



# China Elections and Governance Review

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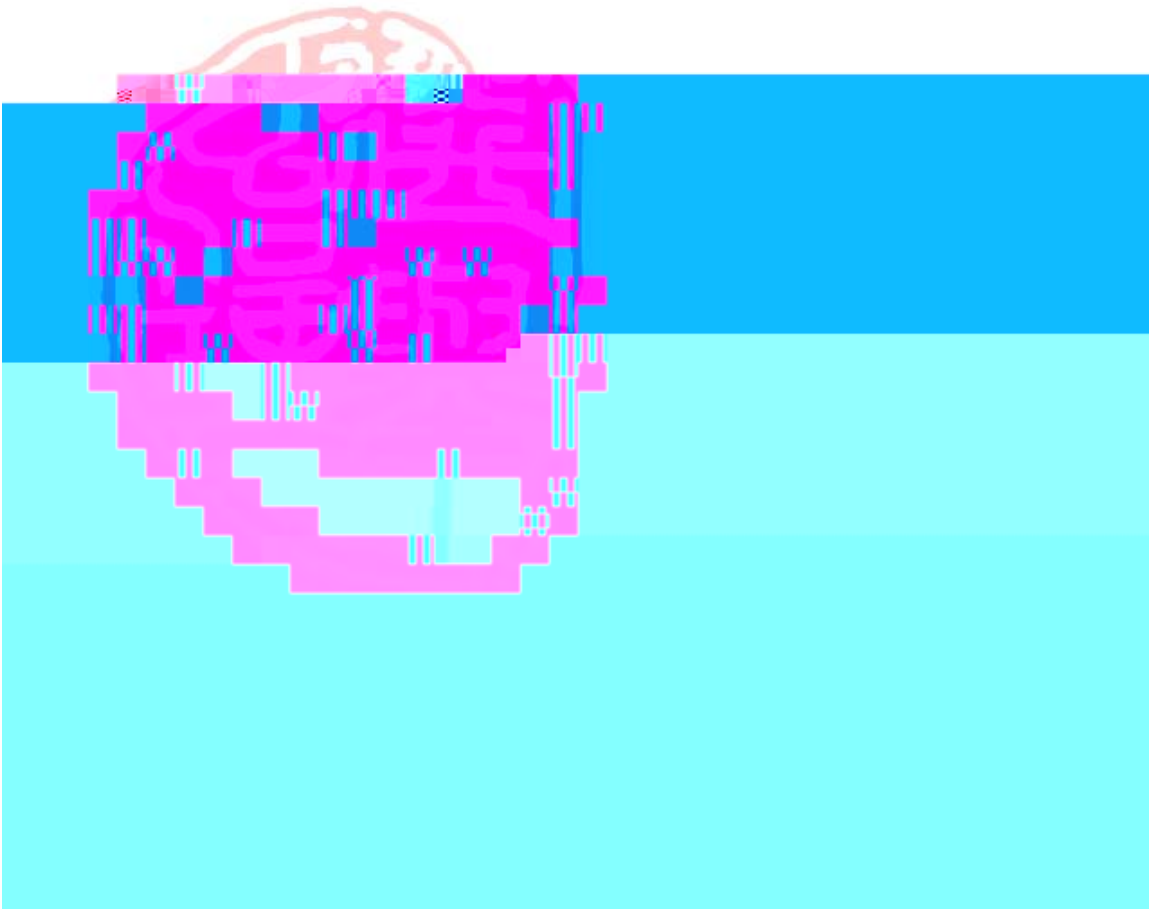
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Dear Readers:

The decade from 1998-2008 was an opportunity for



corruption, reduce popular anger, enhance its legitimacy, and allow people the opportunity to participate in public and political affairs. In this context, both the Qingxian model and the Guiyang experiment seem to be innovative ways of moving forward. While the Qingxian model's applicability and legality are questioned, Guiyang seems to be more significant and necessary. Either way, procedures must be standardized and a system must be adopted on a selective basis throughout the country.

#### Call for change

Following intra-Party democratization, which may take a decade or more to accomplish, it will be time to implement open direct elections of township/town people's congress deputies. While China does not need to use western style democracy, China needs to trust her people and allow them to elect whom they are entitled to elect in accordance with the law. The Party should focus on the preparation of strong and able candidates who can gain popular support on their own merits.

These are the issues discussed in the second installment of the China Elections and Governance Review addressed. We welcome contributions from readers for the next issue of this online report, which focuses on the role of the internet in China's social and political transformation. Please send submissions no later than June 30, 2009 to [cc.chinascope@gmail.com](mailto:cc.chinascope@gmail.com)

Yawei Liu  
 Director, China Program.  
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# Searching for a Direction after Two Decades of Local Democratic Experiments in China

By Lisheng Dong

Prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2007, a heated debate was under way among officials and scholars on the general orientation of the 'Reform and Opening Up Drive' that would reach its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in late 2008. Some argued that the reforms deviated too far from the bottom line a communist state should tolerate. The expanding private sector and shrinking public sector were eroding the socialist state. Therefore more political and economic control should be re-imposed by the party-state. Their adversaries called for major political reform, noting that the current tension in society manifesting in the gap between the rich and poor, between the coastal areas in the east and the hinterland, and between the demands for greater resources for development and the deteriorating environment could only be alleviated through further reforms. According to them, the situation was such that market-oriented reform could not move any further without, on the one hand, political openness in order to allow expression of different interests and, on the other, recognition of private ownership. The debate

became particularly intense when the National People's Congress examined the draft Law on Property Rights, which included clauses on protecting private property. The central leadership put an end to this debate a year or so before the Congress. In an article in the People's Daily by Premier Wen in February 2007, a rare political move in recent Chinese politics, the official line was expressed, repeating the Party's stand of twenty years earlier: its work and its focus would remain on economic development, based on the two pillars of keeping a tight lid on political reform while furthering the "Reform and Opening Up" drive<sup>1</sup>.

The 17<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress ushered in General Secretary Hu Jintao's second and last five-year term. Expectations were high at home and abroad for his delivery of strong policies now that he seemed to have better control at the political centre. Addressing the conference marking the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the initiation of the reform and opening up drive on Dec. 18, 2008, Mr. Hu declared "never to take the old road of closeness nor go astray by altering the banner<sup>2</sup>," basically iterating what Mr. Wen expressed earlier. What

clues can we obtain from these messages incremental approach workable for political to judge the fate of political reform? reform?

An all-round view on Chinese politics Since the late 1980s China has implemented direct elections at the village level. needs to shift from a focus on leadership to a focus on society. Despite official Some .45 the statements made by top leaders, disputes level. have persisted among officials and scholars around the “universal values of freedom, equality, human rights and democracy.” Those who claim that universal values are a US trademark have expressed the view that the existing Chinese political system shows its advantages under the current international financial crisis and there is no need to reform<sup>3</sup> it. Wang Changjiang terms such opinions as “the syndrome of insensitivity toward political reform.”<sup>4</sup> Zhou Qiren concurs with Yang Xiaokai that the advantages enjoyed by the late developing countries may make politicians neglect the need for political reform and when problems accumulate to crisis level historical opportunity is lost.<sup>5</sup>

According to Wu Jinglian, since the early 1980s, China’s economic reform is incremental in nature, i.e., the economic portion under the traditional planning mechanism is retained while the market mechanism is applied to develop the private sector and both Chinese and foreign joint ventures. The latter is much credited for China’s rapid growth but is also the cause of a number of negative outcomes, which can be summed up as the collusion between power and business or rent-setting and rent-seeking by officials. the in-

Jiang Province took the lead on such a move in 2001 when local residents and officials were brought together to discuss local affairs, especially government budget formulation and the implementation of major public works and services. In fact, many county and city governments have used the annual public assessment to evaluate the performance of government departments or officials. In Nanjing, the capital of Jiangsu Province, an annual public assessment of the municipal government departments resulted in the leaders of the two lowest rating bureaus removed from office.<sup>9</sup>

For the latter, village elections were expanded to cover elections of their urban counterparts, the neighborhood committees, in 1998.

The direct elections of the village autonomous organizations have spilled over to the elections of the village Party Branch with the invention of the two-ballot system in Hequ County, Shanxi Province. The new method involves ordinary villagers who cast votes in opinion polls of the candidates. Then the Party members elect the Party Branch with the list decided by the result of the popular vote. Direct elections have been upgraded from the non-governmental villagers' autonomous organization to the lowest government level at township. Various forms of indirect elections have been used to select





April 2004

Honghe Prefecture, Yunnan Province: The direct nomination and direct election of township/town magistrates in seven townships and towns in Shiping County. The elections were carried out in secret and were not reported by Xinhua until six months later.

April 2, 2005

Zhangguan Town, Yubei District, Chongqing Municipality: The Yubei District Party Committee trims down a pool of twelve candidates to three. The people of Zhangguan go to the polls, voting directly for their Town Magistrate from the three choices.

July 23, 2008

Xiaohe and Huaxi Districts, Xifeng and Xiuwen Counties, Guiyang Municipality, Guizhou Province: An elaborate process called, "open nomination and competitive selection" is introduced to make selections for four county-level Party Secretary positions in Guiyang Municipality. Campaign speeches, a leadership capability test, and other means are used to trim down the candidates to a final pool for vote by the Municipal Party Committee.

There are other electoral experiments at various levels of governments in Suqian Municipality and Nanjing Municipality in Jiangsu Province, and across most towns and townships in Sichuan Province. These experiments are known as public nomination and selection (*ngtui gongxuan*) in China and there are too many to list.

(Continued from Page 3)

Changing Assessments of Implications along with the Experiments

Ever since villager self-government was instituted, two different assessments of the move have persisted. Its proponents wanted to resort to it as a way to empower rural residents and initiate the first step in promoting democracy in China with the prospect of upgrading it level by level. They have become more confident of such a prospect with the later developments brought about by the implementation of direct township elections. But its opponents have had no faith in the proper exercise of democratic rights by rural residents and are loathe to weakening the control of the party-state over villages.

With the forceful promotion of direct elections of Villagers' Committees after a few years, a question of their value became apparent. As the Party Branches are the "leadership core" in the villages, no matter how competitive the elections are or how competent and accountable the elected cadres are, the democratic value of such experiments is limited. However, the two-ballot system that opened the positions of the Party Branches to the poll of ordinary villagers has improved the quality of village democracy. Up to that point, it seemed that villager self-government was still viewed positively by the central leadership. It is notable in 1998 that Former President Jiang Zemin praised it as "the third invention" of Chinese farmers following the introduction of the household contract responsibility system and the development of rural enterprises.

The end of 1998 saw the first breakthrough in upgrading the direct election to the township level with the experiment of Buyun Township, Suining County, Sichuan Province. Though the immediate official reaction of the central leaders was negative, less competitive elections were still organized in response in several provinces. Later, the emphasis on experiments was placed on the opinion poll of the candidates of the secretaries of the Township Party Committees. Following the decision of the National People's Congress (NPC) in October 2004 on extending the term of office of the town (township) government from three years to five, elections of the deputies to the People's Congresses at the county and township levels were scheduled to happen between July 2006 and December 2007. This would provide opportunities for reformers to make further experiments. However, to the disappointment of some reformers, Mr. Sheng Huaren, Vice-Chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, reiterated in August 2006 that direct elections of township government leaders were illegal and warned that "evil foreigners" were using the tool of human rights and democracy against China. As noted previously, no more experiments were made until 2008. (See "The Color Revolution and the 'Big Chill'" by Yawei Liu.)

#### Exploration and Rationale

Direct village and township elections have had many folds of political implications. While they have directly impacted the 17

with strong control by the party-state and elections were designed to increase mass support for the Party. With this understanding, the gradual ascension of elections can be seen as a route to China's democratization. However, the 2000 Taiwan election saw the long-term ruling Kuomintang Party lose power. The series of "color revolutions" in Eastern Europe and Central Asia resulted in the coming to power of pro-Western governments. It was under this background that the Chinese leaders heightened vigilance against the so-called peaceful evolution strategy of the West. Related to this, it is notable that the control over NGOs has tightened. This was followed by the NPC decision to forbid further experiments on direct township elections with the understanding that direct elections may threaten the Party's rule instead of the other way around. If such an analysis holds water, the decision is still in line with the Party's overriding concern of strengthening its governing capability.

It is worthwhile to note what has been proposed for and implemented in the meantime in rural areas. In his government report delivered to the NPC annual session on March 5, 2007, Premier Wen Jiabao put forward specific programs for improving the people's livelihood such as provision of health care, social security packages to all eligible citizens, and efforts at insuring all students admitted by colleges and universities are able to attend through scholarship programs and other financial assistance programs run by the Ministry of Education.<sup>18</sup> All these can be regarded as new concrete measures for "Building the New Countryside" as for-

mulated under the concepts of scientific development and the promotion of a harmonious society advanced by President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen. They are an indication of a shift in the focus of government from a one-sided pursuit of GDP onto the provision of public goods and services.

The active publicity of these pro-people policies is in contrast to the discouragement of the experiment on direct elections, a prominent area of recent democratic development in China. Does this mean a re-thinking of the emphasis of local governance and a new understanding of the route for China's political development?

It seems that the Party believes what is preferable are pro-people policies based on maintaining fast economic growth. As Premier Wen recently stressed, while enlarging democracy, improving the legal system and continuously pushing forward political structural reform, the attention is currently focused on spurring economic development, safeguarding the rights and interests of citizens, combating corruption, improving the trust-worthiness and implementation capability of government, and promoting social harmony.<sup>19</sup> In order to improve the provision of public goods and services, efforts are being made at strengthening central power. A notable recent trend is a revival of vertical control. Of course, to the Party all means are acceptable so long as it can prolong its grip on power, no matter if its legitimacy is based on popular active support via regular elections or pas-

"Chinese leaders heightened vigilance against the so-called peaceful evolution strategy of the West"

sive consent resulting from the fact that the Party can still deliver benefits.

### A Strategic Choice of the Central Leadership

Experiments to date have proved that China should and can introduce direct elections to lower levels of government, firstly at the township level. A political decision should be made by the top leadership. Support merely by individual central leaders or the central leadership's acquiescence of further experiments on the models created in the past two decades is not advisable. One reason, as prominent local reformer Luo Chongmin has concluded, is that any bottom-up reforms are too costly and not preferred. Luo Chongmin, an official who has promoted comprehensive reforms in many fields, is well-regarded nationwide. When he was the Party Secretary of Honghe Prefecture, Yunnan Province, Mr. Luo undertook the largest scale experiment on direct township elections (planned for the whole prefecture and actually organized in a county). He was also responsible for the merger of the rural and urban residence registration systems and conversions of hospital and media institutions into limited liability companies etc. He believes that all kinds of such reforms should start at the<sup>20</sup>top.

(Continues on Page 10)

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Case Review: Direct Elections in Shiping County, Honghe Prefecture

Melissa Jen

For the first time in April 2004, Honghe Prefecture started a township-level direct election. The first Jomy). g -s-4.2]T

Local Government, only Town's People's Congress deputies have the privilege of electing Township Magistrates. Furthermore, these Town's People's Congress deputies are elected by individual voters. Only after the election of Congress deputies could Congress deputies elect the Township Magistrate - essentially on behalf of the individual voters. Historically, the candidates for Township Magistrate positions were already predetermined by superior Party Committees, and Township Deputies could only select their candidates from this predetermined list.

For reformers like Party Secretary Luo Chongmin, it was critical for the implementation of this unprecedented election to stay in accordance with the Constitution and other applicable laws. After careful deliberation, Luo Chongmin masterfully resolved this problem by requiring the direct elections of township magistrates to be moderated and supervised by the township people's congress deputies.

According to the electoral regulation, any individual "between 25 to 45 years old, possesses a high-school diploma or the equivalent, has the ability to manage basic economic and social affairs, is a legal resident in the township where one intends to run, and is nominated by at least 30 voters" could become a preliminary candidate for a magistrate position. The complete list of preliminary candidates totaled 66 nominated individuals.

Once these candidates were determined, voter representatives, villagers' committee members, and members of the standing committee of the Township People's Congress formed a joint committee to vote anonymously for two candidates to make the final cut. Those two final

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("Mass Autonomy is an Important Link in the Development of Socialist democracy"), Speech at the Chairmanship Meeting of the Sixth NPCSC, November 23, 1987, in Peng Zhen tongzhi guanyu cunmin weiyuanhui, jumin weiyuanhui de zhongyao jianghua (Important Speeches of Comrade Peng Zhen on Villager's Committees and Residents' Committees), unpublished compilation (Beijing: Minzhengbu jiceng zhengquan jianshesi, 1990), p. 25.

8. Jia Xijin, "Zhongguo Canyushi Minzhu de Xin Fazhan—Zhejiang Wenling Minzhu Kentanhui Chuanxin Moshi Fenxi" (The New Development in the Participatory Democracy in China—An Analysis of the Innovative Model of Consultative Meetings in Wenling, Zhejiang, <http://www.chinaelections.org/NewsInfo.asp?NewsID=111914>, accessed on Jan. 26, 2009.

9. "Li Yuanchao Tan Mowei Taotai, 'Dang Gangbu jiu gai you Yali'" China News Service, March 30, 2002, [http://news.china.com/zh\\_cn/domestic/945/20020330/10234423.html](http://news.china.com/zh_cn/domestic/945/20020330/10234423.html).

10. I coordinated projects for training electoral staff and monitors of the Neighborhood Committee elections in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Regions and Fujian Province between 1998 and 2004.

11. Dong Jiangai, "Liangpiaozhi, Liangtui

baogao wenzi shilu" ("The Proceedings of the Opening Session of the 5th Annual Meeting of the 10th NPC on Premier Wen's Government Work Report"), <http://www.xinhuanet.com/zhibo/20070305/wz.htm>, accessed on March 14, 2007.

19. Wen Jiabao, "Guanyu shehuizhuyi chuji jieduan de lishi renwu he woguo duiwai zhengce de jige wenti" ("On Some Issues on the Historical Tasks in the Primary Stage of Socialism and China's Foreign Policy"), in Xinhua Website, February 26, 2007. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2007-02/26/content\\_5775212.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2007-02/26/content_5775212.htm), accessed on March 14, 2007.

20. Pan Xiaoling, "Qiguan Luo Chongmin" (An Extraordinary Official Luo Chongmin); "Zixiaershang Gai shi Gao Chengben de Gaige" (The Bottom-up Reform is High Cost), in *Southern Weekend*, Jan. 15, 2009, pp. 1-2.

21. Stig Thoergensen, Joergen Elklit and Dong Lisheng, "Consultative Elections of Chinese Township Leaders – report from a recent experiment in Ya'an, Sichuan," *China Information*, Vol. XXII (1), 2008, pp. 67-89.

22. Zhou Qiren, "Yibu Wei Wancheng de Changquan Gaige Shi" (A History of Unfinished Ownership Reform), *Economic Observer News*, Jan. 19, 2009; He Zengke, "Jianjing Zhengzhi Gaige yu Minzhu de Zhengzhi Zhuanxing" (Incremental Political Reform and Democratic Political Transformation), <http://www.chinainnovations.org/showNews.html?id=713>

## The Elections of Township Magistrates in Buyun, Dapeng and Linyi, 1998-1999

By Yawei Liu

December 31 was the Election Day. 6,236 voters cast votes in eleven polling stations in the drizzling rain. 5,113 voters either did not come back from other places to vote or abstained from voting. Around 5 o'clock in the afternoon, the public address system announced the election results. Tan Xiaoqiu got 3,130 votes (50.19%), Cai Xunhui received 1,995 votes, and Zhou Xingyi received 1,013 votes. On January 4, 1999, the 14th People's Congress of Buyun Township passed a resolution, recognizing the electoral procedure and the election of the magistrate as valid and legal! Tan took his oath and became the first township magistrate directly elected by the voters in China.

Buyun, a small town of 16,000 residents, is under the jurisdiction of the Central City District in Suining Municipality, Sichuan Province. The Central City District has a population of 1.37 million and encompasses 37 townships. In 1998, reform-minded district Party leaders decided to experiment with new ways of selecting leaders at the township level. It is still unknown whether the idea was an outside suggestion or came from inside the District Party Committee. There was one report suggesting that Buyun township lead-

ers took the initiative and sought approval from the District government.<sup>3</sup> According to Southern Weekend magazine, it was quite difficult for the District Party Committee members to give the go-ahead order since this could easily jeopardize their political careers. Yet, regardless of the source and considerations of this decision, Party leaders carried out the direct election of the



Constitution and declared that it was incorrect to regard the election as a symbol that the Chinese people were capable of building socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics. He warned, however, “we cannot be too critical of the Buyun election... because the election demonstrated sharp democratic awareness of the people and this awareness should be protected by all means.” He also made a daring claim that the Buyun election shows that “democracy is not a patented product from the West.”

Strangely enough, on January 23, 1999 the *Legal Daily* seemingly reversed itself. In a short commentary on current affairs on the second page of the paper, there appeared the following passage:

Significant changes often take place in the countryside quietly. History has remembered Xiaogang Village that started the household responsibility system twenty years ago. By the same token, history will also remember Buyun Township for its effort to promote direct election of township magistrates. Xiaogang Village was the prelude of China’s economic reform. Will Buyun become a landmark of China’s political reform?

Most officials who spoke with Western journalists seemed to embrace the Buyun election. A longtime observer of political reform in Beijing told a *Washington Post* correspondent, “Did the elections exceed the rules? Maybe--but if there are no breakthroughs, there is no reform. Everybody recognizes that in China.” A senior Chinese official who has been involved from the outset in the country’s tentative experiment with democratization stated: “This is the high-point of 10 years of democratic development.” A high-ranking Party official said he did not think that the Buyun election would be overturned or its participants arrested: “this is reform within the system; the opposition party was outside the system. It is not the same.”

When asked of his opinion of the constitutionality of the Buyun election, Chen Sixi, an official from China’s National People’s Congress (NPC), the body which supervises all Chinese elections above the

“Significant changes often take place in the countryside quietly”

Cha’s analysis of the Buyun election was not only interesting, but subtly argued. Democracy could not overstep the law, he wrote, because China had just undertaken the great cause of the rule of law. While the Constitution and the laws were not permanent, people should abide by the rule of law and engage in activities only once the Constitution and

the laws are amended. Secondly, the current problem with China’s democracy was not that there were no direct elections, but that the people never took the direct elections at the township and county level seriously. He therefore recommended that the best approach to democratization was not to seek new paths, but to conduct people’s congress elections at all levels according to the law, and to strictly prevent any attempt to take these elections as a formality. He also emphasized that all efforts should be made to prohibit any violation or deprivation of voters’ democratic rights.

village level, said, "Although it [the Buyun election] has some areas that do not completely coincide with the current law, it does seem to coincide with the spirit of





88.84 percent, and Wang, the TPC chairman, 88.17 percent.<sup>18</sup>

Some observers called the ballot system of injecting popular choice a failure because the officials went on to become the only candidates for the positions they were running for. Despite the intensive publicity campaign for the three involved in the poll, many voters still did not know who they were and what they had accomplished.<sup>19</sup> However, many observers of the poll felt this was a breakthrough that, if implemented on a wider scale, would fundamentally change the CCP's personnel system and make the promotion procedure much more open and transparent.<sup>20</sup>

A few days after the Linyi experiment, Dapeng, a township in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, conducted its own version of the two-ballot system. On the morning of April 30, 1999, Li Weiwen, a 48-year old government official, was unanimously elected by forty-five deputies of the Dapeng TPC and became the first township magistrate elected through "people's nomination" or *minxuan*.

The April 30 election, in fact, was just a confirmation of the result of an all-out primary that involved all eligible voters in Dapeng.<sup>21</sup> To a certain extent, the Dapeng experiment was the Buyun election repeated with a conservative twist. Dapeng has a population of 6,900 with about 5,300 eligible voters. Like Buyun, Dapeng was chosen because it has a small population. It also had ideal conditions for the

experiment, such as a cohesive leadership corps and less aggressive farmers. According to Yang Chengyong, director of the Section of Liaison, Shenzhen People's Congress, it would be hard for things to get out of control in Dapeng.<sup>22</sup>

In January 1999, the election leadership committee (ELC) of Dapeng announced that all eligible voters could nominate candidates for the position of township magistrate through a secret ballot in seventeen polling stations in the township. The whole nomination process lasted seven days, from January 21 to 27. A total of 5,048 voters participated in the nomination, a turnout rate of 97 percent. Seventy-six candidates were

nominated with Li Weiwen receiving 3,323 votes. There were five other candidates who received more than 100 votes. According to the nomination procedure, those with more than 100

votes would enter a primary to determine the final candidates after an eligibility check by the ELC. The ELC dropped one candidate from the pool for reasons unknown to outsiders. The primary was held in a local theater with 1,068 electors, made up of local officials and household representatives. After hearing campaign speeches delivered by the five candidates, the electors voted to pick the final candidates. Li Weiwen received 813 ballots in this round. The ELC then submitted Li as the final and only candidate for the position of magistrate to the TPC.<sup>23</sup>

From conversations with Chinese officials and a few newspaper accounts, it is un-

“Officials at various levels, including the National People’s Congress, have keenly observed this election”



## Notes

1. This is excerpted from a paper entitled "Creeping Democracy: China's Direct Elections at the Township and County Levels" that was presented to the 17th Conference on Asian Studies, St. John's University, October 1999.
2. Ibid., Huasheng Yuebao, April 1999; Zhoukan, February 8-14, 1999, p.26; Lianhe Zaobao, April 11, 1999; Zhongguo Shehui Daokan [China Social Guide], February 1999, pp. 14-19; Newsweek International, February 4, 1999.
3. Huasheng Yuebao, April 1999.
4. The New York Times, January 26, 1999 and Nanfang Zhoumo, January 15, 1999.
5. Yazhou Zhoukan [Asia Weekly] reported that there were 11,349 eligible voters. Li Fan, who witnessed the election in Buyun, said in his interview with a Singapore newspaper that there were about 7,100 voters.
6. Nanfang Zhoumo, January 15, 1999.
7. Interview with Dr. Tianjian Shi of Duke University on March 5, 1999.
8. Fazhi Ribao [Legal Daily], January 15, 1999. For a complete translation of the legal Daily editorial see BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, February 5, 1999.
9. Ibid., January 23, 1999.
10. Washington Post, January 27, 1999.
11. Ibid.
12. Washington Post, February 26, 1999.
13. Yazhou Zhoukan, February 8-14, 1999, p.26 and Lianhe Zaobao, April 11, 1999.
14. Xiangzhen Luntan [Tribune on Villages and Townships], May 1999, pp. 4-6.
15. Ibid., For the two-ballot system, see Bai Gang, "Liangpiao zhi": Zuwei Minzhu Moshi de Xuanze—Guanyu Shanxi Heqixian Jiceng Xuanju de Diaocha Baogao" [Two-Ballot System: Choosing a Democratic Model—An Investigative Report], February 5, 1999.













Panyu official accusation that Western agents were involved in the Taishi recall, the author said he could certainly understand why evil Americans chose Taishi—Taishi is a village in Panyu; Panyu is a district in Guangzhou; Guangzhou is the capital city of Guangdong; Guangdong is a province of China. Taishi is located in the Pearl River Delta, a strategic location guarding China's southern gate. A Dongfeng missile deployed here could hit Australia; Australia is good ally of Great Britain; Great Britain enjoys good relations with the United States. If one reverses the sequence, the control of Taishi by the United States will easily lead to the American control of China.

In the same month, an international conference of lawyers was held in Beijing. Both Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao met with foreign participants. Both talked about China's determination to pursue democratization in China. Hu talked about four democracies: democratic elections, democratic decision-making, democratic management and democratic supervision. Wen was more specific, indicating a few years after villagers managed to run their villages they would learn how to manage a township. The system would eventually

“A big chill descended and elections came and went, causing no domestic excitement or international attention”

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side and tight control from the inside] in China.

This was best reflected by the trip memorandum written by John Thornton after his visit to China in late October 2006. Thornton reported that during a 75-minute conversation with Wen Jiabao, he saw the looming emergence of democracy of Chinese characteristics. In Wen's scheme, China's democracy has three important components: "elections, judicial independence, and supervision based on checks and balances." Thornton described Wen's vision as follows:

He could foresee the direct elections currently held at the village level, if successful, gradually moving up to towns, counties, and even provinces. What happens beyond that was left unsaid. As for a judicial system riddled with corruption, Wen emphasized the urgent need for reform in order to assure the judiciary's "dignity, justice, and independence." He explained that the purpose of "supervision" -- a commonly used term in China that is better translated as "ensuring accountability" -- is to restrain official power: "Absolute power, without supervision, corrupts absolutely." Wen called for checks and balances within the Party itself and for greater government accountability to the people. In his view, the media and even the 110 million Internet users in China should also participate "as appropriate" in supervision of the government.

people as extensively as possible to manage state and social affairs as well as economic and cultural programs in accordance with the law.

Hu did say more about grassroots democracy than Jiang Zemin but focused little on how China was going to move fully into a new phase of political reform. There is a very dire lack of vision for political reform and no mention of using elections to deepen such reform. There was a section in Hu's report entitled "Comprehensively Carrying Forward the Great New Undertaking to Build the Party in a Spirit of Reform and Innovation". According to Hu, building up the Party requires intra-Party democracy and one of the methods recommended by him was to introduce a new personnel selection system. Hu said:

Adhering to the principle that the Party is in charge of cadre management, we will establish a scientific mechanism for selecting and appointing cadres on the basis of democracy, openness, competition and merit. We will standardize the cadre nomination system, perfect the cadre assessment system in accordance with the requirements of the Scientific Outlook on Development and a correct view on evaluating cadres' performances, and improve the procedures for open selection, competition for positions and multi-candidate election. We will expand democracy in the work related to cadres and make democratic recommendation and assessment more scientific and authentic. We must enforce stricter oversight over the whole process of selecting and appointing cadres.

A year has passed since Hu's call for innovative measures to democratize the Party. How much has happened? Is the CCP seriously pursuing opening leadership selection at various levels?

Democratization has to begin from the CCP: from the Qingxian model to the Guiyang experiment

Qingxian is under Cangzhou City in Hebei

from the organization apparatus and they began to put tremendous pressure on him.

If one peels away all the rhetoric regarding the Qingxian model and looks at its core, it is easy to see it is indeed a bold effort to subject the Party to some sort of checks and balances in a way that will not offend the Party. What Zhao Chaoying was trying to do was to restructure the Party branch-villager committee relationship through

“It is indeed a bold effort to subject the Party to some sort of checks and balances in a way that will not offend the Party”

adding a villager representative assembly (VRA). The VRA is not a new development in China’s countryside. What is new in Qingxian is that the incumbent Party branch secretary runs for the speaker position of the VRA as well as the chairperson of the villager committee. If the Party secretary loses in the race, he or she will have to resign and a new Party branch election will be held. To

many scholars, the Qingxian model, if implemented nationwide, could possibly resolve the Party branch-villager committee tension and turn village governance into something truly participatory and democratic. Others question the legality of the VRA since the Organic Law did not make it a legal entity at the village level. Zhao Chaoying himself also said there were three seemingly insurmountable challenges to the Qingxian model. First, there is no legal foundation for the VRA chairmanship. Second, there are not clearly defined VRA member electoral procedures and their responsibilities. Third, there will be inevitable conflict between Qingxian regulations and national laws. Many doubt

its usefulness in actual governance. They believe the Party will never surrender its decision-making supremacy through chairing the VRA. However, Cao Yesong from the Central Party School sees unlimited significance to the Qingxian Model. There are 345 villages in Qingxian and more than 600,000 villages in China. Cao feels if this model could be applied to all villages there will be a vast system of accountability in place. If the system is to be applied at higher levels, it may lead to a new kind of democracy in China. The Qingxian model began long before the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress but it does fit into Hu’s framework of intra-Party democratization at the local level.

On May 28, 2008, the Party Committee of Guiyang Municipality made the decision to introduce a new method to “appoint” the next Party secretaries for four county level positions: Xiaohe District, Huaxi District, Xifeng County and Xiuwen County. On July 23, all four positions were filled after a very elaborate process, fascinating those who have been waiting for China to launch its political reform. Li Jun, Guiyang Party boss, said at the end of the Guiyang pilot that what happened in Guiyang was only a small test. Bigger and more difficult exams lie ahead. He thanked the 81 candidates who tried to win the four open offices and particularly commended the four final candidates who lost to their opponents during the last procedure, a vote among 48 members of the Municipal Party Committee. During his June 30 mobilization speech, Li Jun mentioned the Tian Fengshan and Hanguizhi case in Heilongjiang. He said of several hundred government officials in-



other but we are not certain if this outcome is the result of the Organization Department officials manipulating the voters.

The Guiyang experiment triggered a flurry of media reports in China and in Guiyang, a winner told the reporter from Liaowang, the new greeting in Guiyang is “Have you studied today?” This is a reference to the fact that if one does not have enough knowledge there is no way for him or her to win in the race to be promoted. The same winner also said, “We have made our pledges in front of a big audience through television. We will be scolded if we do not deliver.” Study Times, a publication of the Central Party School, ran an article entitled “A political science interpretation of open nomination and open election”. According to the author, similar elections were also conducted in Nanjing but the open positions were for the government, not for the Party. Both the Nanjing model and the Guiyang model reflect the supremacy of the CCP in leadership and governing in that the final procedure is the vote by the members of the municipal Party committee. This approach does not contradict the current ironclad arrangement of the Party making all personnel decisions, but creates a huge space for meaningful democracy within the party to flourish. Although the Party controls the entirety of the procedures, it cannot dictate and manipulate the final outcome. This is what democracy is all about. It transforms rule by men into rule by procedures.

The Open Nomination and Direct Election (ONDE) of basic level Party cadres is a more democratic approach to the traditional way of selecting cadres. It is an attempt at implementing democratic governance by changing the rule of cadre selection from “individual centered” to “team centered”. The direct election of basic level Party leadership teams is beneficial to the integrity, accountability, and efficiency of basic-level Party organizations; however, the effectiveness and impact of the elections is subject to the choice of different electoral procedures. This analysis constitutes an effort to assess the effectiveness of ONDE by discussing the pros and cons of the different methods used by Party leadership teams at the township level.

The first method is “bottom-up election”. It means selecting the members of the Party committee, then the secretary and the deputy secretary. This method is appropriate when most of the candidates are from the same town or township.

According to Article 29 of the Party Constitution, the basic level Party committees shall be elected directly by the Party members during the Party convention, but







If the responsibilities of the three branches are not clear and their duties overlap, the leadership teams will become vulnerable to “buck passing” and the method of “cross-branch election” may lead to the Party replacing the government (dang daizheng)

The fourth method is “secretary-forms-a-cabinet”, meaning that directly elected township Party secretary will nominate a cabinet after assuming office. The institutional design in some townships has given the secretary elect the right to nominate candidates for the township Party and government leaders. Such experiments are unprecedented and have attracted significant attention. Although this method is capable of reducing internal friction and clarifies responsibility and supervision, several trends need to be prevented. The political and organizational procedures of the cabinet nomination must be carefully studied in order to avoid the dilemma of the Party organization losing control and democracy becoming a mere formality. Second, to some extent, nominating a cabinet is not a development in democracy but rather a step towards further centralization, because the Party secretary has the right to nominate all deputy positions. Third, this method creates problems for the supervision of the top leader, one of the main obstacles in the cadre system reform. If the deputy secretaries and mayors are all nominated by the Party secretary, to whom they are directly responsible, it is difficult for the same-level oversight within the leadership teams and may lead to unchecked and unsupervised power.

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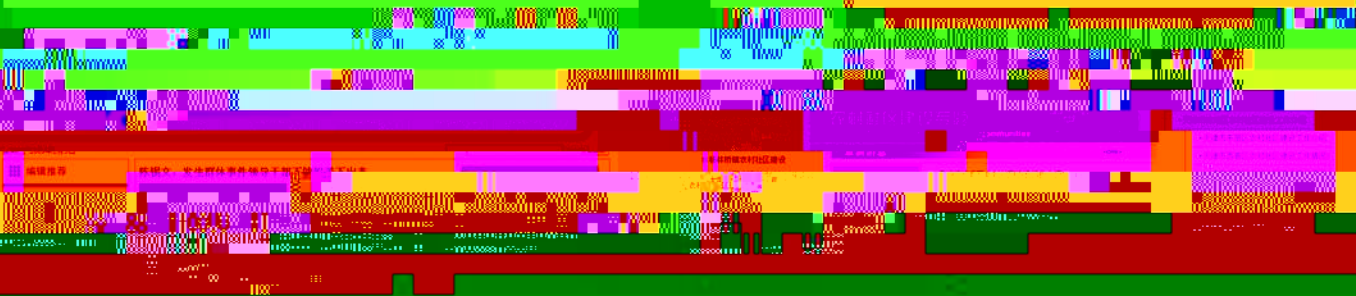
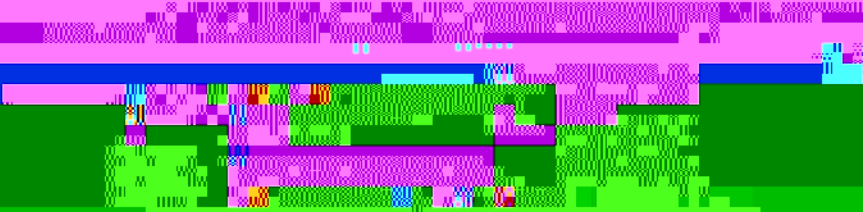
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