The London School of Economics and Political Science

Village economic autonomy and authoritarian control over village elections in China

- Evidence from rural Guangdong Province

Ting Luo

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the effects of village economic wealth and economic autonomy on the authoritarian control of local government over village elections in China. With new data - qualitative evidence and quantitative data collected from the extensive fieldtrips to a county in Guangdong Province, this study finds that given that village elections operate within China's one party authoritarian regime and the official purpose of the elections is to solve the grassroots governance crisis, local government have the incentive to control the elections in their favour, that is, to have incumbents and/or party members elected. Using the election of party members to the village committee chairman position and the re-election of incumbent chairmen as proxies for the inclusiveness and contestation dimensions of village elections, this study demonstrates that collective village wealth triggers fierce electoral competition, as collective village wealth represents the lucrative benefits candidates can obtain from holding the office. However, the success of authoritarian control hinges on village economic autonomy - the opportunities for economic development beyond the control of local government. If economic resources are controlled by local government, economic development might strengthen the capacity of local government to control the elections in their favour. Even if opponents win the elections, they are inclined to be co-opted by the local government - becoming party members, because their economic gain and maintenance of power are affected by the authoritarian local government control over economic resources. In most villages in the sample, authoritarian control prevails in village elections. The findings of this thesis suggest that until now the elections have been maintained within the boundary of the CCP's authoritarian governance. In rural China, for elections to serve the function of promoting democracy and fostering checks and balances of power - neither manipulation by the local government nor manipulation by rich opponents - the key lies in the economic empowerment of villagers.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Diagrams

List of Maps

Abbreviations

VC	Village committee
VEC	Village election committee
CCP	Chinese Communist Party

Chapter 1 : Economic autonomy and authoritarian control of local elections

In February, 2008, I was working as an intern in the finance office of a wealthy village committee in Shenzhen, the special economic zone in Guangdong Province, adjacent to Hong Kong. My purpose was to investigate the function of the village committee and the village election. However, two characteristics of the village made it unsuitable for my research purpose. First, the village is wealthy in the sense that it is located in a developed city with exceptionally valuable land. In possession of such valuable land, the village has its own collective enterprise to manage collective land and outside investments. The village committee chairman is the chief executive, and the village party secretary is the chairman of the board of the village enterprise. This practice is common in Shenzhen and some other relatively developed cities, but it is not a representative sample of vast numbers of villages in rural China. Second, in 2008, the village was in the process of transition into an urban community due to urbanisation. The Organic Law of Village Committees (*Cunweihui zuzhi fa*) thus can no longer be applied to this village and it is precisely because of this second reason, I had to change my research site. It is worthy to point out that those wealthy villages with collective village enterprises which have yet to be converted into urban communities are still worth investigating, no matter how small the sample of such villages.

In March 2008, I boarded a coach to a remote and poor county in Guangdong Province. I was invited by the County Civil Affairs Bureau to work as a consultant, the primary duty of which was to observe and supervise the on-going village election in 2008. Three years later in 2011, I went back to the county and observed the 2011 village election for the purpose of comparison. It is without surprise that electoral competition in villages in possession of relatively wealthy collective resources – land, forestry, ponds and such like at the village committee's disposal – tends to be fiercer with more competitors, as competitors see the potential benefits of getting into office. These benefits could be monetary returns or valuable contacts for one's own business interests. On the other hand, county and township governments have an incentive to influence electoral outcomes as elected village committees are responsible for

carrying out state policies and political tasks and the implementation of policies and tasks affects government officials' political careers. Moreover, government officials deem that villagers are not educated enough to elect the right persons to the village committee, and that those candidates recommended by local government[1] are much better in quality. This thought is prevalent among township and county government officials in the county. It is then unwise to let villagers choose their own leaders without any supervision from local government. The supervision includes investigation of potential candidates, producing list of candidates recommended by local government, soliciting support for candidates favoured by local government and such like.

Here then comes the puzzle. The conventional wisdom (Lipset, 1959, 1994) points to the idea that economic development promotes democracy in the sense that economic development leads to a profound change in the structure and culture of a society conducive to the development of democracy. Studies of China's grassroots elections also found out that economic development reflected through increasing GDP or collective village wealth is conducive to the implementation of competitive elections, as economic development increases the stakes villagers have in village politics and thus heightens their interest in participating in democratic elections and governance. Following this line of argument, we should observe that wealthy villages tend to have free and fair elections, while poor villages are more likely to be subject to the pressure of local government.

However, I observed different patterns in the sample county. Villages U, T and L generated similar amounts of collective business income biannually, above the average collective village business income in the sample county, from subletting collective village properties or running power stations. In the 2011 village elections, in both Villages U and T, non-party members with no previous experience of working at grassroots organisations were elected to the village committee chairman position. In Village U, the party successor, despite being strongly supported by local government, failed in the electoral competition with the outsider, while at Village T, the former village chairman, after pursuing a party membership continuously when in office,

[1] In this research, local government refer mainly to county and township level governments.

failed in obtaining party membership and later on also failed in the electoral competition with the outsider in 2011. Moreover, in Village T in previous five elections since 1999, none of the incumbents managed to be re-elected and only one chairman was a party member. The township and county governments considered Village T the most difficult village in times of election in the sense that it is difficult for government intentions to be realised and the conduct of each election was beset by factional conflicts and social unrest. The situation in Village L is different. Being the wealthiest village in the town where Village L is located, past government intentions can easily be carried out in time of election. In 2011, facing a wealthy competitor who was a young entrepreneur, the party successor with the support of the township government was able to be elected to the village committee chairman position. Why would the three villages, all with collective wealth and resources, be dramatically different on the implementation of election? Why can government intentions be carried out in Village L but not in Village U and Village T? If economic development indicated by collective village wealth in these three cases is not the key in explaining the electoral outcome, what else would be the key explanatory factor?

Before I provide an answer to this puzzle, it is important to understand the official purpose of the village elections as background. Though holding democratic elections for village committees was initially invented by villagers, it is the central government and the CCP's intention to carry out democratic village elections nationwide. Would the CCP implement such a democratic reform at grassroots level for the sake of a genuine democratisation? In official literature, as well as academic studies (e.g.,Chan, 1998; Howell, 1998; Kelliher, 1997; O'Brien, 1994; Oi, 1999; Schubert, 2002), it is considered that the official purpose of the elections is to solve the political anarchy created by the collapse of the commune system. In other words, it is because of "the impracticability of doing otherwise" (Chan, 1998, p. 510). The commune system in place before the early 1980s provided rural peasants with no incentive to increase agricultural outputs. To increase agricultural production and drag China from economic stagnation at the end of 1970s thus requires that peasants are provided with a production incentive. The household responsibility system was introduced against this backdrop, the key of which is to increase individual autonomy in generating family income. Collective resources that used to be controlled by the commune were allocated to individual households. Individual households have from then on decided

their own production activities and have had full control over their own production output beyond the quota required by the state. Commune cadres were thus left with no authority to fulfil their duties and electing self-governance village committees by popular vote became the only viable solution for good government and successful economic development. Taking into account the instrumental reasons for introducing the grassroots elections, such elections certainly have a boundary which is the CCP's monopoly of power and its authoritarian governance.

The findings of this research suggest that the CCP has until now succeeded in maintaining the grassroots elections within the boundary of the CCP's authoritarian governance through the CCP and its local government control over economic resources. Thus, the answer to the puzzle mentioned earlier, as I argue, lies in economic autonomy. Economic development, reflected from collective village wealth, contributes to fierce electoral competition, because increasing collective village wealth increases villagers' stakes in elections and more importantly, candidates' rewards from holding office. In Villages U, T and L, collective wealth and resources attract competitors who foresee the lucrative benefits of holding offices to join the village elections and thus increase the competitiveness of the elections, which makes it difficult for local government to control the elections. However, the extent of authoritarian control over elections is different within these three villages. The key difference between Villages U, T and Village L lies in the village's economic reliance on local government. Village L's collective wealth is generated through the support of the township government and thus Village L is subject to the pressure of the township government in times of election. Villages U and T have their own relatively independent sources of economic development and thus, in times of election, opponents and villagers have more freedom in making electoral choices. If economic resources are controlled by authoritarian rulers, economic development might strengthen the capacity of rulers to control the elections in their own interest. Even if opponents win the elections, they are inclined to be co-opted by the authoritarian rulers, because their economic gains and maintenance of power are affected by the authoritarian rulers' substantial discretionary control over economic resources and decisions over the allocation of these resources. Without considering the effect of economic autonomy, focusing solely on the role of economic development will not help to explain this puzzle.

Though the official purpose of introducing elections has little to do with promoting democracy per se, elections, once carried out, might have their own momentum and cause unintended consequences. With villagers' practice of each round of village elections, villagers might develop their skills in exercising democratic rights and be empowered with increasing level of political efficacy to protect their own interests and rights (e.g., Kennedy, 2002; Li, 2003; O'Brien, 2001; O'Brien, 1996). Also, continued practice of elections might lead to growing demand for more substantial political participation, such as extending the elections to township or higher levels of government (e.g., Li, 2001, 2002). Though we cannot predict for certain that such spill-over effects of elections on the country will happen, the CCP certainly has to face such a risk in holding grassroots elections.

Stepping back from the small picture of China, the findings of this study are related to a recent trend in regime development throughout the world. With a surge in authoritarian regimes that established the visible democratic element – periodic election – since the end of the Cold War, the findings of this study are particularly relevant to the diverging political trajectories of these types of regimes. It might have been an overly optimistic assumption that by installing periodic elections, democratic legitimacy can be rebuilt, checks and balances of power can be established and political participation can be deepened. The reality is that in some regimes elections help to break down the power monopoly by authoritarian rulers and establish democratic accountability, while in others elections only serve to stabilise the authoritarian regimes, as elections might help to divide or co-opt opposition on the one hand and strengthen the ties among political elites at the centre of power on the other. This study helps to explain why elections serve different functions in authoritarian regimes.

This study is not without limitations. Using cases and data selected from a county in one province of China, it would be imprudent to claim that the findings can represent all villages in China, given that it is a huge country with great variance on many dimensions among different localities. However, given the constraints on finance and access to information that researchers faced when doing research in China, it is rare to be able to assess the authoritarian control in China's village committee elections using both qualitative and quantitative evidence. In this regard, based on new qualitative

evidence and quantitative data, the findings of this study shed light on the authoritarian control in China's grassroots elections. To improve the external validity of the findings, a case study of village elections in other localities in China and data analysis based on higher quality and more representative data would certainly consolidate the findings of this study.

1.1 Subnational democracy and elections

Sen's definition of democracy is a good starting point for this section's discussion on democracy and election.

> "We must not identify democracy with majority rule. Democracy has complex demands, which certainly include voting and respect for election results, but it also requires the protection of liberties and freedoms, respect for legal entitlements, and the guaranteeing of free discussion and uncensored distribution of news and fair comment." (Sen, 1999, p. 9 - 10)

These demands point to a key characteristic of a democracy, that is: "the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens" (Dahl, 1971, p. 1). To guarantee government responsiveness, as argued by Dahl, there are two underlying dimensions that must be satisfied. There is contestation: "the extent of permissible opposition, public contestation, or political competition" (Dahl, 1971, p. 4). Citizens must have unimpaired opportunities to formulate and signify their preferences and their preferences must be weighed equally by the government. The second dimension is inclusiveness - the proportion of the population entitled to participate in the system of public contestation. A regime can have a highly-contested system, while only a small fraction of the population is included in the system of contestation. This regime is termed 'competitive oligarchy'; Britain resembled such a regime before the expansion of suffrage in 1867 and 1884. On the other hand, the USSR had no system of contestation, but all citizens were entitled to participate in governing, though not in public contestation. This regime is called 'inclusive hegemony' by Dahl. A shift to more inclusive on the inclusiveness dimension or/and to more liberalised on the contestation dimension might represent a degree of democratisation. An ideal type of democracy would resemble polyarchy: "highly inclusive and extensively open to public contestation" (Dahl, 1971, p. 8). Coppedge, Alvarez, & Maldonado (2008) tested the robustness of the two theoretical dimensions of democracy proposed by Dahl. They point out that based on the evidence at hand, Dahl's two dimensions of

contestation and inclusiveness have empirical grounds and were consistently fundamental to the most commonly used indicators of democracy from 1950 to 2000.

Democracy does not just vary in dimension, but also in levels of government. Democracy, once established, is not evenly developed within a nation state. There can be many reasons accounting for the variance of democracy among subnational level governments; to name a few, subnational level governments with strong power to resist democratisation pressure from central government, subnational levels' structural factors making democracy difficult to take root, and so on. Thus, democratisation, a shift towards a more inclusive and liberalised system, is not only a national level process but also a subnational level process. An increasing number of scholarly studies on subnational level democracy reflect such a thought and also the recognition of a trend in regime development, especially among the new democracies since third wave democratisation. In these new democracies, a key characteristic is that democratic transitions at the national level weaken the centres and empower the subnational actors, which then creates little pressure for subnational democratisation or even hinders it (Gibson, 2005). In contrast to these new democracies, China is by no means a democratic country in terms of its national level politics. However, competitive elections have been introduced at the grassroots level by the central government in China. Despite a powerful communist party government at the central level, it is not too optimistic to consider the possibility of such grassroots elections becoming a breaking through point for bottom-up democratisation in a centrally authoritarian state. To consider such a possibility, a study of these grassroots elections is the first step. Moreover, previous studies of subnational democracy have solely focused on subnational democracy or authoritarianism under the setting of the democratic regime at the national level, which matches well with third wave democratisation. This study enriches that of subnational politics in that it studies a reversed combination of national and subnational politics - subnational democracy in a national authoritarian state.

This leads to a third question in our discussion on democracy. Can democracy be identified with election? Certainly, the installation of periodic elections with a contested nature in a regime which previously had no mechanism of contestation contains a degree of democratisation. It is a shift on Dahl's contestation dimension,

and if the contestation allows participation of a wider population of the citizens than in the previous setting, it also partakes of a shift on the inclusiveness dimension. But the existence of contested elections cannot solely qualify a regime as democracy. As Sen (1999, p. 10) has suggested:

> "Even elections can be deeply defective if they occur without the different sides getting an adequate opportunity to present their respective cases, or without the electorate enjoying the freedom to obtain news and to consider the views of the competing protagonists. Democracy is a demanding system, and not just a mechanical condition (like majority rule) taken in isolation."

Thus, looking solely at the existence of a democratic format is certainly not enough for assessing democracy.

Previous studies of village elections in China quite often use the existence of a recent election being contested as an indicator of electoral competitiveness. This indicator certainly matches well with the reality of Chinese village elections at the early stage when elections with a contested nature - the number of candidates is larger than the number of seats - were not a wide spread practice in China. After the promulgation of the Organic Law of the Village Committees in 1998, it was written that the number of candidates should exceed the number of positions open for competition (The National People's Congress, 1998). From then on, holding elections with a contested nature, reflected through the number of candidates vis-à-vis the number of contested positions, is almost a common practice in all villages in China. The sole existence of an election with a contested nature as an indicator of electoral competitiveness thus becomes outdated. Moreover, elections with a contested nature can still have varying degrees of democracy. It might be the case that even though the competition for a single position involves multiple candidates, they are not offered equal opportunities to campaign for votes or the electorate only has access to information that biases them toward some candidates over others. It also might be the case that the existence of some candidates standing for the electoral competition is a formality to disguise the uncontested nature of the election. For example, as I observed, placing a weak candidate to compete with the official candidate supported by the local government is not something new in the sample county. Hence, opponents might have an opportunity to compete but have a limited chance of winning.

For these grassroots elections to be qualified as democratic elections, once contestation is allowed, we should expect a reasonable degree of turnover. If incumbents are allowed to be continually re-elected, the contested nature of the elections is in doubt. The re-election of incumbents can be attributed not only to good performance of incumbents but to many other factors, such as incumbents' ability to grasp political resources and set up political networks in favour of their re-election. Under a well-developed democratic system, though incumbents enjoy some advantages vis-à-vis opponents, these advantages might not seriously handicap opponents' ability to compete. Furthermore, there is normally a term limit for elected office holders. However, under a less developed democratic system, incumbents might be able to monopolize political resources and networks. The monopoly over political resources and networks creates an uneven playing field and seriously limits the chance of opponents winning the electoral competition. Chinese village elections are such a type of election. Moreover, there is no term limit which might further increase the possibility of resource and network monopoly by incumbents. Thus, in such a setting, looking into the re-election of incumbents is a useful way to assess the contestation dimension of the elections.

We might see a reasonable frequency of electoral turnover, but if the contestation only opens to a small fraction of the population, its democratic value is discounted. China is ruled by one party, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Thus, if the elections at the grassroots level are only open to CCP members, it resembles competitive oligarchy in Dahl's term. In other words, though we see a change of faces of those who hold grassroots governing power, the power is still controlled purely by CCP members. The elections are not inclusive. To assess the inclusiveness of such elections, it is useful to look into the party membership of elected office holders.

Through these two indicators, we will be able to assess the two theoretical dimensions of democracy of such grassroots elections in China. The two indicators might seem too simple; however, the elections are implemented under an authoritarian state and are still much less developed. There are neither well-developed indicators nor data for a comprehensive assessment of democracy. Based on the evidence at hand, these two indicators are straightforward and useful indicators for the relatively poorly-developed electoral system in an authoritarian state.

As argued by Sen (1999), democracy is becoming a universal value and the thinking of "fit for democracy" changed to "fit through democracy" only in the twentieth century. Undeniably, democracy has its intrinsic value. But this study does not focus on the intrinsic component of democracy; rather, it focuses on the instrumental value of democracy. Democratisation is not viewed as a process for promoting democracy per se as a universal value; rather, it is considered a process to promote democracy as an institutional mechanism that checks and balances the power of office-holders and makes them accountable to citizens. The discussion of whether democracy fits for China is not the concern of this study. Democracy, the introduction of inclusive contestation, is to introduce checks and balances of power and thus induce accountability of the one who governs. In all society, a degree of checks and balances of power is essential for government accountability. China is by no means an exception.

1.2 Explaining the variance of subnational democracy

What might explain democracy? The most influential school of thought highlights economic development. Lipset (1959) stresses the importance of economic development. He argues that increasing levels of wealth are closely related to an increase in education, which promotes political attitudes conducive to democracy on the one hand, and on the other hand, transforms the social structure from a pyramid to a diamond shape by increasing the pro-democracy middle class. Lipset's contribution is the setting up of the theoretical link between economic development and democracy, but a convincing explanation of democracy and regime change requires a theoretical mechanism that explains how socio-economic development is translated into democracy. Income inequality is considered as the key underlying mechanism to explain regime change and democracy in Boix and Stokes' (2003) static models of democracy and redistribution and Acemoglu and Robinson's (2001, 2006) dynamic models that apply dynamic game theory to the study of democracy and regime change. In Boix and Stokes' (2003) static models, a linear relationship is predicted between income inequality and democracy. In a society with highly unequal income distribution, democracy, represented by the redistributive scheme supported by the median voter, would deprive the rich of a large amount of income and thus the rich might resist democratisation. In such a society, democracy is difficult to establish and even if it is established, it would be fragile. In Acemoglu and Robinson's dynamic

models (2001, 2006), an inverted-U-shaped relationship between inequality and democratisation is found. They observe democratisation happens in societies at intermediate levels of inequality and democracy is more likely to consolidate in more equal societies.

The link between economic development and the holding of competitive village elections in China has been tested extensively by some studies of China's village elections. Increasing levels of collective village wealth is found to be closely related to villagers' interest in elections, because increasing levels of collective village wealth increases villagers' stakes in village elections and governance (e.g., Hu, 2001, 2005; Shi, 1999a). Oi and Rozelle (2000) go further and stress the importance of a village's industrial structure and its link to the outside world. The likelihood of contested elections falls in richest industrial villages and in villages where villagers have stronger economic ties to the outside world. They share a very similar perspective with the other studies that find a positive relationship between collective village wealth and elections, that is "as income rises interest in political participation and popular control will increase only when people perceive it to matter to their interests" (Oi & Rozelle, 2000, p. 539).

But looking at the three preceding villages suggests that this perspective might not be sufficient to explain the variance of democracy in these village elections. In these three villages, economic development indicated by increasing levels of collective village wealth does increase villagers' interests in voting. Compared to villages with no or limited collective income, it is not difficult for these three villages to get a high turnout in each election. The case of Village L, with village committee chairman position continually being occupied by party incumbents, certainly suggests that economic development might increase villagers' interests in elections and governance but might not automatically lead to the holding of inclusive contestation.

In the light of this observation, economic development might trigger fierce electoral competition but fierce electoral competition does not mean that opponents have a higher chance of winning. Even though opponents have been given an opportunity to compete with party incumbents, the playing field might be skewed to favour the interest of those candidates favoured by the ruling party. Villagers might not have

complete information about candidates who are competing. In addition, with rising income or rising levels of collective wealth, villagers might have a higher stake in village elections and governance and thus might have a rising interest in participating. But participating in voting and participating in competing are different. The cost of voting is certainly cheaper than the cost of competing, as competing for office involves efforts and money on a campaign and networking as well as the risk of running against candidates favoured by the ruling party. Interest in participation brought by increasing levels of wealth can contribute to the holding of a competitive election, but for the election to reflect inclusiveness and real contestation, the capability of making the participation to take effects is even more important. At the very least, we cannot ignore the fact that these elections operate in an authoritarian state and the CCP that rules the state might only use these elections to show legitimacy home and abroad rather than to liberalise the regime and break its power monopoly. Opponents' capability of winning the elections might be seriously handicapped under such a setting. What else might explain the interest in participation and the capability of winning the elections, if economic development is not sufficient?

A recent increase in research on hybrid regimes might shed light on the aforementioned question. Since the end of the Cold War, regimes that combine periodic elections with authoritarian governance have proliferated. In some of these regimes, elections provide momentum for democratisation, while in some others elections seem to stabilise the regime. Increasing research interest in elections in these hybrid regimes has been witnessed (e.g., Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009; Levitsky & Way, 2002; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Lust-Okar, 2006; Way, 2005). Attention has then shifted from looking solely at the democratic institutional building to focusing on authoritarian rulers' capability of holding onto power. Levitsky and Way (2002; 2010) highlight state and party strength as the key in explaining the diverging political trajectories of these hybrid regimes and that state economic control could be used as a substitute for state and party strength. If resources are monopolised by the state, the state possesses powerful economic tools to compel compliance and thwart opposition challenges. It is the monopoly over economy that enables autocrats to use elections to legitimate and sustain authoritarian governance.

There are also recent emerging studies into subnational democracy that share a similar perspective with studies of elections in hybrid regimes. McMann (2006), in her study of four regions from Russia and Kyrgyzstan, stresses the importance of economic autonomy – the ability to earn one's livelihood, career and future prospect independent of the state or subnational governments. At the subnational level, if opportunities for earning income and profits are controlled by the local authorities, citizens are less likely to challenge local authorities, because they do not have sufficient economic autonomy to protect them from government harassment and blackmail. Under the setting where economic resources are highly concentrated at the hands of the state or local authorities, the space for opposition activity is limited. Thus, as McMann (2006) argues, capitalism contributes to the creation and maintenance of democratic rights, but does not necessarily enable people to use these rights. Capitalism contributes to the use of democratic rights through enhancing economic autonomy, which is essential to the practice of democracy.

The solution to the aforementioned puzzle then becomes clear when we consider studies of hybrid regimes and subnational democracy. Economic development contributes to the creation and maintenance of democratic rights, as people have increasing stakes in governance and thus have increasing interests in participation. However, using these rights effectively requires economic autonomy which protects people from being subject to governments' threatening and harassment in authoritarian regimes. The concept of economic autonomy is then the focus of the following section.

1.3 The concept of economic autonomy

The concept of economic autonomy is particularly relevant to authoritarian regimes. The capability of authoritarian rulers to exercise political control with the ultimate purpose of preventing alternation of power hinges on the control of the authoritarian state over economy. If the authoritarian states control most of the economic resources, individuals living under the regimes would have limited economic autonomy which makes it more likely for authoritarian political control to succeed. There are several channels linking economic autonomy to authoritarian political control (See Way, 2005; Levitsky and Way, 2002, 2010; Solinger, 2008). If economic resources such as jobs and economic opportunities are controlled by the authoritarian state, individuals

and challengers without much economic autonomy have less an incentive to challenge the state and tend to join the ruling party. Even if challenge and protests arise, the authoritarian rulers, with their discretionary control over the use of the economic resources, are likely to be effective and powerful at either buying off or punishing the challenges. Similarly, the control of economic resources by the state also enables authoritarian rulers to finance an extensive party and state infrastructure which can help sustain their continuous control of the internal politics.

In this study, instead of looking at the individual villager, I focus on the village level to apply the concept of economic autonomy. Village economic autonomy exists in the village where opportunities for the village to develop economy are not under control by the local authorities. This concept of village economic autonomy is similar to McMann's (2006) environmental economic autonomy in her study of subnational democracy in Russian and Kyrgyzstan. Environmental economic autonomy in her study exists when opportunities for earning income and profits are beyond the reach of local authorities. In China's rural context, township government is the immediate superior authority beyond the village level and thus village economic autonomy exists in the village in the town where economic development opportunities exist beyond the control of the township government.

More specifically, industrialisation brings in investors and resources and in relatively industrial areas, village committees can easily set up networks with investors and have access to resources without support from township government. On the contrary, in relatively agricultural areas, agriculture is the key source of income for individual villagers as well as for villages as a collective economic entity, which is not as profitable as industrial development. There are limited opportunities for economic development. And given its agricultural economic structure, these areas might be relatively poor in infrastructure such as transportation. To attract outside investors and resources, local government, especially township government, are normally the first step. They perform two functions: first, they help to set up the link between villages and outside investors; second, they use financial resources or attract outside resources to provide an infrastructure for industrial development. Thus, villages in such areas have limited economic autonomy.

Village elections in China are conducted for the village committee, which are the self-governance organisations at the grassroots level. A key self-governance responsibility of the village committee is to develop the village economy and bring prosperity to the village. But on the other side, township government rely on elected village committees to carry out state policies and political tasks in the village and the implementation of state policies and political tasks affects the political career prospects of the township leading officials. Thus, township government have a great incentive to influence and manipulate the village elections. The effectiveness of township government's manipulation and control of the elections hinges on township government's control over economic development resources which are essential for the economic development agenda of the elected village committees.

Applying the village economic autonomy concept defined above, village economic autonomy in villages in relatively industrial towns makes these villages more likely to resist township governments' pressure and intervention in times of elections. On the contrary, in agricultural towns, since township governments control key economic development opportunities, villages have limited economic autonomy and thus are more vulnerable to local governments' pressure and intervention in elections, even though villagers have democratic rights to participate in both voting and running for office in such elections. In other words, with the same amount of government pressure and intervention, villages having higher economic autonomy are more likely to resist the pressure, while villages that are economically reliant on governments are less likely to resist such pressure and thus government harassment and blackmail are more effective in such villages.

This concept of economic autonomy is very important when we study the function of election in authoritarian regimes. Elections might not necessarily bring about democracy to authoritarian regimes if citizens do not have the economic autonomy to exercise their democratic rights. Though elections might raise citizens' democratic awareness and provide them with the skills of exercising democratic rights, if they are economically reliant on governments for making a livelihood or having career prospects, they might not be able to resist government pressure. Moreover, they might also be inclined to be co-opted to increase their chances of getting a better life or a brighter career prospect. Following this logic, elections might stabilise and legitimise

the regime instead of acting as an important step for the regime to introduce checks and balances into its monopoly of power in a long run.

1.4 Data

China is a huge country with a great range of regional variations in rural areas, which made the initial selection of the research sample difficult. Moreover, the topic of this research, the authoritarian control of village elections, is considered politically sensitive by officials in China, making it even more difficult to locate the research site. Largely due to political sensitivity and the lack of access to valuable data, there is almost no previous research that studies in detail the political dynamic of village electoral competition. Taking into account these two constraints, a remote and poor county in Guangdong province was selected as the research sample. Map 1.1 shows the location of Guangdong Province in China. Guangdong is located in the south of China, a main hub of China's economic growth since 1978. The Pearl River Delta, one of the most economically dynamic regions in China, is situated in Guangdong Province, including cities such as Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, etc., in the low-lying area surrounding the Pearl River estuary (See Map 1.2). Guangzhou is the capital city. Hong Kong is just across the sea to the south of Shenzhen, the special economic zone in Guangdong.

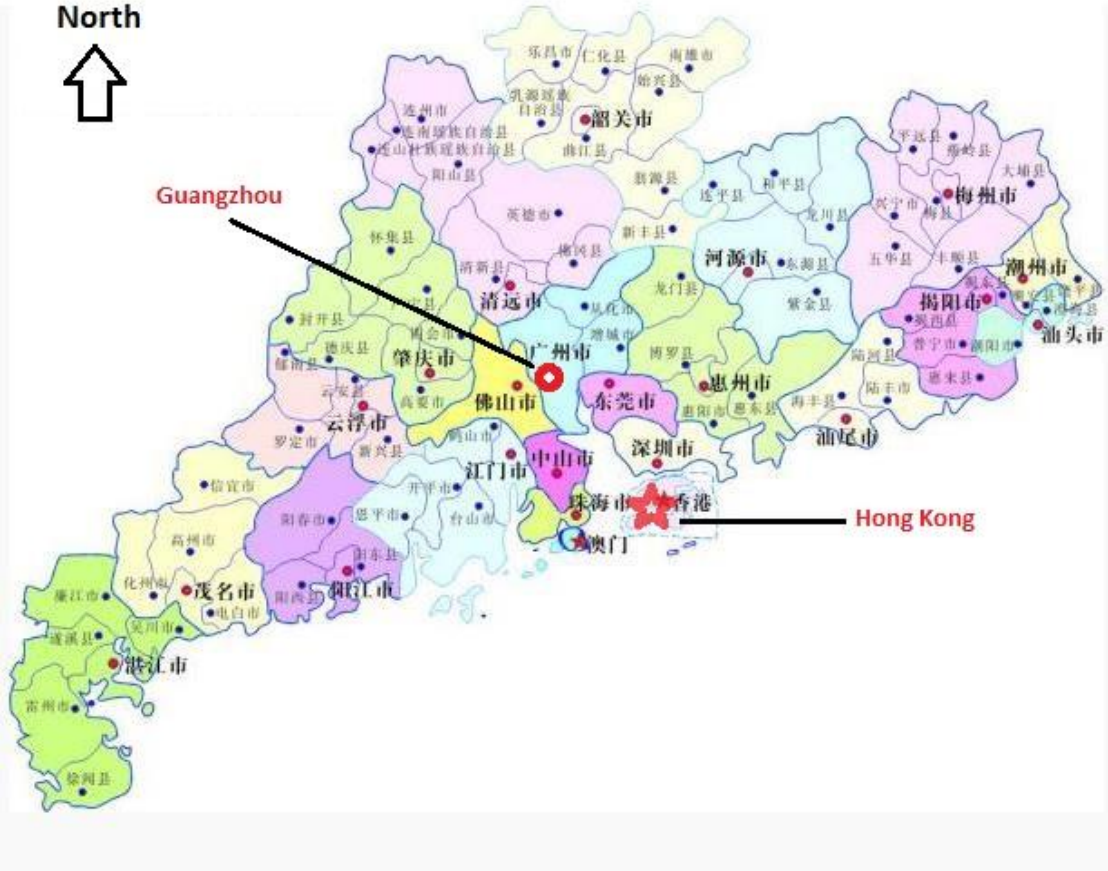
The sample county is further away from The Pearl River Delta, one of the most urbanised areas in China, about five hours by car. Due to the political sensitivity of this topic, the location of this county will not be released. Great variances on economic development, electoral competitiveness and control of elections by local government exist among villages in the sample county and thus the county serves as a good sample. Furthermore, focusing on one county can hold certain conditions constant, especially the institutional design. This is particularly important for the investigation of electoral competition at China's villages. It is the county level governments that design the specific electoral plan according to the national law, the provincial regulation and the local context and who carry out regular visits to villages. In addition to the formal electoral plan, the actual practice of elections and political behaviours are also heavily affected by county government officials' ideology, approach and responses to electoral related issues. Looking at one county can hold institutional arrangement and government response constant.

The purpose of this research is two-fold. First, though we do not aim for broadly generalisable findings given the two aforementioned constraints and limited research funding, we do intend to find out a relatively generalisable pattern that is not just limited to a few cases. Thus, to serve this purpose, a relatively large sample of villages was required. Second, to develop a deep understanding of how economic autonomy influences political behaviours, it was necessary to investigate in detail how local officials interact with candidates and villagers in times of election at the village level. Spending time conducting interviews and participatory observations at a few villages thus become necessary and important to serve this end. In short, the purpose of this research required a mixed methods approach which uses both qualitative and quantitative methods.

I did extensive fieldwork study in the sample county on and off for about eighteen months between 2008 and 2011. I worked as a village election consultant in 2008 for the County Civil Affairs Bureau and thus had access to village level electoral information collected by the county government and collective village economy data collected by village committees. These data constitute a large sample for the quantitative analysis of this research. The in-depth case study involved two stages of fieldwork. At the initial stage, I was working as an intern at the County Civil Affairs Bureau and was sent to individual villages by the bureau to carry out brief supervision. I normally accompanied a head or a deputy head of the bureau to three to four villages located in two to three towns in one day. At each village, I got the chance to observe the actual practice of elections, that is, the design of the ballot box and ballot tickets, the setting of polling stations and the voting. I was also able to interview village election committee members as well as individual villagers. From the early stage of setting up the village election committee to the final stage of counting votes and announcing results, I was able to visit various villages and perform participatory observations. Through this initial stage, I got an overview of the actual practice of village elections and a broad understanding of the distribution of villages in the county in terms of economic development and economic structure, which helped me to select specific villages for the case study at the second stage. Another important contribution of this initial stage of fieldwork was the setting up of networks with township governments, which has also been crucial for my second stage case study.

Map 1.1 The location of Guangdong Province in China

Source: author's compilation, original map from http://www.mpt8.cn/sjsc/UploadSoftPic/200907/mpt8_2009072311114855.jpg (Retrieved July 22,2014)



Map 1.2 Map of Guangdong Province

Source: author's compilation, original map from

http://www.kfly.com.cn/sys/uploadfile/201206/6/4092033325.jpg (Retrieved July 22,2014)

The second stage of fieldwork was conducted subsequently in 2009 and 2011. In 2011, I spent two months visiting 26 villages in the county to carry out extensive interviews. I lived at one of these 26 villages during the two months – Village A. The 26 villages were selected from four towns. These four towns form a representative sample in that two are located in the two extreme sides of the economic development spectrum (indicated by the percentage of a farming population at the township level) while the other two are in the middle. The selection of villages within each town was guided by the township governments. In each town, based on biannual collective village revenue, poor and rich villages were selected to form a representative sample. I interviewed various actors involved in different stages of elections at each village. These actors could review the story from different angles and I was then able to develop an objective account of political competition in village elections. Interviews with village committees and village party committees were normally set up with the help of township governments, while interviews with opponents who failed in electoral

competition were set up through my own personal networks in the county. In some cases where direct interviews with opponents who lost the election were not possible, I was able to interview close relatives or friends of the opponents through my personal network.

In addition to the several fieldtrips to the sample county, I also spent a few months in Beijing doing interviews and archive studies. I interviewed a few prominent professors and national level officials in Beijing who were involved in the making of the draft Organic Law of Village Committees in 1987 and the official Organic Law of Village Committees in 1998. I interviewed one independent activist who actively promotes village democracy at the national level People's Congress through his connection with national representatives. In terms of archive studies, I collected the yearbooks published by the Ministry of Civil Affairs in each year from 1997 to 2003. The trip in Beijing helped me to understand the history of village democratic reform in China since the 1980s.

The rich account of qualitative evidence made an important contribution to this research, because there is little information on the political competition between local government and opponents in China's village elections. The qualitative case study of this research traces the process of political competition in village elections from the early stages, to the final stage of announcing the results. Moreover, strategies used by local government to manipulate elections and those used by opponents to achieve their goals were gathered to understand the actual dynamic of the political competition. The quantitative data allows us to test whether the finding is generalisable to a wider population. These rich qualitative and quantitative data enabled a detailed study of actors' interaction in village elections under different settings on the one hand and a test of the generalisability of the findings on the other hand.

1.5 Overview of the thesis

In order to give a foundation for the enquiry of this research, Chapter 2 sets the scene for the empirical chapters of this thesis by laying out the historical, institutional and economic backgrounds of village elections. Chapter 2 starts with the historical background. The journey towards grassroots democracy in China since the early

1980s is outlined and is followed by an introduction to the journey in Guangdong Province, one of the latest in implementing village elections. The second section of this chapter describes the institutional setting of village elections in Guangdong Province since village elections were carried out in the province in 1998. The final section of this chapter covers the economic background of village elections. Village economic structure and the connection between village committees and villagers at the village level are laid out, based on the evidence collected from villages in the sample county.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 provide a strong theoretical foundation for this research. In Chapter 3 theories of democratisation are reviewed, followed by a review of the studies that look into elections in non-democratic regimes. Since the focus of this research enquiry is China's grassroots level practices, the third section of Chapter 3 reviews studies of subnational democracy. Chapter 3 ends with contributions of this research enquiry to existing studies of democratisation and subnational democracy. Chapter 4 shifts the attention from comparative studies in different regimes in the world to the studies of China's village elections. Existing theories of China's village elections are thoroughly reviewed and discussed. Empirical regularities are identified and contributions of this research enquiry to existing studies of China's village elections are laid out at the end of Chapter 4.

Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 are the key empirical chapters of this thesis. In Chapter 5, we start our enquiry with a detailed introduction to the sample county and the data. In addition, mechanisms used in this research to improve data quality and methods of data analysis are also outlined. The final section of Chapter 5 discusses ethical issues of the research and outlines the appropriate ethic safeguards in place for this research. Chapter 6 focuses on the dependent variable of this enquiry – authoritarian control of village elections. We first look at the preferences of local government and opponents at times of election and then outline local government and opponents' strategies in the electoral competition using the rich qualitative evidence collected. Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 study authoritarian control of village elections from different angles using both case study and regression analysis. The case study is intended to find out a pattern and the mechanisms behind the pattern and regression analysis is used to test whether the pattern can be applied to a wider population, namely, all villages in the

county. Chapter 7 uses the election of party members to the village committee chairman position as a proxy for authoritarian control and investigates the influence of socioeconomic factors. Chapter 8 uses the re-election of incumbent village committee chairmen as a proxy for authoritarian control and investigates the effects of socioeconomic factors. Finally, Chapter 9 concludes with the empirical and theoretical contributions of this thesis, normative conclusions on the prospects for greater democracy in China and areas for future research.

Chapter 2 : Setting the Scene: historical, institutional and economic backgrounds of village elections

The purpose of this research enquiry, as mentioned in Chapter 1, is to study economic autonomy and the extent of authoritarian control of China's village elections. The official purpose of holding village elections is to promote good government and successful economic development within the boundary of the CCP's authoritarian rule. The instrumental end of holding village elections implies that the genuine democratic value of such elections is in doubt. Viewed from the incentive of township government officials who are expected to carry out and supervise the village elections, though it is in theory a grassroots self-governance organisation, the village committee has the obligation to carry out state policies and political tasks, which are crucial to township government officials' political career prospects. In this regard, township government officials have an incentive to control such elections to the extent that the elected office-holders will share the same understanding when it comes to the implementation of state policies and political tasks. The findings of this research suggest that the village elections help to maintain and legitimise the CCP's governance at the grassroots level. However, as is outlined in Chapter 1, once established and implemented, elections might raise people's democratic consciousness and increase their political efficacy, which in turn might lead to demand for more substantial political participation. Village elections, thus, can be viewed as the balance of these two forces, on the one hand, local government with an incentive to control the elections and on the other hand, empowered villagers with increasing political demand.

The implementation and future prospects of village elections cannot be understood out of context. The historical journey toward grassroots democracy in China, the institutional setting of such elections and the changing economic structure in grassroots villages affect the actual implementation and the future prospect of village elections. Thus, this chapter sets the scene for the empirical chapters of this thesis by laying out the historical, institutional and economic background of village elections. This chapter starts with historical background. The journey towards grassroots democracy in China since the early 1980s is outlined and followed by an introduction

to the journey in Guangdong Province, one of the latest in implementing village elections. The second section of this chapter describes the institutional setting of village elections in Guangdong Province since village elections were carried out in the province in 1998. To better illustrate the actual practice of village elections, in addition to the provincial regulations and guidelines, the detailed election plan of the sample county in 2008 is used as an example. Moreover, local government responses to election-related disputes form an important part of the institutional setting, and these responses vary across different areas within a province. To better illustrate the informal part of the institutional setting of village elections, evidence collected from the sample county based on my internship experience is also referred to when necessary. The final section of this chapter covers the economic background of village elections. To understand the effects of economic factors on village elections, we need to understand village economic structure and the connection between village committees and villagers at the village level. These two key points are better understood through specific examples and thus the discussion is mainly drawn upon evidence collected from villages in the sample county.

2.1 The journey: village committee elections in China

Before the introduction of village committee elections in the early 1980s, rural villages were managed under the commune system. Households were organised into collectives. Each collective leader decided the allocation of workload and the distribution of resources to villagers in the collective. Villagers as individuals were not allowed to have any private property. They were physically tied to the collective they belonged to. This collective system showed its merit at the early stage as it helped to organise labour in rural area to accomplish large public good projects and extract rural surplus in support of industrialisation in urban areas, when China was too poor to rely on machines for development. However, because of collective action problems, the disincentive effect of the system gradually outweighed its merit and caused disastrous outcomes, the most notable one being the Great Famine from 1958 to 1962.

By the end of 1970s, China was literally an economic backwater. The economic reform started in 1978 aimed to drag China out of economic stagnation. The household responsibility system, aimed at increasing individual autonomy in

generating family income, was introduced in rural villages to help provide individual villagers with incentives for production. Most collective resources were distributed to individual households. Individual households became the basic unit of production in rural areas and village cadres no longer possessed the power to allocate workload and resources. Individual households, instead of commune cadres, decided the farming activities of each household. Commune cadres who used to base their power on control over collective resources and the allocation of collective production were left with limited resources and unclear authority. With no resource and authority, it was difficult for village cadres to continue governance and thus rural areas were plunged into political anarchy in the early 1980s. "Some grassroots organisations in rural areas become disorganized; in some villages, village governance was partially or even completely paralyzed, causing political anarchy - unfinished governance issues with no one taking responsibility and deteriorated social order" (The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China Party Literature Research Office, 1982, p. 1061). How villages should be managed became a major issue and villages across the country experimented with various types of governance to solve the acute political crisis in rural governance. Against this backdrop, the village committee as a self-governing organisation in substitution for the production brigade of the commune system emerged.

2.1.1 Journey towards grassroots democracy in rural China

The first self-governing village committee was elected in February 1980 in a village called Guozuo in Yishan county of Guangxi Province (Special Journal Commentator, 1999). The village committee consisted of five members and was elected by household representatives. The elected village committee was responsible for mediating disputes and protecting the village forest. The village committee also drafted and promulgated codes of conduct based on the consensus of all villagers. The codes of conduct stipulated the behavioural norms for the villagers in order to regulate villagers' behaviours and restore social order. The practice of having a village governance body elected by villagers offered the village governance body a new power base, namely, the consent of the governed citizenry. This type of village self-governance then spread to other villages in Yishan county and the names of such a village self-governance organisation varied (Cheng, 2000). VCs were called "Village management committees" (*Cunguanhui*), "Public issue consultation committees"

(*Yishihui*), or "Leading groups for village public security" (*Zhi'an Lingdao Xiaozu*). The main responsibilities of such a village self-governance organ were to maintain village public security, mediate disputes and manage public facilities. In general, Guozuo's practice was successful in filling the political vacuum and restoring social order. The village committee in Guozuo village provided a rudimentary framework for the later village democratic reform.

Introducing elections in rural areas caused serious debate at the central level of government. The Liberal camp in the party was in support of the idea of setting up elected village committees. Enfranchising villagers with the right to elect their own leaders fit well with the reform agenda in the early 1980s. Economic reform aims to increase individual's economic autonomy and create incentive for production. Political autonomy, that is, the power to vote and to govern, can help achieve the aim of economic reform. In addition, by the end of 1970s, deteriorated cadre-mass relations were prevalent in rural areas because of the lack of effective checks on cadres' power. Corruption became a serious problem. In some areas, cadres were perceived as local evils by villagers. Delegating villagers with the power to choose their own leaders can provide villagers with the incentive to supervise the leaders they elect, which helps on the one hand to alleviate the financial and administrative burden on the state in supervising village cadres and on the other to restore the cadre-mass relations. With this vision in mind, Mr Peng Zhen, an important figure in the liberal camp (O'Brien & Li, 2000) and the then vice-chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, actively promoted the institution of village committee elections in rural China.

Nonetheless, the Conservative camp had a different vision of village committee elections. Their key concern was how to maintain the Chinese Communist party's leadership at the grassroots level if village committee elections were to be introduced. In the commune era, all cadres in the commune system were appointed by the governments who decided the cadres' political career prospects. Moreover, all commune cadres were party members and thus were also subject to party discipline. Through the control of personnel working at the grassroots level, the party realised its control and leadership status. As is depicted in the left column of Diagram 2.1, in the commune era, the Chinese state was organised according to a seven-level

administrative hierarchy from the central to the very bottom of the state – the production team formed by rural households. The state hierarchy was divided into three levels in rural areas with the People's Commune being the highest. The People's Commune was then divided into two levels, the production brigade and the production team. The very bottom of the state hierarchy is the production team. On average, a production team normally consisted of 20 households and approximately 100 villagers. In the commune era, production team leaders, brigade leaders and commune leaders were all party members and appointed by higher level governments, thus responsible for higher level governments and ultimately the Chinese Communist Party.

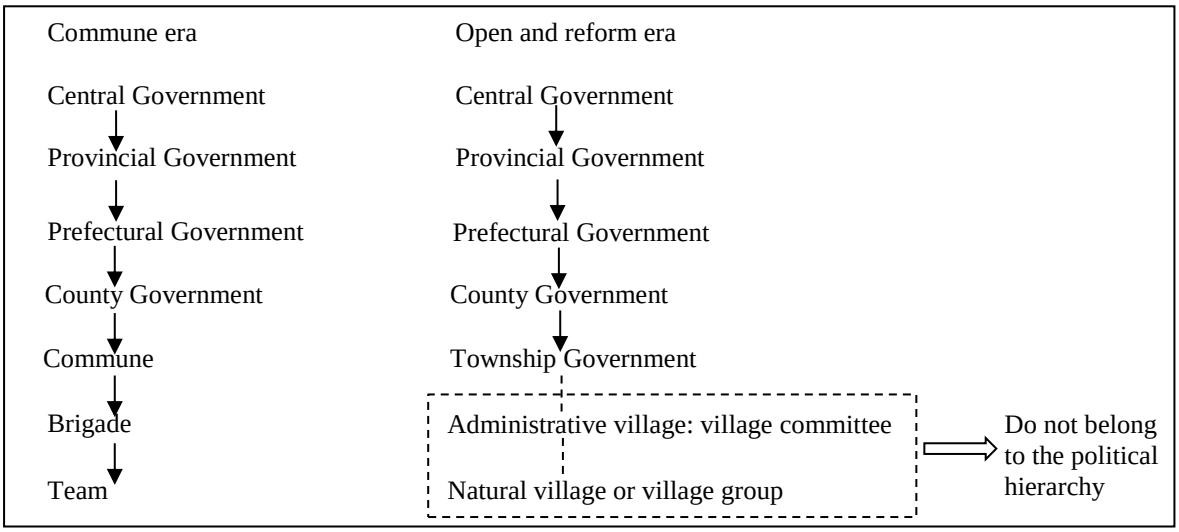


Diagram 2.1The political hierarchy in the Commune Era and in the Open and Reform Era

Introducing elections to rural villages and allowing villagers to govern themselves means that the CCP can no longer maintain strict control at the grassroots level. Through competitive elections, there is no guarantee that party members, especially those production brigade and team leaders, can win villagers' votes and maintain their power. What is worse, in rural villages where tensions exist between cadres and the masses, party members would surely lose the election and party image is compromised. Party members' failure to win the village governance power through elections would certainly undermine the Chinese Communist Party's legitimacy in rural area and might ultimately undermine the party's governing legitimacy in the country. Secondly, the implementation of state policies, especially some unpopular ones such as birth control, is heavily reliant on the cooperation of grassroots cadres. Free elections increase the probability of non-party members who are not subject to

the party discipline and control being elected. These elected non-party cadres who gain their power through the popular vote are only accountable to voters, instead of rural governments, and thus might defy unpopular state polices. Governments, especially rural governments, worried that with the introduction of village committee elections, rural villages will soon become "independent kingdoms" (O'Brien & Li, 2000, p. 470).

Despite the continuous debate in central government, provinces did not stop experimenting with the new practice of holding village elections and the like. Experiments had been carried out sporadically across China in the 1980s. In November 1987, the Organic Law of Village Committees (Draft) (The National People's Congress, 1987) was passed at a meeting of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, which signals that the practice of setting up elected village committee entered into a trial period. Since then, the administrative structure of the Chinese state has changed from the commune system to a new system. In the open and reform era, the lowest level of the state hierarchy is the township level government, which corresponds to the People's Commune in the commune era. While in the commune era the People's Commune was at the highest level of the state hierarchy in rural areas, in the open and reform era state's control reaches only to township level and self-governance is introduced at the village level which used to be governed by production brigades and teams. It is stipulated in the draft law which comprises 21 articles that self-governance in rural villages is carried out by the village committee and all members of village committee are elected directly by villagers. As shown in the right column of Diagram 2.1, in the economic reform era, the number of administrative levels was reduced from seven to five. Village committees and natural villages (See the area in the dotted box in Diagram 2.1) do not belong to the state administrative hierarchy.

However, the draft law did not stipulate the detail of electoral procedure. Provincial governments were encouraged to experiment with village elections and provide feedback to the central government for further revision of the law. During the trial period, provinces were given great discretion to implement the village committee election and thus not all villages in China held village elections. For example, villages in Guangdong Province used a different grassroots management system during this

period, the village administrative office (*Cungongsuo*). This system is introduced in detail in the following section. To encourage the implementation of village elections and promote the village democratic reform, the Ministry of Civil Affairs responsible for the implementation of village election launched a demonstration programme in 1990 (see O'Brien, 1994). The purpose of the programme was to set up demonstration villages for others to emulate. When minimal information about village electoral procedure and self-governance was provided by the draft law, the demonstration programme provided villages with the basic implementation guideline and criteria for assessing the quality of village election and self-governance. Moreover, the setting up of demonstration villages in some provinces helped to provide feedback for further improvement on the institution of village committee elections.

Nor did the draft law mention anything about the party leadership in rural areas. According to the Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party (The Chinese Communist Party, 1982) revised and passed in 1982, all sectors at the grassroots level - companies, shops, schools, government sectors, militaries, communes, village organisations and other grassroots organisations - should set up party committees if these organisations have more than three party members and grassroots party committees are accountable to higher level party organisations. Table 2.1 shows the hierarchy of government and the hierarchy of the Communist Party in China in the open and reform era. As can be seen, there are two parallel systems, one being the government system and the other being the party system. At each administrative level, there exist two state organisations – the government and the party committee. Party leadership is fulfilled through the arrangement that on each level, the party committee leads the government. At each level, the party secretary is the actual head and key positions in the government, such as deputy heads and the head of the government, are appointed by the party, instead of the bureau of human resources affiliated to the government. In rural areas during the commune era, persons serving on grassroots party committees normally served concurrently in grassroots governments, and thus grassroots party committees and governments differed in name only. Because of the setting up of self-governance organisations in rural villages, the duty of the grassroots party committee is blurred. Village committees are now elected by villagers, instead of being appointed by village party committees or rural township governments, and do not belong to the state hierarchy. What is the duty of the village party committee?

How should the village party committee as the agent of the Chinese Communist Party at the village level fulfill its duty and maintain party leadership without trespassing on the village committee's right of self-governance? These questions were not answered in the 1987 draft law. Neither did the law clearly specify the responsibilities of both committees.

Table 2.1 The administrative hierarchy of government and the Communist Party in China

Administrative level	The hierarchy of the government	The hierarchy of the Communist Party of China
Central level	Central government	Central committee
Provincial level	Provincial government	Provincial committee
Prefectural level	Prefectural government	Prefectural committee
County level	County government	County committee
Township level	Township government	Township committee
Village level	Village committee	Village party committee

After a trial period of more than 10 years, in November 1998, the official Organic Law of Village Committees (The National People's Congress, 1998) was passed at a meeting of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, which signals the institutionalization of village committee elections in rural China. Since then, all villages in China have been obligated to set up village committees and hold direct elections for the village committees once every three years. A village committee shall be composed of three to seven members, including the chairman, the vice-chairman (or vice-chairmen) and the members (Article 6). The village committee shall be set up based on the geographic location of village residents and the village population and on the principle of facilitating self-governance by the villagers (Article 3).

The official law, which comprises 30 articles, is more specific than the draft law. First of all, the official law stipulates that any villager reaching the age of 18 or above who is not deprived of political rights according to law is eligible to vote and to become a candidate for the village committee (Article 12). Second, the official law also defines the meaning of self-governance. Self-governance is fulfilled through village democracy by villagers and village democracy consists of four components, namely, democratic elections, democratic decision making, democratic management and

democratic supervision (Article 2). Also, village committees are organisations of self-governance. Thirdly, the official law has sections explaining how to implement democratic elections, democratic decision making, democratic management and democratic supervision. Regarding village elections, secret ballots, counting votes publicly and punishment on voter intimidation and vote buying are all laid out in the official law. Last but not least, the official law also filled in the gap of the previous draft law by defining the relationship between the village committee and the village party committee. Village party committees work according to the Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party and are the leadership core in rural villages (Article 3). There is no detailed description of the meaning of 'leadership core'.

In a recent amendment to the official law in 2010 (The National People's Congress, 2010), the village party committee's leadership core status was further specified. Village party committees should lead and support village committees in carrying out duties (Article 4). In addition to the leadership core status, village party committees are also required to support and protect villagers' rights to govern themselves. Township governments have the responsibility to offer guidance and assistance to village committees but should not encroach on village self-governance issues (Article 4). Village committees are not without any responsibility. Village committees, as stipulated in Article 4, have the responsibility to assist township governments in carrying out political tasks.

As is reflected in the official law and the amendment in 2010 (The National People's Congress, 1998, 2010), village committees have dual duties. First, the village committee is responsible for village self-governance issues. Village self-governance issues include mediating disputes, maintaining social order, providing public goods and developing village economy. The village committee chairman is the legal representative of collective village resources and is legally responsible for the management of collective village resources. Second, the village committee has the obligation to carry out state policies and political tasks. Different policies are weighed differently by the Chinese Communist Party and the central government. Local government are assigned performance targets ranked in importance, which include soft targets (*yiban zhibiao*), hard targets (*ying zhibiao*) and priority targets with veto power (*yipiao foujue*) (Edin, 2003a, 2003b). Local government officials, especially

the leading officials, are responsible for fulfilling these targets, especially the priority targets with veto power. “Veto power implies that if township leaders fail to attain these targets, this would cancel out all other work performance, however successful, in the comprehensive evaluation at the end of the year” (Edin, 2003b, p. 39). There are two priority targets nowadays in China which decide the political future of leading local cadres, namely, birth control and social stability. Village committees have the obligation to assist rural township governments in fulfilling these targets, especially with the implementation of birth control and the maintenance of social stability.

The duty of the village party committee is specified in the Regulation of the Duty of the Chinese Communist Party’s Organs and the State Government’s Organs at Grassroots Level (*Zhongguo Gongchandang he Guojia Jiguan Jiceng Zuzhi Gongzuo Tiaoli*) (The Chinese Communist Party, 1998). First, the village party committee, as an agent of the CCP, is responsible for carrying out the party line and party policy and maintaining the party’s leadership in rural areas. Second, the village party committee deals with internal party issues. The internal party issues involve recruiting new party members, educating party members on the party discipline and ideology, and supervising party members and party cadres. Third, the village party committee also has the responsibility to supervise village elections and the works of elected village committees.

Since the passage of the official Organic Law of Village Committees in 1998, setting up self-governance village committees has become the institutionalised solution to the political anarchy caused by the collapse of the commune system. All villages in rural China are required to carry out direct elections for their village committees. Those provinces which did not implement village committee elections prior to 1998 are required to set up self-governance village committees and hold direct elections for the village committees. Guangdong Province is one of these provinces that started to implement village committee elections in 1998. As the focus for this study, the following section focuses on the journey towards grassroots democracy in Guangdong.

2.1.2 Journey towards grassroots democracy in Guangdong

Only since the promulgation of the official Organic Law of Village Committees in

1998 have all villages in China started to carry out village committee elections. Prior to 1998, as mentioned earlier, provinces were offered the discretion of experimenting with various types of village governance at their own discretion and thus provinces varied in their approach to village governance. For example, some provinces started to experiment with setting up self-governance village committees through direct election by villagers before 1987, such as Guangxi province and Jilin province, while some provinces only started to set up self-governance village committees and carry out village committee elections after 1998, such as Guangdong Province and Yunan Province. The focus of this study, Guangdong Province, is one of the latest provinces to adopt self-governance village committees elected by popular vote in China. Prior to 1998, Guangdong province adopted a different approach to solve the political vacuum caused by the collapse of commune system - the setting up of village administrative offices appointed by rural township governments.

After the collapse of the commune system, in order to fill up the political vacuum, there were two distinct solutions offered to the central government (see Shen, 1998). The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and the Ministry of Civil Affairs were in support of the setting up of self-governance village committees elected through popular vote. Supporters of this solution intend to empower villagers with the right to govern, educate and serve themselves and they consider the role of rural governments in village governance as guidance rather than instruction. Some provincial government officials and local government officials were in support of another solution, namely, setting up village administrative offices (*cungongsuo*, also called "administrative districts"). Supporters of this solution intend to strengthen state control at the grassroots level by setting up village administrative offices directly responsible to rural township governments. In this approach, village administrative offices are government organisations and the personnel of village administrative offices are directly appointed by rural township governments. It reflects the perspective that strengthening the state's control over villages can help to fix political anarchy in rural areas for a short time and concentrate resources on economic development, which was the primary goal of the state in the 1980s.

Before 1987, the passage of the draft Law of Village Committees, eight provinces, namely, Guangxi, Yunnan, Guangdong, Hainan, Jiangxi, Hebei, Heilongjiang, Hubei

and the capital city Beijing experimented with the solution of setting up village administrative offices appointed by the township level governments. Until the end of 1997, only Yunnan and Guangdong provinces had insisted in carrying out the village administrative office solution; all the other provinces had at least started to experiment with the self-governance village committee approach (Shen, 1998).

Supporters of the village administrative office approach do not oppose the idea of empowering villagers with the right to govern themselves. They only consider that self-governance organisations should be set up at the natural village level instead of at the administrative village level (See right column of Diagram 2.1). The natural village is formed as a result of people's natural settlement in a place (see Shen, 1998). In north China, where lands are mainly big plains or flatlands, natural villages tend to be of a big size; while in south China where arable lands are small terraces located along hillsides, natural villages tend to be of a small size. Administrative villages, as the name suggests, are set up by governments for the purpose of governance. The then Premier Zhao Ziyang, who is in support of the village administrative office approach, agreed that elected, autonomous committees should be set up, but self-governance village committees should form in natural villages, instead of in administrative villages replacing production brigades (O'Brien & Li, 2000). This proposal was suitable to some provinces in south China such as Guangdong, where brigades or administrative villages were composed of up to a dozen natural villages. By simply supplanting brigades with elected village committees, the elections for village committees in administrative villages comprised a dozen natural villages of disproportionate size, making it difficult to guarantee the interests of small and remote natural villages, thus, causing social chaos due to the underrepresentation of minority groups. "In this regard, rather than undermining self-government, Zhao's plan would have better enfranchised residents of small, remote settlements, who otherwise might find it difficult to win a seat on a committee based in a bigger 'core village'(*zhu cun*)" (O'Brien & Li, 2000, p. 471).

The village administrative office approach was experimented with in the Guangdong province. There are three versions of the village administrative office approach, which is shown in Table 2.2. As mentioned earlier, in contrast to the village committee approach, village administrative offices belong to the state hierarchy and the

personnel of village administrative offices are appointed by township governments. In Type 1, self-governance village committees are set up at the natural village level and are elected by villagers or village household representatives, while village administrative offices are set up at the administrative village level to replace production brigades. In Type 2, at the administrative village level, two committees – village administrative offices and village committees – are set up, but they share the same set of personnel who are appointed by township level governments. In Type 3, village administrative offices are set up to replace production brigades. In both Types 2 and 3, small village groups are set up to replace production teams and villagers' self-governance is carried out in small village groups.

Table 2.2 Different versions of the village administrative office approach

Administrative level	Commune era	Open and reform era		
		Type 1	Type 2	Type 3
Township level	Commune	Township government	Township government	Township government
Administrative village level	Brigade	Village administrative office	Village administrative office and village committee (overlapping membership)	Village administrative office
Natural village level	Team	Village committee	Village group	Village group

Source: Shen (1998)

The village administrative office approach has its advantages. As pointed out by Zhang (1992), the village administrative office acts as a bridge connecting township governments and villages, helping to accomplish political tasks in rural villages. Moreover, compared to the village committee, as a government organisation belonging to the state hierarchy, it has more authority to carry out works allocated by local government and is more responsible to local government. The village administrative office approach also contributes to the rapid economic development in rural Guangdong (Wang, 2000). The village administrative office quickly filled in the political vacuum because of the collapse of the commune system in the 1980s and integrated fragmented interests by strong government control. Strong government control fostered investors' confidence in investing in rural villages in Guangdong, which, to some extent, helped to attract investment and accelerate rural economic growth in the 1980s and the 1990s.

However, village administrative offices share similar problems with the commune system. Firstly, since all the economic and administrative power is centred in the village administrative office and there were no effective checks on the power of the village administrative office, the corruption problem was not effectively addressed and there was a possibility of officers abusing their power in pursuit of their own private interests. Secondly, since officers were appointed by the township governments, they were only answerable to township governments and were not responsive to villagers' demands and interests. The deteriorated cadre-mass relationship in the commune system still prevailed with the introduction of the village administrative office. In times of economic recession, strong political control might be conducive to economic development, as it helps to direct resources and efforts on investment and production for economic development. However, such an institutional arrangement which is not sensitive to citizens' demands and interests might hamper continual economic growth because of social unrest caused by corruption and deteriorated cadre-mass relationship, especially when the economy is improving. Thirdly, because village administrative offices were government organisation, compared to the self-governance village committee approach, the village administrative office approach created one more level of the state hierarchy at the village level which caused financial and administrative burden to the state. In 1993, the No.7 document issued by the central government stipulated that in order to reduce the level of administrative hierarchy, township governments should no longer set up village administrative offices beneath (Shen, 1998). The issue of this document is a milestone in the battle between the two approaches and helped to win the support for the village committee approach. In 1998, with the passage of the official law of village committees, Guangdong province finally implemented the village committee approach and replaced all village administrative offices with self-governance village committees directly elected by villagers.

The first provincial regulation (The Guangdong Provincial People's Congress, 1998b) and the first detailed guideline (The Guangdong Provincial People's Congress, 1998a) on village committee elections in Guangdong Province were promulgated in November, 1998. The 30-article official law provides the basic principles of village committee elections, the details of how to carry out elections in each province being left for each provincial government to design based on local context. The Guangdong

Provincial Regulation (The Guangdong Provincial People's Congress, 2002) has 25 articles and provides a basic translation of the national principles in the official law into provincial principles. The detailed guideline (The Guangdong Provincial People's Congress, 2001), consisting of 53 articles, is much more specific in defining the electoral procedure. It covers the election for the village election committee, voter registration, voting methods, voting procedure, the dismissal of elected village committees who do not fulfil their responsibility, the resignation of village committee members and the elections to fill up the vacancy, among other thing. According to the Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil Affairs (The Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil Affairs, 2013), from September 1998 to the end of 1999, within one year's time, all village administrative offices in Guangdong were replaced by elected village committees. In the first village election in 1999, about 20% appointed village administrative office cadres failed to be elected to village committee positions (Anonymous, 2013). However, no figure on the number of village administrative offices being transformed into village committees has been provided by the Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil Affairs or published by news agents. According to an internal document presented at a national conference on village committee elections organised by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (The Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil Affairs, 2005), in the third village election in Guangdong in 2005, there were in total 19,562 village committees required to carry out direct elections. By the end of April 2005, 95.6% of these village committees carried out direct elections. In other words, 18,707 new village committees were elected by that time. Since it is the provincial level government that translates the principles set up in the official law into the action plan and designs the implementation of village committee elections, the next section describes the electoral procedure in Guangdong Province, by referring both to the provincial regulation, the provincial guideline and the practice in the sample county.

2.2 The regulation and electoral procedure of village elections in Guangdong

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the institutional setting includes both formal and informal aspects. The formal aspect can be observed by looking at legal documents, while the informal aspect can only be observed by looking at governments' responses to related problems. Thus, when introducing the institutional setting of village elections in Guangdong Province, the provincial regulation, the

provincial guidelines and the sample county election plan are used to elaborate on the formal aspect of the institutional setting, while the sample county government's responses to related election problems are used to show the informal part of the institutional setting.

The detailed electoral procedure and timetable designed by the sample County Civil Affairs Bureau in 2008 are presented in Table 2.3. As can be seen, in 2008 the whole village election process in the sample county, from the preparation for the election to the handover of duty, lasted around three months. The whole election process is further divided into five stages. The detailed contents and actors in charge at every stage of the election process are shown in the table below. The key elements of the village election process are election management, voter registration, nomination of candidates, campaign, and voting and vote counting. The regulation and rules of these five key elements of the village election process are introduced in detail in this section.

Table 2.3 The plan of village elections by the sample County Civil Affairs Bureau in 2008 (The Sample County Civil Affairs Bureau, 2008)

Stage	Time	Content	Actor in charge
1	53 days	Elect a village election committee (VEC)	The village committee, the village party committee and sometimes the rural township government
		Draw up the village election plan, that is, specific date and time for each step of the election starting from voter registration to vote counting.	The VEC
		Audit the village finance and survey public attitudes toward the previous VC members and potential candidates	The VEC and the rural township government
		Train the VEC members	The township government and the county government
2	10 days	Mobilise villagers' participation in the election via radio or leaflet	The VEC and rural township government
		Voter registration	The VEC
		Publish the list of registered voters village wide 20 days prior to the voting date	The VEC
		Distribute the voter certificate	The VEC
3	6 days	Elect village group leaders	The VEC
		Elect village representatives	The VEC
4	5 days	Decide the number of VC members	The VEC
		Convene the nomination meeting or the election for primary candidates	The VEC
		Vetting candidates	The VEC
5	25 days	Prepare for voting, that is, setting up voting venues, preparing voting boxes, etc.	The VEC
		Voting and vote counting	The VEC
		Hand over duty and official stamps from the previous VC to the newly elected VC	The VEC

2.2.1 Election management

Prior to each election, a village election committee (VEC thereafter) is set up and is in charge of the whole electoral procedure in each village. According to the Guangdong provincial regulation (The Guangdong Provincial People's Congress, 2001), the VEC should be elected by the village assembly which should be chaired by the village committee. Alternatively, the quota of village election committee can be allocated to small village groups and members of the village election committee are elected by villagers in small village groups. In practice, there are several ways to set up a VEC. In some cases, the VEC is appointed by rural township governments or the village party committees. In some other cases, the VEC is self-appointed, in which case those self-appointed members of VEC are normally incumbent village committee members or villagers appointed as VEC members in the previous elections. The VEC could also be appointed in a meeting with the attendance of village representatives, village group leaders, the village committee, the village party committee, and sometimes rural township government officials. The Guangdong Provincial government issued a notice (The Guangdong Provincial People's Government, 2010) in 2010 which states that the election of village election committee should be chaired by the village party secretary and it is recommended that the village party secretary should be elected through democratic methods as the chairman of the village election committee. In my interview with a VC chairman of a relatively wealthy village[2], from his standpoint, the village party secretary should undoubtedly be the chairman of the VEC; only in this way can the leadership status of the Chinese Communist Party be represented. Since village election is within the jurisdiction of village self-governance, the provincial notice is only a recommendation rather than an order. As I observed in my visit to some villages in the sample county, the VECs in some villages were elected by popular vote or by small village groups in both 2008 and 2011 village elections, while in some villages, the VECs were appointed or selected in a meeting with the attendance of village representatives, village group leaders, the village committee and the village party committee.

The Guangdong Provincial regulation (The Guangdong Provincial People's Congress, 2001) stipulates that a candidate running for the election of a VC post is prohibited to

[2] Interview with the VC chairman of Village E elected in 2011, July 14th, 2011 (E1).

serve at the VEC. Once being nominated as and accepting to be an official candidate, a candidate cannot serve on the VEC. The electoral rule stipulated by the sample county government (The Sample County Civil Affairs Bureau, 2008) also requires candidates to resign from VEC if they are running for the VC elections. But most villages in the sample county use the sea-election – there is no nomination of candidates. Candidates might utilise this bug in the institutional design to bypass the regulation. As pointed out by a village committee chairman elected in 2011 who served as the chairman of the VEC at the same time[3], because he was not an official candidate for the village committee chairman position, he did not violate any regulation or law. In the sample county, in the 2008 village elections, among the 170 villages with valid data[4], 84 of these villages had at least one of the elected VC members serving on the VEC at the same time without resigning from VEC, accounting for 49.4%.

Rural township governments are aware of the importance of VEC. In an interview with an official from the Civil Affairs Bureau of the sample county, he[5] pointed out that as the village election committee is responsible for conducting village committee elections, the setting up of this management committee is the first step; if villagers appeal to rural township governments concerned about the unfairness in the selection of village election committee members, once the appeal is proved to be accurate, the electoral results of the village committee election will be invalidated. He also pointed out that in 2008 village committee elections the electoral results of two villages in the county were invalidated because of villagers' appeals about the unfair selection of the VEC. In other words, as long as villagers are satisfied with the selection of VEC members, regardless of the methods used to select VEC members, rural township governments turn a blind eye to the selection of VEC, even if the selection of VEC do not fulfill the requirement of the Guangdong provincial regulation. Without an independent third body to organise the election, the fairness of the elections is discounted.

[3] Interview with the village committee chairman of Village P elected in 2011, August 4th, 2011 (P1)
[4] I collected the ballot result reports with the signature of VEC members from the county Civil Affairs Bureau. I went through all these reports and compared the name of the VEC members with the name of the elected VC members. Identical name means an elected member of VC serves on the VEC at the same time.
[5] Interview with the head of the rural governance office of the county civil affairs bureau, August 25th, 2009 (CL2)

2.2.2 Voter registration

Voter registration is an important stage in the sense it guarantees only eligible citizens granted with rights to vote in a particular village. In the sample county, the detailed plan of the 2008 village election (The Sample County Civil Affairs Bureau, 2008) stipulates three elements in defining citizenship in a particular village in 2008, namely, age, residence and political rights. Villagers who are residents of the village and at least 18 years old are eligible voters of a particular village, except those deprived of political rights according to law. In addition, for villagers who migrate temporarily to big cities for job opportunities, they are required to inform the VEC whether they want to cast a vote themselves or delegate the voting right to others. According to the plan (The Sample County Civil Affairs Bureau, 2008), the VEC needs to inform every temporary out-migrant villager via phone or letter about the date of voting and request information about their voting methods. According to the Guangdong Provincial regulation (The Guangdong Provincial People's Congress, 2001), each eligible voter is allowed to cast no more than three proxy votes in each election.

The VEC is responsible for making the list of registered voters. In practice, the list of registered voters in each election is based on the list used in previous election. For example, villagers who are deceased, moved out of the village, or are deprived of political rights during the election period, are eliminated from the list. Villagers who reach the age of 18 by the date of voting, who have recently moved into the village because of marriage or the like, or who restore their political rights after a certain period of deprivation of political rights, are added to the list. The list of registered voters from the previous election is used as a blueprint and is updated based on newly-obtained information. The list of registered voters is then published village-wide on the village board 20 days prior to the voting date (The Guangdong Provincial People's Congress, 2001). Villagers having any question or disagreement with the list should report to the VEC at least 5 days prior to the voting date. Each registered voter is provided with a voter certificate which they then need to show when collecting the ballot ticket on the voting date.

In practice, the control over proxy voting is lax. During my placement at the County Civil Affairs Bureau in 2008, most of the complaints concerned about voter

registration were related to the use of proxy voting. Though it is required that villagers should inform the VEC in written form if they want to delegate their voting rights to others, in practice, VECs do not strictly follow this standard. Instead, in some villages in the sample county I visited in 2009 near the county centre, villagers who want to delegate their voting rights to their fellow villagers could verbally inform the VEC about the proxy voting via phone. Few villages kept any written record of proxy voting. The lax control over proxy voting leaves room for electoral fraud, such as fabricating the list of registered voters, fabricating the number of proxy votes or assigning delegates without the permission of the voters who delegate the voting rights.

2.2.3 Nomination of candidates

The two-stage nomination is widely used in most villages in China. The nomination involves two stages. At the first stage, a list of primary candidates is worked out by the VEC. Candidates can be nominated by the village party committee, village representatives, small village groups, villagers or a joint nomination by villagers from these groups. At the second stage, primary candidates are vetted and selected by the village party committee, the VEC or the village representative assembly with the attendance of village group leaders, village representatives, and the village party committee. Candidates who pass this second stage of nomination are official candidates and the names of the official candidates will appear on the ballot ticket.

In addition to the two-stage nomination, Guangdong Province recommends the use of 'two in one' nomination. Literally, it means that the candidate nomination is reduced from the two stages mentioned above to one stage. On the voting date, if candidates with the most votes receive more than 50% of the votes and the voting has at least 50% turnout, the candidates are successfully elected to the village committee. The remaining position of the VC, if there are any, will be filled up by a follow-up election. In a follow-up election, a candidate only needs to obtain one third of the votes from the turnout in order to be elected to the village committee (The Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil Affairs, 2008). The 'two in one' voting system in Guangdong Province is similar to the runoff system used in some western democratic countries.

If no candidate fulfils the two requirements listed above on the voting date, two-stage nomination is automatically applied. The first few candidates with the most votes are considered official candidates and will appear on the list of official candidates. According to the Guangdong provincial regulation (The Guangdong Provincial People's Congress, 2001), village committee elections are contested in that the number of candidates should be more than the number of positions available. For village chairman and vice-chairman positions, there should be one more candidate than the number of positions. For the village committee specialised member position, there should be one to three more candidates than the number of positions. Among the three positions in a village committee, namely, the village committee chairman, the vice-chairman and the specialised member, in Guangdong province, each candidate can only run for the electoral competition for one position. In some provinces, candidates who fail in the election for the VC chairman can still be considered for the election for the VC vice-chairman or member positions; but in Guangdong province, this practice is prohibited. The standard nomination ticket and ballot ticket used in Guangdong province are shown in Tables 2.4 and 2.5. In villages where the two-stage nomination is adopted, both tickets will be used and the names of candidates who obtain the most votes in the nomination stage will appear on the final ballot ticket. In those villages where the 'two in one' method is adopted, candidates who receive the most votes in the nomination process - provided that the candidates receive more than 50% of the votes from the turnout and the turnout is at least 50% of the registered voters - are elected to the village committee. The ballot ticket (Table 2.5) will be used to fill up the remaining positions in the village committee.

The introduction of the 'two in one' nomination process was intended to simplify the electoral procedure and alleviate the financial burdens on villages for organising elections. A valid electoral result requires at least a 50% turnout rate. In order to guarantee a minimum turnout, subsidies are needed to pay those villagers who show up to vote as a compensation for their loss of farm work. The same applies to the holding of the village representative assembly. In the sample county, the amount is about 10-20 Yuan (1-2 pounds) per person, which is normally covered by the village budget. Subsidies paid to guarantee turnout of meetings and voting can cause great financial burden to villages, especially those with no collective revenue. The introduction of 'two-in-one' nomination process in Guangdong intends to ease

village's financial burdens. In the 237 villages with information on the nomination method in the 2008 village election, 72% use the 'two in one' nomination method, while the remaining 28% use the two-stage nomination method. In the 2011 village election, the majority of the 237 villages in the sample county used the 'two-in-one' nomination method.

Table 2.4 Nomination ticket (The Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil Affairs, 2008)

Village committee chairman	Full name:
Village committee vice-chairman	Full name:
Village committee specialised members	Full names:
Notes:	1. The nomination ticket is valid if there is only one candidate nominated for the village committee chairman position, as the village needs one VC chairman. 2. The nomination ticket is valid if there is only one candidate nominated for the village committee vice-chairman position, as the village needs one VC vice-chairman. 3. The nomination ticket is valid if there are three or less than three candidates nominated for the VC specialised member position, as the village needs three specialised members. 4. A blank nomination ticket is still valid; however, voters who submit blank nomination tickets will be considered abstaining from casting nomination votes. Nomination tickets are valid if voters only fill in part of the blank squares on the ticket.

Table 2.5 Ballot ticket (The Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil Affairs, 2008)

Position	Chairman candidates		Others	Vice-chairman candidates		Others	Specialised member candidates					Others		
Full name	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x			
Decision														
Notes	1. The village committee election is to elect one chairman, one vice-chairman and three specialised members. 2. Please write "O" under the name of the candidate who you vote for, and "X" otherwise. If you don't want to vote for any of the candidates, alternatively, you can write down the name of the person you vote for under the "Others" column and also put "O" underneath the person's name. 3. The ballot ticket is valid if the number of candidates you vote for are the same as or less than the number of positions available; a blank ballot ticket will be considered that the voter abstains from voting.													

2.2.4 Campaign

Candidates are allowed to campaign. There are two types of campaigns, organised campaigning and self-campaigning (The Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil

Affairs, 2008). Organised campaigning is organised by the VEC. Normally, the VEC organises a village assembly and all candidates are encouraged to make a 5-minute speech. The speech covers the candidate's personal information, capability and manifesto. Candidates can also organise campaigns themselves without involving the VEC, which is termed self-campaigning. Candidates can post leaflets which spell out their manifesto and personal information in designated public areas approved by the VEC. Candidates can also pay door-to-door visits to villagers for support. Campaign activities can be conducted until the voting date of those villages adopting the 'two-in-one' method or until the date of primary nomination of those villages adopting the two-stage nomination method. In villages where the two-stage nomination method is adopted, after the list of official candidates is published, candidates cannot conduct any campaign activity. However, on the date of the primary nomination or the date of voting, candidates will be offered time to introduce themselves and make a campaign speech.

In the detailed plan of the 2008 village elections (The Sample County Civil Affairs Bureau, 2008) issued by the sample County Civil Affairs Bureau little has been mentioned about campaigns. I also observed very few campaign activities organised by VECs. For the very few campaign meetings organised by VECs, candidates' campaign speeches tend to be a formality. Nothing substantial was covered by the speech. When taking into account the context of Chinese villages, this observation is understandable. Villages in China are small and closed communities where everyone knows each other. Thus, making campaign speeches and introducing candidates is not necessary.

Governments conduct campaign activities for their preferred candidates. According to the sample county's detailed plan of 2008 village elections (The Sample County Civil Affairs Bureau, 2008), rural township governments investigate the work of the incumbent VC members and any potential candidates for the new VC. Based on the investigation, rural township governments make suggestions on the personnel of the new VC to the VEC. The VEC is required to campaign for the candidates recommended by the rural township governments. The campaign for candidates is conducted in many forms. First, the VEC campaigns for those candidates on the list by broadcasting via village radio system, distributing leaflets or posting information

about those candidates in village public areas. Second, the VEC convenes a meeting with the attendance of village party members, village representatives, village small group leaders, village party committee members, incumbent village committee members and sometimes clan heads. At this meeting, the VEC presents the list of candidates recommended by rural township governments and asks the meeting attendees to campaign and vote for those candidates on the list.

Self-campaigning is widely adopted by candidates, especially free candidates who are not recommended by rural township governments. Candidates can start self-campaigning as early as three or four months prior to the voting date. Self-campaigning can take the following forms: visiting fellow villagers at their homes, mobilising friends and relatives to get support, asking clan heads, village representatives or village group leaders to campaign for the candidates, among other things. The most effective way of self-campaigning is to visit those important figures in the villages and ask them to speak for the candidates. Important figures can be clan heads, village representatives, village group leaders, incumbent VC members, village party committee members or retired government officials in the village. These figures might have a good reputation in the village and villagers might respect their opinions. Besides, candidates can rely on their own family networks to campaign for votes. Villages in China are closed and small communities. Family tie is an important characteristic of majority villages in rural China and thus an effective source of campaign for candidates.

Because candidates organise self-campaign activities themselves, it is difficult to monitor and supervise the self-campaign activities. During a candidate's private visit to an important figure of a village, he might promise to solve a specific problem of the village or invest money in the public good. But he might also promise to pay for each ballot that votes for him on the voting date, which violates the law and the provincial regulation and also undermines the democratic value of the election. Accusations of vote-buying practice are difficult to investigate. As pointed out by a county official[6], "The difficulty of preventing vote-buying practice lies in how you can find solid evidence to support the existence of buying vote practice at a particular village". Vote-

[6] Interview with the head of the rural governance office of the county Civil Affairs Bureau, August 15th, 2009 (CL2)

buying is mostly in the form of cash, which is untraceable. The county government was well aware of the existence of vote buying in several villages in the county in time of village election, but due to the difficulty of collecting solid evidence of electoral bribery, the county government tends to turn a blind eye to this issue.

2.2.5 Voting and vote counting

Casting the ballot is the most important stage of the electoral process. As required in the sample county detailed plan of 2008 village elections (The Sample County Civil Affairs Bureau, 2008), the VEC should post information regarding the date and time of voting, the venue of the fixed ballot box and the roving ballot box, and arrangement of a private room for voters to fill in their ballot in the village public area at least 5 days prior to the voting date. In the sample county, villages normally set up a main voting station at the village centre, either on the playground of the village primary school or in front of the VC building. Several fixed voting stations might be set up in natural villages. Majority villages in the county also use roving boxes to collect ballots of villagers in remote areas of the villages. In the 2008 village elections, only 10% (about 23 villages) of the 237 villages in the county had only fixed voting stations and the remaining villages all used roving boxes to collect ballot tickets in addition to fixed voting stations. The number of roving boxes depends on how dispersed the population of a particular village is. Each ballot box, no matter whether it is roving or fixed at a place, requires at least three persons to supervise it. Volunteers who help to carry a roving box or staff a fixed box receive subsidies, ranging from 50 Yuan (£5) to 100 Yuan (£10) per day in the sample county, as a compensation for their loss of work. In most villages in the sample county, on the voting date voting is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. In some villages, voting is open till 2 p.m. Registered voters can get their ballot tickets and cast votes either at the voting stations or from members who carry the roving voting boxes.

During my internship at the County Civil Affairs Bureau, the majority of disputes concerned with casting votes were related to the roving voting box. The supervision of the roving box during lunch time is an issue which can arouse complaints. During lunch time, all roving boxes are expected to be carried back to and stored at the central voting station to avoid attempts to tamper with ballot tickets. For example, in a village in the sample county in 2008, some villagers complained that a member of

staff who carried a roving box brought the box back to his home during lunch time, which is not allowed. The counting of the ballots in roving boxes is another controversial issue. Normally, each roving box is designated to distribute and collect the exact amount of ballots to and from eligible voters in certain natural villages. When voting is closed, all roving boxes need to be carried back to the central station for vote counting. Members of staff will first count the number of ballots in each roving box. The number of ballots in each roving box should be the same or less than the amount of the ballots designated for the specific roving box. In 2008, a few villages had one or two roving boxes having more ballots than the number of ballots distributed by the members carrying the box, while the total amount of ballot collected did not exceed the number of registered voters. In these few villages, the VECs had to invalidate the election and re-organise the VC elections. In some villages, the VECs did not specify the jurisdiction of each roving box. All tickets collected through roving boxes were put together with the tickets collected from fixed voting stations and counted together. In those villages where roving boxes were assigned the number of ballots and the area of collecting ballots, tickets were also put and counted together to avoid embarrassing situations caused by an inaccurate number of ballots in specific roving boxes.

According to the official organic law (The National People's Congress, 1998), vote counting should be done in public and results should be announced immediately after counting. In the majority of villages I visited in 2008, they counted ballots immediately after the voting stations were closed and announced the results immediately after the counting. In some villages, they counted the ballots and wrote on the village blackboards in open and public areas, such as the playground of the village primary school. In some other villages, ballot counting proceeded in closed areas, such as a classroom of the village primary school or a meeting room in the VC building; villagers were free to enter the rooms when ballots were being counted. VEC members and a few volunteers hired by the VECs divided up the ballot tickets and checked the validity of the tickets while counting. The chairman of the VEC had a final say on the validity of a ballot if a dispute was raised. Ballot boxes being stolen, ballot tickets being discarded purposefully, or accusations of vote-buying can occur and disputes such as this may escalate to riots at this stage.

In summary, there are institutional bugs at every stage of the village elections. In setting up the village election committees, which are expected to act as independent third parties to organize and supervise the elections, in quite a few cases village election committee members were found to be latterly elected to the village committees. The lax control over proxy voting in practice also leaves room for electoral fraud. Vote buying is difficult to monitor and investigate at the campaign stage. The management and supervision of roving ballot boxes is also subject to electoral manipulation and fraud. At the very end, since the village election committee is in charge of the management and organisation of the election in a village, if the election for this important management committee is subject to electoral fraud and the fairness in the election for its members is in doubt, the following stages of the electoral process would hardly be exempt from electoral fraud and manipulation. The institutional weakness in village elections is the very foundation for enabling actors to manipulate and control the elections in their favour. In the following section, we turn to the changing economic structure of grassroots villages which has a direct bearing on village elections and village governance.

2.3 Village economic structure and the connection between village committees and villagers

As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, during the commune era, in order to facilitate the state to extract the maximum surplus from the countryside for industrial development in urban areas, rural China was organised in the form of collective commune. Resources were distributed from the central government to the highest authority in the Chinese countryside – The People's Commune (See Diagram 2.1). All resources were owned by communes and allocated by communes to production brigades and teams beneath. Commune and production brigades had absolute control over the resources necessary to production and to individuals' livelihoods. There was no private property at all. Because of the disincentive effects of collectivisation on China's countryside, the household responsibility system was introduced in the early 1980s, aimed at increasing individual autonomy and providing incentives for individuals in the countryside to increase farming outputs. Household responsibility altered economic structure in China's countryside to a significant degree. The changing village economic structure is introduced first based on evidence collected

from the sample county, and then we proceed to the discussion on the political ramifications of village economic structure on village governance.

2.3.1 Village economic structure

In the open and reform era, the state administrative hierarchy is reduced to five levels, with the lowest level being the township government equivalent to the commune in the commune era (See Diagram 2.1). Also, village committees are set up to perform self-governance function at the level that used to be controlled by production brigades in China's countryside. Diagram 2.2 represents the village economic structure nowadays, based on evidence collected from villages in the sample county and in Shenzhen. Resources generated by the village committee on behalf of all villagers as a collective are termed as collective resources. Nowadays, village committees have two broad sources of collective income (See the upper part of Diagram 2.2). First, village committees can generate collective revenue from business activities. They can attract outside investments to the villages in running either collective enterprises or private enterprises. Village committees, by providing lands or resources for investors to build up enterprises in villages, can in return become shareholders of the enterprises or obtain financial contributions from the enterprises. For example, villages at the outskirts of big cities might generate collective business income through setting up enterprises with outside investors because of their close proximity to urban cities, such as villages at the outskirts of cities in the Pearl River Delta. The village in Shenzhen mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 1 was such a village before it was converted into an urban community. Village committees can also generate collective revenue by subletting collective village natural resources, such as ponds, forestry, or lands. In the sample county of this research, wealthy villages normally generate collective business income through subletting a village's natural resources.

Second, village committees receive subsidies from governments, mainly township and county governments. In the sample county, government subsidies tend to be limited and are normally indicated for special use. Each VC member is entitled to a monthly allowance of about 350 RMB (equivalent to £35). The VC chairman receives a slightly higher monthly allowance of about 500 RMB (equivalent to £50). The monthly allowance for the VC chairman and members is paid for by the County Finance Bureau and is listed in the county's fiscal spending. It is important to point

out that the monthly allowance for VC members is paid based on the fact that VC posts are part-time. Most VC chairmen and members primarily rely on their own jobs for their living and VC posts for them are just part-time jobs. Wealthy villages with resourceful collective business income might pay extract salaries through the collective village budgets to change some or all part-time VC posts to full-time. In addition to the monthly allowances for VC chairmen and members, village committees obtain certain amount of government subsidies to cover administrative expenses, such as the purchasing of stationery and newspapers. Village committees also receive other subsidies from various levels of government. In most cases, these kinds of subsidies are indicated for special use, such as poor relief or maintenance of natural resources (e.g., national forest, historical buildings) in the village. Subject to availability, village committees can also apply for governmental funding to cover construction of public infrastructures, such as village roads or refurbishing village schools.

In addition, village committees receive a certain amount of governmental subsidies to cover the administrative costs of carrying out state policy. As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, village committees have dual duties. In addition to the self-governance duty, village committees have the obligation to carry out state policy, in particular, birth control policy and the maintenance of political stability. In order for the village committees to fulfil the obligation, township and county governments normally allocate funding to cover the associated administrative costs. For example, township and county governments have to carry out random checks several times per year on the implementation of birth control policy in villages. Villages selected for the random check receive certain amount of subsidies in advance to cover the associated administrative costs.

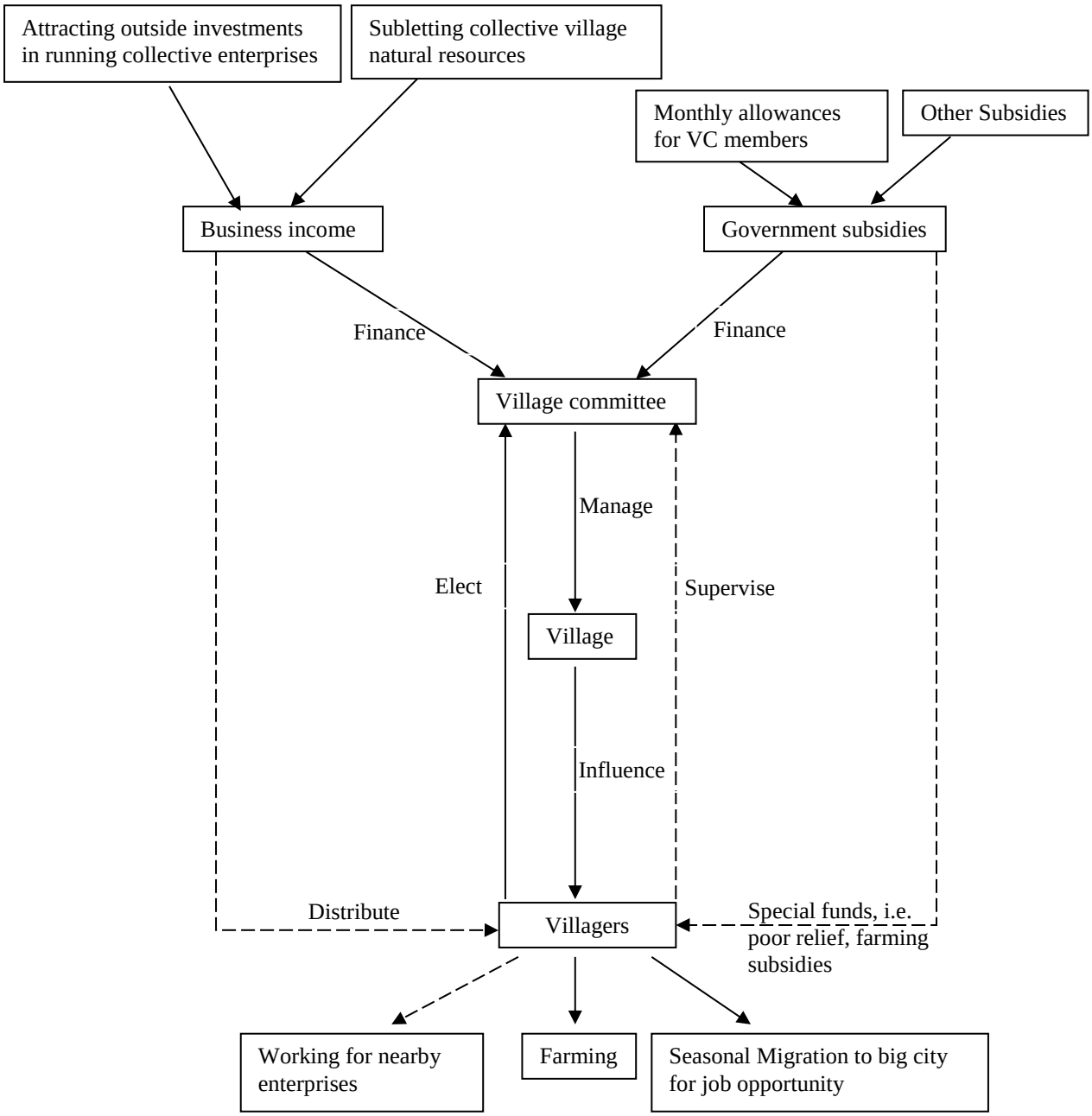


Diagram 2.2 A flow chart representation of the village economic structure nowadays

Table 2.6 A sample of a village's collective income from Jan to June in 2011

Collective income	Amount
Business income	¥2,862.90 (£286)
Rent from subletting commercial properties	¥2,640 (£264)
Balance from previous season	¥222.90 (£22)
Government subsidies	¥109,945 (£10,995)
Special fund for forest protection from the township government	¥6,370 (£637)
Special fund from the County Party Disciplinary Committee to cover the social insurance fees of old villagers who are classified as the neediest in village	¥47,000 (£4,700)
Allowance for VC chairman and members	¥4,575 (£458)
Subsidy for carrying out birth control policy	¥2,000 (£200)
Subsidy from the City Audit Bureau for building village bridge	¥20,000 (£2,000)
Subsidy from the County Party Disciplinary Committee for redesigning street lights	¥30,000 (£3,000)
Other income	¥0
Total	**¥112,807.9 (£11,281)**

Notes: ¥10 ≈ £1

Table 2.6 shows a sample of a village's collective income in the first six months of 2011. The majority of collective income this village generated during that period, about 97% of the total collective income, was funded by local government. Two types of special funds were provided by the local government, one to use for forest protection and the other for social insurance fees of old villagers who are classified as the neediest in the village. Two items from government subsidies were used to pay the monthly allowance for VC chairman and members and for the village committee to carry out birth control policy. The remaining two items of government subsidies, one for the construction of the village bridge and one for redesigning street lights, were offered by specific bureaus of governments, namely, the City Audit Bureau and the County Party Disciplinary Committee, and the village committee was successful in obtaining these two funds. In addition to government subsidies, the village also has collective commercial properties to sublet, which generated the village a total of 2862.90 RMB (about £286.29) in collective business income. In a word, village committees self-govern villages on behalf of the villagers and finance the function of the village committees using government subsidies or/and business income generated from subletting collective village resources or attracting outside investments.

Next, we move onto the side of villagers and see how villagers generate family income nowadays in rural China (see the bottom part of Diagram 2.2). In contrast to individuals living in rural China during the commune era, villagers in rural China nowadays are given full autonomy when deciding their own family economic activities. The purpose of the household responsibility system is to increase individual autonomy. Since the introduction of the household responsibility system in the early 1980s, individual households became the basic unit of production, instead of the production team in the commune system. As can be seen from the bottom part of Diagram 2.2, villagers can generate family income in three ways: working for nearby enterprises; farming and migrating to big cities seasonally for job opportunities. However, nowadays, farming is no longer as profitable as it used to be. Alternatively, villagers can also earn their living from working for factories or setting up their own business in urban areas, from which they can generate a higher income. In addition, if a village has its own collective enterprise or is able to attract outside investments in setting up companies in the village, villagers also have the option of working for enterprises and companies in the village.

At the centre of the sample county - the most industrial town- there are some factories and companies. Some villagers choose to work for these nearby factories or companies or choose to set up their own business in the county centre. Since the county is close to the Pearl River Delta, about 4-5 hours by car, most young adult villagers also have the option of migrating to cities in the Pearl River Delta seasonally for better-paid job opportunities. Those staying behind are mostly female and the elderly who farm to produce agricultural products mainly for family use. To more vividly represent the demographic characteristic of those villagers staying at the villages in some remote towns: they are called the '3860' group, '38' representing females, because International Women's Day is on March 8th, while '60' representing those who are normally older than 60.

Until now, we have covered how village committees generate collective income to fulfil their dual duties and how villagers generate family income under the household responsibility system. Village committees have two broad sources of collective income, business income generated from business activities and subsidies from governments. On the other side, villagers have three ways to generate their own

family income: working for nearby village enterprises; migrating to big cities seasonally for job opportunities or farming. In the following section, we explore the connection between village committees and villagers, namely, the middle part of the Diagram 2.2.

2.3.2 The connection between village committees and villagers

As is shown in the middle part of Diagram 2.2, village committees are elected once every three years by adult villagers aged 18 or above. According to the Organic Law of Village Committees (The National People's Congress, 1998, 2010), villagers have the right to supervise their village committees. On the other hand, village committees govern and manage the villages on behalf of all villagers and the governance of village committee influences villagers' life.

In the coastal regions of China, villages with resourceful collective business income are normally able to provide quite a large amount of annual bonuses to villagers residing in the villages. For example, in the village located in Shenzhen mentioned in Chapter 1, the VC has resourceful collective revenues generated from letting collective lands to outside investors to build up companies. In order to manage the resourceful collective revenues, the VC also set up a company with the legal representative being the party secretary and the residing villagers being the shareholders of the company. All houses for villagers are constructed by the collective company and allocated to individual households of the village. Villagers, as shareholders of the village company, receive monthly bonuses from the company, the amount of which is quite substantial. Villagers can live solely on the monthly dividends without working. However, this case is quite extreme in the sense that it only applies to those villages located in coastal wealthy regions with valuable lands and good public infrastructure. Because this type of village is normally located at the outskirts of urban cities, they are likely to be converted into urban communities as a result of urbanisation, like this village in Shenzhen.

Villages in the sample county are not as wealthy as those at the outskirts of urban cities and the county is relatively remote and poor. However, there are some villages in possession of a large amount of valuable collective resources. In those villages with village enterprises, villagers might be able to work for the village enterprises, instead

of migrating to big cities seasonally for job opportunities. Moreover, village committees, in possession of a relatively large amount of annual collective business income, might be able to distribute bonuses to villagers monthly or annually or pay for villagers' insurance fees. For example, in the sample county, some wealthy villages paid for all villagers' annual costs of medical cover under the new rural co-operative medical care system, which was introduced in 2003. The new medical care system aims to make healthcare more affordable for the rural dwellers. Under this system, the annual cost of medical cover is 50 RMB per person. Of this annual cost, 20 RMB is paid by the central government, 20 RMB by the provincial government and 10 RMB by the insured person. In these wealthy villages, village committees might also be able to distribute bonuses annually, subject to the economic performance of collective village business activities, from 20 RMB to 100 RMB per person, at the end of the year. Compared to villages with limited collective business income, wealthy villages have more economic resources to spend on providing public goods and services, such as renovating village schools and building village roads and bridges. As mentioned in the second section of this chapter, they might also pay some or all village committee staff salaries and change the part-time posts to full-time ones through collective village budgets.

Some government subsidies, designated for special use, that is, poor relief or agricultural subsidies for villagers who are still farming, normally distribute to village committees, village committees allocating these funds according to instructions. For example, each village has certain number of villagers who are eligible for *Dibao* (the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee). The *Dibao* fund is distributed to village committees by township governments and village committees allocate the fund to the individual *Dibao* recipient. It was the same for the allocation of agricultural subsidies. Only in recent years have agricultural subsidies for villagers who are still farming begun to be allocated directly to individual village recipients.

As can be seen, a village committee's ability to generate collective income, especially collective business income, affects villagers' choices over economic activities for family income and also the village committee's ability to invest in village infrastructure. Though subsidies from governments are important sources of collective income for most villages in the sample county, the amount of frequent government

subsidies such as allowances for VC staff and subsidies to cover administrative costs are normally limited. Those relatively large amounts of government funds are normally indicated for special use and short-term collective income, subject to availability. Moreover, since government subsidies are allocated by governments, village committees do not have full control over the subsidies, especially funds for special use. Village committees have to follow government instructions in using government subsidies. On the other hand, collective business income generated from business activities is the most reliable source of collective income and village committees have full control over collective village business income. It is in this sense that the size of a village's collective business income reflects the village committee's economic strength, which the village committee bases its power on. Thus, collective village business income is an important variable considered by this research. And the analysis of this research focuses primarily on the electoral competition for the village committee chairman position, because, as the head of the village committee and the legal representative of the village in charge of collective resources, the chairman has decisive power over the distribution and management of collective revenues, especially collective business income. In times of election, electoral competition normally centres at this head position[7].

2.4 Summary

To sum up, this chapter lays out the historical, institutional and economic background of village committee elections for the empirical investigation of this research. Self-governance village committees elected by popular vote were introduced in the 1980s to restore rural governance and promote economic development in the China's countryside. Before 1998, provinces were offered the chance to experiment with different types of rural governance at their own discretion and not all villages in China implemented direct elections for village committees. Guangdong Province is one of the provinces that implemented village administrative offices in rural villages, which belonged to the state hierarchy and were appointed by township level governments. It is since the promulgation of the official Law of Village Committees in 1998 that all villages in China are obligated to set up self-governance village committees elected directly by villagers. In addition to the self-governance duty, village committees are also obligated to carry out state policies and political tasks imposed by governments.

[7] Interview with the deputy head of the County Civil Affairs Bureau, August 6, 2009 (CL1)

Moreover, at the village level, village party committees are stipulated to be the leadership core in village elections and governance, representing the CCP in China's countryside. Guangdong Province started to implement village committees in 1998 and the first provincial regulation (The Guangdong Provincial People's Congress, 1998b) and detailed guideline (The Guangdong Provincial People's Congress, 1998a) on village committee elections were also promulgated in 1998.

Since the national law only stipulates the basic principles and provincial governments are left with the power to design detailed action plans and procedures of village committee elections based on local context, the second section of this chapter focuses on the regulation and electoral procedure in Guangdong Province. The sample county's election plan in 2008 is used as an example to illustrate the formal institutional setting and the county government's responses to various electoral related questions are used to illustrate the informal institutional setting. As is illustrated in the second section, institutional bugs exist at every stage of the village elections from the setting up of an election management committee to voting and vote counting. As is mentioned in Chapter 1, under a less developed democratic system, incumbents or party members might be able to monopolise political resources and networks, which might create an uneven playing field and seriously handicap the ability of opponents to win the elections. It is the institutional weakness revealed at every stage of the village elections that enables the monopoly of political resources and networks by incumbents or party members and the building up of the uneven playing field of such elections. However, it is important to point out that the institutional weakness can not only be used by township governments and village party committees but also be used by opponents who are not supported by the local government and village party committees to tip the balance of the power competition. The question is under what condition opponents can use the institutional weakness to tip the balance of the power competition in their favour, while under what condition such an attempt would fail. Answering this question leads us to the economic background of village committee elections, the third section of this chapter.

The economic structure of grassroots villages has a direct bearing on village elections and village governance. Village committees have to generate collective income to fulfill the dual duties. There are two broad sources of collective income, namely,

business income and subsidies from local government. Subsidies from local government were either designated for special use or were limited. Some were 'one-offs' rather than regular income. The use of this part of the collective income has to follow the instructions of local government and thus village committees do not have full control over this part of the collective village income. On the other hand, since collective business income is generated through village committees' business activities, village committees have full control over this part of the collective income. It is in this sense that the size of a village's collective business income reflects the village committee's economic strength. A village committee's capability of generating collective business income, its economic strength, affects not only the village committee's ability to invest in public goods but also villagers' choices over activities for family income. It is the size of a village's collective business income that affects the balance of the power competition between the candidates supported by local government and village party committees and opponents. However, the size of a village's collective business income is not the only factor. What also matters is the degree of autonomy a village committee possesses in generating the collective business income.

These two economic factors, a village committee's economic strength and the degree of autonomy in gaining such economic strength, are the two key points addressed in the empirical chapters, while the instrumental official purpose of holding direct elections in China's countryside and the institutional weakness in such elections form the very foundation of the discussion of this thesis on the authoritarian control in village elections. Before we move onto the empirical investigation, in the following two chapters, we step back from the democratic development in China's countryside and draw our expectations both from existing studies on democratisation in other countries and on village elections in China. We can then check whether the expectations drawn based on existing studies match the empirical reality in China's countryside in the empirical chapters that follow.

Chapter 3 : Theoretical perspectives on democratisation and subnational democracy

As pointed out in Chapter 1, this research is triggered by the contradiction between the conventional wisdom and the empirical reality in China's village elections. According to the conventional wisdom - the modernisation school of thought (Lipset, 1959, 1994) - there is a positive relationship between economic development and democracy. In other words, economic growth contributes to the establishment and consolidation of democracy in a country. The empirical reality in China's village elections that I observed in a county of Guangdong Province does not demonstrate a simple positive relationship between economic development and democracy. Before we start the empirical investigation, to better understand the convention wisdom, existing studies on the conventional wisdom and further development on applying the conventional wisdom to empirical realities in different regimes are reviewed and discussed in this chapter.

This chapter is thus organised as follows. To begin with, theories of democratisation are reviewed in the first section. Though the key focus is on the modernisation school of thought and the further development of this school, to draw a comprehensive picture of the story of democratisation, studies that look at contingent factors are also reviewed briefly. The second section reviews studies on applying the democratisation theories when explaining new political phenomena - authoritarian regimes with periodic elections. Since the end of the Cold War, such regimes proliferated and divergent political trajectories have been observed in these regimes. Scholarly attention has been devoted to the understanding of the role and function of elections in such regimes and, more importantly, socio-economic factors contributing to the divergent political trajectories. In the third section, the attention is shifted from theories explaining national level politics to studies explaining subnational level politics. Studies exploring the influence of socio-economic factors on subnational democracy or authoritarianism are reviewed and discussed in this section. Democracy or authoritarianism varies not only on the national level but also on the subnational level. And in reality, variance of politics at the subnational level might be as great as that at the national level. For example, prominent examples of the variance of

government performance at the subnational level are found in southern Italy (Putnam, 1993) and in China (Remick, 2002). A shift to studies on subnational level politics is also related to this research enquiry, the focus of which is on grassroots level elections. Finally, based on the thorough review and discussion of existing studies on the conventional wisdom and the development of such studies in the previous sections, contributions of this research enquiry to existing studies of democratisation and subnational politics are laid out.

3.1 Theories of democratisation

The requisites of the existence and stability of democracy have been a leading puzzle in the field of political science. Why do democracies rise in some countries but fail in others? There are generally two types of explanation for the rise and fall of democracy. Some attribute the democratisation process to the structural conditions of a given society. The most influential school of thought – the modernisation theory – focuses on the economic development of a society. Starting from the theoretical link between economic development and democracy contributed by Lispet (1959), further studies have expanded to look at more fundamental factors, such as income inequality, cultural change as a result of economic growth and economic performance.

This stream of literature is reviewed and discussed in the first part of this section. In addition to the structuralist explanations, some others emphasise the importance of non-structural contingent factors, such as international climate, leadership commitment to democracy, and contingent events. A comprehensive story of democratisation also requires an understanding of these non-structuralist explanations of democratisation and thus this stream is briefly reviewed in the second part of this section.

3.1.1 Structuralist explanations of democratisation

Lipset (1959), in his seminal piece of work in 1959, points out that economic development enhances the likelihood of a country establishing and maintaining democracy, because increased wealth fosters conditions that are conducive to democratic development and stability. These conditions are a better-educated population, empowering the working class, enlarging size of the middle class, changing political values and the appearance of voluntary organisations. Moreover, these fundamental conditions should develop co-ordinately in order for a stable

democracy to establish. As can be seen, in Lipset's account (1959), economic development is used as a proxy for the associated changes in a society as a result of modernisation. However, Lipset does not regard increased wealth and the associated changes in the structural conditions of a society as being either necessary or sufficient for democratic development and stability. As Lipset (1959, p.103) says: "this conclusion does not justify the optimistic liberal's hope that an increase in wealth, in the size of the middle class, in education, and other related factors will necessarily mean the spread of democracy or the stabilizing of democracy". Lipset's contribution is the setting up of the theoretical link between economic development and democracy, the validity of which has been tested extensively by empirical study. Some studies do find a positive relationship between economic development and democracy (e.g., Barro, 1999; Cutright, 1963), while others do not find such a relationship (e.g., Arat, 1988). For example, Arat (1988, p. 33) questions the evolutionary thesis of democracy proposed by the modernisation school and points out that as the longitudinal analysis in his study shows: "democracy is not a one-way ladder that countries climb as their economy and social structures develop".

One of the most influential contributions to the modernisation theory is Przeworski and Limongi's (1997) distinction between endogenous democratisation and exogenous democratisation. The robustness of the theoretical relationship between economic development and democracy is questioned by Przeworski and Limongi (1997). They distinguish two distinct versions of the relationship between economic development and democracy. Economic development brings about democracy, which is the endogenous version. There is another possibility that democracy may be established independently of economic development, but once established, it is more likely to sustain in more affluent countries, which is the exogenous version. They argue that the endogenous democratisation has no empirical basis, while the data support the exogenous version: "once established, democracies are likely to die in poor countries and certain to survive in wealthy ones" (1997, p.167). Moreover, they also refute the view that: "dictatorships generate development while development leads to democracy" (1997, p.177). Because if countries developing under authoritarian rule do not democratise before reaching a certain threshold of per capita income, further economic development will strengthen the dictatorships and reduce the probability of transitions to democracy. Boix and Stokes (2003) challenge

Prezeworski and Limongi's argument about endogenous democratisation on theoretical and empirical grounds. They argue that very few cases of dictatorships at a higher level income do not refute endogenous democratisation, but instead are in support of it, because many dictatorships democratise at the early stage of economic development before reaching the higher level income. Hence, development increases both the probability of democratisation and the probability of consolidation of the established democracy.

In addition to the aforementioned empirical investigations of the robustness of the relationship between economic development and democracy, some research endeavours to find out the mechanisms behind the relationship. Boix and Stokes (2003) find out that per capita income, based on their data, acts mostly as a proxy for other more fundamental structural factors, such as income equality, diversified economy and industrialization. The key causal mechanism is income equality. Per capita income tends to rise in countries where income is becoming more equal. Compared to the redistributive scheme supported by the median voter in a society with highly unequal income distribution, the redistributive scheme in a society with equal income distribution would deprive the rich of less income and thus the rich are more willing to accept the democratic tax structure which is less expensive. Hence, it is not income growth but income equality that causes countries to establish and sustain democracy.

The link between inequality and regime change is also supported in Acemoglu and Robinson's (2001, 2006) model which focuses more on the strategic interaction between regimes and their opponents over redistribution. In essence, as they argue, the transition and consolidation of democracy is determined by the struggle and balance of political power between the rich and the poor. The threat of revolution by the poor can force the elite to democratise, while the elite have the option of mounting a coup if the democracy is redistributive, causing switches to nondemocratic regimes. Several factors influence the balance of power between these two groups. Firstly, sources of income and composition of wealth impact the progress of democratisation. Specifically, democracy is more likely to rise and consolidate in industrialised societies where the elites' wealth is mostly in the form of physical and human capital, than in agrarian societies where elites invest more in land. Secondly, the middle class

plays an important role in the process of democratisation by functioning as a buffer between elites and citizens. Last but not least, inequality is a crucial factor influencing regime stability. In a society with a higher level of inequality, both coup and revolution are more attractive and less expensive, leading to political instability either in the form of frequent oscillation between democracy and dictatorship or constant repression of social unrest. Democracy is more likely to consolidate at a society with a lower level of inequality. Acemoglu and Robinson (2001, 2006) pay more attention to broad socio-economic contexts within which democracy is established and consolidated and the actions of political actors within the system. All in all: "whether democracy succeeds or fails continues to depend significantly on the choices, behaviors, and decisions of political leaders and groups" (Lipset, 1994, p.18).

Cultural change is another important causal mechanism linking the theoretical relationship between economic development and democracy (Inglehart, 1988; Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Economic development brings about cultural changes which are conducive to democracy. More specifically, the rise of industrial society promotes a shift away from traditional to secular-rational values, while the rise of postindustrial society promotes a shift to more trust, tolerance, well-being and postmaterialist values (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Though economic development tends to push cultural changes in a general direction, it does not mean cultural convergence, as cultural changes in different countries are shaped by countries' different cultural heritages. In support of the theory of democratic culture, in an editorial book published by Chu, Diamond, Nathan and Shin (2008), they argue that a key link missing between economic development and democracy, when trying to explain East Asian political development, is the change in mass political culture. Based on the East Asian Barometer survey, Chu, Diamond and Nathan (2008) point out that the support for authoritarian rule is dwindling while democracy has yet to earn enough support among the public in East Asia. Moreover, there is a time lag between economic development and the perceived value changes, and the perceived value change is also influenced by a country's specific cultural heritage. "Citizens understand democracy differently in different countries and in various ways within any given country" (2008, p.36). The lagging behind of the mass democratic values and beliefs may well explain the fact that though East Asia is one of the world's most

economically dynamic regions, democracy does not seem to take root in East Asia, especially when looking at the cases of Singapore and China.

In addition to economic development, economic performance can also influence regime stability and shape regime outcomes. As pointed out by Lipset (1994) in his revisit to the social requisites of democracy, in addition to the system's efficiency in modernisation, the stability of a democracy also depends on the legitimacy of the political system which is influenced by effectiveness. As Lipset (1994) points out, in Asian countries, a prolonged period of effectiveness is gained through constant economic growth, which in return gives legitimacy to the political systems. Levitsky and Way (2010) further point out that economic growth can bolster public support and expand the resources for patronage and public-sector salaries, while economic crises can undermine public support, trigger mass protest and significantly reduce resources available for incumbents to allocate for patronage and public-sector salaries. Thus, economic crises might destabilise regimes, while economic growth might stabilise regimes, regardless of the regime types. On the one hand, poor democracies, as pointed out by Przeworski and Limongi (1997), are extremely vulnerable to bad economic performance. On the other hand, though constant economic growth can stabilise established democracies, it can also sustain dictatorships if transitions to democracy do not happen before per capita income rises to a threshold level (Przeworski & Limongi, 1997), because the effectiveness gained through constant economic growth gives legitimacy to the dictatorships. Hence, the view (Samuel & Dominguez, 1975) that dictatorships generate development which then leads to democracy is refuted by Przeworsky and Limongi (1997). Rather, as they argue (Przeworski & Limongi, 1997), in order to promote democracy, we should promote democracy, instead of dictatorships.

3.1.2 Non-structuralist explanations of democratisation

The structural explanations of democratisation might render an impression of inevitability of democratisation as long as certain socio-economic conditions are ripe. However, the second wave and the third wave of democracy might well present an alternative explanation - the influence of external environment. Democracy is contagious in the sense that autocracies surrounded by democracies are more likely to democratise than other countries (Gleditsch & Ward, 2006). This finding holds even

when some structural factors, that is, the level of economic development and the strength of civil society, are controlled for (Doorenspleet, 2001). Stressing the importance of external environment does not preclude domestic structural factors being important. It only means that the prospect for democracy is not only affected by domestic but also regional and international factors.

External influences in the neighbouring societies or in the wider international environment can: "change the relative power of actors and groups as well as the evaluations or relative payoffs for particular institutional arrangements" (Gleditsch & Ward, 2006, p. 930). The diffusion of democracy also has to do with the collapse of the Soviet Union, which leaves no alternative to the liberal West Model, and it then created a wish for peripheral states to imitate the liberal capitalist democratic regimes (e.g., Schmitz & Sell, 1999; Whitehead, 1996). The diffusion of the western democratic model also has an instrumental logic in the sense that in order to receive scarce development resources mostly provided by the West for domestic economic development, many autocrats put efforts into adopting some forms of democratic institutions (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997). deLisle (2008) in comparing the international pressures faced by China nowadays with those faced by Taiwan in the 1980s during its democratic breakthrough, points out that Taiwan faced a global trend of the third wave of democratisation beginning in early 1970s, while China nowadays faces a new international agenda – the war on terrorism. Because of the US's need of China's support in the new international agenda, the Chinese government does not need to recede on the issue related to political reform under international pressure, especially the pressure from the US.

In addition to the influence of external environments, the role of leadership and contingent events might have a decisive role in shaping regime outcomes (Przeworski, 1986), which have been given less explanatory weight in the literature than structural factors. Political leaders' commitment to democracy and compromise might be a crucial factor affecting the opening to democracy (e.g., Fish, 1998). For example, in Taiwan's 1986 successful transition to democracy, the support and tolerance of democracy of the key elites, especially the then-President Chiang Ching-Kuo, is considered a necessary condition for the democratic breakthrough in Taiwan, while

the lack of support and commitment of the key elites to democracy in China can also explain China's failed 1989 transition (Gilley & Diamond, 2008).

However, though political elites' commitment and attitude to democracy is crucial for the opening of opportunities for democratic transitions, it might only affect the exact timing and nature of the transition, that is, stable and peaceful negotiation between the mass and the authoritarian rulers, or violent crackdown on the authoritarian regimes by revolution. International climate and domestic structural factors might be more crucial in deciding the possibility of such a transition. For example, in the case of Taiwan, before its democratic breakthrough in 1986, it was besieged by serious domestic problems - poor economic performance and social unrest caused by business groups who were marginalised because of the ruling party's exclusionary strategy - and international pressures - the stripping of the Republic of China's UN representation and the global trend of the third wave democratisation (see Gilley & Diamond, 2008). We cannot ignore the fact that the political elites' commitment to and tolerance of political pluralism and democracy in Taiwan played an important role. Nonetheless, the actual choices made by the political elites in the 1980s in Taiwan were heavily influenced by these international and domestic structural factors. In mainland China, as pointed out by Gilley (2008), the political elites' intolerance of democracy can partly explain the regime's suppression of 1989 student protests and the lagging behind of introducing political reform and thus China, faced with different domestic and international contexts, might not be lucky enough to have a similar smooth transition to democracy as Taiwan did in the 1980s. Yet, the destiny towards either genuine democracy or some sort of hybrid democracy is inevitable because of the continuing changes in domestic structural factors conducive to democratisation (Diamond, 2008).

To sum up, economic development is considered a proxy for more fundamental changes in a society that are conducive to the rise and consolidation of democracy in structuralist explanations of democratisation. These fundamental changes could be income equality, the change of mass political culture that is more supportive of democracy, and good economic performance. On the other hand, non-structural explanations stress the effects of contingent factors, such as international climate,

neighbouring countries' regimes, and political elites' commitment and attitude to democracy. These two streams of explanations are not competing. Structural factors decide whether a transition to democracy is on the way, while the actual timing of such a transition is affected more by contingent factors. The nature of such a transition, a violent toppling down of an authoritarian regime accompanied by oscillation between democracy and authoritarianism or a smooth transition to and the consolidation of democracy, is decided both by socio-economic structural factors and contingent factors. Applying these explanations of democratisation to China's village elections, would constant economic growth in China help the elections at the grassroots level to create momentum for further democratic reform in higher level governments and eventually break the monopoly of power by the Chinese Communist Party? Answering this question requires an understanding of the role and function of elections in non-democratic countries, to which we now turn.

3.2 Theories of regime transitions in authoritarianism

When considering elections in non-democratic countries, we need to begin reconsidering the concept of democracy. In studies of democratisation, democracy has long been considered a continuum, ranging from full dictatorship to full democracy, those standing in between considered transitional regimes which will eventually democratise through a set sequence of stages. This transition paradigm, as it is termed by Carothers (2002), is questioned by the record of experience in many countries that are categorised as transitional regimes. As Carothers (2002) argues, the majority of third-wave countries show no clear direction in their transitions – they are neither fully dictatorial nor moving towards democracy. Some transitional regimes seem to be stable with no sign of reverting back to dictatorship on the one hand and heading toward democracy on the other (Levitsky & Way, 2010). It is thus time to consider the grey-zone of democracy as types of regime rather than transitional regimes which will eventually disappear in history.

We also need to let go a very important but inappropriate assumption of transition paradigm: "achieving regular, genuine elections will not only confer democratic legitimacy on new governments but continuously deepen political participation and democratic accountability" (Carothers, 2002, p.15). In many transitional regimes, elections do not seem to deepen political participation and participation might only be

limited to voting. Political competition might also be conducted on a skewed field that is in favour of the authoritarian rulers. In some cases, "elections in even very repressive authoritarian regimes are often true competitions that help to stabilise the regime" (Lust-Okar, 2006, p. 456). As proved by Geddes's study (1999), among the three forms of authoritarian regimes, single-party regimes tend to co-opt challengers and survive longer than military and personalist regimes, even in the face of severe economic crisis, which supports the idea that elections might increase the longevity of authoritarian regimes.

3.2.1 The role of elections in authoritarian regimes

In contrast to elections in democratic countries - as a threat that holds governments accountable - elections serve different roles in authoritarianism. Elections are an institutional tool that can strengthen the tie among members of elites on the one hand and thwart or co-opt opposition challenge on the other. Through the spread of the spoils of office among elites (Lust-Okar, 2006), elites are tied closely to the regime and will not be a threat to the regime stability. On the other hand, by allowing outsiders to compete for the office with limited jurisdiction and decision-making capacity, elections allow authoritarian rulers to divide opposition forces. Those who want to benefit from the spoils of government might have an incentive to join the government (Levitsky & Way, 2010). These elections in authoritarian regimes might achieve an overwhelming victory by the use of blatant and excessive manipulation in elections, which can shape the subsequent expectations and behaviours of various political and social actors (Simpser, 2012). It is the excessive manipulation in election of such regimes that conveys an image of strength, discourages opposition supporters from voting, thwarts opposition challenge, and deters political elites from defection.

Second, elections might also be used as an informational tool. Equipped with information gathered through the poll, authoritarian rulers might be able to identify their bases of support and also the opposition bases of support (Brownlee, 2007; Magaloni, 2006) in order to manipulate the ballot results for next election. Elections could also provide information about the loyalty and competence of local elites to the national leaders (Birney, 2007). For example, China's villages have long been troubled by deteriorated relations between villagers and party secretaries, because party secretaries possess unchecked power. The implementation of the two-ballot

system in some areas of China (Li, 1999) - before being nominated by local party committees, party secretaries need to pass the vote of confidence by villagers or village representatives - helps township governments to identify incompetent party secretaries and enhance the legitimacy of the party at grassroots level.

Third, elections can help authoritarian rulers to establish legitimacy at home or abroad (Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009). "By opening the peaks of state power to multiparty elections, electoral authoritarian regimes establish the primacy of democratic legitimation" (Schedler, 2006, p. 13), even if elections are marred by repression, manipulation and fraud. Regardless of the different claims about the nature of elections in authoritarian regimes, the authoritarian rulers' desire is "to reduce their risk of violent removal from office" (Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009, p.405) by reducing asymmetries of information that would result in bargaining failure between autocrats and their rivals or by offering an alternative route to power for those who might otherwise launch a coup or revolt (Cox, 2008).

3.2.2 Electoral manipulation and fraud in competitive authoritarian regimes

As mentioned in the previous section, by institutionalising elections, the desire of authoritarian rulers is to legitimise the authoritarian governance and stabilise the regimes. In order to achieve this end, elections in such regimes are subject to manipulation and fraud. Methods of manipulation and fraud in elections conducted in authoritarian regimes are explored in this section.

To begin with, it is important to point out the differences between this type of regime that combines authoritarian governance with periodic elections and two extreme types of regime, full authoritarianism and full democracies. Levitsky and Way (2002; 2010) term this type of regime which combines periodic elections with authoritarian governance as 'competitive authoritarianism'. Competitive authoritarian regimes differ from both full authoritarian regimes and full democracies. In full authoritarian regimes, political parties exist only to exercise authoritarian governance. If there is any periodic election, the election might only be formality - there is no real power contestation. Compared to full authoritarian regimes, elections in competitive authoritarian regimes are real in the sense that elections are the primary means of gaining power regardless of the levels such elections are held. Opponents can

compete seriously with incumbents supported by authoritarian rulers for the power of governance and they do win from time to time. Thus, elections in competitive authoritarian regimes are not merely a formality. On the other hand, compared to full democracies, competitive authoritarianism does not satisfy even the minimal conditions of democracy. Political participation is only limited to voting and the playing field of the elections is skewed to favour the interest of incumbents. The ability of opposition forces to compete in elections is seriously handicapped by incumbents' privileged access to resources, media and laws (Levitsky & Way, 2002). Thus, it is in essence authoritarian.

In order to understand the complex frontier between electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism, Schedler (2002), building upon Dahl (1971), summarises seven dimensions of democratic choice and the associated conditions of democracy on each dimension. In competitive authoritarianism, manipulation and electoral fraud could happen in any of these dimensions and hollow the democratic heart out of the electoral contestations. More specifically, on the object of choice, citizens are not fully empowered in competitive authoritarianism, as authoritarian rulers might only open subordinate positions to elections or limit the jurisdiction of elective officials. On the range of choice, freedom of supply might be undermined in competitive authoritarian regimes in the sense that authoritarian incumbents can limit the range offered to voters by marginalising and disorganising opponents. On the formation of preferences, freedom of demand is also affected, as by limiting opponents' access to media and money, authoritarian incumbents could prevent voters from acquiring fair knowledge about choices and thus induce biased formation of preferences. On the agents of choice, universal suffrage enjoyed by citizens in electoral democracy might be restricted in competitive authoritarianism through formal or informal arrangements. When expressing preferences, citizens in competitive authoritarian regimes might be subject to intimidation or vote buying. When aggregating preferences, the simple democratic value of one-person-one-vote might be violated by electoral fraud in the form of stuffing ballot boxes, padding the vote totals of favoured candidates or forging the ballot result. Real democratic elections always come with consequences, while in competitive authoritarian regimes the democratic value of the elections is discounted as authoritarian rulers might prevent the elected officers from exercising real power or even from taking office. Though the menu of manipulation is long,

authoritarian rulers might not deploy all tactics on the menu. As pointed out by Diamond (2002), if political domination can be secured in a more subtle way such as at the ballot box, deploying levels of violence and intimidation is not necessary and might be risky.

It is important to note that electoral fraud is not confined to authoritarian regimes. It is found in some liberal democracies in their early stages of democratisation. For example, vote buying was the key source of electoral fraud in nineteenth century United Kingdom elections (e.g., Cox, 1986; Hoppen, 1996; Lehoucq, 2003). In nineteenth century German elections, vote fraud and repression were more serious in areas with a concentrated economic structure, because employers could use the most important instrument to control the electoral choice of their workers – the threat of layoffs (Mares & Zhu, 2011).

On the other side, opposition forces in competitive authoritarian regimes are not passive. In contrast to opposition forces in democratic regimes where "democracy is the only game in town" (Mainwaring, 2003, p. 9), opposition parties in competitive authoritarian regimes have to play a dual game (Mainwaring, 2003) – an electoral game aiming at winning votes or seats and a regime game aiming at influencing the regime outcome. In the electoral game, opposition parties have to deploy conventional strategies aiming at vote-maximisation and controlling the legislature, while in the regime game under a skewed playing field, they have to resort to extra-institutional strategies aiming at delivering their capability of protecting their votes and seats (see Levitsky & Way, 2010). These extra-institutional strategies include organising mass protests, boycotting at least one round of elections to undermine the legitimacy of the elections or mobilising voters and thugs to fight back in case of repression. Strategies employed by opponents are to convey the message that nastiest levels of repression by authoritarian rulers will entail risks. Alternatively, opposition parties might adopt a coalitional strategy - joining the government - as it might be the only viable way for the opposition parties to survive and keep power on the skewed playing field.

As can be seen, regime outcomes in competitive authoritarianism can be considered a power struggle between authoritarian rulers and opposition forces. The authoritarian rulers aim at manipulating the elections to the extent that the authoritarian governance

is not undermined, while the opposition forces strive to not only win the elections but also change the regime outcomes. Would authoritarian rulers in competitive authoritarianism always succeed in using elections to stabilise the regimes? If not, under what conditions would opposition forces succeed in playing the regime game? In order to answer these questions, we move on to the theories of regime transitions in competitive authoritarianism.

3.2.3 Explaining the regime trajectories of competitive authoritarianism

Though elections might stabilise authoritarian regimes, as is supported by empirical evidence (Geddes, 1999; Lust-Okar, 2006): "the transformations of Taiwan, Mexico, and Senegal in the 1990s show that competitive authoritarian regimes can become democracies" (Diamond, 2002, p.34). In some authoritarian regimes, elections create momentum toward democracy, while in some other authoritarian regimes elections reinforce the existing authoritarian regimes. It is thus important to study authoritarian elections in order to distinguish elections that democratise the regimes from those that stabilise the regimes.

Levitsky and Way (2002; 2010) point out that since the end of the Cold War, competitive authoritarian regimes followed three distinct paths of regime transitions. The first path is successful democratisation, the most notable case being Taiwan. The second path is unstable authoritarianism, in which cases authoritarian incumbents are replaced by opponents but the opponents inherit the combination of periodic elections with a skewed playing field and authoritarian governance. Countries such as Haiti, Kenya and Belarus fall into this category. The third path is stable authoritarianism, in which cases authoritarian incumbents can either stay in power or have their chosen successors remain in power. Russia is a good example of this third path. By studying these authoritarian regimes, the attention has been shifted from looking purely at the process of democratic institution building to stressing the importance of authoritarian rulers' capacity to hold onto power, which has been largely ignored by existing studies (Way, 2005).

In their approach to regime trajectories of competitive authoritarianism, they synthesise both international and domestic factors. More specifically, two main factors - ties to the West and the strength of governing-party and state organisations -

contribute to the different political trajectories of competitive authoritarian regimes. Linkages to the West raise the costs of building and sustaining authoritarian governance and thus competitive authoritarian regimes with high linkages to the West are more likely to democratise. When Western linkages are weak, regime outcomes hinge on domestic factors, particularly the state and party's capacity to resist opposition challenges. Authoritarian stability is more likely to exist in regimes with strong state and party strength, while unstable competitive authoritarianism is more likely to appear in regimes with weak organisational power. State economic control could be used as a substitute for authoritarian state and party control. If resources are highly concentrated in state hands, a state can use powerful economic tools to compel compliance and punish opposition.

A key variable captured by their study is the control of the state over economy. Greater scope of state power over economy could make it easier for autocrats to sustain the authoritarian governance (Way, 2005). The control of economic resources could compel compliant behaviours from the elite and deter defection of members of the elite, as the political career and economic wellbeing of the members of the elite can be affected and decided easily by the rulers. The control of economic resources also enables authoritarian rulers to sustain the proper function of the extensive party infrastructure which can penetrate the national territory and society. Looking from the side of the opposition forces, because most economic resources are in state hands, there are limited independent resources that could breed independent media and opposition forces. As career, business prospects and livelihoods of most of the population are affected by the authoritarian rulers, opposition forces might be easily co-opted by the rulers in order to maintain power and enjoy the benefits and patronage of holding onto power. For example, the state's control over economy could explain the existence of a weak middle class in China. The middle class, especially business groups, are nurtured by and co-opted into the regime and thus are more prone to protecting the authoritarian regime rather than going against it (Solinger, 2008). There is then limited ground to breed opposition forces. Finally, control over economy also offers authoritarian rulers a powerful economic tool to manipulate and steal elections, such as, buying votes or hiring thugs to destroy opposition ballots or threaten opposition supporters.

In a nutshell, the key variable that might tip the balance in a power struggle between authoritarian rulers and opposition forces in competitive authoritarianism is state economic control. However, these studies explain regime transitions solely from a national perspective, while democracy or authoritarianism might also develop differently at the subnational level. The political dynamic of subnational politics are certainly different from that of national politics. Subnational economic and political circumstances as well as the relationship between subnational governments and the national government all affect the extent of democracy at the subnational level. Could state economic control be applied to explaining subnational democracy? Studies of subnational democracy could help to answer this question. The shift to the studies of subnational politics also matches the focus of this research enquiry - elections at the grassroots level.

3.3 Explaining variance of subnational democracy

Scholars of subnational politics have explored the variance of subnational politics on a wide range of issues, such as the institutional performance of subnational governments, local policy implementation and local public good provisions, etc. For example, Putnam (1993) found that among Italy's twenty regions, the northern regional governments as a group are considerably better than their southern counterparts on the level of institutional performance evaluated along three dimensions – policy process, policy pronouncements and policy implementation. In China, Remick (2002) found that during the early 1990s, to deter tax evasion, county officials in Tianjin in the north used strikingly different approaches from their counterparts in Guangdong in the south. Even in two villages located right next to each other, the difference in public facilities can be startling, one with muddy, rutted and poorly-maintained roads while the other having beautifully-paved, wide roads (Tsai, 2007a, 2007b). The variance can be attributed to many causes; to name two, strong traditions of civic engagement (Putnam, 1993) and the existence of local solidary groups (Tsai, 2007a, 2007b).

The development of the Third Wave countries, especially the Latin American countries and post-communist countries, shifts scholars' attention to the study of subnational democratisation. A key fact of the third wave democratisation is that national democratisation transforming politics at the national level creates little

pressure for subnational democratisation and in some cases, leaves subnational authoritarianism intact (Gibson, 2005). We cannot assume that democracy, once established, will develop evenly within a nation. Thus, it is necessary for democratisation theorists not only to look at national democratisation but also subnational democratisation.

However, there are several obstacles that hinder academic study of subnational democracy. First, studies of subnational democratisation need to consider the institutional context of subnational politics - the national politics - and the systemic interactions between centre and subnational governments (Gibson, 2010), which makes subnational democracy and subnational authoritarianism difficult to categorise and measure. The challenge is exacerbated if we study the varying nature and extent of subnational authoritarianism across different countries, as the patterns of the variance in one country might follow a different logic from those in another country (Sidel, 2012). The second challenge comes with the necessity suggested by Gibson (2010) to look beyond the formal institutional structure and measure the actual power dynamics at work in subnational political system. Especially in the context of national level democracies, subnational regimes are almost always democratic in one sense: they install more or less the formal democratic institutional structure such as multiparty elections, real opposition parties, some alternative sources of information and non-trivial levels of freedom of speech. Also, even the most authoritarian subnational regimes might contain significant doses of both authoritarianism and democracy (Gervasoni, 2010). Last but not least, the aforementioned challenges also constrain the possibilities for generalisation and extrapolation of the findings to a wider population beyond national terrain. Also, as Sidel (2012) points out, the ongoing economic and institutional changes in the countries being studied for subnational democracy and authoritarianism limit the ability of scholars to generate hypotheses and results that can stand the test of time.

Nonetheless, scholars endeavour to overcome the obstacles and explain the patterns of variance of subnational democracy or subnational authoritarianism. Similarly to studies of national democratisation, two types of explanations, structuralist and non-structuralist, can be found in the studies of subnational democratisation. McMann (2006), in her comparative study of four regions selected from two countries, Russia

and Kyrgyzstan, attributes varying patterns of local democracy to economic autonomy: "the ability to earn a living independent of the state" (p.28). Economic autonomy operates both at individual and regional levels. At individual level, individual calculation of whether one's economic autonomy is sufficient to protect one from government harassment comes before taking action. This calculation is based on one's current means of earning income and the possibility of finding a different job. As McMann argues: "opportunities for jobs beyond the reach of local government are determined by an individual's skills, as in the case of doctors, but also by the extent of environmental economic autonomy" (p.31). Environmental economic autonomy exists in the case where opportunities for earning income and profits exist beyond the reach of local authorities. In provinces that offer greater economic autonomy, citizens are more likely to challenge local authorities and be active in civic activities. Moreover, in such provinces, the frequency of punishments is lower and government harassment is less effective. Thus: "economic autonomy is the foremost means by which capitalism enhances people's ability to exercise their democratic rights" (p.4). In other words, variance in subnational authoritarianism is determined by the ability of local government to constrain the economic autonomy of citizens, voters, local state agents, and prospective challengers. The importance of socio-economic structural conditions in determining political outcomes is stressed in McMann's study, and local government economic control is singled out as a key variable that enables local government to maintain authoritarian governance.

In contrast to McMann's approach (2006), Hale (2003) stresses the role of elites in contingent decision making which creates long-term effects through processes of path-dependence. In his survey of machine politics on the 89 regions of Russian Federation up until and including the 1999 Duma elections, he stresses the capacities of the local governors in making maximum use of the opportunities left by the Soviet socioeconomic inheritance and Russia's post-communist transition to build powerful political machines. "While economic structure and concentration is sometimes treated as an independent variable influencing governor power, it is important to note that governors themselves typically possessed a good deal of influence over how their economies came to be arranged through the reform process" (Hale, 2003, p. 241) . Instead of treating economic contexts as a given, Hale (2003) argues that subnational authoritarian rulers construct local economic contexts, using not only subnational

economic resources but also supra-local resources. Hale's approach fits nicely with the non-structuralist explanations that emphasise the importance of political leadership in determining political outcomes.

However, these two approaches are not competing. In Sidel's (2012) detailed case study of two Philippine provinces, he confirms the two lines of argument above in explaining subnational variance on authoritarianism. The existence of subnational authoritarianism is associated with constrained economic autonomy of local citizens and concentration of control over local economy by subnational authoritarian rulers. The longevity, nature and extent of subnational authoritarianism are also continually shaped by the capabilities of subnational authoritarian rulers in achieving and maintaining the form of economic control necessary for authoritarian governance through the use of local and supra-local resources. More importantly, Sidel goes further and adds additional important lines of arguments. In the case of Cebu where the local political machine and economic empire can be passed on within the family of the authoritarian rulers in dynastic form, the firmly subnational authoritarian control over the local economy is rooted in "secure property rights, proprietary wealth, and the private legal realm of the market" (2012, p.19). Standing in contrast to Cebu, Cavite's weakness, insecurity and instability of property rights with a very problematic history of land settlement and a highly lucrative set of illegal economies contribute to the single-generation, gangster-ish and highly violent authoritarian rule. Variance in the nature of predominant economic activities - more importantly, legal or illegal economic activities, security of property rights – is crucial in determining the nature of subnational authoritarian rule. Thus, the investment strategies of subnational authoritarian rulers have extremely important political implications for their political future and those of their families. Thus, socio-economic structural conditions are important, while the ability of the authoritarian rulers to construct the socio-economic conditions that are conducive to their authoritarian rule is equally important.

To recall, when explaining the regime trajectories of competitive authoritarianism, Levitsky and Way (2002; 2010) point out that state economic control enables authoritarian rulers to sustain authoritarian governance. When it comes to subnational authoritarianism, according to McMann (2006), local government economic control affects whether people exercise their democratic rights and thus enables local

government to sustain their authoritarian governance. Considering China's village elections operate within authoritarian central and local governments, would economic control by the local government also explain the extent of democracy in such elections? If so, would economic growth have a similar positive effect on the development of such elections, according to the modernisation school of thought? By answering these questions, this research enquiry intends to contribute to continuing debates in the studies of national and subnational democratisation. We now proceed to the contributions of this study.

3.4 Contributions of this study to the debates on existing studies of national and subnational democratisation

This study investigates the relationship between socioeconomic conditions and the extent of authoritarian control in grassroots elections under an authoritarian setting. This study is not only interested in the nature of the relationship but also the underlying mechanisms behind the relationship and the political dynamism affected by the socioeconomic conditions. More specifically, this study intends to investigate whether a simple positive relationship between economic development and democracy can be found in China's grassroots elections. Moreover, inspired by existing studies of elections in non-democratic countries, this study also applies the concept of economic autonomy to China's village elections. In addition to economic development, economic control by the local government might explain the extent of authoritarian control in China's grassroots elections. Taking into account the fact that such elections operate under an authoritarian system and the official purpose of such elections is not to break the CCP's monopoly of political power, the playing field of such elections is skewed to favour the interest of local government and ultimately to support the CCP's authoritarian rule. Economic control by the local government might also be a crucial factor in deciding whether the local government are able to manipulate the elections to the extent that their official purpose is fulfilled. In this regard, this study is able to contribute to the continuing debates in the studies of national and subnational democratisation in the following ways.

First, by exploring the relationship between economic development and democracy, this study contributes to the studies of modernisation theory. This study not only investigates the nature of the relationship but also unravels the underlying

mechanisms behind the relationship. Through detailed case study of twenty-six villages, this study investigates how socioeconomic conditions affect the preferences, choices and behaviours of actors, which in turn influences the power balance in the political competition. In this way, this study adds valuable findings - the political dynamism affected by socio-economic conditions - into the existing studies of modernisation theory. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the adding of the new concept - economic autonomy - helps to extend the application of modernisation theory to hybrid regimes that show no clear sign of democratising. In those hybrid regimes that have yet to be democratised, the control of economic resources by the states might help to explain why constant economic development seems to stabilise the authoritarian governance, instead of democratising the regimes.

Second, this study also contributes to existing debates on local elections in non-democratic countries. Though it is not in the interest of the rulers in non-democratic countries to promote democracy per se, we still see a surging number of authoritarian regimes that install periodic elections. Also, in some of these regimes, these elections create momentum towards democratisation, while in others, these elections seem to legitimise the authoritarian governance and increase the longevity of the authoritarian regimes. This study of grassroots elections in authoritarian China helps to contribute to our understanding of the conditions under which elections in non-democratic countries will create momentum for democratisation. By adding one important variable - economic autonomy, this study shows that in nondemocratic countries where local elections are introduced, if economic resources are controlled by local government, constant economic development would strengthen the capacity of the local government to control the elections. In this setting, elections will only serve to stabilise the regimes in that elections help on the one hand to legitimise the governance of candidates supported by the authoritarian rulers and on the other hand to identify and co-opt opponents. These findings can enrich our understanding of the function and political dynamism of local elections in non-democratic countries.

Third, sharing similar research aims with existing studies on subnational authoritarianism, this study provides additional empirical evidence and findings to enrich our understanding of subnational democracy in an authoritarian state. Existing studies on subnational authoritarianism and democracy focus predominantly on

subnational governments in democratic countries, such as Mexico, Russia and the Philippines. Formal democratic institutions have been established at the national level of these countries, while the subnational governments underneath might operate under different regimes. In all these cases, as they are under the pressure from the centre, subnational level governments, even the most authoritarian ones, will always have some features of democracy installed. However, the subject of this study - China - is the other way round. Formal democratic institutions: multiparty elections, real opposition parties, certain level of freedom of press and speech, to name a few, are missing at the national level. Judging from the national level politics, China is an authoritarian one party regime. Moreover, the democratisation process is also unique in the sense that it is a top-down process imposed by the central government, though the initiation was first invented at the bottom by peasants, as is introduced in Chapter 2. The official purpose of holding such grassroots elections is instrumental in the sense that it seems to be the only way of solving political anarchy and restore the legitimacy of the ruling power at the grassroots level.

Given the authoritarian nature of the regime and the instrumental benefits of holding such elections by the central government, the centre will only promote grassroots democracy to a level that it will not jeopardise its one-party rule. This will certainly have a bearing on the actual implementation of village elections at the grassroots level. Local government officials who have the responsibility to offer guidance and assistance to village committee elections, might only support and assist the implementation of such elections to the level that the elections will not affect their control of the political power and their political career prospects. Socio-economic factors affect the local government ability to manipulate the elections to favour their interest and ultimately the CCP's authoritarian rule. By studying the relationship between socio-economic factors and the extent of authoritarian control in such elections and the political dynamism, this study is able to provide additional valuable findings about subnational democracy in an authoritarian state. Only when we explore all possible combinations of national and subnational regime types are we able to claim that we acquire a fair knowledge of the state of the art.

Last but not least, using the mixed methods approach, this study is able to not only look into the actual power dynamics at work in the subnational political system but

also extend the application of the findings to a wider population, creating a potential for extrapolation and generalisation beyond a few cases. Through a detailed case study of 26 villages and the rich information provided by interviewees involved in the process, this study is able to identify the extent of subnational democracy as well as the political dynamics at work. Moreover, this study also tests the patterns by using the electoral data of a relatively large sample. In doing so, the findings are not applicable only to a few cases; instead the findings can be generalised to a wider population. Extrapolation and evaluation of the hypotheses might then be generalised to other localities in China. Given that China is a huge country and different localities vary greatly on many dimensions, the potential of extrapolation and generalisation beyond one locality is already substantial progress.

This study is not the first attempt to study China's village elections. Since the elections were introduced in China in the early 1980s, there have been heated debates on various aspects of the implementation of village elections in China, and mountains of evidence have been accumulated on the study of China's village elections. In the next chapter, accumulated evidence and studies of China's village elections are reviewed and the relevance and contributes of this study to the field of China's village elections are discussed.

Chapter 4 : Theoretical perspectives on village elections in China

As mentioned in Chapter 3, authoritarian rulers' purpose of incorporating elections into authoritarian governance is not to promote democracy per se; instead, it is to strengthen regime legitimacy and reduce the risk of the regime being toppled down violently. Similarly, in China, village committee elections are considered by the CCP as an instrumental tool for solving political anarchy due to the loss of authority of commune cadres and for regaining its governing legitimacy at the grassroots level after the collapse of the rural commune system. By granting villagers the power of self-governance, the CCP is expected to hold office-holders more accountable and alleviate the acute problems of corruption and deteriorated mass-cadre relationship. Regardless of the regime's initial purpose of introducing direct elections to villages, with villagers' practice of each round of village committee elections, they might be empowered to protect their interests even if it is against the local government, and might also demand political participation in higher level governments. There is a possibility that the unintended consequences might outweigh the instrumental benefits of holding village elections and lead to further democratic reform beyond the grassroots level.

The important implication of village elections to China's political reform attracts scholarly attention to the study of China's village elections. The first and foremost question is whether village elections are meaningful to both villagers and elected office holders. The significance of village elections to villagers and elected office holders has an important bearing on the future prospects of China's village elections, which is the ultimate concern of most scholars and international observers. Studies of these two questions are reviewed in this chapter to lay a foundation for a more important question in which this research inquiry is interested. As pointed out at the beginning of Chapter 3, this research is triggered by the contradiction between conventional wisdom and the empirical reality in China's village elections. As is discussed in Chapter 3, economic development promotes democracy in the sense that economic development might bring about some fundamental changes in a society's

structure and thus increase demands and forces for democratisation. Applying this theoretical relationship between economic development and democracy to hybrid regimes, in these regimes, these demands and forces might be controlled by the authoritarian states or local government. Also, according to those studies focusing on hybrid regimes and subnational politics, economic autonomy affects the ability of the states or local government to control the demands and forces brought about by economic development. Scholars who study China's village elections also try to apply the modernisation theory to China's grassroots elections and explore the mechanisms behind the relationship under the China's grassroots context. Since this research enquiry shares similar research aims with those scholars who endeavour to apply the modernisation theory to China's grassroots elections, it is essential to know the current state of existing studies sharing similar research aims.

This chapter is thus arranged as follows. To begin with, the significance of China's village elections to villagers and office holders is discussed and followed by scholars' views on the future prospects of such grassroots elections in China. In the third section of this chapter, studies that explain the variance of the implementation of village elections in China are reviewed and discussed. Based on existing studies, empirical regularities are identified for the empirical investigation of this research. Finally, contributions of this research enquiry to existing theories of China's village elections are laid out.

4.1 The significance of China's village committee elections

The first question that concerns scholars and international audiences is whether village elections are compatible with the authoritarian nature of China's regime. Given the fact that no genuine election is conducted at various levels of the state hierarchy for officials and there is only one party holding the ruling power in China, the significance of village elections is questioned. It is also reasonable to expect that such elections might be flawed by the party's manipulation.

Do village elections convey any real meaning to both villagers and elected village committee members? Scholarly studies have presented different answers to this question. Some studies (Tan & Xin, 2007) contend that even though elections have yet to be extended to higher level of governments, both villagers and cadres care

about village elections and village governance and elections are considered meaningful in that they produce positive changes to governance and village life. On the one hand, village elections have been proven to have a positive influence on villagers' democratic consciousness. Li (2003), based on a two-wave panel survey conducted in a county in Jiangxi before and after the first elections in Nov 1999, finds that elections significantly enhanced villagers' external efficacy. In other words, villagers' beliefs in the responsiveness of the elected village committees to their demands increased significantly after the inauguration of free elections. Tan and Xin (2007) also find that village elections have raised villagers' political efficacy.

On the other hand, village elections have also been proven to have created a strong incentive for elected office-holders to act in the interests of the electorate. Manion (1996), based on her survey study, shows that the more opportunity villagers have to reject some candidates in favour of others, the more congruence in the orientation to the role of the state in the economy the elected leaders and the villagers have. Even corruptible elections can have these large incentive effects and the mechanism behind this finding is that the re-election probability increases as the elected leaders engage in less rent-seeking (Brandt & Turner, 2007). Similarly, Tan and Xin (2007) find that village elections improved cadre-mass relations and increased the power of elected village committees.

Though village elections, as has been proven by studies mentioned above, improve the responsiveness of elected cadres to villagers and arouse villagers' democratic consciousness, "at the same time, village elections have not noticeably reduced the responsiveness of village cadres to the lawful instructions received from township leaders" (Li & O'Brien, 1999, p. 140). As mentioned in Chapter 2, the conservative camp worries that the introduction of village elections could jeopardise the ruling of the CCP in China's countryside and enable rural villages to become independent kingdoms. Existing studies show this is not the case. Manion's study (1996) shows that a significant congruence between elected village leaders and their selectorates above on stated preferences can be observed. As pointed out by Li and O'Brien (1999), in order to win popular support and maintain in office, office-holders are scrupulous about carrying out tasks assigned from above and often take the lead in observing and complying with state policies, which can then induce villagers to

follow and cooperate. In other words, improved cadre-mass relations and cadres' closer relations with villagers help to smooth the implementation of state policies, even the unpopular ones.

Village elections improve the responsiveness of elected cadres and in turn bring positive and substantial changes to village governance, as some studies show. Li and O'Brien (1999) point out that in order to win popular support, candidates promise to deliver benefits to villagers and the most common pledges are opening village accounts to public inspection and developing the village economy. Once elected, office-holders are often able to deliver the campaign promises they made. Empirical evidence based on data of 48 villages for the period 1986-2002 shows that village elections have a positive effect on village budget (Wang & Yao, 2007), village health care (Gan, Xu, & Yao, 2006) and income distribution (Shen & Yao, 2007). More specifically, Wang and Yao (2007) find that elections substantially increase the share of public expenditures in the village budget but reduce the share of administrative costs and income handed to the township government. Gan, Xu and Yao (2006) find that grassroots democracy helps alleviate the negative impact of health shocks in that elections increase the likelihood of villages setting up a healthcare plan. Shen and Yao (2007) find that elections reduce income inequality within the village and tend to increase the income shares of the poorer portions of population. Both studies (Gan et al., 2006; Shen & Yao, 2007) attribute the positive effects of village elections on village health care and income distribution to the role of village elections in making elected leaders adopt pro-poor policies.

However, some other studies present a relatively pessimistic picture. Zhong and Chen (2002), based on a survey they conducted in twelve counties in southern Jiangsu province in 2000, found that village election constrains and limitation disincentive those with high levels of internal efficacy and democratic orientation to participate. Participation in the elections is drawn more from people who have lower levels of political efficacy and democratic orientation, follow state and local public affairs, are older and less educated. A similar pessimistic finding is based on an ethnographic case study of a north China village in Hebei province. Hu (2008) points out that significant disparities exist between what Chinese policy makers and scholars expect - for instance, enhancing cadre accountability and empowering villagers – on the one

hand and how most villagers in his study view the actual practices of village elections on the other hand. For example, village elections and the operation of the supervisory small groups were regarded by the villagers of his study more as an integral part of the factional politics in the community, rather than an effective way to select competent cadres and foster grassroots democracy. The author contends that even if the democratic forms are well established, it is difficult for the 'rule by the people' to take root. These findings call into question the meaningfulness and democratic nature of village committee elections. However, the disconnect between democratic elections and democratic consciousness does not render the holding of elections a futile performance (Hong, 2006). Following the model of 'marriage before love', Chinese villages, with the continual practice of democratic forms, will gradually enhance the quality of the grassroots democracy. This validates the Fabian approach adopted by the Ministry of Civil Affairs which has succeeded up until now (Shi, 1999b). They focus on instituting direct village elections and increasing the frequency of such elections in the first place, even though the elections are poorly conducted and manipulated, and then strive to improve the quality of the elections at the second stage. Ultimately, "procedural democracy is better than the lack of democracy, and stylized elections are better than no elections at all" (Hong, 2006, p. 32). Thus, these studies only contend that village elections have yet to produce the positive effects as anticipated by scholars and international observers now, but they all agree that village elections should be carried out and it takes time for such elections to show significant and positive influences.

Following those studies that show a pessimistic view about the immediate significant effects of elections on village governance and village life, some studies also point out that though elections have produced some positive effects on village governance, elected village committees still face various obstacles in exercising their full potential of self-governance. It is important to point out that elected village committees operate within an authoritarian system "that is not structured to respond to the demands of constituents" (Bernstein, 2006, p. 30). When exercising power, elected village committees have to consider and even compete with township governments, village party committees and social groups such as clans, religious groups and even criminal gangs (O'Brien & Han, 2009). The vague definition of the status of village party committees and villages' lack of financial dependence (Tan, 2010) put village

committees in the long shadow of township governments and village party secretaries (Tan & Xin, 2007). More specifically, village party committees, though not having been given any specific functions, are assigned to exercise core leadership according to the official Organic Law of Village Committees (The National People's Congress, 1998), which hampers elected village committees' self-governance nature. Village committees' obligation to carry out political tasks assigned from above and lack of control over village budget - because of the introduction of a new scheme of entrusting village accounts to township management (*cunzhang xiangguan*) - give township governments a substantial leverage over villages. Villages that have no collective income and have to rely on agriculture have to ask for township governments' financial support which subjects villages to township control. In addition, in some villages, as O'Brien's visit to a suburban village outside Tianjin shows, social groups possessing their own sources of power, instead of elected village committees controlling few resources, dominate village decision making (O'Brien & Han, 2009).

As can be seen from existing studies mentioned above, village elections on the one hand seem to realise the instrumental benefits of holding the elections anticipated by the CCP, that is, increasing cadres' accountability, restoring grassroots governance and improving cadre-mass relations; and on the other hand, village elections have also exhibited democratic effects in China's countryside, such as arousing villagers' democratic consciousness and interest in village participation and governance, increasing villagers' political efficacy and fostering a closer relation between villagers and elected cadres. However, a cautious optimism should be exercised in assessing the significance of village elections to villagers and elected office holders. It takes time for the positive effects of village elections to become prevalent and be consolidated in the China's countryside, as some research has showed. Moreover, it is also imprudent to exaggerate the current significant and positive effects of village elections without taking into account the fact that elected village committees operate under an authoritarian system. A similar cautious optimism should be exercised when considering the prospects of China's village elections, which will become clear in the next section.

4.2 The prospects of village committee elections

When discussing the prospects of village committee elections, a key important point to revisit is the official purpose of holding the village committee elections in China. As pointed out in Chapter 2, the collapse of the commune system and the introduction of the household responsibility system left commune cadres with limited authority and resources to carry out responsibilities of administration and provide public services at the village level. Delegation of responsibilities and the accompanied delegation of power become the only viable solution. The instrumental value of village election and self-governance is well-documented in academic studies. In official literature, as pointed out by Chan (1998), village democratic election is often regarded as an instrumental tool to good government and successful economic development. "A very important reason for granting villagers self-government is in fact the impracticability of doing otherwise" (Chan, 1998, p. 510). O'Brien (1994) describes the fact that by granting villagers limited democratic rights the central government hopes to enhance cadre accountability in exchange for popular compliance with state policies. Kelliher (1997) suggests that elections represent a mechanism to produce village leadership that can seize control of collapsed villages and reverse the crisis in authority and to produce "a system for getting villagers to enforce unpopular policy upon themselves" (1997, p. 73). The latter function of elections is also agreed by the opponents of village self-governance. The introduction of village election and self-governance suits the continuing need of the Chinese Communist Party to extract resources from rural producers in the least conflictual but more effective manner (Howell, 1998). Village elections are also a pressure valve to let peasants express their dissatisfaction and grievance and a channel for the central leadership to shift the burden of success and failure of village governance and economic development to villagers and the leaders they elect (Oi, 1999). Thus, for the Chinese Communist Party, village election is seen as a means of generating more stability through political legitimacy-building and economic development within the bottom line of accepted one-party rule (Schubert, 2002). Elections are introduced to maintain the one-party rule and sustain regime stability, more than to promote democracy per se.

Though China's central leadership's original purpose of introducing village elections has little to do with promoting democracy, the setting up of democratic village

elections might have spill-over effects which might in turn create momentum towards democratisation. “The transformations of Taiwan, Mexico, and Senegal in the 1990s show that competitive authoritarian regimes can become democracies” (Diamond, 2002, p. 34). Though it is premature to predict for certain that village elections in China will create momentum towards democratisation, there is already evidence showing that village elections not only empower villagers to challenge undemocratic elections but also trigger pressure and demand for refreshing governing legitimacy of village party secretaries and democratic elections for governments at the township level.

Looking at election per se, the practice of election contributes to peasants’ increasing willingness to protect and interest in protecting their own interests and rights against the higher levels of government (O’Brien, 1996). In other words, the beginnings of a more complete citizenship are coming about as a result of the introduction and continued practice of village elections (O'Brien, 2001). Some rural people are increasingly challenging and interpreting the undemocratic elections using the language of rights, influential advocates and recognized principles (O'Brien, 2001). This ‘rightful resistance’ (O’Brien, 1996) operates within the boundary of an authorised channel. Though for now villagers’ demand mainly focuses on entry into local politics and they seldom press for wider civil and political rights to association, expression and unlicensed participation and question the legitimacy of the existing laws and policies and the unaccountability of officials at higher level government (see Li & O’Brien, 1996; O’Brien, 1996), there is a possibility that such rightful resistance may go deeper and have subversive implications for the regime legitimacy: “Some villagers may graduate from combating illegal mistreatment to combating legal mistreatment” (O’Brien, 1996, p. 54).

With growing a political awareness and sense of citizenship, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, villagers feel that village committees can represent them and stand on their behalf when their interests and rights are encroached upon by township governments. As the Chinese Communist Party's agent in the countryside, the legitimacy and authority of the village party committee is questioned and party secretaries are now confronted with a strong rival authority - village committee chairmen whose authority is based on villagers' consent. Tension and conflict between

elected village committees and village party committees arise since the introduction of direct village elections because the basis of their legitimacy and authority differs (Guo & Bernstein, 2004). The more elections take root in China's countryside, the more the party loses its control over village governance and economy and the more imperative the central leadership must consider giving new democratic legitimacy to its agents in the China's countryside (Schubert, 2002). The two ballot system in Shanxi Province, well-documented in Li's study (1999), is such an attempt to regain the governing legitimacy of village party committees and improve the relation between villagers and village party secretaries. Prospective village party secretaries are subject to the votes of confidence by all villagers before being considered official candidates for the village party secretary position.

In addition, the rising conflict between elected village committees and selected village party committees and the corruption of village party secretaries continues to provoke strong popular protests and demand for checking the power of village party secretaries. A similar practice that aims to hold the village party committee accountable is the emergence of concurrent office holding (Guo & Bernstein, 2004). Village party secretaries as well as most village party committee members are obliged to run for elections for the village committees in order to retain their posts in village party committees. In this way, village party secretaries establish their acceptability to the villagers and thus refurbish village party committees' legitimacy and authority in the villages themselves. On the other hand, as a component of the emergent concurrent office-holding, elected village committee chairmen and members who are not party members are encouraged to join the Chinese Communist Party and are selected into the village party committee (The State Council, 2002, 2009). In light of the existing changes in the political structure of village party committees it is clear that village election and self-governance contributes to the introduction of democratic elements in the party's agents at the grassroots level and the broadening social base of the Chinese Communist Party in the countryside.

Though it is less clear, there is much reason to believe that political mobilisation of villagers through continued practice of village election has contributed to growing demand for direct elections of governments at the township level. There is already evidence showing that through village elections, peasants feel empowered and attain

their own organisations which could shield them against the encroachments of local government and protect their legal rights (Wang, 1997). Li's 1999 survey (2001) shows that there is a connection between freer and fairer village elections and the likelihood of villagers demanding elected village cadres in resisting the harmful local policy enacted by the township government in the Chinese countryside. This shifts the conflict between village cadres and villagers one level up to clashes between organised villages and township governments. Since unlawful local policies originate from county or higher level governments, understanding that elected cadres would be more effective in defending villagers' interests than those appointed (Lin, 1995), villagers and elected cadres have begun to press for direct township elections (Li, 2001). Some township leaders who find themselves trapped in a no-win situation like 'the meat in the sandwich' also have begun to call for democratic township elections (Li, 2001). Direct township elections have been sporadically carried out in some areas of China and have yet to be implemented nationwide. However, active participation of eight hundred million Chinese peasants in elections at the very bottom of the state will become an irresistible force in reconstituting the state from below (Wang, 1997).

To reconstitute the state from below, as pointed out by Wang (1997), the practice of village election and self-government is an important step, in that it might help to dissolve the despotic power of the state and build up a routine and institutionalised channels of negotiation, while on the other hand maintain or even strengthen the infrastructural power of the state. Democratic transition of an authoritarian regime which is strong both despotically and infrastructurally means weakening the despotic power of the state and building up routine, institutionalised channels of negotiation between state elites and civil society groups, but has nothing to do with the infrastructural power of the state, as Wang (1997) elaborates on by referring to Michael Mann's (1986) distinction of two types of state power. Following this logic, Wang (1997) foresees a peaceful and orderly process of democratic transition in China in the long run. At the very least, "while it would be premature to predict with certainty the course that village self-governance might take, still it would be unwise to dismiss village self-governance outright as a mere political illusion" (Howell, 1998, p. 108).

If village self-governance is not a mere political illusion, would these unintended consequences nurtured by the introduction of village elections, that is, the democratic effects of village elections, outweigh the instrumental benefits of holding the elections expected by the CCP one day? What would tip the balance between the unintended consequences and the instrumental benefits of village committee elections? One important official purpose of holding the elections is to promote good governance which serves as the very foundation for economic development, the key priority of the CCP. Recalling the positive relationship between economic development and democracy proposed by the modernisation theorists, would continuing economic development in the China's countryside give rise to growing demand for political participation and democratic reform and thus make it increasingly difficult for the CCP to maintain the village elections within the boundary of one-party authoritarian rule? This leads to the discussion of existing studies that explore the link between economic development and the implementation of village elections in grassroots China in the following section.

4.3 Explaining the variance of the implementation of village committee elections

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the theoretical link between economic development and democracy was set up by Lipset (1959) in his seminal piece of work in 1959. Lipset proposes that economic development enhances the likelihood of a country establishing and maintaining democracy, because increased wealth fosters a better-educated population, an empowered working class, a growing middle class, changing political values and the appearance of voluntary organisations which are conducive to democratic development and stability. Scholars also endeavour to explore the nature of the relationship between economic development and the implementation of village elections in grassroots China. In an earlier study by O'Brien (1994), based on his field trip to fifteen demonstration villages in two provinces in China in 1992, he finds that village elections, that is, holding direct and semi-competitive elections, the creation of villagers' representative assemblies and the promulgation of village codes of conduct and charters, are more likely to succeed in wealthy villages. Moreover, these wealthy villages are also effective in implementing unpopular state tasks. However, he points out that the up-to-standard performance of these wealthy villages can be attributed to the large collective economies, while it could also be a result of the considerable

ministry attention attracted by the large collective economies of these villages. Thus, as he suggests, claiming the causal relationship between collective wealth and competitive village elections requires more evidence and understanding of the process of how interests translate into actions. Lawrence (1994) attributes the success of institutional reform in her case to the opposite factors. She argues that in exchange for better economic returns and fuller compliance with state tasks, the authorities were more willing to grant villagers real power over village committees in poor villages.

As can be seen, since these are the earlier studies when village elections were in a very early stage of development and the results are drawn upon the study of a few cases, the findings are rudimentary and required to be tested for external validity. More importantly, in these earlier studies, when applying the modernisation theory to China's grassroots elections, collective village wealth is considered an important proxy for the concept of economic development in the modernisation theory, but the rationale and mechanisms of considering collective village wealth have not been explored by these studies. Moreover, the underlying process of how interests translate into actions has not been explored by these studies and, as argued by O'Brien (1994), is required for any attempt to claim the causal relationship between economic development and competitive village elections.

Hu (2005) goes further and develops new theoretical arguments to understand the relationship between economic development and competitive village elections in China's grassroots context. As Lipset's modernisation theory focuses on explaining macro-level phenomena related to national level democracies, the rationales and mechanisms behind the relationship under the context of local community level practices in China are totally different. Hu (2005) argues that the key mechanism behind the relationship in rural China is villagers' and candidates' reward from the results of elections. With economic development, village committees will control more collective revenues. Thus, in those more economically-developed villages, villagers have a bigger stake in elections and candidates are rewarded more from holding positions. This will lead to greater participation by villagers in elections and more intense electoral competition. This argument is supported by his quantitative evidence based on survey data gathered from rural Fujian Province of China in 2001.

However, different natures of the relationship and mechanisms are found in some other studies. Shi (1999a) argues that the relationship between the speed of economic development and village elections is a convex curve, rather than a simple linear curve. In Shi's study, instead of using collective village revenues, he uses per capita GDP and the speed of development from 1982 to 1993 as independent variables. Using empirical data gathered from a 1993 nationwide survey, he finds that economic wealth increases the likelihood of a village holding semi-competitive elections, but when economic wealth reaches a threshold, the impact of further economic development on competitive village elections is diminishing. Moreover, he argues that rapid economic development may even delay the process of introducing competitive village elections because incumbent leaders can use the collective resources to co-opt voters and buy off government officials to turn a blind eye in controlled village elections. Thus, increasing economic wealth, after reaching a threshold, can act as an obstacle to the implementation of competitive village elections because incumbent leaders have greater economic power to thwart opposition challenge and buy off voters and local government officials.

A similar argument is also supported by Oi and Rozelle's (2000) study based on their empirical data gathered in 1996. Oi and Rozelle propose a negative relationship between income and contested elections. Instead of using per capita GDP as a proxy for economic development, they propose a two-dimension continuum to measure village economic structure. One dimension measures the source of income, namely, whether villagers rely on internal village resources or external resources outside of the villages for income. The second dimension is the composition of village wealth on the agricultural-industrial axis. The two dimensions affect villagers' incentive to participate and leaders' incentive to limit participation. The more the economy is agriculture-dependent and the weaker the economic ties of villagers to the outside world, the higher the interests of villagers in village politics and the greater the likelihood that power is located in the hands of elected village committees and village participatory bodies. In industrial villages, though villagers have an incentive to participate, leaders have a greater incentive to thwart opposition challenge and limit participation as they have more to lose than their counterparts in agricultural villages. In other words, industrial villages tend to have less competitive village elections than agricultural villages.

While Oi and Rozelle focus on the structure of village economy, Zhang (2008) focuses on the overall class structure in the localities where village elections are carried out. Based on his case study of two regions in eastern China, Zhang points out that the developmental pattern and the associated class structure shape local politics, while per capita GDP may only capture one aspect of the relationship between economic development and democracy. Specifically, a polarised class structure caused by the monopolisation of opportunity by local government and unfair privatisation in Sunan region leads to more controlled village elections and has maintained authoritarian governance, while Wenzhou region's flat class structure brought by entrepreneur-initiated development nurtured ideas of equality and fair competition and led to more competitive village elections with the entrance of a significant number of private entrepreneurs into the electoral competition. Zhang's case study is valuable in that he explores the relationship between class structure and democracy in China's rural politics and finds evidence in support of modernisation theory's claim of a growing middle class's positive effect on democratisation. But it is difficult to make predictions about or assessments of the general pattern and trends of village democratisation, as the evidence is drawn from only two cases which are almost diametrically opposed on a number of dimensions.

As can been seen from existing studies that explore the relationship between economic development and competitive village elections, the key to the understanding of the relationship in China's grassroots context is the effect of economic development on villagers' interest in participation. Increasing per capita GDP or collective village revenues might contribute to greater interest and participation in voting and running for office, while on the other hand, it also could be the case that increasing economic wealth equips incumbent leaders with greater economic power and incentive to control the elections. The class structure of a society brought by economic development might also matters, as a flat class structure could supply the elections with candidates on an equal footing. Only when villagers have an interest in voting and in running for the electoral competition would such elections become competitive.

Recalling theories of democratisation in Chapter 3 in addition to the most influential stream, namely, the modernisation school of thought that looks at the structural

conditions of democratisation, the elite approach has long been used by students of democratisation who propose that elites also play a crucial role in the process of democratisation. Similarly, the elite approach is combined with the socio-economic deterministic approach in some studies of China's grassroots elections. There are generally considered to be two types of elite in China's village elections by scholars - the political elite and the economic elite. The political elites could be a central leadership which decides the introduction of village elections in China and the progress of the grassroots democratic reform nationwide; they could also be local level government officials who influence the development of village committee elections at the local level. The economic elites refer mainly to the newly-rich entrepreneurs who return to villages and actively join in the village electoral competition.

In the study of the political elites, Epstein (1997) points out that poorest and richest provinces in China received the most resistance in carrying out village elections and the rationales for these two types of provinces are distinct. On the one hand, in the poorest provinces, because of slow economic development, local and provincial officials have little motivation to improve transparency of village governance and competitiveness of village elections; on the other hand, villagers tend to focus on securing adequate food and shelter and have no interest in improving village governance. In the richest provinces, rapid economic development gives rise to powerful local bosses who can guarantee their continued re-election because of their successful efforts to develop the local economy. Compared with these two types of provinces, provinces with a medium level of development have proceeded faster and better in village elections.

Another study by Lawrence (1994) emphasises the role of township and county officials. Based on her case study of a poor village in Zhao county of Hebei Province, she attributes the success of institutional reform in the county to the support of local authorities. "It was precisely because the villages were so unmanageable, and performing so poorly economically, that local authorities felt the need to experiment with new forms of village governance" (Lawrence, 1994, p.67). The success of grassroots electoral reform should also be credited to the efforts of a democratically-committed midlevel in manoeuvring institutional dynamism to promote grassroots

reform, though the sponsorship of national leaders was important for the reform to be adopted from the very beginning and peasants are also important driving forces, as Shi (1999b) argues.

Political elites, either central government officials or local authorities, play an important role in adopting and carrying out the grassroots reform in a given area, while economic elites might be more important in the actual running of village elections in individual villages. Some scholars, mostly based on case studies, focus on the role of the economic elite. Guo (2003b), based on his case study of a village in Guangdong Province, points out that village elections are an important venue that enables economic elites to return to the village and engage in village governance. Their business success is valued by villagers who are becoming more experienced in and serious about casting votes after years' experience of village elections. Chen and Zhao (2000) point out that the local economic elite plays an important role in village elections and governance. Their resources and capability make it possible to utilise the village election venue to engage in village politics. On the other hand, villagers expect the return of the economic elite to the village political arena will help bring prosperity to the village. In the foreseeable future, the local economic elite will influence the running of village elections and governance in China.

However, the role of the economic elite on village elections and governance is ambivalent. In some cases, entrepreneurs help to promote village democracy and develop village economy, while in some other cases, entrepreneurs may use their economic power to manipulate village elections and governance to favour their own interests. The rise of the economic elite is associated with many unhealthy phenomena in grassroots China, such as the rise in vote-buying practices and the revival of traditional Chinese criminal forces in the countryside, such as hooligans (He, 1997). In the recent annual report on village elections published by the Guangzhou academy of social science, Li and Tang (2011) point out that buying votes in village elections, first developed in some wealthy villages, has now spread to remote and poor villages and there is a connection between the return of rich entrepreneurs to the rural political arena and the rise of vote-buying practice and criminal groups such as gangs.

As Lipset (1994, p. 18) argues in his revisit to the social requisites of democracy, "whether democracy succeeds or fails continues to depend significantly on the choices, behaviours, and decisions of political leaders and groups". The implementation of village elections in rural China also depends significantly on the choices, behaviours and decisions of the actors involved. As discussed in this section, economic development influences the interests of actors involved in the process and prompts them to prefer some actions over others. The choices and decisions of political and economic elites have a direct bearing on the implementation of village elections in rural China. Moreover, these choices and decisions might be consolidated with years' practice of village elections. It is precisely the choices and decisions of elites affected by economic development that will shape the prospects of China's village committee elections in the long run. Drawing upon existing studies of China's village elections, this research enquiry intends to study how economic development shapes the underlying choices, behaviours and decisions of actors involved in village elections. We now turn to the contributions of this study to the existing studies of China's village elections.

4.4 Contributions of this study to the existing studies of China's village elections

This chapter reviews and discusses existing studies of China's village elections. Despite the CCP's instrumental purpose of holding village elections, village elections have been largely proved to be meaningful and significant to village governance and village life. Given the great variance among different localities on various dimensions such as culture, religion and geographic location, village elections might yet live up to the expectations of scholars and international observers in some areas. In light of this observation, it would be imprudent to exaggerate the current positive effects of village elections. Moreover, village elections and governance operate under an authoritarian system and thus there are limits and restrictions on the implementation of village elections and the self-governance of the elected village committees. But even among scholars who hold a pessimistic view about the significance of village elections, the holding of elections is still considered a useful and meaningful performance, as it takes time for such elections to show long-term and consolidated democratic value. In the long run, with constant economic growth, would the unintended consequences

brought on by the practice of village elections outweigh the instrumentation benefits of these elections anticipated by the CCP?

To answer the aforementioned question, we need to understand the relationship between economic development and competitive village elections in China's grassroots context. According to existing studies that apply the modernisation theory to China's village elections, there are several empirical regularities. First, in China's grassroots context, collective village revenues or per capita GDP are considered a proxy for economic development. More complicated accounts of the relationship consider that village economic structure or the class structure of a locality capture the more fundamental aspects of the relationship between economic development and democracy. The key underlying rationale is that these socio-economic factors affect villagers' and candidates' interests in and reward from participation in village elections and governance. Second, in those quantitative studies of village elections, most use the existence of a recent election being contested to reflect village electoral competitiveness. Third, villagers' interest in participation and incumbent leaders' incentive to control the elections jointly affect the competitiveness of the elections. More specifically, the competitiveness of the elections increases with villagers' interest in participation and decreases with incumbent leaders' incentive to control the elections.

Taking into account the aforementioned empirical regularities found by existing studies of China's village elections, this study also aims to explore the relationship between economic development and democracy in China's grassroots context. This study also differs from existing studies with similar research aims in several aspects, which form the strengths and contributions of this research.

First, this study goes beyond simply examining electoral competitiveness to studying the extent of authoritarian control in such elections. Studies of China's village elections, especially in earlier studies, look into the competitiveness of village elections and use the existence of a semi-competitive or competitive election with more than one candidate as the criterion for electoral competitiveness. This focus and criterion were suitable before the promulgation of the Organic Law of Village Committee in 1998. Since 1998, all villages in China have been required to hold

village elections and a key criterion of competitive village elections is to have more candidates than the number of positions available. Looking into the existence of a semi-competitive or competitive election with choice of candidates thus has become outdated since then.

Moreover, as pointed out in Chapter 1, elections with multiple candidates standing for one position have varying degrees of democracy. For example, to fulfil the requirements of holding contested elections, local government might place weak candidates to stand for the electoral competition and thus disguise the uncontested nature of the elections. It could also be the case that even though strong candidates can join the electoral competition, they do not have equal opportunity to campaign for votes as do the candidates supported by local government. They might have restricted access to local media or public resources for campaign, and thus their probability of winning the elections is minimised.

A genuine democratic election requires not only the right to stand for electoral competition but also the opportunity of winning the election. This study takes into account both requirements for a genuine democratic election when operationalising the dependent variable. In the case study section, the existence of the past elections being contested is taken into account, while the electoral outcomes are also considered, that is, who won the elections, candidates supported by the local government or opponents. In the quantitative data analysis section, based on my in-depth knowledge developed from extensive fieldwork in grassroots Guangdong, I focus exclusively on two direct indicators, the election of party members to the village committee chairman position and the re-election of incumbent village committee chairmen. What ultimately really matters is still the outcome. Electoral outcomes matter to local government, as those elected are going to implement the state policies and political tasks that affect the political prospects of local government officials.

Second, this study investigates the nature of the relationship between economic development and democracy and the underlying mechanism behind the relationship from a different perspective of that of existing studies of China's village elections. Similarly to some findings of existing studies of China's village elections, this study also considers that the relationship between economic development and the holding of

competitive elections is not a simple linear and positive relationship. However, inspired by existing studies of elections and political trajectories in non-democratic regimes discussed in Chapter 3, this study pays special attention to the heavily skewed playing field of the elections and the authoritarian nature of the regime where the elections are held. In such elections, voting for opponents who are not supported by local government and competing with candidates supported by local government entail a degree of risk. The study of such elections thus requires special consideration of the capability of local government to make such a risk credible and the capability of opponents and voters to bear the costs of facing such a risk. The role of opposition challenge - the very few among villagers who are willing to bear the costs of competing with candidates put forward by township governments and village party committees - is even more important, as only the existence of a genuine opposition challenge offers voters with real choices. This aspect has been largely ignored by scholars of China's village elections. Following this new perspective, economic wealth might affect the interest of voters in voting and opponents in running for the electoral competition, but it alone cannot explain the ability of local government to control the elections and the capability of opponents to resist the threat. Thus, in addition to economic wealth used by existing theories of China's village elections, the concept of economic autonomy is also applied in this study and operationalised to fit the context of China's grassroots elections, which has yet to be explored by existing studies of China's village elections.

Third, benefitting from the rich qualitative evidence collected through my extensive fieldwork at grassroots Guangdong, this study is valuable in that it provides detailed accounts of the electoral competition between local government and opponents in China's village elections. More specifically, in the electoral competition, this study addresses the control of township governments and village party committees over village elections on the one hand and the active or even proactive role of opponents in response to the authoritarian control on the other. Strategies used by local government to control the elections and strategies used by opponents to win the elections are provided in detail as important evidence in the empirical chapters, which has yet to be covered by previous scholarship in China's village elections.

Last but not least, the validity of my research findings is increased by the mixed method approach. Existing qualitative studies of China's grassroots elections, based on the detailed examination of one or a few cases, are able to unravel the underlying mechanism, but the findings of such studies are difficult to extrapolate to a wider population and to make predictions and implications. On the other hand, existing quantitative studies of China's village elections, based on large N data analysis, are relatively weak in providing a detailed account of the dynamics of political competition. Understanding how is as important as, if not more than, understanding why. Quantitative studies of China's village elections are better in telling why but weak in telling how. In response to the limitation of existing studies, this study combines qualitative case studies with quantitative analysis. Qualitative case study is used to find out the pattern and mechanisms, while quantitative analysis, drawn on a large sample, is used to check whether the pattern is held for a wider population. Though given the great geographic variance in China it would be too bold to claim any empirical findings from one or a few areas in China are generalisable, this research, combining the strengths of both qualitative method and quantitative method, is valuable in providing updated and dynamic picture - China's village elections.

The outcome of an election is determined by the actions taken by the actors involved. Actors' actions are in turn affected by their interests and preferences. It is important to understand these interests and preferences as well as the process of translating interests into actions. In this study, economic wealth and economic autonomy affect the interests of actors involved, namely, local government and opponents, which in turn prompt actors to prefer some actions over others, and these selected actions have direct influence on the outcome of an election. Actors' preferences, available actions and the relationship between socio-economic factors and their choices from the available actions are carefully examined in the following empirical chapters. We begin with research design in Chapter 5 that follows.

Chapter 5 : Research Design

As mentioned in Chapter 4, this study intends to investigate the extent of authoritarian control in China's village elections and unravel the dynamic of electoral competition in grassroots elections under such a regime. As pointed out in Chapter 1, there is yet to be any previous study that examines the political competition in China's village elections in detail, largely due to political sensitivity and the lack of access to valuable data. This study is not only interested in the relationship between economic development and village elections but also the underlying mechanisms of the relationship, and thus requires a mixed-method approach. To this end, I selected a county in Guangdong Province as the research sample and did extensive study to collect both qualitative evidence and quantitative data. Details of the extensive fieldtrips are covered in Chapter 1.

The data collection of this study also faces several constraints, that is, access to valuable data that can reflect the actual practices, the political sensitivity of the topic, and limited research funding. Also, the key priority of the research design of this study is to guarantee that the quality of data and the validity of the findings are not compromised as a result of the constraints. In this chapter, the research design of this study is discussed. First, details of the sample county and villages are described to show a full picture. Then, since data are important sources of research and the foundation of the findings of this study, the procedures and guidelines followed by this research to guarantee data quality are discussed. In the third section, data analysis methods used in the empirical chapters of this thesis to improve validity and reliability of the findings are briefly outlined. Fourth, as mentioned earlier, the investigation of the extent of authoritarian control in such elections is a topic of political sensitivity which calls for appropriate ethical safeguards to be in place to guarantee that the research will not bring any potential harm and risk to the interviewees' normal lives and careers. Ethical research issues to which this study pays attention and the appropriate mechanisms that are in place to uphold the research ethics are thus discussed.

5.1 The sample county and the data

This research is based on several of my fieldtrips to a county with a population of 692,242 at the end of 2010 calculated by the County Statistic Bureau. The county is a remote and poor county which receives earmarked subsidies from Guangdong provincial government annually. In 2010, the fiscal revenue of the county government is £24,733,855.19[8]; while fiscal expenditure is £92,954,990.22. The fiscal deficit of £68,221,135.03 is covered by the fiscal transfer from the Guangdong provincial government.

Though the sample county is both remote and poor, it nonetheless serves as a very good sample for this study for the following reasons. First, villages and towns exhibit great variance in economic development and the extent of authoritarian control over elections, which are the themes of this study. Second, this study attempts to investigate a pattern and the mechanisms behind the pattern, rather than simply looking for a generalisable trend. Focusing on one county enables in-depth study. Moreover, by focusing on only one county, the institutional setting and cultural context, which are the key control variables for cross-locality comparison research, can automatically be controlled. In terms of institutional setting, though villages follow the same provincial regulation and principles, different counties in a province may differ in the practical implementation of regulation and principles. The detailed setting up of the electoral timetable and plan is conducted by the county level governments, while different towns replicate the plan set by county governments and only differ on the exact time of conducting village elections. As for cultural factors, in the sample county, a common characteristic shared by all villages is the existence of lineage groups. It is embodied in the local culture whereby people group together under a common ancestor and each village is likely to have at least one ancestral hall for holding ceremonies on a few fixed dates of the year to worship the common ancestor. Third, for scholars doing research about politics in China, obtaining a representative sample is very difficult when scientific research needs to be approved by related government sectors. Networks are essential for doing research in China. My working experience as a village election consultant at the County Civil Affairs

[8] The county generated fiscal revenue of ¥252,780,000 in 2010. The fiscal expenditure of the county government in 2010 is ¥950,000,000. According to the exchange rate offered by Bank of China, in December 31 2010, £100= ¥1,021.82, http://www.bankofchina.com/. The figures were provided by the County Finance Bureau.

Bureau for three months in 2008 helped me acquaint myself not only with government officials but also some village cadres (VC chairmen and village party secretaries) and villagers who can reveal stories from different angles.

The county has in total sixteen towns, but the sample includes fifteen towns. One town is excluded from the sample because of missing data. This town suffered from a natural disaster in 2008 and due to the disaster - a flood - data on 2008 village elections are missing. The town is not more vulnerable to floods than other towns in the county and thus the occurrence of the disaster in 2008 and the resultant missing data are perceived as random instead of systematic. Moreover, in terms of economic development and economic structure, this town does not stand as an extreme case. For example, in terms of township economic structure, as is revealed from the proportion of its farming population (91.61%), it ranks in the middle among all towns in the county. It is by no means an extremely poor or extremely rich town.

The sample includes all 237 villages in the fifteen towns. The quantitative data were provided by the County Civil Affair Bureau. The data consist of 2008 and 2011 village election results (i.e., age, party membership, education level of elected village committee chairmen and specialised members), village economic data (i.e., collective village business income), village demographic data (i.e., population, number of party members, distance between the village centre and the county centre) and township economic structure figures (i.e., township farming population percentage, arable land per person). Figures on village economic development and demographic characteristics were calculated in early 2011, before the village elections in the same year. Township economic structure is indicated by the proportion of a farming population in a town calculated by the County Statistic Bureau in 2008, which is the most updated figure available. Given that the proportion of the farming population has not changed dramatically over the last few years and there has been no major economic development project since 2008, the figure calculated in 2008 is still able to reflect township economic structure in 2011. Remoteness, distance between the village centre and the county centre, is calculated by measuring the direct distance between the village centre and the county centre where the county government is located on Google maps.

Table 5.1 presents aggregated information of the towns and villages in the sample. At the township level, the average township level percentage of the farming population is 86.67%. As village elections are implemented only in rural areas where the farming population constitutes at least 50% of the overall population, it is reasonable to expect that the majority of villages are more agricultural. At the village level, among the 237 villages, the means of collective business income in the first six months of 2011 of all villages in the sample is equivalent to £1,797, with the minimum being no collective income at all and the maximum being £37,105.

Table 5.1 also shows information about villages in each town. Town 1 is the most industrial town with a farming population of 58.61%, while the remaining fourteen towns have a farming population of at least 86.1%. Town 1 also has the highest mean village level collective business income of £6,314 and the wealthiest village in the sample county in terms of collective village business income (£37,105 in the first six months of 2011). Town 15 is the most agricultural town with a farming population of 96.14%. The fifteen towns vary in size. The biggest towns are Town 1 and Town 4 with 32 and 36 villages respectively.

Apart from Town 1, all the remaining towns have a farming population of at least 86%. The difference between Town 1 and all the other towns in terms of farming population is huge and thus in Table 5.2 they are grouped into two categories, industrial and agricultural towns. Town 1 is categorised as an industrial town, while the remaining towns are categorised as agricultural towns. The average percentage of the farming population in the fourteen agricultural towns is 91.06% and there are in total 205 villages in this category. The mean collective village business income in the first six months of 2011 among the 32 villages in the industrial town is £6,314, while this figure among the 205 villages in the remaining agricultural towns is about £1,092. The minimum village level collective business income in both categories is no income. The maximum village level collective business income is £37,150 for villages in the industrial town and £30,750 for villages in agricultural towns.

Twenty-six villages were drawn from four towns for the case study. The most agricultural and industrial towns, Town 1 and Town 15 respectively, were selected and two towns with an average farming population percentage, Town 6 and Town 7,

were chosen. In each town, villages with different levels of collective business wealth were picked to form a random and representative sample. Table 5.3 lists the farming population percentage in townships and village level collective business income in the first six months of 2011 of all 26 villages. In these 26 villages, the village committee chairmen and the party secretaries elected in 2011 were interviewed and in some villages, the former heads of village committees and village party committees were also interviewed. In a few villages, opponents were also interviewed. It was not possible to interview all opponents of the selected villages for many reasons. First, some township governments do not allow the interview of candidates who have lost the elections, worrying that it might cause political instability. Second, some opponents left the county after the 2011 elections for job opportunities in the nearby Pearl River Delta and I was not able to get in touch with them. Most opponents interviewed were contacted through my personal network, rather than through the local government. Involving local government in setting up such interviews might have threatened the interviewees and made them reluctant to tell me what genuinely happened to them in the elections. Township and county government officials were also approached with questions. In so doing, different angles were provided by various actors involved in village elections. Information about electoral competitiveness, electoral outcomes and methods employed by rural governments and opponents to achieve their goals in the previous five elections (1999, 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2011) was gathered through these interviews.

Table 5.1 Information of the towns and villages in the sample

Town	Farming population percentage		Number of village	Collective village business income in the first six months of 2011							
	Means	Standard deviation		Means		Standard deviation		Min		Max	
All	86.67%	11.43%	237	¥17,966.11	(£1,797)	¥47,973.01	(£4,797)	0		¥371,050	(£37,105)
1	58.61%		32	¥63,137.13	(£6,314)	¥103,720.1	(£10,372)	0		¥371,050	(£37,105)
2	86.1%		22	¥11,368.31	(£1,137)	¥17,239.58	(£1,724)	0		¥62,293.8	(£6,229)
3	87.75%		18	¥10,957.41	(£1,096)	¥17,550.45	(£1,755)	0		¥64,105	(£6,411)
4	88.61%		36	¥1342.97	(£134)	¥6,085.48	(£609)	0		¥36,000	(£3,600)
5	90.82%		16	¥19,197.8	(£1,920)	¥26,028.33	(£2,603)	0		¥83,359.95	(£8,336)
6	91.17%		8	¥8,091.32	(£809)	¥18,210	(£1821)	0		¥52,778.4	(£5,278)
7	91.92%		8	¥3,937.5	(£394)	¥7,608.44	(£761)	0		¥22,000	(£2,200)
8	92.53%		15	¥9,256.63	(£926)	¥11,370.8	(£1,137)	0		¥47,076.41	(£4,708)
9	93.21%		12	¥16,774.15	(£1,677)	¥11,730.38	(£1,173)	¥1539	(£154)	¥40,331.34	(£4,033)
10	93.5%		13	¥5,674.66	(£567)	¥5,271.59	(£527)	0		¥14,720	(£1,472)
11	93.53%		16	¥21,752.05	(£2175)	¥20,647.6	(£2,065)	¥5000	(£500)	¥81,570	(£8,157)
12	93.54%		11	¥35,391.56	(£3,539)	¥90,450.15	(£9,045)	0		¥307,500	(£30,750)
13	93.73%		11	¥1,833.36	(£183)	¥4,862	(£486)	0		¥16,000	(£1,600)
14	94.11%		10	¥8,975	(£898)	¥8,265.63	(£827)	0		¥23,000	(£2,300)
15	96.14%		9	¥8,592.67	(£859)	¥9,006.61	(£901)	0		¥26,000	(£2,600)

Notes: ¥10 ≈ £1

Table 5.2 Information of the fifteen towns in two categories: Agricultural VS. Industrial town

Town	Number of town	Farming population percentage				Number of village	Collective village business income in the first six months of 2011							
		Means	Standard deviation	Min	Max		Means		Standard deviation		Min	Max	
All	15	86.67%	11.43%	58.61%	96.14%	237	¥17,966.11	(£1,797)	¥47,973.01	(£4,797)	0	¥371,050	(£37,105)
Industrial	1	58.61%	---	---	---	32	¥63,137.13	(£6,314)	¥103,720.1	(10,372)	0	¥371,050	(£37,150)
Agricultural	14	91.06%	2.88%	86.1%	96.14%	205	¥10,915.02	(£1,092)	¥25,644.02	(£2,564)	0	¥307,500	(£30,750)

Notes: ¥10 ≈ £1

Table 5.3 Information of the twenty-six villages

Village	Town	Farming population proportion	Collective village business income in the first six months of 2011	
Z	1	58.61%	¥2,000	(£200)
T	1	58.61%	¥28,276.07	(£2,828)
U	1	58.61%	¥39,063.32	(£3,906)
V	1	58.61%	¥51,300	(£5,130)
W	1	58.61%	¥204,076.66	(£20,408)
Y	1	58.61%	¥313,340.7	(£31,334)
X	1	58.61%	¥371,050	(£37,105)
H	6	91.17%	0	
E	6	91.17%	0	
D	6	91.17%	0	
F	6	91.17%	¥1,446.14	(£145)
A	6	91.17%	¥1,600	(£160)
B	6	91.17%	¥1,704	(£170)
G	6	91.17%	¥7,202	(£720)
C	6	91.17%	¥52,778.4	(£5,278)
K	7	91.92%	0	
I	7	91.92%	0	
J	7	91.92%	0	
L	7	91.92%	¥22,000	(£2,200)
Q	15	96.14%	0	
P	15	96.14%	0	
R	15	96.14%	¥6,333	(£633)
S	15	96.14%	¥6,500	(£650)
M	15	96.14%	¥6,850	(£685)
O	15	96.14%	¥18,000	(£1,800)
N	15	96.14%	¥26,000	(£2,600)

Notes: ¥10 ≈ £1

5.2 Data quality

"'Data' are systematically collected elements of information about the world" (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994, p. 23). Researchers might collect data for the purpose of evaluating an existing theory or discovering a new pattern or even new theory. Data are important sources of scientific research. To produce valid descriptive or causal inferences, we need high-quality data. King, Keohane and Verba (1994) outline five guidelines for improving data quality. In this section, I go through these five guidelines and describe how the data collection and data analysis in this research adhere to the guidelines.

The first guideline is to record and report the process by which the data are collected (King et al., 1994). This process includes sampling methods, criteria for case selection, and interview questions. The data collection in this study was spread across a long period of time, running from 2008 to 2011. As mentioned in Chapter 1, at the initial stage, I went into the field with a broad idea in mind and immersed myself in the field,

trying to understand the actual practice of village elections and the local surrounding context of the elections. Based on evidence gathered at the initial stage of the fieldwork, I was able to form a concrete plan. I picked four towns for the case study which varied in their economic structure, two at the extreme ends and two in the middle. In each town, I picked both poor and rich villages among all in terms of collective village business income to form a representative sample. In each town, township officials responsible for the implementation of village elections were interviewed. These officials are the party secretary, the party vice secretary, the mayor and the vice-mayor of the township government as well as the head of the grassroots governance office within the township government. In each village, the village committee and the village party committee were interviewed. As mentioned above, in some villages I was able to interview the opponents, but in some others, I was not able to do so for various reasons. At those villages where opponents could not be reached, I was able to interview their close friends or relatives.

As the purpose of this research is to study the political dynamic of local elections, I not only need information about the conduct in elections but also detailed stories of campaign efforts and manipulation, some of which might be behind the scenes and have no public written record that can be traced. Thus, in-depth interviews were conducted in a fashion whereby interviewees were encouraged to offer their own accounts of the political competition in the elections freely. I only interfered with the interview when I spotted something worthy of further elaboration or the interviewees went off the focus of the discussion. Every interview was transcribed and stored in a Word file. A record of daily interviews and a fieldwork visit schedule was also kept.

The second guideline is that in order for a better evaluation of a theory, researchers need to collect data on as many of its observable implications as possible (King et al., 1994). Putting this guideline in other words that are relevant to this research enquiry, we needed to observe as many variable effects as possible. In terms of qualitative evidence, we needed villages that have been continually successful in obeying local government instructions on who should be elected. We also needed villages that have continually been problematic or had once been problematic for local government to control. Thus, in selecting villages for case study, in addition to the concern of drawing a representative sample, I also paid special attention to the variance of these

villages on the dependent variable. For those villages selected for case study, I was able to trace the electoral outcomes and political competitions in the previous five elections since 1999. In this way, detailed similarities and variations across different election years and different villages can be identified and examined.

The third guideline relates to the validity of measurements. "Validity refers to measuring what we think we are measuring" (King et al., 1994, p. 25). This is particularly relevant for the collection of qualitative evidence from interviews. Interviewees are likely to conceal what they observed and their real feelings if they do not trust the interviewer or they perceive that the interview questions are politically sensitive and might harm their life and career. If they do not release what they genuinely know, the validity of the data is in doubt. Trust is then the first step for effective communication. My working experience in the sample county as a consultant for village election was a useful image for government officials and staff working for village committees and village party committees because they considered me one of the insiders and felt they did not need to answer my questions on official lines. There were cases when interviewees did use official lines to answer my questions. As I worked at the County Civil Affair Bureau and was involved in dealing with appeals and conflict in time of elections, bringing out my insider knowledge did help me in these few cases to break down the barrier between myself and the interviewees. Furthermore, I declared very clearly at the beginning of every interview that I was a research student and that all information collected would be used solely for research purposes. No information which might reveal their personal identities will be released.

However, my working experience and insider knowledge may well have become an obstacle in my interviews with opponents who competed against candidates supported by local government. Though local government have the opponents' contacts, I did not ask the local government to set up the connection for me, because the involvement of local government will certainly make them uncomfortable and unwilling to release information about the real practice. In order to establish trust, I used my own personal networks to get in touch with the opponents. They were aware of the fact that I worked as a village election consultant which is an ad hoc role only in time of elections and were also aware that I was a research student. No information about my

identity was concealed from the interviewees. At the same time, as I got in touch with them through their friends or relatives, they were willing to tell their campaign strategies and their real feelings about the electoral competition.

Moreover, in order to improve the validity of the data, I used triangulation in both data collection and analysis. Triangulation in social science means the mixing of data sources or methods so that claims or viewpoints can be cross-checked and validated. In data collection, in order to understand the political competition at a village, I interviewed several actors, including the elected village committee chairman and specialised members, the village party secretary, opponents who competed but failed or their close friends or relatives, as well as ordinary villagers. In so doing, different actors' accounts were collected and cross-checked to reveal the political dynamic close to the real practice. In data analysis, I used mixed methods to strengthen the findings of this research. A case study was used to find the pattern, while statistical data were used to test whether the pattern can be generalised to a wider population.

The fourth guideline concerns reliability. "Reliability means that applying the same procedure in the same way will always produce the same measure" (King et al., 1994, p. 25). As mentioned previously, the interviewees were encouraged to speak freely about political competition in village elections and I was acting as a listener during interviews with a minimum level of interference. In reporting the findings, minimum personal interpretation and reconstruction of the data were followed.

Finally: "all data and analyses should, insofar as possible, be replicable" (King et al., 1994, p. 26). Replicability of data can also improve the reliability of the measures. In data collection, replicability of data has been used to guarantee the reliability of the data. As mentioned above, the fieldwork for this study spread across a long period of time from 2008 to 2011 and I collected information about two elections, one in 2008 and the other one in 2011. Regarding statistical data, the electoral results of 2008 and 2011 village elections were collected. In terms of qualitative evidence, some interviewees were interviewed several times and were asked to talk about political competition in both the 2008 and 2011 elections. Participatory observations of the voting days of several villages were carried out in both 2008 and 2011.

5.3 Data analysis

In addition to the procedures and guidelines followed to guarantee data quality mentioned above, in data analysis, this research also endeavours to improve the validity and reliability of the findings. In the case study section of the empirical chapters, by referring to the selected 26 villages, all instances of the outcome in question were examined against the possible combination of factors. The approach is similar to Mill's method of agreement (Mill, 1882). We in essence examined the natural cases, the 26 villages, and found the common characteristics that anteceded the outcome in question and were shared by these cases. The common characteristics were then considered as possible causes of the outcome in question. There is also a connection between the common characteristics and the outcome. However, this does not preclude the possibility of other factors that could also cause the same outcome. "We have ascertained one invariable antecedent or consequent, however many other invariable antecedents or consequents may still remain unascertained" (Mill, 1882, p. 486). Though the method of agreement cannot conclude with a connection that is as determinant or causal as that of the method of difference, it is feasible for this study as the strictly defined nature of the combinations required by the method of difference is difficult to obtain. Second, it is also impossible to use artificial experiments to produce cases that are ideal for the application of the method of difference. Third, in this study, we are interested not only in a single factor but also in a combination of factors, and the method of agreement suits this research purpose.

The case study section provides possible connections between certain characteristics and the outcome in question. The 26 sample villages are used to find out the pattern; while to simplify the analysis, a few villages are selected from the 26 sample villages to explain the mechanisms behind the pattern. The quantitative data analysis, by running regression on all villages in the sample, tests whether or not the connections hold for a wider population. As mentioned earlier, the quantitative analysis focuses primarily on the election of candidates supported by local government. The dependent variables are categorical and thus logistic regressions are performed on the dataset. To better measure the dependent variable - authoritarian control of village elections - two measurements are used to measure the extent of electoral control by local government. As discussed in Chapter 1, the two measurements reflect the two theoretical dimensions of democracy, namely, contestation and inclusiveness. Moreover, these

two measures match the actual practice in China's village elections. Party members and incumbents are favoured by local government and thus the elections of these two types of candidates reflect the success of local government in controlling the elections. Using two different measures also improves the validity and reliability of the findings.

5.4 Research ethics

This research enquiry involves the participation of human participants. "As a rule research involving human participants, identifiable personal and / or medical data, is subject to ethical scrutiny under the auspices of the LSE Research Ethics Committee" (LSE, 2008, p.2). Without appropriate ethical safeguards, the participants in this research might face harm and risk because of the political sensitivity of this research topic. To protect the interests and rights of the participants involved in this research on the one hand and gather objective data and evidence on the other, several ethical issues have been given special attention and appropriate ethical safeguards were in place for this research.

In my several fieldtrips to the sample county, informed consent was given to participants. Before I carried out any fieldtrip to villages, government officials were given complete information about my identity, the purpose of my visit and my research. Before every interview, my identity as a research student, the purpose of the interview and my research were explained orally in local dialect to interviewees. Moreover, interviewees were fully aware that information and findings of this research would be published in academic journals, but that no details would be divulged by which the participants could be identified. They were offered sufficient time to consider whether or not they are willing to take part in the interview. They were also offered the freedom to opt out at any time during the interview, should any question make them uncomfortable. None of the interviewees withdrew from the interview. After finishing the interview, I provided interviewees with my contact information and informed them that they have rights and access to information and results of this research that become available.

Confidentiality was also taken special care of. At the data collection stage, as a part of gaining informed consent, government officials and interviewees were informed that details which may enable the participants of this study to be identified will be kept

strictly confidential. In data analysis, given that information released in this research might directly affect participants, the location of the sample county was not released and the names of villages and towns in this study have also been replaced with new codes which protect villages or towns from being identified. Interviewees are strictly anonymous. Their answers to all the questions in the interview are used only in this study and will not be given to any other person.

Informed consent and confidentiality which make sure that participants would by no means be recognised help to establish the trust between participants and me as a researcher. In this way, data quality is also guaranteed because participants were only willing to release what they genuinely knew and their stories when they felt safe to do so.

5.5 Summary

This research intends to investigate the dynamic of political competition in China's grassroots elections. The study of the dynamic requires an understanding of actors' preferences, actions and choices and thus requires a mixed method approach, combining qualitative case study with quantitative data analysis. On the other hand, as this research investigates the control and manipulation of local government in China's village elections, it is a topic of political sensitivity. Data quality and the validity of the findings might be compromised as a result of the political sensitivity of the topic and difficult access to objective and valuable data. To ensure such a compromise does not happen, research design, that is, data collection and data analysis, needs to follow certain procedures, guidelines and research ethics.

As is discussed in this chapter, a county in Guangdong Province is selected as the sample for this study. Qualitative evidence and quantitative data were collected in my various fieldtrips to the sample county between 2008 and 2011. Information about village elections conducted in both 2008 and 2011 was collected. Though the sample county is both remote and poor, it serves the purpose of this study very well - investigating the relationship between economic factors and actors' choices of various actions and the underlying mechanisms. In the selection of cases for case study, a representative sample was selected, while all villages in the sample county, except all villages in one town with random missing data, were included in the large N dataset

for quantitative analysis. The five guidelines listed by King, Keohane & Verba (1994) to improve data quality were paid attention to and mechanisms were in place both at the data collection stage and data analysis stage to improve data quality. In data analysis, a case study was used to find the patterns, and statistical regressions were run to test whether the patterns can be generalised to a wider population. Given the political sensitivity of this topic, ethical safeguards were in place to protect the interest and rights of participants on the one hand and ensure data quality on the other. Informed consent was given to participants before the interview and confidentiality was strictly respected.

As is mentioned in Chapter 4, actors' preferences, available actions and the relationship between socio-economic factors and their choices from the available actions were carefully examined in the empirical chapters of this thesis. In Chapter 6, which follows, the research enquiry starts with a careful examination of the preferences and strategies of the two important actors in village elections in China, local government and opponents.

Chapter 6 : Authoritarian pressures and opposition candidates' strategies in Guangdong

Elections in rural China are the primary means of gaining power of village governance, but given the instrumental official purpose of holding the elections and the authoritarian nature of the Chinese regime, the playing field of such elections is uneven and skewed to favour the interest of local government and ultimately the authoritarian governance of the CCP. Such an election offers a unique opportunity to investigate authoritarian pressures on the one hand and opposition candidates' strategies in the power competition on the other. To date, as discussed in Chapter 4, there is very little research tapping into this aspect of village elections in China. Most research stress primarily the dominance of authoritarian pressures exerted by local government, but overlook the active or even proactive role of opposition candidates in response to the pressures. This research endeavours to fill in this gap in existing studies of China's village elections.

As outlined in Chapter 3, in competitive authoritarian regimes, methods of manipulation are employed by authoritarian rulers to tip the balance of power competition between authoritarian rulers and opposition challenge. There are a range of methods of manipulation which are not necessarily of a violent nature, if authoritarian control can be secured in a more subtle and soft way. Yet in this electoral game with an uneven playing field, opposition parties are not passive; instead, they are active or even proactive in response to authoritarian pressures and manipulation. They have to play a dual game (Mainwaring, 2003) as is discussed in Chapter 3 - an electoral game aimed at winning votes or seats and a regime game aimed at influencing the regime outcome, while opposition candidates in democratic regimes only need to play the electoral game. In the regime game, they need to deploy unconventional strategies, such as intimidating voters, buying votes, boycotting the elections and mobilising mass protest. The purpose of resorting to extra-institutional strategies is to deliver their capability of protecting their votes and seats and to convey the message that violent repression by the authoritarian rulers will entail risks. Thus, incumbents and candidates supported by authoritarian rulers do not always win the elections and opposition parties do not always concede to authoritarian pressures, which make these types of elections meaningful.

Similarly, in China's village committee elections, local government have a strong party network to rely on and have various methods of manipulation to employ in times of election, such as distributing leaflet about recommended candidates, mobilising party members and clan heads to campaign for the recommended candidates and persuading opposition candidates to drop out of elections. On the other side of the power competition, opposition candidates are not necessarily weak compared to candidates supported by local government. They combine conventional strategies, such as making campaign speeches addressing villagers' key concerns, and mobilising family networks to elicit voter support with unconventional strategies such as bribing voters and intimidating voters. Despite opposition candidates' disadvantaged position vis-à-vis candidates supported by local government, opposition candidates do win the elections from time to time in some villages.

In this chapter, based on qualitative evidence collected from my extensive fieldwork in the sample county, preferences of and strategies deployed by both local government and opposition candidates in village committee elections are carefully examined. This chapter consists of three parts. In the first part, preferences of local government and opposition candidates in village elections in the sample county are discussed, followed by definitions of official candidates supported by local government and opponents. In the second part, based on qualitative evidence at hand, the strategies and actions used by local government to have their preferred candidates elected are explored. In the third part, the focus is on opposition challenge and strategies used by opponents to achieve their electoral goal.

6.1 Preferences of local government and opposition candidates

What are the preferences of local government and opposition candidates? What defines opposition candidates in the context of Chinese village committee elections, considering party ideology is irrelevant to the self-governance of village committees? Why do opposition candidates join the electoral competition? The answers to the second and the third questions require an understanding of the preference of local government in village committee elections.

The Guangdong provincial government (The Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil Affairs, 2002) has a list of qualifications which village committee candidates

should fulfil. First, a candidate should abide by the constitution and laws, carry out party ideology and policies, and guide villagers in implementing political tasks designated by the state. Second, a candidate should be honest and devoted to serving villagers' interests. Third, a candidate should be responsible, reliable and have the capability to carry out tasks independently. Fourth, a candidate should be healthy and physically strong enough to carry out the self-governance duty. He or she should not exceed 60 years old and should have at least 9 years' education. Finally, a candidate should have the capability to lead villagers in achieving prosperity and should have the capability to understand and manage economy. Except the requirements on age and education, all other qualifications listed are vague.

In the same notice (The Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil Affairs, 2002), there are specific restrictions on candidacy, that is, villagers who have violated birth control policy in the past five years, villagers who have criminal record from the past three years, villagers who have violated a party disciplinary in the past three years and villagers who do not reside in the villages. Similarly, as stipulated in a notice issued by the Guangdong Provincial Party committee and People's government in 2010 (The Guangdong Provincial People's Government, 2010), villagers who owe money to the village or who illegally encroach on collective village resources should also not be nominated as candidates. These requirements are not orders; instead, they are simply recommendations, as the village election is in essence self-governance by villagers and the electoral result is determined by ballots.

In another notice issued by the general office of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the general office of the State Council (The State Council, 2009), chairmen and specialised members of village committees are encouraged to serve concurrently as secretaries and members of village party committees. In order to promote concurrent office holding, village party secretaries, village party committee members and ordinary party members are encouraged to run for village committee elections, while those elected non-party village committee chairmen and members who show their capability when in office are encouraged to join the Chinese Communist Party (The State Council, 2002). These two notices clearly spell out two specific preferences of the CCP and the central government over candidates for village committees. First, party membership matters, as it matters to the governing

legitimacy of the CCP. Party members are encouraged to run for the election; while excellent elected non-party village committee members are encouraged to join the party. Second, winning the village committee election and being able to perform the self-governance duties are important criteria for assessing whether a non-party village committee member should be absorbed into the party. Incumbents who have experience working at grassroots organisations are thus preferred.

These two specific preferences can also be spotted in election reports submitted by the rural township governments in the sample county. All reports submitted by the fifteen rural township governments in the sample county[9] after the village elections in 2008 stressed the rural township governments' achievement of the aforementioned two preferences – the number of party members being elected into village committees and the number of incumbent village committee chairmen and specialised members being re-elected.

Why do these two specific preferences matter to the CCP in grassroots elections? The CCP is the only ruling party in China because it represents the most advanced productive forces, advance culture, and the fundamental interests of the masses (The Chinese Communist Party, 2007), as is written in the Constitution of the CCP. If so, even with the introduction of electoral competition in grassroots China, the party should still be able to win the electoral competition and continue its governing at the grassroots level. However, in reality, party secretaries and members are not always welcomed by villagers due to the deterioration of the party's image in the eyes of the villagers as a result of corruptions (see Guo & Bernstein, 2004). In addition, villagers are pragmatic in casting votes - the capability of a candidate to bring prosperity is much more important (see Guo, 2003a). The election of non-party candidates is then a slap to the CCP's claim in its Constitution. To maintain the CCP's governing legitimacy, it has to push party members to join the elections on the one hand and broaden its social base by offering party membership to elected non-party village committee members on the other.

[9] County internal documents provided by the County Civil Affairs Bureau.

The preference over experienced village committee members is related to the implementation of policies. Different polices are weighed differently by the CCP. Local government are assigned performance targets (*kaohe zhibiao*) ranked in importance (see Edin, 2003a; Edin, 2003b). These targets include soft targets (*yiban zhibiao*), hard targets (*ying zhibiao*) and priority targets with veto power (*yipiao foujue*). Local cadres are held responsible for fulfilling these targets, especially the priority targets with veto power. There are two priority targets nowadays in China which decide the political future of leading local cadres, namely, birth control and political stability. The implementation of birth control and the maintenance of political stability in villages require the cooperation of village committees. For example, the maintenance of social and political stability in the local area requires information of potential trouble makers who might mobilise protests and cause social unrest. Village committees working on the front line have up-to-date information of villagers with deep grievances and the potential actions they might deploy. The acquisition of this up-to-date information is crucial to rural township governments in taking precautionary actions against any prospective social turbulence. If elected village committee members, especially village committee chairmen, have experience of working at village committees, they have a better understanding of these priority targets with veto power and will prioritise these targets instructed by the rural township governments. Compared to candidates who have no prior experience of working at village committees, unless village committee members overtly disobey township governments' order in tenure, they will be preferred by the governments. Uncertainty associated with new leadership in rural villages is certainly a risk which rural township leading cadres would prefer to avoid in implementing priority targets.

Certainly, the dynamic of electoral competition in China's villages is much more complicated and these two preferences of local government might seem too simple to reflect the actual complicated situation in practice. But as a rule of thumb, rural township governments and even the state would prefer party members and incumbents to be elected; otherwise, they would not bother to issue governmental notices on the qualifications of candidates and neither would they bother to co-opt outsiders.

On the other side, opposition candidates are those who are not supported by rural township governments in village elections. Bearing in mind the two specific qualifications mentioned above, those who are neither party members nor incumbents can be considered as opponents. Of course, the actual practice is much more complicated and the definition of opponents might change from one election to another because of the composition of candidates standing for each electoral competition. For example, when it comes to the competition between two candidates both of whom are party members, one with experience and the other one without, rural township governments normally support the one with experience. In this case, the one with no experience is an opponent who runs against the candidate supported by local government, though he is a party member. However, as mentioned above, as a rule of thumb, the state and local government preference over party members and incumbents are clearly spelled out in official notices and should represent most cases in village elections. The composition of official candidates supported by local government and opponents in actual electoral competition in the sample county are provided to test whether these two criteria correspond to reality.

In the sample county, prior to every election rural township governments and the county government investigate the incumbent village committee members and any potential new candidates. A list of recommended candidates is then made based on this investigation. It should be straightforward and easy to define official candidates and opposition candidates by looking into the list of recommended candidates in each village. However, this record is normally kept by the village election committee in each village and not all villages have a record of this information. I can only obtain this information through interviews. In the twenty-six villages selected for the case study, I was able to collect information about official candidates and opposition candidates in the 2011 village elections.

Table 6.1 listed the composition of opposition candidates and official candidates in the 26 villages in the village elections for the village committee chairman position in 2011. The one who won the election for the village committee chairman in each village is underlined and italicised. Apart from Village B, in all the other villages, opposition candidates were neither party members nor experienced incumbent village committee members. In Village B, though the opposition candidate is a party member,

the rural township government put forwarded two recommended candidates in the 2011 village elections for the village committee chairman position – incumbent village committee chairman and the vice village party secretary. Table 6.2 groups these 26 villages according to candidates' party affiliation and experience of working for village committees or village party committees. Villages with opposition candidates elected are underlined and in bold in the table.

As can be seen in Table 6.2, in 23 villages, official candidates recommended by rural township governments are party members who had previously worked at the village committees or the village party committees. In the remaining three villages, Villages Y, H and T, the official candidates, though they were not party members in 2011, were incumbents. In fourteen villages in 2011, there was no opposition challenge. In the remaining twelve villages with an opposition challenge, only in one village was the opponent a party member, while in the remaining eleven villages, opponents were neither party members nor incumbents with experience of working for the grassroots organisations[10]. Thus, the election of party members to the village committee chairman position and the re-election of incumbent village committee chairmen are good proxies by which to reflect on whether local government achieve their goals in village elections.

In the case study of the empirical chapters, opponents and official candidates in 2011 can be easily identified with the information of official candidates and opponents available at hand. In the previous four elections (1999, 2002, 2005 and 2008), brief information about candidates was also gathered through interviews with the government officials or village cadres[11], while more accurate information of candidates was obtained for the 2008 and 2011 village elections. Thus, in the case study, the analysis focuses mostly on the recent two elections, that is, 2008 and 2011 village elections. This focus also matches the actual practice, as the electoral competitiveness and the turnover rate increases with villagers' practice of each round of village elections. Also, compared to the previous three elections, 2008 and 2011 elections become more formal and standardised and the record of these two elections

[10] Grassroots organisations here and thereafter in this thesis refer to village committees and village party committees at the village level.
[11] Village cadres here and thereafter in this thesis refer to village committee chairmen, village committee specialised members, village party secretaries and village party committee members.

stored by the local government is also more accurate and complete. In the data analysis section, because of lack of data on official candidates and opponents in all villages in the sample, the two specific qualifications adopted by the CCP and local government, which are also proved to match the actual practices in the sample 26 villages, are used as proxies to reflect the preferences and goals of local government in village elections. In other words, the re-election of incumbent village committee chairmen and the election of party members to the village committee chairman position are used to reflect the extent of local government control over village elections in the sample county. These are covered and further elaborated in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8.

Table 6.1 Composition of opposition candidates and official candidates for the village committee chairman position in the 26 villages in 2011

Villages	Opposition candidates	Official candidates recommended by rural township governments
A	No	*Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership*
B	*A party candidate with no experience*	Candidate 1: Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership; Candidate 2: Incumbent vice secretary of the village party committee.
C	No	*Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership*
D	No	*Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership*
E	A non-party candidate with no experience	*Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership*
F	A non-party candidate with no experience	*Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership*
G	No	*Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership*
H	*A non-party candidate with no experience*	Incumbent village committee chairman with no party membership
I	No	*Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership*
J	No	*Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership*
K	No	*Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership (who violated the birth control policy in the past five years and elected in 2008)*
L	A non-party candidate with no experience	*A party successor who worked as a village committee member in the past few years*
M	No	*A party successor who was employed to work as a village committee member in 2008*
N	A few non-party candidates with no experience	*Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership*
O	No	*Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership*
P	*A non-party candidate with no experience*	Incumbent village committee chairman elected in 2008 with no party membership
Q	*A non-party candidate with no experience*	Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership
R	No	*Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership*
S	No	*Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership*
T	*A non-party candidate with no experience*	Incumbent village committee chairman elected in 2008 with no party membership
U	*A non-party candidate with no experience*	A party successor who worked as a village committee specialised member in the past few years
V	No	*A party successor who worked as a village committee specialised member since 2008*
W	*A non-party candidate with no experience*	Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership
X	*A non-party candidate with no experience*	Incumbent village committee chairman who obtained party membership in 2009
Y	No	*Incumbent village committee chairman with no party membership*
Z	No	*Incumbent village committee chairman with party membership*

Notes: The candidate who won the election for the village committee chairman in each village is underlined and italicised

Table 6.2 Composition of opposition candidates and official candidates for the village committee chairman position in the 26 villages in 2011 in groups

Villages		Opposition candidates		
		No opposition	Opposition challenge exists	
			Non-party member + no experience	Party-member + no experience
Candidates recommended by rural township governments	Incumbent + party member	A, C, D, G, I, J, K, M,O,R, S, V, Z	E, F, N, **P**, **Q**,**U**, **W**, L, **X**	**B**
	Incumbent + non-party member	Y	**H**, **T**	No observation

Notes: Villages with opposition candidates elected are underlined and in bold in the table.

After exploring the preference of local government and defining official candidates and opponents, we move onto the final question of this section. Faced with official candidates supported by rural township governments, what motivation drives opposition candidates to join the electoral competition? Free candidates who are mostly non-party members and have no prior experience of working at grassroots organisations join the competition if they foresee there is a possibility of getting benefits when in office. Institutional weakness accounts for this rationality assumption of opponents in China's village elections. According to the Official Organic Law of Village Committees (The National People's Congress, 2010), village democracy has four components, namely, democratic election, democratic management, democratic decision making and democratic supervision. In the implementation of village democracy, more weights are put on democratic election while little attention has been spared to the other three components, especially on democratic supervision. For example, village representative assemblies, which should play a role as a formal legislative and oversight body in village governance, are ill-equipped to perform the role and decisions that are so important in determining village economy are made elsewhere in most villages (Oi & Rozelle, 2000). The meeting of village representative assemblies is infrequent, averaging 3.76 meetings across China in 1995, according to Oi and Rozelle's survey (2000). Moreover, in addition to elected village representatives, the village representative assembly also consists of non-elected members who are supposed to be overseen, such as the village committee. The village committee chairman is also given the power to chair each assembly session and to set the agenda. Thus, in the light of these observations, when in office, village committee chairmen possess almost unsupervised power. Given that the village committee chairman is the legal representative of collective village economy, it is possible for the chairmen to pocket a share of the collective revenues through various means or to use the power in favour of their own private interests.

The benefits associated with the village committee chairman position are mostly in monetary terms. This aspect is better illustrated with examples. For example, the non-party opponent in Village T in 2011 was supported by an outside investor who intended to use the village lands for a development project. With the election of the non-party opponent to the village chairman position, the investor can get a good price on renting the village lands and the opponent can get a certain amount of commission

into his own pocket through this transaction[12]. The non-party-member opponent in Village P owns a small factory which produces bricks. With his election to the village committee chairman position in 2011, he rented the village land at a lower price and moved his factory to the village[13]. In some poor villages with no collective resources, the monthly allowance for each village committee member from the county budget is attractive to those villagers relying on farming, because compared to farming, being a village committee member can bring a steady and easy income[14]. As pointed out by a renowned Professor in Law and Constitution in China, Professor Cai Dingjian in an interview I conducted on February 1st 2010, only when the village committee is stripped of its unsupervised economic power can we have village leaders who work for collective interest instead of private interest[15].

Referring to the private interest mainly in monetary terms does not exclude the existence of other forms of benefits. In addition to monetary interest, opponents also pursue other benefits, such as favouring the interests of their own lineage group when carrying out state policies or implementing economic development projects or climbing up the political ladder. However, the unsupervised economic power possessed by the village committee makes the potential direct monetary benefit a more lucrative and straightforward lure to opponents, while the pursuit of other forms of benefits is a by-product of their pursuit of the direct monetary benefit.

The opponents' pursuit of their electoral goal - being elected - does not always fail in village elections conducted under China's authoritarian rule. As can be seen from Table 6.1 and Table 6.2, not all official candidates supported by rural township governments were elected and in some villages (Villages H, T, P, Q, U, W and X), opponents without party membership and experience of working for village committees were elected. In Village B, even though the opponent with party membership but no experience was not supported by the rural township government, he was elected in 2011. On the other hand, in some other villages (Village A, C, D, G, I, J, K, M, O, R, S, V, Z and Y), there was no opposition challenge at all in 2011; or

[12] Interview with an ex-member of the village committee in village T, July 29, 2011 (T5).
[13] Interview with the newly elected village committee chairman in Village P, August 4, 2011 (P1).
[14] Interview with the deputy head of the county Civil Affairs Bureau who is in charge of the organization of village elections, August 6, 2009 (CL1).
[15] Interview with Cai Dingjian, a renowned Professor in Law and Constitution of China, University of political science and law, Beijing, February 1st, 2010 (1).

despite the existence of opposition challenge, in some villages (Village E, F, N and L) candidates supported by local government managed to win the elections in 2011. Based on the understanding of preferences and motivations of both local government and opponents in the elections, what strategies would both adopt to achieve their goals? The next section starts from authoritarian pressure and control by local government to achieve their electoral goals.

6.2 Authoritarian pressure and control

The previous section has shown that candidates recommended by rural township governments are incumbents or/and party members whom the rural township governments can rely on to carry out policies and political tasks, especially priority targets with veto power. As shown in the 26 sample villages in Table 6.1 and Table 6.2, rural township governments succeeded in quite a few villages in having their recommended candidates elected to the village committee chairman position. How do the rural township governments manage to have their preferred candidates elected? What strategies they could use to achieve their electoral goals?

At each round of village elections, it is routine for a leading group to be set up to decide matters related to the implementation of village elections. In the sample county (The Sample County Civil Affairs Bureau, 2011), early in each election year, a county leading group at the county level and a rural township leading group at each rural township level are set up to lead the implementation of village elections. The county leading group is led by the county party secretary and consists of township party secretaries of all towns in the county, and the rural township leading group at each rural township level is led by the township party secretary. At village level, according to the official Organic Law of Village Committees revised in 2010 (The National People's Congress, 2010), the village party committee is the leadership core in rural areas and leads and supports the village committee in carrying out its duty. Given that the village party committee is responsible to the township level party committee and government, the leadership core status of the village party committee in rural villages means that the village party committee is the agent of the rural township party committee and government at the grassroots level to exert authoritarian pressure and control.

Information is essential for making rational decisions on actions. The information for local government to make recommendations and decisions about village elections is gathered through investigations of individual villages performed by the township leading groups and village party committees. The main purpose of the investigation is two-fold. On the one hand, it is to assess the performance of incumbent village committee members based on two criteria, that is, the completion of assigned political tasks and the support of villagers. On the other hand, it is to identify potential candidates who will run for the electoral competition and their base of support. The list of recommended candidates is produced based on the information gathered through this investigation.

Authoritarian pressure and control can be exerted through the use of the following strategies. First, the privileged access to law and regulations legitimises rural township governments' manipulation over the election for the village election committee. As described in Chapter 2, the VEC is the election management committee which manages the electoral procedure of the village election in each individual village. An independent and fair election management committee is essential for the implementation of a fair election. In Guangdong Province, a provincial issue promulgated in 2010 (The Guangdong Provincial People's Government, 2010) suggests that the election for the VEC should be chaired by village party secretaries and it is recommended that village party secretaries should be elected through democratic methods as the chairmen of the VECs. Prior to each election, rural township governments and village party committees use various means to advertise this official issue. Their intentions are to legitimise the leadership status of the village party committee in the village election and to pave the way for the election of village party secretaries to the VEC chairman position. Having the village party secretary as the leader responsible for the management and organisation of village election could, to a large extent, keep the elections under control and favour the interest of the rural township government. This strategy is used in all villages in the sample county, though not all village party secretaries were successfully elected or selected as the chairmen of the VEC.

Second, persuasion is the most powerful tool used by rural township governments to achieve their goals. Persuasion can be exercised through convening meetings or

visiting individuals. Village representative assemblies chaired by either incumbent village committee chairmen or village party secretaries are normally convened to address rural township governments' intentions for ideal candidates and for those opponents they dislike. For example, on April 19th, 2008, a village representative assembly with the attendance of village representatives, party members, the incumbent village committee and the village party committee was convened in Village A at the preparation stage of the 2008 village election. At the meeting, the incumbent village committee was allowed time to address their achievements and performance during the three years' term from 2005 to 2008 and their plans for the next three years if they were to be re-elected. Attendees of the meeting were allowed to raise questions to the incumbent village committee. Then, the rural township government's intention was released at the meeting - to have the incumbent village committee re-elected in 2008. All attendees were asked to support the rural township government's intention and help to elicit votes for the re-election of the incumbent village committee. In addition to convening meetings, village party committees and the VECs also pay visits to important villagers and persuade them to vote for official candidates supported by local government. These important villagers are normally clan heads, activists, retired government officials and party members who have very good reputation among villagers. Also, village party committees and the VECs might visit opponents who run against the official candidates and their relatives and ask them to drop out of the electoral competition and vote for the official candidates.

Rural township governments and village party committees apply a carrot and stick approach in persuasion. In other words, rewards or/and punishment are offered to induce cooperative behaviours from villagers and opponents. Threatening to blackmail villages from future development projects or villagers from subsidy schemes is a strong message to opponents and villagers which might induce obedient behaviours. Rural township governments do not only use punishment to control the election, however; they also use rewards to influence electoral results. The application of the carrot and stick approach in Village L in 2011 is a good example of how the carrot can work. In 2011[16], a rich entrepreneur ran for the village committee chairman position. The township government preferred a party successor who had worked as a

[16] Interview with the vice secretary of the party committee of the rural town where village L is located, July 20, 2011 (TL3).

specialised member of the village committee for years to take over the incumbent chairman who was promoted to the township government in 2011. In order to persuade the entrepreneur to drop out of the electoral competition, the village party secretary and government officials offered a deal to the entrepreneur. In order to promote women's participation in village elections, it is required by the Guangdong Provincial government (The Guangdong Provincial People's Government, 2010) that each village committee must have at least one female member. The entrepreneur was promised that as long as he drops out of competition, his wife would be supported by the rural township government to be a member of the village committee. At the end, the entrepreneur dropped out voluntarily and his wife was elected as a specialised member of the village committee.

Third, in the cases when the confrontation between candidates is intense or the rural township government faces a stubborn opponent who has organised public demonstration or petition previously, the rural township government can postpone the elections for the sake of social stability. For example[17], on April 12th, 2008, in Village E, the confrontation between the two candidates was intense and on the date of voting, the number of ballot tickets received was four times the actual voter turnout, which caused serious tension between supporters of the two candidates on the ground. The township election leading group immediately nullified the election result and lately the voting date was postponed to July, three months later. Village D, located in the same rural township with Village E shared very similar problems in 2008. A few opponents intended to compete with the incumbent village committee and the confrontation between supporters of the opponents and those of the incumbent village committee was intense on the day of voting. The ballot box was supposed to be opened on the same day and be counted publicly. Because the tension was intense and some villagers challenged the validity of the procedure, the VEC decided to seal the ballot box and postpone the counting of ballot tickets. The exact date of vote counting was not released. At the end, vote counting was conducted three months later in July, with the presence of township and county government officials. The election results

[17] The information was available on an internal election report written by the sample county civil affairs bureau in 2008 and the report was provided by the civil affairs bureau, when I was working as an election observer of 2008 village election in the county.

released in July in both villages were announced as final and no appeal or complaint was accepted by the rural township government.

As was revealed in an interview with the vice-head [18] of the rural township government in the township where Villages E and D are located, there is a trade-off between democracy and social stability. Given the financial constraints rural governments and villages face, no village can strictly follow the electoral procedure. Thus, by their nature elections in very few villages can pass the strict assessment of procedure validity; rather, elections in different villages only differ in the degree of fulfilling procedure validity. From the perspective of rural township and county governments, when social stability is at risk, the governments cannot afford to let the competition go on and on for a long time until one group finally triumphs over the other group; instead, they have to suppress when it becomes necessary.

When the above mechanisms fail in securing local government political domination at the ballot box, as mentioned earlier, a co-optation strategy is the last resort. As previously stated, if the CCP, as the only ruling party in China, is as advanced and representative as it claims in its Constitution, party members should win the village elections. The winning of non-party members to the village committee positions is thus a challenge to these claims by the CCP and might undermine its governing legitimacy in rural area. To restore its legitimacy, the absorption of elected capable village committee members who are not party members into the party is a rational step. In the notice put forward by the State Council in 2002 (The State Council, 2002), grassroots party organisations were asked to consider recruiting elected village committee chairmen and specialised members without party membership who show their capability when in office into the party. In order to be qualified as a party member, a candidate needs to submit an application to the village party committee. If the application is approved by the village party committee, the candidate will then need to go through one year's training on communist ideology, party discipline and policies. After the one year's probation period, only when the performance of the candidate is approved by the township party committee will the candidate be offered

[18] Interview with the vice-head of the rural township government in the town where Villages E and D are located, August 5th, 2009 (TL2).

an official party membership. This co-optation strategy indicates the party's willingness to broaden its social base and refresh its governing legitimacy.

Given that the CCP is the only ruling power in China, some might argue that if local government cannot guarantee the final electoral outcomes in favour of their interest, why can't they just ban the elections and directly announce their preferred candidates to be the village committee members? What is the point of local government engaging in tactical manipulation which takes time and effort, if they can guarantee their interest in an effortless manner by banning the elections? Banning the elections directly is a very risky step and it is unlikely that local government would deploy this extreme strategy for the following reasons. Firstly, the holding of village elections once every three years is protected by the Official Law of Village Committees (The National People's Congress, 1998, 2010); it is illegal for local government to ban the elections. Secondly, the law and relevant regulations of village elections are widely advertised through leaflets distributed in times of election and broadcasted through the media. Also, with villagers' practice of each round of election, they are aware of the democratic right to which they are entitled. Therefore, the banning of village elections by local government might lead to public demonstrations by villagers and cause social unrest, which affects the local government implementation of a key priority target with veto power - political satiability - and thus the political future of local leading officials.

Thirdly, the introduction of village elections in China is a solution to the political anarchy caused by the collapse of the commune system on the one hand and is an outlet for peasants to express their grievances on the other. By holding elections in rural areas, the central government intends to shift the blame to local cadres which would only affect rural political stability. Thus, it is unlikely that the central government would support local government nastiest levels of repression, which will exacerbate the conflict and affect the ruling legitimacy of the CCP. Last but not least, because of the entry of international media outlets in China and the leeway enjoyed by local media outlets in China, the nastiest level of repression could easily bring the issue to the attention of both domestic and international audiences, causing a threat to the governing legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party. The most notable case, the Wukan protests, which took place in Guangdong in 2011, is a vivid example of the

great impact of media reports on the local government's ruling legitimacy. The protests at Wukan village received extensive international media coverage in, to name a few, BBC, New York Times and the Wall Street Journal, which at the time caused a legitimacy crisis to the Guangdong Provincial government. Hence, manipulation has to be done in a subtle way that is not going to put the political stability at risk.

6.3 Opposition challenge and strategies

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, opponents in China's village elections are not inevitably weak in the sense that they do not always concede to the pressures and control by local government. They might take an active or even proactive role in response to authoritarian pressure and control. Similarly to opponents in the elections in competitive authoritarian regimes, they might also combine conventional strategies aimed at vote maximisation with unconventional strategies aimed at indicating their strength to protect their votes and power. What strategies do opponents adopt to achieve their electoral goals?

In grassroots China, power is primarily gained through elections, but the playing field is skewed to favour official candidates supported by local government. As mentioned in the previous section, the privileged access to law and regulations legitimises local government control over the electoral procedure, while the local government can also use other mechanisms to achieve their electoral goals, such as, offering rewards or punishment to induce cooperative behaviours from actors involved, using organisational networks and structures to convey their electoral goals and elicit support, co-opting outsiders, among other things. Under such a setting, opponents' ability to gain and maintain power hinges on their ability to win votes on the one hand and their ability to deploy unconventional strategies to compete and survive on a skewed playing field on the other.

Campaigning is a widely used strategy in China's village elections. As mentioned in Chapter 2, candidates are allowed to campaign for votes. There are two types of campaigns, organised campaigning and self-campaigning. Organised campaigning is organised through the holding of a village meeting by the VEC and each candidate is given a certain amount of time to make campaign speeches. Compared to organised campaigns, self-campaigning is more flexible in that candidates organise their own

campaign activities without the organisation of any formal meeting by a third party and thus it is used widely by candidates. Candidates can post leaflets introducing themselves in designated public areas. They can also pay door-to-door visits to villagers and mobilise their relatives and friends to campaign on their behalf.

Candidates can adopt a conventional approach in self-campaigning. In a conventional approach, candidates would make campaign promises such as investing more collective resources in certain areas of public good provision, attracting outside investors to develop the village economy and bring prosperity, showing determination to solve acute problems in the village. Villagers do care about these campaign promises, especially the ability of a candidate to develop the village economy and bring prosperity to the village. As pointed out by Guo (2003c), after 20 years' practice of village democracy, villagers are getting more experienced in and serious about casting votes and are more pragmatic when casting votes. Villagers expect that a candidate with business success could bring prosperity to them and improve their living standards; and as a result, more and more new economic elite with business success manages to get into village power centre through popular vote.

However, given that the playing field is heavily skewed to favour the interest of official candidates supported by local government, conventional campaign strategies have been, for quite some time, trumped by unconventional campaign strategies in rural China in the opponents' pursuit of village power. What distinguishes conventional campaigns from unconventional campaigns is not the form of the campaign; instead, it is the content of the campaign promise. The content of the campaign promise defines the nature of the campaign strategy. Opponents may promise to pay for each ballot ticket that votes for them. They may also promise to help particular groups to bypass certain policies or to twist the implementation of some subsidy schemes to favour the interest of particular groups in exchange for votes. For example, in Village W in 2011, an opponent who runs his own business in the Pearl River Delta joined the competition. The party incumbent was supported by the township government and the village party committee. Both candidates spent money on buying votes. At the end, the competition between the opponent and the incumbent chairman on the village committee chairman position is very similar to an auction. The one offering the highest bid gets the product. In this village, the product is the

village committee chairman position and the bid is used to bribe voters. The opponent won the election and spent more than ¥600,000 (£60,000) on buying votes. In Village N in 2011, an opponent was nominated by a lineage in the village and the opponent promised to turn a blind eye to villagers from his own lineage when implementing birth control policy[19].

Buying votes, either in the form of money or in the form of the twisted implementation of policy, certainly violates the fairness nature of democratic elections, but it is difficult to convict a candidate of committing vote bribery. As pointed out by a county official[20]: "the difficulty of preventing buying vote practice lies in how you can find solid evidence to support the existence of buying vote practice in particular villages, as payment is mostly made in the form of cash or goods which is difficult to track". The county government is well aware of the existence of buying votes in several villages in the county, but due to the difficulty of collecting solid evidence of electoral bribery, they tend to turn a blind eye to this issue. What is worse, vote buying practice is contagious. A recent annual report on village elections produced by the Guangzhou Academy of Social Science (Li & Tang, 2011) points out that buying votes in village elections, first developed in some wealthy villages, has now spread to some remote and poor villages. Candidates in wealthy villages might use money to buy votes, while candidates in poor villages might use cigarettes in exchange for votes[21]. The vote-buying practice in different villages only differs in the goods candidates use to buy votes.

Opponents can not only offer rewards to villagers in exchange for votes, but also deploy voter intimidation to deliver their ability to win and protect their votes. Candidates might hire gangs to help them intimidate voters or stuff ballot boxes. The involvement of gangs in village elections might cause serious social unrest, such as, fighting between competing groups. For example, Village T[22] is classified by the sample county government as the most chaotic village in times of election and in almost every election gangs are involved in the electoral competition. In 2005, the

[19] Interview with the village committee chairman of Village A who sets up his factory in Village N, July 15th, 2011 (A1).
[20] Interview with an official from County Civil Affairs Bureau, August 15th, 2009 (CL2).
[21] Interview with an official from County Civil Affairs Bureau, August 15th, 2009 (CL2).
[22] Interview with an official from County Civil Affairs Bureau, August 15th, 2009 (CL2).

involvement of gangs in the election in Village T created tension between the competing groups which then caused serious fighting between the two groups on the voting day. The fighting caused one death and several injuries. This is the most extreme case in the sample county. In most villages, though candidates might adopt unconventional strategies with a violent nature, the tension between competing groups does not necessarily end up with a serious fight or social turbulence. In China's countryside, the revival of traditional Chinese criminal forces, such as clans and hooligans and the use of money power or/and clan networks to control elections by candidates are becoming serious (He, 1997) and these problems need to be addressed in order for the democratic value and fair nature of the elections to be realised.

The use of rewards or/and strategies with a violent nature by opponents is also applied to the election for the VEC. The Guangdong Provincial regulation (The Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil Affairs, 2010) stipulates that once being nominated as and accepting to be an official candidate, a candidate cannot serve on the VEC. This regulation applies to villages adopting the two stage nomination, because these villages vet primary candidates and produce a list of official candidates at the second stage of nomination. In villages adopting the 'two in one' nomination, however, the application of this regulation proves to be problematic, as in villages with the 'two in one' nomination there will not normally be a list of official candidates. As described in Chapter 2, in villages adopting the 'two in one' nomination, there is no nomination and everyone can run for the electoral competition. The VECs do not vet and select candidates. Most villages in the sample county use the 'two in one' nomination. Opponents might utilise this bug in the institutional design to manipulate the elections. For example, the village committee chairman elected in Village P served as the chairman of the VEC in 2011, and was responsible for the management and organisation of the 2011 village election. In the 2011 village election in Village P, there was no nomination and vetting of candidates. When questioned about the validity of his serving concurrently as the VEC chairman and a candidate running for electoral competition, he[23] pointed out that he was not an official candidate for the village committee chairman position and thus he did not violate any regulation or law. Village committee chairmen in some of the other villages in the 26 I did detailed case

[23] Interview with the village committee chairman of Village P elected in 2011, August 4th, 2011 (P1).

studies of shared the same understanding of their validity of serving concurrently as the chairmen of the VECs and candidates running for the electoral competition.

Being aware of the importance of the VECs in village elections, opponents use their money power or network resources to get their supporters or themselves control the VECs. If they control the VECs, they might assign their supporters to carry the roving ballot boxes on the day of voting. While carrying the roving ballot boxes to individual households, their supporters might persuade or threaten members of the household to vote for them. Their supporters might also put their names on the ballot tickets on behalf of those villagers who are illiterate. Once the VEC is controlled, it is easy and convenient for candidates to manipulate ballot tickets and ballot boxes[24].

Finally, opponents may join the CCP in order to remain in power. Given that CCP is the only ruling party in China, joining the CCP is a viable option to opponents, especially for those who want to remain in power or climb up the political ladder. Having obtained the CCP membership, a candidate can compete for the village party committee position. As long as the candidate is approved by the township party committee and obtains a position at the village party committee, he can hold the position for a long time, unless he seriously violates party discipline. Moreover, once the opponent is accepted into the party, the support of local government in the next election for the village committee position can increase the opponent's chance of being re-elected. For example, the non-party candidate who was elected as the village committee chairman of Village E in 2008 successfully obtained the CCP party membership in 2009. In 2011, he was then elected as the village party secretary in January and re-elected as the village committee chairman in April with the support of the rural township government. His opponent in 2008 failed in the electoral competition for the village committee chairman position. Though his opponent's party membership application was accepted by the former village party secretary in 2008, after the one year's probation period the opponent's application for formal party membership was rejected by the township party committee in 2009[25]. Knowing that the opponent, once obtaining party membership, would join the electoral competition for both the village committee chairman position and the village party secretary

[24] Interview with an ex-member of the village committee of Village N, August 13th, 2011 (N3).
[25] Interview with one opponent of Village E, July 15th, 2011 (E3).

position, the township party committee extended his probation period and postponed offering him a formal party membership in order to avoid serious tension between the two candidates[26].

6.4 Summary

This chapter shows that because the implementation of state policies and political tasks, especially the priority targets with veto power, requires the cooperation and assistance of village committees, local government have a great incentive to manipulate the elections to favour candidates they trust. As a rule of thumb, local government prefer party members or/and incumbents being elected. The election of party members in village elections is a safeguard of the CCP's ruling legitimacy in China's countryside and the re-election of incumbents is to help to avoid the risk associated with new leadership in implementing state policies and political tasks. These preferences are also proved to match the actual practices, based on the information of official candidates recommended by local government and opponents available in the 26 sample villages (Table 6.1 and Table 6.2).

In order to achieve the electoral goals, local government can use various strategies to exercise their control over the elections. Local government privileged access to law and regulations enables them to control the electoral procedure, especially having village party secretaries control the elections. They can also rely on their organisational networks to campaign for their preferred candidates. Rewards or/ and punishment are deployed to induce cooperation behaviours from both opponents and villagers. They can also postpone the elections if it becomes necessary for the sake of social stability. As a last resort, local government might co-opt some elected capable village committee members who are not party members to restore the CCP's ruling legitimacy. It is important to note that manipulation of the elections has to be done in a subtle way, as political stability is the utmost goal of the CCP.

On the other side, opponents are neither party members nor incumbents having any experience of working for grassroots organisations. The motivation driving opposition candidates to join the electoral competition is the possibility of getting monetary benefit when in office, due to the unsupervised economic power possessed by the

[26] Interview with the former village party secretary of Village E, July 14th, 2011 (E2).

village committee. Also, the pursuit of other forms of benefits, such as the interest of opponents' lineage groups or opponents' political careers, is a by-product of their pursuit of direct monetary benefit. In response to authoritarian pressure and control, opponents in grassroots China can not only deploy conventional strategies - making campaign promises such as investing money on public goods provision, developing village economy - but also resort to unconventional strategies, such as, vote buying, voter intimidation, manipulating the election for the VEC, etc. To win the elections under the skewed playing field in favour of the interest of local government, unconventional strategies are preferred by opponents to conventional strategies and are exercised more widely. Last but not least, to remain in power opponents might also have an incentive to join the party.

As can be seen from Table 6.1 and Table 6.2, not all official candidates supported by the rural township governments were elected despite the rural township governments' efforts. In some villages, opponents managed to win the elections for the village committee chairman position. Why in some villages authoritarian control prevails, while in some others opposition challenge dominates? As mentioned at the end of Chapter 4, the outcome of an election is determined by the actions taken by the actors involved. Actors' actions are in turn affected by their interests and preferences. Economic factors are the key variables linking actors' interests and actions taken, as economic factors affect actors' interest and prompt them to prefer some actions over others. These selected actions have a direct bearing on the outcome of an election. The preferences and strategies of the two important actors in China's village elections, local government and opponents, are carefully examined in this chapter. The next step is to study how economic factors - economic wealth and economic autonomy in this study - affect actors' preferences and choices over available strategies and thus influence the electoral outcomes. In other words, what is the role of economic wealth and economic autonomy in explaining the variance of villages on the extent of authoritarian control reflected from the electoral outcomes?

As mentioned earlier, because of the lack of accurate data on official candidates supported by rural township governments and opponents at all villages in the sample county, the two specific qualifications - party members and incumbents- are used as proxies to reflect the preferences and goals of local government in village elections.

Thus, the focuses are the election of party members to the village committee chairman position in Chapter 7 and the re-election of incumbent village committee chairmen in Chapter 8. Given that the dynamic of village electoral competition in reality is complicated, in both chapters a detailed case study of the electoral competition in the 26 villages is provided to complement the use of simple proxies in the data-analysis section. To simplify the analysis, in each chapter, four villages from the 26 sample villages are used to unravel the underlying mechanisms behind the patterns found in the 26 villages. Moreover, in each chapter, the detailed case study focuses on one aspect of authoritarian control, that is, the election of party members or the re-election of incumbents, as the mechanisms and rationales are different for these two aspects of authoritarian control.

Chapter 7 : Village economic development and the party affiliation of elected village chairmen

Village committees have the obligation to carry out state policies and tasks, especially the priority targets with veto power, the completion of which directly affects rural township government officials' political career. Thus, rural township governments have the incentive to manipulate elections and get experienced and reliable candidates elected. As mentioned in the previous chapter, having party members elected to village committees matters to the CCP's ruling legitimacy. The CCP is the only ruling party and positions itself as the representation of the most advanced force in the country. The application of such a representation in reality is the winning of party members in village elections. Secondly, compared to non-party members, party members have a better understanding of party policies, discipline and working styles and are better in cooperating with the village party committees and the local government to achieve governments' goals. Moreover, party members are answerable to village party secretaries and thus having party members elected to the village committees assures the leadership of the CCP in villages and prevents rural villages from becoming independent kingdoms. Thirdly, as mentioned in Chapter 4, tension and conflict between village committees and village party committees arises since the introduction of direct village elections, because these two committees have different bases of legitimacy and authority (Guo and Bernstein 2004). Power is supposed to be shared by the village committee and the village party committee (Guo & Bernstein, 2004), but in practice both might try to grasp the leadership. The election of party members to the village committee can ease the power conflict between the two committees. Thus, local government prefer party members to be elected.

The election of party members to village committee positions can go through two trajectories. First, village party members, especially those who work at village party committees, are encouraged to run for the election. As mentioned in Chapter 6, in two notices issued by the State Council (The State Council, 2002, 2009), village party secretaries, party committee members and party members in villages are encouraged to join the electoral competition for the village committee. As is discussed in Chapter 4 Section 2, the prospects of village committee elections, in some localities, village party secretaries and party committee members are obliged to run for the elections for

the village committees in order to retain their positions in the village party committees. If they fail, they will also not be able to serve on the village party committees. Second, elected village committee members without party membership are co-opted into the party when in office and encouraged to run for re-election. The issue put forward by the State Council in 2002 (The State Council, 2002) explicitly calls for the recruitment of elected village committee members, especially chairmen without party membership who show their capability when in office into the party, as mentioned in Chapter 6. The ultimate goal is to have party members control village governance power, establishing the CCP's legitimacy at the grassroots level.

As is shown in Table 6.2, based on the electoral results of the 26 sample villages in the 2011 village elections, though local government employ various methods of manipulation to assure the election of party members to the village committee chairman positions, in some villages non-party members with no experience of working in grassroots organisations managed to be elected to the village committee chairman positions. Local government's manipulation and control over the elections does not always prevail. What is the role of economic development in explaining the extent of authoritarian control in such elections? Though economic development has been perceived by many studies as a key socioeconomic factor in explaining competitive elections in China, as is reviewed in Chapter 4, scholars have not reached a consensus on the nature of the relationship. Some (Hu 2005) argue that economic development increases the stakes villagers have in village elections and thus their interests and rewards from participating, which in turn increases the competitiveness of the elections. On the other hand, others (Oi & Rozelle, 2000; Shi, 1999a) argue that economic development increases village leaders' stake and strengthens their capacity to thwart opposition challenge. In addition to economic wealth, as briefly mentioned in Chapter 4 Section 4, this study also applies the concept of economic autonomy to explain the extent of local government control in China's village elections. This chapter focuses on the influence of village economic wealth and economic autonomy on the inclusiveness of the elections reflected from the election of party members to the village committee chairman position (for details, see Chapter 1 Section 1), which empirically also reflects local government authoritarian control.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the role and responsibility of the village party committee. In the second section, the electoral competition in the 26 sample villages is used to unravel the empirical regularities and the relationship between economic factors and the party affiliation of elected village chairmen; and then four villages are selected to explain the underlying mechanisms behind the relationship and show the dynamics of the political competition in elections. Then, we proceed to data analysis using 2011 village election data from 237 villages in the sample county. The empirical investigation intends to test whether the relationship and patterns found in the case study section hold for a wider population or not.

7.1 The role and responsibility of the village party committee

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the state administrative hierarchy in China consists of two paralleled lines - the government line and the party line. The leadership status of the CCP is satisfied through the arrangement that on the same level, the head of the party committee leads the head of the government. This institutional arrangement also applies to the village level, though the village committee is a body of self-governance. At the village level, in addition to the village committee responsible for day-to-day management of village, there is also a village party committee which should lead the village committee. According to the Organic Law of Village Committees (The National People's Congress, 2010) revised in 2010, the village party committee is the "leadership core" in rural areas and should lead and support the village committee in carrying out its duty. In theory, power is supposed to be shared by the two committees (Guo & Bernstein, 2004). The village party committee "should exercise leadership 'over important matters' while the VC should take charge of specific issues" (Guo & Bernstein, 2004, p. 258). "Unlike the undisputed leadership status of the party committees at the state hierarchical levels, at the village level the party secretary shares equal power with the village committee chairman, but the law assigns the leadership core status to the village party secretary. The leadership core status mainly means that the party secretary should lead the village committee chairman in policy issues and big decisions in the village should involve the party secretary"[27].

However, due to the distinctive characteristics of the two committees and little description of the division of labour between the two committees, sharing power is

[27] Interview with the former village party secretary of Village E, July 14, 2011 (E2).

difficult to execute in practice. The introduction of village elections implies the pluralisation of the formal political power in villages (Guo & Bernstein, 2004), which is clearly indicated from the distinctive characteristics of the two committees at the village level in Table 7.1. The key difference between the two committees, which causes tension, is the source of authority. The village party secretary is the agent of the Chinese Communist Party at the grassroots level and is selected through a combination of appointment by the township party committee and close election by village party members. Two reasons[28] make the village party secretary consider himself as the undisputed and ideal head at the village level. First, the party secretary and members of the village party committees have "party spirit" (*Dangxing*) – representing the party in the village and being subjected directly to party disciplines and supervision. Second, villagers are not educated enough to exercise their voting right independently and they are likely to be subject to manipulation. Moreover, villagers also have little incentive to exercise their rights of supervising the elected cadres and participating in making collective decisions. On the other side, the village committee chairman bases his power on the consent of the governed citizenry through direct elections. Compared to the village party secretary who is elected by village party members constituting a small fraction of the village population, the village committee chairman considers himself the legitimate head of the village because he has been elected by the entire adult population in a village.

Among the twenty-six villages I visited, in those villages where the two heads can work with each other, a common characteristic is that the two heads have good personal relationships (e.g. Village S, Village R, and Village Z). But without institutional mechanisms for power sharing, power sharing relying on a good personal relationship is not sustainable. For example[29], in Village T, the former village committee chairman had a very good personal relationship with the party secretary before he was elected to the village committee as a specialised member in 2005. However, since being elected as the chairman of the village committee in 2008, his relationship with the village party secretary deteriorated rapidly. It is difficult to implement any village development project due to the serious tension between the two

[28] Interview with the village party secretary of Village B, July 27, 2011 (B3)
[29] Interview with the head of the rural governance office of the county Civil Affairs Bureau, Nov 23, 2009 (CL2).

committees because of power struggles. The implementation of almost all projects in the village requires the intervention of township and county governments. Without the external intervention of the local government, the tension between the two committees might lead to social turmoil.

Table 7.1 Characteristics of village party committees and village committees

	Village party committees	Village committees
Head	Party secretary	Village committee chairman
Source of authority	An agent of the Chinese Communist Party	Consent of the governed citizenry
Method of selection	Combination of appointment by the township party committee and close election by village party members	Popular elections by villagers
Number of members	3-7	3-7
Eligibility for office	Party members	Villagers regardless of party membership
Salary source	Township governments, sometimes village budget (if there is collective enterprise)	Village budget , sometimes Township governments (subsidy if the village is poor)
Responsibility	"Leadership core" of the village; Deal with internal party matters; Recruit new village party members; Supervise and educate village cadres; Manage and organise village elections.	Develop village economy and manage village enterprises if there is any; Maintain social order; Provide public goods and public service; Carry out state policies; Allocate public land.

Sources: Guo & Bernstein (2004), Birney (2007), The Guangdong Provincial regulation of village management (The Guangdong Provincial People's Government, 2001), The Organic Law of the Village Committees of the People's Republic of China (2010 Revision) (The National People's Congress, 2010).

As an answer to the power conflict between the two committees at the grassroots level, party members, especially those working at village party committees, are encouraged to run for electoral competition for village committees, establishing their legitimacy among villagers, while elected non-party village committee chairmen and specialised members are encouraged to join the Chinese Communist Party, refreshing the party's social base (The State Council, 2009). Merging the posts of the village party committee and the village committee can significantly alleviate the power tension caused by unclear definition of jurisdictions of the two committees and different sources of power. If the posts of the village committee, especially that of village committee chairman, are occupied by party members, the village party secretary is the undisputed head of the village because village party members are answerable to the village party secretary at the village level.

Recruiting new village party members is one key duty of the village party committee. The village party secretary possesses the gate-keeping power in recruiting villagers into the party. To apply for party membership, a candidate must be recommended by two referees who are party members and should first submit an application to the village party committee. Only after the application is approved by majority village party members and the village party secretary will the candidate be offered a probationary party membership. The probation period normally lasts for one year. During the one year's probation period, the candidate needs to go through one year's training on communist ideology, party discipline and policies. After passing a written test and an interview about party discipline and policies, with the approval of the village party secretary and the township party secretary, the candidate will then become an official party member (The Chinese Communist Party, 2007).

Co-opting non-party candidates elected to the village committees is a rational strategy for the party. From the CCP's perspective, co-optation can refresh its social base and regain ruling legitimacy at the grassroots level, maintaining its image as the most advanced force in China. The recruitment of elected non-party village committee chairmen and specialised members can also alleviate the power tension between the two committees mentioned above. Irreconcilable conflict between the heads of the two committees normally results in paralysed rural governance, which more often arises when the village committee chairman is not a party member. Last but not least, given the importance of the village committee in carrying out state policies and maintaining social stability at the grassroots level, the state and local government face less risk if the village committee chairmen are party members. Though village committee chairmen are not answerable to local government, party members are responsible to village party secretaries and township party secretaries.

For non-party candidates elected to the village committees, obtaining party membership is rational. After obtaining party membership, they might be able to utilise the party network in seeking re-election which increases their chance of staying in power. Second, getting party membership can also increase their chance of obtaining more stable positions in village party committees. After obtaining party membership, they are eligible for the posts of the village party committee. The competition for the village party committee is less competitive than the competition

for the village committee, because to be considered for a post in the village party committee, a candidate only needs to obtain a majority of a significant less number of voters - all village party members instead of the whole village's adult population. Moreover, a candidate, once being co-opted and appointed for a position in the village party committee, can serve in the position for a long time, unless he seriously violates party discipline, because township party secretaries prioritise leadership stability when considering candidates for village party committees. Last but not least, for those who want to climb up the political ladder, party membership is a crucial qualification.

However, rational collective interest might be irrational for certain individuals of the group. More specifically, co-optation strategy, which is rational for the Chinese Communist Party, might be irrational for village party committees, especially village party secretaries. In a fieldwork report written by a township official (Cai, 2008) in a town with 21 village committees in Zhejiang Province, the official listed the difficulties of recruiting non-party village committee chairmen and specialised members into the party. He pointed out that among all cases of unsuccessful co-optation of outsiders in village committees, only 10% is because outsiders have no intention to join the party, while the remaining 90% is due to the reluctance of party secretaries to co-opt outsiders. Capable outsiders, once they become party members, are potential competitors to party secretaries and may in future replace incumbent party secretaries in village party committees. In addition, party secretaries worry that co-opting outsiders may alter the existing political balance of village party committees and offer a chance for outsiders to build up their own allies gradually. Yao (2009) points out that in his case, the village party secretary exercised favouritism and factionalism when recruiting new party members. Only the followers of the village party secretary in Yao's case were recruited into the party. Thus, co-opting outsiders, though it is supported by the CCP and the central government, might not always be successful in practice at the village level because of the conflict of interests between village party secretaries and capable outsiders.

Through these two trajectories, either by pushing party members to run or by co-opting elected non-party VC chairmen and specialised members, the party can regain its control over grassroots governance and its legitimacy in the Chinese countryside. However, both the election of party members to the posts of village committee and

the co-optation of elected outsiders do face obstacles in reality. As village elections are open to all eligible villagers in a village, party members are not guaranteed to win the elections, especially in the cases when competition is intense; and the co-optation of elected outsiders might not always succeed due to the conflict of interests between party secretaries and capable outsiders. Under what conditions would the local government succeed in having party members elected through the above mentioned two trajectories? Under what conditions the obstacles, such as fierce electoral competition or intense conflict of interests between party secretaries and capable outsiders, would be too great for the local government to achieve their preference – the election of party members to village committee positions? The following section investigates the socioeconomic factors - village economic wealth and economic autonomy - and the resultant variance across the 26 sample villages in the party membership of elected village committee chairmen in 2011 village elections.

7.2 Case study: socioeconomic factors and the party affiliation of elected village committee chairmen

The CCP's encouragement of party members joining the electoral competition and outsiders being co-opted into the party suggests that party membership, though it is not required for candidates to run in village elections, matters to the CCP when it comes to the grassroots governance power. In this sense, it is a good indicator for the CCP's preference and thus it reflects authoritarian control in village elections. In this case study section, the party membership of the village chairmen elected in 2011 in the 26 sample villages is used as a proxy for authoritarian control. Furthermore, to simplify the analysis and reveal the mechanisms behind the pattern, four villages are selected to do detailed case study and the analysis also refers to the previous electoral history of these four villages which is gathered through conducting interviews and studying government documents. The advantage of detailed case study is that through the use of rich qualitative evidence it enables a thorough investigation of the mechanisms lying behind the pattern.

7.2.1 Collective village wealth, economic autonomy and the election of party members to VC chairman position

As is discussed in Chapter 3, theories of democratisation, looking at the establishment and consolidation of democracy at the national level, consider economic development an important factor in the development of democracy. In the modernisation school,

increased wealth is a proxy for the associated changes in a society as a result of modernisation, such as, a better-educated population, a growing middle class (e.g., Lipset, 1959, 1994), income equality (e.g., Boix & Stokes, 2003), the development of more trust, tolerance, well-being and postmaterialist values (e.g., Inglehart & Baker, 2000), which in turn promote and consolidate democracy. To understand the relationship between economic development and the implementation of village elections in China's grassroots context, however, the nature of the relationship and the mechanisms behind the relationship might well be different, as the social phenomena change from macro level democracies to local community level democratic reform in an authoritarian regime.

As is pointed out in some studies of China's village elections in Chapter 4 (Hu, 2001, 2005), economic development does contribute to the implementation of competitive village elections in grassroots China, but the key mechanism is that increased economic wealth increases villagers' stakes and candidates' rewards from the results of the elections, thus leading to greater participation and more intense electoral competition in the elections. However, the cost of villagers voting for opponents who are not supported by local government and the cost of opponents running for electoral competition seem to be overlooked in the key mechanism mentioned above. Village elections are introduced to legitimise the authoritarian governance of the CCP in China and operate within an authoritarian system (see Chapter 4 Section 1 and Section 2). Therefore, the elections are subject to authoritarian control. Local government, representing the CCP at the county and the township levels, have their ideal candidates for the village committees. Voting and running against the candidates supported by local government entail risks, the cost of which villagers and opponents must take into account when making decision about participating in voting and electoral competition.

Existing studies (e.g., Levitsky & Way, 2002; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Way, 2005) that focus on elections in non-democratic regimes stress the uneven playing field of elections under authoritarian regimes and the capability of authoritarian rulers to control the elections and retain power (see Chapter 3 section 2). In these studies, a key variable is the control of the state over economy. If resources are highly concentrated in state hands, the state can use this economic control as a very powerful tool to

compel compliance and punish opposition. Similarly, existing studies of subnational authoritarianism (McMann, 2006) bring in the concept of economic autonomy (see Chapter 3 section 3). If individuals have sufficient economic autonomy or individuals live in provinces that offer greater economic autonomy, reflected from opportunities for jobs beyond the control of local government, they are more likely to challenge local authorities and be active in civic activities. Taking into account that village elections are subject to authoritarian control in China and have an uneven playing field, the concept of economic autonomy can be applied to village elections in China to capture the cost of villagers and opponents challenging the official candidates. Villagers and opponents in villages that have greater economic autonomy, reflected in opportunities for economic development beyond the control of local government, are more likely to challenge the official candidates and resist the pressure and control of local government in the elections.

Similarly to existing studies of China's village elections mentioned above, this study considers that increasing collective village wealth increases economic benefits or rewards from holding the posts of the village committee and thus might attract strong opponents who foresee the benefits, leading to intense electoral competition. The more intense the electoral competition is, the more difficult it is for the local government to control the elections in their favour. However, the risk entailed by challenging the official candidates supported by local government is affected by another more important factor - the discretionary power local government has on economic resources or village economy autonomy. If villages have sufficient economic autonomy, that is, generating collective village wealth beyond the control of local government, the cost of villagers and opponents challenging the official candidates is decreased. Villagers are more likely to vote according to their true preferences and opponents are more likely to participate in electoral competition.

In this study, collective village wealth is indicated by the amount of business income a village generated in the first six months of 2011. As is discussed in Chapter 2 Section 3, most villages in the sample county generate their collective business income from subletting properties or resources owned by the village as a collective. Some generate their collective business income from attracting outside investment to set up private companies in the village. Collective village business income in the

sample county is mainly in the form of rents. It is important to point out that no village in the sample county generates their collective business income from setting up their own village enterprises. There are some villages at the outskirts of urban cities generating their collective business income through collective village enterprises and villagers, as shareholders of the collective village enterprises, share the benefits and bonus of the enterprises. The village where I worked as an intern in Shenzhen, mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 1, is an example of such village. And as the village in Shenzhen has shown, this kind of villages will eventually be converted into urban communities where different election rules apply. Due to data limitation, the exploration of this kind of villages which have yet to be converted into urban communities will be left for future study. As discussed in Chapter 2, the village committee has full control over the collective village business income generated from its business activities. Because of the lack of democratic supervision of the power of the village committee on spending the collective village business income (See p.138), it is possible for the elected village committee, especially the chairman, to pocket a share of the collective revenues or use the power in favour of their own private interests. Thus, collective village business income represents the lucrative rewards the elected village committee, especially the VC chairman, can benefit from holding the post. In addition, in this case study section, the financial conditions of the selected villages in the past few years are also referred to in order to obtain a dynamic picture of the influence of collective village wealth on authoritarian control over elections.

The operationalisation of the other important concept in China - village economic autonomy - requires us to consider China's grassroots context. Village economic autonomy reflects whether a village possesses independent sources of economic development beyond the reach of local government, as mentioned above. In rural areas, village economic autonomy is better represented from township economic structure - whether a town is an industrial town or an agricultural town. Industrial towns generally have more independent opportunities for development, better public transportation and infrastructure because of industrialisation, and thus it is easier for villages to set up networks with investors and have opportunities for development beyond the reach of local government. Situations in agricultural towns are different. Agricultural towns generally have limited opportunities for economic development and poor infrastructure. The main industry is agriculture. To develop the village

economy, township governments play a crucial role. More specifically, township governments perform two functions in agricultural towns to help develop village economy. First, they help to set up the connections between villages and outside investors. Second, they provide an infrastructure for industrial development either through government budget or through attracting resources from outside investors. Thus, villages in agricultural towns have limited economic autonomy. In this study, the proportion of a farming population at the township level is used to reflect the economic reliance of a village on the rural township government. A higher township level proportion of a farming population means the town is more agricultural and thus villages in the town have less economic autonomy; while a lower township level proportion of a farming population means the town is more industrial and thus the villages in the town have more economic autonomy.

It is important to point out here that the township percentage farming population would not be a proxy for education or attitudes towards authority or other cultural factors in the setting of China's village elections. Village elections are only conducted in rural villages in China. And in some towns, urban communities (*Juweihui*) exist where different election rules apply. In the sample fifteen towns of the county, there are in total 237 villages that village elections apply, while there are also 16 urban communities where direct village elections do not apply. Non-farming residents mainly reside in these 16 urban communities. Town 1 with the lowest township farming population 58.61% have nine urban communities and the residents of these nine urban communities account for the majority of the non-farming population in the town; while in the remaining fourteen towns, seven towns have no urban community and seven have only one urban community. In other words, village elections mainly apply to the farming population in each town and thus township level farming population does not indicate the alternative explanations such as education or attitudes towards authority.

There is a very important control variable to consider in this study. As mentioned in Chapter 3 Section 2, the playing field of elections conducted in competitive authoritarian regimes is skewed to favour the interest of incumbents and incumbents might use their privileged access to resources, media and laws to handicap the ability of opponents to compete in elections and to minimise the opponents' probability of

winning (see Levitsky & Way, 2002). In China's village elections, this feature is evident, as is discussed in Chapter 6. Local government prefers incumbents as they are experienced and have a better understanding of the implementation of state polices and tasks. Moreover, the adoption of the co-optation strategy by the CCP offers a channel for local government to absorb capable incumbents who are not party members into the party. Thus, incumbents who have worked at the grassroots organisations before are more likely to be party members than newly elected village committee chairmen. In this section, because of the co-optation strategy adopted by local government, years of working at grassroots governance organisations is a control variable which might have an influence on the party membership of the elected village committee chairmen in 2011.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, because the chairman is the legal representative of collective village wealth and has decisive power over the distribution and management of collective village revenues, electoral competition centres at this head position and is more intense for this position. In the light of this observation, the empirical analysis of this research focuses primarily on the electoral competition for the village committee chairman position. Table 7.2 and Table 7.3 list information about 2011 village elections in the 26 villages.

Table 7.2 lists information about the 2011 village elections at eight villages with elected VC chairmen having no party membership. In Villages W and Q, the former VC chairmen are party members who have been serving in the same position for years, but they failed in seeking re-election in 2011 despite being supported by the township governments and they were replaced by opponents who have neither party membership nor experience of working at grassroots organisations. In Village U, the former VC chairman reached the age of retirement and the township government supported an incumbent VC specialised member who is also a party member to run for the electoral competition, but the opponent with no party membership and no grassroots working experience won. In Village X, though the former VC chairman was co-opted in 2010 after being elected in 2008 and his re-election was supported by the township government, the opponent won. In Villages T, H and P, though the former chairmen failed in being co-opted after being first elected to the VC chairman position due to the conflict of interest they have with the village party secretaries, they

were all supported by the township governments to run for re-election. They were also all replaced by the opponents. The VC chairman in Village Y is an exceptional case. He has been serving in the same position since 2005 and has been supported since then by the township government to run for re-election. He has yet to obtain the party membership because he has no intention to join the party. In the eight villages, except Village Y, the electoral competition for the VC chairman position had strong competitors and the competition was intense in 2011.

Table 7.3 lists information about the 2011 village elections in eighteen villages with elected VC chairmen being party members. In Villages V, Z, G, A, D, C, K, I, J, S, O, M and R, there was no competition in 2011 and the elected VC chairmen are party members supported by the township governments who have served and still serve concurrently on the village party committee. In Villages E, F, B, L and N, the electoral competition for the VC chairman position had strong competitors in 2011. The elected village committee chairmen in Villages E, F, L and N in 2011 were supported by the township governments. However, the trajectories are different. The village committee chairmen in Villages F, L and N are party members who also serve on the village party committee. Their election to the village committee chairman position follows the first path - party members joining the electoral competition, while the elected VC chairman in Village E follows the second part - being co-opted into the party after he was first elected to the same position in 2008. The elected VC chairman in Village B, though he is a party member, was not supported by the township government but won the election.

Several observations can be drawn from these 26 cases. First, in the 2011 village elections, villages differed greatly on the competitiveness of the election for the VC chairman position. Second, among those villages with intense competition, opponents with neither party membership nor experience of working at grassroots organisations in some villages were elected to the VC chairman position, though they had to run against the official candidates who were supported by the township governments; while in other villages, the official candidates won. Third, the co-optation strategy adopted by the local government worked differently in different villages. In some villages, outsiders were successfully co-opted, while in some other villages, despite

the outsiders' continual efforts, their applications for party membership have yet to be approved.

The following patterns are observed from the 26 villages. First, comparing the villages with non-party candidates elected with those with party candidates elected, those with non-party candidates elected are mostly located in the town with a farming population of 58.61% (Villages U, T, W, X and Y), while those with party candidates elected are mostly from towns with a farming population of at least 90% (Villages E, G, F, B, A, D, C, K, L, I, J, S, O, N, M and R). Second, wealthy collective business recourses in villages in industrial town (Villages U, T, X and W) have contributed to increasingly competitive elections over the years. Third, rich villages in agricultural town are more likely to have party candidates elected, compared to their counterparts in industrial town. As can be seen, collective village wealth and village economic autonomy play a role in explaining the variance among villages on the party membership of the elected VC chairmen. What is the role of village economic wealth and economic autonomy in explaining the aforementioned variance? And what are the underlying mechanisms at work? The focus shifts to answering these aforementioned two questions in the following section. Four villages are used to answer these questions – Village X, Village Z, Village L and Village E.

Table 7.2 Case study of the 26 sample villages

Village	Farming population proportion	Collective village business income	Information of the VC chairman elected in 2011			Competition in 2011	Trajectories
			Party membership of the elected 2011 VC chairman	Year of serving in grassroots organisations till 2011	Supported by the local government		
U	58.61%	¥39063.32 (£3,906)	Non-Party member	No	No	Yes	The former VC chairman retired. The party successor failed in the competition.
T	58.61%	¥28276.07 (£2,828)	Non-Party member	No	No	Yes	The former VC chairman failed in being co-opted
X	58.61%	¥371050 (£37,105)	Non-Party member	No	No	Yes	The former VC chairman was co-opted in 2010 but failed in seeking re-election.
Y	58.61%	¥313340.7 (£31,334)	Non-Party member	6 years	Yes	No	The chairman elected in 2011 has served as the VC chairman since 2005 and has no intention to join the party.
W	58.61%	¥204076.66 (£20,408)	Non-Party member	No	No	Yes	The former party member VC chairman was supported by the rural township government.
H	91.17%	¥0	Non-party member	No	No	Yes	The former VC chairman failed in being co-opted
P	96.14%	¥0	Non-party member	No	No	Yes	The former VC chairman failed in being co-opted.
Q	96.14%	¥0	Non-party member	No	No	Yes	The former VC chairman has also served as village party secretary since 1999 and failed in being re-elected in 2011.

Table 7.3 Case study of the 26 sample villages (continued)

Village	Farming population proportion	Collective village business income		Information of the VC chairman elected in 2011			Competition in 2011	Trajectories (if unspecified, it means the career trajectories of the VC chairman elected in 2011)
				Party membership of the elected 2011 VC chairman	Year of serving in grassroots organisations till 2011	Supported by the local government		
V	58.61%	¥51300	(£5,130)	Party member	3 years	Yes	No	Village party committee member
Z	58.61%	¥2000	(£200)	Party member	at least 3 years	Yes	No	Village party committee member
E	91.17%	¥0		Party member	3 years	Yes	Yes	Co-opted in 2009 and became village party secretary in 2011
G	91.17%	¥7202	(£720)	Party member	6 years	Yes	No	Village party secretary
F	91.17%	¥1446.14	(£145)	Party member	6 years	Yes	Yes	Village party committee member
B	91.17%	¥1704	(£170)	Party member	no	No	Yes	The former party-member VC chairman was supported by the rural township government but failed in the 2011 election.
A	91.17%	¥1600	(£160)	Party member	at least 25 years	Yes	No	Village party secretary
D	91.17%	¥0		Party member	9 years	Yes	No	Village party committee member
C	91.17%	¥52778.4	(£5,278)	Party member	at least 30 years	Yes	No	Village party committee member
K	91.92%	¥0		Party member	6 years	Yes	No	Village party committee member
L	91.92%	¥22000	(£2,200)	Party member	6 years	Yes	Yes	Village party committee member
I	91.92%	¥0		Party member	at least 12 years	Yes	No	Village party secretary
J	91.92%	¥0		Party member	12 years	Yes	No	Village party committee member
S	96.14%	¥6500	(£650)	Party member	6 years	Yes	No	Village party committee member
O	96.14%	¥18000	(£1,800)	Party member	at least 6 years	Yes	No	Village party secretary
N	96.14%	¥26000	(£2,600)	Party member	8 years	Yes	Yes	Village party committee member
M	96.14%	¥6850	(£685)	Party member	3 years	Yes	No	Village party member
R	96.14%	¥6333	(£633)	Party member	16 years	Yes	No	Village party committee member

7.2.2 The cases

The two key independent of interest in this research are collective village business wealth and the township farming population percentage. Four villages are selected to do the detailed case study, based on their variations on collective village business wealth and the township farming population percentage. The four villages are shown in Table 7.4. Two villages – Village X and Village Z – are selected from the most industrial town of the sample county, namely, Town 1 with 58.61% farming population. Village X is the wealthiest village in the sample county, generating £37,105 in the first six months of 2011, while Village Z only generated £200 during the same period. Two villages – Village L and Village E – are chosen from the agricultural towns of the sample, Town 7 with 91.92% farming population and Town 6 with 91.17% farming population respectively. Village L is a wealthy village which generated £2,200 in the first six months of 2011, well beyond the mean collective business income of all villages from agricultural towns (£1,092) in the sample county, while Village E had no collective business income at all during the same period.

Table 7.4 The four villages for detailed case study

Township farming population percentage / *Collective business wealth*	*Industrial town*	*Agricultural town*
Rich village	Village X	Village L
Poor village	Village Z	Village E

Village X, the wealthiest village in the county, is located in the town with 58.61% farming population. In the first six months of 2011, Village X generated £37,105 collective business income. "Our village as a collective has a restaurant, a car park and more than 10 retail properties to let; the management of the restaurant, the car park and the letting of the retail properties are handled by the village committee, the legal representative of the village in charge of collective village resources"[30]. The opinion leader of Village X who was in his 60s was also asked to comment on the previous electoral history:

> "In every election year, those who wanted to run for the village committee chairman position would find their ideal candidates for the other positions of the village committee and run for the electoral competition as a group. And of course,

[30] Interview with an opinion leader of Village X, Aug 12, 2011 (X1).

> when they bought votes, they shared the costs and bought votes for all members of the group. Nowadays, the one who have the money will be the winner. This has to do with the wealthy collective resources the village boasts. Other wealthy villages in our town also share similar situation when it comes to elections"[31]

In Village X, the village committee chairman elected in 2008 was at that time a non-party member with no previous experience of working at the grassroots organisations. He won the election because he outspent his opponent. After being elected as the village chairman in 2008, he successfully obtained his party membership in 2010. During his three-year tenure, he has spent efforts and collective income on a few public issues. First, the manure pit in the village which is used to collect and store human and animal manure for farming was reconstructed and cleaned to reduce the potential health hazards it might pose to villagers. Second, the village school has been refurbished. "Villages appreciated what he has done during his tenure and as such, he thought that he would definitely be re-elected" [32]. However, he failed in his competition with the opponent who had neither party membership nor experience of working at grassroots organisations in 2011. The opponent spent approximately £40,000 on buying votes and won the electoral competition. "He (the incumbent village committee chairman) was over confident in his performance during his tenure and spent too little money on buying vote. That is not how the election works (the one with good performance wins) in our village"[33]. Before my interview with the opinion leader of Village X, I interviewed an official of the County Civil Affair Bureau and he admitted he was aware of vote bribery in Village X. However, he commented that:

> "Situation in Village X is actually much better, because after the electoral result was released, the losing side did neither stir up a fight with the winning side nor appealed to the government for the unlawful conduct in the election. The losing side simply accepted the result and became silent about what have happened".[34]

Facing strong opposition challenge, obtaining party membership did not increase the competitive advantage of the former VC chairman substantially in Village X. The rationale behind this story is related to village economic autonomy. Being located in the industrial town, Village X has independent sources of collective village income –

[31] Interview with an opinion leader of Village X, Aug 12, 2011 (X1).
[32] Interview with an opinion leader of Village X, Aug 12, 2011 (X1).
[33] Interview with an opinion leader of Village X, Aug 12, 2011 (X1).
[34] Interview with the head of the rural governance office of the county level Civil Affair Bureau, Aug 3, 2011 (CL2).

a restaurant, a car park and a few retail properties to let. They rely less on the local government. In time of elections, local government can exert very little influence over the electoral outcome. As is pointed out by the deputy head of the county level Civil Affairs Bureau,

> "In general, elections conducted in Town 1 are the most chaotic ones in the sense that we have to give up our goal of finding reliable VC chairmen we can trust and concentrate on maintaining political stability in times of elections. Those villages with wealthy collective resources in Town 1 are considered as difficult villages by us. Wherever there is lucrative benefit, there is fierce competition for the benefit" [35].

Moreover, Village X also has wealthy collective business income which has contributed to increasingly competitive elections over the years. Competitors foresee the potential lucrative benefits they can get after getting into office and strive to win the elections. The lucrative benefits they can get also explain why they are willing to spend money on buying votes. Though it is not evident in Village X, in other wealthy villages in Town 1, the lucrative benefits also explain why the village party secretaries rejected to co-opt elected non-party village chairmen (for example, Village T). In a word, located in a more industrial town insulates Village X from pressure and control of local government, while collective wealth and resources increases the competitiveness of the elections and intensifies actors' conflict over village economic power.

The situation in the poor village in the industrial town is different. Village Z is a poor village and is located in the same town with Village X. Different from Village X, Village Z only generated £200 in the first six months of 2011. "We have three private power stations in the village; we help to manage the power stations and charge them a management fee of £480 per year"[36]. The village does not possess any other collective resources. Moreover, as the village party secretary commented:

> "The village election conducted once every three years can easily use up all collective business income generated in the previous three years and thus there is no lucrative benefit a candidate can obtain from holding the position. If there is no lucrative benefit, what is the point for candidates to join the electoral competition? Needless to say spending money on buying votes"[37].

[35] Interview with the deputy head of the county civil affairs bureau, August 6, 2009 (CL1).
[36] Interview with the village party secretary of Village Z, August 19, 2011 (Z1).
[37] Interview with the village party secretary of Village Z, August 19, 2011 (Z1).

In the past five elections, there was almost no competition. "If there is any candidate who shows any interest in joining, they can be easily told off"[38]. The village party secretary of Village Z has been working concurrently as the village party secretary and the village committee chairman since the introduction of village elections in Guangdong in 1998. "I was too tired to hold both positions at the same time and thus decided to give up the village chairman position in 2008"[39]. The current village committee chairman is also a village party committee member and has worked at both the village committee and the village party committee for longer than 3 years. In the past five elections, the village party secretary has always been selected as the chairman of the VEC. As can be seen, even though Village Z is located in the same industrial town, there is too little collective business income to attract electoral competition and thus it is easy for the village party secretary to control the elections through his control of the VEC.

At the other end, the influence of collective business income on the electoral outcome is different in villages in agricultural town. Village L is a rich village generating £2,200 in the first six months of 2011, the wealthiest village in Town 7. Town 7 is a very agricultural town with a farming population of 91.92%. Village L was once a poor village with no collective income. The vice-party secretary of Town 7 revealed that:

> "A few years ago, Village L was selected by the township government to join in an economic development program initiated by the provincial government. The Bank of China Guangzhou Branch was assigned the duty to help this village develop village economy. Because of this program, the Bank of China Guangzhou Branch invested in total 100 million RMB in developing the village, including building a village power station and paying a risk deposit to the local bank for village residents to borrow money for opening small family chicken farms. The village committee of Village L can generate annually about £4,000 collective income since the introduction of this program".[40]

The village party secretary was asked to explain his role in time of elections. He mentioned that his main duty is "to guide villagers in casting their vote properly in order to guarantee that the organizational purpose can be reflected from the electoral

[38] Interview with the village party secretary of Village Z, August 19, 2011 (Z1).
[39] Interview with the village party secretary of Village Z, August 19, 2011 (Z1).
[40] Interview with the vice-party-secretary of Town 7, July 19, 2011(TL3).

outcome"[41]. By saying organizational purpose, he means that candidates who are trusted by the township government and the village party secretary can be elected. In 2011 village election, a rich entrepreneur returned to the village and ran for the competition for the village committee chairman position. However, "the village party committee, the incumbent village committee and the township government all think he is not reliable and thus not suitable for the village committee chairman position. We all strongly opposed his joining of the electoral competition"[42]. The village party committee, the incumbent village committee and the township government spent efforts and time on persuading him from joining the competition. They latterly found out that his wife was a good candidate for the women's welfare position of the village committee and promised to support his wife to be elected to the VC specialised member position if he could drop out of the electoral competition. Using the issue (The Guangdong Provincial People's Government, 2010) - each village committee must have at least one female member - the entrepreneur's wife was elected as a specialised member of the VC responsible for women's welfare; and the entrepreneur dropped out voluntarily and the party successor who has worked as a village committee member in the past few years was elected. When asked to comment on this electoral outcome in Village L in 2011, the township vice-party-secretary was quite proud of the fact that the organizational purpose was achieved in the village and as he put, "in the village election, we need to adopt a holistic approach - considering the balance of power among different factions and villages living in different natural villages; thus, we need to spend efforts and time on guiding villagers to cast votes"[43].

As mentioned earlier, agricultural towns generally have limited opportunities for development and poor infrastructure and agriculture is the main industry. Villages in agricultural town tend to rely on local government to generate collective wealth. Village L shows such a tendency. Village L is located in an agricultural town with a farming population of 91.92% and relies on local government support in generating its wealthy collective village wealth. Because of its economic reliance on local government, the township government is more effective in using the persuasion

[41] Interview with the village party secretary of Village L, July 18, 2011 (L1).
[42] Interview with the vice-party-secretary of Town 7, July 20, 2011(TL3).
[43] Interview with the vice-party-secretary of Town 7, July 20, 2011(TL3).

strategy, offering rewards or punishment or both, to achieve the electoral outcome in their favour.

As mentioned before, the election of party members to the village committee chairman position can go through two trajectories – party members winning the elections or elected village committee chairmen being co-opted. It is more likely for elected non-party village chairmen to be co-opted in poor villages in agricultural town than rich villages in both agricultural town and industrial town. Village E is a poor village with no collective resource at all and located in Town 6 with a farming population of 91.17%. "The village committee does not possess any collective resource and thus we have to rely on local government for economic support; we are hoping that the local government can introduce some economic development projects to our village"[44]. The village committee chairman elected in 2011 also served in the same position from 2008 to 2011. When he was first elected village committee chairman position in 2008, he was not a party member. After being elected, he applied for party membership. In the interview with him[45], though he did not explicitly mention his political ambition, he did imply his intention to climb up the political ladder in the long run and thus party membership is essential. His application was accepted immediately by the former village party secretary. In 2011, the incumbent chairman was first elected as the village party secretary and then was re-elected as the village committee chairman. As the former village party secretary put:

> "Young villagers will only apply for the party membership when they can get some benefits from it, either being political benefit or economic benefit or both; however, in our village, there is no collective resource and I was at the age of retirement when he applied for party membership. There is no point for me to reject the application"[46].

As was reviewed in the interview with the former party secretary of Village E, in 2008 village election, there was a challenger who ran for the same position as the current village committee chairman did. But the challenger failed in the electoral competition. After the village chairman was elected in 2008, the challenger also applied for the party membership at the same time with the village chairmen and the application of the challenger was approved by the village party secretary. However,

[44] Interview with the former village party secretary of Village E, July 14, 2011 (E2).
[45] Interview with the village committee chairman re-elected in 2011 of Village E, July 14, 2011 (E1).
[46] Interview with the former village party secretary of Village E, July 14, 2011 (E2).

after the one year probation period, situation changed. The former village party secretary revealed that:

> "After the one-year probation period, the village chairman was accepted by the township party committee as a formal party member, while the challenger's probation period was extended; and I don't think the challenger will ever pass the probation period and be approved as a formal party member, because in this way it is easy to carry out village election and reduce potential threat caused by fierce competition to the political stability in Village E"[47].

In 2011, the challenger initially spent some efforts on running for electoral competition but dropped out half-way through the 2011 village election. As the challenger revealed in the interview:

> "It seems that the village chairman is very powerful that he can manage to influence the township party committee's decision on my party membership application. If I succeed in getting my party membership, I will definitely run for the electoral competition. But I failed, which is very frustrating"[48].

The case of Village E clearly shows that the lack of economic autonomy and collective village wealth, local government is very effective in manipulating the electoral competition in Village E through exercising favouritism in recruiting new party members. By disapproving the party membership application from the candidate they distrust, they sent a clear message of their preference which discouraged the candidate to join the electoral competition in the future. In this way, they altered the dynamics of the power competition in Village E. It is also important to point out that because of the lack of economic benefits in this type of village, village party secretaries and elected non-party village committee chairmen have less conflict over control of power and it is relatively easy for elected non-party village committee chairmen to be co-opted. On the other hand, because most resources of economic development in this type of village are controlled by the township governments, challengers also have more of an incentive to join the party in order to increase their chances of retaining power and enjoying the spoils of office.

[47] Interview with the former village party secretary of Village E, July 14, 2011 (E2).
[48] Interview with the challenger of Village E, July 15, 2011(E3).

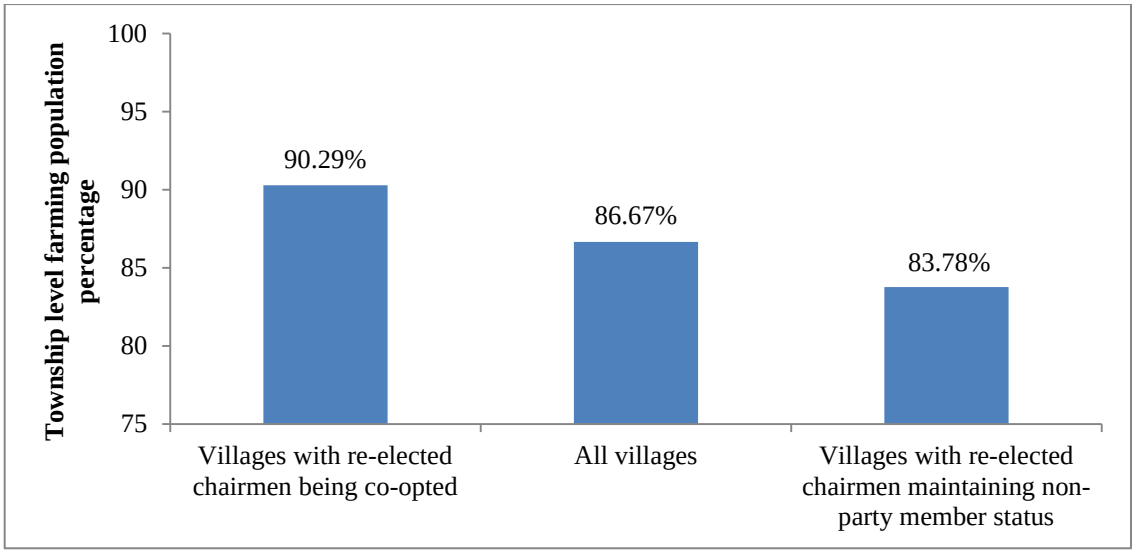


Figure 7.1 The impact of township economic structure on co-optation

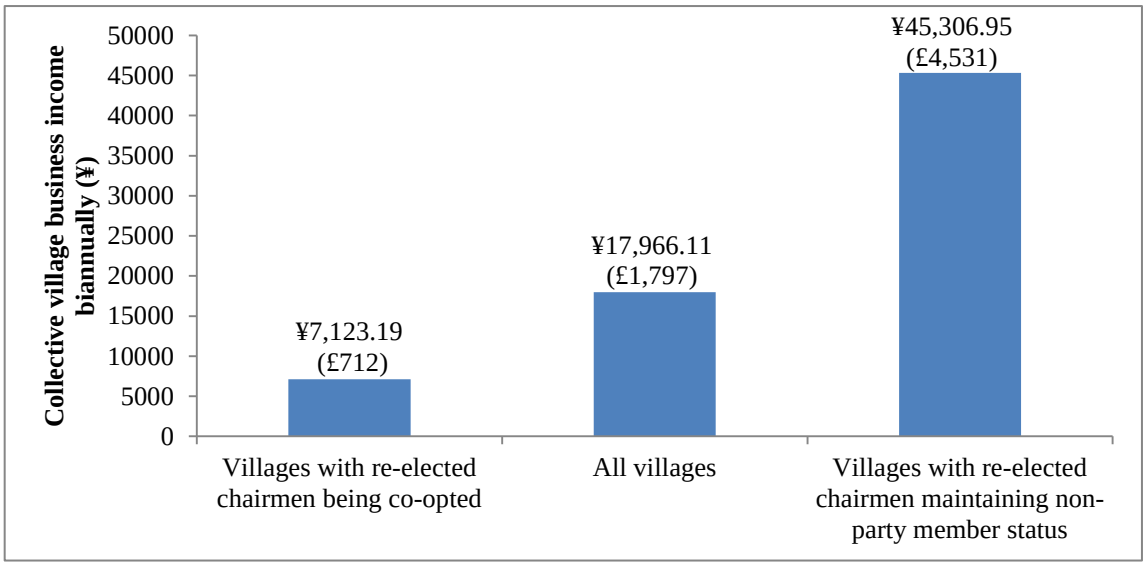


Figure 7.2 The impact of collective village business wealth on co-optation

Looking more specifically at the impact of collective village business wealth and economic autonomy on the performance of the co-optation strategy, this study finds that co-optation works better in villages in more agricultural towns and in villages with limited collective business wealth. In the sample, there are in total 237 villages situated in 15 towns. Among the 237 village chairmen elected in 2011, 118 were elected to posts of the village committee in 2008, among which 46 were not party members in 2008. Three years later in 2011, among these 46 village committee chairmen, 23 maintained their non-party member status, while the remaining 23 were co-opted and became party members. T-tests for significance of differences in the means of the township level farming population percentage and those of the collective

village business income are performed for the three categories of villages – villages where co-optation worked, villages where co-optation failed and all villages. As is shown in Figure 7.1, the mean township level farming population percentage of villages where co-optation worked (90.29%) is higher that of the villages where co-optation failed (83.78%), significant at a 95% level, and is also higher than that of all villages (86.67%), significant at a 90% level. Though the mean township level farming population percentage of villages where co-optation failed (83.78%) is lower than that of all villages (86.67%), the difference is not statistically significant. According to Figure 7.2, the mean collective village business income of villages where co-optation worked (£712) are considerably lower that of the villages where co-optation failed (£4,531), significant at a 95% level. The difference in the means of collective village business income between villages where co-optation failed (£4,531) and all villages (£1,797) is statistically significant at a 99% level. The difference in the mean collective village business income between the villages where co-optation worked (£712) and all villages (£1,797) is not statistically significant.

To sum up, village economic autonomy has been proven to be a very important factor in explaining the extent of authoritarian control in the elections reflected in the variance of villages on the party membership of elected village committee chairmen. Villages located in more industrial town have more economic autonomy, as there are more independent opportunities and better infrastructure for development in industrial towns. The economic autonomy enjoyed by this type of village helps to insulate them from the pressure and control of local government. Moreover, if these villages also have resourceful collective wealth, increased rewards from holding the VC chairman position attract more competitors and increase the competitiveness of the elections, thus making it even more difficult for local government to exert control. Increased rewards from holding offices also intensify actors' conflicts of interest, due to which co-optation tends to fail. Last but not least, because of the economic autonomy enjoyed by this type of village, opponents might have less of an incentive to join the party.

In agricultural towns, the situation is different. As township governments play a very important role in developing village economy in agricultural towns, villages in such

towns have limited economic autonomy and thus are subject more to the pressure and control of local government. Township governments are more effective in manipulating the electoral results through using persuasion strategy (Village L) or exercising favouritism in recruiting new party members (Village E). Even if challengers are elected, especially in those poor villages, the economic reliance of villages on the township governments makes party membership a viable and attractive option for the elected outsiders on the one hand and on the other, the lack of economic benefits makes the outsiders less likely to face objection from the village party secretaries for joining the party.

7.3 Data analysis

The pattern found in the previous section is tested in this section using the quantitative data collected in the sample county. The pattern found in the case study section is translated into the several following testable hypotheses. First, all other things being equal, the more agricultural the township economic structure is, the more likely it is that the elected VC chairman in the village of the town will be a party member. Second, increased collective village wealth decreases the likelihood of the elected VC chairman being a party member. Moreover, the negative impact of collective village wealth on the likelihood of the elected VC chairman being a party member is greater in villages in more industrial towns. It is important to note that these hypotheses do not preclude the effect of other factors on the election of party members to the VC chairman position. The actual dynamism at work would also be much more complicated than the pattern found in this study. Here, this study simply intends to focus on one pattern and one aspect of the complicated real dynamism - the effects of village economic collective wealth and economic autonomy on the election of party members to the VC chairman position.

7.3.1 Measurement

In this chapter, to assess authoritarian control over village elections, the party membership of village committee chairmen elected in 2011 is used as a proxy, the rationale for which has been outlined at the beginning of this chapter and also explored in Chapter 6 Section 1. There are two important independent variables to consider. First, village economic autonomy, as is discussed in the previous section, is reflected in the township economic structure - whether a town is an industrial town or agricultural town - and can be indicated by the farming proportion of the population at

township level. This figure was calculated in 2008. Given that the township economic structure in towns of the sample county has not change dramatically over the last few years and there has been no major economic development project since 2008, the figure calculated in 2008 is still able to reflect the township economic structure in 2011 (see Chapter 5 section 1). Furthermore, the figure calculated in 2008 is the most updated available figure I can access for the purpose of this study. A higher township farming population proportion indicates that the town is located towards the more agricultural end of the spectrum and vice versa. Second, the village committee has full control over the collective village business income and thus the lucrative benefits associated with the VC chairman position are indicated by the absolute amount of collective business income a village can generate biannually. It is measured in this data analysis section by the log transformation of the amount of collective village business income each village generated in the first six months of 2011.

There are a few control variables to account for in order to investigate the effects of the two independent variables. First, the remoteness of a village - the distance between the village centre and the county centre - might have an influence on the independent opportunities for economic development a village can access and thus have an impact on the dependent variable. Villages located near the county centre might have more access to independent sources of economic development than their counterparts located far away from the county centre. Second, population represents the size of a village and might have an effect on the efforts opponents need to make to secure a simple majority. Third, the number of party members in a village is also controlled. A village with a strong party network indicated by the number of village party members might be more likely to have party members elected. Finally, as mentioned in the case study section, the playing field is skewed in favour of the incumbents. Moreover, years of experience working at grassroots organisations might increase the probability of a party incumbent being re-elected and also the probability of a non-party incumbent being co-opted. Due to the lack of information about all village committee chairmen's previous experiences of working at grassroots organisations, a proxy is needed. Age appears to be a good proxy for two reasons. One, older candidates, if they have worked for grassroots organisations before, are likely to have spent more years serving in grassroots organisations, compared to younger candidates. Two, as the village party secretary of Village E revealed in the

interview[49], when it comes to carrying out the co-optation strategy, village party committees are inclined to train older non-party cadres as they are more mature and reliable. Summary statistics are presented in Table 7.5 and the correlation matrix is shown in Table 7.6.

[49] Interview with the former village party secretary of Village E, July 14, 2011 (E2).

Table 7.5 Summary statistics

Variable	Observation	Mean	Standard deviation	Min	Max
Party membership of the village committee chairmen elected in 2011	237	.72	.45	0	1
Log_{10}(collective business income +1)	237	2.74	1.90	0	5.57
Township level farming population percentage	237	86.67	11.43	58.61	96.14
Age	237	50.48	8.04	29	71
Remoteness	237	26.96	16.08	0.78	58.39
Population	237	2343.59	1626.96	399	10321
Number of village party members	237	40.61	20.35	9	115

Table 7.6 Correlation matrix

	Party membership	Log_{10} (collective business income +1)	Township level farming population percentage	Age	Remoteness	Population	Number of village party members
Party membership of the elected VC chairmen	1.00						
Log_{10} (collective business income +1)	-0.16	1.00					
Township level farming population percentage	0.25	-0.14	1.00				
Age	0.12	0.09	-0.02	1.00			
Remoteness	0.08	-0.08	0.44	-0.10	1.00		
Population	-0.05	0.07	-0.01	0.01	-0.48	1.00	
Number of village party members	-0.08	0.13	-0.08	0.02	-0.47	0.86	1.00

7.3.2 Data estimation

The effects of collective village business wealth and economic autonomy on the likelihood of an elected VC chairman being a party member in 2011 are estimated in the following form for Village j (where j = 1, 2… n_i for Town i) within Town i (i=1, 2, …, 15 towns in the sample):

$$Y_{ij} = \alpha + \beta_1 X_{fp\ i} + \beta_2 X_{income\ ij} + \beta_4 X_{control\ ij} + \varepsilon_{ij} \quad (1)$$

Here, $X_{fp\ i}$ represents the township level farming population percentage for Township i and $X_{income\ ij}$ denotes the collective business income of Village j within Township i in the first six months of 2011. $X_{control\ ij}$ indicates the remaining four control variables – age of the elected VC chairman, remoteness, population, and the number of village party members in Village j of Township i. Y_{ij} is the party membership of the village committee chairman elected in 2011 in Village j of Township i, 1 representing the chairman is a party member. Logistic regression is performed on the dataset. Standard errors of the coefficients are robust, clustered at the township level percentage of a farming population. It is expected that β_1 is positive and β_2 is negative. Table 7.6 shows the result.

Model 1 of Table 7.7 applies regression on the electoral results of all 237 villages of the sample county in the dataset. Collective village business wealth exhibits a negative effect on the likelihood of an elected VC chairman being a party member, but the coefficient is not statistically significant. The township percentage of a farming population has a positive impact on the dependent variable and the coefficient is statistically significant at a 99% level, as it is expected. The effect of the township farming population percentage is better understood in terms of larger increments, that is, the likelihood of a VC chairman being a party member of a village in the town with the lowest farming population percentage and that of a village in the town with the highest farming population percentage. In the dataset, the lowest farming population percentage is about 59%, while the highest is about 96%. Holding all other variables at their means, the estimated probability of a VC chairman elected in 2011 being a party member increases from 53% if the village is located in a town with a farming

population of 59%, to 88% if the village is located in a town with a farming population of 96%.

Table 7.7 Logistic regressions: the effects of collective village business income and economic autonomy on the party membership of elected VC chairmen

	Whether the elected village chairman in 2011 is a party member: Yes=1	
	1	2
Log_{10}(collective business income+1)	-0.17	-0.11
	(0.15)	(0.14)
Township farming population percentage	0.05***	0.04
	(0.01)	(0.08)
Age	0.04***	0.04**
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Remoteness	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Population	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Number of village party members	-0.01	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Constant	-4.11***	-3.62
	(0.98)	(6.92)
Prob>Chi2	0.00	0.03
Log pseudo likelihood	-128.97	-109.27
Pseudo R^2	0.09	0.03
Observations	237	205

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors adjusted for the township farming population percentage.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

However, in the dataset, apart from one town has a farming population of 58.61%, all the other towns have a farming population of at least 86.1%. It is very likely that the effect of township economic structure is triggered by this town with a very low farming population percentage. In Model 2 of Table 7.7, the regression only performs on the 205 villages in towns with a farming population of at least 86.1%, while the 32 villages at the town with a farming population of 58.61% are excluded. As can be seen, the township farming population percentage is no longer significant, though the effect is still positive. The remaining 205 villages share similar township economic structure - agricultural, as it is reflected in the farming population proportion in these towns, ranging from 86.1% to 96.14%. Thus, the positive effect of township economic structure on the probability of an elected VC chairman being a party member is no longer statistically significant.

As can be seen from Model 2 of Table 7.7, even though the 14 towns vary on the actual township farming population percentage, the variance is too small to have a statistically significant influence on the dependent variable. Moreover, a farming population of larger than 86% is sufficient to justify any town to be more of an agricultural structure. It is thus reasonable to change the township economic structure from a numerical variable to a categorical variable. In Model 3 of Table 7.8, villages are grouped into two groups, namely, the villages within the industrial town and the villages within the agricultural town. The 32 villages in the town with a farming population of 58.61% are grouped into the industrial town, while the remaining 205 villages are grouped into the agricultural town. As can be seen from Model 3, collective village business wealth exhibits a negative influence on the dependent variable, significant at a 90% significance level. Township economic structure shows an increased statistically positive effect on the dependent variable, compared to Model 1. The positive effect of township economic structure is significant at a 99% significant level. Holding all control variables constant at their means, in an agricultural town, an increase in collective village business income from 0 to ¥20,000[50] (£2,000) decreases the probability of an elected village chairman being a party member from 80% to 68%; while in an industrial town, the same increase in collective business come decreases the probability from 43% to 28%.

The marginal effects of collective village business income and township economic structure are better shown by graph. Figure 7.3 is drawn based on Model 3, using the actual values of the two independent variables. All control variables are set at their means. As it is shown in Figure 7.3, as collective village business wealth increases, the estimated probability of the elected VC chairman being a party member decreases. Villages within the agricultural town have a substantially higher probability of having the elected VC chairman being a party member. The probability of having the elected VC chairman being a party member ranges from 60% to 80% for villages in agricultural towns, while the probability ranges from 20% to 40% for villages in industrial towns. Since most observations are located on the range of collective business income from 0 to ¥110,000 (£11,000), Figure 7.4 only presents those

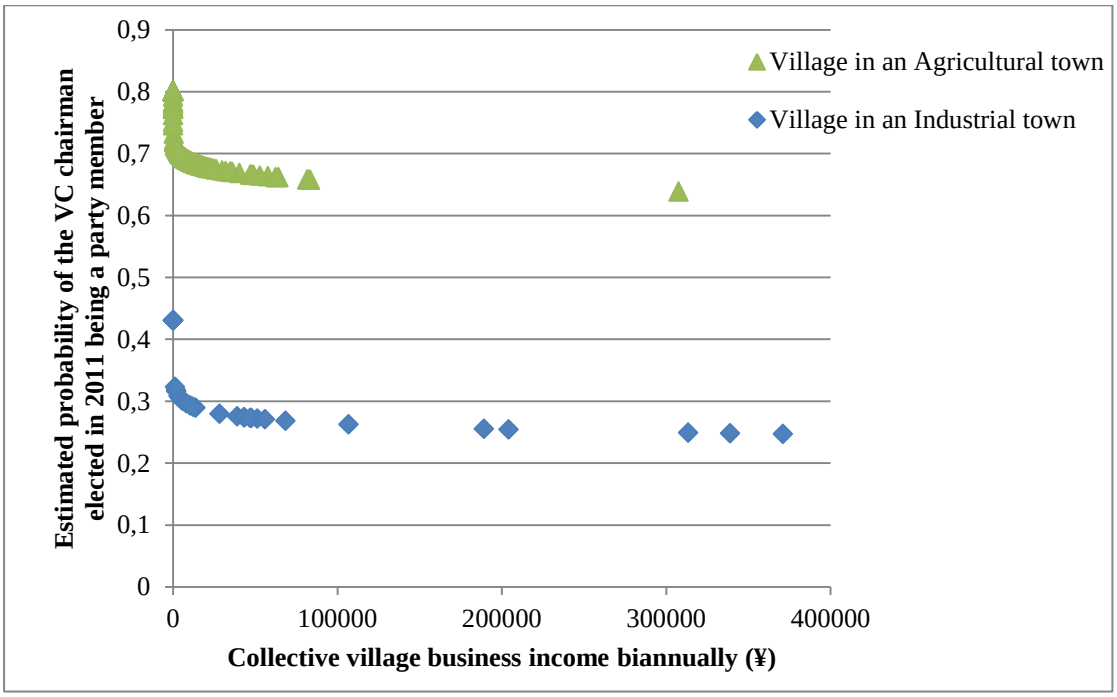
[50] The means collective business income of all villages in the sample is £1,797 (see Table 5.1 for details).

observations with collective business income lower than ¥110,000 (£11,000) in order to show a closer picture of the relationship.

Table 7.8 Logistic regression: Villages in the industrial town VS. Villages in the agricultural town

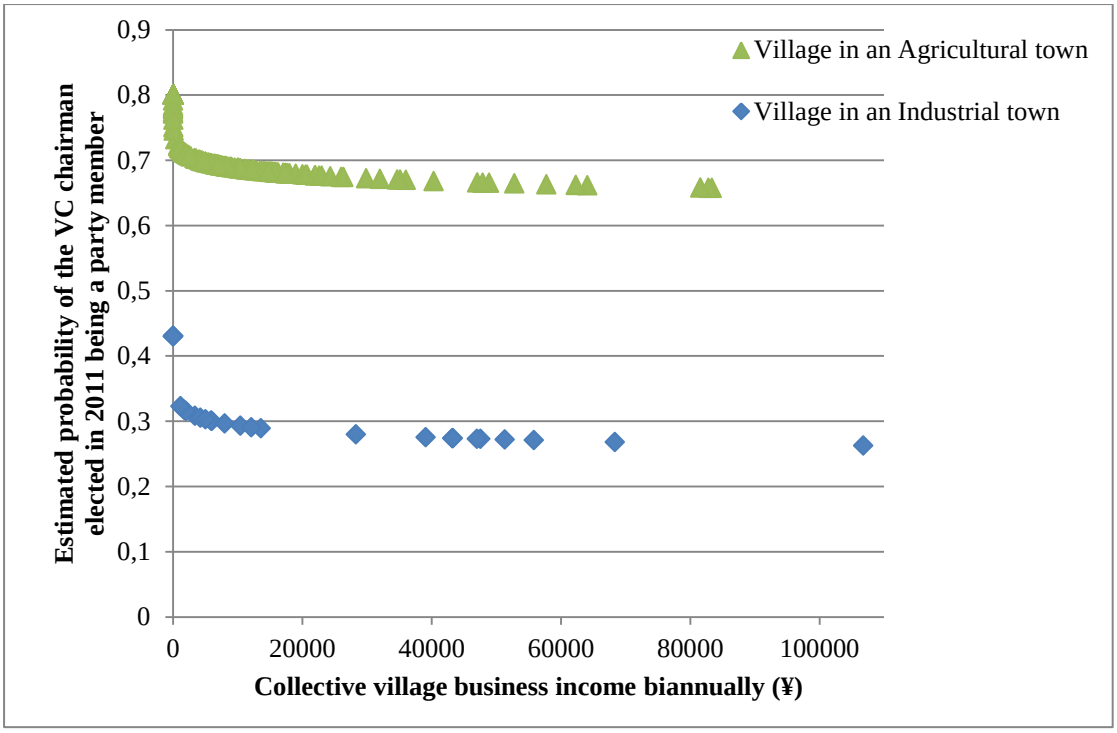
	Whether the elected village chairman in 2011 is a party member: Yes=1
	3
Log_{10}(collective business income+1)	-0.15*
	(0.09)
Township economic structure:	1.67***
Agricultural town=1	(0.53)
Age	0.04**
	(0.02)
Remoteness	-0.02
	(0.01)
Population	-0.00
	(0.00)
Number of village party members	-0.01
	(0.01)
Constant	-1.33
	(1.17)
Prob>Chi2	0.00
Log pseudo likelihood	-129.36
Pseudo R^2	0.08
Observations	237

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1



Notes: Figure 7.3 is drawn based on Model 3 in Table 7.7.

Figure 7.3 The effects of collective village business income and economic autonomy on the probability of a VC chairman being a party member



Notes: Figure 7.4 is drawn based on Model 3 in Table 7.7.

Figure 7.4 The effects of collective village business income and economic autonomy on the probability of a VC chairman being a party member (Continued)

As mentioned above, most observations fall into the range of collective business income from 0 to ¥110,000 (£11,000) and there are only 6 villages having more than ¥150,000 (£15,000) collective business income in the first six months of 2011. The existence of these few observations with extreme values of collective business income might bias the effect of collective village business income on the dependent variable. In Model 4 of Table 7.9, the same logistic regression model as Model 3 is run, but these six villages are excluded from the sample. Collective village wealth continues to exhibit a negative impact on the likelihood of a village committee chairman being a party member, but the effect is no longer statistically significant. But township farming population percentage continues to have statistically significant positive influence on the likelihood of a village committee chairman being a party member, though the magnitude of the co-efficient reduces slightly, compared to Model 3. The result of Model 4 confirms that the effect of the township farming population percentage on the likelihood of a village committee chairman being a party member is robust and consistent.

Table 7.9 Collective village business wealth, economic autonomy and the likelihood of the VC chairman being a party member (Excluding 6 extremely wealthy villages)

	Whether the elected village chairman in 2011 is a party member: Yes=1
	4
Log_{10}(collective business income+1)	-0.13
	(0.09)
Township economic structure:	1.44***
Agricultural town=1	(0.54)
Age	0.04**
	(0.02)
Remoteness	-0.02
	(0.01)
Population	-0.00
	(0.00)
Number of village party members	-0.01
	(0.01)
Constant	-0.99
	(1.18)
Prob>Chi2	0.01
Log pseudo likelihood	-126.24
Pseudo R^2	0.06
Observations	231

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The regression results presented above are supportive of the hypotheses and the pattern found in the previous case study. The township farming population percentage, representing economic autonomy a village possesses, has robust statistically positive effect on the probability of an elected VC chairman being a party member. In other words, compared to villages in the industrial town, villages in the agricultural town have less economic autonomy to resist township governments' pressure and control over elections and thus township governments are more likely to achieve their electoral goals - having party members elected either through party members being elected or through successful co-optation of elected outsiders. Collective village business income, reflecting the rewards and benefits from holding the office, also exhibits the negative effect as anticipated. Increasing collective village business income decreases the probability of the elected VC chairman being a party member. High rewards from holding the office increase electoral competitiveness and intensify key actors' conflict of interests, thus making it less likely for the local government to achieve their electoral goal.

7.4 Summary

As is outlined at the beginning of this chapter, because of the policy implementation function of the village committee and the one-party authoritarian regime under which village elections operate, governments have the incentive to manipulate the elections in their favour. Having party members elected is one preference of the CCP and the local government explicitly advocates this preference in government issues and documents. This chapter thus uses the party membership of the village committee chairmen elected in 2011 as an indicator for authoritarian control over the elections. This preference of local government can be fulfilled through two trajectories - party members being elected to the VC chairman position or elected outsiders being co-opted into the party.

Collective village business wealth and economic autonomy are found in this chapter to play a role in explaining the variance of local government in achieving their electoral goal in different villages. This chapter shows that increasing collective village business wealth makes it less likely for the local government to achieve their goal. The key underlying mechanism is the economic benefits or rewards from holding the office. On the one hand, increasing collective village business income increases the rewards of holding the office and thus increases the electoral competitiveness. Faced with strong opponents, party members have a lower probability of being elected. On the other hand, high rewards and benefits also intensify the conflict between village party secretaries and elected outsiders over economic power and interests and thus co-optation tends to fail.

This chapter also shows that it is more likely for local government to achieve its electoral goal in villages located in the agricultural town than in the villages located in the industrial town. The underlying mechanism is village economic autonomy. Villages located in the industrial town have more economic autonomy, as there are opportunities for development beyond the reach and control of the local government. This economic autonomy helps to insulate these villages from authoritarian control and pressure. At the other side, villages in the agricultural town have insufficient economic autonomy to resist authoritarian pressure and control. Party members have a higher probability of winning the elections. Even if opponents are elected, they have a great incentive to join the party as most economic development resources are

controlled by the local government. Moreover, especially in poor villages in agricultural town, the lack of economic benefits and thus less conflict over interests makes it less likely for the village party secretaries to reject outsiders in their applications for party membership.

There is a caveat in interpreting the findings of this chapter and also the following chapter. The focus on village economic collective wealth and economic autonomy does not preclude the possibility that other factors might have an impact on authoritarian control over village elections in China. Also, though collective village business income and economic autonomy are proven to be very important factors, it does not mean that these two factors can explain every case in the sample, as in some cases, other factors such as lineage conflict might outweigh these two factors in explaining the dependent variable. Moreover, contingent events, such as a recent land expropriation by local government, a recent business activity of contracting out collective village resources, or the personality and working style of the elected village cadres, might also contribute to the change of village leadership after a given election. The exploration of these other factors can be realised by a case study of the specific cases and is beyond the scope of this study. The actual political dynamic in China's village elections is complicated and the happening of one-shot event might create event cycles leading to the change of village leadership. The timing of such a one-shot event and the timing of the change of village leadership is difficult to predict, but it is possible to predict the likelihood of such an event and such a change by investigating the effects of structural factors - collective village business wealth and economic autonomy in this chapter and the following chapter.

This chapter examines one aspect of authoritarian control over village elections in China - the election of party members to the village committee chairman position. As mentioned in Chapter 6, having incumbents re-elected is also a preference of the governments explicitly advocated in government issues and documents and thus the re-election of incumbents is another aspect of authoritarian control over village elections in China. In the next chapter, the effects of the two structural factors on the re-election of incumbents are examined.

Chapter 8 : Village economic development and the re-election of incumbent village committee chairmen

Local government preference over experienced village committee members is driven by the importance of VCs in carrying out state policies and tasks. The implementation of state polices and tasks are crucial to local government officials' political career. As discussed in Chapter 6, incumbents are likely to have a better understanding of the local government political intention than those who have no prior experience of working with local government. Uncertainty associated with new leadership in rural villages is a risk that rural township leading cadres would try to avoid in implementing the priority targets with veto power. Secondly, as mentioned in Chapter 6 and explored in Chapter 7, in order to refresh the party's legitimacy at the grassroots level and broader the party's social base, the state encourages village party committees to absorb capable elected outsiders into the party, which offers a channel for local government to co-opt non-party incumbents who had a good performance and a good relationship with the local government when in office. The co-optation strategy thus strengthens the local government preference over incumbents and increases incumbents' competitive advantage vis-à-vis candidates with no experience of working on the village committee.

Local government preference over incumbents in village elections is also reflected in the actual practice in the sample county. As shown in Table 6.1 and Table 6.2, in the 26 villages in the sample, almost all official candidates recommended by the rural township governments in 2011 elections were incumbents. Thus, in this chapter, the re-election of incumbent VC chairmen, the head position of the VC, is used to indicate local government control over the elections empirically and reflect the contestation of the elections theoretically (for details, see Chapter 1 Section 1).

However, the re-election of incumbents could be a result of incumbency advantage and could also be a result of the good performance of the incumbents when in office. In this case, how could the re-election of incumbents reflect the extent of authoritarian control in China's village elections? Incumbency advantage is not new in liberal democratic countries where elections are the "only game in town" (Mainwaring, 2003, p.9). Incumbents might have access to some resources and perks which challengers do

not (e.g., Abramowitz, 1991; Fiorina, 1977). Compared to unknown challengers, choosing the known incumbent is a safer option especially when party identification among voters is weak (Erikson, 1972). Incumbents have campaign experience and are better campaigners relative to their challengers (Cox & Katz, 1996; 2002). However, under a well-developed democratic system, though incumbents enjoy some advantages, these advantages do not limit the opponents' access to necessary resources and thus do not handicap the opponents' ability to compete. Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter 1, there is normally a term limit for elected office holders, which prevents incumbency advantage from turning into incumbency dominance. However, in elections conducted under the setting of an authoritarian state, the privileged access to resources, laws and media enjoyed by the incumbents enables the incumbents to dominate the electoral game and handicaps the ability of opponents to compete and to win the election. As discussed in Chapter 3 Section 3, there are a range of tactics and strategies the authoritarian rulers could use to thwart opposition challenge, which could take the democratic heart out of the electoral contestations (Schedler, 2002). Moreover, there is no term limit in China's village elections which increases the possibility of resource and network monopoly by incumbents and thus strengthens incumbency dominance. Therefore, in such a setting, the re-election of incumbents is a representation of incumbency dominance, rather than that of incumbency advantage.

On a playing field that is heavily skewed in favour of the incumbents, as observed in the sample county, in some villages incumbents managed to be continually re-elected, while in some other villages incumbents supported by township governments were defeated by opponents. Is the re-election of incumbents in China's village elections affected by the same village economic structural factors covered in Chapter 7 - collective village business wealth and economic autonomy? Chapter 7 shows that as collective village business wealth increases, the rewards from holding the office increase and thus electoral competition becomes more intense. Intense competition weakens authoritarian control reflected in the election of party members to the VC chairman position. Being situated in an industrial town, indicated by a lower township farming population percentage, can insulate the villages from local government pressure and control and thus also help to weaken the authoritarian control. Should we expect the same nature of the relationship in this chapter when the measure has

changed from the inclusiveness of the elections to the contestation of the elections? Similarly to Chapter 7, both a case study and quantitative data analysis are carried out to answer this question.

This chapter is organised as follows. A case study of the 26 villages in the sample county is conducted to investigate the nature of the relationship between the two economic structural factors and the re-election of incumbent VC chairman and four villages are selected from these 26 villages to unravel the underlying mechanisms. The pattern found in the case study section is then tested using the re-election of incumbent village committee chairmen who served in the same position in 2008 in 2011 village elections.

8.1 Case study: socioeconomic conditions and incumbency dominance

In this section, qualitative evidence collected for the 26 villages is used to investigate the relationship between socioeconomic conditions and incumbency dominance and four villages from these 26 villages are selected to unravel the underlying mechanisms. To assess incumbency dominance in village elections, there are two criteria to consider. First is the existence of strong opposition challenge in elections. Challenge to incumbents could be strong as opponents might actively network for support and spend money and time on campaigning. As the strength of opposition challenge increases, the difficulty of incumbents in getting re-elected increases and the probability of the re-election of the incumbents thus decreases. The second criterion is whether the opponents have won any elections in the past. The ultimate purpose of authoritarian control is to have their preferred incumbents re-elected. Despite township governments' manipulation, some incumbents managed to keep their offices while some failed. This criterion directly indicates the outcome of authoritarian control.

Village elections have been implemented in Guangdong since 1999. I visited all 26 villages and gathered information about opposition challenge and electoral results from the past five elections (1999, 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2011). All information was collected from checking the past record of village elections and interviewing township officials and village cadres. For both criteria, because all the records of previous elections were taken into account, it is relatively accurate in revealing a continuous

pattern, a complement to the empirical investigation on one year's electoral results in the next section. To simplify the analysis in this section, if in at least one of the past five elections strong opposition challenge existed, then the electoral competition of the village is coded as 1; if not, it is coded as 0. If in at least one of the past five elections strong opposition challenge led to the removal of incumbents, the electoral control of the village is coded as 1, representing unsuccessful authoritarian control; if not, it is coded as 0. Furthermore, in order to unravel the detailed mechanisms behind the relationship, four villages are selected to do the detailed case study. As mentioned in Chapter 2, since the VC chairman is the head of the village committee and the legal representative of the village in charge of collective village resources, electoral competition is normally centred at this head position and thus the analysis of the incumbency dominance focuses on the dominance of incumbent VC chairmen.

8.1.1 Collective village business wealth, economic autonomy and incumbency dominance

As is discussed in Chapter 7 Section 2, existing studies of China's village elections take into account villagers' stakes and candidates' rewards from the results of the elections when applying the modernisation school of thought to China's village elections, but they overlook a very important context of the elections – that the elections operate within an authoritarian system and thus are subject to authoritarian control. Taking into account this very important context requires researchers to consider the cost of villagers voting for opponents and the cost of opponents competing with the official candidates. Inspired by existing studies of elections in non-democratic countries and studies of subnational authoritarianism, to capture the costs mentioned above, economic autonomy is the key - independent sources of income or job opportunities beyond the control of authoritarian governments. Villagers and opponents in villages that have greater economic autonomy, reflected in opportunities for economic development beyond the control of local government, are more likely to challenge the official candidates and resist the pressure and control of local government in the elections.

To capture the lucrative benefits associated with the VC chairman position, this study uses the absolute amount of collective business income a village generated in the first six months of 2011 before the 2011 village election as one key independent variable,

as it is the collective village income generated from business activities that the village committee has full control of (see Chapter 2 Section 3). To capture economic autonomy, considering China's grassroots context (see Chapter 7 Section 2), this study uses the township level farming population percentage as another key independent variable. A higher township farming population percentage represents a more agricultural township economic structure and thus villages in such towns have less economic autonomy; and vice versa. The effects of collective village business income and economic autonomy on the two criteria of incumbency dominance are evaluated in the following subsections.

Table 8.1 lists detailed information of the sixteen villages where incumbency dominance has prevailed in the past five elections regardless of the level of electoral competitiveness. Table 8.2 lists detailed information of the remaining ten villages where electoral competition in at least one of the five elections was intense and opponents won. The following patterns are observed from the 26 villages. First, the level of collective village wealth is associated with the level of electoral competitiveness. In some villages with a history of strong competition (Villages V, Y, C, L, O, N, T, U, W, X), the occurrence of fierce electoral competition is associated with the wealthy collective business income; while in other villages (Villages Z, A, G, I, J, R, S and M) with no or weak competition in the past five village elections, a common characteristic is that these villages all have little collective wealth, much less than the average collective village wealth (£1,797) in the county. Second, facing strong opposition, incumbents in wealthy villages (Villages C, L, O and N) in agricultural town managed to be re-elected, while their counterparts (Villages T, U, W, and X) in industrial town are difficult to get re-elected. Four villages – Village T, Village Z, Village O and Village E - are selected to unravel the underlying mechanisms behind these observed patterns in the following sub-section.

Table 8.1 Case study of 26 villages

Village	Collective village business wealth		Township economic structure	Electoral competition	Electoral control	Description of the five village elections (1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011)
Z	¥2000	(£200)	58.61%	0	0	No competition; The party incumbent re-elected in early elections and in recent elections replaced by a party successor.
A	¥1600	(£160)	91.17%	0	0	No competition; The party incumbent re-elected.
G	¥7202	(£720)	91.17%	0	0	No competition; The party incumbent re-elected.
I	¥0	(£0)	91.92%	0	0	No competition; The party incumbent re-elected.
J	¥0	(£0)	91.92%	0	0	No competition; The party Incumbent re-elected.
R	¥6333	(£633)	96.14%	0	0	No competition; The party incumbent re-elected.
S	¥6500	(£650)	96.14%	0	0	No competition; The party incumbent re-elected.
M	¥6850	(£685)	96.14%	0	0	No competition; The party incumbent re-elected in early elections and in recent elections replaced by a party successor who is a village committee incumbent.
V	¥51300	(£5,130)	58.61%	1	0	Strong competition existed in elections in 2008 and 2011; The party incumbent re-elected in early elections and promoted to the township government in 2009. Then a party successor took over the village committee chairman position.
Y	¥313340.7	(£31,334)	58.61%	1	0	Strong competition existed; The non-party incumbent supported by the village party committee and re-elected.
D	¥0	(£0)	91.17%	1	0	Strong competition existed in 2008; The party incumbent re-elected.
F	¥1446.14	(£145)	91.17%	1	0	Strong competition existed; The party incumbent re-elected.
C	¥52778.4	(£5,278)	91.17%	1	0	Strong competition existed; The party incumbent re-elected.
L	¥22000	(£2,200)	91.92%	1	0	Strong competition existed in 2008 and 2011; The party incumbent re-elected in early elections and promoted to the township government in 2011; The position was then taken over by a party successor who is a village committee incumbent.
O	¥18000	(£1,800)	96.14%	1	0	Strong competition existed. The party incumbent re-elected.
N	¥26000	(£2,600)	96.14%	1	0	Strong competition existed in 2011; The party incumbent re-elected.

Table 8.2 Case study of 26 villages (continued)

Village	Collective village business wealth		Township economic structure	Electoral competition	Electoral control	Description of the five village elections (1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011)
T	¥28276.07	(£2,828)	58.61%	1	1	Strong competition existed in every election. No incumbent is able to be re-elected. From 2005 onwards, none of the village committee chairmen is party member.
U	¥39063.32	(£3,906)	58.61%	1	1	Strong competition in 2011; Non-party opponent elected and replaced the party incumbent.
W	¥204076.66	(£20,408)	58.61%	1	1	Strong competition in 2011; Non-party opponent elected and replaced the party incumbent.
X	¥371050	(£37,105)	58.61%	1	1	Strong competition in 2008 and 2011; The party incumbent replaced by non-party opponents.
H	¥0	(£0)	91.17%	1	1	Strong competition in 2011; Non-party opponent elected and replaced the non-party incumbent.
E	¥0	(£0)	91.17%	1	1	Strong competition in 2005 and 2008; Non-party opponents elected in 2005 and 2008.
K	¥0	(£0)	91.92%	1	1	Strong competition in 2008; Chairman and all members were replaced by opponents.
Q	¥0	(£0)	96.14%	1	1	Strong competition in 2011; The non-party opponent won the election.
P	¥0	(£0)	96.14%	1	1	Strong competition in 2008 and 2011; Non-party opponents won the election.
B	¥1704	(£170)	91.17%	1	1	Fierce competition between the party incumbent and a party opponent in 2011; The party opponent replaced the party incumbent chairman. All incumbent village committee members except one were replaced by non-party opponents.

8.1.2 The cases

Similar to Chapter 7 Section 2, four villages are selected to do the detailed case study, based on their variations on collective village business income and the township farming population percentage. The four villages are shown in Table 8.3. Village T and Village Z are located in the most industrial town with a farming population percentage of 58.61%. Village T is a rich village which generated £2,828 collective business income in the first six months of 2011, while Village Z covered in Chapter 7 is a poor village. Village O and Village E are located in two different agricultural towns in the sample county, Town 15 with 96.14% farming population and Town 6 with 91.17% farming population respectively. Village O is a wealthy village in the sense that it generated £1,800 in the first six months of 2011, well beyond the mean collective business income of all villages from agricultural towns (£1,092) in the sample county; while Village E is a poor village with no collective business income during the same period.

Table 8.3 The four villages for detailed case study

Township farming population percentage / *Collective business wealth*	*Industrial town*	*Agricultural town*
Rich village	Village T	Village O
Poor village	Village Z	Village E

As is described in Chapter 7 Section 2.2, Village Z only has three private power stations for the village committee to charge a management fee of £480 per year, which can barely cover the cost of holding the village election once every three years. As the village party secretary in Village Z has commented:

> "If there is no lucrative benefit, what is the point for candidates to join the electoral competition? Needless to say spending money on buying votes……. If there is any candidate who shows any interest in joining, they can be easily told off"[51].

As the village party secretary revealed in the interview, he has been the chairman of the VEC in all past five elections, in charge of the management of the village elections in Village Z. In 1999, 2002 and 2005, he was also serving concurrently as

[51] Interview with the village party secretary of Village Z, August 19, 2011 (Z1).

the village committee chairman. In 2008, he decided to step down and keep only his village party secretary position. A party successor, who has been working at both the village committee and the village party committee before, was elected to take over the village committee chairman position. In Village Z, no candidate wants to challenge the official candidate supported by the local government and compete for the village committee chairman position, as there is no benefit to at least offset the cost of challenging the official candidates. Even if there is any candidate who shows interest of running, as it is shown in the interview with the village party secretary in Village Z, he can effectively thwart the challenge through the use of persuasion strategy and his control of the VEC.

The story in rich villages in the industrial town is completely different. Village T is located in the same town with Village Z, a town with 58.61% farming population. Village T is one of the most resourceful villages in the county in terms of the amount of lands the village as a collective possesses. An old township government official[52] who is familiar with the allocation of collective lands in the early 1980s after the introduction of the household responsibility system revealed that "the village committee in Village T possesses a large amount of collective lands, while in all the other villages the majority of the collective lands were distributed to individual households in the early 1980s and the village committees are left with a small portion of the collective lands". Moreover, it is located at the county centre where the county government is. In the past 10 years, because of the construction of the county centre, it has generated a large amount of revenue from selling lands. As a former village committee specialized member has released:

> "In the past ten years, the village committee generated a large amount of collective business income from land expropriation by the government, selling lands to outside investors, and letting the lands and property owned by the village as a collective. In the process of land selling or letting, there were a lot of under-the-table deals and the village committee certainly can pocket some money into their own pockets".[53]

An institutional weakness of village governance in China is the lack of supervision over the power of the village committee and thus it is possible for the village

[52]Interview with the vice-mayor of Town 6, July 25, 2011 (TL4).
[53]Interview with an ex-member of the village committee in village T, July 29, 2011 (T5).

committee chairmen to pocket collective money or to use the unsupervised power to favour their own business interest. He also revealed that when he was in office in 2008, the village committee as a collective still had about £200,000 saving and there was no need for the village committee to rely on local government for economic development, as there were many opportunities available. He attributed the fierce electoral competition every year to the huge lucrative benefits the village committee chairman position can bring. "In every village elections in the past five years, all village committee members were replaced by challengers; from 2005 onwards, none of the chairmen were party members."[54] In the interview with the head of the civil affairs office of the township government[55] and the interview with the deputy head of the county Civil Affairs Bureau[56], both admitted that "Village T is the most difficult village in our county in times of elections; it is impossible to have our candidate elected in this village and our goal is as simple as to maintain political stability during elections". Both township and county officials also confirmed that vote buying and voter intimidation were prevalent in all the past five elections in this village; and from their perspective, as long as this issue does not escalate and threat the political stability, they would normally turn a blind eye to all the malpractice in elections.

The case of Village T shows that if the lucrative benefits are huge enough, challenge will arise and candidates are willing to bear the cost of running for the electoral competition. Moreover, since Village T does not rely on the local government for economic development, the cost of running against the official candidates is much smaller than that in the villages that are economically reliant on local government. These two factors contribute to the fact that in the past five elections, electoral competition in Village T was very competitive and every election would bring a new set of personnel to the village committee. The county and the township governments have failed in manipulating the elections.

On the contrary, collective village wealth in agricultural town can strengthen incumbency dominance. Village O is a rich village in the sense that it can generate rents (£1,800 biannually) from letting collective-owned resources. "With the support

[54]Interview with an ex-member of the village committee in village T, July 29, 2011 (T5).
[55] Interview with the head of the civil affairs office of the township government in Town 1, July 27, 2009 (TL1).
[56] Interview with the deputy head of the county Civil Affairs Bureau, August 6th, 2009 (CL1).

and help of the township government, Village O in recent years has generated a large amount of collective business wealth"[57]. It was released by a township party committee member that in 2011, Village O can still use the old voting system - the two-stage nomination. The VEC in Village O vet nominated candidates and decided the final list of official candidates to appear on the ballot ticket, while majority villages in the sample county used the two-in-one nomination system - no nomination and vetting of candidates (see p.52-54). As the township party committee member revealed:

> "We try not to get involve directly; otherwise, if the newspapers publish that we manipulate the elections, we are in great trouble and our political stability is at risk. Thus, we have to rely on the village party secretary. He needs to make suggestions of the good candidates and campaign for the candidates who we want to be elected. We prefer the two-stage nomination system to the two-in-one nomination system, as it is more certain and it causes less trouble to us".[58]

In Village O, though strong opposition challenge existed in 2011, the party incumbent managed to be re-elected. As a villager has revealed in the interview about the 2011 village election:

> "We received a ballot ticket with the nominated official candidates' names and the village group leader who held the roving ballot box told us which candidate we should tick; and we just ticked it as they were the ones preferred by those people above".[59]

By saying "those people above", the villager means those powerful people working at the village party committee, the village committee and the township government.

Similar to Village L covered in Chapter 7, Village O is located in an agricultural town which generates its collective wealth from the support of the township government. Because of the village's economic reliance on the township government, the township government is more effective in manipulating the electoral outcome. As the case of Village O suggests, the village party secretary could effectively manipulate the election through his control of the nomination system and through persuasion strategy.

[57] Interview with the VC chairman in Village R, August 11, 2011 (R1).
[58] Interview with the township party committee member in Town 15, August 16, 2011 (TL9).
[59] Interview with a villager in Village O, July 29, 2011 (O1).

The final case to look into is the poor village in the agricultural town. Village E, as mentioned in Chapter 7 Section 2.2, is a poor village and located in an agricultural town. Though there was no lucrative benefit, challengers existed in 2008 and 2011 village elections. The existence of the sporadic electoral competition in Village E is a result more of lineage competition - the struggle of two factions within the village for the symbolic honour of holding power, which is beyond the scope of this study. However, we still look into this case, because collective village wealth and village economic autonomy shape the final electoral results.

In the interview with the village party secretary in Village E[60], he mentioned that "whenever there is competition, there is money politics". Though he did not spell out explicitly, he implied that vote buying was evident in his village in 2008 and 2011 when there was competition. In the interview with the challenger[61], he admitted that in 2008 village election, he spent money on buying votes, while the elected village committee chairman also spent some money on buying votes. The former village party secretary admitted that in 2008, both the challenger and the elected village committee chairman were not official candidates and the official candidate failed. I asked the former village party secretary if vote buying existed in 2008, why the village committee did not spend money on helping the official candidate. The former village party secretary said that the village committee possessed no collective wealth to outspend both the challenger and the later-on elected village committee chairman. When asking the similar question, the vice-mayor of Town 6 where Village E is located revealed that "it is democratic election and thus there is very little we can do; you see, later on, it turned out he (the village committee chairman in Village E) was a good leader; I think in this way, we are both better off" [62]. As it is explained in Chapter 7 Section 2.2, the village committee chairman in Village E applied for party membership immediately after he was elected in 2008 and obtained his party membership in 2009. By saying "a good leader", the township vice-mayor referred to the fact that the VC chairman in Village E was latterly co-opted by the party.

[60]Interview with the former village party secretary of Village E, July 14, 2011 (E2).
[61]Interview with the challenger of Village E, July 15, 2011(E3).
[62] Interview with the vice-mayor (also the vice-party-secretary) of Town 6, July 25, 2011(TL2).

In Village E, as can be seen, village party secretary had no resources to control and manipulate the elections. However, as discussed in Chapter 7 Section 2.2, co-optation worked in the case of Village E. The economic reliance of Village E on the township government makes party membership an important, if not a necessary, option for the elected outsiders to retain power and enjoy the perks of office. On the other hand, the lack of economic benefits because of no or limited collective business income also makes village party secretaries less likely to block this channel for outsiders. From the perspective of the township government, compared to using various methods to thwart opposition challenge, the co-optation strategy is an easy and almost effortless option on the one hand; allowing competition and outsiders to win would also help the township governments to create a good image of being tolerant to competitive elections and democracy on the other hand.

To sum up, as anticipated, resourceful collective business wealth increases the lucrative benefits from holding the VC chairman position and thus intensifies the electoral competition. Local government would find it more difficult to achieve its electoral goal. This finding is similar to the findings of existing studies of China's village elections - increased collective village wealth increases the competitiveness of the elections. This is just one part of the story, however.

Opponents might be attracted to compete for the VC chairman position but never be able to win the election. This leads to the other important factor, economic autonomy. Township governments are less likely to exert their influence in villages with wealthy collective income situated in the industrial town given their limited economic control over villages and the intense village electoral competition brought by the huge lucrative benefits. However, township governments are more likely to have incumbents re-elected in wealthy villages located in the agricultural town, because these villages generate their wealthy collective business income from the township governments' support. Compared to rich villages in the agricultural town, challengers in poor villages in the agricultural town might have a slightly higher chance of winning the elections, as the co-optation strategy is better and cheaper than other control mechanisms by the local government and also produces a win-win solution to both the local government and the village.

Hence, in a more industrial town, the higher the collective business income is, the less likely it is for the incumbent VC chairman to be re-elected. As the township economic structure becomes more agricultural, the magnitude of the negative effect of collective village business income on the probability of an incumbent VC chairman being re-elected decreases. In highly agricultural towns, the higher the collective business income is, the more likely it is for the incumbent VC chairman to be re-elected.

8.2 Data analysis

Based on the pattern presented in the previous section, the testable hypotheses of this chapter are as follows. First, all other things being equal, as collective village business wealth increases, the probability of an incumbent VC chairman being re-elected decreases. Second, villages situated in the more agricultural towns are more likely to have their incumbent VC chairmen re-elected than their counterparts in the more industrial towns. Third, as the economic structure of the village becomes more agricultural, the magnitude of the negative effect of collective village business income on the re-election of the incumbent VC chairman decreases; and in villages located in highly agricultural towns, increasing collective village business wealth increases the probability of an incumbent chairman being re-elected.

8.2.1 Measurement

This chapter uses the re-election of incumbent VC chairmen who served at the same position in 2008 in 2011 to reflect incumbent dominance and proxy authoritarian control in China's village elections. More specifically, this chapter focuses on the 237 village committee chairmen elected in 2008 and the dependent variable is whether they were re-elected in 2011. One limitation of this measurement of dependent variable is that those incumbent chairmen who did not seek re-election could not be excluded from the sample. However, this limitation would not affect the results for two reasons. First, based on my observation of the 26 villages and interviews with officials from the county civil affairs bureau[63] in charge of the village elections, the majority of village chairmen ran for re-election and villagers as voters normally consider the incumbents as candidates regardless of whether the incumbents publicly express their interest of running. Second, even though in some villages the incumbent VC chairmen showed no interest in running for re-election, township governments,

[63] Interview with the deputy head of the county Civil Affairs Bureau, August 6, 2009 (CL1)

worrying that the stability of village governance would be at risk, used direct and indirect pressure to force the incumbent VC chairmen to run for the competition.

However, there are two conditions under which incumbent VC chairmen would not run for re-election. First, both village committee chairmen and village party secretaries after working at the same position for 9 years have a chance to be promoted to township governments[64]. In order to be promoted, candidates have to be younger than 50 years old and be nominated by the township governments. After being nominated by the township governments, they also need to be nominated by the county government to attend the municipal entry examination and interview for civil servants. The county government can nominate no more than three candidates per year. Only the one who passes the municipal examination and interview will be able to get a position at the township government. Because of the strict requirement on age, years of experience and strict nomination process, very few village committee chairmen can actually get a position at township governments. Among the 26 villages, only the VC chairman of Village L elected in 2008 was promoted to the township government in 2011. Second, the Guangdong Provincial government (The Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil Affairs, 2010) discourages village committee chairmen and members aged 60 or over from running for the electoral competition. It is only a recommendation instead of an order, as elections are within the jurisdiction of village self-governance. Thus, those incumbents aged 60 or over are less likely to run and regressions are performed not only on the full dataset, that is, 237 villages, but also on a subset, that is, excluding those villages where the incumbent chairmen are 60 years old or over.

Similarly to Chapter 7, this chapter also focuses on the same two independent variables. Collective village wealth is measured by log transformation of the amount of collective business income generated in the first six months of 2011. Economic structure is measured by the township farming population percentage calculated in 2008. Higher farming population percentage represents that the town is more agricultural and vice versa.

[64] Interview with the vice secretary of the party committee of the rural town where village L is located, July 19, 2011 (TL3)

To identify the effects of the two independent variables and the interaction of these two variables, the analysis of this section also controls a few variables that may have an effect on incumbency dominance. First, as mentioned in Chapter 7, remoteness of a village, the distance between the village centre and the county centre, might have an influence on the independent opportunities for economic development a village can access to. Moreover, remoteness of a village might also have a correlation with the amount of collective wealth a village can earn. Those villages located near the county centre might have more access to independent opportunities for economic development and their collective resources such as lands might be more valuable, compared to those villages locating far from the county centre. Second, population may have an effect on incumbency dominance, as voting essentially is a collective action. Opponents in villages with small population might spend less time and efforts on campaigning and mobilising popular support than those in villages with large population, especially villages with a population of more than 5,000. Third, party membership is a very important control variable. As mentioned in Chapter 7, party members are preferred by the state and local government, as the election of party members to the village committee chairman position can on the one hand help to refresh the party's legitimacy at the grassroots level and on the other hand help to solve the conflict over undefined jurisdictions and power struggle between the two committees at the village level. It is thus very likely that party membership has an effect on the re-election of an incumbent. Last but not least, age is controlled for in the regression models. Age might has an effect on the re-election of an incumbent, as older incumbents might be considered more mature and experienced in handling village governance issues by both township governments and villagers than younger incumbents, especially those incumbents in their 20s. Summary statistics are shown in Table 8.4 and the correlation matrix is presented in Table 8.5.

Table 8.4 Summary statistics

	Observation	Mean	Standard deviation	Min	Max
Township farming population percentage	237	86.67	11.43	58.61	96.14
Age	237	52.96	7.79	30	71
Population	237	2343.59	1626.96	399	10321
Remoteness (km)	237	26.96	16.08	0.78	58.39
Log10 income	237	2.74	1.90	0	5.57
Party membership	237	0.87	0.34	0	1
Re-election	237	0.50	0.50	0	1

Table 8.5 Correlation matrix

	Farming population percentage	Age	Population	Remoteness (km)	Log10 income	2011 Party membership	Re-election
Township farming population percentage	1.00						
Age	-0.11	1.00					
Population	-0.01	0.05	1.00				
Remoteness (km)	0.44	-0.04	-0.48	1.00			
Log10 income	-0.14	0.08	0.07	-0.08	1.00		
Party membership	0.14	0.08	-0.04	-0.01	-0.08	1.00	
Re-election	0.12	0.01	0.03	-0.10	-0.13	0.01	1.00

8.2.2 Data estimation

The effects of economic factors on incumbency dominance are estimated in the following two forms for Village j (where j = 1, 2… n_i for Town i) within Town i (i=1, 2 ,…, 15 towns in the sample):

$$Y_{ij}= \alpha+ \beta_1 X_{income\ ij}+\beta_2 X_{fp\ i}+\beta_4 X_{control\ ij} +\varepsilon_{ij} \quad (1)$$

$$Y_{ij}= \alpha+ \beta_1 X_{income\ ij} +\beta_2 X_{fp\ i +}\ \beta_3 X_{income\ ij}\ X_{fp\ j} + \beta_4 X_{control\ ij} +\varepsilon_{ij} \quad (2)$$

Here, $X_{income\ ij}$ denotes the collective business income generated in the first six months of 2011 for Village j within Township i and $X_{fp\ i}$ represents the township level farming population percentage for Township i. $X_{control\ ij}$ denotes the remaining four control variables - remoteness, population, age and party membership of the incumbent village chairman in Village j of Township i. The dependent variable is the re-election of incumbent village chairmen, 1 representing the incumbent VC chairman was re-elected in 2011. Logistic regression is performed on the dataset. Because villages are clustered into different rural townships and may be correlated within the same rural township, standard errors of the coefficients are robust, clustered at the township level farming population percentage. Equation (1) tests the main effects of collective village business wealth and township economic structure, while equation (2) adds the interaction effect of collective village business wealth and township economic structure. It is expected that in both equation (1) and (2) β_1 is negative, β_2 is positive and in equation (2) β_3 is positive.

Table 8.6 shows the results. Model 1 and Model 2 test the main effects only, while Model 3 and Model 4 also include the interaction effect. In Models 2 and 4, those incumbent village chairmen aged 60 or over are excluded from the sample. In Models 1 and 2, collective village business wealth exhibits a negative impact on the likelihood of an incumbent VC chairman being re-elected. The negative effect is significant at a 95% level in Model 2. The effect is better understood in terms of larger increments. The means the collective business income of all villages is ¥17,966.11 (£1,797). In Model 2, holding all other variables at their means, the probability of an incumbent village chairman being re-elected decreases from 66% to 51% when collective village business income increases from no income to the means income of all villages

¥17,966.11 (£1,797). Both in Model 1 and Model 2, the township farming population percentage has a positive impact on the probability of an incumbent being re-elected, significant at a 99% level. In Model 2, the probability of an incumbent being re-elected increases from 20% if the village is located in the town with the lowest farming population percentage in the sample (about 59%) to 62% if the village is located in the town with the highest farming population percentage in the sample (about 96%), holding all other variables at their means.

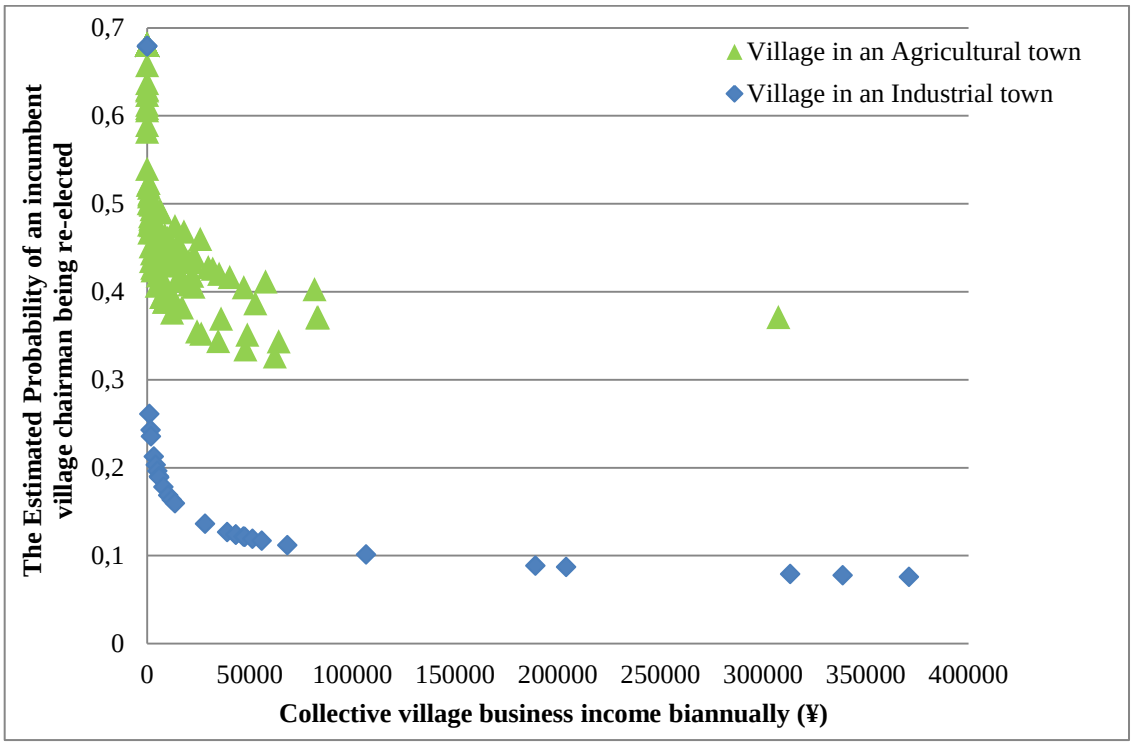
Table 8.6 Logistic regressions: the effects of socioeconomic factors on incumbency dominance

	Whether the incumbent village chairman elected in 2008 was re-elected in 2011: Yes=1.			
	1	2 Age < 60	3	4 Age<60
Log10(collective business income+1)	-0.13 (0.08)	-0.15** (0.07)	-1.17** (0.56)	-1.17** (0.54)
Township farming population percentage	0.04*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.0003 (0.03)	0.004 (0.03)
Interaction: Log10(collective business income+1) * Township farming population percentage			0.01* (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)
Remoteness	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)
Population	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Party membership in 2011: Party member =1	-0.24 (0.45)	-0.26 (0.44)	-0.28 (0.45)	-0.30 (0.44)
Age	0.01 (0.02)	0.03* (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Constant	-2.54** (1.12)	-4.46*** (1.34)	1.29 (2.71)	-0.59 (2.47)
Pseudo R2	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.06
Log pseudo likelihood	-156.42	-131.31	-155.01	-130.40
Observations	237	201	237	201

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors adjusted for fifteen clusters.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

After introducing the interaction term in Model 3 and Model 4, the township farming population percentage exhibits a positive but no longer statistically significant impact on the dependent variable. The negative impact of collective village business income increases substantially, significant at a 95% level; and the interaction term has a positive effect on incumbency dominance, significant at a 90% level. Based on Model 3, when collective village business income increases from no income to the means income ¥17,966.11 (£1,797), the probability of an incumbent VC chairman being re-elected decreases from 68% to 15% if the village is located in the town with the lowest farming population percentage (about 59%); and the probability of an

incumbent VC chairman being re-elected decreases from 68% to 47% if the village is located in the town with the highest farming population percentage (96%). These effects predicted by Model 3 of Table 8.5 are represented in Figure 8.1. In Figure 8.1, all control variables are set at their means and the actual values of the independent variables are used. The X axis indicates the amount of collective village business income in the first six months of 2011. The Y axis represents the estimated probability of an incumbent village committee chairman being re-elected. Among the fifteen towns, apart from one town with a farming population of 58.61%, all the other towns have a farming population of more than 86%. Thus, blue points are villages from the town with a farming population of 58.61%, while green points represent those villages from the remaining towns with a farming population of at least 86%. The town with a farming population of 58.61% is considered as industrial town, while the remaining towns, given the high farming population percentage - above 86%, are considered as agricultural town.



Notes: Figure 8.1 is drawn based on Model 3 in Table 8.5.

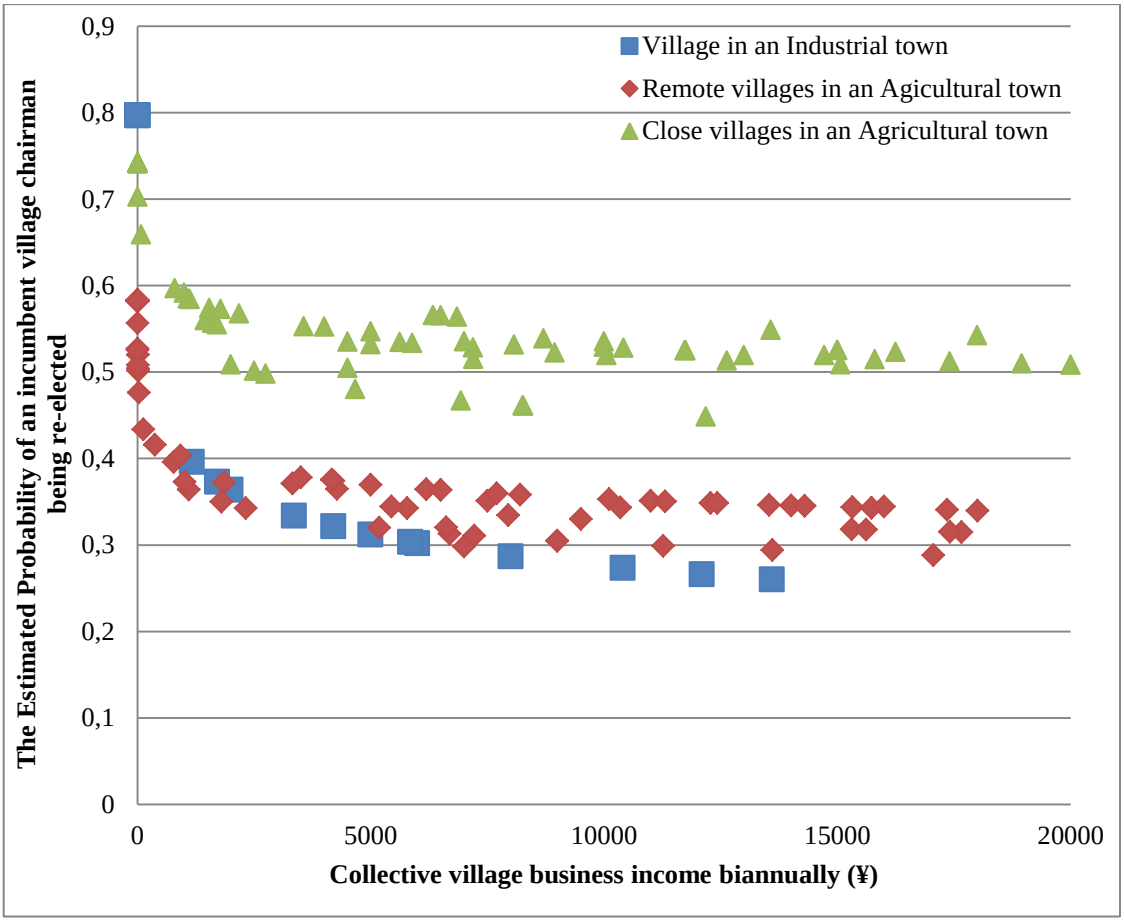
Figure 8.1 The impact of collective village business wealth and economic autonomy on the re-election of an incumbent village committee chairman

Since 80% of the observations (196 out of 237 cases) fall into the range of collective income from 0 to ¥20,000 (£2,000), the pattern is better observed by taking a close

look at these observations. Thus, Figure 8.2 only shows these observations with collective business income below ¥20,000 (£2,000). Moreover, remoteness is found to have a significant negative effect on the probability of an incumbent village committee chairman being re-elected. The effect of remoteness is also taken into account in Figure 8.2. The X axis indicates the amount of collective village business income in RMB in the first six months of 2011, and the Y axis represents the estimated probability of an incumbent village committee chairman being re-elected. All control variables except remoteness are set at their means and the actual values of the independent variables are used. Since the means of remoteness is 26.96 km, the 205 villages at the fourteen towns with a farming population of more than 86% are grouped into two categories, remote villages with distance from the county centre more than 26.96 km and close villages with the distance less than 26.96 km. There is no point in categorising villages in the industrial town, as the town is located at the county centre and villages from this town are close to the county centre by default. Remoteness is set at it means for villages at each category, that is, 6.31 km for villages in an industrial town, 17.02 km for close villages and 41.12 km for remote villages in an agricultural town. As is shown in Figure 8.2, blue points represent the villages in the town with a farming population of 58.61%, red points represent villages in an agricultural town with a farming population of more than 86% and being away from the county centre more than 26.96 km, and the green points represent the remaining villages with distance from the county centre less than 26.96 km in an agricultural town.

As can be seen from Figure 8.2, collective village income exhibits a negative influence on the probability of an incumbent village chairman being re-elected. The probability of an incumbent VC chairman being re-elected is higher in villages within the agricultural town than villages within the industrial town. After taking into account the effect of remoteness, the negative effect of collective village income is most dramatic in villages in the industrial town and least dramatic in close villages in the agricultural town. The estimated probability of an incumbent VC chairman being re-elected ranges from 80% to 20% for villages in the industrial town, while the probability for close villages in the agricultural towns ranges from 80% to 40%. Among villages in the agricultural towns, the negative effect of remoteness on the probability of an incumbent village committee chairman being re-elected is

considerable. Villages close to the county centre have considerably higher incumbent dominance than remote villages. As collective business income increases, the estimated probability of an incumbent VC chairman being re-elected drops more dramatically in remote villages than in close villages in the agricultural towns. The majority of close villages in the agricultural towns have 50% to 60% probability of an incumbent VC chairman being re-elected, while the majority of remote villages in the agricultural towns have 30% to 40% probability of incumbent dominance in the elections.



Notes: Figure 8.2 is drawn based on Model 3 in Table 8.5. All control variables except remoteness are set at their means. Remoteness is set at its means for villages belonging to each category, that is, 6.31 km for villages in an industrial town, 17.02 km for close villages and 41.12 km for remote villages in an agricultural town.

Figure 8.2 The impact of collective village business wealth and economic autonomy on the re-election of an incumbent village committee chairman (continued)

However, because majority villages in the sample are located in agricultural towns (205 out of 237 villages) with a farming population of more than 86%, it is sensible to check whether the pattern still holds after dropping villages from the most industrial

town in the sample. Table 8.7 shows the logistic regression results of equation (1) and equation (2) of villages located in those agricultural towns with more than 86% farming population. In Models 5 and 6 with only the main effects of collective village business wealth and the township farming population percentage, none of the effect is statistically significant. In Models 7 and 8, after introducing the interaction term, the main effects of the two independent variables and the effect of the interaction term are significant. Calculating the marginal effects of the main variables based on Model 7, the result shows that in villages within towns with a farming population of lower than 93%, as collective village wealth increases, the probability of an incumbent being re-elected decreases. But as the farming population percentage increases to 93% and above, the direction of the impact of collective village wealth on the probability of an incumbent being re-elected turns from negative to positive. In villages from the town with a farming population of 96.14%, as collective village wealth increases, the probability of an incumbent being re-elected increases. This result seems to support the hypothesis that after reaching a certain threshold level of township farming population percentage, the effect of collective village wealth on the probability of an incumbent being re-elected changes from negative to positive. In other words, in the highly agricultural town, because of local government monopoly over economic development resources, increasing collective village wealth strengthens, instead of weakening, incumbency dominance in villages.

However, given that these fourteen towns do not differ much in their farming population percentage and the sample size is small with only fourteen towns, it would be imprudent to claim for sure that wealthy collective wealth strengthens the capacity of local government in controlling elections in villages where local government monopolise access to economic development resources. Further studies using high-quality data and large sample size are required to prove such a claim. The results presented in Table 8.6 nonetheless confirm that the negative effect of collective village business income on incumbency dominance is consistent and robust. The interaction term also remains positive and statistically significant. Thus, including those villages from the most industrial town with a farming population of 58.61% in the sample does not change the nature of the relationship.

Table 8.7 The effects of collective village business wealth and economic autonomy on incumbency dominance in villages in agricultural towns

	Whether the incumbent village chairman elected in 2008 was re-elected in 2011: Yes=1.			
	5	6 Age < 60	7	8 Age<60
Log10(collective business income+1)	-0.07 (0.10)	-0.09 (0.09)	-6.54*** (2.26)	-4.66** (1.88)
Township farming population percentage	-0.01 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.20*** (0.07)	-0.15*** (0.06)
Interaction: Log10(collective business income+1) * Township farming population percentage			0.07*** (0.03)	0.05** (0.02)
Remoteness	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.03** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)
Population	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Party membership in 2011: Party member =1	-0.24 (0.56)	-0.21 (0.53)	-0.19 (0.56)	-0.18 (0.52)
Age	0.00 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Constant	2.91 (5.04)	1.38 (4.57)	20.32*** (6.65)	13.68*** (4.89)
Pseudo R2	0.04	0.04	0.07	0.05
Log pseudo likelihood	-135.64	-116.75	-132.44	-115.37
Observations	205	177	205	177

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors adjusted for fourteen clusters.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

In addition, as is evident in Figure 8.1, there are only six villages which generated collective business income beyond ¥110,000 (£11,000). The remaining 231 villages generated the amount of collective business income ranging from 0 to ¥100,000 (£10,000). It is likely that the presence of these few cases with exceptionally high collective business income biases the effect of collective income on the likelihood of a village incumbent chairman being re-elected. Logistic regression is then performed on the data set excluding these six villages (Table 8.8). Compared to models in Table 8.6, the exclusion of these few cases does not influence the results. In both Model 11 and Model 12 with the interaction effect, collective village business income maintains a statistically significant negative impact on incumbency dominance and the interaction term also exhibits the same statistically significant positive effect on the dependent variable. Though in Model 11, township farming population percentage exhibits a negative effect, similar to Model 3 in Table 8.6, this effect is not statistically significant.

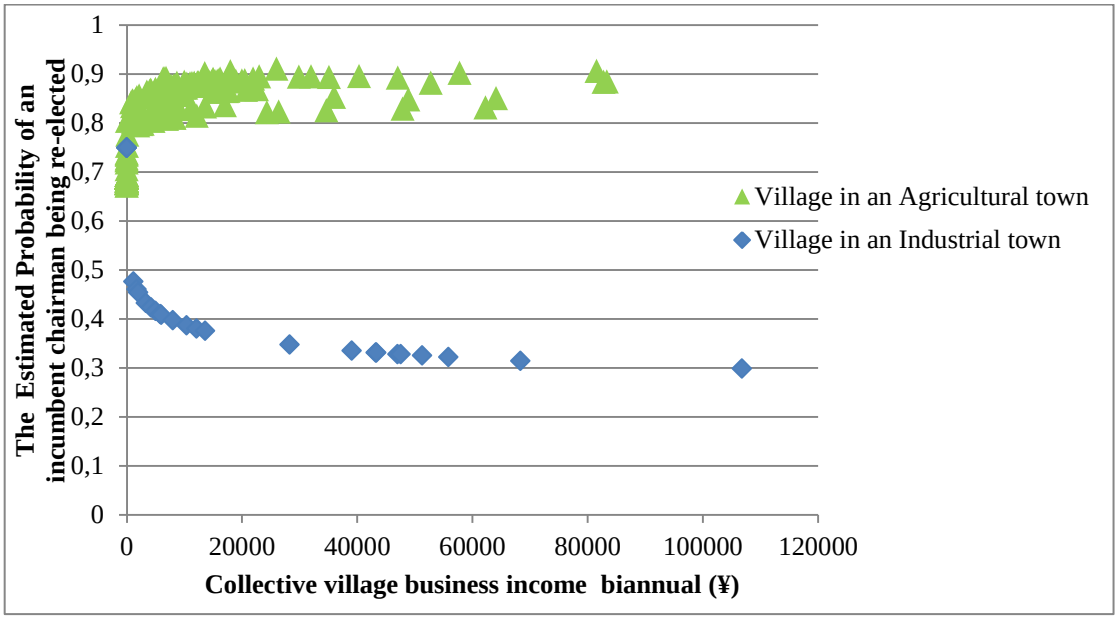
However, compared to Model 3 in Table 8.6, the change in the magnitude of the coefficients of collective business income and the interaction term changes the overall effect of collective business income on incumbency dominance among villages in the agricultural town. According to Model 11, the overall effect of collective business income is the sum of β_1 and β_3 $X_{fp\ j}$. The mean township farming population percentage of villages in agricultural towns is 86.67%. Among villages in the agricultural town, the overall effect of collective business income on incumbency dominancy is then 0.17, a positive influence. In fact, the threshold level of farming population to change the overall effect of collective village income from negative to positive is 78%, as when farming population percentage reaches 78%, the positive effect of the interaction term evens out the negative independent effect of collective business income. This implies that though collective business income retains a negative independent effect on incumbency dominance, incumbents are more likely to be re-elected in wealthy villages in agricultural towns with farming population percentage beyond 78%, because wealthy villages in agricultural town tend to rely on their township governments to generate the collective wealth.

Table 8.8 Collective village business wealth, economic autonomy and incumbency dominance (Excluding 6 extremely wealthy villages)

	Whether the incumbent village chairman elected in 2008 was re-elected in 2011: Yes=1.			
	9	10 Age < 60	11	12 Age<60
Log10(collective business income+1)	-0.12 (0.09)	-0.15* (0.08)	-1.56** (0.69)	-1.93*** (0.74)
Township farming population percentage	0.04*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)
Interaction: Log10(collective business income+1) * Township farming population percentage			0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)
Remoteness	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)
Population	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Party membership in 2011: Party member =1	-0.08 (0.53)	-0.11 (0.51)	-0.11 (0.53)	-0.14 (0.51)
Age	0.01 (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Constant	-2.74** (1.15)	-4.92*** (1.35)	2.07 (3.08)	1.11 (2.99)
Pseudo R2	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.07
Log pseudo likelihood	-152.55	-127.29	-150.46	-125.36
Observations	231	195	231	195

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors adjusted for fifteen clusters.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 8.3 is drawn based on Model 11. The actual values of the independent variables are used and all other control variables are set at their means. Villages in agricultural towns still have a much higher probability than their counterparts in the industrial town to have their village incumbent chairmen re-elected. However, the exclusion of the few villages with extreme values of collective village income changes the effect of collective income on the dependent variable in villages within agricultural towns. In villages within those agricultural towns with a farming population of more than 86%, as collective income increases, the probability of an incumbent chairman being re-elected increases. In villages of industrial town, collective income still has a negative impact on the probability of the incumbent VC chairmen being re-elected. The results confirm to the hypothesis that in villages located in the highly agricultural town increasing economic wealth strengthens incumbency dominance because of local government monopoly over economic development resources, while in villages located in the highly industrial town increasing economic wealth weakens incumbency dominance because of the economic autonomy this type of village possess.

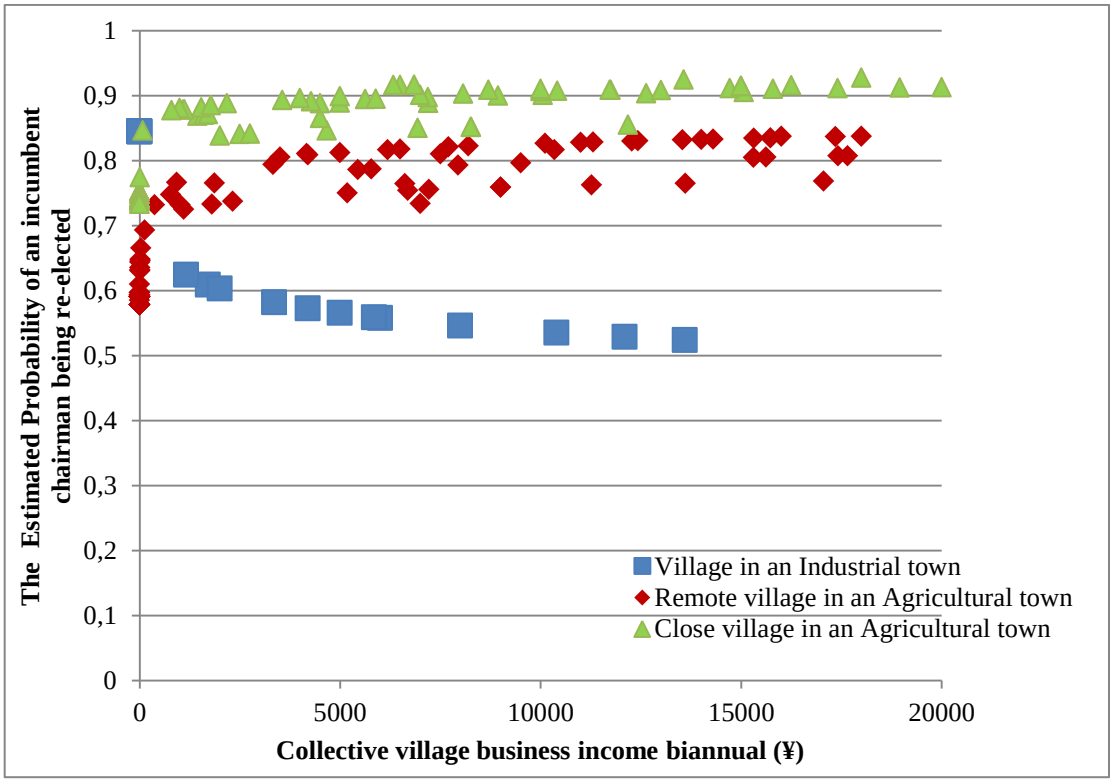


Notes: Figure 8.3 is drawn based on Model 11 in Table 8.7.

Figure 8.3 The effects of socioeconomic factors on incumbency dominance (excluding the 6 villages with extremely wealthy collective business income)

In Figure 8.4, similar to Figure 8.2, we zoom into majority of the observations with collective business income below ¥20,000 (£2,000). Moreover, villages in the agricultural towns are classified into two categories, remote villages with more than

27.38 km from the county centre and close villages with less than 27.38 km from the county centre, as the means of remoteness after excluding the six extreme cases is 27.38 km. The value of remoteness is set at its means for villages at each category, that is, 6.84 km for villages in an industrial town, 17.13 km for close villages and 41.17 km for remote villages in an agricultural town. As can be seen, villages in the agricultural towns, especially those villages with close distance to the county centre, have a much higher probability to have incumbent dominance in the elections than their counterparts in the industrial town. In the agricultural towns, as collective income increases, the probability of incumbent dominance increases in village elections. Moreover, villages in an agricultural town with close distance to the county centre have a higher probability of incumbent dominance than those villages in an agricultural town with remote distance from the county centre.



Notes: Figure 8.4 is drawn based on Model 11 in Table 8.7. All control variables except remoteness are set at their means. Remoteness is set at its means for villages belonging to each category, that is, 6.84 km for villages in an industrial town, 17.13 km for close villages and 41.17 km for remote villages in an agricultural town.

Figure 8.4 The effects of socioeconomic factors on incumbency dominance (excluding the 6 villages with extremely wealthy collective business income) (continued)

Remoteness, the distance between village centre and the county centre, has consistent and robust negative effects on incumbency dominance in all the previous 12 models in this chapter. The negative effect might be a result of the diminishing political control that the county government can exert as the village is further away from the county political centre. On the other hand, remoteness is also correlated to the key independent variables of interest – collective village business income and township farming population percentage. Remote villages tend to have a higher farming population percentage in the sample county, as the sample county is surrounded by mountains. The value of collective resources in remote villages also tends to be less valuable than those in close villages near the county centre. It is thus reasonable to add interaction terms to explore the ways that these three variables affect incumbency dominance. Adding the interaction terms also allow a comparison with the main models – Model 3 and Model 4 - presented above and a robustness check of the results in the two main models. Last but not least, villages situated in a remote town with high farming population percentage are likely to have less independent opportunities for economic development and thus it is very likely that wealthy villages from this category generate their wealth from the support of local township government. The three-way interaction of these three variables might well represent the economic autonomy this thesis wants to capture. Higher value on the three-way interaction term means less economic autonomy.

Table 8.9 presents the results. The same logistic regression is performed on the data set with additional interaction terms included. In Model 13, collective business income is no longer significant, while its interaction with remoteness maintains a significant negative effect on incumbency dominance, which implies that collective business income has a negative effect on incumbency dominance through its interaction with remoteness. Township farming population percentage continues to retain its independent significant positive effect on incumbency dominance. It also has a negative effect on incumbency dominance through its interaction with remoteness. The remoteness term has a statistically positive independent effect on incumbency dominance, and its negative effect is only significant and present with its interactions with the other two independent variables. The three-way interaction term, an additional estimation of the economic autonomy, exhibits a statistically significant positive effect on incumbency dominance. This implies that a higher value on this

interaction term – less economic autonomy - contributes to a higher probability of incumbency dominance. The magnitude of the influence is small. A one-unit increase in the three-way interaction term increases the odds of an incumbent being re-elected by 0.2%. In Model 14, compared to Model 4, the overall effect of collective business income remains significantly negative, but its independent effect becomes significantly positive. This implies that the negative effect of collective business income on incumbency dominance is through its interaction with remoteness and township farming population percentage. The three-way interaction term maintains the same magnitude and significant level with that in Model 13. The most notable thing is that compared to Model 3 and Model 4, the township farming population percentage term gains considerably in magnitude and becomes significant (1 percent) in both Model 13 and Model 14. In Model 14, considering only the independent effect of township farming population, a one-percentage increase in the township farming population percentage increases the odds of an incumbent being re-elected by 24%.

The results after adding the interaction terms do support the main theory of this thesis. Economic autonomy, either township percentage farming population or the three-way interaction term, exhibits a statistically significant positive effect on incumbency dominance. Collective business wealth exhibits a mixed story and it is because of the nature of its interaction with the other two independent variables. There is an interesting story after adding the interaction terms. The consistent negative and statistically significant effects of the interactions of remoteness with the other two independent variables do imply that in addition to the economic autonomy factor, diminishing political control associated with the distance of the village with the political centre is also an important factor to consider. This presents a spatial model of political control. With similar amount of economic control by the local government, those villages located far away from the political centre might still have more freedom than those villages located near the political centre. However, because of the lack of case study on exploring further this aspect of the effect of remoteness, the exploration of the effect of remoteness will be left for further study.

Table 8.9 The interaction effect of collective business income, township farming population percentage and collective business income on incumbency dominance

	Whether the incumbent village chairman elected in 2008 was re-elected in 2011: Yes=1.	
	13	14 Age<60
Log10(collective business income+1)	1.18	2.31**
	(0.91)	(1.04)
Township farming population percentage	0.14***	0.22***
	(0.05)	(0.06)
Remoteness	0.94***	1.23***
	(0.23)	(0.31)
Interaction terms		
Log10(collective business income+1) * Township farming population percentage	-0.01	-0.03**
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Log10(collective business income+1) * Remoteness	-0.17***	-0.21***
	(0.05)	(0.05)
Township farming population percentage * Remoteness	-0.01***	-0.01***
	(0.003)	(0.004)
Log10(collective business income+1) * Township farming population percentage * Remoteness	0.002***	0.002***
	(0.0006)	(0.001)
Control variables		
Population	-0.0001	-0.00004
	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
Party membership in 2011:	-0.23	-0.26
Party member =1	(0.47)	(0.51)
Age	0.01	0.04*
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Constant	-10.92**	-19.06***
	(4.84)	(5.48)
Pseudo R2	0.08	0.10
Log pseudo likelihood	-151.44	-125.94
Observations	237	201

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors adjusted for fifteen clusters.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

As can be seen, the empirical results are supportive of the hypotheses based on the patterns found in the case study section. The township farming population percentage, representing economic autonomy a village possesses, has a positive effect on incumbency dominance. Increasing township farming population percentage strengthens incumbency dominance, as villages in agricultural towns have less economic autonomy to resist the pressure and control of township governments and the incumbents. Collective village business income has a robust statistically negative effect on the probability of an incumbent VC chairman being re-elected. In other words, higher collective income, reflecting the higher amount of lucrative benefits candidates can receive from holding the VC chairman position, attracts competitors and thus increases electoral competitiveness. In contrast to the findings in Chapter 7

where the dependent variable is the election of party members to the VC chairman position, the negative effect of collective village income on incumbency dominance in this chapter has different magnitudes after considering the township level farming population percentage. Increasing collective wealth weakens dramatically the incumbency dominance in villages located in the more industrial town; while the weakening effect of increasing collective wealth on incumbency dominance is less dramatic in villages located in the more agricultural town. As the results of the regressions performed on the dataset excluding villages in the industrial town and results of the regression performed on the dataset excluding the six extremely wealthy villages show, increasing collective wealth might strengthen, instead of weakening, incumbency dominance in villages in towns with a more agricultural economic structure, though this finding needs to be confirmed by further studies. In addition, the results after adding the interaction terms suggest that economic autonomy, reflected from township farming population and the three-way interaction of collective business income, remoteness and township farming population, shows statistically significant positive effect on incumbency dominance. The results also suggest that remoteness is a factor that is worth further exploration for future study.

8.3 Summary

This chapter examines authoritarian control over village elections by using the re-election of incumbent VC chairmen as a proxy. Local government prefers certainty in the village leadership to guarantee the implementation of state policies, especially priority targets with veto power. Moreover, as explored in Chapter 7, incumbent VC chairmen who are not party members with good performance when in office are encouraged to join and be absorbed into the party, which further strengthens the local government preference over incumbents. In China's village elections, because of local government privileged access to resources, media and laws, incumbents enjoy political dominance, rather than advantages in elections conducted in liberal democracies, and thus the re-election of incumbents reflects incumbency dominance in such elections.

Similarly to Chapter 7, the two socio-economic structural factors - collective village business wealth and economic autonomy - are proved to have substantial influence on incumbency dominance. Similarly to studies of China's village elections, collective

village business wealth contributes to competitive village elections, but the rationale is different. Collective village business wealth represents the lucrative benefits or rewards from holding the office and thus increasing collective village business wealth contributes to intense electoral competition and weakens incumbency dominance. However, the successful elections of opponents to the VC chairman position requires looking at the ability of opponents and voters to resist local government pressure and control in having their preferred candidates elected – incumbents in this chapter and party members in Chapter 7 (see Chapter 7 Section 2). This ability is affected by village economic autonomy. Villagers and opponents in villages that have greater economic autonomy, reflected in opportunities for economic development beyond the control of local government, are more likely to challenge the official candidates and resist the pressure and control of local government in the elections. This argument is confirmed by the case study and the data analysis. Incumbents are more likely to be re-elected in villages located in the more agricultural town than their counterparts in villages in the more industrial town. Furthermore, increasing collective wealth weakens incumbency dominance and the weakening effect on incumbency dominance is less dramatic in villages located in agricultural towns, as township governments in agricultural towns have more of a monopoly over resources for economic development and villages, especially those with substantial business wealth, might generate their collective income from the local government support. It is likely that in villages in highly agricultural towns, increasing collective wealth might strengthen incumbency dominance, as threatening to blackmail the villages from benefiting from future economic projects is a strong message in such villages that generate their wealthy collective income through the support of local government. The case study and data analysis of this chapter show such a likely pattern.

Chapter 9 : Conclusion

This thesis investigates the effects of economic development and economic autonomy on the authoritarian control over China's village elections. With new data - both qualitative and quantitative - this study is able to discover empirical patterns of the authoritarian control in China's village elections on the one hand and unravel the effects of socioeconomic factors and the underlying mechanisms on the other. The findings have contributed empirically and theoretically to our understanding of not only village elections in China in particular but also elections in authoritarian regimes in general. The findings also have valuable implications for the prospects of greater democracy in China and contribute normatively to our understanding of elections and authoritarian resilience.

In this conclusion chapter, the empirical and theoretical contributions are summarised, followed by implications for democratisation in China and normative conclusions on elections and authoritarian resilience. Future research built on the findings of this study is assessed at the end.

9.1 Empirical findings: Economy autonomy and village elections in China

As is demonstrated in this thesis, given that village elections operate within China's one party authoritarian regime and the official purpose is to solve the grassroots governance crisis, the elections have to be implemented within the boundary of the CCP's authoritarian governance. In reality, the boundary is maintained by the local government at the township and the county levels. It is crucial to the local government that reliable candidates are elected, as the implementation of state policies and political tasks which affects their political careers needs the cooperation of the elected village committees. As is explicitly advocated in governmental issues and observed in elections in the sample county, party members or/and incumbents are preferred by the CCP and the local government when it comes to the elections.

With new qualitative evidence, this thesis is able to unravel the tactics used by both local government and opponents in elections and reveal the dynamic of the political competition in rural China, which have yet to be covered by existing studies of China's village elections as a result of the lack of data. With privileged access to law,

resources and media, local government can use various methods to have their preferred candidates elected. Rewards or/and punishment are deployed to induce cooperation from both voters and candidates. Also, the party is adapted to the possibility that party members might not win all the time in the elections and thus opens its membership to elected outsiders. On the other side, opponents, who foresee the lucrative benefits from holding offices, are not passive. In addition to conventional campaigning used widely in western liberal democracies, unconventional strategies, that is, vote buying, voter intimidation and the like, are not uncommon in the opponents' pursuit of village power. Moreover, joining the party is also a viable and rational option for opponents.

Though the playing field is uneven and skewed to favour the interest of local government and ultimately the CCP, official candidates supported by local government do not always win the elections. As the electoral data of the sample county have shown, 28% of the elected VC chairmen (67 out of 237) in 2011 are not party members and 50% of the incumbent VC chairman in 2008 (119 out of 237) are not re-elected in 2011. There are two key messages behind these figures. First, though party members still dominate the village elections, a degree of inclusiveness in such elections is witnessed as non-party members are able to win the elections. Second, though the uneven playing field of the elections and no term limit to office holders might turn incumbency advantage into incumbency dominance, some incumbents are still replaced by opponents who have no prior experience. In the light of the turnover rate, the elections are contested.

Similarly to existing studies of China's village elections, economic development, reflected from collective village wealth, is found in this study to contribute to electoral competitiveness. However, the rationale is different. Collective village wealth represents the lucrative benefits candidates can obtain from holding the office. Following this logic, higher collective village wealth intensifies the electoral competition which in turn makes it more difficult for local government to achieve their electoral goals. Since the village committee only has full control over the collective village business income rather than the government subsidies, this study goes further and proves that it is the collective village business income that contributes to electoral competitiveness.

However, increasing collective village wealth alone cannot explain the variance among villages on the authoritarian control reflected in the electoral outcomes. Inspired by existing studies of elections in non-democratic countries, this study pays attention to the uneven playing field and the authoritarian nature of the regime where the elections operate. This focus leads to the consideration of the costs of participation in voting and competing unique to the setting of elections in authoritarian regimes, which has been neglected by scholars of China's village elections. Voting and running against the candidates supported by local government entail risks, the cost of which villagers and opponents must take into account when making decisions about participating in voting and competing. This cost is captured by village economic autonomy - the opportunities for economic development beyond the control of local government. Moreover, as the empirical investigation has proved, the effect of collective village business wealth on authoritarian control is also contingent on village economic autonomy. Based in the Chinese grassroots context, villages in more industrial towns enjoy more independent opportunities for economic development beyond the control of local government and thus enjoy a higher degree of economic autonomy, while villages in more agricultural town need to rely on local government for economic development and thus have a limited degree of economic autonomy.

The key empirical findings are summarised in Table 9.1. As can be seen, authoritarian control, reflected from the election of party members and the re-election of incumbents, are weak in villages with wealthy collective business income located in the more industrial town. A high degree of economic autonomy insulates villages in the more industrial town from the pressure of local government. In this type of village, increasing collective village business income increases the amount of lucrative benefits candidates can obtain from holding the office and thus intensifies the electoral competitiveness. Competitive elections make it less likely for local government to either have party members elected or have incumbents re-elected. Furthermore, high lucrative benefits also intensify the conflict between village party secretaries and elected outsiders over economic interest and power and thus it is less likely for elected outsiders to be co-opted.

Table 9.1 Economy autonomy, lucrative benefits and authoritarian control over village elections

Lucrative benefits \ Economy autonomy		Industrial town	Agricultural town
Poor village	Electoral competitiveness	No competition	Sometimes competitive
	Electoral outcome	Incumbents re-elected	Official candidates (party members or/ and incumbents) elected; Elected outsiders being co-opted.
Rich village	Electoral competitiveness	Highly competitive	Competitive
	Electoral outcome	Opponents elected; Co-optation fails.	Official candidates (party members or/and incumbents) elected.

In the remaining types of villages, authoritarian control is more likely to prevail. In poor villages in the more industrial town, since there are no lucrative benefits, there is almost no electoral competition and thus incumbents are more likely to be re-elected. In the more agricultural towns, in villages with wealthy collective business income, the elections might be competitive. But the wealthy business income of the villages is generated from local government support and threatening to withdraw such support is a credible threat to villagers and candidates. Thus, official candidates are more likely to be elected. In villages with limited collective business income, as this study has shown, the elections might sometimes be competitive, as compared to farming, the monthly allowance an office holder can receive is an attraction to villagers. Because of the villages' economic reliance on local government, official candidates are likely to be elected. Even if outsiders are elected, they are more likely to be co-opted, because they have a great incentive to join the party on the one hand and on the other, they have no conflict of economic interest with the village party secretaries to prevent them from being co-opted.

9.2 Theoretical contributions

This thesis has made a number of theoretical contributions to our understanding of not only village elections in China but also elections in authoritarian regimes in general. In contrast to existing studies of China's village elections which focus more on the competitiveness of the elections, this thesis considers not only the contested nature of the elections but also the outcomes of the elections, as a genuine democratic election requires not only the right to stand for electoral competition but also the opportunity for outsiders to win the elections. With the right to stand, rewards and benefits can increase actors' interest in participation, but the effective outcome of the participation

requires more than just interest; rather, it requires the capability to participate effectively. Some existing studies of China's village elections mention the capability of incumbent village leaders to thwart opposition challenge and delay the implementation of competitive elections, but there has been very limited discussion on the rationale and underlying mechanisms.

By providing a thorough discussion of the rationale and underlying mechanisms, this thesis is able to reconcile the differences in the existing findings of the role of economic development in China's village elections. Some scholars (e.g., Hu, 2001, 2005) find that village economic development indicated by collective village wealth increases villagers' stakes and candidates' rewards from the results of the elections and thus leads to greater participation and more intense electoral competition. On the other hand, some others (e.g., Shi, 1999a) find that the positive effect of economic development on the village electoral competitiveness has a limit; and after this limit, further economic development hampers the implementation of competitive elections. This is because of the capability and incentive of incumbent village leaders to thwart opposition challenge and control the elections. The seemingly contradictory findings about the relationship can be attributed to the other more fundamental structural factor - economic autonomy - for which economic development in the latter argument acts as a proxy.

According to the aforementioned two contradictory arguments and findings, in the former case, economic development is related to interests of voters and candidates in participation; while in the latter case, the negative role of economic development is a result of incentives and the capability of the one in power to retain power. This study disentangles these two aspects of economic development and is able to measure and investigate their effects separately. The absolute amount of collective village business income represents the lucrative benefits and the increasing amount increases candidates' interest and rewards from the results of the elections. Township economic structure represents the economic autonomy a village has and the capability of the one in power to make their threats credible and retain power. Contingent on the economic autonomy a village possesses, increasing collective wealth has an impact of a different nature on the implementation of the elections. As is shown in Table 9.1, economic wealth contributes to the implementation of competitive elections when villages have

sufficient economic autonomy; in the case where most economic resources are controlled by the local government, economic wealth might strengthen the control of local government over the elections.

As can be seen, the empirical findings of this study, especially the addition of the concept of economic autonomy, revise the mechanisms and rationales behind the relationship between economic development and competitive village elections in China's grassroots context. In this way, this thesis also extends the application of modernisation theory to the context of local community level elections in China. Focusing on national level democracies, the modernisation theory considers more the demand side of the story of democratic development. Economic development leads to structural changes in a society, such as a growing middle class, an educated population, changing political values and the appearance of voluntary organisations, which create demands for democracy. When looking into the same relationship in the context of China's grassroots level practices, the uneven playing field of the elections and the authoritarian nature of the regime require us to look more at the supply side of the story - how much economic control the local government in China have to control the elections. Only when economic development breaks the economic control and monopoly possessed by the local government will economic development contribute to the implementation of competitive elections in China's grassroots context.

The empirical findings also enrich existing studies of local elections in authoritarian regimes. Under the same authoritarian regime, different localities might differ on the extent of authoritarian control over the local level elections. These differences can be attributed to the difference in the local level governments' control over economic resources. In other words, the extent of authoritarian control over local elections is affected by the economic autonomy individuals or groups within the localities enjoy - independent opportunities for jobs or economic prosperity beyond the control of local government.

The findings of this thesis also enrich our understanding of elections in authoritarian regimes. Though it is not in the interest of the rulers in authoritarian regimes to promote democracy per se, there are still a surging number of authoritarian regimes that install periodic elections. Moreover, not all elections introduced in authoritarian

regimes create momentum towards democratisation. As other empirical evidence has shown (e.g., Geddes, 1999), elections might legitimise the authoritarian governance in some countries and increase the longevity of the authoritarian regimes. The findings of this study help to understand why elections serve different functions in different authoritarian regimes. If economic resources are controlled and monopolised by the authoritarian rulers, elections will only serve to stabilise the regimes in that elections help on the one hand to legitimise the governance of the candidates supported by the rulers and to identify and co-opt opponents on the other.

9.3 Elections and authoritarian resilience

As is briefed in the introduction of this thesis, though it is the central government and the CCP that implement the village elections at the grassroots level in China, the official purpose is not to promote democracy and checks and balances of power; instead, village elections are used as an instrumental tool to solve the CCP's legitimacy crisis and governing failures in China's countryside. The findings of this thesis suggest that until now the official purpose of village elections have been achieved and the elections have been maintained within the boundary of the CCP's authoritarian governance. In most villages, authoritarian control prevails in village elections.

The findings of this thesis help to understand why China's village elections have yet to be extended to higher level governments and create momentum for further democratic reform in China. First, competitive elections are only introduced in rural areas where the township economic structure is predominantly agricultural. As the empirical findings of this thesis have shown, villages in the more agricultural towns enjoy limited economic autonomy to resist local government pressure and control in time of elections and thus local government electoral goal is likely to be achieved. Even though opponents win the elections, given the economic reliance of the villages on local government, being co-opted is a rational option for them so as to enjoy the perks of office and climb up the political ladder. In other words, since elections are only introduced to areas where key economic resources are controlled by the local government, elections serve to stabilise and legitimise the political dominance of the local government and ultimately the authoritarian governance of the CCP. Furthermore, the introduction of competitive elections to the grassroots level self-

governance organisations also minimises the destabilising effect of the elections on the CCP's governance.

Second, the implementation of co-optation further strengthens the CCP's control over grassroots power and governance. It is important to point out that in the 16th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 2002, a necessary revision to the Party's Constitution paves roads for the implementation of a co-optation strategy. Before 2002, in the party's Constitution (The Chinese Communist Party, 1982), it was stipulated that the Communist Party of China is the vanguard of the Chinese working class. According to this definition, only people from the professed working class can join the party. However, after two decades' economic development since 1979, the party faces a growing business class which accumulates a large amount of economic wealth as a result of the economic reform and which is eager to make its impact in politics. In response to the changing society, the party revised the Constitution in 2002. It is defined in the new Constitution (The Chinese Communist Party, 2007) that the Communist Party of China is the vanguard of the Chinese working class but also the vanguard of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation. The new definition makes it possible for the party to co-opt all Chinese people, not just people from the working class. The revision of the CCP's Constitution and the implementation of co-optation strategy signal the willingness of the party to broaden its social base and to respond to the changing structure of the society.

The introduction of elections to rural areas where economic resources are controlled predominantly by local government and the opening of party membership to outsiders reflect the adaptability and resilience of the CCP in China. These two measures help to minimise and postpone the democratisation effect of elections in China. Would the resilience of the CCP in China only consolidate the authoritarian governance in the long run and make the prospects for greater democracy bleak in China? Would the unintended consequences of holding village elections - empowered villagers with increasing democratic consciousness and political efficacy and growing demand for more substantial political participation as a result of practising village elections - create momentum for greater democracy to become the case in China in the long run? Though the findings in this thesis suggest that until now the elections have been maintained within the boundary of the CCP's authoritarian governance and the regime

has sufficient adaptability and resilience to the changes in the society, the prospects for greater democracy in China are still bright.

As the case study of this thesis has shown, party membership is not offered to outsiders as an honour or a title with no real power; instead, in most cases after being co-opted, outsiders can step into the village party committee and are able to grab the real power of the village party committee. Though it is the CCP's intention to invigorate the party by recruiting new and young people, these groups of newly co-opted party members might share completely different ideas and values with the established old party members at the grassroots level due to their different backgrounds and life experiences. In such a case, they might become the opposition faction to the group of established old party members within the party at the grassroots level. The space within the party makes it likely that opposition might breed within the party, instead of outside the party where there is limited space.

In addition to the co-optation of outsiders, as this thesis has shown, party members, especially those serving on the village party committees, are encouraged to run for the elections for the village committees. The pluralisation of the formal political power in villages as a result of the introduction of village elections and the conflict between the two committees at the grassroots level does create pressure for the CCP to regain the governing legitimacy of its grassroots organisations. In some extreme cases, in order to maintain their positions in the village party committee, village party committee members are obliged to run and win the elections for the village committee. The two ballot system in Shanxi Province (see Li, 1999) is an attempt by the CCP to regain its governing legitimacy at the grassroots level. In the two ballot system, prospective village party secretaries are subject to the votes of confidence by all villagers before being considered as official candidates for the village party secretary position. Therefore, we are more likely to see the happening of democracy reform in the CCP's grassroots organisations - the village party committee. The road to greater democracy in China might come from inside the party and from below.

The findings of this thesis have a profound implication for democratisation in China. As is shown in the case study, opponents deploy mainly non-conventional strategies with or without a violent nature, such as vote-buying and voter intimidation, in order

to win the elections at China's villages. Villagers, as voters, do not have much freedom in making sincere choices. Instead, those who have access to or control of economic resources, either the local government or the group of rich entrepreneurs, have determining influences on the electoral outcomes and village governance. Indeed, to promote checks and balances of power, the institution of elections is only the first step. Further efforts should be spent on breaking the monopoly on economic resources by a small elite and on fostering independent economic opportunities. In rural China, for elections to serve the function of promoting democracy and fostering checks and balances of power - neither manipulation by the local government nor manipulation by rich opponents - the key lies in the economic empowerment of villagers.

The findings of this thesis also have an implication for elections and democratisation in authoritarian regimes. The findings of this study show that though the installation of periodic elections with a contested nature in a regime which previously had no mechanism of contestation contains a degree of democratisation, as the Introduction Chapter has mentioned, democracy should not be identified with the existence of the democratic format - periodic elections. Authoritarian rules might introduce periodic elections in the areas where they have sufficient control over key economic resources to constrain the elections within the boundary of the authoritarian governance. Also, they might only open subordinate positions for contestation. These two measures minimise the destabilising effect of the elections. In doing so, the authoritarian rulers might be able to postpone democratisation of the regimes or even consolidate the authoritarian governance, which explains why some authoritarian rulers are willing to introduce elections to the regimes. To break the monopoly on power by authoritarian rulers and introduce checks and balances of power to the one who governs, it requires more than the building of one or two mechanical conditions such as majority rule; rather, it requires the fostering of the civil society with sufficient economic autonomy.

9.4 Future research

Looking ahead, built upon the findings of this thesis, there are potential avenues for future research, which are briefly explored in this final section of the thesis. First, this study is not without limitation. All villages in the most industrial town in the sample generate their collective business income from subletting collective resources and none of these villages set up their own village enterprises. There are some villages on

the outskirts of urban cities generating their collective business income through setting up collective village enterprises. Villagers, as shareholders of the collective village enterprises, share the benefits and bonus of the enterprises. The village where I worked as an intern in Shenzhen, mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, is an example of this kind of village. Though the sample of such a village is small and many of such kind of villages will eventually be converted into urban communities where different election rules apply, it is still worth investigating the political competition in this kind of village. What methods would the local government and the village party committees in such villages use to guarantee the continued control of village governance power? And what tactics can the opponents who wish to compete with the official candidates deploy to win the elections? Do villagers in such villages enjoy more freedom to make sincere choices? Further study of such cases will certainly consolidate the findings of this study, the importance of economic autonomy to democratisation.

Second, the data analysis in this thesis shows that remoteness, the distance between the county centre and the village centre, has consistent and robust negative effects on the authoritarian control over the elections in rural China, especially on incumbency dominance. In other words, the farther a village is away from the county centre, the weaker the authoritarian control the local government exercises on the village election. The effect might be due to the weak party infrastructure and network in remote villages. Some early studies of China's village elections (e.g., Shi, 1999a) also find a similar influence of the distance between the village and the county seat on village elections but are yet to explore the mechanisms and rationales. Further study on the relationship is valuable, as it would help to provide lessons to the implementation of democratic reform. If because of weak authoritarian networks and control the reform can achieve better outcomes in remote areas, then we should put more effort into promoting such reform in remote instead of urban areas.

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Appendix A Coded list of interviewees

Interviewee code	Organization	Official capacity	Date of interview
1	University of Political Science and Law, Beijing	Professor in Law and Constitution of China	Feb 1st, 2011
The County Level			
CL1	The county level Civil Affairs Bureau	The deputy head of the Bureau in charge of rural governance and village elections	Aug 6th, 2009
CL2	The county level Civil Affairs Bureau	The head of the rural governance office of the Bureau	Aug 15th , 2009
			Aug 25th, 2009
			Nov 23rd, 2009
			Jul 22nd, 2011
			Aug 3rd, 2011
CL3	The county level Bureau of Land and Resources	The head of the Land and Resources Trading office	Jul 20th, 2011
CL4	The county level Communist Party School	The vice-head responsible for training village cadres	Aug 5th, 2011
CL5	The county level Finance Bureau	The deputy head	Aug 19th, 2011
The Township Level			
TL1	Town 1	The head of the civil affairs office of the township government	Jul 27th, 2009
TL2	Town 6	The vice-mayor (also the vice-party-secretary) of the town	Aug 5th, 2009
			Jul 25th, 2011
TL3	Town 7	The vice-party-secretary (also the vice-mayor) of the town	Jul 19th, 2011
			Jul 20th, 2011
TL4	Town 6	A vice-mayor of the town	Jul 25th, 2011
TL5		The party secretary of the town	Jul 25th, 2011
TL6	Town 14	The vice mayor of the town	Aug 8th, 2011
TL7	Town 10	The township party secretary of the town	Aug 8th, 2011
TL8	Town 4	The head of the civil affairs office of the township government	Aug 8th, 2011
TL9	Town 15	The township party committee member	Aug 16th, 2011
The Village Level			
A1	Village A in Town 6	The VC chairman (concurrently the village party secretary)	Jul 15th, 2011
A2		The VC vice-chairman (concurrently the village vice-party-secretary)	Jul 15th, 2011
A3		A villager who worked at the village administrative office of Village A before 1999	Aug 14th, 2011
A4		The VC specialised member (responsible for village finance and budget)	Aug 21st, 2011
B1	Village B in Town 6	The former VC chairman from 1999 to 2011 (one of the official candidate for the VC chairman position in 2011)	Aug 5th, 2009
B2		The VC chairman elected in 2011	Jul 27th, 2011
B3		The village party secretary since 2002	Jul 27th, 2011
B4		The village vice-party-secretary (one of the official candidate for the VC chairman position in 2011)	Jul 27th, 2011
C1	Village C in Town 6	The village party secretary since 2005	Aug 9th, 2011
C2		The VC chairman since 2005	Aug 9th, 2011

D1	Village D in Town 6	The VC vice-chairman	Jul 26th, 2011
E1	Village E in Town 6	The VC chairman re-elected in 2011 (also the village party secretary since 2011; elected to the same position in 2008)	Jul 14th, 2011
E2		The former village party secretary (retired in 2011)	Jul 14th, 2011
E3		The opponent who competed with E1 both in 2008 and 2011 village elections for the VC chairman position	Jul 15th, 2011
F1	Village F in Town 6	An opinion leader and potential opponent in the next election for the VC chairman position in 2014 (a trouble maker considered by the township government)	Jul 28th, 2011
F2		The village party secretary	Aug 12th, 2011
G1	Village G in Town 6	The VC chairman (concurrently the village party secretary) since 2005	Aug 6th, 2009
			Jul 14th , 2011
H1	Village H in Town 6	The former VC chairman elected in 2008 (failed in running for re-election in 2011)	Jul 16th, 2011
H2		The village party secretary since 2005	Jul 18th, 2011
H3		The VC chairman elected in 2011	Jul 18th, 2011
I1	Village I in Town 7	The VC chairman (concurrently the village party secretary) since 1999	Jul 19th , 2011
J1	Village J in Town 7	The village party secretary since 2005	Jul 19th, 2011
			Jul 26th, 2011
K1	Village K in Town 7	The VC chairman re-elected in 2011 (elected to the same position in 2008)	Jul 19th, 2011
K2		The village party secretary since 2005	Jul 19th, 2011
L1	Village L in Town 7	The village party secretary	Jul 19th, 2011
M1	Village M in Town 15	The village party secretary	Aug 16th, 2011
M2		The VC chairman	Aug 16th, 2011
N1	Village N in Town 15	The village party secretary	Aug 11th, 2011
N2		The VC chairman	Aug 11th, 2011
N3		The former VC specialised member (responsible for civil affairs; served on the VC from 2003 to 2008)	Aug 13th, 2011
O1	Village O in Town 15	A villager	Jul 29th, 2011
O2		The VC chairman (also the village party secretary) since 2005	Aug 16th, 2011
P1	Village P in Town 15	The VC chairman elected in 2011	Nov 26th, 2009
			Aug 4th, 2011
P2		The village party secretary	Aug 4th, 2011
P3		The former VC chairman elected in 2008 (failed in re-election in 2011)	Aug 24th, 2011
Q1	Village Q in Town 15	The village party secretary (served concurrently as the VC chairman till 2011)	Aug 10th, 2011
Q1		The VC chairman elected in 2011	Aug 10th, 2011
R1	Village R in Town 15	The VC chairman	Aug 11th, 2011
S1	Village S in Town 15	The village party secretary	Aug 5th, 2011
S2		A villager	Aug 5th, 2011
T1	Village T in Town 1	A villager	Jul 28th, 2009
T2		The father of the VC chairman elected in 2008 (T3)	Aug 3rd, 2009
T3		The former VC chairman elected in 2008	Nov 25th, 2009
T4		A villager at his 80s who worked as a county official during the commune era	Nov 25th, 2009
T5		The former VC specialised member elected in 2008 (responsible for civil affairs)	Jul 29th, 2011

U1	Village U in Town 1	The village party secretary	Jul 29th, 2011
U2		The former VC chairman (retired in 2011)	Jul 29th, 2011
U3		The VC chairman elected in 2011	Jul 29th, 2011
V1	Village V in Town 1	The former VC chairman from 1999 to 2009 (promoted to the township government in 2009)	Jul 27th, 2009
V2		The village party secretary	Jul 28th, 2011
V3		The VC chairman elected in 2011	Jul 28th, 2011
W1	Village W in Town 1	The village party secretary	Nov 26th, 2009
			Aug 12, 2011
W2		The former VC chairman from 2003 to 2011 (failed in the re-election in 2011)	Nov 26th, 2009
W3		The VC chairman elected in 2011	Aug 12, 2011
X1	Village X in Town 1	An opinion leader of the village (an retired government official)	Aug 12th, 2011
Y1	Village Y in Town 1	The village committee specialised member (responsible for women welfare)	Aug 15th, 2011
Y2		The village committee specialised member (responsible for civil affairs)	Aug 15th, 2011
Z1	Village Z in Town 1	The village party secretary	Aug 19th, 2011