patron-Client Politics," 99.

⁷² L.M. Hanks, "The Corporation and the Entourage: A Comparison of Thai and American Social Organization," in *Friends, Followers, and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism*, ed. Steffen W. Schmidt, Laura Guasti, Carl H. Landé and James C. Scott (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 162-63.

⁷³ Auyero, "From the client's point(s) of view."

⁷⁴ Javier Auyero, "The Logic of Clientelism in Argentina: An Ethnographic Account," *Latin American Research Review* 35, no. 3 (2000).; Scott, "Patron-Client Politics," 99.

⁷⁵ S.N. Eisenstadt and Renê Lemarchand, *Political Clientelism: Patronage and Development* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1981).; Ernest Gellner and John Waterbury, *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (London: Duckworth, 1977).; Schmidt et al., *Friends, Followers, and Factions*.

⁷⁶ Scott, "Patron-Client Politics;" Powell, "Peasant Society."

clientelism became embedded in modern political institutions and expanded into complex clientelist networks.⁷⁷ In this view, clientelism is a strategy adopted by political actors to expand their power, and arises structurally at the point of confluence among capitalism, bureaucracy and democracy.⁷⁸

This contemporary literature sees clientelism as a practice explicitly associated with political competition.⁷⁹ In this view, clientelism involves redistribution of goods to clients in exchange for political support, while its opposite, predation, involves minimal redistribution of resources to constituents. Predatory rulers will not tolerate any kind of opposition or political competition, and have no need to use clientelist redistribution to build electoral coalitions. Grzymala-Busse highlights two alternative possibilities: state capture under conditions of democratic competition (“exploitation”) and clientelist redistribution accompanied by little tolerance for political opposition.⁸⁰ Party-state fusion regimes, which fall in the latter category, tend to replace state structures with party structures and build institutions to meet the extractive and redistributive goals of the regime (or rather, individuals within the regime). State resources are redistributed to societal actors contingent on their acquiescence to rule by the party-state regime.

⁷⁷ Chubb, *Patronage, Power, and Poverty in Southern Italy*.; Roniger, "Political Clientelism, Democracy, and Market Economy.;" Jonathan Fox, "The Difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship: Lessons from Mexico," *World Politics* 46, no. 2 (1994).; Sharon Kettering, *Patrons, Brokers, and Clients in Seventeenth-Century France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁷⁸ Junichi Kawata, *Comparing Political Corruption and Clientelism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).

⁷⁹ Typically, nominally democratic political competition. See Stokes, "Political Clientelism;" Grzymala-Busse, "Beyond Clientelism;" Robinson and Verdier, "The Political Economy of Clientelism;" Roniger, "Political Clientelism, Democracy, and Market Economy;" Kitschelt and Wilkinson, *Patrons, Clients, and Policies*; Rebecca Weitz-Shapiro, "What Wins Votes: Why Some Politicians Opt Out of Clientelism," *American Journal of Political Science* 56, no. 3 (2012). There is some evidence that some politicians within political systems where clientelism is widespread may opt to not adopt clientelist electoral strategies; Weitz-Shapiro demonstrates that clientelism costs politicians support among middle-class voters.

⁸⁰ Grzymala-Busse, "Beyond Clientelism."

The possibility of an “exploitative” clientelism utilized by party-state regimes underscores a significant lacuna in the contemporary literature on clientelism. Clientelism exists in nondemocratic political systems, China being a striking example.⁸¹ In this context, a client cannot weigh competing offers from two potential patrons. There is a single patron, and an individual either has a clientelist relationship with him, or he does not. To understand the noncompetitive patron, the earliest examinations of political clientelism must be brought back into focus.⁸²

A final point about clientelism that must be addressed is the role of economic development. Related to the expectation that modernization is inimical to clientelism, predictions about the debilitating role of economic development in patterns of clientelism are widespread in the literature. The main claim is that clientelism is generally associated with poverty and low levels of economic development, a claim that is supported by empirical research.⁸³ The specific mechanism by which this occurs is not clear, however, nor does it seem to be uniform across cases. As the incomes of potential clients (voters) increase, they become less susceptible to clientelist appeals from political candidates.⁸⁴ Low-income voters also seem to be more risk-averse than higher-income voters, preferring a certain and immediate material clientelist payoff

⁸¹ Studies that apply the concept of clientelism to nondemocratic systems have tended to focus on clientelism as a tool used by national or regional elites jockeying for power, rather than a political practice engaged in at the grassroots. See, for example, Xia Li Lollar and Anne Wing Hamilton, “Patronage or Prebendalism? The ‘Mishu/Shouzhong’ Relationship and Corruption in Chinese Politics,” *China Review* 10, no. 1 (2010), 157-182.; Andrew J. Nathan, “A Factionalism Model of CCP Politics,” *China Quarterly* 53 (1973), 34-66.; John Willerton, Jr., “Clientelism in the Soviet Union: An Initial Examination,” *Studies in Comparative Communism* 12 (1979), 159-211.

⁸² Landé, “The Dyadic Basis of Clientelism;” Scott, “Patron-Client Politics;” Powell, “Peasant Society.”

⁸³ Robinson and Verdier “The Political Economy of Clientelism;” Kitschelt and Wilkinson, *Patrons, Clients, and Policies*.; Karen L. Remmer, “The Political Economy of Patronage: Expenditure Patterns in Argentine Provinces, 1983-2003,” *The Journal of Politics* 69, no. 2 (2007).; Leonard Wantchekon, “Clientelism and Voting Behavior: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Benin,” *World Politics* 55 (Apr. 2003).

⁸⁴ Kitschelt and Wilkinson, *Patrons, Clients, and Policies*, 25.; Ernesto Calvo and Maria Victoria Murillo, “Who Delivers? Partisan Clients in the Argentine Electoral Market,” *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 4 (Oct. 2004).

to an uncertain one through a change in policy down the road.⁸⁵ Related to this is the finding that, as incomes rise, voters' interest and investment in national politics increases, making programmatic appeals more effective than clientelist ones.⁸⁶ The persistence of clientelism in some high-income nations is the result of "political-economic governance structures and competitive configurations among partisan forces" particularly those associated with "coordinated market capitalism."⁸⁷ The less competitive market, bureaucratic and political institutions are, the more likely clientelism is to appear, even in high-income countries.⁸⁸

In review, clientelism is a close personal relationship, bordering on friendship, between two actors of differing status in which the higher-status actor (the patron) offers material resources to the lower-status actor (the client) in exchange for political support. Clientelist relationships develop over time between a patron and his supporters and are regulated by normative expectations of behavior that gain lasting power through their continuity. Actors embedded in a clientelist network may have no conscious awareness of the political-economic exchange in which they are involved. However, it may also be the case that patrons use clientelist strategies as a method of political control and to reinforce their position of dominance.

Bureaucratic principal-agent relationships also involve a hierarchical relationship between an actor with political authority (the principal) and another actor (the agent) to whom the principal has delegated some decision-making authority. While their preferences differ, the principal can discipline the agent by shaping rewards and sanctions to incentivize compliance.

⁸⁵ Kitschelt and Wilkinson, *Patrons, Clients, and Policies*, 25-26.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁸⁷ Herbert Kitschelt, "The demise of clientelism in affluent capitalist democracies," in *Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*, ed. Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 320.; Ethan Scheiner, "Clientelism in Japan: the importance and limits of institutional explanations," in *Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*, ed. Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁸⁸ Junichi Kawata, *Comparing Political Corruption and Clientelism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).

However, as the principal-agent relationship is a personal relationship between two individuals that continues for a certain period of time, it is not devoid of “non-rational” characteristics such as mutual expectations of behavior. These normative features may also encourage agent compliance by cultivating agents’ role perception and enhancing goal consensus.

A clientelist relationship between two actors can be identified by four variables: contingency, intimacy, hierarchy and iteration.⁸⁹ While hierarchy also exists in bureaucratic principal-agent relationships, such relationships are defined more by the institutions of reward and sanction in which the two actors are embedded and by the authority delegated to the agent by the principal. In both types of relationships, rational and “non-rational” pressures play out in ways that in turns enhance the position of the subordinate or the dominant actor.

Rural China

At the founding of the People’s Republic of China in October 1949, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party faced a nation of 595 million people, 85% of whom lived in the country’s vast, incredibly underdeveloped rural areas, relying on small-plot agricultural production for subsistence.⁹⁰ In the late 1940s, the CCP began reorganizing village life in areas under its control, carrying out an aggressive land reform program, appropriating property from landlords and redistributing it to the peasantry according to a Maoist system of class labels. Land reform was extended to the rest of the country following the establishment of the PRC in 1949. At the time, one of the primary goals of the party’s leadership was to systematically eradicate what it saw as predatory “feudal” institutions suppressing rural economic development and oppressing the Chinese peasantry, such as kinship or lineage groups and temple societies. Land

⁸⁹ Hicken, "Clientelism."

⁹⁰ National Bureau of Statistics, "Fifth National Census (*wuci quanguo renkou pucha renkou jiben qingkuang*)."
While rural incomes have grown significantly in the reform era, confronting the challenge of severe rural underdevelopment remains one of the main tasks of the Chinese state.

reform was an important method for the destruction of these groups along with the landlord class, which often held a significant portion of village land, renting it out to dependent villagers.

In the 1950s, rural property was gradually collectivized and rural government was organized into people's communes (*renmin gongshe* 人民公社, analogous with modern townships) overseeing production brigades (*shengchan dadui* 生产大队, analogous with modern administrative villages or natural villages), which oversaw production teams (*shengchan dui* 生产队, a sub-village grouping of households), which were grouped geographically by residence within a village. Each level of collective was led by four primary officials: a party secretary, a head of collective, a vice head of collective and an accountant.⁹¹

Despite the fact that all rural residents worked for the collective and nominally had all of their needs (food, health care, education, etc.) met by the collective, the central state hardly penetrated into the countryside, and rural people continued to have almost no interaction with the state beyond the brigade.⁹² Agricultural procurement was basically the only interaction with the state for most peasants, and this was a function of the local state.⁹³ Traditional social structures remained, aided by geographical organization of production teams, which tended to concentrate lineage groups within one production team in a village.⁹⁴ Peasants' social realms continued to be limited to their village and the natural marketing communities in which their village lay.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Mobo C.F. Gao, *Gao Village: A Portrait of Rural Life in Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 144.

⁹² It is not the case that collectives were always able to meet people's needs; in many cases essential needs were left unmet, often catastrophically so.

⁹³ Vivienne Shue, *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 44-48.; Gao, *Gao Village*, 166-68.

⁹⁴ Ben Hillman, *Power and Patronage: Local State Networks and Party-State Resilience in Rural China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 19-20.

⁹⁵ Shue, *The Reach of the State*, 48-54.

If Maoist political and economic institutions did not integrate Chinese rural residents into the new polity effectively, neither was the peasantry's normative integration an unequivocal process. Despite the vast resources the state expended on propaganda, education and thought control, the leadership of the PRC was unable to force peasants to think in lock step with the central state. While the state was highly successful at using mass media and the education system to instill in rural residents the values of Mao Zedong Thought, it failed to drive out pre-existing systems of belief and value.⁹⁶ Part of the problem lay in the fact that team and brigade cadres were recruited from within the villages, were not state cadres, did not earn a state salary and had little opportunity for advancement within the party-state apparatus.⁹⁷ The result was that throughout the Mao era, villagers, including village elites who served in leadership roles in the local party-state, adopted a syncretistic approach to social values, appealing to both traditional and Maoist systems of belief.⁹⁸ While the interactions with government officials were performed in the language of national elites, rural residents continued to negotiate value among themselves according to their own traditional system.⁹⁹

With the institution of the “household responsibility system” (*jiating lianchan chengbao zerenzhi* 家庭联产承包责任制) starting in 1978, rural property was decollectivized and each household was assigned an allotment of land according to its size. Households were required to sell a certain amount of produce to the state at a fixed price, while anything produced beyond the procurement quota was allowed to be sold on the free market; households were also permitted to specialize in non-agricultural commercial undertakings. State planners gradually increased the

⁹⁶ Ibid., 63-69.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 67.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 63-69.

⁹⁹ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).; James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

state procurement price for agricultural products.¹⁰⁰ Increase in state procurement prices, expanded access to markets for agricultural produce and a changing political culture that actively encouraged entrepreneurship led to growth in rural income through the 1980s, with a corresponding increase in education and health outcomes.¹⁰¹

Simultaneously, decentralization of political authority, particularly with regard to economic issues, gave local governments increased discretion for adopting development strategies. Allowed to retain profits and taxes from local collective enterprises and given additional responsibilities for providing for the welfare of citizens within their jurisdictions (starting with the 1978 fiscal responsibility system *caizheng baogan zhidu* 财政包干制度), local governments now had an effective incentive to promote industrialization and development in rural areas. While the methods adopted varied widely on the basis of existing local institutions,¹⁰² it was generally the case that because of the political atmosphere and resource configuration at the beginning of reforms, collective enterprises (“township and village enterprises” or TVEs *xiangzhen qiye* 乡镇企业) were best positioned to lead development. Once collective enterprises had exhausted the economic niche left by the retrenching state sector and as human capital accumulated and the political climate changed, local governments adjusted their policies in the 1990s to begin to favor private modes of production and privatization of TVEs.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Gao, *Gao Village*.; Joseph Fewsmith, *Dilemmas of Reform in China: Political Conflict and Economic Debate* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994).; Jean C. Oi, *Rural China Takes Off: Institutional Foundations of Economic Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

¹⁰¹ Yasheng Huang, *Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics: Entrepreneurship and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).; Chih-Jou Jay Chen, *Transforming Rural China: How Local Institutions Shape Property Rights in China* (Routledge, 2004).; Jean C. Oi and Andrew G. Walder, *Property Rights and Economic Reform in China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).; Oi, *Rural China Takes Off*.; Jean C. Oi, *State and Peasant in Contemporary China: The Political Economy of Village Government* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).; Jean C. Oi, "Commercializing China's Rural Cadres," *Problems of Communism* 35 (Sep./Oct. 1986).

¹⁰² Chen, *Transforming Rural China*.

¹⁰³ Oi, *Rural China Takes Off*. Huang (*Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics*) offers a compelling counterargument that it was entrepreneurial, private sector growth in the countryside through the 1980s that both

Formal rural land usage regulations have generally become more liberal in the reform period, increasing the security of rural residents' property rights and making some motions towards expanding rural land markets.¹⁰⁴ In 2007, the central government announced that the policy of "long-term" (*changqi bu bian* 长期不变) rural land contracts, legally enshrined in the 2002 Law on Land Contract in Rural Areas as 30 years, would be changed to "lasting" (*changjiu bu bian* 长久不变) contracts that would guarantee usage rights for a yet to be defined period of fewer than 30 years.¹⁰⁵ Currently, land usage rights can be transferred from villagers to the village government, which, with township government approval, can transfer usage rights to commercial enterprises. As demand for commercial land grows, revenue from land transfers account for an increasing portion of local government budgets. The resulting incentive structure has led to a widespread phenomenon of forced evictions and illegal land transfers throughout China. Even when land is expropriated from peasants legally, compensation is often significantly below market value and the usage rights are resold for a much higher value to commercial developers or industrial enterprises.¹⁰⁶ Illegal land appropriation and under-compensation are the cause of a large portion of the protests and social unrest seen in rural China in recent years.¹⁰⁷

The most important consequence of decollectivization in the late 1970s and early 1980s for rural residents was the resultant increase in geographic mobility. Under the household registration system (*hukou* system), Chinese citizens are entitled to access social services only in

drove GDP growth in the aggregate and reduced inequality by improving the welfare of rural residents in the poorest provinces. By opening rural markets, allocating land to households and individuals and freeing up credit for rural non-farm investment, policymakers created an environment in which indigenous private capital could flourish. In the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, the pro-state Shanghai gang leadership of Jiang Zemin and Zhu Rongji came to power, drawing on their experience in Shanghai to establish policies that stifled rural finance, promoted foreign investment and skewed the economy towards the large SOEs.

¹⁰⁴ Yongjun Zhao, "China's Land Tenure Reform: Time for a New Direction?" *China Review* 11, no. 2 (Fall 2011).

¹⁰⁵ Rui Liu, "Deciphering the Spirit of the Land System Reforms of the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Party Congress," *China National School of Administration Office of Research Management*.

¹⁰⁶ Xiaoyang Zhu, *Xiaocun gushi: dizhi yu jiayuan (2003-2009)* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁷ Zhao, "China's Land Tenure Reform."

the jurisdiction in which their household is registered, and getting one's household registration changed is notoriously difficult, particularly for rural residents. Prior to 1978, food was only available through an individual's commune or work unit; while social services such as public health care and education continue to be accessible only to those with the relevant household registration status, the introduction of markets after 1978 enabled Chinese citizens to purchase food wherever they went, giving them greater access to employment opportunities outside their immediate locale.

Many rural residents have capitalized on their new mobility and an FDI-driven surge in labor demand in coastal cities by migrating to urban areas in the southeast and seeking employment in the booming industrial economy. Higher wages in urban factories enable workers to send remittances home to support parents, spouses, younger siblings or children who remain in the village.¹⁰⁸ While this has raised the standard of living in much of rural China, it has also resulted in widespread "gerontification" of childcare and agricultural labor; abandonment of large tracts of farmland; changes in agricultural production, agricultural technology usage, consumption patterns and household resource management; as well as brain drain from rural areas, as it is generally the rural elite who seek employment in the cities.¹⁰⁹ Ultimately, despite

¹⁰⁸ Zhen Cong and Merrill Silverstein, "Intergenerational Exchange Between Parents and Migrant and Nonmigrant Sons in Rural China," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 73, no. 1 (Feb. 2011).; Zhongwei Zhao and Wei Chen, "Changes in Household Formation and Composition in China Since the Mid-Twentieth Century," *Journal of Population Research* 25, no. 2 (2008)

¹⁰⁹ Yao Lu, "Education of Children Left Behind in Rural China," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 74 (2012).; Feinian Chen, Guangya Liu and Christine A. Mair, "Intergenerational Ties in Context: Grandparents Caring for Grandchildren in China," *Social Forces* 90, no. 2 (2011).; Larry Willmore, Gui-Ying Cao and Ling-Jie Xin, "Determinants of off-farm work and temporary migration in China," *Population and Environment* 33 (2011).; Chengchao Wang, Yusheng Yang and Yaoqi Zhang, "Economic Development, Rural Livelihoods, and Ecological Restoration: Evidence from China," *Ambio* 40 (2011).; Hua Qin, "Rural-to-Urban Labor Migration, Household Livelihoods, and the Rural Environment in Chongqing Municipality, Southwest China," *Human Ecology* 38 (2010).; Feinian Chen and Kim Korinek, "Family Life Course Transitions and Rural Household Economy During China's Market Reform," *Demography* 47, no. 4 (2010).; Zhaobao Jia, Lizheng Shi, Yang Cao, James Delancey and Wenhua Tian, "Health-related quality of life of 'left-behind children': a cross-sectional survey in rural China," *Quality of Life Research* 19 (2010).; Ellen R. Judd, "Starting again in rural west China: stories of rural women across generations," *Gender and Development* 17, no. 3 (2009).

the remarkable increases in rural income that have been enabled by economic reform, household incomes remain low in the countryside and economic disparity between rural and urban China has grown steadily. While urban households on average earned about twice as much as rural households in 1985, by 2012 the urban-rural income ratio had grown to more than 3.0.¹¹⁰ In 2012, the average per capita income of urban households was 24564 RMB, while rural households only earned 7916 RMB per capita on average.¹¹¹

Household income in rural China comes from a variety of sources today. Rural residents may grow staple crops, such as grain or oil-producing plants, on land contracted from the village, or they may use their land to produce cash crops, such as fruit. They may be employed in collective village enterprises or private enterprises, either in their village or in a nearby village or township. Household entrepreneurship may be another source of income. Other members may seek employment prospects as a factory worker or a laborer elsewhere in the country. Generally, households adopt a mixed approach to allocating human resources, with some members raising staple crops for personal consumption on a small plot of land and cash crops on the rest of their land, while other members work in collective or commercial enterprises nearby or in far-off provinces.¹¹² What economic opportunities are available to a household varies not only on the basis of the education level, social status and personal connections of its members, but also as a matter of geography. In coastal areas that have successfully attracted foreign investment there are more opportunities for non-farm employment than in the inland areas.

Village governance structures were reorganized in 1987 with the implementation of a draft version of the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees, which divided village governance

¹¹⁰ Terry Sicular, "The Challenge of High Inequality in China," *Inequality in Focus* 2, no. 2 (World Bank, 2013).

¹¹¹ China Statistical Yearbook 2013.

¹¹² Chen and Korinek, "Family Life Course Transitions."

between an elected Villagers' Committee (*cunmin weiyuanhui* 村民委员会, VC) and the village party branch committee (*cun dang zhibu weiyuanhui* 村党支部委员会, PBC).¹¹³ While the distribution of power between the “two committees” is one of the more understudied aspects of the impact of the Organic Law, there is evidence that some of the authority previously monopolized by PBCs has relocated to the VCs. In other words, the chair of the VC may serve as an important counterbalance to the dominant position of the village party branch secretary. The balance of power between the two committees has real effects for Chinese rural residents: one recent study found that elected leaders of administrative villages spend more on public goods provision in their natural village of origin than unelected party branch secretaries.¹¹⁴

While the relationship between the two committees could conceivably be cooperative, a number of factors work together to stymie cooperation and encourage confrontation, and conflict between the two committees in many villages is widely reported.¹¹⁵ Most significantly, the two committees derive their legitimacy from different sources: the PBC from its position in the hierarchy of the Chinese Communist Party, its role as the agent of the township party committee and government; the VC from its role as elected representative of the villagers.¹¹⁶ Furthermore,

¹¹³ For an incredibly thorough review of the literature on the impact of and factors influencing village elections, see Gunter Schubert and Anna L. Ahlers, *Participation and Empowerment at the Grassroots: Chinese Village Elections in Perspective* (New York: Lexington Books, 2012), 25-65.

¹¹⁴ Ren Mu and Xiaobo Zhang, “Do elected leaders in a limited democracy have real power? Evidence from rural China,” *Journal of Development Economics* 107 (2014): 17-27.

¹¹⁵ Jean C. Oi and Scott Rozelle, “Elections and Power: The Locus of Decision-Making in Chinese Villages,” *The China Quarterly* 162 (2000).; Guo Zhenglin and Thomas P. Bernstein, “The impact of elections on the village structure of power: the relations between the village committees and the party branches,” *Journal of Contemporary China* (2004).; Xin Sun, Travis J. Warner, Dali L. Yang, and Mingxing Liu, “Patterns of Authority and Governance in Rural China: who’s in charge? Why?,” *Journal of Contemporary China* (2013).; An Chen, *The Transformation of Governance in Rural China: Market, Finance, and Political Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 128-159.

¹¹⁶ This is an oversimplification of the sources of legitimacy of the two committees; for a more detailed treatment, see Oi and Rozelle, “Elections and Power.” In any case, the authority of individual members of the party branch committee or Villagers' Committee may be highly contingent on their own personal bases of authority and legitimacy. Particularly in the case of village party branch secretaries, whose authority has traditionally been based on monopoly control of economic resources in the village, market reforms may increase the urgency of acquiring other sources of legitimacy; this will be discussed further later in this paper.

the division of responsibility between the two committees is not clearly demarcated in the Organic Law.¹¹⁷

Evidence suggests that the distribution of power among the dual authority structure of party and government in the village is determined in part by local economic conditions, the level of villagers' activism in local political issues, the level of township activism in village politics and the perceived legitimacy of the two committees relative to each other.¹¹⁸ Jean Oi and Scott Rozelle demonstrate that when villagers have fewer economic connections to the outside world and the local economy is primarily agricultural, villagers take a greater interest in village politics; greater activism on the part of villagers tends to shift the balance of power towards the elected VC.¹¹⁹ Guo Zhenglin and Thomas Bernstein find that in twenty-five industrialized villages in southern Guangdong province, conflicts between the two committees increasingly cause the township party committee to step in to settle disputes; rather unsurprisingly, it tends to side with the party branch committee, which contributes to the party's continued dominance of decision-making in village government.¹²⁰

The primary cause of conflict between the two committees is a difference in priorities stemming from the fact that the village party branch secretary is the agent of the township party committee, while the Villagers' Committee chair (VCC), who according to law should be democratically elected without interference from the township government, is the agent of the villagers. Because the heads of both committees are endowed with authority by their principal,

¹¹⁷ While most of the provisions of the Organic Law are very detailed and clear, the articles dealing with the role of the village party branch committee are, on the contrary, vague: Article 3 requires party branch committees, which are referred to as the "leading nucleus" of the village, to, "in accordance with the Constitution and laws, support the villagers' committees and ensure that they carry out self-government activities and exercise their democratic rights directly."

¹¹⁸ Oi and Rozelle, "Elections and Power.;" Guo and Bernstein, "The impact of elections on the village structure of power.;" Sun et al., "Patterns of Authority and Governance in Rural China."

¹¹⁹ Oi and Rozelle, "Elections and Power."

¹²⁰ Guo and Bernstein, "The impact of elections on the village structure of power."

based on a survey of 115 villages distributed across six provinces Sun et al. find that greater activism by the township government in village government will lead to party branch secretaries consolidating power, while greater activism by villagers causes more power to be concentrated in the hands of the VCC.¹²¹ Sun et al. further hypothesize that village leaders gain legitimacy according to how representative their selection (or in the case of VCCs, election) is, and find that in villages where party branch secretaries are selected by a method that involves some representation of the will of the villagers, party branch secretaries tend to have more authority vis-à-vis the VCC.¹²²

In most cases, the members of the VC conduct day-to-day governance of the village, but authority ultimately rests with the party committee.¹²³ While implementation of VC elections has differed significantly from locality to locality, resulting in a high level of variance in just how free and fair elections are, even in areas where elections are perceived by external observers to be highly democratic, the party branch secretaries continue to dominate village governance.¹²⁴ There is evidence that party membership remains the primary variable for screening potential village leaders; election to the VC has also served as a method for recruiting capable individuals

¹²¹ Sun et al., “Patterns of Authority and Governance in Rural China.” In the analysis by Sun et al., the distribution of power in the village is measured according to two factors: “the authority to allocate collective financial resources and the responsibility for day-to-day administrative work.” In 50% of the villages they studied, the village party branch secretary was the dominant decision maker; in 26%, authority was shared between the two; 18% of villages had implemented “single shoulder” governance (discussed later in this paper); while VCCs led in only 6% of villages. Analyzing township activism in village government, Sun et al. adopt township leaders’ dependence on the cooperation of village cadres, as reported by township leaders (based on the assumption that township leaders will apply more pressure to party branch secretaries than VCCs because their powers of appointment give them more leverage over the secretary).

¹²² The “representativeness” of VCC election was not found to be statistically significant, although the authors attribute this to difficulties in identifying an independent variable that reports autonomy from township authorities, which Sun et al. argue is what really legitimates village leaders in the eyes of villagers. Because “elections can still be subject to substantial influence from township governments even when nomination procedures are relatively open ... further research ... calls for greater attention to the role played by township authorities in village elections” (18).

¹²³ An Chen, *The Transformation of Governance in Rural China: Market, Finance, and Political Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 128-159.; Sun et al., “Patterns of Authority and Governance in Rural China.”

¹²⁴ Chen, *The Transformation of Governance in Rural China*, 128-30.

who are popular among villagers into the party.¹²⁵ Reports suggest that the practice of village cadres holding concurrent postings as members of the party branch committee and VC is widespread; for members of the village committee who are also party members, deference to the party branch secretary would be expected by virtue of their status as village party branch members, despite their position of authority as village cadres.¹²⁶

In some localities, village party branch secretaries may also hold the position of director of the VC, a practice known as “carrying [the village government] on a single shoulder” (*yi jian tiao* 一肩挑). This method of village governance has been promoted by both the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the party committees of a number of provinces, including Jiangsu, Shandong, Guangdong and Hainan.¹²⁷ In areas where the township government endorses this governance structure, it is almost universally the case, and some estimates indicate that 60-70% of villages nationwide have adopted this practice.¹²⁸ An increasing number of township governments have been active in promoting this policy in recent years, as a way to reduce administrative costs by cutting back on the number of village cadres who must be paid a salary, as a means for gauging the popularity of the party branch secretary

¹²⁵ Chih-Jou Jay Chen, "Elite Mobility in Post-Reform Rural China," in *Dynamics of Local Governance in China During the Reform Era*, ed. Tse-Kang Leng and Yun-han Chu (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010).; Linda Jakobson, *A Million Truths: A Decade in China* (Lanham, MD: M. Evans, 2000), 128.

¹²⁶ Chen, *The Transformation of Governance in Rural China*, 128-32. One survey conducted in Hunan in 1999 that Chen cites found that even though the heads of Villagers' Committees saw management of village-owned assets as the exclusive right of the Villagers' Committee and not the party branch committee, deferring to the dominance of the party branch secretary was almost universal. (Junji Mao and Yuanzhang Chen, "Current relations between the two committees in the countryside and the solution (Nongcun liangwei guanxi xianzhuang ji duice)," *Zhongguo dangzheng ganbu luntan* 1 (2001), 21-23)

¹²⁷ Sun et al., "Patterns of Authority and Governance in Rural China," 6.; Guohui Wang, *Tamed Village "Democracy": Elections, Governance and Clientelism in a Contemporary Chinese Village* (New York: Springer, 2014), 110.; Wang Qingwu and Dong Leiming, *Changes in Governance Methods and Modernization in Jiangsu Villages (Zhili fangshi de biange yu jiangsu nongcun xiandaihua)* (Beijing: Renmin University Press, 2004), 161

¹²⁸ Wang and Dong, *Changes in Governance Methods and Modernization in Jiangsu*, 161.; Zhao Shukai, *Nongmin de zhengzhi [Peasant Politics]* (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2011), cited in Sun et al., "Patterns of Authority and Governance in Rural China," 20. In Sun et al.'s sample of 115 villages across six provinces, 18% of villages had implemented the "single shoulder" system.

among villagers and to resolve conflicts between the two committees.¹²⁹ Even in cases where townships are unwilling or unable to establish a “single shoulder” system in villages, township officials will often conspicuously meet with *only* the party cadres when they visit the village to relay information and instructions; this monopoly over information about higher-level directives reinforces the dominant position of the party branch secretary.¹³⁰

While village leaders—both the village party branch and the VC—are not technically part of the Chinese state, they perform many functions that would otherwise have to be carried out by the lowest level of government, the township. The village leadership is responsible for implementing policies set by higher levels of government, such as the national family-planning policy, which limits both the number of children any individual woman may give birth to and the amount by which a village’s population can grow per year. Village governments are responsible for the provision of public goods such as roads, sanitation and education. To enable them to do this, village cadres collect state taxes from villagers, passing a fixed amount to higher levels of government and keeping the residual for the operation of the village government and public

¹²⁹ Chen, *The Transformation of Governance in Rural China*, 130-31.; Sun et al., “Patterns of Authority and Governance in Rural China,” 6, 20. A counterargument to this claim is offered by Landry (Pierre F. Landry, *Decentralized Authoritarianism in China: The Communist Party’s Control of Local Elites in the Post-Mao Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)), who finds that it was common during the trial period of the Organic Law for there to be one party-appointed candidate for the position of Villagers’ Committee head, who would generally be a vice secretary of the village party branch. He would be groomed to be promoted to village party branch secretary during his time in office, and if, at the end of his three-year term as Villagers’ Committee head, he was judged satisfactory, he would be promoted to village party branch secretary. However, when the central government and the provinces cracked down on the implementation of the Organic Law by requiring elections to have more than one candidate, the rate with which Villagers’ Committee heads were promoted to the position of party branch secretary declined significantly. Meanwhile, the heads of neighborhood committees (the urban equivalent of Villagers’ Committees, which are not democratically elected) continued to be promoted to the position of party branch secretary at a rate similar to the 1990s. This finding suggests that township party committees are “adapting to the institutionalization of mild electoral uncertainty” by finding alternative channels for grooming future village party branch secretaries (Landry 2008, 255). As the “single-shot no predetermined candidates direct ballot” (不确定候选人一次直接投票选举) electoral method, which is being experimentally implemented in a number of localities in Jiangsu and Fujian provinces, becomes the norm, the party’s control over elections will continue to decline, heightening the importance of controlling the top position in the villages (Landry, *Decentralized Authoritarianism*, 236-38; Nanjing Civil Affairs Bureau; Standing Committee of the 11th People’s Congress of Fujian Province).

¹³⁰ Chen, *The Transformation of Governance in Rural China*, 132.

goods provision, although most villages face chronic budget shortfalls and often require transfers from higher level governments to ensure solvency. Finally, village cadres are responsible for maintaining stability and public safety in the village.¹³¹ Again, while they are technically not part of the Chinese state, “from the perspective of China’s 800 million villagers, village officials have almost complete authority and discretion over issues within the village community.”¹³²

A Model of Village Party Branch Secretary Decision-Making

Sun et al. argue that “different selection procedures for [village party branch secretaries and Villagers’ Committee chairs] have imbued them with distinct behavioral logics ‘based on two different sources of authority.’”¹³³ While their analysis is an important corrective to the claims that the decision-making of village party branch secretaries is largely unconstrained by any consideration of villagers’ wishes and that VCs are powerless in relation to village PBCs, it oversimplifies both the limitations and sources of empowerment the party branch secretary faces. Even when he is not embodying both of the two committees under the “single shoulder” system, the party branch secretary is imbued with two “distinct behavioral logics” that guide his interactions with both of his principals in very different ways.

In his unique position as the link between rural residents and the Chinese state, the party branch secretary faces certain constraints and is endowed with a set of resources that expand his autonomy; together, these form the institutional environment in which he makes decisions and

¹³¹ Hairong Zhang, *A Party Branch Secretary's Work Journal (Yi ge cunzhishu de gongzuo biji)*, Contemporary Chinese Folk History series, volume 6a (Zhongguo dangdai minjian shiliao jikan 6 shang), ed. East China Normal University Contemporary Chinese History Research Center (Huadong shifan daxue zhongguo dangdai shi yanjiu zhongxin) (Shanghai: Zhongguo chubanshe, dongfang chubanshe, 2012), 5-22.; Lily L. Tsai, "The Struggle for Village Public Goods Provision: Informal Institutions of Accountability in Rural China," in *Grassroots Political Reform in Contemporary China*, ed. Elizabeth J. Perry and Merle Goldman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).; Shuguang Zhang, *Villagers' Committee Cadre Work Handbook (Cunweihui ganbu gongzuo shouce)* (Beijing: Zhongguo fazhi chubanshe, 2006).

¹³² Lily L. Tsai, "The Struggle for Village Public Goods Provision," 360.

¹³³ Sun et al., "Patterns of Authority and Governance in Rural China."

conducts business. From above, he is limited by the constraints of the cadre responsibility system, which determines his remuneration on the basis of his ability to achieve a fixed set of governance targets; the township's powers of appointment and recruitment, which force him to respond to township directives or risk losing his position; and the official ideology of the Communist Party, which creates expectations for how a cadre should act and forms a large part of the normative environment in which the party branch secretary operates. To resist these constraints and expand his autonomy, the party branch secretary can take advantage of agency problems the township faces, such as the high costs associated with monitoring, discipline and replacement, as well as policy ambiguity that enables him to adapt and selectively implement certain higher-level directives. He also can expand his autonomy by drawing on sources of

legitimacy external to the party-state, such as his position as head of a private enterprise, an informal institution like a lineage group or temple organization or a clientelist network in the village.

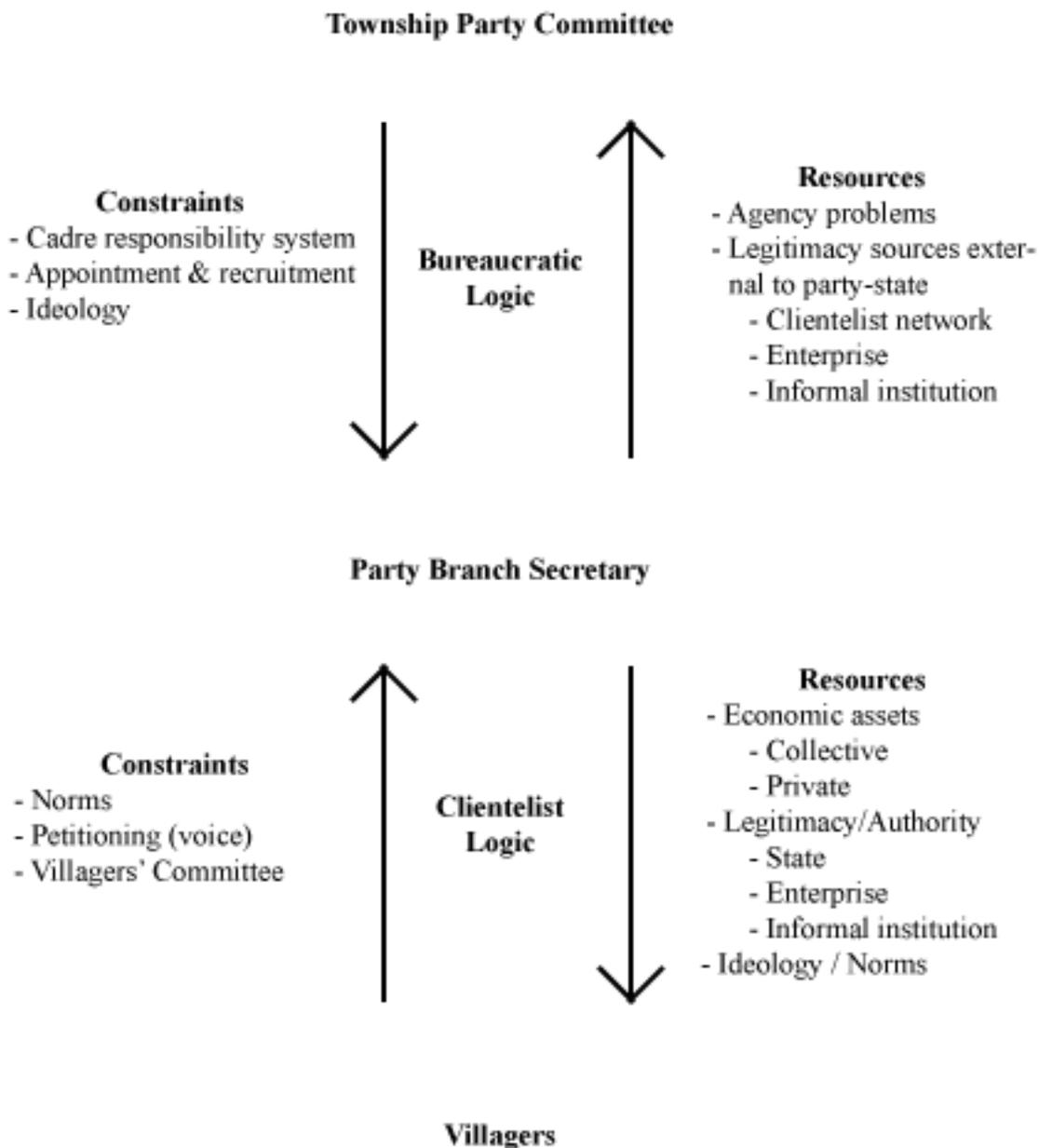


Figure 1

From below, the party branch secretary must be responsive to the prevalent norms of the village, given voice by individual villagers, village institutions such as lineage groups or the VC; failure to do so could result in villagers voicing their discontent by petitioning higher levels of government.¹³⁴ To exert control over his constituents, the party branch secretary can employ resources including economic assets, both collective and private; personal legitimacy and authority drawn from his position as the leading party-state official in the village, head of an enterprise or leader of another informal village institution, such as a kinship group or temple organization; personal relationships; and official ideology.

This interlocking system of resources and constraints is presented in Figure 1. In the following sections, I explain in detail the elements that constitute the decision-making environment of the party branch secretary. While I address them separately, it should be noted that each of the elements demarcating the decision-making space of the party branch secretary is interconnected. Resources for control over the village are also a source of autonomy from the township, while constraints imposed by the township can be a source of autonomy from the village. It is fair to hypothesize that autonomy is a political asset that party branch secretaries, like political actors elsewhere, seek to maximize;¹³⁵ to do so, party branch secretaries draw on the constraints and resources at hand.

Bureaucratic Logic: The Party Branch Secretary as Bureaucrat

As the “leading cadre” at the village level and the head of the most basic unit of the Communist Party apparatus, the village party branch secretary fits within the architecture of the

¹³⁴ Given the emphasis higher-level authorities place on “stability maintenance” in the villages and how negatively incidents of petitioning are viewed as a result, this is a genuine concern for village party branch secretaries.

¹³⁵ Miller, “The Political Evolution of Principal-Agent Models;” Golden, *What Motivates Bureaucrats?*; Christensen, “Bureaucratic Autonomy as a Political Asset;” Miller, *Managerial Dilemmas*; Kiewiet and McCubbins, *The Logic of Delegation*; Wilson, *Bureaucracy*; Gruber, *Controlling Bureaucracies*; Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy*; Niskanen, *Bureaucracy and Representative Government*; Downs, *Inside Bureaucracy*.

Chinese party-state bureaucracy. His primary responsibilities are to implement state policies in the village, ensure the provision of public goods in the village and serve as the “eyes, ears and mouth” of the party in the village, passing information on the local situation up the bureaucratic hierarchy so that policies can be formulated effectively.¹³⁶ His conduct of this role is expected to be impersonal and mechanistic; he should deal with all villagers equally and respond to situations according to rules laid down by a higher-level bureaucrat. While political reforms initiated in the post-Mao era have led to state retrenchment from policy implementation at the grassroots level, the Chinese state has done so in order to enhance state capacity in other areas, and the central state still sets the course of overall policy.¹³⁷ In the reform era, policy implementation is left to the discretion of cadres at the “street-level,” creating a problem of agent control for higher-level authorities.¹³⁸ To overcome this problem, township party committees have four primary tools they can draw on: the cadre responsibility system, appointment, recruitment and ideology.

Constraint: Cadre Responsibility System

The cadre responsibility system (*ganbu gangwei mubiao guanli zerenzhi* 干部岗位目标管理责任制) offers township party committees one tool for increasing compliance by village party branch secretaries.¹³⁹ Each year, the township sets quantifiable targets in areas that fall

¹³⁶ Yongshun Cai, “Between State and Peasant: Local Cadres and Statistical Reporting in Rural China,” *China Quarterly* 163 (Sep. 2000).; Kevin J. O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, “Selective Policy Implementation in Rural China,” *Comparative Politics* 31, no. 3 (Jan. 1999).

¹³⁷ Maria Edin, “Remaking the Communist Party-State: The Cadre Responsibility System at the Local Level in China,” *China: An International Journal* 1, no. 1 (Mar. 2003).

¹³⁸ Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy*.

¹³⁹ Hansheng Wang and Yige Wang, “Target Management Responsibility System: The Practical Logic of Local Party-State in Rural China (Mubiao guanli zerenzhi: noncun jiceng zhengquan de shijian luoji),” *Shehuixue Yanjiu* (Feb. 2009).; Susan H. Whiting, *Power and Wealth in Rural China: The Political Economy of Institutional Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).; Edin, “Remaking the Communist Party-State;” Maria Edin, “State Capacity and Local Agent Control in China: CCP Cadre Management from a Township Perspective,” *The China Quarterly* 173 (Mar. 2003).; Susan H. Whiting, “The Cadre Evaluation System at the Grass Roots: The Paradox of Party Rule,” in *Holding China Together: Diversity and National Integration in the Post-Deng Era*, ed. Barry J.

within the village party branch secretary's responsibility and the village party branch secretary signs a contract saying he agrees to meet the targets. At the end of the year, the village party branch secretary undergoes a performance assessment by the township party committee that determines his compensation for the year. Based on a comprehensive score drawn from all of the individual performance targets, cadres are rated as excellent (*youxiu* 优秀), competent (*chengzhi* 称职) or incompetent (*bu chengzhi* 不称职).¹⁴⁰

Performance target agreements are signed for each separate policy area by each level of government. As each level wants to ensure that its own targets are met, this leads to targets having grown by the time they reach the village level.¹⁴¹ For example, in one village near Beijing, the district government expected the township government to achieve 98% compliance with the family planning policy birth rate target for that year, while the township government expected the villages within its jurisdiction to achieve 100% compliance with the policy.¹⁴²

Performance targets also communicate the priorities of their superiors to cadres, and the ability of superiors to change targets at will enables bureaucratic superiors to directly affect the amount of time their subordinates spend on a given policy task.¹⁴³ Performance targets are given a priority ranking; there are soft targets (*yiban zhibiao* 一般指标), hard targets (*ying zhibiao* 硬指标) and "priority targets with veto power" (*yi piao foujue* 一票否决).¹⁴⁴ In addition to being

Naughton and Dali L. Yang (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); O'Brien and Li, "Selective Policy Implementation in Rural China."

¹⁴⁰ Edin, "State Capacity and Local Agent Control in China," 38.; Whiting, *Power and Wealth in Rural China*, 100-110.

¹⁴¹ Wang and Wang, "Target Management Responsibility System."

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁴³ Whiting, *Power and Wealth in Rural China*, 270.; Edin, "Remaking the Communist Party-State," 11.; Edin, "State Capacity and Local Agent Control in China," 39.

¹⁴⁴ Edin, "State Capacity and Local Agent Control in China," 39. O'Brien and Li, "Selective Policy Implementation in Rural China." In some ways this picture is overly simplistic; O'Brien and Li report that "when it comes to a target that has veto power, grass-roots cadres often are able to distinguish between hard and soft dimensions" (O'Brien and Li, "Selective Policy Implementation in Rural China," 175).

issue areas that higher levels of the party-state does not consider essential, soft targets tend to be targets that are difficult or impossible to quantify, such as "employing a democratic work style [or] respecting villagers' rights."¹⁴⁵ Hard targets are typically drawn from the annual economic and social development plan for the locality and are generally economic in nature, examining such measures as tax income or collective enterprise profits. Edin gives the example of a township in Shandong province that in 1997 was expected to achieve output value of 700 million RMB, sales income of 830 million RMB and profit of 54 million RMB among its collective enterprises and successfully complete two key industrial projects.¹⁴⁶ In every township surveyed, Edin found that tax revenues submitted to the county were a hard target for the township government.¹⁴⁷

Priority targets, on the other hand, are generally political in nature, and are used for key political objectives of higher government levels. The veto power connected to them means that, regardless of how successful cadres are at meeting all other targets, failure on a priority target would result in a failed rating overall. However, success on a priority target alone is not enough; cadres must also meet other targets to receive a favorable year-end assessment.¹⁴⁸ Reflecting how important these policies are to the Chinese Communist Party, two issues are considered priority targets throughout China: family planning (*jihua shengyu* 计划生育) and maintenance of social order (*shehui zhian* 社会治安).¹⁴⁹ An example of the targets set for villages in one county

¹⁴⁵ O'Brien and Li, "Selective Policy Implementation in Rural China," 174.; see also Edin, "Remaking the Communist Party-State," 10.

¹⁴⁶ Edin, "State Capacity and Local Agent Control in China," 39.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.; Edin, "Remaking the Communist Party-State," 10-12. Ben Hillman, *Power and Patronage: Local State Networks and Party-State Resilience in Rural China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 90. Hillman reports that, in addition to family planning and social order maintenance, economic growth is also a national priority target (Hillman, *Power and Patronage*, 90). Explaining her interpretation of the ranking of targets, Edin writes, "From the ranking of targets, we can deduce that under normal circumstances, the CCP places economic development first, especially the submission of tax revenues to the centre. At the same time, it is evident that the

Hillman examined is provided in Appendix I. Edin reports that in one county in Zhejiang province, failure on any one of three social order criteria—economic crime, violence or large-scale demonstrations—can cancel out successful work performance in other areas.¹⁵⁰

Constraints: Villagers' Committee

Of course, the information asymmetries resulting from township party committees' inability to monitor all of the villages within their jurisdiction around the clock still present a serious obstacle to effective agent control. This may be mitigated by recent reforms aimed at delegating certain monitoring responsibilities to villagers, who are better able to assess the quality of village governance due to their constant presence in the village.¹⁵¹ Villagers' Committee elections, while implemented in a haphazard, gradual manner, at the very least create an institutional mechanism through which villagers can voice displeasure with cadre misconduct in a way that can catch the attention of higher-level cadres without seriously threatening “social stability.”¹⁵²

In addition, in the 1990s localities began to include questionnaires and opinion polls filled out by a cadre's subordinates as part of the cadre's evaluation process.¹⁵³ Representatives

bottom line is social stability and that the party would not promote economic growth at the expense of large-scale social instability" (Edin, “Remaking the Communist Party-State,” 11). Hillman's observation of economic growth being ranked as a priority target may have to do with his sample; the area he is examining is an impoverished region in southwest China. Presumably economic growth would be central to social stability maintenance in deeply impoverished areas. Edin notes that some localities may create additional priority targets based on local conditions, and reports one Zhejiang county that made cremation of the dead a priority target because land was limited and county officials wanted to reserve available land for productive uses (Ibid., 11). Whiting similarly reports significant variance in the priority targets in the areas she examined (Whiting, “The Cadre Evaluation System at the Grass Roots,” 106-12).

¹⁵⁰ Edin, “State Capacity and Local Agent Control in China,” 40. The target for economic crime is any in which more than 200,000 RMB is embezzled; violence is any violence resulting in a person's death; and large-scale demonstrations are those in which more than 50 people gather.

¹⁵¹ Edin, “Remaking the Communist Party-State.,” Edin, “State Capacity and Local Agent Control in China.,” O'Brien and Li, “Selective Policy Implementation in Rural China.,” Sun et al., “Patterns of Authority and Governance in Rural China.”

¹⁵² Schubert and Ahlers, *Participation and Empowerment at the Grassroots.*; Landry, *Decentralized Authoritarianism*, 226-27.; Edin, “Remaking the Communist Party-State,” 9.

¹⁵³ Edin, “Remaking the Communist Party-State,” 8.

from the cadre's own unit and subordinate units anonymously fill in a questionnaire rating a cadre's performance in four criteria (integrity, ability, diligence and work performance); if more than one-third of those polled rate the cadre as unqualified, he should be removed from his post. If a significant number of those polled (but fewer than one-third) express dissatisfaction with a cadre, the party will initiate an investigation.¹⁵⁴ In one village near Shanghai, the village government established a "small disciplinary committee" (*xiao jiwei* 小纪委) composed of 18 villagers that annually critiques village cadres' performance; the criticism directly affects their remuneration, and if a cadre receives fewer than 85 points in the committee's performance review, he is not permitted to serve as a cadre again.¹⁵⁵ Petitions submitted by citizens to higher levels of government complaining about a cadre may also impact a cadre's score in annual work assessments.¹⁵⁶

Contrary to the arguments of some earlier analysts that VC elections would have little impact on village governance so long as the party branch secretary maintained the power to veto decisions of the VC, the findings of Sun et al. suggest that the implementation of elections have genuinely created an alternative voice of authority in village affairs that may challenge the party in some cases.¹⁵⁷ While the party branch secretary's authority was eroded by market reforms after 1978, in most villages there was no institutional mechanism for villagers to challenge his

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹⁵⁵ Qiu, *Chinese Village Party Branch Secretaries*.

¹⁵⁶ Edin, "Remaking the Communist Party-State," 8-9. In one county Edin studied, failure to respond to a petition of complaint results in a petitioner going to the next level up (*yueji shangfang* 越级上访) or a petitioner "assembling a crowd to petition" (*juzhong shangfang* 聚众上访) can both "pose serious problems for" a cadre in his performance assessment. Arguing that "information from citizens plays a major role in uncovering cadre misbehaviour ... and intervention from the public also puts pressure on the Party to act," Edin points to a study by Lü and Bernstein that found that 80% of tip-offs about cadre misconduct come from citizen petitions (Lü Xiaobo and Thomas P. Bernstein, *Taxation Without Representation in Contemporary Rural China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.) If a small group of discontented citizens can seriously undermine a cadre by petitioning to a higher level or assembling a demonstration (in other words, *all* citizens must be kept contented by local cadres), this brings into question whether there can be any "minimum winning coalition" (Riker 1984) in a Chinese village.

¹⁵⁷ Sun et al., "Patterns of Authority and Governance in Rural China."

leadership. VCs may serve as a channel for such a challenge. Although Sun et al. find that the VC chair is the dominant decision-maker in a minority of villages (6%), power is shared or party branch secretaries must be responsive to the demands of the electorate through the “single shoulder” system in a much larger percentage of villages (44%). The findings of Sun et al. suggest that the dominance of the party branch secretary in the village may not be unequivocal. Even in villages where the VC plays a minor role, their response is a factor the party branch secretary must take into account when making decisions.

Constraint: Appointment

Whiting points out that the political incentives created by the cadre responsibility system may be more significant at the township and higher levels than at the village level.¹⁵⁸ As state cadres, township officials are compensated from state coffers and are more fully integrated into the state. Village cadres, on the other hand, are more autonomous and insulated from the state because of their near-absolute control over village resources. However, the increased power and autonomy of the village party branch secretary compared with his superior in the township may ironically be the source of the township's ability to control village cadres.¹⁵⁹ The high value of his position may make village party branch secretaries more responsive to threats to remove him, which makes the township's second tool for agent control, control over lower-level appointments, particularly important.

Under the nomenclatura system of personnel management, which was adopted from the Soviet system in the party's early years, the Communist Party controls the appointment of key authority positions at each level of government.¹⁶⁰ During the Mao era, party committees

¹⁵⁸ Whiting, *Power and Wealth*, 269.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁶⁰ John P. Burns, “China's Nomenclatura System,” *Problems of Communism* 36, no. 5 (1987).

appointed officials two levels down, but in 1984 personnel management was decentralized so that officials at each level had control over the appointment of leading cadres at the level immediately below them. In this way, village party branch secretaries are appointed by the township party committee headed by the township party secretary. Because their appointment, re-appointment, dismissal and promotion are all contingent on the will of the township party secretary, village party branch secretaries nominally have a strong incentive to comply with directives from the township. Of course, information asymmetries still exist, and the single level of management may lead village party branch secretaries to comply with the wishes of their immediate superior even if they know they conflict with higher-level directives.¹⁶¹

Constraints: Recruitment and Ideology

Recruitment and ideology also enhance the ability of township party committees to exercise control over their agents in the villages. Studies of bureaucracy have emphasized the role of training, indoctrination and selective recruitment in increasing compliance by bureaucratic agents. Anthony Downs argues that using ideological indoctrination and selectively recruiting members whose views align with institutional views can increase "goal consensus" within an organization, while James Q. Wilson argues that cultivating "a sense of mission, a commitment to craftsmanship, or a belief in professional norms" can improve agent compliance.¹⁶² Golden empirically demonstrates that by fostering lower-level bureaucrats' role perception and capitalizing on socializing norms within an organization, bureaucratic superiors can more effectively achieve the goals they have set for an organization.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ O'Brien and Li, "Selective Policy Implementation in Rural China."

¹⁶² Downs, *Inside Bureaucracy*.; Wilson, *Bureaucracy*.

¹⁶³ Golden, *What Motivates Bureaucrats?*

The recruitment process for members of the village party committee involves multiple checkpoints at which both the township and village party committee review a candidate and can determine whether or not he is eligible for party membership. Candidates must also take courses on the party's history, ideology and its role in modern Chinese society. After joining the party, membership is “provisional” (*yubei* 预备) for a period of one year, at the end of which candidates' development as party members, including their progress in understanding party ideology and their success in implementing work assignments, is reviewed yet again. Party guidelines stipulate that recruitment decisions should reflect both the practical achievements and the ideological “correctness” of the member under consideration.¹⁶⁴

While the previous dominance of Marxism-Leninism has diminished significantly in the reform era as the Chinese Communist Party has adopted a pragmatic value system aimed at realizing socialism through economic growth built on neoliberal precepts,¹⁶⁵ the emphasis the party has placed on adherence to the ideological main line by party members has not faded. What has changed is the goal of that ideology: from the resolution of the contradictions of bourgeois capitalist society under the guidance of the Communist Party, to achieving sustained rapid economic development and maintaining political stability while upholding the dominant position of the Communist Party.¹⁶⁶ In other words, reinterpretation of ideology in official discourse and historiography has stressed “the priority of the forces over the relations of production.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Wang and Dong, *Changes in Governance Methods*; Renshan Li, Heping Huang and Jiwen Wu, *Striving to Enter the Party and Developing Party Members (Zhengqu rudang yu fazhan dangyuan)* (Changsha: Zhongnan gongye daxue chubanshe, 1987).

¹⁶⁵ Song Yang and Bruce W. Stening, “Mao Meets the Market: Reconciling Ideology and Pragmatism in China,” *Management International Review* 53 (2013).

¹⁶⁶ Yongnian Zheng, *The Chinese Communist Party as Organizational Emperor: Culture, reproduction and transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 152.; Frank N. Pieke, *The Good Communist: Elite Training and State Building in Today's China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 187-95.

¹⁶⁷ Arif Dirlik, “Mao Zedong in contemporary Chinese official discourse and history,” *China Perspectives* 2 (2012), 24.

To “update” its ideology for the reform era and resolve the apparent contradiction between the party’s past ideological stances, its continuing claim to revolutionary legitimacy and its current practice, the party has offered a careful reinterpretation of the past, and of Mao Zedong in particular, since the beginning of reform and opening. Mao the individual has been disaggregated from Mao Zedong Thought, which is presented as “the crystallization of the collective wisdom of the Party’s revolutionary experience” applying and developing Marxism-Leninism in the historical and social context of China.¹⁶⁸ Separated from the actions of any individual party leader, Mao Zedong Thought has emerged in the reform era as an untouchable (but still practical and applicable) ideology on par with Marxism, “having demonstrated repeatedly its ability to correct its mistakes.”¹⁶⁹ The subsequent ideological formulations of party leaders, such as “socialism with Chinese characteristics” and the “important thought of Three Represents,” have been presented as a further elaboration and fulfillment of Mao Zedong Thought, elaborations that are essential to the practical work of the party.¹⁷⁰ The policy changes that have resulted from these ideological positions have affected the lives of both Chinese Communist Party members and the Chinese people, giving the party’s ideology a substantive role in modern China.

Ideological education in the reform era has attempted to give party members a coherent strategy for approaching their work. Central party theorists have expended significant effort to demonstrate how “the theories of Marx, Mao and Deng formed ‘in one continuous line’” that carries on through the practical work of a contemporary Chinese Communist Party cadre.¹⁷¹ This

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 20.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 20. Zheng, *The Chinese Communist Party*, 167.

¹⁷⁰ Dirlik, “Mao Zedong,” 24.; Zheng, *The Chinese Communist Party*, 163.

¹⁷¹ Alan P. L. Liu, “Rebirth and Secularization of the Central Party School in China,” *The China Journal* 62 (Jul. 2009), 114.

message is passed on to party members through formal courses of study at one of the country's 2,600 party schools, which are an essential tool for maintaining control over party and state cadres.¹⁷² In addition to long-term classes at party schools, cadres are also inculcated in party ideology through regular short-term classes on timely issues conducted by party authorities at every level.¹⁷³ Even while the share of ideological education in curricula for party members has decreased with the introduction of practical courses and the study of Western liberal economics, party educators have used cultural relativism to circumscribe education in Western ideas that are seen as threatening to the party, so that "concept stretch applies almost exclusively to Marxist theories."¹⁷⁴

Nevertheless, Liu notes "a widespread attitude among [students at the Central Party School] that ideological education [is] useless and irrelevant."¹⁷⁵ Despite this perceived irrelevance, party authorities continue to emphasize the importance of ideological education at all levels, including in villages.¹⁷⁶ Central party organizations continue to stress the importance of relying on "the nourishment of Marxist philosophical wisdom" for conducting governance in

¹⁷² David Shambaugh, "Training China's Political Elite: The Party School System," *The China Quarterly* 196 (Dec. 2008), 828.

¹⁷³ Liu, "Rebirth and Secularization," 116-17.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁷⁶ See for example Shi and Wang 2014, Qiu 2012 and Zhang 2006. Self-reported belief that an ideology is "useless and irrelevant" is not sufficient evidence that this is actually the case. A short thought experiment demonstrates this: a young physicist, fresh out of a PhD program at a reputable American university, begins working as an assistant professor at a liberal arts college in the southern United States. When it comes time for her tenure application to be reviewed several years later, she is dismayed to find that her tenure is contingent not on the approval of multi-member committees that use democratic practices such as free discussion and popular vote, but the fiat of her department chair, a faculty tenure committee of one member and the chairman of the Board of Trustees. Our young physicist has never taken a course on liberalism or given any serious conscious thought to how liberal democratic societies should operate, and yet liberalism shapes her expectations of how she will be treated by her peers and superiors. So too with Chinese Communist Party cadres. Furthermore, the point at which ideology is most important for a bureaucratic agent is when he must reconcile competing interests and needs; if ideology influences his decision at this point, then from the perspective of his principal ideological indoctrination has been effective (Downs 1967, 226-27). Reports by students taking classes on Marxist theory that ideology is "useless" does not necessarily imply that the ideology will not govern how they make critical decisions.

the era of deepening reform and since Xi Jinping came to power in 2013 he has overseen a severe crackdown on heterodox ideological discourse both online and in the academy.¹⁷⁷

The party has even adopted modern telecommunications technology in its effort to revitalize ideology and build a connection to the party among grassroots village cadres. In January 2010, the party announced a “national grassroots party-building cell phone information system” connecting village party branch secretaries and other rural cadres directly to party central through regular SMS messages announcing party initiatives. At the official opening of the system, then-vice president Xi Jinping sent an SMS to more than one million grassroots party cadres: “On behalf of Party Central, warmest greetings to all grassroots party organization secretaries and university student 'village cadres!' - Xi Jinping.”¹⁷⁸

Something is missing from this picture of village party branch secretaries as ideal bureaucratic functionaries responding to well-designed incentive systems to carry out state policy in the village. In many cases, state policy is *not* implemented.¹⁷⁹ While there are no formal institutions that hold the party branch secretary accountable to the villagers he represents, as a member of the local community, his actions exist within the web of interpersonal relationships

¹⁷⁷ Xinhua Net, “At 20th Politburo collective study session, Xi Jinping emphasizes adhering to the use of the dialectical materialist worldview to raise the ability to resolve our nation's reform and development basic questions” (Xi Jinping zai zhonggong zhongyang zhengzhiju di ershi ci jiti xuexi shi qiangdiao jianchi yunyong bianzheng weiwu zhuyi shijieguan fangfa lun tigao jiejie woguo gaige fazhan jiben wenti benling), *Xinhua*, Jan. 24, 2015.; Rogier Creemers, “Ideology Matters: Parsing Recent Changes in China’s Intellectual Landscape,” *Sinocism China Newsletter*, Feb. 7, 2015.; Rogier Creemers, “Cyber-Leninism: History, Political Culture and the Internet in China,” working draft.

¹⁷⁸ Xinjiang Daily, “National grassroots party-building cell phone information system opened, Xi Jinping video chats with Urumqi cadres (Quanguo jiceng dangjian shouji xinxi xitong kaitong, xi Jinping yu wushi shequ ganbu shipin tonghua),” *Xinjiang Ribao*, Jan. 6, 2010. University student village cadres are young, college-educated individuals who have taken up posts as village cadres under a central scheme to improve the quality of village governance. For more information, see Lü Shuliang, “Considerations regarding university student village cadres and policy from the new village perspective (Xin nongcun shijiao xia daxuesheng cungan jiqi zhengce kaoliang),” *Zhongguo Nongcun Guan* 3 (2008).

¹⁷⁹ Anna L. Ahlers, *Rural Policy Implementation in Contemporary China: New Socialist Countryside* (New York: Routledge, 2014).; Christian Göbel, “Uneven Policy Implementation in Rural China,” *The China Journal* 65 (Jan. 2011).; Yang Zhong, *Local Government and Politics in China: Challenges from Below* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003).; Cai, “Between State and Peasant.,” O’Brien and Li, “Selective Policy Implementation in Rural China.”

and informal normative institutions governing village life. Informal institutions may override material incentives or ideological imperatives aimed at party cohesion in the party branch secretary's decision-making calculus.

Clientelist Logic: The Party Branch Secretary as Patron

Informal institutions are often regarded as a channel for the pursuit of private interest rather than a force for improving governance. In the case of China, many scholars have highlighted the ways in which clientelist networks and interpersonal relationships (“*guanxi*”) can evolve into factions based on a shared native place, lineage group, school or other form of association; in the words of Andrew Nathan, these factions are like “vines” that subvert the “trellis” of the state by enabling officials to abuse their positions to extract rents or provide favors and privileges to friends, family or other favored individuals.¹⁸⁰ There is evidence that informal institutions such as religious organizations and lineage groups may play an important or even dominant role in village governance;¹⁸¹ some scholars have pointed to the potential role of associations external to the Chinese state shaping their members’ thinking and behavior in ways that then influence those individuals’ opinions of and interactions with the state.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Nathan, “A Factionalism Model for CCP Politics.”; Ruixue Jia and Xiaohuan Lan, “Red Capitalism: Cadre Parents and Entrepreneurial Children in China,” Paper presented at the 4th Annual Conference on the Chinese Economy, Fudan University, Shanghai, China, Dec. 11-12, 2013.; Ben Hillman, “Factions and Spoils: Examining Political Behavior Within the Local State in China,” *The China Journal* 64 (July 2010), 1-18.; Lollar and Hamilton, “Patronage or Prebendalism?,” Graeme Smith, “Political Machinations in a Rural County,” *The China Journal* 62 (Jul. 2009).; Xiaobo Lü, “Booty Socialism, Bureau-preneurs, and the State in Transition: Organizational Corruption in China,” *Comparative Politics* 32, no. 3 (Apr. 2000), 273-294. You-Tien Hsing, *Making Capitalism in China: The Taiwan Connection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).; Lowell Dittmer and Xiaobo Lü, “Personal Politics in the Chinese ‘Danwei’ under Reform,” *Asian Survey* 36, no. 3 (Mar. 1996).; Oi, “Commercializing China’s Rural Cadres.”; Jean C. Oi, “Communism and Clientelism: Rural Politics in China,” *World Politics* 37, no. 2 (Jan. 1985).

¹⁸¹ Richard Madsen, “Religious Organizations and Local Self-rule in Rural China,” in *Dynamics of Local Governance in China During the Reform Era*, ed. Tse-Kang Leng and Yun-han Chu (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010).; Tsai, “The Struggle For Village Public Goods Provision.”

¹⁸² Shaoguang Wang and Jianyu He, “Associational Revolution in China: Mapping the Landscapes,” in *Dynamics of Local Governance in China During the Reform Era*, ed. Tse-Kang Leng and Yun-han Chu (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010).; Tse-Kang Leng and Yun-han Chu, *Dynamics of Local Governance in China During the Reform Era* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010).

Resource and constraint: Informal institutions and norms

Examining formal and informal institutions in Chinese villages, Lily Tsai finds that party membership of the village leadership has no impact on public goods provision in the village.¹⁸³ Similarly, existence and consolidation of democratic institutions does not lead to an increase in public goods provision. Village leadership signing performance contracts is linked to increased investment in public goods, but this increase in investment does not lead to a similar increase in the actual provision of public goods. According to Tsai, the existence of formal institutions for holding village leaders accountable does not guarantee that they will be effective or that people will even use them.

Informal institutions of accountability such as village-wide lineage groups or temple organizations (which Tsai calls “solidary groups”), on the other hand, may discipline village leadership and effect public goods provision even in villages where formal state institutions are nonexistent or weak. If they are able to demonstrate that they are motivated by moral considerations and concerned about the interests of the whole community rather than those of specific individuals or groups, these informal institutions may gain the moral authority to define and enforce norms that require village leaders to contribute to the collective good.¹⁸⁴ “By increasing the value of the community to its members, these institutions invoke norms of indebtedness that obligate individuals to repay their debts to the village community.”¹⁸⁵ Informal institutions also incentivize village cadres to work for communal interests by making moral standing a source of political power in the village.¹⁸⁶ Informal institutions can serve as a venue

¹⁸³ Tsai, “The Struggle For Village Public Goods Provision.”

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁸⁶ This is particularly useful to village leaders when the state’s credibility is low—which is frequently the case in rural China following fiscal reforms, particularly in areas that are remote or have low natural resource endowments. In this way, informal institutions serve not only to influence cadre behavior through creation and enforcement of

for “test interactions” between cadres and villagers, as well as allow them to develop a “common language” for signaling intentions and interpreting motivations.¹⁸⁷ Tsai finds that in villages where there is an active village-wide lineage group or temple organization, provision of public goods is better than villages where these informal institutions do not exist.¹⁸⁸

Despite attempts to wipe them out during the Maoist era, kinship groups have returned with a vengeance since the beginning of the reform era, coming to play an important role in social, economic and political life in villages throughout China. Kinship groups were able to survive the constant critique they endured during the Mao years because production teams were primarily organized geographically, which preserved kinship connections by grouping households connected by familial relations within the same production teams. Class labeling and its hereditary transfer further solidified familial ties, while mass political campaigns gave kinship rivalries an arena in which they could play out.¹⁸⁹ In the absence of the ability to form other kinds of social organizations (such as agricultural associations), villagers have turned to kinship and lineage in the reform era as the platform for establishing mutual obligations that can form the basis for sharing productive assets.¹⁹⁰

Informal institutions like kinship groups and temple organizations constrain the actions of the party branch secretary by defining the normative environment in which he must operate, but they also can be a source of power for the party branch secretary, relative to both the village and the township party committee. So long as he responds to the normative expectations of the community, the party branch secretary can exploit informal institutions to legitimate his actions

communal norms, but also make it easier for cadres to accomplish their jobs by increasing their political authority (Tsai 2007, 129).

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 129-30.

¹⁸⁸ These institutions must be inclusive and village-wide; in cases where they represent or include only a portion of the village, they may actually contribute to conflict in the village and make governance more difficult (Ibid., 141-43).

¹⁸⁹ Hillman, *Power and Patronage*, 19-20.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 13-4, 20-21.

and enforce compliance with government decisions among villagers. At the same time, informal institutions give the party branch secretary a certain measure of latitude in implementing higher-level decisions, so long as those decisions conflict with the normative expectations of the community.

Resource: Collective assets and enterprises

Jean Oi has argued that clientelism played a dominant role in rural Chinese politics during the Maoist era as a method of bureaucratic coordination, resource allocation and linkage between elites and the masses.¹⁹¹ During the Maoist era, collectively controlled resources were distributed at the discretion of local political elites (brigade and team leaders).¹⁹² Distribution of collective resources was mediated by personal relationships between political elites and villagers; while the patron-client ties that developed out of such personal relationships “are addenda to existing institutional arrangements,” they became so prevalent that they could be considered “almost legal.”¹⁹³ When an informal institution is so widespread that it can be considered nearly universal, it goes beyond being a simple appendix to formal institutions, engraining itself in individual behavior and gaining an inertia that makes it largely self-perpetuating. In this case, patron-client ties become “the key to making the best of a hard life in China’s countryside.”¹⁹⁴

Despite changes in the economic power of village cadres resulting from privatization of collective enterprises and the institution of the household responsibility system, clientelism remains an important—and in some regions, dominant—pattern of elite-mass relations in

¹⁹¹ Oi, “Communism and Clientelism.”

¹⁹² These resources included state grain rations; work assignments and work points; collective tools or animals; private employment opportunities; and relief funds and loans (Ibid., 242-51).

¹⁹³ Ibid., 252.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 253.

Chinese villages. It is easy to understand what stake the party branch secretary has in maintaining this state of affairs: as before, the primary benefit he receives from the clientelist exchange is respect and political support necessary to maintaining his position. But why should villagers continue to offer support to the party branch secretary if the collective resources he was formerly able to relay to them are now greatly diminished?

One reason is that in many villages the party branch secretary still does control a significant share of economic resources in the village, in particular, allocation of land. Furthermore, because of his privileged position, the party branch secretary is in a better position to connect with the outside world and can still serve as a channel or middleman for essential inputs. These may be resources that come through local government channels over which the party branch secretary has control, such as credit, grants, employment opportunities or development and poverty alleviation funding.¹⁹⁵ But even for those inputs that come from sources external to formal state channels, the privileged position of the party branch secretary grants him unique access. A village party branch secretary can use his privileged status to establish connections with enterprises or academic institutions to introduce new knowledge, expertise, credit or technological inputs to agriculture or collective or private enterprises in the village.¹⁹⁶

Resource: Private assets and enterprises

Furthermore, even when they are unable to deploy collective resources in clientelist exchanges, party branch secretaries may have private economic resources they can draw on. Many party branch secretaries have responded energetically to the spirit of the Three Represents, becoming private entrepreneurs. This process started in the beginning of the reform era, with the

¹⁹⁵ Hillman, *Power and Patronage*, 21-24.

¹⁹⁶ Chen, *Transforming Rural China*, 54-69.

appearance of the “cadre entrepreneur” heading village-owned enterprises; when village-owned enterprises were privatized in the late 1990s and early 2000s, many village cadres took advantage of their position, connections and the resources they had accumulated as enterprise managers to purchase the collective enterprises and maintain their position as entrepreneurs.¹⁹⁷

Following privatization, cadre entrepreneurs are village cadres who “are the owners of sizable private companies; hold private contracts for a large portion of village land and assets; or are involved in economic projects for which they have bidden [sic] successfully on their own. Their authority over fellow villagers does not stem from their own political appointments but is based on their private property and wealth, with little or no connection to their office ... to the extent that it is successful, their authority is typically de-politicized, personalized, and largely beyond the party-state’s organizational or institutional regulations.”¹⁹⁸ As market reforms and the increased mobility of rural residents stripped political office in the village of its former absolute control over the distribution of resources, the authority of village cadres has become more closely wedded to their personal ability to achieve positive economic growth outcomes for the village.¹⁹⁹ Some cadre entrepreneurs established their status in the village through private sector success and were subsequently co-opted by the regime to serve as village leadership, while others leveraged their position as a cadre to amass private wealth from privatization of collective enterprises in the late 1990s.²⁰⁰

The number of cadre entrepreneurs holding political office in rural China is very high, both in the highly industrialized coastal areas and the agricultural inner regions. In 2008, two-

¹⁹⁷ Chih-Jou Jay Chen, “The Path of Chinese Privatisation: a case study of village enterprises in southern Jiangsu,” *Corporate Governance* 13, no. 1 (Jan. 2005).; Chen, *Transforming Rural China.*; Zhong, *Local Government and Politics in China.*; Oi, *Rural China Takes Off.*; Oi and Walder, *Property Rights and Economic Reform in China.*; Hsing, *Making Capitalism in China.*

¹⁹⁸ Chen, *The Transformation of Governance in Rural China*, 263.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 275-78.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 265-66.

thirds of village party branch secretaries and VC directors in Zhejiang province were private entrepreneurs,²⁰¹ while even in inner regions such as Hubei and Chongqing private entrepreneurs tend to comprise a significant portion of village leaders.²⁰² Nor are these numbers static; the ranks of rural cadre entrepreneurs appear to be growing rapidly.²⁰³

Resource: State authority and legitimacy

While entrepreneur cadres may be motivated by an altruistic or ideological desire to contribute to village welfare, holding political office in the village concomitantly to running a private enterprise is undoubtedly self-interested. The household income of cadre entrepreneurs is significantly higher than that of entrepreneur households, cadre households and ordinary (non-cadre and non-entrepreneur) households.²⁰⁴ Serving as a cadre brings an entrepreneur social status and credibility that enhances trustworthiness in business dealings; running a private enterprise endows a village cadre with economic resources, social connections and a proven track record that makes his superiors and villagers respect him more.²⁰⁵ In both cases, the concomitant posting is a highly useful tool for the cadre entrepreneur.

²⁰¹ Huabao Jin and Leshan Jin, "A study of charismatic authority and the development of rural communities in mainland China (*Meilixing quanwei yu dalu nongcun shequ fazhan zhi yanjiu*)," *Zhongguo Dalu Yanjiu* 45, no. 1 (2002), Cited in Chen, *The Transformation of Governance in Rural China*, 264.;

²⁰² Reporter, "The new era of governing villages by the rich (furen zhicun xin shidai)," *Dongnan Xibei* 3 (2004), cited in Chen, *The Transformation of Governance in Rural China*, 264.; Jing Ouyang, "Rich people governing villages: A study of its mechanisms and effects (Furen zhicun: jizhi yu jixiao yanjiu)," *Guangdong Shehui Kexue* 5 (2011), cited in Chen, *The Transformation of Governance in Rural China*, 265.

²⁰³ Xiaofeng Zhao and Huihuang Lin, "The effects of absorbing social talents and political exclusion of rich people governing villages (furen zhicun de shehui xina jizhi jiqi zhengzhi paichi gongneng)," *Zhongguo Ningbo Shiwei Dangxiao Xuebao* 4 (2010), cited in Chen, *The Transformation of Governance in Rural China*, 281.; Tangbiao Xiao, "Who are village cadres? A preliminary analysis of village cadres' socio-political capital (shenme ren zai dang cun ganbu: Dui cun ganbu shehui zhengzhi ziben de chubu fenxi)," *Guanli Shijie* 9 (2006), cited in Chen, *The Transformation of Governance in Rural China*, 264. According to Chen, "what is described here is not a local/regional occurrence, nor should it be seen as peculiar to a transitional stage of rural development. Rather, over the decades, having spread from economically developed coastal provinces to impoverished traditional agricultural regions, this model has become one of the most prominent features of China's new village politics" (Chen 2015, 267).

²⁰⁴ Andrew G. Walder, "Markets and income inequality in rural China: Political advantage in an expanding economy," *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 2 (2002).

²⁰⁵ Chen, *The Transformation of Governance in Rural China*, 270-84.

Beyond the material resources cadre entrepreneurs bring to the table, they also enjoy a privileged status that enables them to build more interpersonal connections that allow them to govern more effectively. The most important reason villagers continue to establish clientelist relationships with village leadership, however, may not be economic or “rational.”²⁰⁶ Clientelist relationships are not formed on the basis of one-off exchanges, but long-term, face-to-face interactions that create feelings of trust and even friendship, for which “the balance sheet may stretch over many years.”²⁰⁷ Even if a village party branch secretary lacks material resources to distribute to clients, clients may continue to support him out of genuine commitment or friendship; respect for personal characteristics unrelated to his access to material resources, such as age, wisdom, familial ties or past achievements, to name a few; or out of an expectation that he will gain material resources at some time in the future that will enable him to “balance the books.”

The irony of the informal institution is that while it imposes a normative constraint on the village party branch secretary, it simultaneously creates yet another source of legitimacy and authority for the party branch secretary to wield, which has important implications not only for villagers, but also for the township party committee. If a dominant informal institution exists in a village, the township has an incentive to identify the individual who controls (or will best be able to control) the institution; this person comes into office with an external source of authority and legitimacy that enables him to more quickly consolidate power and govern effectively.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Auyero, “The Logic of Clientelism.”; Auyero, “From the client’s point(s) of view.”; Eisenstadt and Roniger, *Patrons, clients and friends.*; Scott, “Patron-Client Politics.”

²⁰⁷ Oi, “Communism and Clientelism,” 257.

²⁰⁸ Naming the head of the dominant informal institution in the village party branch secretary also has the added benefit of reducing the amount of resources the township must expend on identifying, recruiting and training a new party branch secretary; an individual’s status as head of the village’s dominant informal institution serves as an indicator that the individual already has the approval of most of the villagers and is an effective leader. Even in the township’s worst-case scenario (that it is unable to co-opt the head of the dominant informal institution), the informal institution still dominates the township’s decision-making in choosing a village party branch secretary. In

To recap, village party branch secretaries face constraints imposed by both township party committees and village constituents and are endowed with resources that expand their autonomy vis-a-vis both of these actors (see Figure 1). Some of these constraints (such as ideology or the VC) may not be as effective as the designers of the Chinese rural political system intended them to be, and in this sense may, in certain contexts, function more as conditioning factors than true constraints. Similarly, some resources may be particularly effective and useful for some party branch secretaries and less effective (or entirely inaccessible) for others, depending on local institutions, traditions or economic conditions. In the following section, I draw on evidence from the field to present examples of how party branch secretaries make decisions and navigate the environment of constraints and resources within which they work.

Conclusion

The emphasis in the recent literature on clientelism as a strategy adopted by political actors in competitive environments is a positive development, but it should not come at the cost of losing sight of how clientelism plays out in non-democratic settings.²⁰⁹ When the choice for potential clients is not between hitching one's star to one of two different patrons, but rather whether or not to become a client of *the* patron, the political calculus becomes quite different. Facing multiple potential patrons, clients have some power to negotiate the terms of their relationship (what material resources are gained for what kind of political support). Facing a monopolist patron, voicing discontent may not be an effective strategy for improving the terms of the clientelist exchange. In this case, "exiting" and searching for work elsewhere may be the only viable option for improving one's situation.²¹⁰

this case, the township's optimal outcome can be achieved by identifying the individual who is most insulated from the influence of the informal institution.

²⁰⁹ Scott, "Patron-Client Politics.;" Landé, "The Dyadic Basis of Clientelism.;" Powell, "Peasant Society."

²¹⁰ Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*.

The village party branch secretary is in a unique position. He is expected to be a “generalist” who can implement, regulate and monitor a number of different policy initiatives simultaneously, reporting to different township agencies on each issue.²¹¹ From the top-down, he is constrained by the cadre responsibility system, the township’s powers of appointment and recruitment and official party ideology. Yet these institutional mechanisms for disciplining him are largely concentrated in the hands of a single principal at the township level—the township party committee—which operates according to a system of sanction and reward that leads it to incentivize behaviors by the party branch secretary that may be in direct opposition to his interests if he hopes to maintain his authority in the village. Luckily for him (if not for the township), information asymmetries are severe and the tools of agent control at the disposal of township officials relatively weak.

The limited constraints imposed by the township do not resonate deeply with either the day-to-day or long-term imperatives of governing a Chinese village, and may in fact contradict them. While the party branch secretary’s interactions with his superiors in the township can be explained by the logic of bureaucracy, governance of the village is conducted according to a very different logic: political clientelism. From the bottom-up, this logic forces him to include the constraints of normative expectations of action, villager petitions to higher levels of government and the response of the VC in his decision-making process. However, the clientelist logic also lends the party branch secretary extensive resources that expand his autonomy of action. His position as head of a clientelist network, redistributing collective or private material benefits in exchange for political support, serve to enhance and complicate the agency problems already inherent in his distance and separation from the township party committee.

²¹¹ O’Brien and Li, “Selective Policy Implementation in Rural China.”

Ten years into Reform and Opening, Vivienne Shue pointed to the difficulty of controlling political actors at the lowest levels of government in China. Despite its near-absolute dominance of Chinese political, economic and social life, the Maoist state failed to fully penetrate and control the Chinese countryside. Shue argued that to overcome the localist constraints that tied down the Chinese state in the Maoist era, reformers sought to:

attack *both* the old cellular structure of rural life *and* the subcultures of localism (both honest and corrupt) that thrived in its recesses. For this double attack, however, they have employed but a single weapon—rapid expansion of the role of market relations in economy, society, and the very work of local government. With this one weapon, they have shaken both the organizational skeleton of the honeycomb polity and the morality of localism that both legitimized and stiffened it.²¹²

Shue identified four possibilities for how economic and political elites might respond to the new conditions of the reform era.²¹³ They could remain distinct, but cooperate through illicit means such as bribery, extortion and backroom deals, or they could peacefully coexist, remaining distinct, with “ground rules” shaping and delimiting the space for competition between them. Alternatively, if they failed to find sufficient common ground for cooperation, they might engage in open conflict. Finally, they might become merged, with one group holding both economic and political power. Looking back at thirty years of political and economic reforms and the impact it has had in the Chinese countryside, it seems that Shue’s final hypothesis—elites holding both political and economic power—has become the dominant situation.

Central leaders appear to be generally interested in delegating some of the responsibilities of monitoring agent compliance previously held by the township government to villagers through

²¹² Shue, *The Reach of the State*, 148.

²¹³ Shue, *The Reach of the State*, 151.

the “self-government” mechanism of the Organic Law, and evidence suggests that the party branch secretary is no longer the sole locus of decision-making authority in some villages. However, the party continues to hold on to the reins of power in most villages, and so long as central leaders remain unwilling to change the selection of village party leadership to a fully democratic process, the checks imposed on the village party branch secretary’s exercise of power will remain incomplete. However, the consequence of semi-democratic institutions that only serve as a partial check on power is not open warfare between villagers and their leaders, like that which erupted in the village of Wukan, Guangdong Province in December 2011.²¹⁴ Instead, the adoption of clientelism as a governance method by party branch secretaries may lead to a decline in the volume of citizen-cadre conflicts that result in mass incidents, giving the appearance that all is well in the Chinese countryside.

This paper began with a story about a Beijing entrepreneur named Wang Dalin who, upon becoming village party branch secretary, spent 8 million RMB of his own money to pay off the village government’s debt to “get everyone to support [him].” After telling how he became party branch secretary and improved the village economy, Sec. Wang concluded with the following remark:

“How to be a good village secretary? I’ll sum it up in two sentences. What the masses want is what I do. What I do is what the masses want.”²¹⁵

²¹⁴ Martin Patience, “China’s Wukan village stands up for land rights,” *BBC News*, Dec. 15, 2011.; “Wukan: After the Uprising,” *Al Jazeera*, Jun. 26, 2013.; Shenjing He and Desheng Xue, “Identity Building and Communal Resistance against Landgrabs in Wukan Village, China,” *Current Anthropology* 55, no. S9 (August 2014), S126-S137.; Anne Christine Lie, “Rethinking rural resistance in China: A case study of the 2011 Wukan Incident in Guangdong province,” master’s thesis, University of Oslo, 2014.

²¹⁵ 群众想的就是我做的事，我做的事就是群众想的事 (Qiu Bing 2012, 7).

Appendix I. Village Cadre Responsibility Contracts

Figure 1. Laxiang County Village Responsibility Contract. Source: Hillman 2014, 92.

Responsibility targets

1. Increase average village household income by 10.8 percent
2. Ensure that the work output per 10 villagers attains an income of 20,000 yuan
3. Increase average grain production to 186 kilograms per capita
4. Solve the basic needs (温饱 *wenbao*) and poverty situation of 174 people
5. Reduce the fertility rate by 9 percent

Figure 2. Laxiang County Responsibility Contract for Public Order Governance in Administrative Villages. Source: Laxiang County Government (Hillman 2014, 94-95)

Method of Evaluation

Section I: Reporting the circumstances of major crimes to higher authorities and cooperating with public security organs.

1. Immediately reporting to higher authorities any crime and enthusiastically cooperating with public security organs during their investigation (9 points).
2. Number of incidents of serious crimes restricted to 0.04% of the population (11 points).

Section II: Making concerted efforts to prevent and manage sudden public order issues, addressing problems the moment they arise. Once a public order problem arises, taking decisive measures to resolve it comprehensively at its incipient stage.

1. Making concerted efforts to prevent and manage public order problems and exposing latent trouble (4 points).
2. Investigating and understanding conflicts of interests and disputes within the community and producing a written document with practicable measures to guarantee the prevention of serious conflicts erupting (3 points).
3. Conducting research into possible instability, latent troubles, and sudden disturbances and adopting a written policy of countermeasures (3 points).
4. Causing by error in work practice the exacerbation of conflicts (5 points deducted per incident).

Section III: Key Governance Work

1. Demonstrating that measures taken against gambling within the local jurisdiction including among farmers, local cadres and other staff are effective (5 points).
2. Demonstrating strict and effective enforcement of the "four bans" against narcotics (planting, selling, using, and manufacturing) (6 points).

Section IV: Strengthening the local area's "culture" by managing temporary residents and floating population.

1. Demonstrating effective measures for constraining the spread of the "six harms" and attacking criminal activity (2 points).

2. Putting in place effective measures against the sale of women and children and controlling the outflow of naive women from the village (2 points).
3. Banning feudal and superstitious rural practices and demonstrating results (2 points).
4. Resolutely implementing national, provincial, prefecture, and county party committee resolutions forbidding the participation by any organization, party official, civil servant, group member or farmer in "Falungong," "Mentuhui," or any other cult-like organization (2 points).
5. Immediately registering itinerant people or temporary residents (2 points).

Section V: Preventing fires, crime, and traffic accidents, and reporting the circumstances surrounding accidents.

1. Establishing a fire prevention and safety responsibility system for public entertainment areas, shops, petroleum depots, forests, and other dangerous places (4 points); in case of fire causing serious damage (deduct 10 points).
2. Maintaining vigilance against theft (4 points); deduct double points in case of failure.
3. Maintaining road safety and ensuring that no accidents result in death in any given year (3 points).
4. Demonstrating impact on the legal education of villagers (2 points).
5. Immediately reporting any accidents to higher authorities and to the Comprehensive Public Order Governance Committee (7 points); failure to act (deduct 10 points).
6. Demonstrating the effective resolution of conflicts within the village in accordance with the law (6 points). Practicing favoritism for friends or relatives or conducting affairs with partiality (deduct 10 points).

Section VI: Demonstrating strong leadership and concern for comprehensive public order governance.

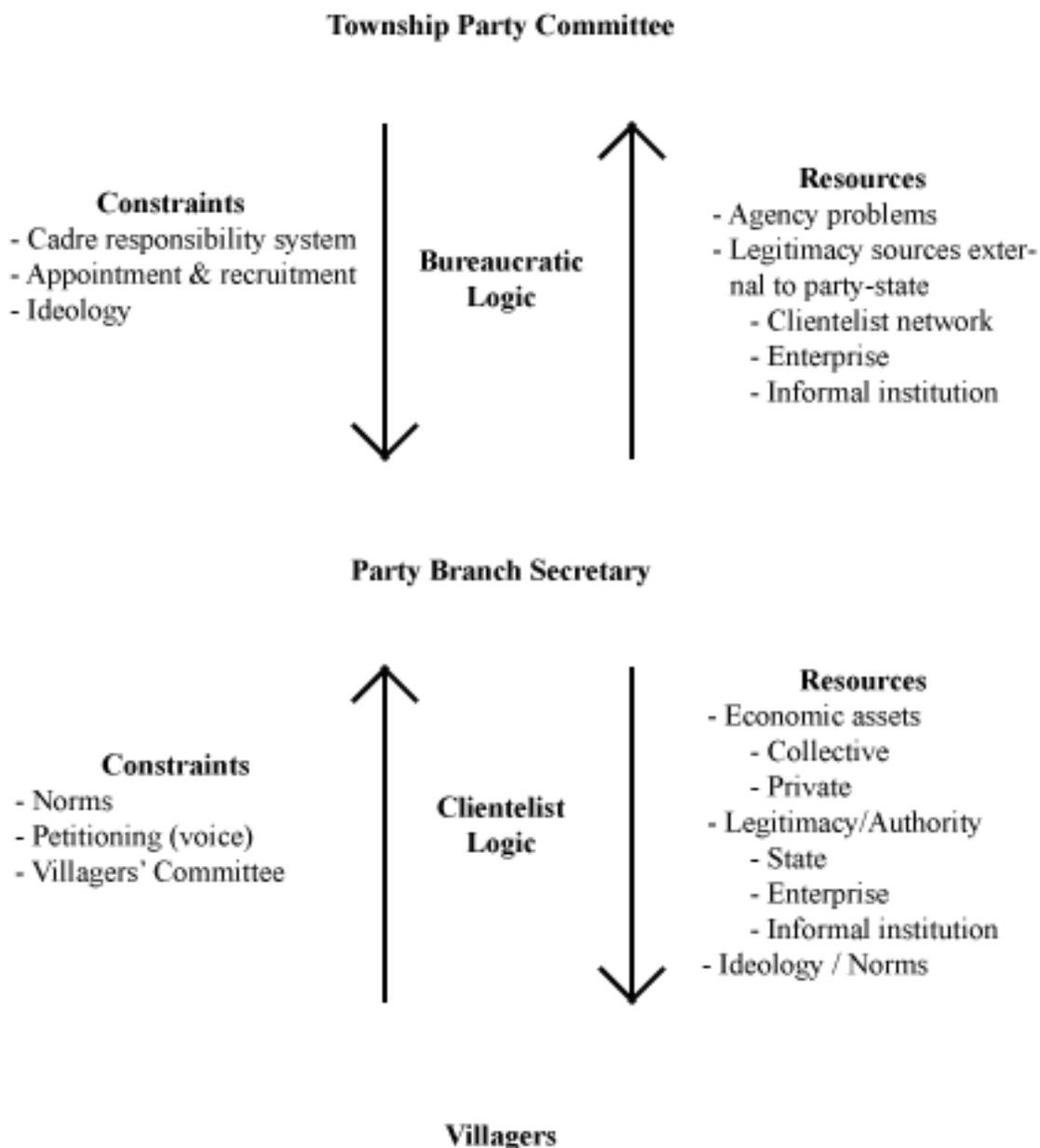
1. Conscientiously implement the "Longtan Township Party Committee Comprehensive Public Order Governance Objective Management Method" and demonstrating strong leadership in ideological and organizational work (7 points).
2. Finding practical and genuine approaches to work (3 points).

Section VII: Rewards and Penalties

1. At the end of each year every organ and the village party branch will undertake a thorough evaluation.
2. Rewards: Following examination, the attainment of an excellent score will be awarded 200 yuan; a passing score will neither be rewarded nor penalized.
3. Penalties: Following examination, if the score is 50-59 points, a fine of 100 yuan will apply; if the score is 40-49 points, a fine of 200 yuan will apply; if the score is below 39 points, a fine of 300 yuan will apply.

The above system of rewards and penalties must be strictly followed or leading cadres will have all achievements and promotions cancelled, and forfeit the right to stand for election; twenty-five percent of the total amount of fines will be borne personally by leading cadres.

Appendix II. Model of Village Party Branch Secretary Decision-making Environment



Appendix III. Bibliography

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