

Governance in Rural China_An Ethnographic Case Study in Two Suburban Villages in Guangdong Province, China

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Abstract

This PhD research focuses on rural governance in the context of Mainland China. It focuses on three aspects of the changing rural governance: 1) internalization of the state-sponsored reforms for rural democratization, 2) external intervention and mediation of the human agents for policy implementation, and 3) dispute settlement. Drawing upon the three above-mentioned aspects, this study aims to dissect the interactive processes of China's rural governance over the ongoing urbanisation of small-to-medium-sized cities. The fieldwork utilizes iterative-inductive ethnography as the research methodology. It additionally adopts the theoretical framework of social constructionism and actor-oriented perspectives to interpret the changing rural governance and employs interface analysis to examine the ethnographic data. It finds that the outcome of rural governance in the selected villages is greatly influenced by the interaction of the human agents' capabilities and the (emerging) structural forces. In particular, various actors not only construct the emerging power structure but make use of their own knowledge, power relations, discursive practices, and innovate strategies to accommodate, negotiate and compromise with the external forces to solve problems emerging out of rural governance. Simultaneously, structural factors limit the scope of the actors' choices, and the opportunities for strategies concerning rural governance. In terms of the representativeness of the selected samples, it firstly could reflect on the possible trajectories of rural governance over the next decade for the urbanisation of small-to-medium-sized cities, which is promoted by both the central and local governments. Secondly, the selected samples represent the changing rural governance in villages that feature Hakka culture and history. Further research should be taken on villages consisting of different cultural contexts and political-economic conditions in order to expand on this research as the representativeness of the samples is limited to the specific contexts under study.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

'The villagers' committee is the primary mass organization of self-government, in which the villagers manage their own affairs, educate themselves and serve their own needs and in which election is conducted, decision adopted, administration maintained and supervision exercised by democratic means. (Article 2)'

'The primary organization of the Communist Party of China in the countryside shall carry out its work in accordance with the Constitution of the Communist Party of China, playing its role as a leading nucleus; and, in accordance with the State Constitution and laws, support the villagers and ensure that they carry out self-government activities and exercise their democratic rights directly. (Article 3)'

____ Organic Law of the Villagers' Committee (2010 amended version)¹

1. Issues

A new form of village governance has been embarked on since the late 1980s in Mainland China. This form of village governance was different from the production brigade administration under the People's Commune in the era of collectivization. Since 1978 China has started economic reforms and the system to manage rural households in terms of production, resource allocation and welfare support by a production team was replaced by the 'Household Responsibility System'. This change allowed the introduction of the market mechanism which has dominated the Chinese rural economy ever since. However, it is commonly observed that village-level management did not function properly during the first decade of the rural economic reforms. The reduced power of the production brigade system meant it was clearly in need of a replacement for managing China's rural villages. As a result, many villages underwent decreased social order and security, such as the spread of gambling and theft and the lack of maintenance of irrigation facilities. Villagers in Yishan and Luocheng County, Guangxi Province were the earliest known to establish a mass self-organization of their own volition to fill the void of public authority, restoring public order in 1980 and early 1981 (O'Brien and Li, 2000; Oi, 1999).

Peng Zhen played a vital role in promoting the nation-wide village democratization. He was inspired by those farmers' innovation in self-governing so he suggested that the NPC (National People's Congress) and MoCA (Ministry of Civil Affairs) appoint investigators to find out the situation in Guangxi. He argues that by prompting village democracy, the party would, firstly, be dragged back to follow the original cadre-mass line and, secondly, the villagers would be empowered to govern themselves, to sustain public order and to deliver public goods. With Peng Zhen's urging and lobbying, the central government decided to take a step further to promote village governance nationwide. In 1982, the regulation on villagers' committees was written into the amendment of the state constitution. Yet the opponents from the central party had contrasting statements, arguing that village governance would threaten

¹ *The Organic Law of the Villagers Committees of the People's Republic of China (2010 revised version)*, available at: www.gov.cn/flfg/2010-10/28/content_1732986.htm, translated version can be seen at: www.enread.com/job/law/29528.html, accessed 19 March, 2013.

the party's grip in rural communities, resulting in the obsolescence of the CCP's (Chinese Communist Party) ruling regime. The 1987 trial version of the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees was indicative of the central government determination on making village governance institutionalized and legalized across the nation.² Since then, villagers' committees began to proliferate in the majority of regions except Guangdong Province, and after the enactment of the 1998 official version of the Organic Law the villagers' committees were implemented all over the China.

China does not generally endorse popularly elected central and local government officials, including provincial, municipal, prefectural, county and township governments. The villagers' committees, by contrast, are designed to be established via 'democratic' elections. These self-governing organizations have been allowed to proceed only at the level to which no resources from the central budget are provided. This is because it is not officially included in the governmental structure of China. In this regard, the village cadres are not civil servants and the cost of villagers' committees would not be transferred from central funds, causing the villagers' committees to be self-financed organizations. Although villagers' committees are not financially supported by the state, village-owned properties and enterprises can generate revenue for the village coffers and the village cadres have diverse channels of income in addition to the county-level governmental subsidies.

The co-existence of the village party branches and the villagers' committees is highlighted in China's rural governance. In the era of collectivization, the village party branches were an organizational core for the upper-level government to mobilize the villagers. Their activities included political campaigns, centrally-commanded agricultural production, and the safeguarding of top-down controls. This functionality of organizational control of the village party branches seems to remain similar in the Post-Maoist period, except that the fact that the villagers' committees are perceived to share parallel authority with the party branches (Yu, 2008; Chan, Madsen and Unger, 2009; Li, c2009). The party branches are not elected by the village constituents but are elected by the village party representatives, in some cases, appointed by the township government. It is unsurprising that the village party branches are accountable for the township party government but not the village constituencies. Although the Organic Law (2010 amended version) states that the party branches shall have a cooperative working relationship with the villagers' committee in coping with village-wide affairs, conflicts of interest between the two are commonly observed. Thus, the independence and capacity of the villagers' committee is called into question in collective decision-making, in voicing the villagers' demands and in protecting the interests of the villages (Sun, Warner, Yang and Liu, 2013; Guo and Bernstein, 2004).

Moreover, free and active participation of the villagers in rural politics and management is essentially on the way to rural democratic governance. First, the villagers exercise a liberal right to elect their favoured village leaders to represent the villagers' interest. Second, after the village elections, this normative form of villagers' participation is merely dubbed as 'Villager Representative Assembly' (*cun*

² The more details can be seen in O'Brien and Li's article (2000).

min dai biao da hui) and 'Villager Assembly' (*cun min da hui*) in the Organic Law. Importantly, the setup of the two assemblies is designed to monitor misbehaviour of village cadres, engender public consultation, participate in collective decision-making, and recall corrupt village cadres. In short, the accountability of elected villagers' committees and 'checks and balances' of the two assemblies in the village governance activities are advocated. However, villagers' free participation in the village elections and the management of village affairs are often impeded by the manipulation of elections and their exclusion from collective decision-making (He, 2007; He and Wang, 2007; Han and O'Brien, 2009; Björn, 2004, 2009).

2. Multifaceted Rural Governance

Rural China has transformed dramatically since the start of the 'Open Reform' policy. This transformation has brought about both positive and negative outcomes for rural governance (Zweig, 1997; Zheng, c2014). On the one hand, it is undeniable that the quality of farmers' lives has been enhanced greatly. For example, villagers have more opportunities to access the outside world thanks to improvements to transportation, telecommunication, and the establishment of the open market (Oi, 1995, 1999; Murphy, 2002; Unger, 2002; Li, c2009). Additionally, rural urbanisation and industrialization have helped farmers raise their income and improve their quality of life. Among others, agricultural technologies are now widely used, which results in the enhancement of farming productivity and the villagers' income. During this process, many villagers are better off and some have become farmers-turned-entrepreneurs (Chen, 2007; Chen, 2009; Peng, 2001; Zheng, Ruan and Cheng, 2012; Chen, Lu and Ni, 2016). On the other hand, it has accompanied series of problems. The villagers' living environment has been badly affected by water, air and waste pollution. The income gap between urbanites and villagers has increased. Villagers have more difficulty to access high quality of health care and education. Last but not least, farmers, especially those who lost their land, are struggling with the re-employment and the replacement of housing after their demolition (O'Brien, 2002; Cai, 2003, 2009; O'Brien and Li, 2004).

These tremendous social, cultural and economic changes have given rise to the nurturing of a completely distinctive social fabric different from the Imperial, Republican and Maoist periods. The rise of local entrepreneurial elites, revitalization of lineage institutions and emergence of social organizations contribute to the diversification of village governance. First, industrialization of township and villages not only generates varying levels of village income but also nurture a new stratum of economic elites. The former affects the incentive of the villagers to join the villagers' committees and the latter brings about a power shift from the party cadres (Hu, 2006; Oi, 1999; Chen, 2007). When rich people take a post in the villagers' committees, they are in a position to bring more wealth, job opportunities, and public goods and construction projects to the villages (Levy, 2003).

Second, lineage or kinship legacy is re-emerging alongside social development and loosened political control over revival of traditional folk culture. Lineage institutions used to play a pivotal part in the provision of school education services, welfare for the elderly, and the construction of public projects such as in the late Qing Dynasty

and the early era of the Nationalist Regime (Yu, 2008; Ma, 2006; Li, 2005). Nowadays, the revival of lineage traditions, and, specifically the lineage council committees, plays a vital role not only in delivering public goods in rural areas but also negotiating and communicating with village cadres to engender efficiency in the provision of public goods.

Third, rural societal organizations are also emerging in Chinese countryside. The church, temples, varying types of villagers' cooperative units, rural folk, sport and health organizations and The Elderly Association, amongst others, not only produce a positive impact on the provision of rural public goods but also improve the quality of life of farmers (Tsai, 2002, 2007; Pesque-Cela, Tao, Sun and Liu, 2009; Ruan and Zhang, 2009).

The emergence of rural economic elites, rural societal organizations and lineage institutions enrich the nature of village governance and make its processes more complicated and dynamic. Accordingly, villagers' committees and village party branches are not the only organizations which engage in rural governance. Generally speaking, local economic conditions and urbanisation, socio-political and socio-cultural contexts have an impact on the village governance. Yet the party state has enacted strict regulations on the establishment of social organizations and has created a set of strategies to ameliorate the pressure of market power (Tan, 2000, 2009; Chen, 2007). For instance, many economic elites, like private entrepreneurs, are being recruited into the CCP to be part of the party alliance, and there is no exception to the rural economic elites (Dickson, 2010). The party has sought leeway to retain its authoritarian nature that is being ostensibly challenged by privatisation, marketization and the pluralisation of society. It is unsurprising that a wrestling match has taken place between the local party government, village party branches, villagers' committees, rural entrepreneurial elites and ordinary villagers on the way to rural democratization.

The diversity of the China's rural governance has attracted a lot of attention from scholarship at home and abroad. Many scholars have made efforts to answer why this diversity happens, and to evaluate the extent to which the rural governance has been transformed from different points of view. Some look at how the political reforms at grassroots levels have an impact on the village-level management and the changing villagers' political perceptions and daily experiences (Su and Yang, 2005; Warner and Yang, 2012; Sun, Warner, Yang and Liu, 2013; Chen, 2005; Yu, 2008; Li, 2009; Tan and Xin, 2007). Some attempt to evaluate the effect of the state intervention and the local policy implementation in driving the local development, changing rural landscapes and the improvement of quality of villagers' lives (Björn, 2001; Wang and Wang, 2009; Bernstein and Lü, 2004; Kennedy, 2007). Some attempt to tease out relationships of the local economic development and the changing rural governance (Zweig, 1997; Oi, 1999; Chan, Madsen and Unger, 2009; Pieke, 2004; Shi, 1999).

Their answers to the diversity or the heterogeneity of the rural governance or development triggers furthermore debates on what paths to China's rural governance or development should be embraced. Selection of standpoints,

discourses and perspectives matters interpretations to China's changing rural governance. For instance, explanation and interpretation of the rural governance are often rooted into the discourse of liberal democracy, civil society and free market economics, which have been taken for granted by many scholars, journalists, news reporters, editors, politicians and the like. It is commonly seen that those notions, concepts, values and assumptions derived from the discourses are greatly associated with the corresponding social and political arguments of the democratization and marketization of (rural) China (O'Brien and Han, 2009; Pastor and Tan, 2000; Zweigh and Chuang, 2007). By comparison, the Chinese Communist Party and other levels of government also legitimize their own relation with the state, market and the society by producing so-called guidelines, discourses and blueprints, and varying forms of social engineering (Mertha, 2010; Dickson, 2010; Powell, 2013). Thus, it is unsurprising to see top-down policy generation, implementation and intervention, though that sometimes indeed contradicts the local people's interests, are utilized to achieve the designed goals (Zhou and Lian, 2012; Zhou, 2010). In a nutshell, the dominating discourses that are being embraced always refine the legitimacy of its power and corresponding practices and praise its superiority over other discourses.

Are ordinary people able to be in a position to express their own interpretations of those dominating, powerful discourses, to be integrated part of the discursive interaction? It has been found that conflict of interests, specifically local intervention and coercion and the corresponding resistance, signal this transformation of the China's rural governance (O'Brien and Li, 1995, 2006; Yu, 2005, 2006; Cai, 2009). However, the conflicting processes are always perceived and interpreted by those dominating, powerful discourses or perspectives that often neglect vulnerable, powerless, disadvantaged or marginalized social groups' perspectives, values or interests. Grassroots voices should be of great importance to fully understand the changing rural governance, including the maintenance, transformation, diversity and the discontinuities. My research embraces the paradigm of social constructionism and its greatly associated branch of the actor-oriented perspectives so as to interpret China's changing rural governance. By doing so, China's rural governance is explored with the respect to the social actors' knowledge and reality construction, daily social interaction, power relations, lived interpretation of social values, and discursive interaction. Importantly, those dominating discourses are just treated as part of ongoing social construction rather than being treated as the presupposed, already-made truths.

3. Governance in a Global Context

3.1 Decentralization of Central Political Power Worldwide

Governance proposes a perspective on how to deal with the relations between the market, the state, bureaucracy and society. In developed countries, like the UK and the US, traditional welfare states have confronted massive challenges of fiscal crises, economic recessions, regulatory crises, the effects of a digital society and difficulties for international cooperation in ecological and environmental issues, as well as terrorism and extremism (Cheema, 2005; Bekkers, Dijkstra, Edwards and Fenger, 2007). Therefore, cooperation between international organizations and nation states has been sought; governmental and public sectors have transferred part of their

duties and functions to the market, social organizations and communities. Likewise, the reforms and programs of decentralization in developing regions and countries, like Latin America (Colombia), Africa (South Africa and Uganda), India, and Southeast Asia (Philippine, Malaysia and Indonesia), empowers citizens to participate in the formulation and implementation of local social policy and political decision making and enable them to have more access to social welfare services. In addition, this establishes an institutional and legal framework of partnership between local government, private sector, non-governmental organizations and the citizens. Last but not least, decentralization improves 'checks and balances' in central and local governments, and local government functionaries and public sectors in society (Cheema, 2005; Popovski, 2010).

Networks of international civil society inevitably grow alongside economic globalization, the rise of new technology of telecommunication, worldwide internet communication and the cooperation of international non-governmental organizations. The notion of worldwide civil society takes advocates of global citizenship, universal human rights and liberalization, which challenges those non-democratic countries that impede these democratic values, like China. In addition, civic organizations are inclined to be nourished in the civil society and they are allowed to establish partnerships with public and private sectors and informal institutions, as well as individual citizens (Yu, 2008). In a nutshell, the citizens in the civil society have more chances of political participation and consultation, can voice more demands in the processes of production and implementation of social policy and produce a force of 'checks and balances' of government and political officials in particular. If not impossible, governance would be very difficult to achieve without the existence of civil society (Popovski, 2010).

Yu proposes that the ultimate goal of governance is to generate democratic governance or 'good governance' that contains 'ten key elements: (1) legitimacy; (2) rule of law; (3) transparency; (4) civil engagement and civil participation; (5) accountability; (6) responsibility; (7) effectiveness; (8) stability; (9) justice; and (10) honesty' (Cheema, 2005: 174; Yu, 2008: 5). Admittedly, since the beginning of reform policy, the central government of China has promoted political, economic, administrative, legislative and social reforms. Separation of power, decentralization of the central government, downsizing of state bureaucracy and partial empowerment to society, amongst others, have been enforced to enhance the quality of governance (Sigley, 2006; Howell, 2003; Burns, 2003; Zheng, c2014; Mertha, 2010; Yu, 2008). However, according to the key accounts of 'democratic governance' or 'good governance', China still has a long way to go to improve its governance. Rural governance has taken into this account.

3.2 Norman Long's Studies in Rural Development of Developing Countries

Norman Long and his colleagues have studied the planned intervention, commoditization, globalization, technological innovation, family enterprises and local entrepreneurship, agricultural management, and social networks in rural areas of developing countries and regions, China, Africa and Latin America in particular. They employ the actor-oriented perspectives so as to develop the 'theory from

below', and to uncover how the external forces function via the internal factors altogether. In practice, that offers some ideas on the path to the development in those economically less developed districts or regions (Arce and Long, 2004; Long and Liu, 2009; Long, 2001; Long and Long, 1992; Landini, Long, Leeuwis and Murtagh, 2014).

In Long's series of studies, it is not uncommon to observe that many rural societies have encountered tremendous changes of governance. Local governors and international organizations have taken actions aimed specifically to aid those remote rural communities. In their perception, those villagers find it extremely difficult to escape the sometimes extreme poverty, reduce high rates of illiteracy and improve management of rural resources unless they have gained external support. Thus, local governments are often guided by, or coordinate with, international organizations to figure out the ways by which they can transform the rural societies.

However, real local needs are often not taken into consideration. It is partly given that the local governments and the international organizations did not do much investigation on understanding the rural situations and issues at that time. Secondly, they often confidently assume that external intervention can work by transplanting successful programs from their home countries to the developing regions. In reality, the rate of success of the external intervention on the rural changes is often out of expectation. While encountering failures or different results from the original development programs, the mediating force of the social actors is taken into account by Long and his colleagues to explain the heterogeneity of the rural development and governance.

4. Research Questions

At the beginning of reform of the China's rural governance, international scholars, especially from the USA, were sent by the UN or American government to mainland China to observe how village governance is run, often resulting in guidance on how to implement village governance in accordance with the 'liberal democracy' or 'democratic governance' ideologies (O'Brien and Li, 2000; Pastor and Tan, 2000). However, on the ground forms of rural governance are multifaceted. Long's empirical studies suggest that not only do the social actors play a vital role in mediating the external interventions but also challenge the usage of singular discourses in explaining the changing China's rural governance. In other words, ordinary villagers are able to in a position to challenge the scholars, the local governments, the party politicians and the policy implementers' powerful discourses. Moreover, without national democratic institutionalization, it is argued that rural governance cannot be advanced. Top-down governmental intervention and power control of village party branches restrains the genuine village elections and villagers' participation from coming into being. Importantly, CCP control holds strong bargaining power which at times overturns rural governance. Yet the promotion of the democratized rural governance might reflect the dilemma that one-party authoritarianism seeks for a way to reconcile itself with democratization. Moreover, party government still holds predominating power to allocate political resources, generate political decision making, as well as formulate and enforce policy. In general, public consultation is very limited and often intentionally constrained by the

party government. Empowerment of party government to rural communities is of poor quality. All in all, the party political structure has constrained the development of rural governance over the long term.

The changing rural governance should be understood under the greater context of China's transformation. The local urbanisation, changing political scenarios, and the formulation and implementation of a series of external policies and law impacts rural governance. In particular, rural urbanisation has greatly influenced the ways in which the Chinese countryside is being governed. More often than not, local governments work with grassroots governments, including township governments and villagers' committees, in order to pursue the local interests by making a series of policies regarding land confiscation, land conversion and commercialization. This inevitably causes conflicts between the farmers as the *de facto* land holders and the local government agents as the land takers. Grassroots cadres have to confront those wicked problems emerging from the policy implementation in the land expropriation and have to figure out a way to solve them. Besides, there are many new problematic situations occurring during the rural urbanisation processes that challenge the current grassroots level governance. Therefore, this project's central research questions are:

- 1) What changes have been happening to the China's rural governance and how are those changes are perceived and interpreted?
- 2) How and why does diverse rural governance occur?
- 3) How do the rural urbanisation processes affect the rural governance?

I will attempt to answer these questions from three aspects: 1) internalization of the designated rural democratization articulated on the Organic Law, 2) external intervention and mediation of human agents in policy implementation, and 3) dispute settlement.

5. Methodology and Theoretical Framework: Ethnography, Actor-Oriented Perspectives and 'Interface Analysis'

An ethnographic investigation focuses on social processes rather than social structure, as well as action and interaction, lived experiences and inter-subjective understanding wherein both the researchers and the researched are blended into the processes of mutual learning, and constructing local knowledge and unfolding codes of social norms and rules (O'Reilly, 2012; Wilson and Chaddha, 2009). It emphasizes 'here-and-now' knowledge construction and is of great importance to different interpretations of social rules and values (Arce and Long, 2004). It frequently adopts research methods of participant observation and ethnographic interview to gather the data alongside the iterative-inductive research processes.

In my case studies, conversations, situated actions, and interactive processes are the main forms of the data collection. They referred to power relations and knowledge exchange among the involved parties, conflict of interests between the land takers and the land possessors, between the policy recipients and the policy implementers, as well as to strategic responses to settlement of disputes or conflicts.

Also, ethnography makes a very strong connection to the actor-oriented perspectives and 'interface analysis'. Simply put, actor-oriented perspectives stress the greater importance of the capability of human agency to fashion social consequences or outcomes, or generate emerging social structures. Their key points are that external interventions, including external policy or projects implementation and political and economic designation and reforms, have to be filtered by internal mediation following the unexpected consequences of the interventions. Likewise, external worldviews have to be interpreted even internalized by the social actors embedded with different interests, values and beliefs. There is a process of internalization of the external interventions and the outside worldviews happening to the local transformations (Long and Ann, 1992; Long, 2001; Landini, Long, Leeuwis and Murtagh, 2014). That, to some extent, is able to explain why external interventions generate idiosyncratic outcomes and why external values have evolved into varying alterations or mutations at local levels. 'Interface analysis' takes 'social interface', such as face-to-face interaction, confrontation and strategic actions cross the wider social boundaries, as the unit of analysis. It particularly focuses on power relations and construction, knowledge construction and exchange, language uses, and conjuring-up strategies and problems solving processes. Apparently, these foci are nothing more than ethnographic or anthropological investigations on the lived experiences, subjective interpretations, attached social meanings, suited actions and the social processes.

It will demonstrate in my research, rural governance is understood and interpreted diversely by villagers of different roles. More importantly, the 'here-and-now' knowledge of the rural governance is concurrently and contextually being generated. The implementation of rural democratization has been internalized into which that vastly differs from the original ideas or the western conventions. Likewise, the local land taking policy implementation has to take the cultural values and the villagers' 'here-and-now' knowledge construction and interpretation, and emerging power structure and strategies into account. There is a compromising balance between the top-down mandatory and the bottom-up strategic resistances, between human agents and emerging social structures, and between the external lawful policy instructions and the internal adaption to changes. Last but not least, human agents are capable of mediating the external prohibiting forces, and constructing knowledge and interpreting social values, as well as taking advantage of social relationships and networking to settle series of disputes. Especially those living at the bottom of society are able to compromise the external interventions and the institutional restrictions. 'Interface analysis' is in a position to document and analyse how and why these happened wherein some analytical concepts from within social constructionism and the actor-oriented perspectives are particularly helpful.

6. Research Contribution

My research contributes to the scholarship and the practical policy realm in two aspects. It might reflect on the possible trajectories of small-to-medium-sized city urbanisation or rural urbanisation in the next decade and for the greater political reforms at the village levels if possible. To be specific, first it uncovers the processes of the social interaction of the social actors over the rural governance. By doing so,

the problems, the conflicts and the possible solutions to them might be acknowledged broadly. Moreover, there is a possibility for policy makers take these research findings into account. They might bring part of modification to series of policy formulation and implementation, and re-evaluate the outcomes of the rural political reforms by reconsidering the effect of the local internalization practices.

Second, it might provide a better understanding and explanation of rural governance. It uses the theoretical framework of social constructionism and actor-oriented perspectives to interpret and explicate the diversity of the rural governance. The theoretical perspectives and analysis differ from series of theories of governance. Thus, it could add more to the debates in academia. In addition, it could drive the rethinking of the explanatory power of varying perspectives on the rural China's governance and other forms of social changes nationwide. Lastly, it offers an attempt to challenge the belief in the dominance of discourse and to realize the importance of the perspectives and the actions from below, the ordinary people on the changing rural governance.

7. Structure of the Thesis

The thesis will have seven chapters. I will firstly conceptualize the key concepts and introduce part of the theory imposed upon governance. Then I will articulate social constructionism and actor-oriented perspectives. First, I will clarify what social constructionism is about and where it comes from, and introduce the key concepts, as well as state its following assumptions and implications. This articulation of social constructionism helps us better understand actor-oriented perspectives. I will then speculate the key concepts, theories and approaches to analysis stemming from actor-oriented perspectives. Thirdly, I will explain why social constructionism and actor-oriented perspectives are more appropriate than other alternatives to theoretical and analytical framework.

In the next section I will move on to the literature review on the China's rural governance. First, I will focus on the rural political reforms and particularly stress what effects have been brought about by them. Second, I will move forward to talk about the changes alongside the local economic development, such as power redistribution and rise of local economic elites and policy implementation, as well as their impacts on the rural governance. Lastly, I will evaluate the changing governance from the aspect of the self-organizations in rural society. Importantly, I will criticize these studies based on the rationale of social constructionism and actor-oriented perspectives throughout the evaluation of the existing research findings and arguments.

In Chapter 3 I will articulate the processes of how I blend ethnographic research, actor-oriented perspectives and interface analysis as a whole during my fieldwork. Both ethnography and actor-oriented perspectives emphasize social construction of knowledge and reality and treat researchers as integrated part of this constructing process and social interaction. Taking this guidance, this study will use various forms of social interaction, including individual and group conversations, meetings, conferences, gatherings and events over a period of time. I will detail how the pilot

study helped me narrow down the research focus and determine the selection of research sites. At the same time, I will stress how some key concepts and theories in ethnography and actor-oriented perspectives helped me direct the research and conduct ongoing data analysis. The section that comes next is about how I conducted the primary research. Likewise, my continual learning, communication and interpretation of local knowledge guided me to realize the importance of social situations and processes of knowledge construction. Last but not least, I will discuss the limitations of the fieldwork design and how the ethical issues had affected the research direction and data collection.

Chapter 4, 5 and 6 are the main analytical chapters. In Chapter 4 I will focus on the consequences of rural democratization in two villages. I will discuss how the villagers' committees are constituted and how the power structure is constructed. I will evaluate how the village elections had been internalized or institutionalized in such a way that the township and village cadres and representatives are in a position to shape. Then I will move on to describe and analyse how the village cadres admit the post of the villagers' committees in reality. What is more, I will attempt to uncover how the power structure is being constructed by the local actors, especially the village cadres, and how it affects the format of the selection of the village cadres.

In Chapter 5 I will articulate how the human agents mediate the implementation of series of policy of different levels, including New Countryside Cooperative Medical System, New Rural Society Pension Insurance and Family Birth Control, and the local land expropriation policy and other tasks at the local level. By referring to the analytical concepts such as social interfaces, knowledgeability, power relations, social relationships and networking and discursive practices, I will demonstrate the capability of the local actors in the realms of innovating strategies, language usage, problem solving, negotiation, accommodation, compromising consent, interpreting social values and beliefs, and of knowledge and power construction as a whole. It will show that the implementation of policy is often fashioned by the human agents and their interaction with the structural forces.

In Chapter 6 I have collected a number of cases to display the interactive processes of the disputes settlement in the villages studied. First, by eliciting the cases concerning house construction, the distribution of land compensation fees, and the villagers' conflict with a local household, I will show how the village cadres play a vital role in helping redress the disputes by implying the social values of 'emotion', 'reason' and 'law' into their practices. On the other hand, I will show that why in some cases the dispute settlements fail at the village level. The remaining cases focus on how the villagers seek approaches to settle disputes after the failure of low level mediation. These cases refer to land reallocation for resettlement, the distribution of the land compensation fees, and the dispute of how to unblock the drainage channel. It finds the capability of the ordinary villagers to control the processes of dispute settlement. Villagers are able to come up with strategies, construct knowledge and power, take advantage of social relationships and networking, appropriate and problematize the situations, utilize linguistic skills, and so on, to solve their problems over the conflicting processes.

In Chapter 7 I will summarize and analyse the mediation of human agency in the rural governance, including the implementation of the rural democratization and of the policy and the assigned missions, and the disputes settlement. First of all, I will analyse the capability or agents at the actors' level, including villagers and the village cadres, and at the organizational level. Secondly, I will reveal how structural forces constrain human agents in shaping the outcomes of the rural governance, to be specific, the establishment and the operation of the villagers' committees, policy implementation, and the ways in which disputes are solved. In the next section I will discuss how the human agents interact with the structural forces altogether to bring about the internalization of the rural democratization, and to fashion the policy implementation and the consequences of the disputes settlement. After highlighting the research findings, I will discuss the limitations of the fieldwork research. Last but not least, I will look back to those existing research and discuss the significance to that research in comparison with my research.

Chapter 2

Multifaceted Rural Governance under China's One-Party Control:

Conceptualization and Theorisation

1. Introduction

This section will conceptualize the key concepts and articulate relevant theories in governance to examine whether they are used differently under Western and Mainland Chinese contexts. Secondly, I will elaborate on the key concepts, theories, assumptions and implications of social constructionism. Then, it will articulate the theoretical framework of the actor-oriented perspectives and the approaches to data analysis, which is closely associated with the social constructionism. Lastly, it will discuss why social constructionism and actor-oriented perspectives are in a position to function well in my fieldwork research, and why they are the most appropriate theoretical and analytical framework to adopt. In the final section, I will take a critical look at the existing studies on the changing rural China's governance. With reference to actor-oriented perspectives, I will discuss the weakness and the strengths in those previous studies and what contributions my research will make in specific at the end of each section.

2. Conceptualization of China's Rural Governance

2.1 Governance and its Related Theory

Governance and its related theories provide a new perspective of understanding the relations between the state, market and the society. China's transformation from a planning economy to a socialist market has brought about unprecedented social, cultural and economic changes. With the advent of emerging private sectors and economic marketization, diverse interest groups are emerging with different levels of access to social welfare, legal protection and political bargaining (Florini, Lai, Tan and Ye, 2012; Zheng, c2014; Teets, Rosen and Gries, 2010). The government monopoly of social and economic spheres gradually weakens alongside this social and economic transformation. It is necessary for the Party and the government to promote social, political, administrative and legislative reforms, as well as ideological propaganda renewal, in order to keep pace with the ever-changing society. For instance, some social organizations that are perceived by the party government as an alternative body to share responsibility and accountability with the government have been established under the relatively loosened policy regulation. On the contrary, the party government puts rigid restrictions on those types of social organizations which are perceived as potential threats to CCP in power, like the Falungong cult (Kang and Heng, 2011; Roy, 2010). Take civil service reform as another example: the Party government has made an effort to downsize bureaucratic organs at both vertical and horizontal administrative levels, paving a path leading to 'small government, big society' (Sigley, 2006; Howell, 2003; Burns, 2003; Zheng, c2014; Mertha, 2010).

However, the party has to confront the dilemma of how a one-party hegemony can coexist with economic privatisation, marketization, emergence of civil organizations and globalization without altering the Leninist nature of the regime (Dickson, 2010; Tsang, 2009). There is no wonder that 'selective centralization', 'graduated control'

and 'consultative authoritarianism' are becoming survival strategies of the party to ameliorate pressure from an emerging civil society (Teets, Rosen and Gries, 2010; Teets, 2013; Kang and Heng, 2011; Zheng, c2014). What is more, financial distribution has been recentralized by the central government since the early 2000s. This is because the central government worries that local governments will threaten the central government's bargaining power when the former has gained more and more financial independence (Zheng, c2007, c2014). Last but not least, grassroots political reform also has to encounter the governmental control over the course. All in all, these social, economic and political reforms have to be exclusively implanted and grown from the soil of authoritarianism or 'fragmented authoritarianism' (Mertha, 2010; Teets, Rosen and Gries, 2010).

As a matter of fact, reforms of governance have also arisen over the past three decades in Western countries since the late 1970s. The traditional welfare states have confronted unprecedented challenges in welfare service provision due largely to fiscal crises and the economic recessions. Thus, the state government has been searching for a way to pass on part of its responsibilities to other stakeholders, such as private sectors and social organizations. In the UK and the United States, privatization of public assets and marketization of public services during the Thatcher and Regan governments, respectively, are a hallmark of neoliberal reform. With the increase in globalization, regionalization and the digital society, a monolithic government is no longer preferred. The government and public sectors have found it difficult to ascertain the appropriateness of policy without the active public participation and the input of local knowledge and to implement policy smoothly without the collaboration of the local citizens and the social organizations. Thereby, there is a need to engage international organizations, private sectors, semi-public sectors, voluntary organizations, and communities, families and individuals in not only production but also implementation of the policy (Bekkers, Dijkstra, Edwards and Fenger, 2007; Sundaram and Chowdhury, 2010; Bevir, 2010; Fenger and Bekkers, 2007; Milligan and Fyfe, 2006). All in all, the mode of government has transitioned to modes of governance.

The modes of governance arising out of China's 'soil' differ from the modes of governance cultivated on the Western 'soil'. It is therefore to distinguish governance between the types shall help understand theoretical underpinning my research on the rural China's governance. Giving a comprehensive and absolute definition to governance is indeed a difficult task. Scholars from varying backgrounds of academic disciplines define 'governance' differently.

Chhotray and Stoker (2009: 3) argue 'governance is about the rules of collective decision-making in settings where there are a plurality of actors or organizations and where no formal control system can dictate the terms of these actors and organizations.' Kooiman (2003: 4, 93) states that 'governance can be seen as the totality of theoretical conceptions on governing,' adding

Governing can be considered as the totality of interaction, in which public as well as private actors participate, aimed at solving societal problems or creating societal opportunities; attending to the institutions as contexts

for these governing interactions; and establishing a normative foundation for all those activities.

What is more, he specifies that 'self-governance is considered a governance mode embedded in the inter-ferential interaction processes around primary societal processes' (ibid).

Other state that 'governance can be defined as the guidance or control of an activity, in order to meet a specified objective' (Jewson and Mac Gregor, 1997: 6; Rosenau, 1997: 146, cited from Fox and Ward, 2008). Pierre (2000: 24) suggests that 'governance can be generally defined as the means by which an activity or ensemble of activities is controlled or directed, such that it delivers an acceptable range of outcomes according to some established social standard.' Bevir (2010: 35) states that 'the new governance is often defined in terms of the hollowing out of the state: the state is said to have lost the ability to impose its will, and to have come to rely instead on negotiations with other organizations with which it forms networks and partnerships.' Lovan, Shaffer and Murray (2004: 3) put forward that 'contemporary conceptualizations of governance place emphasis on interdependence between governmental and non-governmental bodies, with the role of central government being reduced over time to one of seeking to co-ordinate or manage policy networks through facilitation and negotiation.' Yu (2008: 138) advises that

the basic meaning of governance refers to a governing authority's efforts to maintain order and to enhance public welfare. The objective of governance is to utilize power in order to guide, control and institutionalize citizens' activities and to maximize the public good in its various institutional expressions.

Interdisciplinary research makes a definition of governance more difficult. For example, from the perspective of international relations, governance often refers to cross-state cooperation and a bilateral, trilateral and multilateral relation of the international organizations as well as a relationship between supranational organizations, like WTO, World Bank and World Monetary Fund, and nation states across the world (Popovski, 2010; Chhotray and Stoker, 2009). In the domain of 'New Public Management', a defining characteristic of governance is to incorporate the market incentive structure into the public sectors and prompt the reforms within the bureaucratic sectors concerning budgetary planning and customers-oriented services by reference of machinery of private sectors (Bevir, 2007, 2010; Fenger and Bekkers, 2007). Last but not least, 'participatory governance' highlights engagement of the communities, voluntary organizations and individual citizens in the processes of self-governing activities underlying cooperation and coordination of a civil society, scholarly community, the state organs and the private organizations; it takes an advocacy of 'action research' in which the researchers, local practitioners and other stakeholders participate in a social practice in order to bring changes to improve local well-beings (Lovan, Shaffer and Murray, 2004).

Further, governance can be categorized into varying modes of 'governance at a distance' or 'hierarchical governance,' 'multi-level governance,' 'market governance,' 'network governance' or 'co-governance' and 'societal self-governance' (Fenger and

Bekkers, 2007; Bekkers, Dijkstra, Edwards and Fenger, 2007; Dunsire, 1993). Hierarchical governance merely entails a vertical relation among the steering organizations and the steered ones, where the former provides funds and action guidelines but the latter has autonomy to formulate and enforce their decisions and policies (Kooiman, 2003). Multi-level governance combines a vertical and horizontal organizational relationship and basically emphasizes two forms of cooperation in transnational organizations and in the regional and the local level government (Bevir, 2010; Fenger and Bekkers, 2007). Market governance brings market mechanisms into the management of public good deliveries wherein the government interferences mostly create the shared information system and a transparent marketplace as well as define the relation and the rules of game, like the rule of inclusion and exclusion of the parties involved. Network governance simply highlights the importance of policy networks and partnership through which a complex social problem, like juvenile crime prevention and reconstructing an urban area, would be relatively effectively addressed. Interdependency of the multi-level organizations involved, regulated partnership between, and exchanges of resources of the varying stakeholders lie at the heart of the co-production of policies (Bevir, 2010; Sørensen and Triantafyllou, 2009). Societal self-governance rests with communitarianism and social capitals. Therein, public sectors in societal self-governance often play a weak or invisible role in engaging in the communal self-regulated activities as the community itself is capable of self-governing. Importantly, a high quality of trust among community-minded individuals is an indispensable part of the creation of efficiency and legitimacy of societal governance (Kooiman, 2000, 2003; Fenger and Bekkers, 2007).

In particular, neoliberalism, rational choice theory (RCT) and institutionalism shed light on sets of forms of new governance reforms. Self-interested ego and self-utility maximization is the fundamental assumption underlying RCT. With this premise upon RCT, neoliberal theorists propose that the modern state bureaucracy is inherently a fragmented, vested interest entity representing and maximizing its interests in its own right, rather than being a unitary government representing universal public interests and being free from neutral bureaucracy that hardly co-exists with entrenchment of political ideology and agendas. Marketization of public sectors and incorporation of incentive structure pertaining to private sectors into the public bodies saw the first wave of reforms of governance (Bevir, 2010; Chhotray and Stoker, 2009; Eriksson, 2009; Meier and O'Toole, 2006).

For the influence of RCT, Thatcherism in the late 1970s in Britain is a case in point. For institutionalism, the rise of New Public Management (NPM) has taken place alongside this neoliberal reform in the UK and the United State in particular. Contracting out public services, building up an internal market among the varying level of government and public sectors and signing management contracts between the public sectors and the private ones are the main means to marketization aimed at enhancing efficiency of public sectors and overcoming factionalism and irrationalities of bureaucracy. Performance accountabilities of public servants or technocrats in implementing the policies and delivering services and an emphasis upon an appropriate ratio of input and output and budgetary reforms is a focal point

of NPM. Therefore, with references to techniques of private organizations, in the rhetoric of NPM public servants turn out to be manager-like and are responsible for offering a good quality of service for the customers or consumers rather than the citizens. Discretion of customers/citizens on satisfaction level of services provided would be greatly associated with an assessment of efficiency of public servants in the service delivery; apparently the former is conceived of the principle delegating the latter as its agent to fulfil the common goals of services and tasks. In this regard, the role of the state government or public sectors in public management is decentralized and the capacity of the state or public organs in social management and policy implementation is weakened, namely the 'hollowing out of the state' (Bevir, 2010).

However, neoliberal reforms and NPM have challenged representative democracy in three aspects. Firstly, when the public servants or technocrats are more accountable for the customers-like citizens, rather than the popularly elected superior politicians or officials, the latter is inclined to be insulated from the constituency owing to a lack of direct accountability of policy continuity and implementation by the public servants. Secondly, when public servants face the pressure from the performance accountability in organizations, they tend to focus on short-term rather than long-term effects in the provision of public goods. Yet the interest of the public more often than not requires long-term consideration and policy continuity. Thirdly, the focus on efficiency of public bureaucracy intensifies tension between accountability and efficiency. To some extent, vague boundaries of public-private cooperation cause more difficulties for the citizens to identify the accountability taken by the public servants. While the efficiency of service delivery is being met by the profit-driven private sectors, hollowing out of governmental sectors in the provision of public services always occurs. As a result, obscurity of accountabilities and at times fragmentation of the public service delivery happens. In short, neoliberal reform and NPM weaken the role and the capacity of the state government and public sectors in delivering social welfare services and monitoring policy implementation on one hand and give rise to a risk of democratic legitimacy of public-private cooperation and confront a loss of public ethic of public sectors on the other (Bevir, 2007, 2010; Chhotray and Stoker, 2009; Stoker, 1999).

Institutionalism to some extent leads attempts to respond to shortcomings of the above-mentioned neoliberalism and RCT. The second wave of reforms of governance under part of influence of institutionalism responds to the first wave of governance reforms in the UK in particular. RCT itself is not in a position to explain why 'a tragedy of commons' cannot be avoided, to propose how the dilemma of free riding in the provision of public goods is addressed, nor to propose in what ways the higher authority enables the self-interested egos to adhere to common rules and engage social exchanges.

Institutionalism partly ascribes policy networks and partnership to a new form of governance. That was particularly reflected in the New Labour government and its policy agendas from the mid-1990s to the late 2000s in Great Britain. Organizational networks among the public sectors, private sectors, semi-public sectors and the voluntary organizations seem more legitimate than marketization of the public

sectors in producing and enforcing policies and delivering welfare services by virtue of interaction, communication and collaboration across varying organizational levels (Fenger and Bekkers, 2007; Carmel and Harlock, 2008; Casey, 2004). Instead of public-private engagement in the service delivery, public-private partnership is more likely to be advocated in which accountability of public and private sector is particularly clarified. In addition to public-private partnership, this new mode of governance entails more extensive partnerships between public and private sectors, and communities and non-governmental social organizations (Kendall, 2000, 2003; Macmillan and Townsend, 2006). In this regard, policy networks and partnership of the varying stakeholders are interconnected (Bevir, 2010; Sørensen and Torfing, 2007). In the agenda of the New Labour policy, a revitalization of communal spirit of self-regulation was advocated. In this regard, communities are encouraged to work with the state and government in the provision of social service. And social exclusion and deprivation is claimed to be reduced within the society-state partnership. Unlike the weakening role of the state in the provision of public goods and in social management, herein the state and government play a much stronger role in shouldering responsibilities and accountability with society (Edwards and Woods, 2006; Christine and Conradson, 2006; Hardill, Baines and Perri, 2007; Bevir, 2010; Kendall, 2003).

This form of governance, like so-called 'joined-up governance' and 'one-stop government', shifts from an emphasis on efficiency of bureaucracy to public goods such as social security and equity. In addition, the institutionalism theorists refuse to accept undemocratic practices, like non-majoritarian settings, that are proposed by the RCT theorists. In order to solve the time-inconsistency problem and lower the political transaction costs, RCT theorists are receptive to adopting the non-majoritarian principle especially in the banking system and budgeting planning. Again, institutionalism theorists do not favour the stance of proclamations of efficiency at the expense of democratic principles in a democratic state. They hold a strong faith in the democratic principles of the rule of law, majority rule, liberal rights, citizenship and accountability of the popularly elected government and officials and to the 'legal accountability of horizontal relation of the networks' and inclusion in particular (Bevir, 2010; Bekkers and Edwards, 2007).

Additionally, the radical democrats and deliberative democrats forward further that the grassroots participation and public consultation and deliberation should be prompted in the governance activities. In the practice of the representative democracy, public consultation and deliberation in the processes of production and implementation of policies is not institutionally setup (Bevir, 2010; Bekkers and Edwards, 2007). But Bevir (2010) adds another form of governance by incorporating the individuals' beliefs into production, communication and implementation of policy, namely 'dialogue governance.' Equally, Kooiman (2003) adopts an interactionist perspective that interaction of actions and structure will shape the formation of governance of which actions are nurtured by the combination of intention, interest and content.

Moreover, modes of governance have an association with modes of democracy. While the reforms of governance partly engender a contradictory relationship with

the representative democracy, they also partly have ties with pluralist, deliberative and associative forms of democracy (Meier and O'Toole, 2006; Bekkers and Edwards, 2007; Rosenberg, 2006). Simply put, for the advocates of pluralist democracy, interest groups would have an open access to political resources and decision-making and the input of policy production by negotiation, competition and coalition, thereby leading to political checks and balances and restrain the state's encroachment. Deliberative democracy claims that the citizens' preferences would not be taken-for-granted but need to be carefully examined by means of public discussion and information exchanges. Political consultation, city forums, round-table conferences and deliberative hearings, for example, are commonly seen as a means to exercise deliberative democracy. Association of the citizens in the provision of public services, like housing, education, public health and welfare, lies in the centre of associative democracy. It is noted that part of the functions of government upon public service provisions is transferred to the civil society and herein the notions of self-government and active citizenship are highly valued. These three modes of democracy all embrace the concepts of the active citizenship and accountability and exert political checks and balances; in the governance activities deliberative devices could be utilized in combination with associative and pluralist democracy; deliberative democracy is a considerable supplement to representative democracy (Bekkers and Edwards, 2007: 48-56; Bevir, 2010; Pierre, 2000; Cheema, 2005). In short, mode of governance shall be examined through the lens of democratic legitimacy in the various modes of democracy, namely democratic governance.

Accordingly, drawing upon governance and its related theoretical underpinning, there is one common characteristic in the discussion of governance, which lies upon readapting role or transformation of the state, government and the public sectors (Bevir, 2010; Fenger and Bekkers, 2007; Bekkers, Dijkstra, Edwards and Fenger, 2007). More specifically, in the domain of market governance, the state and public sectors give way to the market mechanisms in a way to deliver the public services. In the realm of network governance, the state and public sectors are designed to share authority, policy networks and partnership with other forms of non-governmental organizations and the private sectors. In the arena of societal self-governance, civil society, democracy of association, and active citizenship play a pivotal role, reflecting socio-political complexity and interaction of state-society.

Drawing upon the above-mentioned discussion, governance is conceived of as including these five basic elements:

1. Multiple parties are involved in the activities, described as pluralistic and multi-level participatory;
2. Dialectical, negotiable and interactive communication take place throughout individual and organizational networking;
3. Organizational rules are not necessarily hierarchical, formal, fixed and singular instead using a pattern of rule that is adaptable and flexible;

4. Public and governmental sectors do not necessarily control or steer action rules, with social organizations sharing public authority and generating action rules;
5. Certain organizational, collective and individual objectives need to be met, such as the provisioning of social welfare and public goods, as well as problem-solving.

In this regard, rural governance under the discourse of China's one-party regime might have different implications. More often than not, under the party state the Chinese government plays a dominate role in regulating rules of organizational activities, shaping legal framework and accountability, allocating political power and resources, and formulating policy making (Zheng, c2014; Mertha, 2010; Teets, Rosen and Gries, 2010; Teets, 2013; Kang and Heng, 2011). In other words, the party-state government is the singular source of public authority and political power. Arguably, a western version of civil society might not exist in the Mainland China, as the establishment of civil organizations has to be scrutinized by the state and government that tightly control the scope and the areas open to the social groups (He, 2008; Ma, 2006; Lu, 2008; Tian, 2008).

2.2 Kooiman's Notions of Socio-Political Governance

Kooiman (2003) distinguishes between the interaction of governance at the intentional and the structural level. In the assumptions of social-political governance, social actors' actions imply the intention, including the actors' consciousness, identity, role-setting, common goals, purposes and interest. Normally the action occurs in a state so that self-governing situation is more commonplace to be the analytical unit of interaction governance. The situated contexts in Kooiman's viewpoint are also so-called 'structures' that constrain, condition and broaden the intentional interaction. To be specific, Kooiman clarifies 'the structural dimensions of governing interactions point to the material, social and cultural contexts in which interactions come about and into effect' and are composed of such particular circumstances as 'institutions, general social constructs, patterns of communication, material and technological possibilities and societal power distributions' (2003: 15). Further, intentional and structural interactions would induce tensions with each other, which is a major form of social dynamic and significant source of structural change. When the interaction creates more choices and freedom for the actors to assert their goals, values and interests, it might enable social-political interactions to be constantly preserved. But if the interactions cannot concern the actors' values and interests and engender their achievement of goals, social-political interactions are likely to be changing. Therefore, the effect of the intentional and structural interactions might either produce the 'social-political' change or conservation (Kooiman, 2003: 11-20).

Kooiman takes the interactions of the actors' intentions and the structural force into the account of the governance. This takes into consideration the complexity and the dynamics of social networking and social relationships as a vital feature for socio-political governance. In this case, I prefer to apply the meaning of the socio-political governance into the conceptualization of China's rural governance.

2.3 State-Society Relation and a Civil Society

Articulation of the state-society relation and different meanings of civil society will help us better understand the connotations of the governance in the context of Mainland China. There are varying ideal types of state-society relations. Kang and Heng have categorized them into the five ideal types, including civil society, corporatism, civil society resists state, general system and graduated control system (2011: 118). Scholarship often perceives corporatism as the working state-society relation in Mainland China as the state interposes the society by a means of functional administration and legislation. For example, the corporatist state of China often represses the growth of civil organizations throughout 'administrative registration system of mass organizations' (Ma, 2006; Lu, 2008, 2009; He, 2008; Tian, 2008; Zhang, Fan and Wang, 2009). Yet society has empowered autonomy with the state, free right to independent association and entailed cooperation with the state in the provision of public goods under the discourse of the state corporatism. On the other hand, the type of general system, civil society resists state and graduated control system denote a conflicting relation between the state and society in public, economic and private realms. As widely noted, it is where the state plays a dominant part of political decision-making and its implementation and public goods provisions; the right of the society to independent association is greatly restricted, even prohibited (Kang and Heng, 2011: 115-119). Consequently, society has to fight against the state's interventions to emancipate itself from the state's control. These types of state-society relation are also normally seen in the Mainland China.

The state-society relation in civil society has its own distinctive characteristics. First, it is not uncommon that non-profit driven volunteering and self-associated activities have widely taken place in a civil society. Citizens from within a civil society are likely to be self-autonomous, self-determined and mutual-aided social agents and should have free right to independent association in law. Social capital stemming from social networking in a civil society, like enforceable trust and reciprocity, help construct solidarity of social groups and attribute efficiency to effectuate common goals (Putnam, 1993; Loran, Muray and Shaffer, 2004; Popovski, 2010; Lu, 2009; Fenger and Bekkers, 2007; Cheema, 2005). Secondly, civil society bestows full independence on the state and the latter would not interfere with the former in formulating and implementing political decision-making. In addition, society would cooperate and coordinate with the state in delivering public goods (Kang and Heng, 2011; Yu, 2008). Furthermore, the state embeds itself into society and vice versa. Overlapping boundaries between the state and society signify a harmonious, cooperative and coordinated relation of state-society. It is largely due to the intermediating function of civil society, like the function of societal associations connecting to public sectors, that contributes to a dynamic, healthy interaction of state-society (Putman, 1993; Cheema, 2005). Accordingly, the emergence of a civil society in the Mainland China is highly questionable.

Yet a civil society in the Mainland China is indeed nascent. That is why some Chinese scholars have labelled the problematic emerging civil society as the pre- or semi-civil society in order to grasp this early stage of development (Zhang and Zhuang, 2008; Yu, 2008; Zhang, Fan and Wang, 2009). From Kang and Heng's viewpoint, the *de*

facto state-society relation in the Mainland China is dubbed as the graduated control system, or namely a modified version of general system. Simply put, different groups have varying levels of autonomy and right to independent association in law and society plays a supplementary part of delivering public goods and has limited channels to voice itself in light of formulation and implementation of political decision-making. Premised upon the above-mentioned relation between civil society and democratic governance, there is no wonder the trajectories of governance in the Mainland China have their own way.

Democratic governance is highly associated with democratic liberal state regime and polity and existence of a civil society (Cheema, 2005; Meier and O'Toole, 2006; Bevir, 2010; Pierre, 2000). A state government constituted by the populace election is designated to be more responsible and accountable and the citizens should be bestowed the liberal rights of political participation and deliberation as normally seen within the regime of liberal democracy. What is more, interdependence of and partnership between, public, private, societal and informal organizations are inclined to be formed from within a civil society. The slight difference between governance and self-governance is that the latter is derived from the former (Kooiman, 2003; Fenger and Bekkers, 2007). Of course, social practitioners at the grassroots level are bestowed upon a liberal democratic right to participate in self-governing activities where the public sectors may or may not be involved.

2.4 Definition and Indicators of Rural China's Governance

It has been noted that China does not promote the popularly elected central and local government and does not institutionalize nation-wide democracy. Concurrently, a full-fledged civil society is far from being cultivated. Therefore, although China's rural governance might be designed to refer to the overall framework of democratic governance, its defined meaning shall be developed or constructed historically and contextually. By reference to Kooiman's notions of socio-political governance, I define China's rural governance as referring to a socio-political interactive process in which the local actors or agents, including the local officials, village cadres, the villagers and other stakeholders, work effectively with each other to manage rural affairs and resources. Moreover, rural governance in the Mainland China contains four indicators as mentioned below.

1. Pluralistic and multi-level participation. In this case, all stakeholders are equally involved in governance activities.
2. The style of management in day-to-day village administration tends to be cooperative, coordinated and negotiable, and organizational rules tend to be adaptable and flexible.
3. Local governments and the village offices are not the singular source of public authority and do not play a predominate role in decision-making; ordinary villagers and other grassroots' organizations can share public authority and steer the rules of action.
4. Some concrete objectives need to be met. For example, village elections, provision of public welfare, policy implementation and fulfilment of

assignment tasks, dispute settlement, economic development and other affairs related are expected to be fulfilled.

The section that follows will articulate the theoretical framework of social constructionism and actor-oriented perspectives and the approaches of 'interface analysis.' It will help us identify the inappropriateness of the RCT and the perspectives of political-economy as the theoretical and analytical framework.

3. Social Constructionism and Actor-Oriented Perspectives

3.1 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a major paradigm of the social sciences. Like any other paradigm, it has provided answers to those fundamental questions – what is reality and truth, and how do we know reality and truth? (Blaikie, 2000, 2007). Different paradigms offer different answers to the questions. As Kuhn claimed, paradigms exert varying explanatory power and work particularly for particular schools of scholars. Acceptance of certain paradigms means that the acknowledgement of reality, truth and knowledge, and its corresponding assumptions, and implications in practices would be naturally accepted. Under different historical contexts, paradigms do shift from one to another, which does not necessarily mean one paradigm must be better than the other in the arenas of social sciences. A new paradigm is merely a new way of understanding reality, truth and the knowledge (Kuhn, 1962, 2003; Burr, 1995; Gergen, 2009).

Social constructionism has affinities with phenomenology, symbolic interactionism and cultural anthropological studies. Berger and Luckman's claimed that phenomenological understanding of the everyday life or life world is one of key concepts to social constructionism (1966). From the phenomenological standpoint, everyday life or life world cannot represent itself as a reality without getting subjective experience and interpretations involved. Subjective experience and interpretations are by no means homogenous, by which the reality of everyday life is specifically constructed resulting in varying versions of it. The reality of everyday life is internalized and routinized by human beings in order to make sense of their experiences. Therefore, reality is organized in an ordered fashion. In short, reality is multiple, heterogeneous but ordered (Burr, 1998; Gergen, 2009; Elder-Vass, 2012).

Symbolic interactionism and cultural anthropology demonstrate the multiplicity of life world and realities in empirical studies. In the early 20th century, Plummer and Mead's work put forward that people's identities are constructed within the relational networking and via the social interaction (Mead, 1934; Plummer, 1991). People are likely to realize their roles and positions across the relational networks and apply the corresponding norms into their ongoing actions. Over the process of social interaction, people not only exchange knowledge and resources but also attach their own meanings to social status, artefacts, discourse and texts. Thus, once social identities and rules are constructed, people should acknowledge the boundaries and appropriateness while expressing their beliefs to, and act accordingly with others (Burr, 1995, 2015; Gergen, 2009).

Anthropological studies in aboriginal communities and rural society in Africa, Asia and the Pacific Islands, and anthropological urban studies in USA done by the Chicago School, paved a way to better understand alien cultures vis-à-vis the western cultures and sub-cultures vis-à-vis mainstream culture (Malinowski, 1979; Mead, 1934; Scott, 1985; Burawoy, 2009; Athens, 2010; Judith, 2012). It is commonly seen that those social codes can be uncovered by local people embedded into local communities, sub-cultural society, or marginalized society. While Western culture and ideologies and global economics had swept away other forms of culture and society, varying social outcomes appeared. There are huge intensions and incompatibilities between the different forms of cultural and political values and practices. Unsurprisingly, the superiority and the universality of Western values are questioned by other cultural carriers; the acceptance of the mainstream culture is not compelling, even intrusive, through the eyes of sub-culture or marginalized groups without taking their known 'reality' and 'truths' into account (Scott, 1985; Arce and Long, 2004).

Given to the existence of multiple realities and here-and-now construction of reality and knowledge, social constructionists proclaim that taken-for-granted knowledge is bound to be challenged from time to time. From their point of view, there is no such thing as reality 'out there', independent of people's subjective experiences. Thus, people's knowledge does not come from a version of reality that is normally regarded as causal, with law-like truths or hypotheses. In comparison, knowledge of reality is constructed by people in a specific historical and cultural context, within the social relationships and through daily interaction (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Gergen and Gergen, 2003; Burr, 1995, 2015; Garfinkel, 2003; Gergen, 2003, 2009). Among others, relational networks often determine the way we approach to each other in everyday life, to some extent the way how we interact with each other to construct knowledge. Realities, in the social constructionists' eyes, are the 'outcomes of the conversations in which we are engaged' (Gergen, 2009: 4). It is thus not surprising to claim that the realities are constructed in the here-and-now and open to be altered and reconstructed.

Language plays a vital role in everyday conversations and social interaction. Language use carries the meaning of everyday life by which people are able to make sense of temporal ordered realities. Also, people understand everyday life by the learning the signs and symbols attached to languages and translate their subjective experiences to their life worlds by interpreting these signs and symbols (Burr, 1998, 2015; Gergen, 2003, 2009). While there is a gap appearing between the common language and reality, people need to reconstitute the objectification of the everyday life with a means to reinterpret the meanings of the symbols via language (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Once the reality of everyday life has been temporally symbolized by the language in an orderly manner, people are able to distance themselves from the face-to-face encounters while interpreting discourses and texts as a form of language.

People use language to translate their feelings, experiences, or knowledge to share with others. Why this person-to-person sharing is possible in knowledge exchange is because most people in a social grouping use this already-made system of signs in

language. Those linguistic skills can even be utilized to some extent to create similar implications on the accounts of conversations, or discourses. But the system of signs is susceptible to change and reinterpretation when the 'validity of knowledge of everyday life' has been challenged, or a collision between the old and the new realities occurs (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Long and Long, 1992; Long, 2001). This adjustment of language to new or problematic situations cannot be done without day-to-day social interaction, and that is meant to be coherent with an individual's pictured everyday life.

Once we accept a paradigm, we naturally accept its assumptions and implications. This of course applies to the social constructionism. What assumptions are extracted from the social constructionism vary from one social constructionist to another. We will now examine a numbers of these commonly taken assumptions and implications (Burr, 1995, 1998, 2015; Gergen, 2003, 2009; Gergen and Gergen, 2003; Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Hindess, 1986; Aceros, 2012; Sayer, 1997; Bliakie, 2007).

Although social constructionism assumes the existence of a variety of realities, it definitely abandons relativism and exclusively admits other possibilities of explaining the world and telling the truths. The danger of relativism is that it dismisses truth telling and admits the incapability of human beings to find truth. However, social constructionists accommodate human beings' capability to seek truths and construct knowledge, as well as embrace realities with multiple versions (Long, 2001). In other words, from the social constructionists' point of view, reality cannot be only interpreted as a systemic and united truth. What is more, due to the multiplicity of realities and constructive nature of knowledge, social constructionists by no means prioritize social constructionism among other thought systems. It supports other traditions of truths telling on nature.

Construction of knowledge and understanding of the outside world depends upon the social relationships, daily interactions and conversations (Gergen, 2003, 2009; Hindess, 1986). Without being blended into the social relationships and day-to-day interaction, it is not possible for human agents to construct culturally and historically specific knowledge, thus expressing their version of reality. Likewise, human agents play a vital role in the maintenance of traditions and the reconstruction of knowledge. Social changes cannot be fully explained if the construction of knowledge among the varying life worlds is not taken seriously. Thus, it also implies that in anthropological and ethnographic research, researchers are an integrated part of the social processes of here-and-now knowledge and reality construction and thus are not more superior than other participants and stake-holders (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Long, 2001; Elder-Vass, 2012).

As knowledge is culturally and historically constructed, knowledge and its implied utility might only work in certain contexts. It is noted that different communal groups have different rules and, more generally, traditions and conventions. Knowledge construction and its implications have to function within the rules of language, rituals and other forms of games (Wittgenstein, 2003; Gergen, 2003, 2009). Otherwise, while those rules and traditions lose their foundation within a form of life, conflicts, constriction and even oppression will arise. For example, when two

different life worlds clash with each other, it is inevitable to see the conflicting processes of knowledge construction and the truth telling (Long and Long, 1992; Long, 2001).

Likewise, when reality and the knowledge are reconstructed, the subjective meanings attached to preceding traditions also have to be modified and transformed. It implied that external interventions, such as law and policies, military force and social engineering, cannot work without modification and adaption of life worlds in order to generate the designed outcomes. Still, engaging into life worlds or everyday life is the essential, prerequisite step to understand and explain a series of modifications, adaptations and transformations, even guiding the social practices by those constructed knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Long, 2001). Thus social constructionism refuses engineered social changes.

Social constructionism does not agree on a singular authority of truths telling and uncovering reality. Thus, binary or dichotomous truth telling is criticized by social constructionism. The dichotomy of truth telling not only appears in our language use, discourses and ideologies but also fashions our social practices. That hugely contradicts with the ideas of a multiplicity of realities from social constructionism (Burr, 1995, 2015; Gergen, 2009).

Knowledge construction operates via daily interaction and conversation wherein language use provides us with a toolkit to disseminate, exchange and transcend knowledge itself. Meanwhile, how language is used represents social relationships. This has implications on how to use language in our society. Language can be utilized to create constructive power by reconstituting the system of signs and to reinforce the existing power relations by treating people differently in a linguistic sense. That ultimately reflects to the construction of knowledge (Long and Long, 1992; Long, 2001; Gergen, 2009).

Social constructionism has influenced many disciplines, like feminism, post-modernism, deconstructionism and ethnography. Likewise, the part that follows will articulate what connections of the actor-oriented perspectives to the social constructionism are and how the former has developed some ideas derived from the latter in developmental studies.

3.2 'Actor-Oriented Perspectives'

3.2.1 Denial of Essentialism and Determinism in Development of Developing Countries

Essentialism and determinism are ontological and epistemological proclamations on the reality or truths of nature (Blaikie, 2000, 2007; Gerring, 2001; Elster, 2007; Sayer, 1997, 2010). It is not promising at all to adopt the worldviews of realities independent of human beings' consciousness and activities to understand and explain human society. Max Weber's interpretationism poses the opposing views to it, that individuals' purposes and activities must fashion the social outcomes interlocked with social entities (2001, 2011). Moreover, essentialism and determinism point out that human society has a universal formulation for stages of development, which is parallel to universal law in the hard sciences (Long, 2001).

That fundamentally distorts the multiplicity of realities and the deconstruction of singular authority of uncovering the reality, in the social constructionists' eyes.

Modernization theory and Political Economy in the sociology of development share the logic of essentialism and determinism. First, modernization theory poses a binary description of the outside world consisting of modern/backwards, liberal/totalitarian, enlightened/barbaristic, rational/emotional, progressive-evolutionary/traditional-stagnate, developed/developing, civilized/uncivilized, emancipatory/hegemonic, humane/dehumanized, and so on. Secondly, it exclusively privileges one side of the continuum over the other. More importantly, it assumes that with the means to planned designation, intervention, and implementation by external forces, such as state or international bodies, the transformation from the wrong side to the proclaimed right side of the binary is achievable (Arce and Long, 2004; Long and Liu, 2009; Long, 2001).

Likewise, Political Economy, to be specific, Marxist Political Economy, proclaims that the omnipresent structural forces of world capitalism must expand into other less advanced nations to exploit additional resources and accumulate capital. That is determined by the exploitative nature of capitalism. Thus, those non-capitalist countries or bodies have to be forced to integrate into the similar relations of production globally and cannot be refrained from having more wealth extracted by those more powerful, external political-economic bodies (nations, international organizations and transnational companies). Ultimately, people with less powerful political economy have no choice but accept the subordinating position in the world capitalism and cannot escape from the unequal involving processes of 'the continued exploitation of 'peripheral' societies and 'marginalised' populations' (Long, 2001:17).

The two modes both pave a singular path to the development liberal or advanced models to replace those traditional or backward ones, or the structural forces of varying capitalist regimes will determine the changes in the rest. In other words, they impose the law-like formulation or central tendencies on the developmental successions and the possibilities of rural changes. Apparently, there is not much room for individual autonomy, societal cooperation and internal solidarity to be involved in development and social changes, other than the external forces alone.

Actor-oriented perspectives point out the limitations of these two models and stress the mutual interlocking of the external and the internal forces. Additionally, they have been applied to a series of anthropological and ethnographic investigations. Actor-oriented perspectives share the key concepts and assumptions arising out of the social constructionism. The following part will articulate this and the furthermore development and implications.

3.2.2 Life Worlds

Long adopts 'life worlds' as an equivalent term to 'everyday life' used in phenomenological analysis (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 30-60; Elder-Vass, 2012). People share their lived or subjective experiences with others, use language to express their meanings and interpretations, as well as to construct the here-and-now knowledge temporally and spatially in a form of life. Life worlds do not necessarily

have a physical boundary, especially when taking the embedded social relationships into consideration. It is given that those social relationships not only encompass the face-to-face situation and the 'dyadic ties', such as the patronage-client relation, also more expansive social exchange networks, and the exogenous actors, such as the formally operated organizations and groups.

Common language use provides itself as a foundation to interpret various forms of knowledge, such as how to maintain the local social relationships, exchange new forms of knowledge, and other emerging social meanings via daily interaction or network exchange. In this way, life worlds are orderly organized and managed, having become the ordered reality of actors. This has given the routinization of social learning, day-to-day interaction and the maintenance of social relationships possible an equilibrium.

On the other hand, due to the multiplicity of realities, life worlds are heterogeneous in nature. Actors in different life worlds construct the reality of lives differently. That inherently determines the emergence of conflicts, incompatibility and discontinuity, but also the possibility of coherence, coordination and continuity, when external factors, like market forces, state interventions, policy implementation, involvement of international organizations and the scholars, come into the life world.

It is commonly observed in Long's studies that actors in life worlds encounter a series of problems in face of external interventions. Those problematic situations emanate from misinterpretation of the local taken-for-granted knowledge by the so-called experts and supposedly more advanced worldviews, and from the conflicting internalization of the external factors. Actors acknowledge the problems, to be specific, challenging the taken-for-granted system of signs of language, social values and rules, and knowledge. Importantly, they are capable of solving these problems, even under the conditions of coercion. For example, they are able to readjust language use, reinterpret social relationships and attach new meanings to social values and norms, as well as reconstruct taken-for-granted knowledge. Actors in life worlds are able to come up with emerging strategies to reconstruct the here-and-now knowledge, which is one of pivotal factors leading interventions to different directions (Long, 2001: 115-145).

The multiplicity of the reality of actors, or the heterogeneity of life worlds, determines the various consequences or outcomes of external interventions. The external factors have to be translated to life worlds, which mediate the processes of translation. That is adopted to explain how and why the similar external factors produce the various outcomes.

3.2.3 Livelihoods

Rural changes and transformation always to some extent impose positive and negative effects on local livelihoods. External interventions merely propose the good effects of the planned schemes on the people's lives. From Long's point of view, people's livelihoods are much more than making a living or surviving (2001: 86-87). First, it is about identity and social relationships. People in a form of life construct identification from within social units, including households, communities,

cooperative units and social networks. Social identity and social relationships not only help to strive for those tangible needs, such as subsistence and economic consumptions, but also support those intangible needs, such as membership and fellowship, or social status. Secondly, it is about lifestyle. In this sense, rather than only earning a living, people might stick to certain ways of life or switch between different types over the course of their life. Thirdly, it is about the interdependency of needs, interests, and values of individuals or groups. Patterns of livelihood are affected by the degree of interdependency. This will be articulated with more details below while developing the notion of social networks.

3.2.4 Social Networks

Social networks have a great impact on life worlds and people's livelihoods. Long claims that the 'social networks are composed of sets of direct and indirect relationships and exchanges' (2001: 88). Simply put, different types of social networks meet different needs of social actors in a form of social life. In particular, social actors are able to take advantage of the social networks for their own ends. One type of social network that is characterized by the open-ended and the expansive social ties is usually used for the information and resources exchanges. In this case, the weak ties mainly made up of friendship and fellowship work particularly well to help job-hunters, such as the exchange the job information and making contacts with employees over the job-seeking process (Granovetter, 1973, 1986). Another type of social network is featured by the more close-knit social relationships or the strong ties of the social actors, and the higher level of the common interests, and the shared organizational goals. This is particularly effective for the social actors to strive for their ends in the form of collective action, such as the striking, demonstration and the social petitioning.

Those of types of social networks are not only often observed in formal organizational activities but also in the day-to-day social interaction and interlocking projects of self and other. In some cases, they contain relatively equal or even social ties, or reciprocal social relations. In other cases, they are based on unequal social ties in a way that networks are more centralized and hierarchical, such as in private companies and administrative official units. Actor-oriented perspectives particularly focus on the social networks and the networking across the overlapping boundaries of the day-to-day social practices and the relatively fixed institutional arrangements, and the conflicting process, negotiation and accommodation of varying types of principles embedded in the networks and the networking processes (Long, 2001: 89-90). Moreover, they put forward that social networks are able to transform as the forms of social life and interactions evolve over a period of time. Thus, the contents and the structure of the networks are able to re-fashioned, which re-characterizes the ways of the social interactions and relationships.

Furthermore, social actors cannot always realize the impact of their actions on forming the structure of social networks, always encountering unexpected and unknown consequences. This structure affects the way in which social actors interact with each other, exchanging information and mobilizing resources, or even transmitting disease over a period of time (Hedström, Sandell and Stern, 2000;

Bearman, Moody and Stovel, 2004; Granovetter, 1978). For example, the behaviour of residents in choosing which communities to live in inadvertently leads to neighbourhood segmentation, which arouses further self-segmentation for future tenants or buyers (Granovetter, 1978). But social actors are able to modify even alter this structure via reconnecting bulk of social links and bonds (Long 2001; Rolfe, 2009; Hedström and Bearman, 2009). This would be delineated further while considering the relation of agency and structure.

3.2.5 Structure versus Agency

3.2.5.1 Agency

Agency is another pivotal term in constructing the actor-oriented perspective. Broadly speaking, agency refers to the capabilities of social individuals, and state agents, enterprises, political parties and other social organizations to cope with various forms of social life or events, process social experiences, creating a series of strategies, and making decisions, and the like. Hindess (1986) and Long (2001) both emphasize the property of decision-making of social agents or actors. In comparison, they exclude social class, ethnicity and social hierarchy from the content of human agents as they do not entail decision-making properties.

Social individuals or actors are culturally cultivated and live under the specific historical contexts. Those social projects interpret and reinterpret social meanings, construct and reconstruct knowledge, thus constructing and reconstructing the reality of the life worlds. Moreover, they are capable of exerting effects of power or commands on the others, and of taking advantage of social relationships and networking according to their here-and-now projects and schemes (Long and Liu, 2009: 71-72; Landini, Long, Leeuwis and Murtagh, 2014: 129-135). It is therefore unsurprising for them to challenge the taken-for-granted knowledge, problematize situations, solve a series of problems, or mediating the external forces or structures.

3.2.5.2 Structure

In Kooiman's viewpoint 'structure' is also called the situated context that constrains, conditions and broadens intentional interactions. To be specific, Kooiman clarifies the structural dimensions 'are composed of such particular circumstances as institutions, general social constructs, patterns of communication, material and technological possibilities and societal power distributions' (2003: 15). Although Long stresses the significance of human agents on the social construction of reality and knowledge, he indeed does not overlook an enabling and constraining effect of social institutions and structure. Broadly speaking, external structural effects on human agents spring from the market forces at different levels, institutional arrangements, cultural repertoires, political systems, availability of materials, technology and regulation and resources, organizational arrangements and network configurations, and so on. Those structural forces limit the room of strategic actions of social actors and the degree of the social interaction and constrain the possibilities of social actors' choices.

3.2.5.3 Structure vis-à-vis Agency

As Giddens stresses that social structures routinize life of social agents; meanwhile, social agents participate in producing and reproducing social institutions (1986). Furthermore, although structures might go beyond agents' knowledgeability and capacity in time and space, human agents are still capable of challenging the pre-existing political and economic system, seeking the alternative ways of social arrangements, re-synthesizing cultural and social resources, and reconstituting the components of social institutions (Long, 2001: 24-32; Elder-Vass, 2012).

Interaction or mutual mediation of structure and agency is used to explain social changes, development and social continuity in general. Social constructionists do not embrace structuralism and cause-effect approaches. Likewise, they do not adopt reductionism in explaining social transformation as reductionism attributes simply aggregated individuals or groups to the social changes (Sayer, 1997, 2010; Elster, 2007; Elder-Vass, 2012). Instead, they stress the multiplicity of realities rather than their uniformity. In general, mutual mediation of structure and agents or social actors in life worlds is used to explicate social continuity and discontinuity, social coherence and incompatibility, and explain why similar social institutions and structural forces produce different social consequences.

At this point, RCT contradicts social constructionism and the actor-oriented perspectives on nature. First, self-interested ego and self-utility maximization are the fundamental assumptions underlying RCT. According to RCT, social actors are assumed to have fully rational behaviour, not only behaving rationally in accordance with the rules of game but also accurately predicting the outcomes of their ongoing actions from time to time (Bevir, 2009; March and Olsen, 2006; Hay, 2006). Secondly, institutions, in the view of RCT, are merely viewed as a constraining force imposed upon the actors, and as an equilibrium system that should always entail accommodation with the rules of game provided by players, otherwise it must be altered. It does not embrace the mutual interaction of actors or behaviours and institutions (Shepsle, 2006). Therefore, thirdly, the analytical methods of RCT often rely on statistical or mathematical modelling. Fourthly, RCT itself is not in a position to explain why a tragedy of commons cannot be avoided, to propose how the dilemma of free riding in the provision of public goods is addressed, as well as to propose in which ways higher authority enables self-interested egos to adhere to common rules and engage social exchanges (Bevir, 2010). In short, RCT exploits rigorous cause-effect logic, simplifies social dynamics and interaction, and is founded on the ontological assumption of rationality maximization of social actors (Long, 2001).

Some more concepts coined by Long and other scholars make this explanation mode more approachable and analytical rather than be abstract in rural developmental studies.

3.2.6 Quasi-Structure: Social Field, Domain and Arena

In anthropological and ethnographic studies, unlike lab studies in the natural sciences, research boundaries are not delimited. 'Social field' is coined to emphasize

the much wider areas social actors make their lives and how their actions are shaped in the open spaces. Social fields might have a physical boundary but mostly go beyond physical limits. It is composed of visible matters, like materials, natural resources, production, demography, political parties, administrative institutions, markets, infrastructure, transport, ethnic communities, and ritual ceremonies, and those invisible matters, like social relationships, social rules and norms, institutional constraints, information flow, and networking processing. The defining features of social fields depend on the focus of research and analysis (Long, 2001: 92).

Again, this notion of the social field entails the social constructionist's stance. It is unlike Bourdieu's notion of social field or habitus in which social actors are more likely to be organized according to game rules, norms and regularities embedded into social positions of a field (1990). Long's notion of social field embraces composition and decomposition of the processes of social construction, stressing the contestation of social values, rules and regularities. In short, although a social field often exerts an enabling and inhibiting effect on the social actors, the latter are capable of mediating the structural forces of the former (Long, 2001: 92-93).

Furthermore, Long exploits other concepts of social domain and social arena to narrow down the boundaries of research in open spaces and refines the delimitation of social interaction, regularities and ordering. 'Social domains' focus on how particular rules and norms function and operate within a particular type of social unit or life, such as family, community, production, consumption, market and state. In other words, social actors' values and interests, and that mutual conflicts have to be associated with a particular social domain that not only influences actors' choices but also creates room for strategic actions. Again, from the social constructionists' point of view, those social domains are not culturally or institutionally pre-existing, rather being 'transformed through shared experience and struggle which take place between actors of various sorts' (Long, 2001: 94).

'Social arenas' focus on more specific struggles of varying values, and interests in specific social situations or locations. They might refer to face-to-face confrontations, confined physical locations, demarcated social situations, or localized settings. But they are also stretched out to extensive social networks and affected by other arenas and external institutional arrangements. In social arenas, conflicting social processes in and between social domains are commonly observed. Thus, it is very useful to understand why different value interpretations of actors occur, why actors' interests are incompatible with each other, as well as why disagreements or disputes of various actors take place (Long, 2001: 95-96). Together with the notion of social domain, social arenas use an analytical toolkit to understand situated decisions, discrepancies of actors' values and interests, and maneuvering room for reinterpreting social values and the attached meanings, and the corresponding strategic actions over the process of intervention, social engineering and transformation. Importantly, it is acknowledged that social actors have to be influenced by enabling and inhibiting forces of social fields, domains or arenas.

3.2.7 Emerging Structures

Social constructionists go much further beyond interaction of agency and structure or agency and quasi-structure. As mentioned above, they assume that the construction of social reality is the product of everyday conversation and interaction. Moreover, they put forward that structure is the outcome of human agents' intentional and unintentional social interaction and practices and the emerging structures carry the driving forces to enable, condition or constrain agents' capabilities, power construction and knowledgeability of everyday practices (Long, 2001: 97-101). Thus, understanding structure should be linked to an analysis of how human agents or social actors construct social reality and knowledge, cope with intentional and unintentional social consequences and conjure up micro foundation of structural or institutional frameworks. Emergence and decomposition of structure are also the product of ongoing day-to-day interpersonal interaction in the life world. It follows that social constructionists have strong tendencies to adopt the notion of emerging properties of structure with enabling and inhibiting forces on human agents, and often go beyond human agents' intentions.

4. Interface Analysis

4.1 Social Interface

'Social interface' is regarded as an analytical unit from within actor-oriented perspectives. The confined boundaries and compositions of social interaction are relatively easier to be recognized in a social interface than in a life world, social field, social domains or social arena. First, it points directly to face-to-face confrontation, negotiation, accommodation, coordination and maneuvering when different types of life words, social domains and social arenas interlock. Moreover, it also contains differences of social values, interests and interpretations, social relationships, rationality and modes of power over confrontation, negotiation, accommodation and maneuvering (Long, 2001: 105-116). To be specific, social interface entails conflicting or contesting relations between varying actors, such as intervening parties and local actors or policy recipients, or between researchers and other stakeholders. Importantly, social actors in social interfaces are acknowledged, understood within social fields, domains or arenas.

What is more, social interface particularly focuses on varying types of social relationships, such as official/worker, manager/worker, official/farmer, patron/client, landlord/tenant, over a period of time. Furthermore, it elucidates how different actors negotiate problem-solving out of interaction of conflicting values and interests, amongst others, by taking advantage of their intermediate roles or ambivalent positions in an organization, factory, enterprise, community and administrative-political institution. Last but not least, it focuses on differences of worldviews and cultural representations and how social actors culturally differently define and interpret their own cultural meanings and symbols, the nature of ideological legitimacy, and the challenging or opposing views.

4.2 Analysis of Interface

Accordingly, analysis of interface helps us to analyse the following aspects (Long, 2001: 110-116):

Processes of Knowledge Construction and Actor's Knowledgeability

When social actors encounter a social interface situation, knowledge construction is spread throughout the social interaction, negotiating conflicts and the representation of the cultural repertoires and the worldviews of life worlds. For example, it is noted that layers and experts construct knowledge in different ways in intervening processes so that there is always confrontation between each others' knowledge construction. Social actors are capable of distinguishing different worldviews of life worlds, reconstructing knowledge and reality to achieve their goals, and a degree of negotiation, coordination or consent.

Power Relations

In association with the assumptions of social constructionism, power is produced through meaning struggles, negotiation over social relationships and day-to-day interaction. Social actors take advantage of different distributions of social resources, authority, social status and reputations, and the degree of control to affect other actors' actions. These power relations not only come from the top-down commands but also the bottom-up creation of maneuvering actions.

Discursive Practices or Language Use

They are the product of social relationships and day-to-day interplay. Unequal social relationships or power relations devise the way in which the discourses are utilized. Given that the multiplicity of reality, dominance of discourses that prioritize certain perceptions and social traits belonging to individuals, groups and societies are bound to be challenged by the subordinated or marginalized discourses. This process of contradiction or blending of varying discourses would be detailed within the interface situations.

These three aspects cannot really be separated from each other and should be captured in the interface analysis as a whole.

5. Why are Actor-Oriented Perspectives and Interface Analysis Appropriate for this Research?

The fieldwork research was conducted in the areas with characteristics of Hakka culture. First, it is assumed that different people with different cultural backgrounds, namely the varying life worlds, are more likely to interpret external intervention, policy and worldviews in their own ways. In general, Hakka rural society, where the people are likely to have shared cultural identities, organize social relationships and networks in their own ways, experience specific social customs, as well as speak the same language, which should be perceived as a life world. In some aspects, the Hakka people indeed have their own form of social life. The actor-oriented perspectives help us understand the reality and knowledge construction of this life world.

As explained in the introduction, rural China has been transformed in many aspects and the diversity of the rural governance forms is greatly pronounced. The villages selected for this study are experiencing massive rural transformation, such as rural urbanisation and modernization. It is inevitable for the local people to engage in the continuity and the discontinuity of the traditions and cultures. Compared to essentialism and lawful-like determinism in social sciences, such as RCT, modernization theory and the political economy of Marxism, actor-oriented perspectives are more appropriate to uncovering the social actors' changing views and values, construction and reconstruction of knowledge and reality, utilization of social relationships, mobilization of social resources and exercise of power and linguistic skills to solve the problematic situations. Moreover, interface analysis is in a position to reveal the conflicting processes of varying interests, values and beliefs, power relations, varying forms of social life and the stocks of local knowledge over the rural governance.

6. A Critical Review of the Existing Studies

6.1 Rural Political Reforms: Designated Rural Democratization

By employing electoral democracy at the village level, these elected village cadres are designed to be more responsible and accountable to their electorates to manage village-wide affairs, to have less opportunities to engage corruption, power abuses and malfeasance, as well as to be motivated to place more attention on the public good. Likewise, premised upon the rationale of deliberative democracy, ordinary villagers have more chances to supervise the governing organs and be involved in public decision-making, as well as having more choices to raise demands.

Importantly, this designated democratization at village levels has become a legal framework. The officially enacted law, titled Organic Law of Villagers' Committee in 1998, followed by the amendments of 2010, regulates the objectives and contents of village governance and articulates how to facilitate village elections and participatory assemblies. As mentioned, the village elections contain a set of essential steps, ranging from establishment of makeshift committee of election (*xuan ju wei yuan hui*), to nomination (*timing*), from preliminary elections (*chu xuan*), public campaigning to a finalized list of candidates (*zui zhong hou xuan ren*), from methods to voting, ballot collection, to ballot counting. Moreover, villagers' committees are stipulated as needing to coordinate with village party branches; the Villager Representative Assembly is normally frequently held when Villager Assembly cannot be practically convened often; Villager Assembly is described as a supreme power with village party branches as a supplementary core leadership in decision-making; upper-level governments are allowed to send advice as guidelines but not as leadership instruction to village governance.

More importantly, ordinary villagers' participation in not only village elections but also decision-making process and management of village affairs over the period of post-election is an indispensable part of village governance. He and Wang (2007) claim that village-level democratic reforms should exercise both electoral politics and deliberative politics (He, 2007). Firstly, within a liberal deliberative mechanism villagers should be regarded as having a right to engage with public communication,

consultation and discussion. Secondly, from Rosenberg's (2006) perspective, during the process of public deliberation, not only should participants realize the limitation of their own knowledge, skills and cognition, but also learn how to empower themselves in political participation and consultation. Also, public participants would bring their demands, advice and recommendations into public decision-making and consultation and public debates. By doing so, the general public is able to overcome the irrationality of the general public itself, which is more likely to produce popular policies, regulations and lawful documents. In this light, village assemblies are a vital means by which villagers exercise deliberative right to bring about good outcomes via their participation. It was partly proven by Sun (2008) that the more often a villager assembly has been convened, the better performance the village cadres have in managing village affairs.

The legal rationales of village participatory bodies would be summarised as seen in the table below.

Table 1 Summary of the Legal Framework for Villager Participatory Assemblies

Participatory Organizations	Memberships	Responsibilities and Rights (Liberal Democratic Rights and Citizenship)
Villager Assembly	Eligibility: over 18-years-old Chinese citizens with residential registrations in the villages	• highest decision-making body for vital village-wide issues; • to supervise wrongdoings of village self-government and recall the corrupt village cadres; • to cooperate and coordinate with villagers' committees and village party branches; • the villagers have right to self-convene Villager Assembly in need
Villager Representative Assembly	The villager representatives are elected from the 'village groups' on the basis of the principle of 'one household, one vote'; the numbers of the representatives vary with the population sizes of the villages. In general, that would not be more than three representatives.	• a proxy body when the Villager Assembly cannot be practically convened often; • responsibilities and democratic right held as similar to Villager Assembly

Firstly, village elections have been found to have a positive impact on village governance. Wang and Yao's survey, undertaken in seven provinces³, shows the way candidates are nominated is significantly indicative of the level of competition arising out of the village elections. They categorize the method of nomination into four types: popular nomination, nomination by government, nomination by village representatives and combined nomination (2007: 1643). They find that the type of nomination has a positive effect on the expenditure of public and administrative funds. The reason for this consequence is popular and village representatives' nomination is much more likely to elicit competitive elections in comparison with local government-controlled nominations. Hence, the elected village cadres throughout this competitive election are prone to reduce administrative funds, like

³ Guangdong, Hunan, Zhejiang, Henan, Sichuan, Gansu, Shanxi and Jilin

office maintenance, but enhance public investment, like construction of local roads and village schools, irrigation facility and health care.

A study of six provinces⁴ by Luo, Zhang, Huang and Rozelle presents similar findings to Wang and Yao. They compared a group of appointed village heads and a group of directly elected village heads to find out the impact of direct elections on the provisions of public goods. Compared to those appointed village heads, the percentage of directly elected heads in six provinces is 69%, 76%, 89%, 80%, 91%, and 69% respectively (2007: 592), reflecting a well-implemented direct election. In these areas, direct elections contribute to improvement in public investment, especially village-funded projects, including road building, irrigation and schools. Yet tax-for-fee reform has given rise to reduction of village revenues in turn to constrain the village cadres' incentives to mobilize public investment of public projects in their own right. Therefore, they suggest that when the direct elections bring more public investment to public project construction this political reform is being meaningfully promoted, deeply and widely.

Kang, Cai and Sun's national survey of 400 villages take stabilized salaries as the main incentive for the village cadres to serve the state and the community in the provision of public goods. They have categorized the village cadres as state task-oriented, community affairs-oriented and family income-oriented (2009: 66). The criterion in determining the above-mentioned categories is time allocation of the village cadres to the state-, community- and family-based tasks. In their design of statistical testing, there were three independent variables: 1) economic incentive measured by state tasks-oriented cadres and community-oriented cadres; 2) formal institutions measured by dummy variables of elected village representatives and one issue, one decision; 3) informal constraints measured by dummy variables of religious activity, clan, and group of largest surname. The expenditure of public goods at the village level is designed as the dependent variable. What is more, characteristics of villages, like population, income per capita and revenue capita and regions are regarded as the control variables.

By exploiting analysis of Tobit Regressions, it is discovered that village cadres who have relatively higher payment from the state payroll are more likely to allocate more resources to the delivery of public goods. Informal institutions, specifically clan members with relatively more groups of the largest surname, are inclined to provide more local public goods than those from more religiously diversified villages. In addition, the variable of the elected village representatives helps better provide public goods. Thereby, they argue that village democracy helps enhance public goods provisioning at village levels and the state capacity plays a pivotal role in enabling the village cadres to serve as state agents by a means of making their job payment stable.

As can be seen, popular and village representatives' nomination and direct election of village leaders and village representatives are regarded as a significant factor depicting the level of competitive elections and village democracy. However,

⁴ Jiansu, Gansu, Sichuan, Shanxi, Jilin and Hebei

democratic and competitive village elections should contain many more elements than the way in which the village leaders and the village representatives are nominated. More importantly, village governance does not just contain the provisions of public goods. Furthermore, such quantitative research is not an ideal instrument for focusing more on social processes, day-to-day interaction and the activities of human agency over the village governance.

Hu (2008) conducted an anthropological fieldwork study in a village of North China over a period of time which detailed dynamic processes of village elections. His study demonstrated that rivalries between two families or clans could drive village democratization in a different direction. Interestingly, public transparency in light of the procedural village elections was observed. Sending township-appointed cadres to guide and monitor the implementation of village election doubly ensured there was no violation of essential lawful procedures. It was commonly seen that those nominated candidates deliberately pulled the votes from their relatives and fellow members. The final competition ended up with a rivalry between two cliques of villagers who actually controlled village office in a rotated manner in the past years. In this light, they were conceived by the villagers as a clique or faction (*bang pai*) and the village election was considered, at best a vessel for factional maneuvering. Implementation of village elections, specifically the procedural election, might not ensure that the elected village cadres represent the interest of the village.

Besides that, a clash between villagers' committees and village party branches, specifically between the village chairperson and the village party secretaries, tends to take place after village elections (Sun, Warner, Yang and Liu, 2013). Guo and Bernstein's (2004) case study in Zhongshan city, Guangdong revealed the reasons why the village party branches always encounter conflicting relationships with the villagers' committees in the aspect of village power sharing. They argue it is because the village party branches are often required to fulfil assignment tasks handed by the township party and government. It is unsurprising that township party committees always prefer a closer relationship with the village party branches rather than the villagers' committees (Zheng, c2007, c2014).

Among other things, instead of handing over authority to village chairpersons, the village party leaders tend to withhold transfer of village power, especially in managing collective economics and village finances. Consequently, there was a daunting question around the two committees on which are the true village leaders, leading to a response from the upper-level government on this matter. As a result, top leaders in Zhongshan city government replied that the village secretaries but not the village chairpersons should still have genuine village power.

In responding to this conflict of interest, central government issued a circular⁵ to simply merge the top leadership of the two organizations (Manion, 2009). In particular, the village secretaries consecutively hold the post of village head and the villagers' committees have overlapping personnel with village party branches. Concurrent office holding (*yi jian tiao*) was perceived by the local cadres as a

⁵ 2002 Central Committee and State Council Circular

successful way to redress power struggles and jurisdictional conflicts, as well as to eradicate unnecessary duplication of personnel of the two organs. This merging of the two organizations prevailed in Guangdong and other provinces since 2000 (Levy, 2003; Chen, 2007; Björn, 2001; Li, 2002; Pastor and Tan, 2000). From Guo and Bernstein's perspective, the central government is reluctant to deepen political reform, like promotion of constitutional reform, to fundamentally address power struggle and transformation in rural governance, even the local governance. Thus, it is not surprising that scholarship has a deep doubt on how far village democratization can go.

In addition to village elections and participatory assemblies, there are more approaches to improving the quality of village governance introduced and being implemented. Levy (2003, 2007) provided some cases in Guangdong in which these approaches, such as establishment of institutions of transparency (*tou ming*) and making village affairs public (*zheng wu gong kai*), were utilized (2003: 46). To be specific, an elected financial supervision team (*li cai xiao zu*) and transparency supervision team (*gong wu jian du xiao zu*) were founded as a tool to effect democratic supervision and management. One of main purposes in doing so was to combat village-level corruption.

However, Levy put forward a number of questions on the effect of democratic supervision, despite measures undertaken which are designed to widen and deepen the rural governance movement and to fight corruption. Firstly, recent officially enacted regulations could not accurately define and measure the level of village corruption. Secondly, local cadres were not willing to tell Levy about the reality of village corruption, causing the information collected to be hard to trust. Thirdly, village affairs are far from being fully publicized, especially village-level finances. Fourthly, it is too difficult to tell to what extent villagers have contributed to village decision-making because most of the time villagers just received the already-made decisions either from the village government or a higher level. Fifth, the fact that villagers face huge obstacles to recall corrupt village cadres has impeded the progresses of the anti-corruption movement.

As can be seen, a positive effect of rural democratization on village governance exists but has unquestionable limitation. O'Brien and Han place an emphasis on the importance of the exercise of power in parallel with access to power, advocating principles of democratic governance rather than of electoral democracy. They agree that village elections have achieved a lot with regard to facilitation of election procedures and improvement of awareness of the liberal democratic rights of the villagers in evaluating a number of key studies home and abroad. However, village-level democratization should not be confined to access to power through village elections. Democratization should contain more content of the rule of law, including separation of powers, protection of minorities and protection of civil liberties, which would profoundly alter the way power is exercised (O'Brien and Han, 2009: 361). Leadership instruction from the township government, dominating control of village party branches over village leadership, and social forces of lineage institutions and local gangsters are three major obstacles that refrain village-level power exercise from adherence to these democratic principles. Likewise, Pastor and Tan (2000)

pointed out that liberal rights, independence of villagers' committees and transparency in public life should be put into effect in parallel to electoral democracy. There is no wonder that direct elections of township, even county government are put forward to prompt large-scale local democratization (Schubert, 2009; Li, 2002).

Those studies have provided empirical findings on the establishment of villagers' committees, especially the relationship between rural governance and rural democratization. However, there is weakness in these research arguments from the actor-oriented perspective. First, Hu's case study focuses on the processes of election only and does not adequately show ordinary voices. Moreover, Hu seemed to not realize how structural forces affect the social actors as he did not put much emphasis on the enabling and inhabiting drive of social structures (2008). Likewise, Guo and Bernstein do not explain fully why the clash of the power holders exists since they attribute the struggles for power transitions to the village cadres' individual vested interests and the township governmental control while neglecting the interaction of the social agents and structures (2004). Levy's study does not give too much space to the villagers' perspectives on the villages' democratic practices (2003, 2007). The other scholars take the discourse of liberal democracy for granted so as to evaluate how far the rural democratization has reached. From the social constructionists' point of view or from actor-oriented perspectives, the knowledge of the social actors, including the researchers themselves, is contextually and concurrently constructed; the taken-for-granted knowledge should be challenged and be able to be reconstructed. Therefore, it is unwise to stick to the rationale of liberal democracy to interpret and evaluate Chinese rural governance. The social actors, especially villagers and village leaders or cadres, their interpretations and knowledge construction of the democratic practices, are better to be displayed via the social interaction and processes.

6.2 External Policy Implementation and Rural Governance

As mentioned previously, in addition to village elections and public goods provision, rural governance includes policy implementation and fulfilment of assigned tasks. The section that follows will focus on how the grassroots governments, including the village and the township governments, enforce varying types of policy and assignment tasks in the previous studies. This might also draw a picture of struggles between the grassroots cadres and the villagers and the interaction of state-society. Are the main responsibilities of village offices to fulfil the above-appointed tasks rather than communal and family affairs? Following the principles of the electoral democracy, the elected village cadres should represent the interests of the vast majority of the villagers and make actions to protect their interest in general. Particularly speaking, on one side, when policy and assignment tasks are beneficial to villages and villagers alike, village cadres are expected to fulfil them in a thorough and efficient manner. On the other side, when policy and assignment tasks have been able to bring potential harm to the rural publics, village cadres are in a position to negotiate higher-level officials to seek for better solutions to on-going struggles. From a principle-agent perspective, simply put, it is arguable whether village electorate or upper-level government are to be principle in delegating village cadres to enforce a variety of policy and assigned tasks (Björn, 2001).

However, instead of being responsible for the village electorate, within the party-state hierarchical control, village offices tend to be responsible and accountable for the township, and to a lesser extent, the county level government. 'One-level-down' administrative reform in China enables subordinating cadres to be responsible to their closest supervising leaders. Apparently, the township party government is the immediate leader of village offices, especially the village party branches, and it always sends assignment tasks down to village offices directly. Moreover, local cadre rotation systems, when combined with one-level-down reform, allows for local cadres to ignore public demands but please their direct leaders in order to create political advancement and career promotion. In this regard, for example, local leaders left a huge debt for the next ruling government's term, resulting from excessive expenditure on so-called image-building projects (*xing xiang gong cheng*) (O'Brien and Li, 1999; Wang and Wang, 2009; Zheng, c2014).

More importantly, the performance of village cadres in the fulfilment of assigned tasks has to be evaluated through a form of assessment on which their reward-winning and penalty are based, namely the cadre responsibility system (*guan bu ze ren guan li zhi*). The main objectivities of the cadre responsibility system are to quantify and standardize the grassroots cadres' performances. In this system, evaluation of village cadres' performance, such as in enforcing policy and tasks, would be broken down into a number of categories that are allotted different scales of scores for assessment. In general, this target setting is divided into hard targets (*ying zhi biao*), such as economic growth having more weighs in the overall assessment, and soft targets (*ruan zhi biao*), such as public education about rule of law and village democracy having less importance. Accumulation of scores allotted to each category is a significant criterion for rewarding or punishing village cadres. Some categories like the target of birth control policy are treated as a veto vote (*yi piao fou jue*). Yet the cadres' performance in some activities, such as enforcement of village-level democracy, are difficult to quantify (O'Brien and Li, 1999; Heberer and Trappel, 2013; Wang and Wang, 2009).

This incentive mechanism of performance evaluation somehow entails village cadres to select policy and tasks to be fulfilled in their own right. It is notable that popular policies, like fee limits, implementation of the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees and the Administration Litigation Law, combating corruption and promotion of rule of law, fall within the category of what might be called unquantifiable policies. On the contrary, the target setting for the implementation of unpopular policies, like one-child policy, revenue collection and funeral reform, is relatively easy to quantify. Therefore, in order to gain more rewards, village cadres enthusiastically execute unpopular policies rather than popular policies (O'Brien and Li, 1999). This also allows village cadres to be consequentialists and flexible over the course of the implementation of policy and assigned tasks, and to deliberately ask for flexibility from their supervising leaders against evaluation of performance in soft targeting in particular (Wang and Wang, 2009). As a consequence, subordinate cadres tend to cultivate personal ties with their supervising leaders outside the local formal bureaucracy in response to the superior officials' subjective appraisal of their performance (Zhou, 2010: 66-71).

Accordingly, village cadres have to be affected within this cadre responsibility system by a means of incentives to gain political advancement and material interests. In fact, when coupled with this system, upper-level officials often exploit villagers' committees as a subordinating body to enforce top-down policy and locally-set assignments. Björn's (2001) and Kennedy's (2007) studies are a case in point. Björn documented the implementation of the one-child policy and projects for local economic growth in a county in the north of China. Top-down control networking among the township cadres, the appointed party secretaries, the village heads and the leaders of Village Women Federation played a vital role in implementing this national policy. One of the top township leaders would be allocated to supervise the implementation of family birth-control policy and some township cadres would be assigned to take charge of an individual village. Village offices had to receive this task from the township leadership and be monitored by the township appointed cadres. In turn, the village cadres assigned the task to the secretaries of the Village Women Federation who subsequently mobilized the leaders of village groups to monitor women of child-bearing age and report the records of pregnant women and the cases of violation of policy regulation to the village office. Village office would then report to the township government. In the meanwhile, women of child-bearing age were required to attend inspection at township stations on a quarterly basis.

Local economic development provides another example. The target of local economic development was often set by local governments and guided by the national agenda on how to develop local economies. In the county being studied by Björn, farmers were persuaded by the local government to grow cotton at the cost of reducing the acreage of grain planting because the state ascertained that cotton planting would increase farmers' income. In order to achieve this, technicians were sent to train the farmers; again, women were mobilized by the secretaries of the Village Women Federation to sow cotton. The villagers had no choice to choose their own production and economic activities. Instead, they had to meet the quotas dictated from above. The village cadres acted as state agents to enforce the quotas and township superiors always had final say over the village-level leadership.

Given that information asymmetry and the rise of compliance alongside the dynamic of principle and agent, village cadres may not always be loyal to their superiors and follow top-down instructions. For instance, birth control statistics were fabricated and false reports raised to the township government so as to meet pre-set targets. In fact, both village cadres and township- and county-level officials recognize the difficulties of enforcing the one-child policy and also realized that statistics are manipulated. From Björn's perspective, the village cadres would only falsify figures for the higher-level officials if they have no other choice. On the other hand, village cadres would like to accomplish their tasks to show their loyalty to the higher-level officialdom. In doing so, the higher officials would be pleased to see the grassroots cadres' loyalty to the party government instruction, despite the fact that the figures were not real.

Kennedy (2007) showed a similar logic behind top-down policy enforcement. He compared the implementation of tax-for-fee reform and village self-government reform by using survey data. By employing both top-down and bottom-up

approaches, he found that from either the villagers or village cadres' point of view tax-for-fee reform was much more successfully implemented than the village self-government. He revealed that this was because the tax-for-fee reform had been able to bring about social good in the short run, resulting in political achievement of the local government. However, village self-government required a long-term experiment to exert its positive effect on society and politics. As a consequence, local governments had prioritised the tax-for-fee reform and put more effort into its implementation.

Cai (2003) revealed that village cadres' motivation in agricultural land takings and conversion was also driven by interdependence of villagers' committees and upper-level government. This was largely due to upper-level government needing the village cadres' assistance in land seizures. In the meantime, when village cadres faced villagers' resistance and the risk of dismissal from village offices, the upper-level officialdom always stood up to protect their *de facto* corruption and ensure they remained in their position. Unsurprisingly, village cadres were inclined to serve for the upper-level officialdom and more often than not searched for personal gain.

In many cases, village cadres have to confront resistance from the villagers in a rural society over the processes of enforcement of policy and assigned tasks. Sometimes fellow villagers and clan members, rather than the village constituencies, are able to generate a resisting force to the grassroots cadres, especially when policy and task implementation collide with their beliefs and values and infringe on their interests. In Peng's study (2010), it is revealed how kinship norms and solidarity conflict with the formal law of state-party in the implementation of Birth Control Policy by using the statistical modelling of negative binomial regression. It is suggested that the villages featuring strong kinship networks have higher birth rates.⁶

Sun and Guo's (2000) fieldwork-based study on a township in North China articulated how the grassroots cadres, especially village cadres, exploited hard and soft measures to fulfil the grains levies set by the state. Those soft measures merely refer to *mianzi* (face value), *renqing* (interpersonal sentiment) and *ethics* strategies throughout 'contextual construction setting' (*qing jing she zhi*). The reason for the village cadres to employ soft authority is because the grassroots cadres are an integral part of rural social networks and are identified with local knowledge. If they often utilized hard measures to force villagers to comply they would be condemned by their fellow villagers as immoral, unreasonable and unethical. Moreover, the grassroots cadres' interpersonal and informal social bonds are normally attached to the local formal bureaucracy. Interestingly, village cadres claim that the reason why they are willing to serve their superiors in helping them fulfil the above-appointed levies is that they would like to give their big brothers respect and face (*mianzi*). Accordingly, it is a way in which formal state power is exercised through the exertion of informal authority imposed upon a close-knit rural community.

Additionally, Long and Liu's (2009) study showed that village cadres' social relationships and networks do matter in policy implementation. In order to ensure

⁶ The kinship networks are measured by the 'proportion of household that belong to the largest lineage group in the whole village', 'the kinship homogeneity index' and 'the presence of ancestral halls' (2010: 793-94).

the win-win situation in dealing with the relationship between the local inhabitants' survival, the environmental and rare species protection, the Village Forestry-Management Project requires multi-stakeholders' coordination. Among others, the villagers' committee leaders' and other committee members' extensive social contacts and networks are able to enable more activists to join Village Forest-Management Committees (VFMCs) and participate in this project.

Political and social settings enable and constrain the activities of village cadres in implementing policy and various tasks at the same time. As noted above, village constituencies cannot effectively delegate village cadres to serve them and villagers cannot participate in the determination of policy content and target assignments in general. Conversely, the local party state often plays an arbitrary role in making policy and assignments. The grassroots cadres' main responsibilities are needed to fulfil these above-appointed policy and tasks. Interestingly, village cadres had differing reactions to policy implementation and the fulfilment of tasks. By and large, they act as either the state agents within the system of cadre evaluation or as seekers of personal gain at the expense of the villages. Moreover, village cadres are able to change the way that the state's authority is exerted in a rural society and provide flexibility, and take advantage of their own social contacts and networks in enforcement.

The preceding review provides several significant considerations for preparation for the fieldwork to be conducted. Firstly, from the perspective of democratic governance, village democracy is still far from being facilitated in a widely and deeply and deprivation of ordinary villagers from village affairs management and collective decision-making challenges the implications of the designated village governance. Second, presumably, the Cadre Responsibility System, local relationships and networks, and powerful upper-level instructions affect village cadres' capacities in creating varying strategies to tackle various forms of assignments. Third, the social relationships and networking of the rural community might need to be taken into account in policy implementation; village cadres or leaders are able to alter the way in which the power is exercised.

To some extent, those studies have proved how human agents mediate policy implementation. However, there are some weak or missing points. First, the village cadres' motives for their actions are simplified into instrumental incentives measured quantitatively over the processes of the policy implementation. Second, the principle-agent perspective might not be able to fully explain more dynamic and complicated social interactions, entailing more complex social relationships and networks. Third, the interactive processes of policy implementation in some cases are uncovered. Lastly, overall speaking, the heterogeneity of the outcomes of policy implementation are vaguely explicated or even overlooked.

6.3 Economic Development, Rise of Village-Level Economic and Political Elites and Power Redistribution

The literature often asks the following two questions: 1) whether economic development is able to produce greater demands of democracy and democratization,

and 2) whether the development of democracy is able in turn to ensure long-term economic growth (Zweigh and Chuang, 2007; Sundaram and Chowdhury, 2012; Cheema, 2005). Interestingly, one of the reasons why village elections were recently introduced to Guangdong Province was that the Guangdong provincial government was uncertain whether the introduction of village democracy would impede the local economic development (Levy, 2003, 2007). Local economic conditions could affect the way in which village affairs are governed. For example, there are many village-owned companies and factories in the Pearl River Delta separating leadership of villagers' committees from leadership of those enterprises and factories. In addition, the level of political participation of villagers varies with the level of the economic development.

In Hu's (2005, 2006) investigation, he assumes that both villagers and election candidates are rational actors who always calculate cost and benefits of participation in the village elections. For example, when villagers realize that the reward exceeds the cost of involvement in village elections, they are more inclined to take part in the election events; when the candidates perceive that the benefit of admitting a post of the village office outweighs the cost in engaging in the village campaign, they would like to participate in the competition to admit a place in village office. Therefore, within economically developed areas, village cadres and villagers presumably have more opportunities to obtain more perceived benefits than losses when participating in village elections. Based on the survey data collected in Shouning County and Xiamen city in Fujian province, Hu attempted to analyse the association between the level of economic development and the level of implementation of village elections. In order to remedy the limitations caused by the simplistic measurements of election procedures in previous studies (Shi, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Oi and Rozelle, 2000), Hu used more complex items to operationalize village elections (15 items), villager participation (15 items) and election competitiveness (9 items). The level of economic development measured by annual per capita village revenue and respondents' rating of living standards was regarded as the independent variable. Meanwhile, both villagers' participation and election competitiveness were treated as intermediate variables and the enforcement of village elections was designed as a dependent variable. He revealed that a higher rating for relative living standard has a positive effect on both village participation and implementation of village elections. Moreover, the more collective revenue that villages have, the more competitive the village elections would be. This is due to the presumption that village cadres have higher salaries and more opportunities to run their own enterprises as well as retain control of or distributive power over resources in economically better off areas once they were elected. As a consequence, the high level of competitiveness between the candidates and the active village participation are at work as an intermediate mechanism to contribute to well-performed implementation of the village elections. Hu concludes that the implementation of village elections would be run better in the more economically developed districts.

Zweigh and Chuang (2007) made efforts to identify the relationship between village elections, villagers' democratic perception and local economic development on the basis of survey in 120 villages in Anhui and Heilongjiang provinces. One of the core

goals was to examine whether villagers demand greater democracy as they become richer and richer. The researchers divided villagers into five income groups (lower, lower-middle, middle, upper-middle and upper) by asking how the villagers rated their income level relative to their villages (Zweigh and Chuang, 2007: 34). Villagers who have upper, upper-middle and lower income perceive themselves as non-democratic in contrast to the villagers who have lower-middle and middle income. Moreover, villagers in richer villages, when compared with those in poorer and middle-income villages, are more likely to agree on such a statement, that it is not necessary to promote greater democracy so long as stable economic development would be maintained. Likewise, village cadres from richer villages are more likely to categorize themselves as not democratic, while village cadres from poorer and medium-level income villages are more likely to regard themselves as very democratic. Thus, the research concludes that economic growth does not necessarily associate with democratic perception.

Furthermore, Zweigh and Chuang looked at the perception of local rising entrepreneurs on village democracy and the expectation of villagers on entrepreneurs to be village leaders. Interestingly, the local entrepreneurs were likely to support good rural management and political stability but not necessarily greater democracy. By contrast, very few villagers (7%) would like to select the entrepreneurs as the village leaders as most of the villagers believed that self-perpetuation between political elites and economic elites to be a threat to village democracy. From the viewpoint of the village directors and the village secretaries, especially the one-office holding village heads, they are likely to agree that democracy is not necessarily promoted when good economic development can be maintained and that they tend to believe that 'rich people should have more say in public affairs than poorer people' (Zweigh and Chuang, 2007: 41).

Local economic development not only affects village cadres and villagers' perception of and attitude towards democracy, but also the power structure of village leadership. There are more and more local entrepreneurs joining village governance especially in affluent coastal regions (Levy, 2003, 2007; Chen, 2007). The rise of local entrepreneurs or local businessmen is associated with local economic de-collectivization, growth of socialist market economy and more opportunities for non-agricultural jobs and domestic migration (Oi, 1999). The incentive for local entrepreneurs to take a position in the village office is related to payoffs which stem from distributive and control power of collective resources, more chances to gain personal interest and from improvement of official treatment.

The key question in Oi and Rozelle's (2000) research lies in what determines which body - village assemblies, village representative assemblies, villagers' committees and village party branches - has decision-making power and how this power is exercised in administering village affairs. The answer to this question was based upon two vital economic variables, including the level of village industrialization and the relationship between the village economy and the external world. The research materials were made up of open-ended interviews in their extensive fieldwork and a nationwide survey dataset. Unlike the village cadres in the era of collectivization, the village cadres during the era of de-collectivization have to face a fiscal crisis as

collective village revenues have dropped dramatically. This is especially the case since local financial reform has begun to require villages to sustain finances in their own right without the transfer of top-down funds (Chen, 2008; Chen, 2007). The individual farmer household has substituted the production team as a unit of production and consumption in the backdrop of the household responsibility system and the emerging countryside economy market. In this light, such groups of village leaders who are able to provide social and economic resources for the villagers tend to retain village power. Moreover, with the advent of the greater opening-up of the labour market economy, villagers have diversified their sources of income. As a consequence, the importance of agricultural production to improvements of villagers' livelihoods has declined rapidly. Unsurprisingly, villagers mostly rely on wage-earning jobs outside the village boundaries. These above-mentioned economic contexts indeed have an effect on village politics.

Oi and Rozelle adopted a method to design two axes to measure these economic contexts, agricultural-industrial and external-internal. Within these two axes a particular type of village would be specified. Based on that, they forward two hypotheses: first, that the stronger economic bonds a village has with the outside world, the lower would be their interest in politics, specifically their interest in village elections and village assemblies; second, the more a village economy depends on its internal resources such as being agriculture- or industry-dependent type of villages, the more villagers would be interested in village politics and the villagers' committees would be more likely to retain village power. By employing both statistical confidence intervals and multivariate regression, the results conformed to the two hypotheses. Among others, in the villages that are specified as a pattern of open economy villages, the villagers are less interested in political participation. But the local entrepreneurs have stronger interest in political participation especially village elections as many of them are not the party members and they expect to have political power via party affiliation. In addition, contested elections would be less frequently facilitated in such villages where there are more village enterprises and higher collective revenues. This is due in part to the village cadres intending to dampen villagers' political participation in industrialized villages when considering the threat of active villagers' political participation to their re-election. As a result, there is a reverse U-curve relationship between competitive elections and the level of village incomes.

Although Hu criticized Oi and Rozelle's measurement of villagers' political participation, concluding it was too simplistic, Oi and Rozelle's research showed how economic patterns have affected the construction of village leadership. In Zweigh and Chuang' study, middle and lower-middle income village groups tend to uphold democratic values, and Oi and Rozelle's research pointed out that the rate of village-contested elections would start to decrease as village income rises. In this sense, economic development might not trigger greater demands on wider democratization in Mainland China.

What is more, the rise of local entrepreneurs challenges village power structures, especially the traditional party-cadre leadership structure, and the legitimacy of state-agent control at village levels. As observed by Levy (2007) in Guangdong

province, a so-called entrepreneurial strata exists in village politics. As expected, local entrepreneurs are in a position to bring wealth to villages and villagers alike due largely to their capacities in business management. Interestingly, local entrepreneurs are welcome by the local government to join the village office and are regarded as 'red hat merchants' because one of their tasks is to maintain political stability by developing local economics. Chen (2007) reveals that when real power stems from the distributive power of village cadres over village economic resources, the legitimacy of village cadres' authority is more likely to be reliant on market power rather than party appointment and organizational control. Chen classifies the village cadres who are perceived as market power holders into two categories: cadre-turned-entrepreneur and entrepreneur-turned-cadre. Villagers benefit greatly from these cadres' private capacities. For example, some villagers were recruited to work in the enterprises managed or owned by these cadres. In this regard, Chen claims that these village cadres tend not to act as 'state tools' but as 'gentry-like intermediaries between the regime and villagers' (2007: 167) wherein a cooperative but not subordinate working relationship between the gentry-like village cadres and the regime would likely be created.

Although the base of party organizational control might be challenged facing the rise of entrepreneurial cadres, village party organization, and to a lesser extent the local party government, have strategies to retain their village power. Private entrepreneurs with party membership, who happened to be elected to be village chairpersons, were often appointed to take the post of village party secretaries; those elected entrepreneurial cadres without party affiliation were always subsumed into village party branches (Chen, 2007). To some extent, talented politics (*neng ren zheng zhi*) or political elitism is advocated by the local party government because according to the current developmental agendas of China's party-state regime, it is believed that economic prospects have a very strong association with social and political stability. Therefore, there is no doubt that the grassroots party control is still prevalent, though the legitimacy of party control might change from a traditional party-state organizational control to a rising market power.

Based on the above review, there are contradictions in village governance concerning the framework of democratic governance and civil society, economic-centred developmental strategies and party power control. Political elitism mainstreams village governance and somehow creates discretionary village governance, which conflicts with the principle of democratic governance. When growth of the economy remains as the primary agenda and political guideline of the party-state regime, rural governance might be exercised as a tool for the regime to reach this agenda, reflecting its pragmatism and making it difficult to achieve, under the discourse of political elitism and party control, villagers' engagement in political participation and decision-making.

The above-mentioned empirical studies and theoretical thinking sheds light on this current research which focuses on village-level power transition and structure under a wider political and economic context. Admittedly, these quantitative research and case studies provide a number of good arguments and theoretical assumptions. But indeed there are some arguable or questionable stances or assumptions while

referring to the actor-oriented perspectives. First, social actors, such as the village cadres and villagers, are treated as the people who always maximize utility rationality. Based on this assumption, it is fairly likely to simplify the action choices and the room for creating strategies. The assumption of actors' utility maximization might be only useful for us to analyse the relatively simple social interactions such as in Hu, and Oi and Rozelle's studies (Hu, 2005, 2006; Oi and Rozelle, 2000), but not to the multi-dimensional and interlocking value-driven interaction. Second, it is questionable that the villagers' perceptions on democratic values can be measured accurately by the questionnaire surveys in Zweigh and Chuang's study (2007) instead of being measured over the social interactions. It is noted that actor-oriented perspectives assume that social values shall be interpreted and reinterpreted throughout the everyday interaction and the social actors' knowledge constructed contextually. In other words, the people's perceptions on the democratic values are changing but not yet fixed. Third, Chen's studies (2007) describe the power clash and transition but does not particularly explore the conflicting processes of the power transitions, and explain the emergence of power structure.

6.4 Revival of Lineage Institutions and Rise of Grassroots Self-Organizations and Their Impacts on Rural Governance

China's rural community is bound up with conventions of reciprocity, mutual assistance and interpersonal sentiment. It is common that villagers have affinities with one and another and are inclined to help each other in activities of production such as grain planting and harvesting and construction activities such as house building (Yan, 1996c; Chan, Madsen and Unger, 2009). This society is an institution where people build up dense social networks and share local identities and are aware of the extent to which they should adhere to or modify rules, regulation and local customs (Tsai, 2002; Li, 2005). Thus, within such lineage institutions fellow members are likely to feel obliged to contribute to the communal good as they almost always receive moral pressure from other fellow members and lineage leadership. And also, the dilemma of free riders is likely to be overcome over the course of sharing public goods and services among the villagers (Peng, 2004; Hillman, 2004).

Ancestral tradition, worship activities and rural folk associations used to be regarded as the remains of feudal superstition and cultural backwardness, and in particular had confronted massive destruction during the Maoist period. Such lineage traditions appear to have been reconstructed over the past three decades (Tsai, 2007; Yu, 2008). Importantly, temple and lineage community councils not only organize ritual ceremonies but also are in a position to supply public goods and services to village communities. For example, they are efficient bodies pooling the resources from communities, organizing folk activities, contributing to the construction of village infrastructure and redistributing welfare among villagers. Therefore they are often treated as alternative organizations to villagers' committees in terms of welfare services provisions (Tsai, 2002, 2007). Of course, the negative impact of clan groups on village governance should not be ignored (Hu, 2008; O'Brien and Han, 2009; Manion, 2006).

When village cadres are integrated into extensive social ties within a rural community, the dual role of village cadres is commonly seen. In order to avoid moral criticism and sanction, village cadres often combine soft and coercive measures aimed at enforcing policy and tasks (Sun and Guo, 2000). In some cases, village cadres often play a mediating role between the state and society. Unsurprisingly, village leaders often set up a moral model for village fellows and the latter is prone to conform to policy regulation and its implementation by showing its trustworthiness and credibility towards moralistic village leaders. Importantly, these leaders help negotiate between local state and villagers in seeking for mutually acceptable solutions to village affairs and disputes (Tsai, 2002, 2007; Li, 2005; Huang, 2008). Clan tradition does not always exert negative effects on rural governance.

In addition to Kung, Cai and Sun's study (2009) as mentioned above, several of Tsai's studies (i.e. 2002, 2007a, 2007b) demonstrate how and why lineage institutions are able to contribute to public well-being. For her comparative case studies (2002) of two villages (High Mountain Village and Li Settlement) in Jiangxi province and of two villages (River Bridge Village and West Gate Village) in Fujian province Tsai discovered that the existence of a single lineage and village-wide lineage community councils helps enhance public goods provision rather than village elections implementation, village representative assemblies and the level of village wealth. Li Settlement and High Mountain Village were both poor villages with a lack of public assets and private enterprises, village elections were poorly implemented, and village representative assemblies were rarely convened. In Li Settlement the villagers were either much more inclined to donate money for public projects or the village cadres were actively involved in polling funds from the township government and the villagers. However, in High Mountain Village the village cadres utilized public funds for personal expenses instead of investment in public projects. The different results of public projects construction lay in a vital difference of lineage setting in the two villages. There is a single-surname in Li Settlement and multiple surnames in High Mountain Village, so it is claimed that the villagers in Li Settlement tend to have loyalty to their identified community and the village cadres are more accountable and trusted.

In comparison with Li Settlement and High Mountain Village, West Gate and River Bridge were both multi-surname and relatively affluent villages. In addition, democratic institutions were well implemented and importantly, there were public funds in the village financial accounts. The key difference lay in the fact that there are a number of community councils across West Gate Village organizing temple construction and religious activities and supplying public goods. As a result, compared to River Bridge, the facilitation of public goods provisions was more efficient and sustainable. For instance, the villagers in West Gate always effectively raised their demands to the village cadres as the villagers' meetings were frequently convened by the community councils. Voluntary donations for public projects were much more easily collected from the villagers. Moreover, the village cadres were more willing to listen to and hence meet the villagers' needs and to engage in the management of projects. Accordingly, Tsai concludes that village-wide social organizations and social networks as informal institutions both help mobilize social

resources to provide public welfare services especially when the capacity of formal institutions in the provisions of public goods is relatively weak in rural China.

Furthermore, Tsai's quantitative study (2007) based on survey data in four provinces also supports the arguments which came from her qualitative case study. She categorized public goods into five types, including paved footpath, countryside road building, water infrastructure, and school and classroom building, which were designed as dependent variables. Independent variables referred to local village self-governments, the existence of church and temples, number of local enterprises, democratic participation, and clan tradition, with control variables such as distance to town, per capita income and local area size, and population. By employing SUR Model (Seemingly Unrelated Regression), it is discovered that temple and church associations and clan tradition significantly contributed to local public goods provisions. Among others, the existence of lineage groups with a singular surname was particularly significant in the better performance of public goods delivery.

Tsai attempts to explain why lineage legacy has a positive impact on the provision of public goods without democratic accountability in rural China. She puts forward a theoretical concept of the embedding and encompassing of solidarity groups to explicate this phenomenon (2007a, 2007b). When the social boundaries of a singular lineage institution overlap with administrative or political boundaries of a village, village cadres tend to be embedded and encompassed into lineage institutions. Within a singular village-wide clan group village leaders and villagers share identified ethics and 'moral system'. When village cadres are embedded into local social networks and entitled to lineage memberships, they tend to have loyalties towards lineage communities and community committees alike. Simply put, their identity of the state-agents is interlocked with their identity of lineage solidarity. Thus, they are likely to protect fellow villagers from being maltreated and from coercive enforcement and tend to be accountable for delivery of public goods. Otherwise, they would be criticized, condemned or sanctioned by lineage councils or clan members. It is normal for them to be concerned about their reputation, social statuses and the cost of losing credibility, trustworthiness and prestige. As a matter of fact, they are often regarded as moral models in the local areas. For lineage members, unsurprisingly, they are more willing to devote themselves to village-wide projects and to cooperate and coordinate with village cadres alongside public goods provisions and the fulfilment of tasks. In this regard, cooperation and coordination between village cadres, village clan members and lineage council leaders are likely to take place, resulting in a higher satisfactory rate for performance of providing public goods.

Moreover, Peng (2004) reveals how kinship institutions and networks are of great importance to foster private enterprises. There are four structural characteristics of kinship networks: 1) strong ties, 2) cultural identity, such as ancestor halls as symbolic of clan culture, 3) leadership, and 4) density (2004: 1049). Within this close-knit institution, kinship solidarity commonly exists and mutual trust is likely to be enforced. Also, information and influences would be gained via bridging relations of the kinship networks to the outside world. In theory, these kinship networks would protect private property rights during the wave of enterprise privatization when

official and legally-enacted measures for the protection of private property rights were insecure and the market economy was not yet fully-fledged. In Peng's statistical modelling (Negative Binomial Regression), kinship networks were operationalized by proportion of largest lineage groups. It was found that kinship-networked villages are more likely to nourish private enterprises than collectivist ones in the Chinese countryside (2004).

Likewise, Unger's (2002) case studies in Xiqiao Township and Nanhai County illustrate how familial relationship, like brotherhood and parenthood, matter in the development of local private enterprises at the stage of primitive accumulation of money capital. Unger maintains that mutual support and trust from within the lineal relatives helped address difficulties such as the lack of money or loans, and policy backing in the premature socialist market economy. Nonetheless, those private enterprises indeed faced fragmentation of familial collaboration when the sizes of enterprises were getting larger. All in all, the positive effect of lineage institutions and networks on the local economy and politics is evident and observable.

In addition, mass or social organizations in rural China also engage in management of village affairs, giving rise to an additional approach to village governance. According to Pesque-Cela, Tao, Sun and Liu's (2009) nation-wide survey, by using descriptive statistics they observed a positive impact of village-level social organizations on the performance of local infrastructure projects. Social self-governing organizations consist of weddings and funerals, cultural, sport and health, local learning, local temples, churches and religious, technical mutual aid, production rights protection, civil intermediation, and public order and security amongst others. Public infrastructure projects are made up of roads, bridges, tap water and others, infrastructure for agricultural production and school building and facilities (2009: 154). Secondly, the survey desired to find out what factors enabled villagers to participate in those self-governing social organizations. Among others, intra-lineage solidarity is in a position to raise the rate of villagers' participation in the self-governing organizations but tension among inter-lineage rivalry groups has the opposite effect. In addition, when the local government delivers a better provision of public goods, the villagers are more likely to trust the government and hence are less likely to attend self-governing organizations, resulting in a reduction of the rate of participation. In this sense, Pesque-Cela, Tao, Sun and Liu's research not only supports Tsai's arguments (2002, 2007a, 2007b) but also supplements the existing debate about the impact of lineage solidarity on village governance from the civil society organizations' point of view.

In addition, Ruan and Zhang's (2009) case study illustrated how a mass organization – the Association of the Elderly – was engaged in village governance in Liu Village, Zhejiang province. This association was initiated by the government in 1993 and aimed to deliver services for the elderly as its initial purpose. During its development over the past nearly fifteen years, it has become an association with a relatively formal organizational structure and regulations. It not only meets the needs of the elderly by organizing entertainment activities and providing medical allowances, but also participates in the management of economic issues, such as the collection of rental fees and the contracting out of public property, as an assistant body for

villagers' committees. Interestingly, the structure of leadership within the association overlaps with the ranking of clan groups in Liu village. In other words, clan leaders often take the post of leader in the association. Power balance of clan groups also applies to this mass organization and lineage norms of leadership seem to be the recognizable public ethics (Ruan and Zhang, 2009: 134).

Accordingly, lineage legacy and kinship networks impact farmers' livelihoods. Premised upon the actor-oriented perspectives and interface analysis, those studies have some weak points. First, quantitative studies are not apt for uncovering the conflicting processes wherein the social actors negotiate, communicate, compromise and accommodate, utilize social relationships and linguistic skills, and create a series of strategies for problem-solving. Second, Tsai's series of studies rarely include other forms of interactive processes over the rural governance other than the processes of the provisions of public goods. She does not pay much attention on the conflicting processes where the social actors settle their problems and appropriate the problematic situations. Third, Ruan and Zhang's case study does not show much how the public ethics have been implied in practice.

7. Research Gap and Significance

My research aims to unfold the interactive processes of the changing rural governance. First, it focuses on the mediation of human agency in the political reform of rural democratization, policy implementation related to the local urbanization in particular and day-to-day rural dispute settlement. Thus, I will not take the discourse of liberal democracy or democratic governance for granted. Moreover, I will give equal weight to the perspectives and the lived experiences from powerless or disadvantaged social groups other than powerful officials, scholars and policy experts. Second, I will particularly focus on the conflicting processes of social interface and use the interface analysis to unfold those processes. By doing so, the social actors' capability would be demonstrated over the construction of power relations and in taking advantage of linguistic skills and social relationships and networks, as well as in the aspect of knowledgeability and creation of strategies arising out of social interface. Third, I will not overlook the forces of the social structures. Rather, I will uncover how the structural forces enable and constraint the social actors in shaping the outcomes of rural democratization, policy enforcement and daily management, and the disputes settlement.

8. Conclusion

This chapter articulated the key concepts and the series of theories on governance and conceptualizes rural governance in the Mainland China. Among others, social constructionism and actor-oriented perspectives are employed as the theoretical and analytical framework of interpreting and analysing rural governance. It then discussed why this framework works better than others such as rational choice theory or rational choice institutionalism, modernization theory and political economy. It summarised and evaluated the existing research surrounding the China's rural governance, including the designated village democratization, the local economic development, revival of lineage traditions and the rise of rural self-organizations. On the one hand, those studies provide a set of insightful findings of

the changing rural governance. To some extent, it is pronounced that the village cadres are capable of mediating the reform of the Villagers' Committees, the policy implementation and the day-to-day village management. What is more, the existing studies prepare the potential research arenas in my study.

On the other hand, there are weaknesses in those studies with reference to social constructionism and actor-oriented perspectives. First, it is questionable that liberal democracy or democratic governance is taken as the singular discourse or rationale to interpret the rural democratization against the claim of the multiplicity of the knowledge and the reality construction. Second, especially in quantitative research, social interactive processes cannot be unfolded and the social actors' agents are barely understood under a specific context during the transforming rural governance. Third, there is still room for the scholars to explain the diversity or heterogeneity of the rural governance under this paradigm. Last but not least, in comparison to interface analysis, many existing studies cannot provide an analytical framework so as to interpret the social interactive processes wherein the social actors' agents mediate the external forces.

Chapter 3

Iterative-Inductive Ethnographic Research Methodology, Actor-Oriented

Perspectives and Interface Analysis

1. Introduction

1.1 Impact of Rural China's Urbanization on Rural Governance

Simply put, rural China's urbanisation has undergone three stages. During the first stage, township and village enterprises (TVEs) played a vital role in rural industrialization and the first wave of rural urbanisation. The local township governments have incentives to trigger the booms of the TVEs as they were allowed to retain the revenues within the 'system of fiscal responsibility' between the 1980s and early 1990s (Lin and Yi, 2011). Over the processes, the rural landscapes began to be transformed from farmland to factories, multi-storey buildings and public spaces such as public streets and township trade centres. During this period, more and more local farmers and migrant workers began to work in those TVEs (Oi, 1999; Yeh, Xu and Liu, 2011).

The second wave of the rural urbanisation is greatly associated with the land and the housing reform during the late 1980s and 2000s. Market economics calls for the privatization and commercialization of the capitals and the production factors such as the land, and the free influx of, and commercialization of the labour forces. Among others, central governments realized urgency of the reform of the land management system in dealing with issues of ownership of the foreign direct investment companies and the joint-ventures. The first trial of the land reform was introduced in 1984 to deal with the issue of the state-owned and collectively-own land use for commercial purposes taking place in Special Economic Zones, such as Shenzhen. In 1988, the previous land management system, to be specific, the free land-allocation system, was replaced officially by the new way of the paid land-allocation system in the First Session of the Seventh People's Congress (Yeh, Xu and Liu, 2011: 13). This resulted in the expansion of large cities over the course.

In addition, the work units of state-owned and collectively-owned enterprises were no longer able to supply sufficient housing for their workers and started to trigger housing commercialization reforms. In the late 1990s, the majority of work units had abolished the system of housing distribution through work units themselves, which furthermore led to the commercialization of housing and a booming real estate business. Meanwhile, as the urban population constantly grew and the economy boomed, especially in a cluster of large size cities such as in Yangtze River Delta, Pearl River Delta and the open coastal cities, the demands for commercial housing increased. Consequently, not only large cities but small and medium size cities and towns underwent urban development and land-centred urbanisation (Yen, Xu and Liu, 2011; Liu and Yi, 2011; Ong, 2014; Chen, Lu and Ni, 2016).

During the third stage, China's urbanisation was promoted by the third or tertiary industry. The service sectors were of great of importance to have a contribution to support primary and secondary industries and national and local employment. It was not until the late 1990s that finance and commercial services (i.e. central business

districts), logistics, information centres, exhibition hall, entertainment industry, special economic zones, high-tech parks, tourism industry, outsourcing business, and human resources industry, amongst others, greatly contributed to economic development (Yeh, Xu and Liu, 2011: 21-22). Apparently, the service sectors cannot be rapidly developed without the governmentally-supported land trade (Ong, 2014).

When the value of land increases, and the urban areas within centres of mega-cities confront the shortage of land supply, the low-value-added industries have to move to the inner-cities, small and medium size cities, or suburban areas or sub-centres in accordance with the principle of economic efficiency. Likewise, those local governments are using all the means to improve their fiscal revenues by attracting investment and selling the land use rights to the developers in particular. Thus, it is commonly observed that a large amount of arable farmland have converted into different forms of commercial use, which brings about different consequences on the farmers' livelihoods (Ong, 2014). Interestingly, somehow "urban expansionism" is regarded by the central and local government as an efficient approach to transform more and more farmers into urbanites (Hsing, 2010). From those officials' perspective, a growing number of the urbanites seems to mean social progress and political achievement.

In fact, the improvements to villagers' livelihoods are at the centre of the design of national and local policies in recent years. Constructing the 'moderately well-off society' has been set as an ultimate goal to be achieved for the next decade.⁷ As known, the meanings of 'well-off society' inevitably change as society and the economy move forward. Nowadays an affluent, healthy or so-called 'harmonious society' might signal many things, including increasing household incomes, stable political and economic environment, higher quality of health care, education, social welfares, working environment and living conditions, among others (Wang, 2014; Cui, 2006).

Indeed, the quality of Chinese lives has been greatly improved in many aspects, and there is no exception to Chinese villagers. Many means have been used to help farmers improve their livelihoods, though at the same time some of methods have created negative effects. Out-migration economies, local industrialization and urbanisation, national and local policy interventions are commonly regarded as a series of effective means to enhance farmers' quality of life (Oi, 1999; Zweig, 1997; Murphy, 2002), and it is likely those means would be still work for the next two or three decades. Because more than half of population of Chinese lives in the countryside, the central government has signalled several times on different occasions that further improvements for Chinese people, especially Chinese villagers', quality of life, still needs to rely upon urbanisation.⁸ Moreover, governments of

⁷ "shi liu da bao gao" (English translation given as: "Full text of Jiang Zemin's Report at 16th Party Congress on Nov 8, 2002"), available at: www.ce.cn/ztpd/xwzt/guonei/2003/sljsanzh/szqhb/jt20031009_1763196.shtml, accessed March 8, 2016; "shi ba da bao gao" (English translation given as: "Full text of Hu Jintao's report at 18th Party Congress, Nov 18, 2012"), available at : www.xj.xinhuanet.com/2012-11/19/c_113722546.htm, accessed March 8, 2016.

⁸ "guo jia xin xing cheng zhen hua gui hua: 2014-2020" (English translation given as: "National Scheme for New Model of Small-to-medium-sized City Urbanisation"), available at: www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2014/content_2644805.htm, assessed March 15, 2016.

different levels hope that this small-to-medium-sized city urbanisation is able to drive a new round of economic development, which is expected to constantly contribute to the future medium-high speed of growth of China's economy (Zhao and Wang, 2015; Amighini, 2015; Green and Stern, 2015; Yao, 2014).⁹ Compared to the early stage of urbanisation mainly driven by township industrialization, this new wave of rural urbanisation will reach out to much more complex industries, including the establishment of large-scale agricultural production, economic and industrial zones in the rural-urban fringe, and the commercial or government-led rural community built-in projects. Also, the designated policy strategies of *in situ* urbanisation are to enhance the employment rates and bring more job opportunities at local levels, as well as strive for sustainable economic development across the nation (Ong, 2014; Elena, 2016).

Although rapid urbanisation has tremendously transformed the landscape of rural China, it produced massive tensions between the villagers as landholders and the local governments as land takers (Yu, 2005, 2006; O'Brien, 2002; Li, 2002). As is widely known, there is a lack of public consultation prior to approval of the local land expropriation and demolition policy, and at the outset of systemic city planning set by the local government. Over the course of land requisition and house destruction and relocation, farmers are under-compensated and endure a painful, coercive and disturbing enforcement. After land expropriation, the absence of proper measures for resettlement deprived those farmers of a share in social progress and beneficial improvements to livelihood resulting from rural urbanisation and modernization. Herein there are contradictions between the population urbanisation and the land-centred urbanisation. In other words, farmers are not prepared at all to live as urbanites due to the underdeveloped public infrastructure and welfare and service provisions, as well as the lack of local employment opportunities (Ong, 2014; Elena, 2016). In response to the hardship incurred by policy implementation, individual and collective resistance in rural society is taking place in order to fight against grassroots cadres and local governments (O'Brien and Li, 1995; Cai, 2008; Guo, 2001). These altogether have been generating problems and challenging rural China's governance in many aspects.

More often than not, land leases or transactions are driven by the local (city, county and township level) government for local ends. While city and rural urbanisation and local industrialization is a significant indicator that displays the local leaders' image building achievements, local leaders can be motivated to initiate land expropriation and property demolition agendas so as to grab land for financial reasons (Liu, Tao, Yuan and Cao, 2008; Hsing, 2006, 2010; Yeh, Xu and Liu, 2011; Liu and Yi, 2011). Importantly, land sales can produce a great deal of revenue for local government finances. Thereby local governments, especially those short of other revenue sources, can be over-dependent upon such land finance (*tu di cai zheng*). Nonetheless, government-led strategies of city development could deviate from the demands of

⁹ Wen Li, "shen ke ren shi wo guo jing ji fa zhan xin chang tai" (English translation give as: "Understand China's New Normal Economic Development at a Deeper Level"), *The People Daily*, available at: opinion.people.com.cn/n/2015/0602/c1003-27088631.html, assessed March 15, 2016.

city expansion and urbanisation, which may create an oversupply of land.¹⁰ Thus, it is realized that there are contradictions between the government-led urbanisation and the market-oriented urbanisation.

The central government has noticed conflicts of interest between landholding villagers and local grassroots cadres regarding land requisition and house demolition. Measures for protection of the landholders' and the property owners' interests have been undertaken and some of them are stipulated in a series of law and policy documents at central, provincial, autonomous regions and central-administrated municipal levels.¹¹ Among other matters, improvement of the rate of compensation, redevelopment of cultivated land, land reallocation for resettlements, property reallocation and social insurance provisions have been adopted to protect the people who are subjected to land-loss and property dismantlement; units or organizations now encounter more stringent procedural applications for land use in city construction.¹² However, policy rectification still cannot effectively circumscribe the behaviour of local government when in breach of the public interest and in violation of law and policy regulation.

To sum up, differing from the rural urbanisation prompted by the township industrialization and the large or mega cities urbanisation and expansion, this new wave of small-to-medium-sized city urbanisation has featured government-led

¹⁰ Moreover, Yew (2011) attempted to demonstrate the negative effect of the government-led local urbanisation and economic development by comparing urban and rural districts in land supply in Sihui County, Guangdong. It was found that large-scale unused land, especially in rural districts, was produced due in part to the local government interventions in supplying land. The example of production of idle farmland in the course of agricultural land conversion can be also seen in Cai (2009).

¹¹ *The Law of Land Administration of People's Republic of China (2004 revised version)*, on Article 47, the compensation fees of land expropriation has been improved in comparison with 1998 version, available at: www.china.com.cn/chinese/law/647616.htm, accessed March 19, 2013; "guang dong sheng shi shi <<zhong hua ren min gong he guo tu di guan li fa>> ban fa" (English translation given as: "Specific Regulations on The Law of Land Administration of the People's Republic of China, Guangdong Province") available at: law.hexun.com/100002698.html?mark=1&category=10003, accessed March 19, 2013, on Article 32 (5), 33, 34, 39, 40, 41, there are regulations on how to settle land expropriation compensations, how to deal with land conversion and under what conditions the land transaction cannot be allowed; "guang dong sheng zheng shou nong cun ji ti tu di liu yong di guan li ban fa" (English translation given as: "Measures on Land Reallocation of Rural Collective Land, Department of State Land and Resources of Guangdong Province"), available at: www.gdhr.gov.cn/newsAction.do?method=viewNews&classId=020010350000000614&newsId=02001004000001910, accessed March 13, 2013; "guowuyuan guanyu shenhua gaige yange tudi guanli de jue ding, guofa, 2004, 28 hao" (English translation given as: "Decision on Deepening Reform and Strengthening Land Management, issued by The State Council, 2004, Document No. 28"), The measures on protecting the farmland-loss farmers' interests had been considered in many respects, available at: www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2004/content_63043.htm, accessed April 18, 2013; "zhong gong guang dong sheng wei, guang dong sheng ren min zheng fu guan yu jie jue she hui baozhang ruo gan wen ti de yi jian" (English translation given as: "Suggestions of Resolutions to Address A set of Problems of Social Insurance, The People's Government of Guangdong Province and Guangdong Provincial Committee of Chinese Communist Party"), In particular, land reallocation for resettlement is one of means aimed at improving the level of social insurance for the localities, available at: www.gdhrss.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/gdhrss/s51/201204/33603.html, accessed April 18, 2013.

¹² "guo tu zi yuan bu guan yu jia qiang cheng shi jian she yong di shen cha bao pi gong zuo you guan wen ti de tong zhi" (English translation given as: "A Notice On Regulating Examination and Approvals of Application for Land Use for City Construction, The Ministry of Land and Resources of the People's Republic of China"), available at: china.findlaw.cn/fangdichan/fdcfg/fdcfgk/10913.html, accessed April 18, 2013; Xiaoqiao Wang, Chenzhong and Xiaolu, "tudi guanli fa boyi wunian, zhengdi buchang tiaokuan duzi chuanguan" (English translation given as: "A Five-year Game of The Law of Land Administration, Breakthrough of Terms of Land Acquisition Compensation", *Southern Weekend*, available at: www.infzm.com/content/85258, accessed April 18, 2013. As can be seen, amending 2004 version of The Law of Land Administration has been discussed, though agreement is very difficult to achieve.

rationales instead of market-oriented ones and is designed to be held responsible for the economic growth of the next decades. Contradictions between village population urbanisation and land-centred urbanisation, and between local government-led urbanisation and market-oriented urbanisation, and a game between the central government and the local governments in terms of land management policy and its implementation have a profound impact on rural governance.

1.2 Background for Case Selection

1.2.1 Introduction to the Local County and Township

The two villages in my case studies are under the way to the local urbanization. The studies not only exemplify the interactive and conflicting processes of changing rural governance, but also are able to carve out a lesson plan for the foreseeable small-to-medium-sized city urbanization embraced by the governments. This fieldwork research was conducted in Longgang and Xinzhai villages in the county seat Huliao Township, Dapu County, Guangdong Province. Dapu County is under Meizhou City jurisdiction, adjacent to Pinghe and Yongding County of Fujian Province, located northeast of Guangdong Province. Its territory is 2467 square kilometres and its population is 553,945 as of 2013.

Dabu County (Huliao Township)



Hakka inhabitants are Han Chinese but not a Chinese ethnic minority group. One of the distinctive characteristics of the Hakka inhabitants is the language they speak, namely Hakka dialect (*ke jia hua*). In Guangdong province there are three major local languages, including Cantonese (*guang dong hua*), Chiuchow (*chao zhou hua*) and Hakka dialect. The biggest population of Hakka inhabitants lives in Meizhou City, Guangdong.¹³

¹³ Overview of Dapu County, available at: www.dapu.gov.cn/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=lists&catid=14, assessed March 15, 2016.

In 2013, GDP of the county was 5.852 billion rmb. The ratio of the three economic sectors (primary, secondary and tertiary) was 29.6:34.7:35.7. The manufacturing industry is made up of the porcelain manufacture, electricity power generation, mining, medicine production, and the alcohol industry. Moreover, the agricultural industry accounted for 2.711 billion rmb of GDP, which consists of tea, pomelo and herb planting. In recent years, the tourism industry has developed and become one of the key policies for driving the local economic development. Within that year, the revenues of the tourism were 1.05 billion rmb.¹⁴ As can be seen, the local GDP per capita falls into the category of lower-middle level in comparison to the national GDP per capita.¹⁵

The township in which the fieldwork research was conducted is the county seat. Its territory is 208.79 square kilometres and accommodates about 93,000 inhabitants, including 30,000 rural and 63,000 urban citizens. There are 19 villagers' committees, 1 forestry station and 4 community committees under its jurisdiction. In 2013, the agricultural revenues was 0.573 billion rmb and the net average income of the farmers were 7,972rmb; the revenues of primary industries was 0.642 billion rmb.

On the township government website, it is stated that the infrastructure of transport and telecommunication and the facilities of energy consumption have been improved greatly. Among other things, the main countryside roads in all 19 villages had been built with reference to the national criteria on countryside road building. What is more, the networks of telecommunication and mobile communication, and telephones and fax have been set up in every village. Also, the coverage of cable TV is 100 *per cent* across the whole township.¹⁶

1.2.1 Introduction to Xinzhai and Longgang Villages

The two villages studied are both located at the center of the physical boundary of the township. One is called Longgang village, located in middle of the township; the other, Xinzhai village, is located in the east side of the township.

¹⁴ Overview of Dapu County's Economics, available at:

www.dabu.gov.cn/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=show&catid=16&id=16374, assessed March 15, 2016.

¹⁵ Per capita GDP of Dapu County is around 2,040 US dollar in 2011 in comparison with China's per capita GDP 5,414 US dollar and Guangdong's GDP per head 7819 US dollar. 2011 Guangdong Statistical Yearbook, available at: www.gdstats.gov.cn/tjnj/2011/c20.htm; news.xinhuanet.com/local/2012-02/07/c_122667889.htm, accessed June 4, 2013.

¹⁶ Introduction to Dapu County's Administrative Structure, available at:

www.dabu.gov.cn/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=lists&catid=15, assessed March 15, 2016.

Xinzhai Village and Longgang Village



In Xinzhai village there are 20 village groups, 866 registered households and 2530 registered rural residents in 2014. Xinzhai village is 4.2 square kilometres, of which there are 329 *mu* of farmland. In 2014, the output of Xinzhai village was 14,870,000rmb and the sources of finances come from the sales of vegetables, fruit, and commercial and rental businesses. In Longgang village there are 27 village groups, 814 registered households and 2338 registered rural residents in 2014. Longgang village is 8.68 square kilometres and the size of cultivatable farmland is

359 *mu*. In 2014, the output of the village was 13,450,000rmb and shared similar compositions of Xinzhai village financial sources.¹⁷

Xinzhai village is divided into two parts. The first part is called Upper Xinzhai village (*shang xin cun*) and the second part Lower Xinzhai village (*xia xin cun*). Upper Xinzhai is relatively developed and urbanised whilst Lower Xinzhai is relatively dependent on agriculture. In Upper Xinzhai there are more self-employed enterprises and small businesses, and more land expropriation has taken place over the past two decades. In Lower Xinzhai the farmers cultivate crops like vegetable, fruit, and rice. In terms of the provision of public goods, every household has tap water; both main and small countryside paths were constructed as were bridges. A primary school located in the village is administered by the County Education Bureau.

In 2012 Xinzhai village had 200,000rmb as annual revenues collected mainly from rents collection and the fees for contracting-out projects. Compensations for collective land expropriation are another source of village finances. Village-owned properties consist of 18 department stores, three kindergartens, two fish pools and two warehouses. Xinzhai village office adopts one-office-holding setup so that the villagers' committee shares the same personnel with the village party branch. The post of the village office of 2011-2014 term contains a chairperson (party secretary), vice-chairperson (vice secretary), director of Village Women Federation, accountant, director of birth control, director of village security, and disputes mediation and village clerk. Besides for seven village cadres, there is a college graduate village cadre with a two year long contract (*da xue sheng cun guan*) and an intern cadre who would join the villagers' committee after the next village election.

Longgang village is a suburban village under the jurisdiction of Huliao Township. Compared to Xinzhai village, Longgang village is relatively peripheral to the township centre. The farmland of Longgang village has mostly been confiscated and the villagers have not relied on agricultural farming as their main income sources for the past decade. Self-employment, like running small businesses, and part-time work, such as construction work (*da gong*), as well as remittances from outside areas are the main income sources for the villagers. The elder villagers tend to stay in the village and the young villagers tend to move to large cities to make a living, similar to Xinzhai village. In terms of the provision of public goods, the main countryside roads are mostly all cemented, though small paths are still not cemented, bridges were built, and every household has tap water.

In terms of village finances, Longgang village is relatively poor in comparison with Xinzhai village. The collective annual revenue was about 50,000rmb in 2012, mainly collected from renting out department stores and flats.¹⁸ Village-owned properties are composed of five department stores, two floor flats, around 3000 square meters of collective idle land in the suburban areas and a few acres of rice land in the

¹⁷ Introduction to Longgang Village, available at: www.tcmmap.com.cn/guangdong/dapuxian_huzhen_Longgangcun.html, Introduction to Xinzhai Village, available at: www.tcmmap.com.cn/guangdong/dapuxian_huzhen_Xinzhaicun.html, assessed March 15, 2016.

¹⁸ The collective revenues shall be increased significantly as the 3000 square meters idle land is underway to be converted to the private apartments. So, a large amount of revenues will be collected from the department stores rent-out.

mountainous areas. The villagers' committee was established in 1999. The personnel setup of Longgang villagers' committee was separated from the village party branch for the first year of the 2011-2014 office term. But in May, 2012, due to the resignation of the village party secretary, the villagers' committee combined with the village party branch to become a one-office-holding. There are seven village cadres in Longgang village office and the position of the village office is as the same as Xinzhai village.

1.2.3 Approaches to Payment for the Cadres

Since the village cadres do not stay within the state's wage and pension system, apart from a certain number of bursaries and bonuses out of either the local government financial support, like specified funds or the village-level collective finances, they always have other income sources. Since 2008, not only the village cadres in the two villages but also the village cadres across the entire county are paid by the County Bureau of Civil Affairs with basic wages of about 500rmb per calendar month. Meanwhile, they are eligible to register for the system of medical insurance, endowment pension and occupational injury insurance. The insurance fees are paid half by the County Bureau of Civil Affairs and half out of the village officials' fixed wages. In addition to the village-level financial bursaries, the total monthly salary of the village cadres including fixed wage and floating salary can generally be up to 1000rmb, despite the fact that relatively financially well-off villages, like Xinzhai village coffers, are able to offer more bursaries. Accordingly, the treatment of the village cadres has improved as at the very least the salary they have received is stabilized, and an endowment pension would be provided after the age of retirement akin to those officials in government and public sectors at varying levels.

1.2.4 Approaches to 'Making Village Affairs Publicized'

At least on face value, Xinzhai and Longgang villagers' committees publicize village affairs. Written documents are hung on the wall in village head's office in Longgang and public documents are pasted on the notice board near to the village office in Xinzhai. It was noted in July, 2014 that the documents pasted on the notice board in Xinzhai village were all produced in the year of 2012 so it would appear that the publicized documents were not at all up-to-date. Those publicized items are mainly about the annual planning reports, distribution of the profits, expenditure statement lists, investment and construction statement, collective properties contracting out, village-owned land leasing, issues for 'one item, one vote', subsidies for village cadres, land compensation, countryside cooperative medical systems, democratic financial management, birth control, management of rural housing land, and so on.

In theory, the villagers have the right to make enquiries and hold the villagers' committees accountable when publicized issues are called into question. In addition, the village financial supervising team which was established in the two villages and made up of three to five villager representatives elected from the different village groups should not usually be relatives of the incumbent village cadres and should have basic skills in accounting and auditing. Sometimes the members of the financial supervising team are required to attend accountancy training organized by higher-level official sectors. In addition, the village head usually sets up the password of the

bank account of the village coffers, the village vice-head keeps the bankcard or the passbook without knowing the password, and the village accountant is only assigned authority to issue receipts. Thus, if there is a need to use public funds, these parties have to negotiate together so as to withdraw the money. This is a commonly used approach to prevent village cadres from embezzling public funds.

1.2.5 Village-Wide Management System

1.2.5.1 'Cadre Responsibility to (Natural) Villages'

The management system of 'Cadre Responsibility to (Natural) Villages' (*gan bu bao cun zhi du*) that should be proliferated in most of the regions of Mainland China has been adopted in Xinzhai and Longgang village. In this a township official leader would be sent to be responsible for an administrative village and the township cadres would be allocated responsibility to monitor the village cadres who are responsible for a group of village teams or natural villages. In the meantime, the appointed township leaders directly supervise the appointed township cadres, and, to a lesser extent, the village cadres. The village cadres have direct contact with the villager representatives. This cadre monitoring and managing system plays a pivotal part in the implementation of policy and assigned tasks, and, to a lesser extent, in dispute settlement.

1.2.5.2 Cadre Responsibility Assessment

In order to evaluate the performance of township and village cadres, a system of cadre responsibility assessment has been adopted. The performance of grassroots cadres is standardized on an assessment sheet, upon which the rewarding and punishment of the cadres is based. The contents of the performance evaluation are currently composed of village economic development, public project construction, family planning policy and other policy implementation in the two villages. The township secretary is required to sign a so-called responsibility contract (*ze ren zhuang*) with the county level government, and the village secretary or chairperson also has to sign up to a similar contract with the township government. By doing so, the result of the performance evaluation would affect not only the material attainment of the township cadres, but also would affect political advancement up the hierarchy, especially for the township leaders who are public servants (*gong wu yuan*) and remain in the system of state payroll. But for village cadres, the outcome of the performance assessment only affects their economic attainment but not their political promotion, because they are not public servants and do not have a state-paid salary.

Somehow the system of cadre responsibility assessment and the cadre monitoring system work together. One or two township cadres are responsible for one village and being a monitor for the village cadres' especially the village heads' performance. Village heads are responsible for their own villages and serving as a monitor for the village office members' performance. Each village cadre is responsible for several village groups and serves as a monitor for the village representatives' performance. Two or three village representatives are responsible for several households respectively belonging to each village group. In short, the grassroots leading officials

and the ordinary cadres alike need to utilize the 'Cadre Monitoring System' as a tool to accomplish the goals stated on the responsibility contract and the evaluation assessment sheet.

1.2.3 Possible Representativeness of Selected Samples

The village governance in Longgang and Xinzhai village represent one type of rural governance across Mainland China. This type of rural governance must be related to the specific local conditions and contexts.

- Semi-urbanised and semi-agricultural: the villages are urbanizing and modernizing where land expropriation is taking place on a large scale; the villages are not industrialized and some villagers are still working in farming.
- Suburban villages under the greater contexts of the small-to-medium-sized city urbanisation and expansion: the local government plays a vital role in triggering the rural urbanisation; people, mainly from other surrounding townships and villages, are constantly moving to the county seat leading to a growth of population.
- Open economy and the lack of village-owned enterprises: the great majority of the young villagers are migrating to cities to make a living and usually send remittances back to their home family; the average quality of life of villagers is relatively low; the village collective revenues rely largely on the compensation for collective land expropriation due to lack of village-owned enterprises.
- Close-knit Hakka communities: to some extent, reciprocity and interpersonal sentiment are still exercised either between villagers or between villagers and village cadres. Moreover, the lineage traditions still have an impact on building social ties and networking.
- No village-level democratization: rural democratization is not enforced and the style of mandatory management is usually adopted in decision making, in particular.
- The local centralized system of commands: the upper-level, especially the county level government and party organization, strongly intervenes with village level governance, such as the setting of the personnel of the village office and the contents of the assignments and tasks.

The section that follows will document the iterative-induction processes of the fieldwork-based inquiry and how the actor-oriented perspectives and interface analysis are connected to ethnographic fieldwork. In simple terms, this research process is composed of the three phases: 1) fieldwork preparation and pilot study, 2) primary research, and 3) re-entering the field. The pilot study examined implications of the actor-oriented perspectives and interface analysis in determining the potential of the research focus, theoretical representation, and research sites. In the primary

research, closely connected to the pilot study, I reclassified the research topics, connected research methods to data collection and conducted on-going analysis of data. Following O'Reilly (2012) and Gerring (2001, 2007), during the primary research the collection of data, adjustment of research topics, snowball sampling, and on-going analysis of data took place. The pilot research was conducted between 20 July and 20 September, 2011 and primary research between 13 February and 20 June, 2012 and the phase of re-entering the field took place between 14 July and 29 July, 2014. The fieldwork findings, limitations of the fieldwork design and the ethical consideration will be elaborated respectively below.

2. Iterative-Inductive Research Process and Implication of Actor-Oriented Perspectives

2.1 Pilot Study Armed with Actor-Oriented Perspective

Premised upon social constructionism, the actor-oriented perspective stress knowledge and reality have to be constructed contextually during social processes and day-to-day interaction and networking. Therefore, it is significant for researchers to engage themselves into this process to construct here-and-now knowledge, which is also the key to fully understand concurrent social codes and norms and, to a large extent, social changes. Meanwhile, the previous research provided research findings in relation to actors' perceptions, values, interests and actions in the rural democratization, economic development, state intervention and policy implementation, and the emerging of societal self-organizations.¹⁹ As mentioned, the lineage society or institutions entail villagers' own social values and interests, and interpretation of so-called rural democracy and bulk of social interaction and networking. I am interested in learning how villagers perceive the rural democracy and how they react to its implementation, and what changes the designated rural democratization has brought about. Conversations with some villagers and village cadres are the first step to (re)acquire their local knowledge and understanding of what they are experiencing regarding this change.

At the beginning of fieldwork study, gatekeepers are a necessity to provide introductions to the field. Fortunately, a relative is a lineage leader from one of Lan lineage branches and has actively taken part in the lineage activities in recent years.

¹⁹ Lineage legacy impedes village democratic institutionalization when rivalries of intra-lineage groups are taken into account. However, solidarity of inter-lineage groups helps enhance performance of village cadres in public projects investment and the provision of public goods. In this regard, the implementation of the village elections and the economic level of the localities do not necessarily matter in the provision of the public goods.

The quality of village elections varies with the level of local economic development. In particular, in Zweigh and Chuang's research, villagers who have lower-middle and middle incomes are more prone to advocate democratic values and democratization might be more prominent in villages with poor and middle-level collective revenues. In Hu's study, the implementation of village elections would perform better in the better-off localities.

There is always a conflict of interest between the Villagers' Committee and the Village Party Branch especially in managing village-owned properties and enterprises.

If 'open economies' operate in the villages, and where the great majority of the villagers are migrating-out workers, villagers are less interested in political participation; within the 'industrialized villages', the local entrepreneurs are more inclined to compete for posts in village self-government and to impede the political participation of villagers in the village elections.

He recommended Longgang village as a potential research site to be studied and invited me to talk to the Chairman of the Lan Lineage Committee. In addition, my mother has a link with the village head of Xinzhai village office and was able to initiate contact to arrange a visit to see the village head. Longgang and Xinzhai village may not be the ideal selection for the purpose of comparison, so further possibilities were pursued. In reality, once I began the research it became clear that the links of the two previously mentioned gatekeepers were rather limited so there was a necessity to build up further personal relations to gain further information and contacts. The key sources described below also helped me approach more contacts.

2.1.2 Individuals' Interpretations to On-going Changes in the Rural Governance

2.1.2.1 Unstructured Interview with Chairman of Lan Lineage Committee

The Chairman is a retired vice-headmaster of a primary school and was elected by the Lan Surname Committee members in 2005. He gave me a brief introduction to the history of Lan surname genealogy, the establishment of the Lan lineage committee, scholarship regulation and lineage scholarship committee, as well as information about the responsibilities shouldered by the committee members. Supporting materials like videos, meeting memos and Lan genealogy revealed that the activities of the Lan lineage organization are accepted by the local government due in large part to its contribution to the local public good. So, although the lineage legacy used to be so-called 'superstitious remains,' the government removed restrictions on lineage activities. From his point of view, the Lan surname committee has nothing to do with the village office in practice. Also, the chairman stressed that the former should not have relationship with the latter since it is better to place lineage institutions into a neutral position, otherwise they could be in danger if the lineage forces interfere too much and the government and party would not prefer that.

The Chairman described a general demographic distribution of the inhabitants with the surname Lan which showed that the branches of the surname are scattered in different natural or administrative villages. There is an administrative village named Xiali where the population is made up by more than 90 per cent of those with the Lan surname and there are other two administrative villages where the Lan surname group is one of the main lineage forces.

I realized a few things from the conversation with the chairperson. First, I knew that the social boundaries of Lan lineage institutions might not overlap with the political boundaries of administrative villages. This is because there is no singular surname group in Xinzhai and Longgang village. Second, I reflected that Xiali village might be another comparative case as there seems to be a singular surname group in this village. Third, the chairman recognized the extent to which the lineage committees organize activities and that the governments and party should play an important role in delivering public goods and maintaining public order. I was invited by chairperson to attend a scholarship ceremony and was told that I would have opportunities to talk to more village cadres and lineage leaders. Participating in the event enabled me to get access to social groups and settings and hence then reduce visibility when observing the events wherein the villagers behave (following Judith, 2011).

Moreover, I needed to have more lived experiences and understand more about the opinions, beliefs, interests and the values in terms of the rural development or governance from the social actors, like villagers, village cadres and other officials of different levels at the locale.

2.1.2.2 Unstructured Interview with Village Cadres in Xinzhai, Longgang and Xiali

Village Office

In order to explore more about the changing rural governance over the past few years, village cadres' responses to several topics were collected. Those topics were referred to the implementation of the establishment and the operation of the villagers' committees, impacts of the lineage legacy on the village elections, the delivery of public goods, and the implementation of the concurrent national and local policies. The information collected to some extent ruled out part of the preconception of the rural governance in the villages selected. Moreover, it was helpful for me to identify the research gap and narrow down the research focus.

First of all, I had few rounds of conversation with the Xinzhai village vice-head, Longgang village head, some village office members in Xiali village and some villagers from three villages. In terms of the impacts of the lineage groups on the village elections, Xinzhai village vice-head, Longgang village head and Xiali village vice party secretary, director of Family Planning and accountant all expressed their opinions. From the conversation with the Xinzhai village vice-head, I knew that in Xinzhai village, the Liu surname group is very large, accounting for 10 out of 20 village groups in total, and there are more than fifty smaller surname groups. Competition between the different lineage groups in the implementation of the village elections is rarely seen. In addition, it was assumed that the level of competition during the village elections in Xinzhai might not be as fierce as the election in Longgang where there are two main kinship groups, the Lan and Luo lineage groups.²⁰ He did not respond directly and quickly about how the village elections were implemented when we chatted first time, though he was pleased to talk about the influences of the lineage groups on the village elections.

From the conversation with Longgang village head, I learned that there are two lineage groups (Luo and Lan) of relatively similar size and other small surname groups in Longgang village. He seemed to agree that unlike the rural democracy in Taiwan and America, village elections in rural China are not democratically enforced and somehow have to be tightly monitored. The context of lineage should not be neglected over the course of the elections. However, from their experiences of the village elections in the past, competition between different lineage groups was rarely observed.²¹ Furthermore, he admitted that vote-rigging is commonly seen as the village cadres often ask for a vote from their friends and relatives. Normally, candidates were nominated by the villagers' committee and village party branch and it is quite rare for villagers to nominate the candidates in their own right. Interestingly, the village head admitted that the village cadres should co-opt to win

²⁰ on the afternoon of 19 August, 2011, individual and group conversation

²¹ on the morning of 22 August, 2011

over the contestants in the election campaign as a collective team. He also claimed that the village cadres in Xinzhai are doing exactly the same thing and they needed to learn from the experiences of Xinzhai village as a cohesive and unified group. The village head also pointed out that sometimes it is not necessary to convene the village representative assembly because of a lack of interest from villagers. Yet involvement of villagers and village representatives in decision making should be one of the defining characteristics of so-called village governance. Because of the above findings, further information was required into the ways in which the village cadres behave like a cohesive and unified group. Additionally, verification was needed of the village head's assertion that villagers are not interested in collective issues when the villagers realize the importance of transparency in public affairs and of the villagers' supervision imposed on the villagers' committees.

The similar responses were also heard from the above-mentioned village office members in Xiali village. As far as impact of the lineage context on the village election is concerned, rivalries or engagement of the lineage forces have been observed at times, but conflicts among different clan groups over the course of village elections are seldom seen. They also guessed that due to there being two lineage groups of relatively equal size in Longgang village, the tension between the two groups is possibly stronger. In response to the topic, the village clerk from Xinzhai village also admitted that, thanks to existence of a mixture of surname groups, peace among the villagers during the village elections is normally seen. Most of them agreed that more importance is attached to the competence of the candidates than lineage forces when it comes to elections or re-elections.

Some villagers' experiences also helped me picture more clearly the situation of the village elections in the recent years. It was found that it is very normal for them to receive a phone call or a visit from the election candidates before the elections. They admitted that they would cast a vote for their friends and relatives who attempted to win a village office place, especially when those candidates asked for help in person. They barely heard of any conflicts happening between the different clan groups during the village elections in recent years. Always, the composition of the village cadre teams did not change much over the past several office terms.

Secondly, I was keen to investigate the ways in which the public goods were delivered in the three villages, which is perceived as the vital contents of the rural governance. The three villages report a similar pattern of public goods provision: basically, the fundraising for the provision of the public goods, such as road and bridge construction and water supply, adopts the principle of three-tier management where county-level financial support accounts for 70% of the total funds, the village office contributes 20%, and the remaining 10% is self-funded by villagers. During the 1980s and 1990s, overseas Chinese played a pivotal role in the funds of donation for public goods, such as in the example of the construction of a primary school and kindergartens in Xinzhai village. Since 2000, the local rich and entrepreneurs from outside the village play a greater role in fund-raising for public projects, such as the bridge construction in Xiali village. Lineage members do not engage in the provision of village-wide public goods. There are no singular surname

groups with the characteristic of overlapping administrative and cultural boundaries, and no village-wide lineage councils as seen in Tsai (2002, 2007). Unsurprisingly, public goods are only shared within the lineage groups. The village cadres are more inclined to rely on top-down funding and donations from the rich in support of the local provision of public goods. In fact, the villagers are rarely mobilized by the village cadres to contribute to fund-raising for investment in public projects in these three villages.

Thirdly, the implementation of policy at different levels is also an important part of the rural governance. Thus, I observed that a new countryside cooperative medical system policy was being implemented across the county so village cadres were busy fulfilling the task of enabling qualified villagers to have an entry into this system. The difference in policy enforcement between Xinzhai and Longgang was that the former paid the fee 30rmb for each villager using village finances whilst the villagers of the latter had to pay this fee themselves due to the lack of public funds until 2011. The villagers who were interviewed admitted that the great majority of qualified villagers including themselves had signed up to this system. This policy is beneficial to them, though it cannot help much.

Otherwise, there were emerging issues on the disputes over the course of rural urbanisation. There was a typical example of how to deal with the waste disposal over the rural urbanisation. One time when I was visiting the Longgang village office, the village head was dealing with a petition submitted by some inhabitants. It requested that the village office should have effective negotiation with higher-level officials in order to get rid of the waste in a timely manner. Furthermore, the accountant of Longgang claimed that the toughest issue at the moment facing the village cadres was land dispute. During my visit, a group of the villagers who came to the office to request land compensation fees attracted my attention. There is tremendous tension between the villagers and the local cadres over the course of the land acquisition across the whole of China. However, the village leaders always conveyed that they truly cannot solve the problem as they always follow mandates or instructions from above. In the course of land expropriation, villagers, village representatives, village cadres and other high-level officials are all involved in the implementation of land expropriation policy, reflecting the exercise of power and the struggle to enforce policy.

I am not sure to what extent villagers share similar understanding and interpretation of the rural governance with village and township officials. But it is often observed that village cadres have shared perspectives on the implementation of village elections, policy implementation and series of problems arising out of the rural urbanisation. From the social constructionists' point of view, their knowledge of the changing rural governance should be constructed and reconstructed, interpreted and reinterpreted through conversation, social interaction and relational networking over a period of time. Ethnographers or anthropologists require themselves to either be part of this construction of social interaction and conversation or document how conversations and daily interaction proceed from a more distant, neutral position.

That depends on the immediate requirements of situations, participant or stakeholders' consents and the ethical limitations.

3. Participant Observation and Contextualized Conversation as Part of Social Construction

Most forms of participant observation fall in between participant observer and observer participant. Participant observer emphasizes the priority of observation, when combined with participation whilst the observer participant highlights the priority of participation merged with observation at the same time (Mason, 2002; Gerson and Horowitz, 2002; Silverman, 2005; Angrosino, 2007). More often than not, conversation will be naturally taking place when the ethnographers or anthropologists engage into the daily interactions. Sometimes I only observed how people interacted and talked to each other, and sometimes I was part of interaction and conversation (more details in Appendix 2). All these helped me realize how people interpreted messages, information, perceptions, knowledge and values, and used language and linguistic skills, as well as expressing their own understanding of knowledge and reality in specific contexts. On the other hand, in theory my prior perspectives can be challenged thus then my personal knowledge could be also reconstructed and reinterpreted over a period of time. I often visited the village offices since the places have a relatively confined social boundary and interface where the face-to-face conversation, conflicting processes, and power struggles, and even more distant relationships interlock together.

3.1 Day-to-day Interaction and Conversations in the Village Offices

During my visiting in the offices, I observed how the village affairs were being managed and sometimes I interacted with the villagers, village cadres, village representatives and the township-appointed cadres. Most of the time, the reason why the villagers come to the village office is mainly because they need to get materials stamped and make enquiries of the village cadres. For instance, couples need to obtain an application form for a Birth Service Card filled in at the village office and villagers need to obtain proof documents when transforming their *hukou* status. In addition, villagers seek guidance on how to prepare written materials and how to get through the procedural application. Sometimes villagers are invited by village cadres to come to the office to solve disputes, such as the distribution of the land compensation and on other occasions villagers approach the village cadres as to seek advice and suggestions to get their problems addressed. It is also not uncommon that the villagers come to the village office to have a casual chat with the village cadres. Compared to the Xinzhai, fewer villagers visit the Longgang and Xiali village offices.

There is at least one village cadre on duty during office hours. They often provide consultation and the document authorization for the villagers. The village cadres act as mediators in disputes among the villagers. Moreover, they assign the tasks to the village representatives and fulfil the above-appointed tasks. In terms of the everyday administrative issues, they usually follow official procedures. Village representatives usually play a major role in passing down notices to the villagers and collecting documents for the village cadres. Representatives also appear at the office to report

the progress on the implementation of policy and tasks and participate in dispute resolution. During office hours, village representatives often visit the office and have casual conversation. In comparison to the villagers, the representatives seem to be much closer to the village cadres.

At least one township cadre is assigned to each village office. The responsibility of the township-appointed cadres is only to deliver the commands issued above to the village cadres and monitor the progress of policy and the enforcement of tasks. They do not need to stay in the village office all day long and usually only remain in the village office for a short while whilst there are tasks to deal with.

I realized the village cadres often play a role in disseminating policy information and in correcting the villagers' perceptions in terms of understanding the information. But occasionally challenging questions raised by villagers would drive the here-and-now adjustment of interpretation of policy information. Most of the time, the village and township officials were able to reach an agreement on how to handle those challenging situations but, again, this agreement had to be subtly altered according to the unexpected encounters. Furthermore, power relations were concurrently being conveyed and were often imbalanced since village cadres always commanded villagers to do something with little explanation to their instructions. In short, the happenings in the village offices were organized following certain procedures most of the time, though minor adjustment or adaption of the ordered practices were accommodated.

In addition to the village offices, I also engaged myself into more gatherings such as in Lan surname clan hall and in the grassroots elections across the villages, which entails more complex social relationships and interaction, and more ambiguous social boundaries. Again, this helped me acknowledge more about understanding, interpretation and knowledge of the rural governance of the local people.

3.2 Participant Observation in the Lan Surname Graduate Celebration

As mentioned above, I was invited by the chairperson of the Lan Surname Committee to attend the scholarship ceremony which was held in a recently built ancestor hall. On the morning of 26 August, 2011, Lan surnamed members were gathering in the hall already when I arrived. Most of the scholarship recipients were present with their parents. Later on, a retired village cadre from Gucheng village, next to Longgang village, joined the conversation with me and another village cadre from Xinzhai village. This retired village cadre is a board member of the Lan Lineage Committee. Among other things, he was critical of village governance, stating that it was not a working mechanism as the village elections brought risks and pressures to the village cadres since they would lose everything once ousted in the (re)election campaign. Additionally, he related, within the discourse of rural democracy, the villagers were still not ready to fully understand what democracy should be defined as and how they can exercise their democratic rights. In his opinion, more often than not, villagers evaluate the performance of village cadres with their biases. As a result, most of the villagers are not be capable of casting a proper vote. Meanwhile, in light of the quality of the villagers, the vice-head from Xinzhai village gave the example

that there was an increase in so-called 'chaotic petitioning' (*chan fang*) at the grass-roots level. The retired village cadre looked unhappy when mentioning his retirement pension of only 440rmb per month, even though he had worked for the village offices for more than 25 years. Importantly, he also suggested in general that the better the village-wide economics, the more complicated issues the village cadres have to deal with.

Before the ceremony began, I was invited by the chairperson to sit with the committee members in the front row and I was asked to prepare for a short speech as a guest speaker. Interestingly, the chairperson of the Scholarship Fund Committee is the person who contributed the most donations and was to compete for the election of Representative of County People's Congress, which I learned later. By participating in the event, I became familiar with some village cadres and learned something about lineage culture and activities. Although village cadres are not expected to take the post of board members in the lineage committee due to regulation within the party, the current village head of Xiali village is a board member of the lineage committee and most board members were made up of retired village cadres, retired military officials and some entrepreneurs.

At this stage, I realized that the villagers and the village cadres actually live within extensive social networks and play varying roles in their life worlds. For instance, the village cadres are not only the lowest rung of the ladder of the state administrative system but also carry varying types of ties across local social networks. Interestingly, there is a conflicting relation between varying roles. Those social roles and their contents are often identified via building up social relationships and social interaction. Importantly, those social actors have capability to solve the conflicts of the role play, and to intentionally build up social relationships and extend relational networks to serve their purposes. Furthermore, different life worlds seem to be mediated with each other resulting the human actors' multiple versions of knowledge construction, and the reality of the rural governance, such as the rural democratization and economic development. Besides that, the implementation of grassroots elections offered me more lived experiences on how the knowledge of the rural democratization is constructed contextually and temporally in the field.

3.3 Participant Observation in the Grassroots Elections

3.3.1 Election Work Forces Training

On the morning of 05 September, 2011, three days before the elections, I went to the office of the Xiali village office. The chairperson knew me already as he is one of board members of the Lan Lineage Committee. I attended a meeting among the cadres where the head of the village allocated tasks to colleagues. The main task was to get the ballot boxes ready on 07 September, 2011, and to train the village representatives for the upcoming election. The timetable for running the elections was also set up. Afterwards, I participated in stamping the candidates' names on the voting forms. I realized that one of two candidates is the chairperson of the Lan Lineage Scholarship Committee who was going to compete for the post of representatives of County People's Congress. Xiali village head and another village cadre were going to compete for the post of representatives of Township Party

Assembly. I asked how the candidates were nominated and finalized, and in response the village head noted that villagers' committees can recommend candidates but the final list of candidates had to be approved by the county and township government.

When I was doing my work and talking to village head, an official, county or township level official, came to the office. Briefly, their conversation was about the allocation of tasks to ensure that there would be no protests while a higher-level government official was inspecting the county. The village cadres were warned to be vigilant to prevent a large number of villagers from Xiali village from engaging in the public protests. Thus, the cadres had to monitor the protesters especially those who were regarded as active leaders or organizers. Maintaining stability is still one of central jobs of village cadres and local officials alike. I stayed there until the job was finished and my request to participate in the training session on the afternoon of 07 September, 2011 was accepted by chairperson of Xiali village

The Xinzhai village office shared lots of similarities with Xiali village in terms of the training of the election workforce. The training session was to take place in Xinzhai office on the morning of 07 September, 2011. When I visited Xinzhai village office on 06 September, 2011, the cadres were busy informing the village representatives to attend the training activity on time and the ballot boxes were already prepared. To some extent, the training event was rather like a village representative assembly and most of attendees were familiar with the procedures of grassroots elections. Normally, the village representatives staff the elections. Technically speaking, the facilitation of village elections is the same as for other types of elections.

The head of Xiali village emphasized in particular the principle of two majority and the official regulation of proxy voting. It was said that the number of proxy votes should not be more than two and also of those voters who cast a proxy vote should show letters of authorization from their assignees. Equally important, the cadres were required to conduct a face-to-face announcement that the villagers have the responsibility to vote as a Chinese citizen, despite the fact that some villagers might abstain from voting. This was because, according to what the Xiali village head said, in the last village election a villager had challenged the legitimacy of the election by claiming that he was not informed to vote by the cadres. In short, the election was expected to be run in accordance with those election procedures and principle. Likewise, in addition to the fundamental principles and basic requirements of the procedures, in the Xinzhai village office the village cadres were divided into different teams with responsibility for election supervision, vote collection, and vote counting. Compared to Xiali village office, the training event in Xinzhai village office seemed to be relatively formal. It was interesting for me to compare what the cadres said and what the cadres actually did during the elections.

3.3.2 Implementation of the Elections

Xiali village was selected to be the site where I participated in and observed the elections. The reason for this was to answer to the question of whether lineage context had an impact on local elections. There was also the question of whether

legal regulations are able to lead to a healthy running of the elections. I arrived at Xiali village office at 6:15am on the morning of 08 September, 2011, and the ballot collection started at 6:30am according to the timetable. The reason for the vote collection beginning so early was that most of the villagers are at home at that time and the job was expected to be completed before the weather became too hot. There were four teams as the election staff. I joined a team that was made up of six village representatives and one village cadre. This team was responsible for collecting votes from four village groups or natural villages. More specifically, a mobile ballot box was used throughout the elections, by which the village cadres found it easier to handle the processes of voting.

Initially, I wondered if the village representatives might change their behaviour since I might be perceived as an outsider or even as a monitor. I was relieved after I observed for a while. Indeed, most of the time the village representatives informed the villagers to vote and the villagers were told they had the right to decide whether or not to vote. However, surprisingly, quite a lot of villagers did not know what the election was about and some of them were not interested in voting at all. Moreover, the village representatives showed the voters how to tick the box under the candidates' names and how the voter should follow this format. They filled out the vote papers for their relatives and also for those who could not make it for whatever reason: elderly households account for the majority of the electorate and some of the elder villagers are illiterate. When faced with this situation, the village representatives showed them a sort of guideline, and asked them to replicate an example of a provided vote paper. It was also apparent, that the representatives did not abide by the regulation of proxy voting which was underscored by the village head during the training session.

Later, having realized my curiosity, the village representatives explained to me why this occurred. The main reason was that the representatives to be elected were determined by higher level officialdom so that what they can only do was to fulfil instructions from above. Further, they underscored that the election of representatives of the County People's Congress and of Township Party Assembly had nothing to do with the villagers. Thus, they reasoned, there was no need to take it seriously. The vote collection was completed at around 10:30 am and the voting counting was to take place on the afternoon of the same day. The result was officially announced and publicized on 09 September, 2011, on the village notice board. Although the principle of more candidates than posts was used, there was no competition among the candidates at all. Unsurprisingly, the candidates who were allegedly recommended by the higher-level government were elected. Given my intention to compare Xinzhai and Longgang village, I shared what I had observed in Xiali village with some cadres from the two village offices over next few days. The processes of the elections were very similar among the three villages.

After the mid-autumn festival holiday on the morning of 13 September, 2011, I had an opportunity to meet with Longgang village head. The village representatives were doing similar things during the village elections. The village head explained how, in the course of the villager elections, the village cadres helped one another to win the contest and that how the representatives normally behaved corresponded to the

decision making of the villagers' committees. Therefore, I was able to understand more what a cohesive and unified village cadre team might imply. Interestingly, the team of village cadres in Xiali village was regarded as a factional or uncooperative one. That might partially explain why one village cadre in Xiali village office complained that due to the absence of cooperation among the village cadres he had to put much more individual effort in to ensuring his re-election.

In order to obtain comparison and reconfirmation in light of the local elections, I revisited the Xiali and Xinzhai village offices on 15 September and 19 September, 2011, respectively. I found that in general the village elections and other forms of elections alike are illegally and undemocratically implemented (more details and analysis seen in Chapter 4). A village cadre from Xiali village office pointed out that the mode of democratic centralism should be understood in a way which centralism is always placed as the priority and democracy is merely treated as a political formality.

3.4 Interface Analysis

Villagers experienced how the grassroots elections were implemented and they learned from what they experienced. Their version of knowledge and reality of the rural democracy or elections are constructed not only by the here-and-now interaction during the elections but also over long-term interaction processes, communication, and exchange surrounding the topics of the elections or the democracy. Thus, it is not surprising for them to attach their own interpretation to democracy and elections as a concept or series of knowledge claims. For example, they often perceive democracy as the nothing to do with the improvement to their livelihoods but only as an inconvenience.

Village and township cadres and, to a lesser extent, village representatives seem to have mastered the approach to implement grassroots elections in compromising the party control and the external lawful regulation on it. They had experienced what the grassroots elections looked like in reality, and learned what the elections were meant to them, ranging from training of the work force to vote collection. They have developed a series of strategies to cope with the face-to-face confrontation while pocketing a vote, and managed the potential risks to challenge the legitimacy of the elections, as well as imposed their power upon others more efficiently. Somehow they have shaped the enforcement of the designed grassroots elections or democratization with their knowledgeability, capabilities, and power relations.

4. Primary Research Armed with Actor-Oriented Perspectives

Processes of iterative-induction research are commonly the case in fieldwork based study. There is no exception to those scholars who undertake fieldwork in Mainland China to experience this process. For example, when O'Brien and Li were supposed to investigate village elections as their initial research interests, they changed their interests to focus on the 'Cadre Responsibilities System' after conducting interviews with informants (O'Brien, 2006). When faced with difficulties in gaining access to a research site, Heimer (2006) decided to adopt the approach of one-case multi-field-site so that she undertook her inquiry in 12 counties instead of 1 county as initially designed. When researchers propose new research puzzles which are different from

their initial discipline-driven questions, they need to gather evidence to attest to their new research arguments. So, it is normal for the researcher to adjust research focuses, research methods and sampling, reflecting flexible scheduling in the course of conducting research (O'Brien, 2006).

Guided by clearer research directions or focuses arising out of the pilot study, normally ethnographers or anthropologists will move to the stage of collecting furthermore data and they will be constantly figuring out research arguments and rethinking theory and sampling.

4.1 Provisional Fieldwork Findings and Development of Research Focuses

The changing rural governance in the pilot study mainly refers to the establishment and the operation of the village offices, the provision of the public goods, the rural urbanisation and the policy implementation. As can be seen, the villagers' committees were absolutely not run in accordance with the Organic Law. The lineage groups and committees do not play an important role in delivering public goods in the villages. What is more, varying forms of disputes or conflicts are emerging over the course of the rural urbanisation. However, the villagers' committees and the village cadres seem to be in a weak position to bring about the efficient problem-solving, or say good rural governance. So, I wonder that the (good) rural governance is achievable in that context and the reasons why the rural governance is being directed that way.

With reference to the social constructionism and the actor-oriented perspectives, I found that as the research moved on, those social actors expressed more and more of their lived experiences and multiple types of understanding and interpretation of the rural governance, such as a series of knowledge claims on the rural democratization. Still, I attempted to analyse and explain how the multiplicity of version of the rural governance is being formed. By referring to the key concepts in the social constructionism and the actor-oriented perspective, and adopting interface analysis, I was directed to pay attention to demonstrate how the mediation of the agency of the social actors works, and to explicate the emerging structure, as well as, to contemplate how it was being constructed by the human agents.

More and more conflicting interactions were discovered when I was constantly engaging myself in conversations, gatherings and meetings as forms of social interface. Those social interfaces particularly entailed the conflicting processes of, and negotiation and accommodation of, the individuals' projects and (quasi)-structures. For instance, conflicts came from policy implementation, such as the land taking and family planning policy. Interestingly, the policy implementation was also shaped somehow by the human agents and other (emerging) structural forces together. I collected more and more data in these arenas.

When those conflicts or disputes came, there were always strategies created to solve them. It was recognized that land reclamation always brought conflicts or struggles between varying involved parties, and the disputes in the distribution of compensation funds and the returned farmland. As more and more data had been gathered, I developed another research focus. It was mainly about how the social

actors constructed the here-and-now knowledge via daily interaction, and how they reinterpreted the meanings of social values of justness, fairness, legitimacy and rightfulness, as well as how they utilized problem-solving skills and power relations over the processes of the disputes settlement.²²

5. Limitations of Fieldwork Design

5.1 Limitations of Sampling and Case Comparison

The fieldwork research was undertaken in the villages with the characteristics of the Hakka culture. On the one hand, the culturally specific contexts would be taken into account of the analysis of the internal factors shaping the external interventions. On the other hand, this selection of the villages might greatly limit the scope of representativeness of the study for rural governance across China. Thus, while other villages have encountered the culturally and historically different situations, these research findings might be no longer applicable.

The selection of the two villages are designed to compare the capability in public service provisions, the impact of clan groups and village governing organs on the rural governance, and performance over the different stages of rural urbanisation. As mentioned in the pilot study, the two villages are different from one another in the level of villagers' committee finances, in the composition of the clan groups and the village governing organs, and in the degree of the land urbanisation. Thus, the two villages represent two different types of rural governance. However, as the fieldwork observation evolved, it was realized that Longgang village seems to be undergoing a similar trajectory as Xinzhai village did over the past decades. In fact, they might both only represent a single type of rural governance. It is partly for this sampling selection did not fully consider a comparison of the other villages wherein the villages are situated within different local contexts and the village governance is strictly operated in accordance with the Organic Law. Therefore, to some extent, the heterogeneity of the rural governance might not be fully explained as the both villages selected are not considered within varying local contexts and as such a mode of democratic governance.

5.2 Limitations of Research Methodology

Iterative-inductive ethnography is particularly useful for investigating a dynamic social process, the lived experiences, inter-subjective communication and interaction, and complex social relations and networks. But it also raises some questions in the fieldwork. First, when I had become part of the local relationships, I found that the degree of the ambiguity of the subjective judgement and the objective observation increases. That sometimes disturbs how I distinguish my own interpretation and judgement from the others'. If ethnographers are not able to master the skill or art of balancing subjectivity and objectivity of the knowledge construction, that might cause the greater uncertainty of truth telling. Compared to quantitative research, ethnographic research somehow relies upon the subjective judgement rather than operationalized variables, objective indicators, and a commonly recognized analytical framework. In this case, it is relatively difficult for other researchers to

²² The research timetable can be seen in Appendix 1.

evaluate ethnographic research findings. Second, the fieldwork research requires the researchers to participate in the contextualized situations so as to investigate the here-and-now changes. Once the local contexts are changing, if the researchers are not able to reinvestigate in the field, the applicability of the research findings could be greatly challenged.

6. Ethical Consideration

To protect the research informants and for the researcher himself to stay safe there are two main ethical considerations alongside the conducting of fieldwork. Firstly, informants' unwillingness to answer questions should be accepted. Sometimes, the questions being raised are sensitive to the informants. For example, the village cadres did not respond actively to me when the questions in relation to the implementation of land expropriation were asked. In this case, I chose to go for other informants, often villagers. Secondly, some informants refused my request for introductions to other informants who were assumed to be the important source of useful information from my point of view. It is conceivable that these informants were afraid of getting involved in unexpected risk or trouble. I accepted their refusals of my requests and attempted to approach the informants in another way. For example, I went to their houses directly after I got their residential addresses. Thirdly, some topics were deliberately avoided with the informants so as not to cause interpersonal tension especially within the group conversation.

Moreover, as a researcher, I also needed to be concerned about my own safety when I was exploring the details of the events. Sometimes, the villagers, especially who were suffering unfair and unjust treatment, asked me whether I was able to raise the issue to the upper-level government, expose their stories on the social media, or give them suggestions as to how to solve their problems. Although I was felt compassion when hearing their stories, I was not in a position to get them addressed. I stated that the data collection was merely used in my PhD thesis, and gave them some advice on the way to address their issues. For instance, I gave them the guidelines of how to go through the administrative procedures and suggested to them that they find a lawyer.

These above-mentioned ethical issues bring up the downside to the sufficiency of the data collected. Firstly, the village cadres would know much more than the villagers, especially in the event of land disputes, so that their refusals to reveal the details of the certain events would cause insufficiency in the data gathered. Secondly, disruption of snow-balling the informants also restricted the researcher from digging deeply into certain events. Thirdly, because of the safety concerns of the researcher, details were not fully explored when informants seemed not interested (or were not happy) with the questions being asked. Thus, the data collected for certain events are not ample enough.

7. Conclusion

Ethnographic research is chosen for defining research questions, seeking for regularities between behaviours and events, studying participants in the field, documenting a social process and conducting setting-appropriate measures (Angrosino, 2007: 21-25; O'Reilly, 2012; Yin, 2008). Also importantly, ethnographic

study is often undertaken as discipline-driven or theoretically-embedded research processes. Relevant theoretical representations play a vital role in guiding ethnographers to attend to research areas. New research topics often emerge over the processes of research practices. In the meanwhile, data collection occurs concurrently with analysis of data, theoretical (re)consideration and ethnographic writing-up. Ethnographers often employ iterative-inductive approaches in order to formulate research arguments in the field, reflecting the interaction of theory and data throughout the research. More often than not, the design of ethnography is flexible, open-mined, adaptable and reflexive.

What is more, social constructionism and actor-oriented perspective entail affinities with the ethnography. By referring to the theoretical framework, ethnographers are treated as ones of social actors who are concurrently being involved into the social construction of the knowledge and the reality. In some cases, ethnographers use this theoretical and analytical framework to interpret the social actors' lived experiences, values, beliefs, identity, and interests and day-to-day social interaction under the historic and cultural circumstances. Moreover, they analyse the processes of the social actors' interaction with the external forces or social interfaces.

The previous findings offered me some clues on what aspects of the potential research arenas I might focus on in my pilot study. Armed with the social constructionism and the actor-oriented perspectives, I was guided to determine what data could be collected and to what extent the data is able to be interpreted and analysed. Then I was redirected to explore other potential research arenas. In the meanwhile, as an ethnographer I had to redesign my research schedules and ways of the data collection according to the here-and-now conditions in the field. Gradually, I narrowed down my research topics and constructed and reconstructed my knowledge of the rural governance over a period of time.

Chapter Four

Internalization of the State-Sponsored Rural Democratization: Lived Experiences, Social Relationships and Emerging Power Structure

1. Changing Rural China's Governance and Power Configuration

The impact of the rise of rural entrepreneurs on the Chinese countryside, especially in affluent provinces like Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Guangdong, has been widely noticed. Levy (2007) observed talented politics (*neng ren zheng zhi*) or entrepreneur stratum in Guangdong province. Oi (1999) reveals that the emergence of local businessmen is related to de-collectivization, the growth of the market economy, and opportunities for internal immigration and non-agricultural jobs. There are more and more local entrepreneurs entering villagers' committees which may provide business opportunities for the locality. Meanwhile, they also bring about a power shift away from the appointed party cadres.

The emergence of rural economic talent brings power struggles and power redistribution to rural politics. In industrialized areas, real power is likely to spring from the economic elites who run income-generating enterprises rather than stem from village elections (Oi and Rozelle, 2000). When entrepreneurs-turned-cadres or cadres-turned-entrepreneurs are in charge of the distribution of vital resources in villages, the legitimacy of local authority rests more on their market power, such as their control over job security and allocations for the villagers, rather than traditional party organizational control. As a result, the basis of party-control legitimacy on rural society seems ostensibly to be challenged, giving rise to a depoliticized pattern of village governance (Chen, 2007).

Arguably, rich men's predominance on rural political resources might create new barriers against the participation of ordinary villagers in the management of village affairs. For example, a difficulty faced by the poor villagers to enter the villagers' committees is the fact that they do not have campaign funds to support competition for posts in villagers' committees. Post-election, the poor villagers' demands are easily ignored by rich village cadres (Chen, 2011). Also, those entrepreneurial incumbent village cadres worry about challenges to their grip on power caused by the active political participation of villagers. They thus have a tendency to demobilize the villagers to participate in village elections and village assemblies (Oi and Rozelle, 2000).

While the local party is fighting over local authority against the rise of economic elites in light of village administration, it adopts a set of approaches to ameliorate power challenges. Selective and graduated control over the development of social organizations, broadening party membership in all walks of life, presiding over privatization of economics necessary to citizens' livelihood improvement, redefining ideological propaganda on the nature of the Party and so on, are conceived of as survival strategies of the Party (Dickson, 2010; Tsai and Dean, 2013). There is no exception when it comes to the strategies of local parties in dealing with the rising rural economic elites. Recruitment of moneyed elites into village party branches is perceived as an efficient means to prevent the party from losing a unitary, systemic

leadership. Interestingly, the metaphor of ‘a red-hat merchant’ (*hong ding shang ren*) is used to describe those economic talented who have been recruited into the party and conform to the political baseline of the CCP. It implies that fostering local economics is a sort of political task (*zheng zhi ren wu*) imposed upon them so as to maintain political stability (Levy, 2007). Among others, an elected entrepreneurial chairperson with party membership would be appointed to assume the post of the village party secretary (Chen, 2007: 165-67). Likewise, the elected economic talents that have yet to hold party membership, including the village heads and ordinary committee members, would more often than not be subsumed into the village party branches (Levy, 2007). Unsurprisingly, through so-called party rectification or party adaption the contradiction between the elected economic talent and the incumbent party leadership has been redressed to some extent with the party branches still remaining the core decision-making body (O’Brien and Han, 2009).²³

This chapter will focus on rural China’s reform of rural democratization from the perspectives of social constructionism and actor-oriented perspectives. It will look at the social actors’ multiple perspectives regarding the establishment of the villagers’ committees and its impact on rural governance, and how the human agents and the emerging structure mediate with each other over the processes of constructing knowledge and reality about the rural democratization. Last but not least, it offers an explanation on why the internalization and, to a larger extent, the heterogeneity of this designated rural democratization takes place nationwide.

2. Implementation of Rural Political Reforms via the Local Life Worlds

2.1 Human Agents’ Mediation of State-Sponsored Political Reforms of Villagers’ Committees

Elections in Xinzhai and Longgang villages have echoed the above-mentioned aspects of implementation of village elections in the introduction. In practice, the finalization of the candidates list did not undergo a primary election nor allow free speech during the campaigns. It is alleged that candidate lists are recommended by village party branches, voted through by village party assembly, and finally approved by the township government.²⁴ Moreover, although the principle of ‘the number of candidates being more than the number of post’ (*cha’e xuan ju*) is normally used, the candidates who are supposed to compete with the incumbent cadres in the final round of campaigning are, more often than not, ill-suited or incompetent. As a consequence, the main pressures surrounding re-election of the incumbent cadres are as follows: 1) to ensure turnout rate exceeding 50% of the electorate or registered voters, the rate of vote cast for candidates as considered elected more than 50%, namely the ‘two majority’ rule (*liang duo yuan ze*, see Tan, 2009); 2) to

²³ *The Organic Law of the Villagers Committees of the People’s Republic of China (2010 revised version)*, on Article 4, ‘The primary organization of the Communist Party of China in the countryside shall carry out its work in accordance with the Constitution of the Communist Party of China, playing its role as a leading nucleus; and, in accordance with the Constitution and laws, support the villagers and ensure that they carry out self-government activities and exercise their democratic rights directly,’ available at: www.gov.cn/flfg/2010-10/28/content_1732986.htm, translated version can be seen at www.enread.com/job/law/29528.html, accessed March 19, 2013.

²⁴ A similar case to Björn (2001: 53-54).

prevent invalidity of election outcome and, 3) to thwart spontaneous or well-prepared nominations.²⁵

Interestingly, incumbent village cadres have evolved a set of rationales on how to ensure re-election. First of all, ideally, success in village campaigning should be a team victory instead of an individual victory. Village cadres in both villages confirmed that the incumbent cadres need to work together to ensure re-election. Given that some village cadres have more or less influence on the given sub-areas, taking advantage of one another's cooperation and coordination can help draw more votes from their friends and relatives. It is possible that some cadres have to encounter more barriers to being re-elected than cadres who have more sources of local social support, including more extensive friendship network and influential relatives. That alludes to the fact that some cadres might have to consider their colleagues' disadvantages of less familiarity with and connection to some areas, hence necessitating a helping hand. Indeed, it is difficult for all voters to recognize all candidates, especially newly-nominated ones. It is in large part due to no public promotion and public speeches in a relatively large population size and semi-urbanized village, wherein new residents are not yet established and migrants working outside the village are not informed about the local politics. Unsurprisingly, they are motivated to act collectively for mutual aid.

Moreover, they also adopt similar approaches of collective shielding in coping with those competitors who could potentially take over the posts of an incumbent village cadre, and village representatives who are able to nominate contestants, monitor, and even manipulate the villagers' voting behaviours. For example, in Longgang village the introduction of new candidates to the election campaign was expected to be discussed among the incumbent cadres to reach an agreement. While some cadres supported some contestants in secret, they not only made their colleagues' job insecure but also threatened collective protection as a function to secure members in the long run. When there is need to offer special treatment to the village representatives, like gifts and dinners, the village cadres choose to act together and thus each of them can benefit.

The rhetoric of the village cadres for describing collective shielding refers to the unification and cohesiveness (*tuan jie*) within a team in village elections, which seemed a value to be maintained. Among other matters, the village cadres in Longgang village office claim that the Xinzhai village cadres team has set a good example for them. It is noted that a unified and cohesive team (*tuan jie de ban zi*) and the role of village head in unifying other committee members can attribute to certainty and less anxiety for the incumbent village cadres in seeking re-election. The cadres in Longgang showed a contrasting example in another neighbourhood village committee (Xiali village, as mentioned in Chapter Three) where massive pressure on re-election appeared due to fractures among the village cadres.

In other words, there is indeed competitiveness in campaigns for re-election. However, production of this competitiveness is likely to be determined by the

²⁵ The numbers of ballots collected cannot exceed the numbers of the ballots that are dispatched.

degree of sharing of supportive resources among village cadres, rather than the opinion of the electorate at the polls regarding the competing popularity of the candidates. So, when incumbent village cadres are able to integrate their sporadic sources of local support into systemic public support under given local conditions, individual incumbent cadres have much less pressure for re-election. It is a process of institutionalization of a 'winning team'. If so, in comparison with solidarity of collective shielding embedded into a village cadre team, the forces of the lineage groups like Lan and Luo surname clan groups in Longgang village, does not matter. Yet segmentation or rivalries within and between the two lineage groups might take place.²⁶ As observed, the majority of the incumbent village cadres were re-elected without exception in the two villages during the elections of the past decade (discussed in greater detail below).

Second, the assistance of villager representatives as workers in village elections doubly ensures the smooth running of the incumbent cadres' re-election. Collective shielding also compels villager representatives to act in conformity with collective decision-making and agendas. It is normal for villager representatives to guide, even manipulate, voters' voting dispositions. For example, village voters usually were told to cast votes to all incumbent village cadres; illiterate voters were told to fill out the form by only duplicating what the villager representatives provided. Moreover, the proxy vote was misused by the villager representatives who not only represent their family members or relatives when voting but also encourage other voters to vote for their family members as often as they could.²⁷ In addition, although some villagers decided to abstain from voting, the village representatives filled out those absentee votes at their will. The villagers admitted that they always follow the villager representatives' instructions when they are carrying mobile ballot boxes and standing next to them to ask for a good turn or interpersonal sentiment (*ren qing*).²⁸ In so doing, this manipulative process for gathering votes is an indispensable part of the institutionalization of a team victory in village election campaigns.

Interestingly, village cadres in the two villages conceive village elections and villagers' committees *per se* as a problematic setup and they point out reasons why they have chosen to utilize collective shielding and electoral manipulation concerning re-election. These reasons can be elaborated by drawing on the village cadres' values, views, goals and vested interests as shown below:

Problematic Consequences of Village Elections

First, peasants will misunderstand the village cadres' actions in dealing with village affairs, even if the village cadres have done the right thing. The villagers can retaliate

²⁶ The impact of inter-rivalry lineage group on the village elections could downplay the meaning of the village self-governance. See Hu (2008) and Pesque-Cela, Tao, Sun and Liu's (2009) study.

²⁷ All these actions of the village representatives in manipulating the ballots collection was also evidently observed in the election of the representatives of county people's congress and the election of the representatives of township party assembly taking place between 07 September, 2011 and 09 September, 2011. The principle of 'proxy vote', according to official enacted regulation at that time, is the 'proxy vote' cannot be more than two votes for an individual 'proxy voter' and authorization letters from the assignees are needed. More details on the Chapter Three.

²⁸ In fact, 'proxy vote' and 'mobile ballot boxes' had been regulated strictly. In some places, they had been abandoned in order to prevent cheating behaviours in voting. See O'Brien and Han (2009: 366-367).

against (*bao fu*) the village cadres by voting against them. Thus, instead of offending the villagers, the cadres have to please them when coping with issues, especially disputes, at expense of impartiality and justice. After all, the quality of the peasants (*nong min de su zhi*) at the present is not sufficient to understand democracy, let alone exercise democratic rights.²⁹ Secondly, the incumbent cadres who are ousted in re-elections have to leave the village offices even though they have mastered how to cope with village affairs. Apparently, the newly elected cadres have to spend a lot of time familiarizing themselves with village administration. That is inefficient for running villagers' committees.³⁰ Third, when village cadres, especially elder incumbent cadres who have been working for a long time, fail to win re-election, it implies that they would lose a relatively stable salary, a variety of bonuses and allowances and endowment pensions, leading to hardship in their future life.³¹

Face Value

In rural society, it is considered shameful if the incumbent village cadres lost in the village elections. That might signify that their incompetence was disastrous and that the local support of their extended families is breaking down, thus increasing rumours and gossip.³²

Shortage of Funds in Running Village Elections

While the primary expense of organizing village elections can be covered by the top-down financial support, such amounts of money are still inadequate to run a truly democratic election which is perceived as a time-consuming process. Consequently, it drives the contestants or the village representatives to complete it as quickly as they can. Therefore, electoral manipulation, like pulling the votes and manipulating the vote collection, is inevitable.³³

Higher-level Government Control

The candidate list has to be approved by higher government prior to the village elections. So, letting the incumbent village cadres win in re-election falls within category of a higher-level government arrangement. Therefore, there is no point in enforcing village governance if the village cadres have to be guided or led by higher-level government.³⁴

²⁹Interview with village-vice head in Xinzhai village office, August-September, 2011.

³⁰Interview with the new elected secretary of family planning of Xinzhai village office for the 2011 village election, May, 2012.

³¹Interview with a retired village cadre, August, 2012.

³²Interview with Longgang village head, September, 2011.

³³Interview with a Longgang village based township cadre, August, 2011.

³⁴Interview with Longgang village head and Xinzhai vice-head, August-September, 2011.

Despite the apparent eloquence of the village cadres in defending themselves, they in fact confused cause and effect within village elections and treated the checks and balances imposed on the village cadres' behaviours by the introduction of the village elections as making trouble in their everyday life. With regard to control of higher-level leadership over village level governance, it is argued that the village cadres should not be expected to be a vanguard in pioneering rural political reforms. On the contrary, from their point of view, the villagers' committee to which the village cadres belong is part of the local top-down state apparatus. Thus, it is unrealistic and unnecessary for them to play a significant role in triggering this political reform. Moreover, from the village cadres' perspective, villagers' democratic values and consciousness is an essential part of the success of the reform; when villagers do not care about the reform and are inactive in governance, there is no point to facilitate mass governance. In a word, without villagers' political participation, village cadres' efforts cannot make the reform come into effect.

Furthermore, some village cadres take seriously the informal rules of being perceived as involved in individual and familial crises. Also, insufficient financial support of election funds likely offers an opportunity for those contestants who have campaign financing to manipulate the election processes. When faced with weak protection networks of social benefits and insurance, village cadres argue that they have to protect themselves from the lack of state capacity building of wider social security in their own right. Accordingly, the village cadres project the message that they have no choices other than manipulation of the elections because they need to survive a political and social environment with a lack of political certainty and social security. Further, the village vice-head in Longgang expressed the opinion that the village election is only a gala showing ambitions for promotion of rural democratization in the manner of America or the West, but in reality is inappropriate for Chinese villagers.³⁵

It is partly demonstrated how the social actors are capable of taking advantage of the local social relationships and networks to mediate or internalize the implementation of the village elections externally designed. Also, they had constructed their own vocabularies in day-to-day language use, their discursive practices. For instance, they have their own understanding and interpretation of cohesion and unification, team victory, and of rural democracy itself, and implied them in a specific context. Importantly, they have capabilities to adjust their language use and attach meanings to the specific types of knowledge by means of everyday social interaction. Secondly, social relationships, including power relations and social networks, significantly affect their discursive practices and interpretations to the local changes and the external values.

3.2 Agency, Social Relationships, Networking and Power Relations in Shaping the Designated Rural Democratization

It is a matter of fact that most rural cadres have to make a living out of complementary farming or non-farming jobs as they do not stay in the state payroll system. Since the local economic reforms and the rural urbanisation are underway

³⁵ Interview with vice-head in Longgang village office, February-May, 2012.

and the market economy is growing, the income structures of the village cadres have been diversified. Some village cadres' distributive power over the village collective properties, such as farmland and the contracting out of collective resources, and their personal connections with higher-level leadership and local business groups, can contribute to their economic advancement (Cai, 2003; Zweigh and Chuang, 2007; Chen, 2007; Oi, 1999; Yeh, Xu and Liu, 2016). Meanwhile, local economic entrepreneurs who used to stay away from rural politics have begun to join the village administration, due in part to considerable pay-offs such as increased political power (Oi and Rozelle, 2000; Levy, 2007). More importantly, advocacy of political elitism is closely associated with the party state's economic-centred developmental strategies. Somehow the party government supports the economic elites to retain village power. Thus, it is argued that the entry threshold for village administration is getting higher and higher for ordinary villagers since either incumbent village cadres, who are beneficiaries, are deliberately withholding village power or the contestants are more likely to be rich people.

The two villagers' committees in this research will be a case in point since the coexistence of cadres-turned-entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs-turned-cadres appears to be common, as seen in the table below:

Table 2 Villager's Committee in Xinzhai, March 2011-March 2014 (9 village cadres)

Gender(Surname)	Position(s)	Party Member	Businesses activities	Year Joined	Notes
Male (Liu)	Secretary of village party branch; village head	Yes	Real estate (after)	1999	Promoted from vice-head to village head in 2011 election; ascended to post of vice-head at the township level in 2014
Male(Lan)	Secretary of dispute mediation and security; vice-secretary	Yes		1999	Military veteran; middle school education
Male (Lan)	Vice-village head	Yes	Owner of motorcycle shop (before)	2011	
Male (Wu)	Village clerk	Yes	Landlord (after)	1999 (1991)	Joined the village administration office in 1991; used to be a production team leader
Male (Wu)	Director of family planning	Yes		2011	
Male	Village clerk and accountant	Yes		2011	College graduate
Female (Liu)	Director of village women federation; cashier	Yes		2005	Primary school education
Male	College students' village official	Yes		2011	Two-year contact as college students' village official
Male (Lin)	Head of Young League of China in the village	Probationary	Family business for construction materials (before)	2012	Part-time village cadre member before officially joining the village administration in 2014; vocational school education

Table 3 Villagers' Committee in Longgang, March 2011-March 2014 (7 village cadres)

Gender(su rname)	Position(s)	Party Member	Businesses activities	Year Joined	Notes
Male (Luo)	Secretary of village party branch	Yes	Doctor; pharmacy owner (after)	1999	Formerly 'barefoot' doctor; resigned in early 2012 under suspicion of embezzling. Resignation was the only resolution to avoid the interrogation of villagers and the village representatives' and formal investigation. It was alleged that his appointment was related to the support of his brother who occupies a high position in Guangzhou Army Office.
Male (Lan)	Village head	Yes	Running restaurant (before)	2008	Became the secretary of village party branch in 2012 after the old secretary had left, was voted to the village representative assembly. High school education
Male (Wang)	Village vice-head; secretary of dispute mediation and security	Yes	Real estate (after)	1999 (1989)	Joined the village administration office in 1989; Former secretary of Youth League of China Branch; village head for the first term the committee established in 1999; left the villagers' committee between 2004 and 2010 to concentrate on his new business and re-joined the villagers' committee in 2011. ³⁶ High school education
Male (Luo)	Village clerk	Yes	Owner of small market; local grain wholesaler(b efore)	2011	High school education
Male (Luo)	Accountant	Yes	Landlord (after)	1990s	Joined at the beginning of the 1990s; previously militia leader before the first villagers' committee was established.
Female (Liu)	Director village women federation	Yes		2011	
Female	Director of family planning	Probatio n-ary		1990s	Joined at the beginning of the 1990s.

Village offices in both Xinzhai and Longgang village Xinzhai village underwent the combination and separation of the two committees (*liangwei*), namely village party

³⁶ In fact, he did not officially leave the committee between 2004 and 2007 but he was not in charge of the village administration during this term. There was an opportunity to create extra revenue for Longgang village finance by selling off quota of household register by that time the citizens' household were still relatively sacred sources. If the villagers desired to change their household statuses from the farmers to the citizens by following the administrative procedures, not only they had to be subjected to time-consuming and unfamiliarity with getting through those procedures across varying sectors, but also they had to pay a lot more for the transfer and registration fees. Accordingly, he put forwarded that selling off the spare quotas to the villagers who would like to purchase, especially the village cadres' relatives and friends, not only can produce more revenues for the village coffer but also benefit the villagers in many aspects. He admitted that, for example, the purchasers who did not want to get through those procedures on their own as they either have no time or were not familiar at all with the setup of the government sectors tended to authorise him to get things done with certain amount of money in return. Then, the fees that were agreed within the villagers' committee belonged to the village finance and the rest of the money will be flowed into his pocket. In his words, he had no reluctance to receive the money from the villagers as, on the one hand, helping them would cost him in a way that at times he also had to make use of his personal connections to the staff in the government sectors and even had to treat them meals or gifts; on the other hand, he did not embezzle any penny belonging to the village finance. As a matter of fact, that cost the villagers paid was much less with his help. Although that seemed to be a win-win consequence, sooner and later he was investigated by the County People's Procuratorate, which ended up with no evidence to prosecute him for being corrupted but ended up with the penalty of probation within the party for a year.

branch and villagers' committee, on two occasions since 1999.³⁷ For the village office term of 2011-2014, Xinzhai village administration adopted the system of concurrent office holding. Longgang village office changed from the setup of two committees to concurrent office holding as the village head assumed the post of secretary in May, 2012. Apart from these matters, there are few things that can be drawn from the table description.

Impact of Incumbency on Chance of Re-election

At first glance, the majority of the village cadres who joined since 1999 have worked for three or four terms in the village administration. In fact, vacancies by committee members or leaders were due in large part to village cadres' retirement rather than loss in re-election campaigns.

Promotion

Some cadres were promoted to higher positions like head or vice-head, secretary or vice-secretary. This is related to the incumbency of villagers' committees: the longer the village cadres stay, the more chance for them to be promoted.

Party Membership

All of the village cadres (aside from two probationary members) are Chinese Communist Party members, thus seeming to be an indispensable qualification. Yet it is important to note that villagers affiliated to non-party membership are allowed to take part in the village campaigns. In fact, according to the village cadres, candidates should first be approved by the village party assembly and the township government prior to running in village elections.

Male Domination

Not only do the males account for the vast majority of the governing teams, but also exclusively hold important positions in the village office. According to the legal regulation, there is a necessity for there to be at least one woman working in the villagers' committee and they are normally appointed to the post of the director of Village Women Federation.³⁸ Apparently, Xinzhai and Longgang villagers' committees meet this requirement.

Occupation and Income Diversification

A very high number of the village cadres do not rely on their salaries which are perceived to be too little to live a good life.³⁹ Interestingly, the cadre members who

³⁷ For example, for Xinzhai village, two committees combined together for three times, from 2002 to 2005, from 2005 to 2008 and from 2011 to 2013; separated for two times, between 1999 and 2002 and between 2008 and 2011. The village elections were officially promoted in Guangdong in 1998. Policy background can be seen with more details in Levy 2003 and Levy 2007.

³⁸ *The Organic Law of the Villagers Committees of the People's Republic of China (2010 revised version)*, on Article 6. *ibid*.

³⁹ About stabilization of the village cadres' wages which is discussed more in Kung, Cai and Sun's (2009) article.

joined in 1999 and in 2011, especially those in the higher positions, probably improved their economic situation while working in the villagers' committee; the cadre members who joined in very recent terms of the villagers' committee are all already better off before entering the villagers' committee.⁴⁰ Overall, they are economically advantaged and many of them are doing real estate related businesses.

Leaders Having Main Clan Surnames

Of course, statistically, the candidates from within large surname groups, like Luo and Lan surnames in Longgang Liu surname in Xinzhai have better chances of being posted as committee members or leaders. As discussed above, the village leaders with more sources of local support can help other incumbent committee members in winning re-election by sharing their sources with them, giving rise to a lack of conflicts between two relatively equal sizes of Lan and Luo surname groups, and between Liu surname group and other small surname groups.⁴¹ Besides the above, both early and recent village cadre members have different types of relationships with incumbent cadres. These relationships refer to business partnership, fellowship, collegueship, friendship and familial relations, examples of which will now be discussed.

For example, by the late 1990s and early 2000s the vast majority of young villagers were leaving the backward villages for more non-agricultural job opportunities. Admittedly, the post of village cadre member was not yet an attractive job, especially for the young male villagers, during the early reform of the villagers' committee. Village leaders intended to recruit young and competent villagers into the relatively aged village administration team. The current village chief in Xinzhai village was recommended by a village secretary who had served between 1993 and 2002 to join the village office, as did the current village vice-head in Longgang village.⁴²

As far as a new entrant to Xinzhai villagers' committee in 2011 was concerned, he was appointed to the post due to having an internship at the village-level Youth League of China and would inevitably become a party member after one year of probation.⁴³ Additionally, he will become a committee member by taking over the vacancy created when the present village chief assumes the post of township-level vice-head in 2014. Apparently, the village election in March, 2014 was not a challenge to his accession. Moreover, his father is the contractor of three village-owned stores where construction materials are sold and his family has a business partnership with the present village chief who runs a real estate business.

⁴⁰ In Longgang village office, accountant and village vice-head have private, medium lower grade vehicles; in Xinzhai village office, village head owns a top grade vehicle (Audi Q7) and accountant has a lower grade vehicle. The majorities of others have motorcycles and the majority of male smoke brand-name cigarettes (*Chunghwa* and *Furongwang* cigarette).

⁴¹ The incumbent village cadres' mobilization affects competitiveness of the village election. In other words, they are able to mobilize the village voters to be their contesting forces in order to win over other (incumbent) contestants. See Wang 2012: 707.

⁴² Head of Xinzhai village in the office term of 2011-2014 has a relative relation with just mentioned head of Xinzhai village (1993-2002). The village head's (2011-2014) daughter married the grandson of the village head (1993-2002).

⁴³ When I revisited Xinzhai village office on 15 July, 2013, one more village intern cadre is working in the office before 2014 village election and will take over the job vacancy when a village clerk retires in 2014.

Additionally, his wife's uncle is a county-level high official. The connections of his family to the village chief and higher-level officials, rather than the village elections, seem to be the main reason why he was admitted into the villagers' committee.

Both the recently-joined village clerk in Longgang village and village vice-head in Xinzhai village are local entrepreneurs; the former has close friendship with the present village vice-head and the latter has close friendship with the present village chief as well.⁴⁴ It was also observed, through group conversation with village cadres and villagers, that the Longgang village vice-head has common ideas with the village clerk in terms of approaches to facilitating village governance and developing the village economy by such as the land leasing and the rental businesses. The Xinzhai village head supports the village vice-head to ascend to the post of village chief for next term of villagers' committees, showing the possible existence of a clique among the village cadres.

In the Longgang villagers' committee, the present director of Village Women Federation is daughter-in-law of the retired director of Village Women Federation. She took over the post when her mother-in-law permanently left the villagers' committee in 2011. Lastly, the current director of the Village Women Federation in Xinzhai village committee was recommended by a village chief, who worked between 2005 and 2011, to take over the post after the female director of Village Women Federation retired in 2005. It was alleged that the village chief at that time was struggling to find a qualified female for the post as the majority of stay-at-home female villagers were less educated and inexperienced. Eventually, this village chief selected a woman from his village group, despite the fact that she only attained primary school education.

Chen emphasizes the economic advantages of the entrepreneurs-turned-cadres in control of the village power and in gaining trust from the villagers (2007). Accordingly, their entrance into the villagers' committees probably still requires connections with the village leadership, such as existing business partnerships and friendships. Posts passed down to committee members from retired cadres are likely to be determined by fellowship and familial relations. Generally, village leaders or secretaries play a vital role in selecting the candidates of the village cadres and allocating posts for them. What is more, relational ties are not only rooted at the village level, but also extend to political and economic networking beyond. It is likewise noted that political resources are prone to be circulated among the clique of close friends overlapping with business partners, and family members. This therefore results in the exclusion of other villagers from the rural politics and management. At the same time, it is not surprising that the villagers perceive the village elections and the village affairs management as the village cadres' businesses but not their own concerns by the day-to-day observation and communication. There is no wonder

⁴⁴ Existence of friendship between the village cadres is indirectly or directly denoted by village cadres' answers to these questions, such as 'when they knew each other, who are their close friends and what events they used to engage with each other' and the villagers' answers to these questions, such as 'who have a close friendship with whom and who are in whose allies in the village office', and so on. Asking these relevant questions either happened in the middle of events or in the individual conversation.

some villagers stated that the village cadres have formed a tight-knit group with each other (*la bang jie pai*).⁴⁵

Interestingly, compared to the village cadres being accused of embezzlement of public funds, these economic elites have not been objects for the people's hatred. For example, in some villagers' eyes, they are intelligent, innovative and adaptable to the pace of social development. Some villagers' point of view is that, since the moneyed elites have more local networking resources, they are in a position to effectively settle the local disputes and bring more funds to support construction of public projects. Additionally, villagers perceive that, as the economic elites are better-off already, they are more inclined to pursue social reputation rather than being involved in corruption. However, some villagers hold different views, arguing that the reasons why the current village cadres are not corrupt is that either there is nothing left for them to hijack or they have obtained enough personal benefits already. Some also pointed out that the village cadres are forming a tight group with each other, like a clique of gangers, to seek personal gain.

Thus, it is unsurprising to realize the social actors' multiple versions of the implementation of the rural democratization are due in part to varying types of social relationships and ways of creating social networks. Again, those entrepreneurs-turned-cadres are capable of utilizing connections with the incumbent cadres to obtain access to the villagers' committees and, in turn, procure personal benefits. More importantly, it seems that routes to village leadership have already been organized and the way to be admitted to a post in the villagers' committees has been pre-structured. I will now move on to the analysis on the interaction of human agency and (emerging) structure based on the rationale of social constructionism and actor-oriented perspective.

3. Emerging Power Structures: Enabling and Inhabiting Forces for Rural Democratization

Interestingly, the conduct of the first round of the village election used to be relatively democratic, embracing secret ballots, free popular nomination and public discussion, similar to so-called 'sea-elections' (*hai xuan*) (Tan, 2009). A retired village chief, who had been serving as a chairperson in Xinzhai village office from the era of land reform to the early period of open policy reform, witnessed the process of converting the system of village administration districts (*guan li qu*) into villagers' committees. Previously, a blank voting paper was sent to the voters' households one day earlier than vote collection in order to ensure the voters had adequate time for discussion about the candidates. The villagers did not know the candidates list in advance and were not forced to select hand-picked candidates. The conduct of the first village election in Longgang village was similar to that in Xinzhai village. As a result, the above-mentioned village vice-head was elected to be village head because of, according to his claims, his recognisable effort in dealing with practical issues for the village and the villagers alike, thus engendering mass voting support.

⁴⁵ Individual interview with household heads and some household members from the nearly 10 households each village; group interview with the villagers who came over the village offices. Nonetheless, the sample was not representative.

The villagers' main reason for giving a vote are the candidates' reputation, including their being an honest character, having no record of involvement in corruption, and being impartial and accountable in general. It is noted that voting is not new for villagers as they had previously experienced elections to elect production team leaders. The majority of them would be able to evaluate the performance of the candidates through their familiarity with the long-term activities of the candidates in the villages. Thus, if the village election is free for the villagers to participate in, they are capable of choosing appropriate village cadres who have established a good image through managing village affairs. In this regard, it is unsurprising that the incumbent cadres are likely to be elected. However, the villagers should at least be able to dismiss those candidates they deem incompetent and corrupt from the village offices as that is one of essential purposes behind the introduction of the officially-supported village elections.

However, the manipulation of elections began to appear when the next election was being planned. In Xinzhai and Longgang villages alike, voting paper was no longer blank but was attached to a list of the candidates. Not only were the village voters disallowed from keeping the ballots overnight in a manner convenient to hosting a group discussion, but the vote collectors also monitored how the village voters filled out the ballots in person, and collected them immediately afterwards. In Longgang village, during the second election, the village head was subjected to the replacement due to the higher-level direct appointment of village party secretary.

In Xinzhai village, aside from election manipulation, the villagers, the village representatives, and the party representatives' participation in village issues became less and less frequent. Meanwhile, the village cadres overtly controlled dissemination of policy messages, especially policy information at the local level, and decision-making. The retired village chairman in Xinzhai and his wife mentioned that convening village representative assemblies had become less frequent, unless the village cadres needed to announce their previously-made decisions and report some top-down official notices. Consequently, from their own experiences, the majority of the villagers, village representatives, and even party representatives had to confront the fact that they were being discouraged from involvement in the collective decision-making process and in political deliberation. Unsurprisingly, the villagers and the village representatives were being distanced from village affairs as, at the very least, they did not know much about what the village cadres were doing. To some extent, the events as shown below reflect reasons why the village cadres dampened the villagers' participation in decision-making.

The village cadres had the opportunities for rent-seeking by utilizing their political power as the collective planning economy collapsed and the local urbanisation and market economy emerge. In Xinzhai village during the late 1980s, the village-owned collective facilities, like the grain processing station and canning factory, were sold off one by one. By the late 1990s, a village-level construction team was established to meet the needs of booming public project construction alongside the on-going land expropriation. Additionally, it is not uncommon for the village cadres to seek donations from overseas Chinese in the name of village public interests such as

primary school building and construction of kindergartens. In Longgang village, although the village-level economy is growing comparatively slowly due, in part, to its peripheral location to the county centre, the variety of construction projects have also appeared to be burgeoning since the late 1990s, alongside the local city urbanisation and expansion.

Further, over the course of local development, most of the village cadres in the two villages have amassed great personal benefits. Among other matters, they had had privileges of purchasing land use rights from the County State Land and Resources Bureau at a very low price at the same time when the local policy of land reallocation for resettlements was being implemented. As a result, most of them built their own private apartments. With regard to the establishment of the village-level construction team, that could be the reason (as shown in the table 2) why some incumbent village cadres in Xinzhai village office are landlords or run real estate businesses. In Longgang village, the current village-vice took over the contract of a village-owned club (for greater detail see Appendix 3). As can be seen, the incumbent village cadres have more opportunities than ordinary villagers to seek for personal gains by exploiting their political power.

More importantly, upper-level government was closely engaged with the activities of rent-seeking and in providing a protective umbrella for those corrupt village cadres (Cai, 2003). For example, the retired Xinzhai village chief who had served between 1993 and 2002 and the Longgang village chief who resigned in 2012 were both accused of embezzling collective land compensation funds.⁴⁶ However, given the protection of higher-level officialdom, the former stayed in the post of secretary until he retired and the latter did not confront failure in previous terms of villagers' committee until 2012.⁴⁷ In fact, from an elderly party representative's recollection, the retired head of Xinzhai village openly stated in the village party assembly that he was still able to serve for three more years and his reappointment was voted through, though he was already at the retirement age of 60. Although those party representatives knew that he had committed corruption and did not wish to re-elect him as the village chief by an intra-party election (*dang nei xuan ju*), they had fears of offending him openly, and also the decision of his reappointment had already been made by the above-level party government.

⁴⁶ In 1988, land acquisition took place in Xinzhai for accommodation and office building for the staff of state-owned hydropower station. As a consequence, apart from land acquisition compensation fees provided, there were two more forms of compensation: 1) a quota for transfers from farmer householder status to citizen householder status; 2) a quota for job reallocation in the 'work unit'. Due to his efforts, his son was allocated to a place in the state-owned hydropower station and his other three daughters were all assigned to the public kindergartens. Moreover, as the village head, he had priority to purchase the reallocated land from the County State Land and Resources Bureau with the extremely low price. As a result, the villagers are irritated with his power abuses, corruption and malfeasance and his immorality, selfishness and injustice. Although some villagers (some of them were his relatives) tried all the means to expose his wrongdoings, he still stayed in his job. It was said that some petitioners were intercepted on the way to lodging the petition to the upper-level government. In Longgang, the village secretary decided to resign in order to avoid seemingly ever-lasting public opposition, though some villagers and village representatives are resented with his resignation that was conceived as his last resort to escape from court trial.

⁴⁷ In fact, in Longgang, the village secretary's wrongdoings had been exposed among the villagers and they also tried to get him dismissed from the post. It was assumed that he lost out in contesting the post of the head of the villagers' committee thus a new village chairperson had to be elected. Apparently, he might have been protected by the political appointment. That might explain why within Longgang village office separate setup of the village party branch and the villagers' committee had lasted for a few years.

In order to retain their personal vested interests and power control, the village cadres have to not only constrain public consultation and deliberation but also be careful with new members of the villagers' committee. This phenomenon is commonly observed in the fieldwork research such as Oi and Rozelle (2000) and Chen (2011). Recruitment of village cadres into the villagers' committee should not generate potential adversaries, so they are likely to be hand-picked in terms of their alignment with the incumbent leadership. For example, since the present village vice-head in Longgang village office had conflicts with the team under the secretary's leadership, he was treated as an opposition party, subject to exclusion and isolation during the second term of the village administration. As a consequence, powerful incumbent cadres, like village secretary or vice-secretary, their family members, close friends, business partners, and the like, are more likely to enter the villagers' committee and leadership positions. More importantly, the mode of entrance to the village administration may have been institutionalized to the extent of the exclusion of outsiders and inclusion of insiders. Furthermore, power has evolved into an agency by which material-based interests are more likely to be sought.

Additionally, there is no exception to the rule that the entrepreneurs-turned-cadres have to conform to this institutionalization, enabling this means for composing the villagers' committees. For those more wealthy new members, it could be contended that even if the village election was democratically facilitated with perfect transparency and free campaigns, economic elites would still be much more likely to be elected rather than ordinary villagers. This is because the ordinary villagers who are struggling to make a living would not be interested in a low salary (approximately 1,000rmb) and managing village affairs. Only the entrepreneurs who have stable, high incomes and flexibility in allocating time to village affairs would be interested in posts as village cadres.⁴⁸ Perhaps they are correct and the moneyed elites merely treat staying in a job on villagers' committees as that of an investment that could somehow bring them more benefits for future business dealings (greater details seen in Appendix 4).⁴⁹

However, it is more convincing to argue that the way in which the village office is constituted for political appointments and local nepotism raises the entry threshold for ordinary villagers to join, and allows for the economic elites to seek political connections from within the incumbent village cadres. In other words, the advantage of possessing economic capital might not be enough to ensure their entry into the village administration if no links to the incumbent village cadres exist. The testimony of their loyalty toward the incumbent village team and of their disposition towards behaving as a collective, to some extent, has been assured by the institutionally internalized mechanism through which new village cadres have been selected. In addition to Chen's studies (2007), that might account for why there is co-existence of cadres-turned-entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs-turned-cadres rather than the dominance of a singular class and their claims for a cohesive and unified village team. Therefore, although the transformation of the local economy has generated more

⁴⁸ Interview with Longgang village vice-head and village clerk who were elected in 2011 village election. Both of them are regarded as entrepreneurs or money elites.

⁴⁹ For example, the village cadres in Longgang village are likely to be shareholders when a plot of village-owned land is to be developed for the commercial usage in next few years.

economic elites, it still might not have altered the mode of composition of the village office and construction of power in favour of insiders.

These power relations have great association with the varying versions of interpretation of teamwork, cohesion and unification, insiders and outsiders, and so on. First of all, as can be seen, the villagers' interpretations of the village elections or the notion of democracy are able to be temporally and spatially specific. Moreover, the emerging power structure is constructed by the social actors' relational connections and networking, though it is done unexpectedly somehow. For instance, the village cadres might not realize the construction of the power structure as they pursued personal interests at the beginning. The emerging power structures regulate the incumbent village cadres and the villagers' actions, choices, and the space for opportunities to access village leadership positions. There are emerging rules of the game imposed upon the village cadres and those candidates, who are able to constantly follow, adopt, and even modify those rules or norms over a period of time. While the external domains of rural democratization, entailing varying types of values and worldviews, collide with this emerging power structure and the human agents, the implementation of idealized rural democratization appears to be internalized.

4. Conclusion

The establishment of the villagers' committees in Xinzhai and Longgang villages is not run according to official regulations. To be specific, the village elections were manipulated, public participation is rarely seen in post-election village management, and decision making is retained almost entirely by village cadres and upper-level leadership. These research findings are also found among many scholars' studies, such as O'Brien and Han (2009), O'Brien and Li (2000) and Pastro and Tan's (2000) research. Not only do the village cadres perceive this reform as trouble making and a formality, as opposed to the reality of the Chinese countryside, but the villagers also generally denigrate it as simply a show.

My research provides increased focus on the analysis of the village management after the village elections and the processes of the exercise and construction of power. Local actors, especially village cadres, internalize the way by which reform is implemented. First, the village cadres and the villagers alike have their own interpretations of village elections and of the value of democracy. The village cadres run the village elections by their own right and select the new village cadres as opposed to external regulations on rural democratization. Second, the villagers and village cadres construct their knowledge about village governance via social interactive processes. For instance, the village incumbent cadres often coordinate with each other as a collective unit when they have to attract the votes during the elections, and seek the personal gains in the day-to-day village management.

The power structure is created by the village cadres, and, to a large extent, enables the village cadres to retain the village leadership while constraining villagers from participating in village elections and post-election village affairs management. The village cadres might not be able to acknowledge the consequences of their self-perpetuating activities to hold onto the village leadership, though the emerging

power structure indeed gives rise to a format of selecting the village cadres. Thus, the people who are willing to join the leadership group have to be constrained by this structure and force themselves to obey those rules of game. This provides an additional explanation why village cadres are keen to constrain the activism of the public participation, in comparison to Oi and Rozelle's study (2000). Oi and Rozelle mainly attribute the inactivism of the public participation to the incumbent cadres' deliberative actions rather than to the emerging power structure itself. From Chen's (2007) point of view, the village elites, those cadres-turned-entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs-turned-cadres are able to use their market power to allocate rural resources among the villagers. My research offers another case in terms of the power configuration of village elites in addition to impacts of the village elites' market power on the rural governance in Chen's study. And this emerging power structure affects the rural governance in many aspects, such as village elections, day-to-day management, economic development, provision of public goods and the mediation of external political decision-making and lawful regulation besides allocation of rural resources.

Chapter Five

External Intervention and Mediation of Human Agents in Policy Implementation

1. Introduction

National and local governments are concerned with the effectiveness of policy enforcement and the fulfilment of assigned tasks at the grassroots level. A weak capacity of top-down policy transmission might threaten party-state control over society and its legitimacy in public, despite the fact that some policies are recognized as disturbing and destructive. The central state realizes that there is a need to use adaptive strategies against local policy implementation so that it forces local governments to rectify national policies and regulation in accordance with the local conditions. However, policy rectification and flexible implementation at the local level often distort the original purposes of the centrally-enacted policies (Zhou, 2010). Sometimes, the local party government changes the policy in order to meet local ends, namely 'unlawful local policy' (*tu zheng ce*). As a consequence, this not only displeases the central government but also brings harm to local citizens. Although the misbehaviour of the local governments are recognized by the central government, the latter still struggles to curb the former's deviation from original policy designs.

Consider, for example, those policies towards China's rural population. On one hand, tax collection and levies, education surcharges, cremation policy, national birth control policy, land expropriation, and property demolition and relocation tend to produce tremendous tension, grievances and local upheavals in rural societies (Bernstein and Lü, 2004; Björn, 2001; O'Brien and Li, 1999; Guo, 2001). Still, these policies rely on the local or grassroots officials' efforts to implement them. On the other hand, during policy implementation, it is uncommon for those implementing the local policy to change the policies' content. For instance, although taxes and fees should not exceed 5% of the villagers' annual revenue, in accordance with the official regulation, the village cadres often violate this regulation in order to take more resources from farmers (Bernstein and Lü, 2004).

Thus, it is not surprising that villagers have a friendly impression of the distanced central and provincial governments but express hostility towards the front-line township governments and village offices. From Wang's perspective, this is because villagers are prone to establish moral or symbolic relations with the central state yet have face-to-face conflicts against the so-called local evils or local emperors (2012). It is thus important to note that some unpopular policies were removed, like agricultural-tax levies. To some extent, the burden on the farmers' shoulder has been reduced. However, it is inadequate to benefit many villagers' livelihood when considering the deteriorating environment, undercompensated landless farmers, and predatory and developmental local state in policy implementation.

Some institutional settings are taken into consideration when explaining the divergence of policy enforcement and accomplishment of tasks and the imposition of the local party state. Within the cadre responsibility system or cadres guaranteed system (*gan bu ze ren zhi*), the cadres tend to categorize policies into quantifiable, or

hard target-hitting, and unquantifiable, or soft target-hitting. This results in selective policy implementation where they are more likely to fulfil the easily measurable former rather than the abstract latter. Meanwhile, the village cadres are more accountable for their least-distanced ruling leaders after the one-level-down administrative reform. As a consequence, in order to gain more rewards, rural cadres zealously execute unpopular policies characterized by their quantifiable nature but pay much less attention to popular policies characterized by their unquantifiable nature (Li and O'Brien, 1999; Wang and Wang, 2009; Zhou, 2010; Heberer and Trappel, 2013).

Björn (2001) compared the implementation of a birth control policy and cotton planting project, having the goal of local economic development, in a county in northern China. He conceived that a higher degree of township monitoring, local supervising networks and the cadre guaranteed system drive the rural cadres to implement policy and local assignments. Therefore, he contended that the local higher authorities, and not the electorate, are the principal agent that is in a position to delegate the village cadres as agents for the fulfilment of the assigned policies and tasks. Kennedy (2007) argued that, after comparing the implementation of village self-government reform and tax-for-fee reform, upper-level government's preferences for certain reform policies are more likely to determine success (or failure) of policy implementation. Since the tax-for-fee reform falls into the category of policy that can improve social stability in the short run, the county and township-level officials are keen to affect this policy rather than to enforce the reform of village self-government that entails a long-term experiment.

In addition, Kung, Cai and Sun (2009) suggest that the village cadres' incentives to serve on behalf of the state and collectives are closely associated with the sources of the village cadres' payment. When village cadres are put onto the local state's payroll system, those members of highly paid village cadres can devote themselves more to state affairs or communal activities in conflict with their personal interests, such as family-generated income. Control by the local state of the village cadres' payment sheds light on their motivation to more greatly serve the state or the communities and act less for their own self-interest.

However, due to the uncertainty and inconsistency of local officialdom and unrealistic responsibilities for policy implementation assigned by higher-level officials, village cadres are likely to be pragmatic in order to survive in their political environment. For example, in order to bring more fines as generated revenue into limited village finances and cope with inspections from upper-level government officials, the village cadres are inclined to be blind to violations of the one child policy, preparing one set of real and one set of fake birth statistics (Wang, 2012).⁵⁰ As Zhang (2006) argues, with the lack of the state's capacity to build and adhere to public ethics, it is difficult for village cadres to escape from self-serving ends and adopt the principle of flexibility in handling village affairs, even though they are democratically elected.

⁵⁰ The village cadres' behaviours in deceiving the upper-level government when implementing one-child policy are documented with more detail in Zhou's study (2010).

In Sun and Guo's fieldwork in a township of North China, they found that grassroots cadres exploited hard measures to levy fees for the state-sanctioned grain (*guo jia ding gou liang*) from the villagers. In the meanwhile, grassroots cadres, especially the village cadres, usually exert informal, soft authority like *mianzi* and *renqing* strategies through 'contextual construction setting' (*qing jing jian gou*). This is largely because such grassroots cadres are highly integrated into rural social networks and are identified with local knowledge; personal informal social ties among the grassroots cadres are usually embedded into the local formal bureaucracy. In this case, the formal hold of power by the state on rural society can partially be exercised in an informal manner (2000). In Long and Liu's study, it is claimed that four village cadres' individual relationships with villagers and their extensive connections to the local officialdom enable more people to join the Village Forestry Management Project (2009).

Accordingly, on one hand, grassroots cadres can be linchpins of the state hierarchical structure so long as they are acting as the local state's agents in enforcing policy and assignment tasks handed to them by upper-level government. In this case, it is likely to be seen that their appraisals are performance-based and their immediate leaders have final say over their political prospects. On the other hand, they are seekers of private gain rather than the agents of the state. Sometimes, they are patrons or protectors of the local community, like the village cadres' alliance with the villagers in establishing the land share-holding system in Cai's study (2003) and, to a lesser extent, in Sun and Guo (2000) and Long and Liu's studies (2009). In short, they are able to be pragmatic, consequentialist, and flexible in their principles.

Scholars often adopt principle-agent and patronage-client perspectives to explain and analyse the consequences of policy implementation. Put simply, they claim that within China's one-party authoritarian, centralized state regime, local governments (county or township) are regarded as the principle that delegates township or village cadres as their agents to fulfil appointed policy and assigned tasks. This is where the principle usually sets up goals for its agents, appointing agents via a top-down approach, designing incentive frameworks and assessment systems for the anticipated performance of the agents, and undertaking inspections for evaluations of outcomes. In the meanwhile, the village cadres can be empowered by their electorate, village fellows or clan members to be the representatives or patrons of their communities (Zhou and Lian, 2012; Björn, 2001; Li, 2002; Tsai, 2002, 2007a, 2007b).⁵¹ In this light, the dual role of village cadres enables them to face dilemmas or conflicts in policy implementation and task fulfilment at the grassroots level.

Social constructionism and the actor-oriented perspectives refer to different theoretical and analytical frameworks. They focus on the interactive processes of policy implementation, and on how human agents mediate local state intervention and official regulations in practices. Also, especially the actor-oriented perspectives employ the concept of here-and-now knowledge construction and social interface,

⁵¹ The elected village cadres tend to stand up for the villagers to lodge collective petitions to the local higher-level government (Li, 2002); The village cadres from within a singular lineage institution are likely to be trusted by the village fellows. And they are in a better position to mobilize the clan fellows to contribute provision of public goods and village self-governance (Tsai, 2002, 2007a, 2007b).

and interface analysis, which goes far beyond the analysis of duality of the middlemen in and between varying social domains. This chapter argues that human agents have the capability to construct knowledge contextually and to create strategies so as to mediate the outcomes of policy implementation. Thus, to some extent it explains how rural governance is being shaped by policy implementation. Moreover, interface analysis will look specifically at the social actors' knowledgeability, power relations and discursive practices.

What follows will be divided into four sections. The first section will focus on national policies designated for rural dwellers, evaluate the quality of their implementation, and discuss the way they are put into effect. Likewise, the second section will consider enforcement of local land expropriation policy and the third will look at the tasks or projects assigned by the county and township governments. More importantly, comparative analysis and discussion will be concurrently provided. In the discussion and conclusion the findings will be summarized.

2. National Policy: Its Characteristics, Legitimacy and Struggles

2.1. Implementation of New Countryside Cooperative Medical System and New Rural Society Pension Insurance

More often than not, the newly issued national policies are broadcast widely on social media so the villagers are able to become familiar with them. Importantly, in recent years the central government have released a set of national policies with the aim to improve the quality of farmers' lives. For example, the implementation of the New Countryside Cooperative Medical System (hereafter, NCCMS) and the New Rural Society Pension Insurance (hereafter, NRSPI), especially the former, are important cases. If the farmers join NCCMS, their medical costs are expected to be reduced dramatically. Written materials saved in Longgang office, for instance, indicate that the level of reimbursement for the villagers' medical expenditures increased from 60,000rmb to 80,000rmb. If the farmers join NRSPI, female farmers are eligible for receiving endowment pensions at the age of 55, and male farmers at 60.⁵²

The implementation of NCCMS and NRSPI might represent the way in which some national popular policies are executed in the two villages and beyond. Firstly, in terms of implementation of NCCMS in Xinzhai village, national and local governments provide the great majority of public funds for farmers to sign up to

⁵² *The Social Insurance Law of the People's Republic of China (2011)*, available at: www.gov.cn/flfg/2010-10/28/content_1732964.htm; more detail about the policy can be seen in "guo wu yuan ban gong ting zhuan fa wei sheng bu deng bu men guan yu jin yi bu zuo hao xin xing nong cun he zuo yi liao shi dian gong zuo zhi dao yi jian de tong zhi, guo fa ban, 2004, 3 hao" (English translation given as: "Guidance of Exemplary Project of Establishing New Rural Cooperative Medical System, Document of Ministry of Health etc., Transmission by The Office of The State Council, 2004, No.3 Document"), available at: www.gov.cn/zwgk/2005-08/14/content_22628.htm, accessed March 19, 2013; "guan yu jian kuai tui jin xin xing nong cun he zuo yi liao shi dian gong zuo de tong zhi" (English translation given as: "A notice on Accelerating Pilot Works of Establishing New Rural Cooperative Medical System"), available at: news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2006-01/19/content_4071514.htm, accessed 19 March, 2013; "guo wu yuan guan yu kai zhan xin xing nong cun she hui yang lao bao xian shi dian de zhi dao yi jian" (English translation given as: "Guidance Of How to Promote New Rural Social Pension Insurance, Issued by the State Council, 2009"), available at: www.gov.cn/jrzq/2009-09/07/content_1411208.htm; "yin fa guang dong sheng xin xing nong cun she hui yang lao bao xian shi dian shi shi ban fa de tong zhi" (English translation given as: "Specific Measures on Pilot Works of New Rural Social Pension Insurance, Guangdong Province, 2009"), available at: www.gd.gov.cn/govpub/zfwj/zfxxgk/gfxwj/yf/200911/t20091116_106774.htm, accessed March 19, 2013.

NCCMS; farmers also need to pay an amount of money by themselves. In Xinzhai village, government finances pay 90rmb for individual farmers on a yearly basis. Individual villagers were supposed to pay 30rmb annually, but Xinzhai village coffers have paid for the farmers since the start of implementation of NCCMS. Thus, the villagers in Xinzhai do not need to pay anything. The case was slightly different in Longgang village. Due to the lack of public funds in Longgang village office, villagers themselves paid 30rmb as annual membership fees for a few years. But Longgang village coffers have taken the responsibility to pay the fee since 2011.

NRSPI was introduced to the two villages in 2012. If villagers want to sign up to NRSPI, they need to pay the registration fee of 10rmb in one instalment and are able to select certain grade of payment on a yearly basis.⁵³ Therefore, basically farmers will receive different grades of endowment pensions according to the annual payment they have chosen beforehand. Both in Xinzhai and Longgang village, the village coffers paid the registration fees 10rmb for the villages in 2012.

Secondly, the policy agendas and regulations were issued by the central and the provincial government, thus their stipulations are officially publicized and verifiable on social media, so it is not surprising that both the villagers and village cadres are able to acknowledge the content of NCCMS and NRSPI. Of course, the responsibility of guiding those qualified villagers to sign up to NCCMS and NRSPI rests with the village cadres. The village cadres put in an effort to help the villagers in policy propagating, documents preparation and stamping, and getting through the submission of documents to the government sectors in accordance with the enacted official papers. Also, some villagers who are particularly familiar with the policy regulations could monitor the village cadres' behaviour in enforcing the policy.

Thirdly, the success of NCCMS and NRSPI implementation is an integral part of evaluation for the local cadres' performance, and specifically the village, township and county leaders' performance, and that requires subordinate officials' assistance within a monitoring network. Not only do township cadres transfer guidelines to the villagers' committees, but they also monitor the progress of policy enforcement. Unsurprisingly, enforcing policies is part of the village cadres' everyday routines. Moreover, the village representatives are also involved in diffusing policy information and messages and collecting a variety of documents across the village groups. In the end, all materials as required for establishment of user accounts would be delivered to the County Human Resources and Social Insurance Bureau which not only issues medical insurance booklet and social insurance cards but also administers reimbursement of medical expenses and the pay-off of endowment

⁵³ About the detail of membership fees, see the local and provincial policy: "mei zhou shi ren min zheng fu guan yu yin fa cheng xiang ju min ji ben yi liao bao xian zan xing ban fan de tong zhi" (English Translation given as: "A Notice on A Temporary Measure on Basic Medical Insurance for Rural and Urban Residents, Printed and Issued by the People's Government of Meizhou City, 2012"), for annual membership fees paid by the villager individual: A Grade: 30 yuan, B Grade: 60 yuan, available at: www.dbxrsj.gov.cn/index.aspx?menuid=6&type=articleinfo&lanmuid=69&infoid=1011&language=cn; "yin fa guang dong sheng xin xing nong cun she hui yang lao bao xian shi dian shi shi ban fa de tong zhi" (English translation given as: "Specific Measures on Pilot Works of New Rural Social Pension Insurance, Guangdong Province, 2009"), for annual membership fees paid by the village individuals: First Grade: 100 yuan, Second Grade: 200 yuan, Third Grade: 300 yuan, Fourth Grade: 400 yuan, Fifth: 500 yuan, available at: www.gd.gov.cn/govpub/zfwj/zfxxgk/gfxwj/yf/200911/t20091116_106774.htm, accessed March 19, 2013.

pensions. All in all, the degree of policy implementation reflects the local leaders' capabilities in transmitting the top-down policy down to rural society, giving rise to the winning of rewards or political promotion for the local leaders.

Are policies successfully implemented and beneficial to the villagers and who is suited to evaluate the consequences? Both the village cadres and the villagers' perspectives should be considered. Village cadres often claim that NCCMS has brought immediate benefits to villagers especially of those living in poverty who cannot afford the medical expenditure. They are confident with the fact that full coverage of NCCMS and NRSPI has been achieved insofar as they have not confronted considerable trouble in putting them into effect. It is perhaps the case that national fiscal backing, transparent regulation, explicit instructions, higher-level official monitoring, and villagers' cooperation together contribute to the efficiency of the policy executives.

At the other end of the scale, villagers know much more about NCCMS than NRSPI, since the latter was a relatively recently-issued policy. When coupled with the village cadres' mobilization, the villagers show their intentions to join NCCMS. It was proven that during working days quite a few villagers still come to the village offices to ask village cadres how to prepare documents; village representatives were required by village cadres to inform those villagers who could join or register. Moreover, even some householders who used to be farmers, especially in Xinzhai village, transferred back to their farmer status so as to benefit from the policy implementation and predicted welfare distribution among the farmers in the future. To some extent, a positive effect of enforcement of NCCMS is visible. It is not surprising that a villager was satisfied with the fact that there is no longer a need for them to pay for rabies vaccines. However, there are criticisms or suggestions from villagers that should not be neglected: 1) greatly increasing medical charges preserve the effect of NCCMS; 2) a wider range of illnesses, especially chronic diseases, should be covered in a list of categories of illness eligible for appropriate reimbursement; 3) the rate of reimbursement still needs to be improved greatly.

Nevertheless, implementation of NRSPI brought more trouble to village cadres, particularly to ordinary committee members and the villagers, since the local leaders at the county and township level pursued measurable political achievement in implementing this policy among the villagers. The village cadres seemed to have made the decisions of joining NRSPI for the villagers. Yet joining NRSPI has to be based on the villagers' willingness in accordance with the policy regulation. The villagers were guided by the village cadres to join NRSPI without knowing the content of the policy in greater detail, despite the fact they did not need to pay the registration fees. As a consequence, some of villagers faced unforeseen inconveniences after joining NRSPI. Since some villagers were already signed up to other forms of social pension schemes, they were informed by the office staff from the County Human Resources and Social Insurance Bureau to withdraw NRSPI accounts when either receiving endowment pensions based on their existing account

or signing up to another form of account.⁵⁴ For example, a female villager from Xinzhai village showed her anger when having a consultation with a village cadre as she did not know who she should visit in order to withdraw her NRSPI account, with her illiteracy complicating the situation. Accordingly, the villagers seemed not to obtain clear policy messages from the policy disseminators. Perhaps, from the villagers' point of view, if they do not need to pay, at worst, they can just withdraw if they find NRSPI was not as helpful as imagined. At best, they could benefit from it one day. Unsurprisingly, the majority of the policy recipients seemed to be convinced by the village cadres' decision-making when they were asked to hand in their personal documents to the village offices.

Implementation of NRSPI was extremely effective in Xinzhai and Longgang village because the village leaders and higher-level officials are concerned about the joining rate of NRSPI, which is indicative of good performance for policy implementation. Unsurprisingly, it seemed to be the most effective way for village cadres to fulfil the policy in which the public funds for villagers' registration to NRSPI was provided, and thus a decision for villagers without public consultation was made. Yet this made the situation difficult not only villagers but also ordinary village cadres as they had to confront the frontline villagers' grievances.

Other types of national policy share similar merits to the NCCMS and NRSPI. Normally, the promulgated regulations, transparency of procedures, and national fund support contributes to the effective implementation of those national policies. The variations between NCCMS and NRSPI, and other types of national policies rely upon the degree of policy coverage, the degree of villagers and village cadres' involvement, the level of top-down fiscal support, and the timing of policy implementation. There are some policies, such as flood prevention, hill fire prevention and plant-insect and infection prevention, whose enforcement depends on the village cadres' efforts in a given time, with earmarked funds if needed. Some policies, such as the basic living allowance and reconstruction of endangered households, and to a lesser extent bursaries for grain planting, require the villagers' procedural application and the village cadres' policy dissemination, with earmarked funds, and explicit regulation on eligibility for the applicants. Family planning policy, and to a lesser extent, transfer of household register system alike are not only the village cadres' day-to-day administration but also incur a great deal of policy recipients' consultation and reactions, with no need of top-down financial support.

Indeed, the majority of national policies are able to benefit villagers at varying degrees if they are executed in a timely and honest manner. When the villagers have lauded these policies and their enforcement, it is likely seen that the state's capacity building into policy deliveries at the rural society begin to appear, shifting from the state's decreased role over the past two decades. However, this does not ensure

⁵⁴ Because villagers were only allowed to enter one type of endowment pension systems according to law policy regulation and some villagers indeed prefer other forms of social pension schemes, such as the City Worker Pension Scheme, which provide a higher level of endowment pensions. *The Social Insurance Law of the People's Republic of China*, Article 58, 'The State shall establish a unitary national individual social security number. Individual social security numbers shall be ID number of citizens.', available at: www.gov.cn/flfg/2010-10/28/content_1732964.htm, translation seen at www.doc88.com/p-979358736754.html, accessed March 19, 2013.

that the local government will implement the policy in line with the central and provincial policy agendas. The way in which the policy is enforced is largely affected by the local officialdom concerning their own interests, such as the enforcement of NRSPI. The implementation of the birth control policy is a good example of this trend, as will now be illustrated.

2.2. Birth Control Policy Fulfilment

National birth control policy has been well implemented in light of the statistical figures of the two villages. The incorporation of birth control into the relevant institutional settings that significantly affects the villagers' everyday life and the procedural monitoring seems to be effectively working. First, obtaining the Birth Control Service Card (previously called the Birth Control Certificate) is an essential step for childbearing mothers to have a physical check and give birth to a baby, especially in public hospitals, and the completing of the registered household identification for new born babies, which is directly related to future (pre-) schooling and signing in the countryside public health system. Second, birth control is supervised at nearly every step in applying for the Birth Control Service Card as well as the Approval of First Child and Approval of Second Child paperwork. It is clearly known that applicants need to go to the villagers' committees with an original and copies of citizen identification card, a household registration booklet and a marriage certificate for the application of the Birth Control Service Card between three months after pregnancy and the time prior to giving birth to a child. The application for Birth Control Service Card and the approval of a first or second child would be inspected and then released by the Township Family Planning Office under its jurisdiction. Childbearing females need to take the Birth Control Service Card with them when having physical examination and giving birth to a child in the hospital. As can be seen, by following the procedural application, the village cadres and the township cadres are able to identify up-to-date information on childbearing mothers and hence then able to take up immediate measures to fulfil birth control if there are violations of the policy. Given these intersecting networks of legal, administrative and institutional control, the villagers seem to intrinsically conform to the sets of law and policy regulations.

In addition to and alongside the above-mentioned procedural applications, in terms of the work of village cadres and the township cadres, their main responsibilities are to control extra births. Again, the Cadre Monitoring System plays a vital role in implementing this mission in combination with the regulation of a veto vote for birth control policy implementation for the annual evaluation of the cadres' performance. More specially, the cadres are allocated the tasks of monitoring the conduction of inserting the intra-uterine device (IUD) and sterilization surgeries in a timely manner. Township appointed leaders are responsible for a few numbers of villages and act as a monitor for village-based township cadres' performance. One or two township cadre(s) is (are) responsible for one village and being a monitor for the village cadres' especially the village heads and the family planning director's performance. Village heads are responsible for their own villages and being a monitor for the village office members' performance. Each village cadre is responsible for a few numbers of village groups and working with the family planning director in need of help.

If the NCCMS and NRSPI are recognized as popular policies, then the birth control policy should be regarded as a public enemy. Although the target for birth control was ridiculed by the village cadres as opposite to common sense, the failure to accomplish the quota is one-vote-deny of the village cadres' annual evaluation for winning rewards.⁵⁵ Even worse, 80rmb of their salary is docked monthly by the township government, to be returned as reward if the target is met. The village cadres expressed huge difficulties in the implementing of family planning policy, especially considering that nowadays many young female villagers are working outside the village and are not easy for the village cadres to contact.

In addition to the supervising networks, persuasion and education, or thought work, are specific techniques for the grassroots cadres to prevent extra births across Mainland China (Björn, 2001; Zhou, 2010). Those brutal measures that used to be undertaken by the grassroots cadres have been abandoned. Apart from the above-mentioned measures, the township-appointed cadres and the village cadres in the two villages, and to a large extent across the whole county, are taking contract signing and statistical manipulation as additional measures to achieve the quotas. First, when those pregnant women need to register to give birth to a child, they have to ask for some necessary documents provided by the village cadres; in the meantime, they will be required by the village cadres to sign the contract. To be specific, on the contract the mothers-to-be agree to use an intra-uterine insertion device within three months or have sterilization surgery within one month after they give birth to a child.⁵⁶ Sometimes, households with new children would receive more conveniences in return for the new born babies' registration. Of course the number of the contracts would be counted towards the quota.

Secondly, the village cadres were not forthcoming as to whether they have been involved in producing false figures for birth controls. They did admit that there is an incredibly large number of staff both in the Office of Family Planning at the township level and in the Bureau of Family Planning at the county level for filling out a variety of forms as evidence to produce convincing statistics. Again, the assessment of cadres' performance would largely account for this behaviour of producing questionable figures concerning the reward-winning and political advancement. For instance, it is allegedly reported that the township-level head and secretary would receive 1000rmb as a bonus on a year basis; even the township appointed cadres would gain 100rmb when the task is accomplished. Thus, it is unsurprising that the secretary of village security in Xinzhai village pointed out that contract signing is often a sort of formality.

⁵⁵ It is unsurprising that although in theory the village cadres are not accountable for the township and county government, the top-down instructions and personalized relationship between the higher-level cadres and village cadres would enable the village cadres to be accountable for the their superiors during the policy deliveries and transmission (Zhou, 2010; O'Brien and Li, 1999; Wang and Wang, 2009).

⁵⁶ A couple with mixed household residential statuses is allowed to have one child and farmer couples are allowed to have two children. Normally, the measure of intra-uterine insertion is expected to be done for those women who are eligible for reproducing the second child and have given birth to their first child already; sterilization surgery for those women who are ineligible for giving birth to more children.

In addition, what increases the degree of difficulty for the village cadres to complete their targets is also due to the villagers' improved awareness of their rights and increasing acknowledgment of up-to-date birth control policy. The villagers' updated information of the policy and awareness of official propaganda of protection of mass interests and rights is becoming their lexicon in arguing with the policy implementers. Nonetheless, the latest policy proposal on the social media left open discussion about rules for having second child across China and, ironically, consciousness of mass interests and liberal rights might have been enhanced by learning from governmental propagandas over the recent years.⁵⁷ Moreover, some villagers do not rush to register household statuses for their children until they need to be schooled. In other words, they do not really care whether their children would be temporary black householders who do not have a *hukou* registration. Being given proof of a women's sterilization as a required document for baby household registration is not urgent. As a result, the quota for birth control would, at times, not be fulfilled. The policy implementers' trick for contractual agreement does not work at times, thus they have to rely more on statistical manipulation, which is a common means for enforcing this policy as found in Björn (2001) and Zhou (2010).

Although the village cadres criticized the way in which birth control policy is being enforced, they still have to act in accordance with the commands issued from above. Meanwhile, they conduct contract signing and statistical manipulation to protect themselves from being penalized by the township governments and being derided by villagers. Unlike township cadres, who are civil servants and have to face the risk of being punished if top-down assigned tasks are not accomplished, village cadres might only lose their docked salary when tasks are not fulfilled. However, village finances could be able to compensate their losses. More importantly, the township leaders and appointed cadres might have a tacit understanding of the villagers' struggles in enforcing birth control policy and they might be deliberately blind to village-level statistical manipulation. Additionally, fabricating statistics at the township and county level would be able to not only please the local ruling leaders but lessen the village cadres' strain on the enforcement of this policy as their superiors do the same thing.

To some extent, national policies characterized by transparency, top-down earmarked funds, and weighs allotted on the township and the village leaders' assessment circumscribe the policy implementers' behaviours in embezzling government funds, deceiving the villagers on policy info and grudgingly fulfilling tasks. However, there is still a possibility that the grassroots officials are capable of acknowledging the ways by which the national policies could be implemented. For example, they exploited their power to command the villagers or the policy recipients to follow their instructions and were driven to seek their own self-interest,

⁵⁷ From a conversation with the director of family-planning from Xinzhai villagers' committee, he said that a village household was arguing with him about a new policy which was announced on the television to allow for two children birth. He contended that the policy is only a proposal but not an official paper and he emphasized that what all he can do is to await this new policy from above. Otherwise, he still has to implement current Birth Control Policy. From his point of view, sometimes villagers do not fully understand the policies on their own right when they argue with village cadres. Since January 1, 2016 onwards, the Second Child Permission Policy is officially implemented. More information available at: *Communiqué of the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the CPC*

and they modified the original version of the policy implementation in practice. Villagers or those policy recipients often learn the content of national policies via chains of interaction with officials and are able to construct their own understanding of the policies over a period of time. This in actual fact has been reflected in their everyday language use such as in the implementation of birth control policy.

The section that follows will place focus on local policy implementation. Among other matters, implementation of local land expropriation and property demolition policy is chosen to examine power struggles, the conflict of interest between the human agents, and the local state intervention and mediation of the social actors. This will show the dynamism of human agents in mediating external worldviews and interventions, utilizing social relationships and power and in (re)constructing here-and-now knowledge.

3. Fulfilment of Local Policy and Assignments

3.1 Rural Urbanisation and the Rising Conflicts

Extensive rural conflicts have occurred over local land takings due to small-to-medium-sized city expansion and urbanisation. Guo's (2001) study of Banyan County, Yunnan, gave a vivid example of the tension between the village office, township government, and farmers over the course of the land acquisition. In order to seize land from farmers for a planned economic development zone, a conspiracy between the township and the village cadres is inevitable. The farmers were hugely resentful of the village cadres' imperious behaviours in pushing the villagers to comply, and of the township government's coercive enforcement and its cheating behaviours in requisitioning more land in excess of legal permits. Thus, the farmers created collective petitions for acquiring more compensation and prosecuting aggressive land expropriation by the township government.

In Pils's (2009) investigation in Nongkou village, Jianqiao Township, Hangzhou City she analysed the legality of the local government over the course of the property dismantlement. She compared principles in the Constitution, the Land Administration Law (1998 version) and the Property Right Law (2007) to the local governmental actions in destroying a house owned by the farmer Liang household. Apart from the local government's violation of the law, she criticized the developmental strategies in triggering economic growth. She was also against the usage of measurable wealth in defining the property of the citizens without concerning the farmers' personal dignity that is treated as instrumental to national and local economic progress.

Another study authored by Pils in Baiguo village, Zigong County, Sichuan Province illustrated the process whereby the villagers had been engaged in collective petitioning and administrative reconsideration (*xing zheng fu yi*) at varying administrative levels (2006). This was caused by several factors. First, from both the villagers and the author's point of view, the Zigong county government and Zigong High-tech Zone Administration Committee did not provide supporting documents and undergo proper application procedures. Second, they changed from public project construction as the initial agenda to a commercial property development

agenda. Additionally, they did not clarify the compensation standards for land expropriation and house demolition.

Some root causes are revealed from the two above-mentioned cases. The vulnerability pertaining to the collective ownership in conflicting with the state ownership with reference to the Land Administration Law does not empower legitimacy to the farmers in pursuit of land ownership. As echoed by Ho (2001), he contended that ambiguity within and between the collective and state ownership is deliberately designed in law and policy institutions. By doing so, it aims to cope with tensions between the village groups, the village administration, the township government and other higher-level government in competing for land ownership and the right to land management, alongside the city sprawl. In addition, the dualist structure between rural and urban land use rights discriminates against the villagers. It should be noted that the Land Administration Law (1998 version) and the Property Right Law (2007) not only allow for transaction of the urban land use right but also protect those transfers. What is more, villagers have difficulties to litigate the government due largely to judicial non-independence from the party-state's invasion. As a consequence, the farmers' attempts to safeguard their own interests are easily thwarted (Pils, 2006, 2009).

Cai (2003) emphasized the importance of the village cadres on the vanguard of the villagers' interest in the land seized by the local government. The village cadres' alliance with villagers can contribute to the success of the villagers' preventative measures like the establishment of the land share-holding system. By doing so, collective ownership can be formed in some villages in Nanhai County, Guangdong, which can restrict land seizures by the local government. However, when the village cadres side with their leadership at the above level, villagers are more likely to take *ex post* actions such as in the elections of village group leaders and village elections to constrain the village cadres' misbehaviour in land management and transactions. Unfortunately, these remedial actions after land conflict had occurred were often ineffective. Cai assumed that the reasons why the village cadres decided to fall in line with the local leadership were due either to their vested interest in their positions or to their motivation for serving higher-level leadership. For instance, village cadres can take advantage of their personal connections with higher-level cadres who are able to shield their *de facto* corruption; the village leaders, especially the village secretary who are hand-picked by the higher-level leadership, tend to be submissive to higher-level political instructions in managing village activities.

To summarise, the local party state and its agents' intervention, political appointment and the centralized system of decision-making can easily lead to encroachment on the villagers' interests. It is partly because non-independence of jurisdiction and legislature and the ambiguity of land ownership exist. Since the complexity of rural lineage context, life worlds, and social relationships and interaction have not been taken account into the analysis of processes of land expropriations, to a large extent rural urbanisation in previous scholarship, the three case studies as below will show how this can be done.

3.3 Three Cases in the Two Suburban Villages

Rural Urbanisation and land expropriation commenced in the mid-1980s and has prevailed since the early 2000s. The table 4 as shown below briefly shows the cases of urbanised rural areas land expropriation from within some village groups in the two villages under study, through which a view of the past 30 years of urbanisation can be seen.

Table 4 Brief Information of Rural Urbanisation and Land Acquisition in Some Village Groups in the Two Villages

Village	Group Subjected to Rural Urbanisation and Expropriation	Period	Purposes
Xinzhai	Village group 1	1984-1985	Public street and township market place construction
		1987-1988	Accommodation and facilities in a work unit of a state-owned hydropower station
		2001	County-level road and flood prevention project
		2011-2012	Project consisting of a five-star hotel, walking street, <i>Hakka</i> cultural gallery and commercial apartment
		2012-2013	Expansion of public road
	Village group 2	1984	Local market place construction
		1996	Public road and a primary and vocational school construction
		2004	Central street construction
		2011-2012	Establishment of a commercial district
	Village group 3	2005	Township-level public security station construction
		2011-2012	Project consisting of a five-star hotel, walking street, <i>Hakka</i> cultural gallery and commercial apartment
Longgang	Village group 1	1994	Public stadium construction
		2000	A public park, a new residential district, a new county level coach station and a public street construction
		2004-2005	Central street construction
	Village group 2	2005	Public street construction
		2010-2011	Central street construction

The establishment of a township market place signified the local emerging market economy in the early 1980s. These public construction projects and state-owned properties account for the majority of the local constructions between the late 1990s and mid-2000s. The land acquisition and trade for commercial land use has been emergent in recent years. The agricultural landscape of the two villages has been transformed to the urbanised towns gradually as the farmland has converted into public buildings, public parks, residential apartments, public streets and road and commercial districts. Much of the farmland in Longgang village was acquisitioned and in Xinzhai village there still were hundreds of *mu* of farmland, most of which is likely awaiting acquisition. As can be seen, this type of rural urbanisation is not driven by industrialization but strongly associated with public projects construction, commercial housing, development of the third sector services and expansion of the city boundary. Given to the geographical location of the two villages, it is unsurprising that they are subjected to urbanisation and land confiscation gradually.

Landholders almost always are insulated from the local master plan of land conversion (*tong yi gui hua*) and rarely are given many choices as to the ways in which land-lost farmers are resettled. There is no exception in the two villages under study here. Basically, the villagers would be given an official notice, which is normally publicized among the village groups and pasted somewhere noticeable, before the upcoming land expropriation. Afterwards the landholders would be informed by the village team leaders to attend the meeting based on a village group as a unit, or namely a villagers' assembly, in the village office. During the villagers' assemblies, discussion would take place about the issues in relation to the land expropriation, such as the time when the land expropriation would take place, the amount of compensation to be given, the proposal of distribution of the compensation, as well as the approach to resettlement for the land-lost farmers. Normally, the village group leaders keep the original records of the land (re)distribution and possessions among the farmers from within each village group and the village cadres have copies of these original records. The landholders can hence check and then confirm the size of the land to be confiscated by examining the records from either the village group leaders or the village cadres during and after the villagers' assemblies. Later on, the village group leaders would work on the land measurement so as to precisely gauge the size of the land to be confiscated for each landholding household with the village cadres and the township cadres, and sometimes with landholding villagers. In this step of land expropriation, although the landholders have opportunities to negotiate more compensation and alternative approaches to resettlement in particular, and to a lesser extent attempt to argue against the land re-appropriation, the space for negotiation is very limited. Thus, the resistance of landholders to the policy and policy implementers, and even the conflict between the landholders themselves, often occurs in this process.

It is important to point out the landholders who are granted land compensation fees are not necessarily holding a *hukou* for farmers. There are two things which need to be clarified here. First, although some landholders changed to a residential *hukou* for non-farmers, they still are entitled to obtain the land expropriation compensations

so long as a piece of farmland was allocated to them in the past land distribution. As a matter of fact, over the past land expropriation some land-lost villagers were granted by the local government to transfer their farmer *hukou* registration to the citizen registration, which was regarded as a supplementary approach to compensate the land-lost villagers. Even limited quotas on recruitment of some land-lost villagers into a work unit were assigned. Second, the last land redistribution in the two villages took place in 1989, and thus villagers born after 1989 are not the landholders and cannot be compensated.

In addition to the latest regulations of the local county level, enacted in 2011, in terms of land expropriation and house destruction and relocation, first, the rate of compensation per *mu* for the first grade of rice farmland rose from 34,000rmb per *mu* to 49,500. Second, the measure of 10% land reallocation for resettlement was adopted, with monetary refunds as alternative to the land reallocation also available when needed and the amount of refunds bilaterally negotiated among the parties of the varying levels.⁵⁸ Moreover, regulation on the destruction of ancestral halls is not particularly stipulated other than general regulation on property demolition. Despite the legality of this local policy paper in comparison with law and policy at national and provincial level is at stake, it is more focused on how the local land expropriation policy is enforced at a practical level.

Case 1: Lan Surnamed Ancestor Hall Demolition⁵⁹

There are 27 households in a village group with the Lan surname. The leaders of this clan community also occupied three posts in the village group committee after the elections of the village representatives in 2010. This clan, which is one branch of Lan lineage genealogy at the local county, is located in Longgang village. These Lan inhabitants used to live in a grand ancestral hall with a size of more than 10,000 square meters with characteristics of traditional Hakka architecture, namely one hall, one surname. Given the improvement of quality of life, the residents started moving out the hall between the beginning of the 1990s and mid-2000s. As a result, the ancestor hall was physically collapsing. Although the building of the ancestor hall was being endangered, the clan members did not have collective funds for the building's maintenance. In 2005, given the plan of urban expansion and public road construction, the hall building was due to be demolished through so-called 'master or systemic city planning' (*tong yi gui hua*) across the county. Thus, the township government that has jurisdiction over Longgang village had to take over the assignment and the township vice-head was appointed to negotiate with the clan group.

⁵⁸ "Specific Regulations on Compensation of Land Expropriation and Demolition Relocation for Urban Planning District in Dabu County, The People's Government of Dabu County", September 2011, Article 4, '10 per cent of land reallocation out of real size of requisitioned land will be allocated to collective use. There are two ways of arranging land reallocation: 1) land reallocation will be compensated in money and the standard of compensation will be negotiable among the parties; 2) land returned for resettlement will be allocated to the locality and its mapping has to be systemically planned in accordance with master plan of state-owned land use.'

⁵⁹ It was not certain whether an official policy paper was enacted to deal with destruction of ancestral halls at that time. However, according to interviews with the clan elites and the foregoing policy paper (2011), in 2005 at least the standards of how to compensate demolition of ancestor hall were probably not clarified.

Although the building was no longer a proper place to live in on a daily basis, it still accommodated lineage funerals, worship, and reproduction ceremonies. More importantly, the hall is a symbol of their ancestors' spirits. The clan members still believe that the descendants should safeguard the predecessors' property, otherwise the next generations would dismiss the predecessors' protection and blessings with respect to their wealth, health, careers and family happiness in particular. In other words, they are afraid of paranormal revenge incurred by the lack of protection of their ancestors. Therefore, it is unsurprising that there was a great deal of resistance against co-operation with the township government when the news spread across the clan community.

The township cadres' interactions with the clan elites opened a leverage to negotiate mutually acceptable proposals. The clan elites began to see that the township cadres' frequently visited their homes and received gifts like brand-name cigarettes and wine. It was likely seen that the clan elites were regarded as playing a vital role in assisting this policy implementation. The clan member assembly was convened to host group meeting or discussions with the clan elites and the township cadres a few times, by which they understood more about the policy messages. They reported their requirements when realizing that they had to accept policy making of the city planning of the county government. Meanwhile, perhaps the reality that the ancestral hall would collapse without emergency restoration and repairs for the next few years had been clearly recognized among the clan members. They were thus convinced that if they followed the government urbanization planning at least they would be able to get something back.

The provisional Lan clan committee was established to meet the needs of policy implementation. There were three village representatives, one prestigious accountant and one experienced fellow selected for a total five committee members, being accountable both to the township government and the clan community. However, the decision-making body for the whole clan community is the clan fellow assembly. At length, the following issues were raised by the community as required to be met, including reconstruction of a new ancestor hall, compensation for hall building demolition, and reallocation of land in return.

Fortunately, the usage rights of a land plot were transferred to the Lan village-clan group for collective use and a new ancestor hall was built in the vicinity of the old one in the same year. What is more, in addition to compensation for the removal of the hall building, the local government also returned the land of approximately 800 square meters to the village group.⁶⁰

Likely, the local government paid the costs of the demolition from government funds. First of all, given the clan elites' connections with the clan community, the township cadres had to seek for the clan elites' assistance. Thus, they offered an opportunity for the clan elites to generate some 'grey' income. Second, the clan fellows pushed the township cadres to enlarge the size of the rooms up to one or two square meters more in order to obtain more compensation. Third, the clan elites also manipulated

⁶⁰ Interview with two lineage leaders (concurrently village representatives), April, 2012;

the figures of those compensable items with the aim of extracting more money from the local state's treasury.⁶¹ For the clan elites' viewpoint, the state has to pay the bills and the policy implementers are not really concerned with expenditures. This is because their primary goal is to fulfil the task rather than to minimise expenditure. Simply put, the forces of lineage institutions negotiated the local state. Moreover, it is likely that the local leaders tended to pacify the collective ire in a way which the clan fellows were highly compensated when the risk and cost of utilizing coercive forces was perceived to be high in the face of policy ambiguity and lineage collective forces.

Despite the involvement of the clan elites in deceiving the township cadres in light of statistical manipulation, the township government faces more difficulties to enforce the policy without the clan elites' assistance and mediation. Given the clan elites' moral pressures from their spiritual ancestors and the clan community, they are inclined to be more accountable to their community. For instance, they tend to publicize collective funds and the clan members' compensations, though they did gain some extra money from the township cadres' bribery and their behaviours in obtaining more reimbursement.⁶² The similar experiences can be observed in Long's (2001) study in the implementation of the irrigation scheme in western Mexico. Since the local officials and engineers do not know clearly the situation in the villages, they have to rely on the village water guards' mediation in distribution of water in day-to-day management and the busy season. In the meanwhile, the villagers often offered the water guards gifts in order to gain the water guards' individual extra efforts. For instance, the water guards would re-open the water gate when it was requested by the villagers even though they were not allowed to do it according to the local official regulations.

To some extent, the clan members are in a position to mediate the implications of official regulations in the demolition of the ancestor hall. First, they are able to make calculations of gain and loss and mediate external intervention and traditional values. The clan fellow members are likely to trust their clan leaders as the majority of them share the strong relational connections with each other. Moreover, they took advantage of the collective forces, such as in a form of the clan assembly and committee, to construct power to negotiate with the local officials. Second, unsurprisingly, the township cadres, treated as the outsiders from this clan group, have to rely on the connections of the clan leaders to the whole clan group. It is given that the relationships between the clan leaders and the officials were often weak or temporally built up, their knowledge and power construction was doomed to be deconstructed as this social interface disappeared. In actual fact, the short-

⁶¹ Interview with a wife of a lineage leader, April, 2012; The lineage elites allegedly engaged into negotiating the measurement of the room sizes in turn a compromise between the township cadres and the clan fellows was made. For example, when the clan members pressured the township cadres to accept their requirement that they wanted the room sizes to be measured three or four square meters more, the clan elites were likely to step in to mediate the dispute. By doing so, the clan can accept that the room size was measured one or two square meters more and so did the township cadres.

⁶² An explanation on the lineage elites' behaviours in taking accountabilities for the lineage institutions is provided by Tsai, who forwarded that the lineage elites' 'embedded and encompassed' moral identity from within the lineage institutions attribute to the better provision of public goods and village governance (2007).

term and fragile social relationships have shaped the ways the clan members cope with the conflicts with the external officials.

Case 2: Rice Farmland Expropriation

During the expansion of a central street in the county in Longgang village, between late March and late April, 2012, the local government confiscated about 5 *mu* of rice farmland from Wang-surnamed villagers who came from the same village group. The village vice-head, who was well-known as having a talent for tackling land conflicts, was appointed to this task. There had been four main changes since policy regulation of the local land expropriation had been promoted:

1. Higher compensation increasing from 34,000rmb to 49,500 per *mu*;
2. Well-informed provision of 10% land reallocation for the collectives;
3. Up-to-date knowledge of the increasing value of land among the villagers;
4. Ostensibly more stringent procedures for the convening of the village assembly on behalf of the collectives⁶³

Unsurprisingly, the village vice-head took the changes into consideration when fulfilling his tasks. However, the practice did not mirror the principle. First, the convening of the village assembly was carried out in a perfunctory manner. In fact, the attendees at the village assembly were entirely uncooperative while discussing the issues. Instead of calmly consulting the village cadres on the proposal for land expropriation, assembly attendees criticized the policy itself and the village cadres. As a result, the attendees were too irritated to sign the meeting memo, which was regarded as a compulsory document for an open consultation before the land expropriations could start. In order to collect the attendees' signatures (80% were needed according to the account of the vice-head), either the attendees were called back to the office or the village cadres had to visit the attendees' households in person. Finally, the majority of attendees' approval was gained for the above-appointed policy, in spite of their unwillingness.⁶⁴

While preliminary procedures had been carried out and the essential documents were ready, the land expropriation moved to the next stage of time-consuming negotiation and the subsequent land measurement. The village cadres in Longgang village office did not distort the policy information but indeed passed down the message that the village groups have a right to obtain 10% of land as reallocation.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, the villagers still tried to acquire more compensation. Some of them even put forward that if they can still use the rest of the land of which only certain

⁶³ *The Organic Law of the Villagers Committees of the People's Republic of China (2010 revised version)*, on Article 24, 'with regard to approaches to deal with the issues in relation with the villagers' interests as showed below, the village assembly must be convened to discuss and make a final decision...(4) use of land compensation fees and proposal of compensation distribution...(9)other issues that refer to the villagers' interests should be determined by the village assembly.' Available at: www.gov.cn/flfg/2010-10/28/content_1732986.htm, accessed April 18, 2013.

⁶⁴ Interview with village vice-head in Longgang village office and a household head who attended in the village representative assembly, April, 2012.

⁶⁵ Interview with village vice-head and village clerk, April, 2012.

size of the land was seized.⁶⁶ A few of them asked for the assessment of cost of grain planting on which the compensation of attachment and young crops should be based.⁶⁷ As a matter of fact, the villagers are likely to recognize the state's legitimacy in confiscating the land for public interests such as infrastructure construction, national defence, and other public projects, and they acknowledge that they have no land ownership but land use rights.⁶⁸ In response to the villagers' requirement for higher compensation fees, instead of altering the standards stipulated in the official paper, it was resolved that the size of the land should be reported as more than its real area by the village cadres. This measure of improving the level of the compensation so as to reach an agreement between the cadres and the villagers is also mentioned in Zhou (2010).⁶⁹ Other requirements were refused consideration as city construction had to be systematically planned, or they simply were not written on the local policy paper handed to the villagers.

The experienced village vice-head attributed his mediating role in balancing the villagers' requirements and the promulgated regulation to the success of the policy enforcement. First, he had to adopt the stick and carrot strategy in marathon visits and persuasion. By and large, he was projecting an image of the overwhelming vulnerability of the villagers in their fight against the state, a ruling omnipotent power under which both law and policy are produced for its self-serving purposes. Meanwhile, the villagers were offered an opportunity to acquire a little more compensation by tactically altering measurements of the size of the land, which was the limit of the local government's concessions. However, if the villagers were still too unsatisfied to give in and still kept asking more, he envisaged that some township or county government cadres would be appointed to replace him, resulting in no possibility of manipulating the measurements. It is possible that the villagers did have a fear of direct confrontation with higher-level officials when the village cadres retreated from on-going negotiation. Generally, the villagers clearly and wisely acknowledged their vulnerabilities in conflict with the local state. For instance, a village was afraid that if the local government played a trick by reallocating 10% of the land for resettlement purposes in marginal areas, such as on the edge of commercial zones, they would lose a lot more.⁷⁰ Thereby, paraphrasing the village-vice head's perspectives, it is likely to be reasonable for the vast majority of villagers to choose to cooperate for while analysing advantage *vis-à-vis* disadvantage.

Second, the village vice-head and, to a large extent, the village cadres, tend to privilege their executive role in fulfilling imperatives handed down from above, beyond conflicts of interest with the villagers. Thus, the upper-level government is often described as a genuine body compelling the villagers' cooperation. Although most of village cadres in Longgang admitted the fact that the villagers gain so little

⁶⁶ Interview with village vice-head in Longgang village office, May, 2012.

⁶⁷ Interview with a female village, who came to Longgang village office to ask why her compensation fees for removal of rice plant on her cultivated land were so little, May, 2012.

⁶⁸ Interview with a few numbers of householders, who either used to be involved into the land issue or who were involved in conflicts by that time in the two villages, February-June, 2012;

⁶⁹ Zhou cited this example from Wu Yi's research (2007).

⁷⁰ Interview with a villager who was involved into the issue of the land takings, May, 2012. He said if the land was relocated to a bad area they might have to beg the local government for collecting their land for systemic development. He believed that the mass can never fight against the state (*ming dou bu guo guo jia*).

from the land expropriation, instead of rectifying the policy and voicing the villagers' demands, their main responsibilities were to assist the upper-level government. Basically, the villagers are aware of the village cadres' dilemmas and the tremendous pressure on them from above. It is thus unsurprising that they were less reluctant to give a helping hand, especially when the village cadres showed their indebtedness to the villagers' understanding, kindness and generosity.⁷¹ According to the village vice-head, it indeed occurs in rural society where people exercise reciprocity and friendliness (*ren qing*).

The village cadres' role as intermediaries between the township, the county leadership, and the villagers seems to contribute to their identity moving from protector of the rural community to agent of the local state. Consequently, the villagers are able to avoid direct confrontation with upper-level government in the enforcement of policy, leading to some extent to a reduction of tensions between the local state and the villagers. They also have opportunities to seek margins for slightly higher compensation that might not be disclosed to the upper-level officialdom. Nevertheless, the demeanour of the village cadres, especially Longgang village vice-head, reflects their pragmatic, opportunistic, and consequentialist dispositions in implementing the policy. Contradictions between the rule of law and the local expropriation policy direct the village cadres to minimize the effects of checks and balances, like the Organic Law of Villagers' Committee, with seemingly legal documents.

To a large extent, types of social relationships shape the way of coping with conflicts among the social actors. First, the village cadres, like the Longgang village vice-head, develop a series of strategies and linguistic skills for day-to-day interaction which are able to be implied contextually to solve conflicts. Generally speaking, an experienced or skilful village cadre is able to clearly acknowledge to what extent the individuals' interests shall be compromised. Second, more often than not, the village cadres have a strong and long-term relationship with the villagers. This type of social relationship then affects the way in which the village cadres tend to adopt the relatively soft measures (like in Sun and Guo's study (2000)) to deal with the villagers' resistance.

Villagers also realize to what extent they can maintain this relationship with the village cadres. They notice that they have to rely on the village cadres' capabilities to bridge a connection to the external officialdom. They often learn from the village cadres about the official law and policies and construct their knowledge on the external changes via chains of interaction and communication with village cadres. Meanwhile, they experience the conflicting values and interests, and often express their feelings and emotions. But, the attached meaning of the external values, regulations, and intervention might be reinterpreted as the furthermore interactions come. Thus, the villagers could be able to accommodate the compromise version of the conflicting values and interests. At the same time, social relationships are able to be reinforced, maintained, modified, and even altered.

⁷¹ Interview with a few numbers of householders, who either used to be involved into the land issue or who were involved the conflicts by that time in the two villages, February-June, 2012.

Accordingly, the official law and the external policy regulations were not implemented strictly, instead being mediated contextually by those social actors. Not only do the external interventions and policy have to be contextually interpreted and understood, but also the implementation of policy has to be fashioned by the day-to-day interaction and the social relationships.

Case 3: Orchard Farm, Rice Farmland and Dry Land Expropriation

Between early November and late December, 2011, hundreds of villagers from thirteen village groups in Xinzhai village faced 200 *mu* of land expropriation. This was due to a proposed project for a multifunctional commercial zone, including a five-star hotel, commercial housing, Hakka cultural gallery, and pedestrian streets. Importantly, the county and the township government and the villagers' committee had all been involved in the land expropriations together. It was realized that the gap between the revenue generated by the land transaction for local government finances and the compensation fees paid by the local government treasury would be huge, unlike the land expropriation for public usage in Case 2.⁷² Among other matters, perceptions that the county, township government, and villagers' committee can divide revenues of as much 100 million rmb, as was estimated after the land sale, prevailed among the villagers. Some of the villagers were even aware of the regulation at the provincial level that land use rights cannot be transferred from the local government to the property developers or investors if the contractual consents among the land right users have not yet been reached. Some villagers were aware of the updated policy against the protection of the villagers' interests, which was echoed to the concept of rightful resistance put forward by O'Brien and Li (2006, 2008).⁷³

The arbitrary role of the local government in determining the content of compensation packages was clearly observed. The compensation of 49,500rmb per *mu* was offered no matter whether the land was an orchard, rice paddy, or dry land.⁷⁴ The 10% land reallocation for resettlement would be purchased at the price of 5,800rmb per square meter by the government. Bursaries of 20,000rmb per *mu* for the removal of fruit trees, grains, vegetables, and other attachments to the land would be offered without the cost assessment provided. What is more, the farmers who lost land would be disbursed an additional 8,000rmb in the name of social insurance.⁷⁵ That means that the amount of insurance fees as part of compensation package per *mu* depends on the number of farmers who had land registration on a

⁷² Interview with the village cadres in Xinzhai village office and a few numbers of householders who knew the event, February-May, 2012.

⁷³ "Specific Regulations on The Law of Land Administration of the People's Republic of China, Guangdong Province (2008 revision) ", on Article 41, 'Transaction of the land use right cannot be transferred when the below-show situations have occurred: (1) dispute of land ownership title...(5) shareholding of land ownership without land shareholders' written agreements', available at: law.hexun.com/100002698.html?mark=1&category=10003, accessed April 18, 2013.

⁷⁴ The rate of the compensation fees varies based on the grade of the land according to the latest policy paper. The reason why the local government did not distinguish compensation fees for dry land from other forms of land might be that the local government did not want to shoulder more tasks. More importantly, they desired to complete the work as soon as possible.

⁷⁵ To some extent, a set of policies issued by the central and the provincial government as mentioned above are considered by the local government during the local policy implementation.

given piece of land. Simply put, the sum for compensation fees per *mu* can be formulated as below:

- $49,000 + 5,800 * 10\% * 667$ (per *mu* is approximately equivalent 667 square meters) + $20,000 + 18,000 * \text{the number of the farmers}$ (unit: rmb)

On average, the price for per square meter land was no more than 900rmb at that time. From the villagers' point of view, it was acknowledged that the rate of compensation was much higher in comparison with the rate of the previous decade. However, living costs had also grown rapidly. For example, the compensation fees they receive are inadequate to purchase a normal apartment with a size of 100 square meters in their locale. In addition to the transaction fees for the reallocated land in the local land market would be more than the procurement price provided by the local government. This was proven by the Lan clan elites in Case 1, who claimed that the sale price per square meter for their reallocated land in 2010 had been up to 10,000rmb as offered by a potential local investor. That is likely to be main reason why the villagers in Case 2 strongly demanded land reallocation that would be able to bring new business opportunities for landless farmers. Likewise, the villagers in Xinzhai preferred land reallocation, which was one of the villagers' demands to the local government. Other than this, some claimed that they should receive higher compensation and others still preferred to keep possession of their land no matter how much they would be compensated.⁷⁶ Although the village group assemblies across the village were organized a few times, consensus was still difficult to reach between villagers and local government.

The Xinzhai village secretary, who concurrently acts as village-head, was appointed to take this mission, coupled with the county and the township cadres' cooperation and assistance. He not only has clan affiliations with some Liu-surname households but also has friendships across the village in general. Moreover, given that a large number of the village groups had been engaged, the village representatives were proactive in mobilizing the villagers in their village groups to cooperate. However, unlike the land expropriations in the past, there were more stringent regulations requiring signature collection for each landholding household member instead of only the household heads for land expropriation settlement (*zheng di xie yi*) and more frequent involvement of the village assembly, which combined to pose more obstacles to the grassroots cadres' enactment of land expropriation. In order to complete the project, apart from the well-known marathon thought work accompanied by stick and carrot strategies and *renqing* manoeuvring, predatory behaviour from within party government was more efficient in this case. A story that was revealed by a Liu-surname household exemplified this statement in greater detail.⁷⁷

The village representatives from within the group to which the Liu household belongs signed the land expropriation settlement immediately after the assignment was passed down. It was assumed by the Liu household that they were selected for

⁷⁶ Interviews with Xinzhai village cadres and some householders of involved into the event, February-May, 2012.

⁷⁷ Interview with the household heads' two adult daughters and their husbands, March-June, 2012

model setting as policy co-operators, with rumours spreading around that they were given special treatment. The Liu household was persuaded to make a permanent and complete break with the land. From the village representatives' (village group leaders') point of view, not only would the next young generation not take farming jobs any more, but also the farmers should live as urbanites, advocating social development. Based on their propaganda, the state is able to expropriate the farmers' land without any compensation, like cases happening in the collectivization era. In other words, the farmers as landholders should appreciate the current land taking policy that offers compensation. However, their statements seemed to be unconvincing for the Liu householders, who still perceived the land as the last resort for their survival.

The village head has clan fellows with the household. He visited an elderly couple who were supposedly the household heads, holding decision-making power, along with the township and the county government leaders. Although the elderly couple received two red envelopes of 1,400rmb from these visitors, they still informed them that the decision had to be made among all the family members, especially their grown up children who were allocated the land by land redistribution and readjustment. Consequently, a decision by the Liu household made was to refuse to hand over their land. They believed that the land expropriation cannot move on without the vast majority of the farmland holders' permission from across the village and signatures on the consent form. The work was stuck here due to their resistance.

Later on, one family member, who is one of the elderly couple's children and lives locally, encountered tremendous pressure from her son's work unit, a local middle school. Her son was given a mission to persuade his extended family to cooperate with the government and he would be granted a return to work only if the mission was accomplished. Moreover, if he failed to fulfil it he would probably be reallocated to another school, teaching in mountainous areas. His parents were so panicked that they had to negotiate with other family land holders, although they were not supposed to be involved in the event as they transferred to an urban household a long time ago and were not farmland holders. The Liu household had to surrender and in the end to co-operate, due largely to protect their family members from harm. The village representatives came over to collect their signatures on the second day after they were forced to agree and they were not informed when they would be compensated. Unsurprisingly, they were extremely disappointed with the local government. They said that the local party government was even worse than Kuomingdang that was perceived as evil government in the Republic of China-era.

From the Liu household's own analysis, this type of farmer household that has family members employed by party government or public sectors, namely work units, in their neighbourhood are consistently subjected to coercion and intimidation by the local leadership. Conversely, those types of households that are constituted only of farmers, self-employed workers, or private sector employees are bolder in impeding the aggression of the local party state. Non-work unit employee households attached to a larger size of the land use were particularly tough to force into compliance with the policy assignment. Since their cooperation is of a greater importance to land collection, they are in a position to argue more. Meanwhile, the

policy implementers tended to placate them if they desired to fulfil the task in a timely manner. As a consequence, on one hand, those farmer households characterized by non-work unit employment are likely to develop into so-called 'nail households' (*ding zi hu*, named by the village cadres) and, on the other, are likely to be granted special treatment such as extra compensation and special dinners with the village head.⁷⁸

The policy assignment was accomplished within two months. Thus, Xinzhai village head's commitment to the mission handed down from above was allegedly rewarded by the local government whilst there were still some householders who had not signed the land expropriation settlement. For example, in the village group to which the Liu household belongs, although there had few householders who did not comply, their compensation fees were distributed to the finance account of their village group around two months later. Interestingly, each farmer householder received 500rmb as a bonus before the Spring Festival in February, 2012. Some might argue that the farmers are able to benefit from increasingly abundant village finances by virtue of the collective land expropriation. However, that was perceived by some villagers as the village cadres' gimmick to appease frenzied villagers. By comparing what they had gained and what they had lost, at the least it can be said that they will not be the primary beneficiaries over the course of the land expropriation.

Accordingly, the power of the local party state is not effectively constrained by popularity, publicity, and lawful policy regulation. It is thus unsurprising that the farmers had endured the supreme authority of the local officials in decision making; public consultation prior to the policy approval and equal negotiation during the policy implementation is virtually missing. Meanwhile, the complexity of rural society and the system of rural management have complicated the situation. Although the mediating role of village cadres and, to a lesser extent, the village representatives reduces the level of confrontation between grassroots society and the local party-state and its agents, they are still more likely to be subordinated to the local party-state. When the soft measures conducted by the village cadres were no longer effective in dissolving the villagers' resistance, hard follow-up measures would be utilized by higher level officialdom so long as the measures are effective, irrespective of their violation of public norms and interests and of law and policy regulation at varying administrative levels.

One of Long's studies (2001) show how the village women entrepreneurs' identity and values were fashioned during the implementation of the bee-keeping business project. One of research findings is that the entrepreneurial women have to encounter the interface between traditional values and the new meaning of women and wives in the context of the local marketization and commoditization. In another Long's (2001) case study, the peasants and the local bureaucrats have different perspectives on which agricultural production, rain fed agriculture *vis-à-vis* irrigated, export-oriented production, is better for agricultural development and improvements to the peasants' livelihoods. The local officials, the engineer Roberto,

⁷⁸ As told by the informants who saw village head having a dinner with those tough villagers, May, 2012;

the rich peasant Don Pedro, and the poor peasant Don Jorge, represent the different versions of life worlds and thus unsurprisingly have different perspectives of agricultural production and the following implications on the peasants' livelihoods. There is a gap between the local peasants and administrators in terms of the choices for production modes. Although Roberto had done all the means to bridge the gap and compromise varying interests and values of the local peasants and the local bureaucrats, he was distrusted by the peasants and was dismissed from the position by the local administration in the end.

In this case, to some extent the external forces inhabited the internal values and interests, and brought about discontinuity or conflict. The values and the interests of the local governments and officials have a clash with that of the rural society and the villagers. Land taking, transaction and commercialization are regarded by the local officialdom as a means to the local economic development and its agents' political advancement. The latter somehow still embrace the values of risk protection of the farmland cultivation. From a social constructionist' point of view, knowledge should be constructed, and interpreted via social interactions and relationships; the meanings attached to social values have to be understood through social processes. If not impossible, the external officials hardly understood the needs and worldviews of the villagers since they are not keen to interact with those villagers and have not cultivated social ties with them. They might perceive those villagers as the uncommunicative, uneducated trouble makers, so when the external officials deal with the villagers in order to tackle the struggles of varying values and interests, they face a series of resistant reactions. In this situation, the village head played a mediating role in exercising the state power or authority against the villagers' varying values and interests.

These three cases, as discussed above, first reflect that the external officialdom has to encounter the villagers' increasing resistance when compelling the villagers to comply with local land requisition and demolition policy. This policy implementation did not concern the villagers' needs, interests, and values to a great extent. Villagers' needs and interests are diverse and their values conflict with the outsiders'. For example, although the land is no longer the primary material in productive activity and off-farm jobs are their main income sources, some villagers still perceive the farmland as their survival substance over this rapid rural urbanization.⁷⁹

Second, to some extent, the policy implementation relies on the social actors' mediation of the external forces. The village cadres and representatives are embedded into local social relationships and networks. The village and clan leaders are especially in a position to redistribute the resources, help compromise conflicting interests and values, and bridge the gap between different versions of prospects of the local urbanization. Not only the village elites but also other villagers are able to take advantage of social relationships and networking, thus constructing power to fashion the way by which policies are enforced. They are able to construct and

⁷⁹ As observed in the two villages, the vast majority of the farmers were no longer to work on their land, thus either they contracted their land out or they just let the land be idle.

reconstruct knowledge, interpret and reinterpret the meanings attached to, and engage and reengage the values into, the processes of the policy implementation.

It is noted that a social interface entails the conflicting processes, continuity and discontinuity, agreement and disagreement, negotiation and accommodation. First, the social actors from the clan lineage, the state machinery, households, and the village and township leadership convey varying values and interests all together. In the meanwhile, these expressions often interlock with the extensive social networks and dynamic interactions, especially in the Case 3. Last but not least, social actors are able to figure out varying forms of strategies to solve conflicts and thus shape the implementation of the policies, though some eventually failed.

Likewise, the completion of other tasks passed down by the city, the county and the township government are often greatly affected by the social actors

4. County and Township Appointed Tasks

Basically, the enactment of local tasks is not necessarily derived from the provision of law and policy at various levels. Local governments often enact a series of policies and tasks according to their needs. More often than not, these tasks and missions have to be passed down to the lowest level of the state administration. Importantly, those grassroots cadres, including township and village cadres, as the last rung of the bureaucratic hierarchical ladder are required to fulfil the tasks that somehow are miscellaneous. Those interactive processes of implementation entail bulks of here-and-now knowledge construction. Again, human agents often fashion the ways in which the tasks are completed.

In order to promote the national New Countryside Built-in project, the city government initiated a movement called *Bring Electronic Appliances to the Villagers Households*. In this case the villagers were offered the discount coupons if they wanted to purchase household electronic devices such as air-conditioner and refrigerator. On September, 2011, Xinzhai village cadres received a number of coupons. However, they distributed them among themselves as they asserted after a brief group discussion that none of villagers needed to use them.

On the morning of 27 March, 2012, an appointed township cadre allocated a task to the Xinzhai village office, originally sent down by the County Police Station to gather statistics about the satisfaction level of local security, wherein one village administration and one community committee under this township jurisdiction were randomly selected for this purpose. Logically, the Xinzhai village office was one of the village administrations to potentially be selected. Eight village cadres and five village representatives were called on to attend the training for filling out the questionnaires. Consequently, after negotiation and discussion between the two appointed township cadres and other cadres there was an agreement made on how to respond to both the closed and open-ended questions. As expected, the same group of people would be those participants if Xinzhai village was chosen by the local police stations. Then, each attendee obtained 30rmb as an allowance for their additional work. The village cadres tactically coordinated with the appointed

township cadres, from their perceptions, otherwise such a rehearsal prior to inspection from above should not be required.

The village cadres indeed complained that they have a large work burdens and pressure from the local government and its agents. Thus, if the policy or tasks from above do not necessarily require broadcasting and are not given importance by the higher-level officialdom, the village cadres are often inclined to conceal the information from the villagers in order to either reduce their burdens on task accomplishment or to avoid accountability from the villagers. For some village cadres' perspectives, the more the villagers know about what the villagers' committees have engaged in, the more trouble they can bring to the village cadres, giving rise to difficulties in meeting the upper-level requirements in terms of policy and task fulfilment. It is unsurprising that when the policy message of land reallocation concerning the villagers' resettlement was newly issued some village cadres hid it from the villagers on purpose since they might be afraid that the villagers would contest what the village cadres proclaimed by referring to the policy provision over the course of the land expropriation.

What is more, the task enforcers often construct their own knowledge on the mission assigned under specific contexts. For example, village cadres skip perceived unnecessary procedures and achieve mutual agreement on their own rights in terms of how to implement those tasks. This is because village cadres are able to ascertain the degrees of importance of certain policies and tasks and how risky it is for their behaviour to be reported. Again, the types of social relationships and networks were deliberately selected and then utilized by them in the completion of the tasks. More often than not, trusted people were selected to support the cadres' works on one hand while on the other hand the cooperation among them is perceived to be more likely to avoid leaking the secrets to other villagers.

5. Conclusion

This chapter compared several cases in policy implementation and the fulfilment at different levels. It shows that the social actors have the capability to mediate policy implementation and task fulfilment. First, to some extent, grassroots cadres, especially village cadres, and villagers affect the implementation of series of national policies. For instance, when the policy of the New Countryside Cooperative Medical System the New Rural Society Pension Insurance was being implemented in the two villages, the village cadres played an important role in guiding qualified villagers to sign up the system and in selecting the way the policy information was disseminated among the villagers. What is more, village cadres were able to negotiate ways to prevent villagers or households from disobeying the birth control policy and figure out how to protect them from being penalized by higher governmental sectors. Second, village cadres are in a position to determine the way by which the tasks passed down from the upper-level officialdom are enforced. They often take advantage of the social relationships to help them fulfil the tasks. Meanwhile, they could behave consequentially and opportunistically under the specific conditions.

These discoveries are also found in Björn (2001), Zhou and Lian (2012) and O'Brien and Li's (1999) studies. Statistical manipulation was commonly observed for birth

control policy. The cadre monitoring and responsibility system and the cadre assessment system to a large extent ensure not only tasks completion but also policy selection for enforcement. From Björn's (2001) perspective, due to information asymmetry between the principles and the agents, the village cadres are in a position to modify the implementation of the policy and assignments. By reference to Zhou and Lian's theory of control rights, it is given that the instructions appointed by principles are often incomplete. Therefore, the supervisors and the agents have room for their own control on how to implement the policy and tasks. As such, O'Brien and Li put forward that the cadre assessment system entails the incentive mechanism for village cadres to deliberately implement certain types of policies for their own sake. To some extent, these perspectives are able to explain the actors' behaviour under the specific contexts. However, while encountering the dynamics and the complexity of the socio-political interaction and networking, they are inappropriate to be employed.

My case studies fill this gap by employing actor-oriented perspectives and interface analysis. It was observed that the villagers, village cadres and township officials interact with each other over the conflicting processes of the land expropriation. Importantly, there are emerging strategies, power construction, negotiation, accommodation, compromise, and linguistic skills usage in these social interfaces. Village cadres have mastered useful skills in coping with the villagers' resistance over a period of time and are also able to conjure up a series of strategies to manage urgencies in accordance with the here-and-now situation. In this sense, 'contextual construction setting' (*qing jing she zhi*) can be perceived as one of the commonly used skills for the village cadres to transmit the state power to the rural society, as observed in Sun and Guo's fieldwork study (2000). Moreover, villagers are able to utilize the collective forces and the social relationships and networking to construct power relations and negotiate powerful officials for their own ends. Meanwhile, they construct the knowledge and the reality of the land taking and the local urbanisation and often reinterpret the values or meaning attached to 'farmland.'

What is more, structural forces enable and constrain the social actors' agency in fashioning policy implementation and task fulfilment. Emerging power structure, the local political decision-making system, the local leadership structure and historical issues limit the actors' action choices and room for creating strategies, negotiation, and accommodation. The village cadres and villagers involved are able to acknowledge those constraints and balance the conflicting interests and values. The social interfaces unfold the conflicting and interactive processes of the interface between the actors' agency and structural forces. Thus, social constructionism and actor-oriented perspectives engender a better understanding of the conflicting processes of varying interests, beliefs, and values for policy implementation, compared to other perspectives.

Chapter Six

Dispute Settlement

1. Introduction

Scholars have paid a lot of attention to the functionality of rural elites in managing and settling rural disputes or conflicts. By and large, it is the intermediary role of rural elites in linking the peasantry to the local state machinery which brings about the effectiveness of dispute resolution. For example, according to Li's (2005) archival research, the *xiangbao* (countryside guard) rotation system in the late Qing Dynasty and the early era of the Nationalist Party regime and elite activism combined to deliver health village governance, including provision of public goods, taxation levies and dispute mediation, in Huailu County, northern China. In this light, more often than not the state apparatus exercises its formal power on the county government (*yamen*) in a way that rests on informal institutions like the *xiangbao* system instead of the state's direct penetration into the society below the county level (Li, 2005; Huang, 2008; Yu, 2008; Ma, 2006; Peng, 2010). Thus, rather than adhere to the dichotomy of state vs society, Huang (2008) coined the term 'centralized minimalism' to delineate 'a third realm' where, in practice, the state authority utilizes the forces of local patronage and favours minimized layers of formal administration below county magistrate level and the engagement of intermediate bodies for rural governance, like dispute mediation.

In Li (2005) and Huang's (2008) study, the dual structure of rural elites exerts a positive effect on rural governance. Rural elites are in a position to lessen tensions between the local state and primary social groups by means of offering resolutions for disputes and negotiating the methods of tax levies between the villagers and the local government. Thanks to deprivation of rural elites from village governance after the 1920s, local strongmen began to take responsibility for collecting miscellaneous taxes, which caused chaos and the malfunction of village-wide governance. Unsurprisingly, this dual structure of village elites is still at work in the post-Mao era in a different way which forces the village elites have to act under the party organizational control (Yu, 2008).

Indeed, the networking of party organizational control reduces the intermediary function which the village elders or elites used to perform. Rural democratization has been promoted in order to rebuild ties with villagers as the elected villagers' committees are designated to be a self-governing body for the public good for the villagers. Importantly, in the context of the village management system, law and policy formulation and implementation still put an emphasis on the intermediary role of the village cadres akin to village elites like in the Republic-era.

In fact, dispute mediation is one of vital duties imposed on grassroots cadres, especially village cadres, and is one of the main roles of rural governance as stated in the Organic Law.⁸⁰ Importantly, grassroots cadres hope that they can always nip

⁸⁰ *The Organic Law of the Villagers Committees of the People's Republic of China (2010 revised version)*, On Article 2, 'the villagers committee shall manage the public affairs and public welfare undertakings of the village, mediate disputes among the villagers, help maintain public order, and convey the villagers' opinions and

disputes in the bud, preventing them from escalating into bigger conflicts or even collective actions. Simply put, one of the main political missions required by the upper-level governments to sustain local stability. Despite the *de facto* near paralysis of village governance and the 'abused and defied authority' which exists in some rural areas (Chen, 2007), the village cadres' actions can effectively resolve disputes village-wide. This is partially because they are likely to be local experts who are adept at constructing here and now mechanisms through which disputes can be effectively and peacefully addressed. In the meantime, village cadres as rural dispute mediators often happen to be prestigious, well-informed, knowledgeable, outward-looking or respectful talented people (Wang and Wang, 2012). In addition to the formal court system and administrative arbitration, informal institutions of dispute settlement are commonplace in rural areas. The dual role of the village cadres is still evidently seen, especially in settling societal disputes (Chen, 2006).

By making use of the theoretical and analytical framework of actor-oriented perspectives, this chapter will mainly focus on here-and-now knowledge construction, conflicting processes of varying values and strategies and the power construction from below over the processes of the dispute settlement. It will not only rethink the dual role of grassroots cadres but also put an emphasis on the capability, knowledgeability, power relations, and discursive practices of the social actors in dispute mediation and resolution. It is also found that quasi-structures, such as the rural cultural contexts and the political structure, constrain the scope of the action opportunities and the room for the strategies creation of the involved parties. To a large extent, dispute settlement is the outcome of the interaction of human agents and (quasi)-structures; it showcases the bulks of social interface. The cases selected below show various types of disputes and the processes of the settlement in a rapidly changing rural society for urbanisation.

The village cadres' involvement in dispute mediation in Xinzhai and Longgang villages is one of their main day-to-day tasks. Unsurprisingly, the village cadres have disputes with other villagers as well. There is a wide array of disputes or conflicts within and between the households and neighbours, ranging from disputes in production activities, such as allocation of water resources, to conflicts over house construction, property ownership, distribution of public compensation, from inter-household fighting to disputes in individual familial life like quarrelling and conflicts incurred by gambling, domestic violence, and so on. There is no wonder that the village cadres are called Tiger Balm (*wan jin you*), described by the locals as a sort of panacea to cure a variety of diseases. In other words, it is as if the village cadres can cope with nearly everything taking place in rural communities (Ou, 2011).⁸¹ As a matter of fact, some personal disputes or issues that used to be dealt with by the village cadres no

demands and make suggestions to the people's government.', available at: www.gov.cn/flfg/2010-10/28/content_1732986.htm, translation seen at: www.enread.com/job/law/29528.html, accessed March 19, 2013.

⁸¹ From the Longgang village vice-chairperson's point of view, 80% of the lowest-level disputes would be resolved if the village cadres as the disputes mediators actively engage. In fact, the engagement of the grassroots, including the village and township level, is required by the villagers in the dispute mediations. Otherwise the grassroots cadres could be dubbed as lazy, unresponsive and irresponsible bureaucrats by the villagers and the latter could report those bureaucrats' perceived misbehaviours to the higher-level officials. Also, the upper-level government sectors and officials expect the grassroots cadres, especially the village cadres in rural public, to solve the lowest-level disputes at their best, which reduces the burden of the higher-level official bureaucracy.

longer fall into the category of dispute mediation, to some extent reflecting separation of all-inclusive state and peasants' private space. For example, couples who intend to divorce do not need to obtain an approval letter from the village office, as used to be the case in the collectivized era, and the village cadres seldom get involved in persuading the couple to carry on their married life.

2. Lowest-level Disputes Resolution - Constructing Interpretations to Values of 'Emotion', 'Reason' and 'Law'

The general principles of emotion, reason, and law (*qing, li, fa*) are often utilized by the dispute mediators to seek resolution in the rural public realm wherein harmony of social relations is intentionally sustained among the villagers (Wang and Wang, 2012). Dispute mediators' rational calculation of how to allocate weight to emotion, reason, and law in character would be affected by the nature of disputes, social relationships with the dispute initiators, and acknowledgement of justice among the disputing parties.

Broadly speaking, emotion applies to intrapersonal intimacy and affectionate ties among the villagers or the disputing parties; reason applies to dispute resolution which needs to be accorded with general wisdom, like being just, fair and appropriate; law refers to official regulations and formal authority. More importantly, those actors' interpretations attached to those values are assumed to be concurrently, contextually constructed. The strategies implied are consistent with those here-and-now interpretations in many cases.

Case 1a: House Construction

On the morning of 26 April, 2012, there was an elderly couple from Longgang village seeking for help from village cadres. The village vice-head, with concurrent post of secretary of dispute mediation, and the village clerk were involved in dealing with the complaint. The conflict they reported was caused by ongoing house construction undertaken by their neighbouring household (Wang household, hereinafter), known to be disrespectful and unyielding among the village cadres. From the narrative of the couple, first, they and other neighbours were required to sign a contract drafted by someone from this cunning and arrogant Wang household and, second, the Wang household was suspected of illegally occupying the public area. In the contract, the neighbours were required to agree to the statement that the Wang household would not take any responsibility if any negative events occurred to the neighbours during the house construction. After reading the so-called contract submitted by them, both of vice-head and village clerk were shocked and made fun of the contract drafters as if they were actually high quality people who adhered to contractual agreements.

Thereafter, it was suggested that they shall not agree to sign the contract paper because the clauses were completely illegal. Also, the contract drafters were dubbed as 'legal illiterates' (*fa mang*). In order to explain the land use for house construction, they said that, according to current policy regulation, if the Wang householders demolish their original house to rebuild a new one then they were required to apply

for an approval certificate from the County State Land and Resource, otherwise their new home would not meet building regulations. What is more, if the Wang householders claimed that they have right to utilize the public path, a certificate of permission for land use should be in their hands. According to the old couple, a couple of years previously the Wang household had asked for permission from the neighbourhood as they wanted to use public path as their courtyard was too small. At that time the neighbours agreed to give them permission.

According to this couple's understanding of local convention, the Wang householders needed to return the public path to its original status instead of occupying it, especially when the Wang householders had the ability to build a newer and bigger house. However, the dispute mediators did not take the so-called unwritten convention much into consideration, instead that they attempted to solve the problem in accordance with newly enacted policy regulations. It was suggested that the neighbours should report the conflict to Urban Management Office or the State Land and Resources Bureau if the Wang householders kept constructing the building. In the end, the village clerk gave this couple the mobile phone number of a team leader in the Urban Management Office in case the neighbours have need to raise the issue.

Case 1b: House Construction

This case of dispute resolution was collected from village clerk's experiences in coping with house construction in Longgang and reflected his skills in the balance of emotion, reason and law in the given situation. This dispute took place in the village group where he resided, so he shared fellowship and friendship with some of the villagers. The complaint he received was that a household (Tang household, hereinafter) did not take protective measures for its neighbours when constructing a six-storey building, resulting in the neighbourhoods' environment being damaged and their safety being threatened. The Tang householders were facing conflicts with the residents from the house next door when the latter made an effort to constrain Tang householders' construction works.

From his judgement, it was clearly noted that Tang householders had made a number of wrongdoings. First, the Tang householders should not have dug a sewage tank in their neighbourhood front yard as that had indeed ruined the neighbourhood feng shui, which caused the neighbours a lot of concern. Second, the surrounding area was dirty and messy as the Tang householders did not get rid of construction waste in a timely manner. Third, the neighbours' safety was indeed threatened because the Tang householders did not take proper measures to prevent construction materials falling down to the ground. Accordingly, notice was given to some of the Tang householders, who the clerk knew quite well, to come to the village office to discuss the situation. However, the Tang householders were reluctant to compromise first. They did not care for the village clerk's warning and did not intend to go to village office to talk to him. However, as the conflicts between the Tang household and other neighbours caused construction to cease, they were willing to seek for solutions to the dispute from the village cadres. After a short period of waiting, the village clerk stepped into the issue to help them out.

The village clerk was in a position to mediate the dispute. At first, as explained by him, legally speaking, the Tang householders should have held an official certificate to demonstrate that the physical foundation of the building was designed for a six-storey building. By showing possession of the document when asked by neighbours, they not only warded off the neighbours' anxiety about the threat of the construction itself but also ensured that the construction was legally permitted. It was found that this document was indeed in their hands. In turn, from the village clerk's advice, the individual safety of the neighbours had to be taken into account. Therefore, a protective net had to be employed on the surface of the building as soon as possible. In addition, the Tang householders were required to urgently stop digging the sewage tank in front of the neighbours' courtyard and put it back to the original condition in favour of the neighbourhood feng shui concerns.

While the Tang householders were correcting their wrongdoings, the clerk was communicating with the neighbours and asked them for their understanding and support. Generally speaking, in his experience the neighbours are far less likely to be unsupportive if the communication between the disputing parties was going well. The Tang householders were instructed by him to visit their neighbourhood households in person to apologize for what had happened in recent past and to ask for their understanding for unavoidable construction waste left during the building process, as well as to promise that they would remove all construction waste in due course. Although he was not sure whether the Tang household would follow his suggestions, the neighbours would be more prone to accept the humble, modest attitude of people who require their neighbours supports. He also suggested that small gifts could be provided for the neighbours. Since he was a friend with someone in the neighbourhood households, he told the Tang householders that he would like to visit them in person if they were still unsatisfactory and uncooperative after the Tang householders had visited them. As a matter of fact, it is rare for neighbours to withhold the invitation of interpersonal sentiment as most of them adhere to sentimental attachment and *mianzi* value in rural publics. Finally, the building construction was completed as expected.

Housing construction signals the changing scenarios of the villages since the villagers are more affluent and prefer better living conditions, as well as being motivational for others' attentions. To some extent, it reflects their life-long achievements and success in the village and beyond. In the meanwhile, construction brings a series of disputes or conflicts, such as misunderstandings of the policy regulations, controversies surrounding land use, neighbourhood disagreements, and so on. Village or clan leaders are often in a position to mediate the disputes.

In these cases, it is vital for the dispute mediators to have a just stance when either correctness or wrongness is easily ascertained. The mediators' professionalism and persuasiveness in interpreting relevant law and policy decrees is able to augment legitimacy of justice assertion and engender trust in those involved in the disputes. Meanwhile, the here-and-now content of reason attached to dispute settlement is likely to be well recognized among the dispute parties, like their beliefs in feng shui and the fundamental principle of protection of private safety and property. The mediators' encouragement of and the villagers' embrace of interpersonal sentiments

help complete a final compromise, if needed. The mediators' aim is to not only address the dispute itself but also attempt to negotiate a mutually acceptable resolution, even reach a win-win situation and sustain interpersonal relations (Wang and Wang, 2012). Especially when mediators are faced with negotiating a compromising agreement between both sides of the parties they share friendship with, the principle of 'either side of dispute parties compromises with each other' (*yi ren rang yi bu*) is usually adhered to. In this light, it looks as if they allocate the cost of compromising and their personal sentiments with the dispute parties equally and fairly.

Nevertheless, adherence to reason and interpersonal sentiment over the course of dispute mediation could be constrained, even overturned by escalation of conflicts. In some cases, those mediators have to confront loopholes or ambiguity of law and policy regulation, the disputing parties' refusal to accept a set of solutions in dispute mediation, as well as complex arguments left over from the past, namely historical problems (*li shi yi liu wen ti*). Besides, imperious actions of the local powerful tyrants could completely ruin the implications of emotion, reason, and law in dispute mediation. Again, that reflects the context-specific interpretations and implications of social values. There is the possibility that the social actors are able to switch from one approach to another while facing difficult resolution in some cases. 4

Case 2: Who should Obtain More Land Compensation Fees?

In this case there was a conflict over the distribution of compensation fees taking place in a village group in Xinzhai village after the land takings for the multi-functional commercial built-in project (as articulated in Chapter Five) was accomplished. The main reason why an agreement was difficult to be reached was due to controversy over the land use rights of a piece of land between Zheng-surnamed and Luo-surnamed villagers. Put simply, determination of this land use belonging to either Zheng or Luo people would put an end to how to distribute compensation fees and, to be specific, ultimately decide which group would receive more compensation. In the collectivization era, Zheng villagers were under the aegis of one production team while Luo villagers worked within another. Over the course of the establishment of the household responsibility system, these two production teams were converted to become a village group. At that time there are 47 Zheng- and 84 Luo-surnamed villagers. The village cadres did not know the details of the issue, so at the beginning they had to listen to some old production team leaders, some whom are current team leaders of the village group, who are acquainted with the process of land redistribution, readjustment, and expropriation in their village group.

From their narratives, the villagers who were members within the same production team were inclined to be allocated to the same area of the land altogether when the first wave of land distribution came in 1981. There was no exception in the case of Zheng and Luo villagers. Unexpectedly, a few number of Zheng householders were allocated to another plot of land that used to be planted by another production team. The reason for this was that the land to be allocated was not big enough to enable all of Zheng and Luo villagers' land to be located together. Logically speaking,

the land distribution should be documented and therefore that would need to be checked. In this light, some Luo people argued that they should be eligible for sharing compensation that was given to Zheng householders whose land was allocated to another place, as mentioned above, because their land use was still registered within the same village group.⁸² However, Zheng villagers did not conform to the Luo villagers' suggestions and made much effort to offer evidence to prove this piece of land has nothing to do with the Luo people. For example, Zheng people showed a document stating that this piece of land had been rented out for a few years in the Zheng people's name, though the legality of the document was called into question. Although a few rounds of meetings were convened in the village office to seek solutions to the distribution of compensation, the two groups of villagers were arguing with each other and neither wanted to negotiate peacefully.

The village head in charge of the land issues recommended that they should aggregate the land size of each group to see whether the total land size would match the original size after the first round of land distribution in 1981 for the village group. If the former land size was equal to the latter land size, it would be possible to judge under which village group the land use was registered. Unfortunately, the already tough situation was worsened after checking the documentation of the land expropriation and distribution. According to the records, each household was allocated approximately 2.13 *mu* first-grade rice land equally with the method of 'to choose by lot' across the whole village.⁸³ However, judging by the documentation alone, it was found that Luo villagers were only allocated 2.03 *mu*, though this might have been mistakenly recorded. In addition, the written materials in the village cadres' hands only showed the detail of the land expropriation of rice farmland but not other land. Consequently, the approach of seeking evidence from historical documentation had to be abandoned.

Over the course of the discussion, more and more arguments came out. As mentioned above, Zheng people stated that Luo villagers had never inquired about the issue relating to the piece of land for nearly 20 years. They implied that the Luo people already accepted the fact that the land had always been managed by Zheng people. They criticized the Luo people for being greedy. Whether or not these arguments and statements were convincing, the dispute mediators still made efforts to work out mutually acceptable solutions. Several proposals for compensation distribution were presented: 1) to distribute compensation for the expropriation of the piece of land among the villagers equally, regardless of their surname; or, 2) two thirds of the compensation fees would be divided by Zheng villagers while the rest would be shared among Luo villagers; or 3) the Zheng people would return one *mu* of confiscated land to Luo people to remedy possible loss caused by the mistake found in the documentation first, in turn they shared compensation fees of the piece

⁸² There are two main approaches to divide compensation fees among the villagers at the locality: 1) the compensation fees are distributed equally among the households within a village group unit; 2) the villagers in a village group were given compensation fees in accordance with the sizes of their registered land first and then they share equally the collective compensation fees. The collective land use of the village groups could be made up of private plot land (*zi liu di*) for collective use (of a production team) and the land that was left by those villagers who transferred to the citizen *hukou* registration.

⁸³ The method of 'draw lots' (*zhua jiu*) to allocate the land to exact location within the same areas of the land for the villagers was used.

of land equally;⁸⁴ or 4) to adopt majority rule of voting. The solutions were put forward by the village cadres accompanying negotiation between the villagers and the village cadres. The Zheng villagers denied the method of majority rule of voting as it was regarded as an unjust approach, as apparently Luo villagers are much more representative than Zheng villagers. Likewise, all other solutions were rejected as the Zheng and Luo people refused to give one another more compensation and the village cadres were perceived by both the Zheng and Luo people as unjust and partial mediators who favoured one at the expense of the other. As a result, there seemed to be no room for alternative resolutions.

Among the solutions, the second one was recommended by the village cadres, particularly by the vice-head of village office. When they were looking through existing materials, some of them provided by Zheng and Luo village group leaders, in relation to the land expropriation and compensation distribution for Zheng and Luo villagers, they found that the approach to allocate compensation fees in an equal manner among the villagers had always been used in the past. They strongly advised that it was better to abide by the previous rule of distribution of the compensation fees. The main reason why the two groups were fighting against each other was assumed by the village cadres to be because the compensation in the past were much less than now and as a result the villagers had not cared much about the way compensation were divided in the past. It was said that the compensation for all Zheng and Luo villagers was up to 2,500,000rmb and 400,000rmb respectively. That was why the villagers had tried all means to obtain more with ignorance to the normative measures on distribution of compensation. In order to solve the problem, both Zheng and Luo villagers were ready to file a complaint in court. It was alleged that they were receptive to judicial judgement no matter who became the winners or the losers.

From the village vice-head's point of view, arbitration in the court was not optimal as a very significant proportion of the compensation would have to be charged as legal fees. Apparently, the result of compensation distribution after the trial in the court might not be better than the foregoing proposals that were suggested by the village cadres. More often than not, trials in court are regarded as the last resort to tackle disputes and conflicts in the rural populations since it might not only prevent a win-win situation but would also ruin societal relations in the villages. The village vice-head admitted that harmonious relations within and between the farmer households seemed to be threatened in dealings with compensation distribution. For example, the siblings in some families fought over how to allocate compensation fees among family members.

The struggles on distribution of compensation are seen more frequently as urbanisation is ongoing in the villages and beyond. It is a fact that farmers are compensated on different levels all over the China. Although a series of policy regulations have been issued to tackle this problem nationwide, controversies of the land ownership make it tough to be solved in some cases (Ho, 2001). To some extent,

⁸⁴ Luo surname villagers might argue with the village cadres on the mistake and they might also think that they have missed some compensation fees in the past as the size of their land allocation was less than other villagers.

the settlement of this issue relies on the mediation from the grassroots, including the cadres and villagers' mediation. That inevitably involves varying conflicting beliefs, values, and interests, and the creation of negotiation, accommodation, and strategies over the processes.

In this case, despite the fact that the dispute resolution was not yet achieved by the time the case was observed, the village cadres played a vital role in providing consultations and potential proposals for dispute resolution. Mutually acceptable and just agreements among the disputing parties seems to be the key to the disputes settlement, while the dispute mediators always guided the dispute parties to reach agreements, some of which might not be articulated by regulations. However, the villagers constructed their own power via social relationships and networking to deny the suggested proposals and negotiate additional approaches to the settlement. In this particular case, the village group's ownership entitlement for the land use is not clarified according to current law and policy, which gives rise to difficulties for both the village cadres and the villagers to ascertain based on certain official policy decrees. As such, the inaccuracy of historical documentation was not in support of negotiable proposals. What is more, fighting over maximization of material interests of each group, when combined with individual emotional behaviours, entails abandonment of the previous methods of allocating compensation. As a consequence, unlike Case 1, dispute resolution was difficult to reach.⁸⁵ The implications of balancing emotion, reason, and law were not effective to settle the dispute in this specific context.

Case 3: Opposition to the Adherence to 'Emotion', 'Reason' and 'Law'-a Village Hooligan

There was a local household (Wu household, hereinafter) living in Xinzhai village, and a number of neighbours had suffered from the Wu householders' actions, especially the Wu household head's (pseudonymous name, Wu Qiang, hereinafter) crimes over the past two decades. Their deeds were enumerated by some village cadres and villagers in the village group where the Wu household resided. Firstly, in order to take over the contracting of a collective owned fish pond, he filled up the pond by pouring the cement into it. By doing so potential contractors were scared off. The village cadres were forced by Wu Qiang to accept for him to take over the contract with extremely low contract fees, despite the fact that the village cadres did not agree to comply with him.

Secondly, he forcibly occupied a female villager's vegetable plot. At the beginning, the female did not agree to rent out her vegetable garden to him, so he put sand on her vegetable plot and intimidated her so as to force her to comply. In addition, a fruit tree belonging to an elderly male villager was stolen by him. Thirdly, he and his family members often blocked the countryside road and blackmailed householders who wanted to deliver construction materials for construction. Some of householders had to offer him so-called 'payment for permission to pass through' (*mai lu qian*). Last but not least, he was suspected of assaulting villagers who were

⁸⁵ Zheng and Luo people could go back to the negotiating table to seek for dispute settlements with the village cadres after they had been carefully considered.

reluctant to be submissive, and when investigated he counterfeited materials as evidence in order to obscure the crimes he had committed.

It was said that the victims of his crimes were always vulnerable female or elderly farmer householders with a small extended family and a less well-off economic and social background. These villagers had greatly suffered since the early 1990s and the village cadres in past office terms had not stood up for the victims to help address the conflict. It was alleged that the village chairperson in the office between 1996 and 2001 had a good relationship with Wu Qiang and the village chairperson in the office between 2005 and 2011 did not provide a voice for the villagers since he did not want to displease Wu Qiang and his family and fall into trouble with them. Although a petition attached with signatures across the village group had already been raised four times to the County Police Office, the Township Office of Justice and the county-level government leaders, Wu Qiang was not arrested until May, 2012.

It was said that the current village head was determined to address the issue when the villagers reported it again. After the collective petitioning report was handed out to the above in the name of the village office, a work team was dispatched to investigate. On 03 May, 2012, the victims were summoned to the village office and each of them was individually listened to with what had happened to them written down by the work team. When the villagers were talking to the officials of the work team, they admitted that they were desperately waiting for a response from above. However, they claimed that they would persist with appeals to the upper-level government until their case was dealt with in a just manner if the government still did not give them a satisfactory answer.

Unlike two previous village heads' indifference to the villagers' petition, in addition to the villagers' petition, the village head's personal connections to the upper-level officialdom might help prompt investigation from above. Villagers had encountered a marathon process of dispute resolution. When powerful local bullies are able to frighten the village cadres they tend to avoid dispute mediation. In other words, village cadres' mediating role in applying principles of emotion, reason, and law are dysfunctional under this specific context. Thus, villagers had to seek for alternative approaches to settle their problems.

3. Strategies Creation from Below

All disputes cannot be solved at the lowest level, due in part to lack of evidence-based law and policy regulation, and the limited scope of responsibilities, capability and authority of the dispute parties involved, as well as other context-specific encountering. In the following cases, villagers play a vital role in creating strategies to settle disputes when the village-level resolution fails. For instance, over the process they are able to identify who might be able to offer a helping hand outside of the village cadres, adjust their approaches in a timely manner, and construct power relations to achieve the goal of making a compromise. In a meanwhile, their actions have to be constrained by the specific contexts and structural forces. In a

word, it was observed that the disputing parties entail the capability to mediate the disputes.

Case 1: Identify a Local Bureaucratic Benefactor

On the morning of 30 August, 2011, a group of villagers of the same village group visited Longgang village office to enquire as to whether their land compensation had arrived in the bank account and thus when they could get their money. The village chairman confirmed that the compensation had been transferred to the village account already. Some of the villagers were still very worried about whether they can get the compensation as expected and they pushed village head to fulfil it as soon as possible. They emphasized that the township vice-secretary had, over and over, made a promise that they should be able to obtain the compensation of 20,000rmb on that day. Thus, they kept pushing the village head to give them an honest answer as to what time they could finally gain the money. Since the village accountant and cashier, who were not in the office at the time, needed to be there to withdraw the money, he promised that by 3pm that day they could go to bank together. In the meantime, the village head asked a village cadre to draft a document stating the confirmation of the compensation received that would be signed by these villagers involved. For these villagers, it seemed very convincing that they should have the money soon.

The origin of this dispute was traced back several years to the wave of land acquisition and reallocation. A number of householders did not know that part of their reallocation land for resettlement had previously been sold until construction was ongoing on the reallocated land. Although they did not admit that they transferred the returned land to the property developer, the official documents on the property developers' hands demonstrated that the land trade and the ongoing construction were legally conducted. The householders said that they had never been informed by anyone such as their village group leaders or the village cadres about the land transactions. It was assumed that someone had secretly sold the reallocated land to the property developers. Unfortunately, it was difficult for them to track who was responsible for the land sales. Although they were aware of the fact that they could not get the reallocated land back and the village cadres could do nothing about it, they still made efforts to ask for compensation by raising the issue to the local upper-level officialdom. The township vice-secretary stood up to negotiate with an array of local government sectors and eventually promised to compensate their loss with 20,000rmb.⁸⁶ The villagers were told that the compensation fees would be transferred to the village coffers and they just needed to go straight to the village office. The township vice-secretary was seen by some villagers as a good servant on behalf of the interests of the masses.

It is not uncommon for government officials to assist the villagers in addressing their conflicts, disputes, appeals, or petitions. In this light, the disputing parties conceive of the higher-level officials as heroic figures and that their interventions create

⁸⁶ Unlike much higher price for land sales in very recent years, the price of the reallocated land transaction a couple years ago was indeed very low. It was said by a village representative that per square meter just cost 150 yuan eight years ago. Accordingly, 20, 000 yuan as compensation fees could be accepted.

leverage for dispute settlement. Sometimes, officials' individual decision making, in response to the dispute parties' requirements, are not much more effective than other dispute settlements mechanisms like juridical and administrative arbitration, but also are likely to be executed in a timely manner. That is why sometimes the disputing parties involved would like to have direct contact with the higher-level officials in seeking for dispute resolution.

In this case the parties involved recognized the willingness and the capability of the township vice-secretary in settling the dispute after a few rounds of visiting the township office. They utilized the township vice-secretary's decision making to negotiate with the village office to exert pressure on the village cadres in order to gain the compensation as quickly as they could. By using face-to-face confrontation with the village cadres and the extensive (though weak) social networking with the township vice-secretary, this group of villagers relatively effectively settled this dispute by their own right.

Case 2: Who should be Responsible for Making Blocked Drainage Channel Flow?

On the afternoon of 13 February, 2012, a female villager visited Xinzhai village office to report a dispute among households incurred by a stinky, malfunctioning, and clogged drainage trench. Thanks to rural urbanisation, more and more new buildings had been erected in the village. In the meanwhile, some householders had to confront the reality that the infrastructure lagged far behind this rapidly growing property development. According to the description of the female villager, the waste from a new tall building next to an old one-storey hall obstructed drainage pipes and overwhelmed the surrounding drainage trenches. As a result, the householders living in the hall could not drain their waste water. The dispute had, in fact, already been reported a few times but it had yet to be solved.

The village vice-head said that he had raised the issue up to the County Urban Planning and Construction Bureau and the County Conservancy Bureau respectively. However, after his enquires there was a disagreement between the two bureaus as to who should have responsibility for dealing with the issue between the two bureaus. The former forwarded that there was no special funds to deal with the matter as the management fees for drainage system maintenances was charged by the County Conservancy Bureau. On the contrary, the latter contended that the problem seemed to be related to city planning therefore it should not fall into the category of their duties. In his words, the village cadres could not do much if these two bureaus did not engage in the matter, even though neighbourhood households' unease with inefficiency of the dispute mediation was being noticed. Later on, the village cadres were informed by the villager that she and her neighbours had decided to hand a petition with signatures to the upper-level government sectors to seek solutions to the dispute. Therefore, she represented their neighbourhood households and requested that they would need a document from the village office showing that the failure of the village cadres' mediation drove them to look for resolution from above. A petition might be easier to be accepted by the higher-level officials after the lowest-level mediation failed. However, the village vice-head was reluctant to give her the document as she required.

Village cadres are expected by the higher-level government to resolve disputes and conflicts within villages as much as they are able. The disputes might need to be reported to the above government sectors only if the mediation does not succeed at the lowest level, which seems to be clearly known to the villagers. Therefore, the party involved expressed a seemingly reasonable request since the village-level mediation did not work. That later on exerted a strain on the village vice-head who finally sent two village cadres to investigate the issue, though he was not willing to do so.⁸⁷

In addition, it seems to be clearly acknowledged by the disputing parties that village cadres were not willing to involve higher-level officials in the issue since they did not want to be regarded as incompetent. The neighbours and their representative still waited for the village cadres' activism in solving the issue on the one hand, while on the other they forced the village cadres to tackle it effectively. As a matter of fact, demands for higher-level government sectors' engagement in dispute settlements are increasing, especially in the context of rapid urbanisation. Cooperation and coordination between the government sectors and the village offices is therefore essential. However, most of the time cadres adopted a method of passing the buck and of having less unnecessary trouble, especially when such dispute resolutions are perceived as a burden for them. The neighbouring households somehow acknowledged the grassroots cadres' approach to tackle the disputes and create a series of strategies to negotiate, wherein the power relations are generated throughout inter-subjective interaction. The following case will bring more details and discussion.

Case 3: Where was the Reallocated Land Located and was the Distribution of Compensation Just?

There are 136 villagers in a village group in Longgang village with a singular household surname, Luo. More than 80 villagers had signed a lawsuit petition that enumerated the misdeeds of a group leader (pseudonymous name, Luo Ming, hereinafter) of this village group. Luo Ming was accused of selling villagers' reallocated land by deceitful means and keeping the compensation of the three villagers, as well as embezzling collective funds of the village group. Luo Ming was appointed to be group leader by one village cadre in 1987, but not elected by Luo householders, and was the only person in charge of the village group committee. Surprisingly, the majority of villagers did not cast doubt on the village cadre's statement that there was no need to elect more village representatives because otherwise the villagers had to pay for her or his duties.⁸⁸ It was no wonder that Luo Ming had always easily escaped monitoring.

In 2004, villagers' farmland was requisitioned by the county-state due to public street construction and they were compensated 34,000rmb per *mu*. Importantly, the policy of land reallocation for resettlements was being implemented at the local

⁸⁷ I went there with the two village cadres and had a look at the issue.

⁸⁸ According to the Organic Law of the Villagers' Committee, a number of the village representatives from within the village groups should be elected to establish the group committee. Basically, the village representatives are unpaid or very low paid volunteered job.

level. However, the majority of villagers did not acknowledge the policy message due in large part to Luo Ming's misbehaviour of concealing policy information. He lied to the villagers, saying that they had to pay 200,000rmb if they desired to purchase the reallocated land from the County State Land and Resources Bureau. In turn, he asked the villagers who wanted to purchase to report their names to him and they would go to the County State Land and Resources Bureau together. According to those key informants, what he meant to do was to make the villagers lose interest in making enquires on the reallocated land and scare those purchasers off by such high a purchase fee, from Luo Ming's point of view. Interestingly, a number of villagers still wanted to buy the reallocated land, but Luo Ming did not show up when those potential purchasers arrived at the County State Land and Resources Bureau.

In order to collect some villagers' reallocated land into his pocket, he had to perform another method. The land-lost farmers, according to Luo Ming's statements, can get either 34,000rmb or 44,000rmb per mu compensation, dependent upon their decision. If the villagers would like to obtain the reallocated land, they would be given only 34,000rmb; if the villagers did not want the reallocated land they could transfer it back to the County State Land and Resources Bureau so that they would gain 10,000rmb in additional compensation. When the villagers decided to select the second proposal, they were required to sign a contract demonstrating they agreed to do so. A number of the villagers who decided to choose the second proposal were the ones who were having conflicts with Luo Ming a few years later. Some of them stated that they did not think through what Luo Ming attempted to do at the time and they regretted that they should have paid more attention to the policy of the land reallocation before making the decision. On the other hand, they insisted that Luo Ming indeed cheated on them by giving them misleading advice and insisted that the document they signed should be considered illegal.⁸⁹

In fact, what Luo Ming had done to the villagers was not exposed until June, 2011, when a villager (pseudonymous name, Luo Wei, hereinafter), who had initiated the collective appeal, pointed out that their reallocated land might have been sold by Luo Ming in 2005.⁹⁰ Following Luo Wei's initiative, another villager (pseudonymous name, Luo Qing, hereinafter) became involved in the issue. Luo Qing and other villagers desired to join the appeal to reveal Luo Ming's crimes. Meanwhile, they attempted to get their reallocated land back. Luo Qing is a 70 year-old villager and is regarded as a knowledgeable, experienced, weathered, and respectful person among the petitioners. Therefore, Luo Qing was in charge of writing up the majority of appeal materials and played a vital role in guiding those petitioners on how to get through the government sectors or bureaus, despite the fact that most of the time their appeals to the local governmental agents did not help to work out solutions to the disputes.

⁸⁹ Current village clerk in Longgangvillage office harboured his doubts on this statement as in his viewpoints these Luo householders signed the contract paper at their wills and no one forced them to do so; the villagers have responsibilities for acknowledging the policy contents themselves.

⁹⁰ Perhaps, in 2011, the value of the land reallocation in the local land transaction market was increasingly raised up. Thus, Luo Wei began to hear a lot about the information of the land reallocation across the village and realized that Luo Ming could conspire to sell their reallocated land in 2005.

Of course, appealing to upper-level government should have been Luo Qing, Luo Wei and the other petitioners' last choice. From Luo Qing's point of view, the farmers have always acknowledged the ethics of how to make a living in rural public. First, by and large, farmers put more emphasis on their own business rather than keeping an eye on other farmers' businesses, especially in terms of gossip and rumours (*bu guan xian shi*). Second, farmers are inclined to swallow their pain rather than to fight back when unfair and unjust matters come to them (*bu de zui ren*). Third, and related to the second point, very few farmers are willing to stand out as leaders or activists in organizing those petitioning or protesting as they believe that petitioning initiators or organizers would be caught first (*qiang da chu tou niao*). They would not care about who are the village cadres and the group leaders and what they have performed so long as they obtain what they deserve. Luo Qing's thoughts represent what most petitioners involved thought. Only if their collective interests are being infringed, are those atomized farmers likely to be driven to act together out of the same pursuit of their interests. What Luo Ming had done was too excessive to be tolerated by the villagers. If Luo Ming had not overstepped, the villagers would have been less likely to displease him by means of accusing him of committing economic crimes.

The villagers involved sought for mediation from the village cadres, though the mediation did not work. In fact, the villagers began to distrust Luo Ming since late in 2004 he was accused of being embezzling the villagers' compensation fees and the collective funds.⁹¹ The villagers required him to hand over the accounting book and required that new group leaders be elected to take his post. But he rejected the villagers' requirements as he knew that the accounting book would be checked in greater detail and hence his wrongdoings would be exposed to the public. Consequently, the villagers reported the dispute to the village office and hoped that the village cadres could make Luo Ming quit his post and hand over the accounting book, yet Luo Ming still refused to submit the accounting book. The village cadres allegedly could do nothing to force Luo Ming to comply, therefore the village cadres were dubbed as Luo Ming's protectors and viewed as siding with him. The villagers had to ask for further investigation from the County Public Security Sector when they realized the incapacity of the village office in helping them solve the problem. In turn,

⁹¹ In fact, Luo Qing has relative relationships with Luo Ming. Luo Qing accused Luo Ming of docking compensation fees that was supposed to belong to three villagers including himself in late 2004. By that time, there was a disagreement among the villagers in terms of compensation distribution. Some villagers suggested that the households where the household heads (under their names the land use was registered) had passed away cannot share the compensation. If so, Luo Qing household cannot share the compensation fees as his mother had already passed away. Likewise, there were two other households that had similar situations to the Luo Qing household. Given that sharing compensation fees equally was conducted all the time, Luo Qing argued that adherence to the existing approach to distribute compensation should not be breached. Nonetheless, Luo Ming retained their compensation fees first before an agreement would be reached.

Interestingly, there was someone who reported to the County People's Procuratorate to expose Luo Ming's embezzlement of the villagers' compensation fees. Thus, he was called on to be interrogated and stayed overnight in the County People's Procuratorate. However, he was released on the second day free of any punishment. From Luo Qing's viewpoints, since Luo Ming seemed to realize someone within the village group had attempted to accuse him of being corrupt, Luo Ming was so angry that he decided to dock the three villagers' compensation fees to retaliate against the people who leaked his secrets to the County People's Procuratorate. Even though Luo Ming was allegedly accused of fabricating the signatures on the memo paper of compensation distribution for these three households, Luo Ming and other two village households never admitted they had signed it.

under the pressure of the three Luo households, two members from the County Public Security Sector were dispatched to investigate the issue and they required Luo Ming to pass down the accounting book to the next elected group committee. However, although eventually Luo Ming had to hand out the accounting materials, the investigators claimed that they did not find sufficient evidence to prove Luo Ming's corruption. This outcome was derided by the villagers as from their viewpoints the investigators had not really examined the accounting book. A rumour circulated amongst the villagers that the local upper-level officials had given the investigators a notice that they should not inspect the accounting book deeply. It was well-known among the Luo householders that the secretary of the County Political and Legislative Affair Committee was the husband of Luo Ming's niece and has direct leadership towards the Country Public Security Bureau. Unsurprisingly, Luo Ming did mention his niece's husband frequently in front of the Luo householders.

Due to the Luo householders' dissatisfaction about Luo Ming's duties as a village group leader, an elected group leader took over Luo Ming's post. After that, the peace between Luo Ming and some Luo householders remained for years until the issue of the reallocated land came out. Due to the nature of the dispute between Luo Ming and those Luo householders, as the dispute could be related to economic crimes, the village cadres could not provide much help to the Luo villagers. Also, the village cadres did not desire to get involved in the issue so they were not in a position to mediate. Some of the Luo householders then attempted to seek for top-down intervention outside the village administration. In late July, 2011, a long journey to search for a resolution to the conflict began. As Luo Qing's health conditions did not allow him to go out, most of the time Luo Wei, as another group leader, took the responsibility of delivering the petitions to different governmental sectors. Usually, Luo Wei left his mobile number to the offices they went to and was thus the contact person once any responses were made.

As a matter of fact, Luo Qing admitted that they did not have a clear clue on where they should go and who they should go for in the county state bureaucracy. It was not surprising that Luo Qing made a metaphor, that they were likened to a bunch of headless chickens barging around (*wu tou cang ying, dao chu luan zhuang*). For the place to be first visited, they had a vague idea that the County People's Procuratorate is where the party cadres' misbehaviour would be handled. However, the officers in the County People's Procuratorate did not accept the case as the reason for their refusals was Luo Ming was either not a member of village party branch or a village cadre. Afterwards they turned to the Economic and Inspection Office in the County Public Security, and there the petitions were received. Unfortunately, when those petitioners received the responses from this office, they found that what the answer sheet stated was irrelevant to what the petitioning letter asked for. According to the answering sheet, Luo Ming did not embezzle collective funds for the reallocated land. It was funny that it said there were collective funds for the reallocated land, which was never mentioned on the official paper. Consequently, they had to hand in the letter to this office again and expected

the officers there to provide different answers. But the responses from this office still remained unchanged.

Later on, given the petitioners' requests, the appealing letter was passed to the Office for Rule of Law. The officers there informed them that they needed ten working days to make a response. Luo Wei did not receive any response after ten working days had passed, so he decided to call the office to check whether the decision had been made. Likewise, the response insisted that no evidence had been found to attest to Luo Ming's wrongdoings as mentioned on the letter. Interestingly, the data stamped on the answer sheet was exactly the same date when the letter was received. This alluded to the belief that the officers there did not conduct any investigation and only followed the decision from the last office. The petitioners confronted the same outcome when they received the response letter from the Office for Letters and Visits.

Yet the petitioners persisted in delivering their appeal letter to other local governmental sectors and officials. First, they went to see the secretary of township government and wished to gain a meaningful response. The secretary replied that their reallocated land for collective use was not yet transferred for commercial use. That was potentially good news for the petitioners, but they were still unsure if the reallocated land still belonged to them. In order to find out the location and the ownership of the reallocated land, they went to the County Office for Letters and Visits which still could not resolve the problem, but was able to contact a higher-level official to cope with the issue. As a result, the vice-secretary of the office informed the petitioners that the county vice-mayor would deal with the issue for them in the near future. The visitors were told to come back again when they were given a notice that the county vice-mayor was available to handle the issue.

A few days later, a person was sent to tackle the issue, despite the fact that some petitioners claimed that the person was not the county vice-mayor. From his words it was confirmed that the reallocated land for the Luo household village group in Longgang village was indeed not yet transferred and the nature of the reallocated land was still held for collective use. Moreover, he showed a newly produced city planning map within which county-wide reallocated land was all marked. Thus, the Luo petitioners recognized the land reallocated to the Luo household village group and requested a photocopy of this city planning map. Although the vice-secretary of the Office for Letters and Visits strongly denied this request, the so-called county vice-mayor agreed to meet their requirement after a few rounds of bargaining.

Although the petitioners got some information from the high-level officials, it was far from clear for them to assert the individual land use of the reallocated land. Apparently, this required a much deeper investigation that seemed not be convincing for the Luo petitioners, at the least in the near future. Therefore, the Luo petitioners had to give way to another method of asserting their interests. After knowing the location of the reallocated land, they decided to erect a sign on the land to declare the land use entitlement for the Luo household village group. To make the declaration more legitimate, on 26 March, 2012 a group of villagers came to the

village office to request a stamped document to be pasted on the board sign. Village vice-chairperson agreed to offer them this document with the village office stamp.

During nearly nine months of appealing to the local governmental sectors and officials, no decent investigation was conducted to produce a meaningful response to the Luo petitioners' requirements. Of course, the so-called declaration of the reallocated land use would not rule out the anxiety of possible fighting ahead because the petitioners' reallocated land could have been already collected under Luo Ming's name. There was a rumour that Luo Ming was just a middle man and would transfer the reallocated land to a local businessman. What is more, although the reallocated land was still for collective use, it was possible that it might be traded some day without letting the Luo householders know in advance. Luo Qing pointed out that this journey towards a mutually acceptable solution to the conflict would be endless: if the petitioners could not get the reallocated land back, at the least they should be compensated additionally. Since then, the Luo petitioners have begun to keep their eyes on the empty reallocated land so that they would be able to take immediate action to new development.⁹²

This case shows a series of interlocking social interfaces. In this case social relationships and networking are more dynamic and there are more strategies being conjured up. Members of petitioning groups shoulder varying types of responsibilities and create varying levels of influences on the appealing results at different stage. Luo Wei and Luo Qing are the leading roles, guiding other members to report the issue. First, they requested the village cadres to deal with the dispute and then raised it to the upper-level officialdom after the village cadres' mediation failed. They then sought other possible approaches when the first investigation from above was seemingly perfunctory. But in fact the group members cannot always clearly understand the policy messages and know exactly what happened to them

⁹² While some petitioners put forward that they should appeal to the upper-level government beyond the county, Luo Ming disagreed with this suggestion. He believed that disturbing the construction work should be a more effective means to claim additional compensation. If the government sent officials to negotiate with the villagers involved, they would have to act as a united collective group in the process of negotiation. Otherwise the villagers' alliances would be easily decomposed. In a nutshell, the villagers involved would like to have compromising with the government dependent upon the on-going situation.

I went back to the village and re-interviewed Luo Qing household on 22 July, 2014. The dispute of the reallocated land is not solved yet and the land reallocated to the Luo household village group is still empty. Luo Qing resubmitted the appealing letter when the political campaign of 'three combating, two constructions'(combat the behaviours in monopolizing the market, manufacturing and selling counterfeits and commercial bribery, built up the social credit system and the market supervision system) was being promoted across the county. But the dispute of the reallocated land was not written on this appealing letter as it was irrelevant with the political context of this campaign. He sent those written materials to the Office of 'Three combating, Two Constructions' to accuse Luo Ming of embezzling the compensation fees of his and other two households as mentioned above. The decision was quickly made that Luo Qing got compensation back, which were docked by Luo Ming in 2004. Like most of the political campaign movements, the local government officials long for short-term, positive social effects along with the campaigns implementation. So, it is not surprising that Luo Qing's appeal was put on priority to be dealt with. Meanwhile, the sufficient evidence Luo Qing provided attributed the efficiency to the dispute settlement, as well as the compensation in this case being a small amount of money (about 3,000rmb). Compared to this case, Luo Qing revealed that resolution to the dispute of the reallocated land is impossible to be asefficient as more complex social networks, like government officials' shielding networks, are involved in the process and it could refer to a large amount of money out of illegal transaction.

and how to react to the problematic situations. For instance, some of them had no idea on what the policy of the reallocated land meant at the beginning and how to run the village group leaders' election. Importantly, social interaction and networking not only enable the group members to understand those policy messages, but also to find out more possibilities of strategies conjuring up for disputes settlement in accordance with the specific conditions and the outcomes of concurrent interactions.

Petitioning group leaders and members enforced the village cadres and the upper-level officialdom to engage into the investigation of Luo Ming's suspected criminals. Although the village cadres and the local officials resisted getting fully involved in this investigation, they were in the end forced to offer assistance or cooperation requested by the group members. Meanwhile, the petitioning group members had recognized the ways in which their appeal was dealt with by the local officialdom and had developed their own interpretations of officials shielding and protecting each other, and the unjust treatment to the villagers. In short, to some extent their creative strategies and construction of power negotiation forced the village cadres and upper-level officials to sort out approaches to the dispute settlement. This is the case that the powerless or vulnerable social actors are able to construct power to fight against the powerful external forces even under the condition of coercion (Long, 2001).

What is more, the group members' opportunities for construction of power and room for creating strategies are constrained by the counterparts' strategies and networks, such as the networking of the official shielding. For example, in order to respond this petitioning, the upper-level officials adopted the strategies of doing perfunctory investigation, passing the buck, and of waiting and seeing. Also, the deliberative networks of the official protection created huge barriers for the petitioning group to move forward. Thus, the group members had to alter their approaches to combat the counterparts' resistance from time to time. It reflects the conflicting, interactive processes among the social actors from varying social domains or life worlds, and the mediation of the human agents in the outcomes of the dispute settlement.

4. Conclusion

The dual role of the village elites or cadres has been widely acknowledged in rural governance. The significance of the duality of the village or lineage leaders is particularly recognized in settling the disputes, providing the public goods and transmitting state control at the lowest level (Li, 2005; Huang, 2008; Tsai, 2007). My case studies not only prove this but also enrich the understanding of the dual role of intermediaries in the context of the small-to-medium-sized city urbanisation. Moreover, more attention was paid to the ordinary villagers' agency in dispute settlement.

The cases studied demonstrate the capabilities of actors in handling disputes at the village level. Both the village cadres and villagers are able to exercise the implication of the values of emotion, reason and law under the specific contexts. Village cadres

have mastered approaches to apply those values into the practices in order to assist the settlement of disputes, and the parties involved are able to recognize the extent to which the values have been implied reasonably.

When the lowest-level dispute mediation fails, the parties involved have capacities to seek for other approaches that might work for the specific circumstances. They are able to acknowledge to what extent the people they are approaching for help are able to settle the issues, and able to create the strategies to tackle the emerging problems. For instance, they utilize their social relationships and networking and mobilize the social resources to construct power to negotiate the village-level cadres and the upper-level officials. Meanwhile, they learn from mistakes they make and are able to construct the here-and-now knowledge on the way to dispute resolution.

Structural forces constrain the actors' choices and the room for the creating strategies in dispute settlement. For instance, cultural factors, such as the conventional implications on interpersonal sentiment, delimit the boundaries of the selection of the strategies, while the officials' extensive shielding networks restrict room for the disputing parties to work out alternative approaches to settlement. Importantly, those varying values, beliefs and interests interlock with one another over the conflicting processes of the dispute settlement. These processes involving mediation, negotiation, accommodation, and compromise, are uncovered amid the social interfaces, and by interface analysis. In short, the outcomes of the disputes settlement are also the products of the interaction of the human agency and the structural forces.

Chapter Seven

Discussion and Conclusion

There have been a set of social, economic, and political changes taking place in China's rural areas since the start of the opening up policy, resulting in various impacts on the life of Chinese villagers. This thesis takes the internalization of the designation of the rural democratization, policy implementation, the accompanying disputes or conflicts, and approaches for disputes settlement to paint a picture of this changing rural governance. First, the thesis adopts the theoretical framework of social constructionism and its associated branch of actor-oriented perspectives to analyse and explain the aforementioned aspects. Second, it offers ethnographic data collection ranging from lived experiences to inter-subjective interaction, from conflicting, negotiating, and accommodating processes, to creative strategies, and so on.

Social constructionism and actor-oriented perspectives assume that human agency entails the capability to mediate outside structural forces in order to fashion the outcomes of social change. To be specific, human agents are able to shape the outcomes of a series of reforms and mediate the implementation of a series of policies, as well as creating emerging structures and social networks. Social actors are essential components of human agency. They concurrently construct knowledge and reality, use their language to communicate, attach their own meanings to interpret social values and beliefs, build up relational ties and networks, and construct power relations even under extreme conditions.

But human agency of the social actors is constrained by (emerging) social structures, contextualized conditions or the structures of social networks. First, it implies that the social actors have to encounter varying limits to the availability of social and political resources, social relationships, opportunities for action choices, and of room for creating strategies. Second, those unexpected circumstances that might result from the emerging structures, and the social actors' deliberative actions and strategies and the forms of social networks, would be able to redirect social actors to unexpected encounters. In this light, social actors are able to reconstruct their versions of knowledge and reality, reinterpret social values and beliefs, readjust discursive practices, re-establish relational ties and networks, reconstruct the power relations, recreate the strategies, and re-accommodate consent. By doing so, the outcomes of social changes would be refashioned.

To a large extent, these assumptions have been demonstrated in the fieldwork conducted in Xinzhai and Longgang villages. It is shown that social actors strongly mediate the designated rural democratization, the implementation of the policy of land expropriation in particular, and affect the ways in which the disputes are settled. The following section will unfold the interactive processes of the interaction of the human agency and the structure over the rural governance in the context of rapid rural China's urbanisation. It uncovers the social actors' capabilities in social interfaces wherein varying social networks, social values, knowledge construction, power relations, and discursive practices interlock with each other. Thereafter, it attempts to explicate the heterogeneity of the local rural governance and beyond.

After showing the main research findings, I will discuss the limitations of my fieldwork research. It will then discuss to what extent the existing studies are still significant in academia while comparing my fieldwork research as a whole, and finally some suggestions for the China's future rural governance especially over the small-to-medium-sized city urbanisation will be given.

1. Human Agency

1.1 Social Actors: Knowledgeability, Discursive Practices and Power Relations

Ethnographic research is in a position to understand social actors' lived experiences and identify, their interpretations of external values and beliefs, and unfold the interactive processes of social interaction, knowledge construction, language usage, and power relations under specific contexts. But social actors do not act idiosyncratically within temporal and spatial boundaries and there is no exception for the social actors in the two villages.

Village Party Cadres:

Drawing on the setup of the villagers' committees in the two studied villages, entrance to the village offices is not via popular elections. Village cadres play a vital role in internalizing the implementation of the designed democratized rural governance. First, the incumbent cadres worked together to ensure the re-election by means of relying on collective shielding. For example, the co-opted behaviour of village cadres and representatives in manipulating the village and other grassroots elections has been incrementally institutionalized. Meanwhile, they create their own understanding of the village democratic elections and management and constructed their own knowledge and reality by experiencing how the villagers' committees manage the village affairs in reality. Second, the door to village office easily opens to relatives and close friends of incumbent cadres, especially of village party secretaries and committee heads, who often attest to be allies with incumbent cadres long beforehand. Moneyed elites also have to follow this format of selecting the village cadres. It shows that the village cadres are fairly likely to be embedded in vested interests, and self-perpetuated cadres who deliberately or non-deliberately control the village power.

Village cadres sometimes are accountable and responsive, and stand in an intermediary position between villagers and other officials. For example, they play a pivotal part of negotiating between villagers and local state agents in the implementation of land reclamation. Also, they often calculate the balance of the gain and the cost contextually. It is noted that they are able to recognize the boundary of the flexibility of the task completion and exercise a series of approaches to cope with them in day-to-day life. They are able to create corresponding strategies and exercise their linguistic skill when the problematic situations appear. For instance, they choose to act pragmatically while encountering the contradictions of upper-level leadership, lawful regulations on running Villager Assembly and Villager Representatives Assembly, and the villagers' resistance.

In addition, grassroots cadres, especially village cadres, play an important part of settling the lowest-level disputes. They are capable of applying the principle or values of emotion, reason, and law in the discursive practices. They often direct a live show constructing knowledge, interpreting information, and expressing their understandings and feelings. Also, they are able to position themselves in between being active and inactive while mediating dispute settlements within extensive social relationships and networks. If the dispute settlement requires the village cadres to sacrifice their own gains or challenge powerful officials, they are likely to respond inactively.

Importantly, the village cadres' opportunities for action and room for strategies are constricted by the local cadre evaluation system, cadre supervising networks, power structures, local relationships and values, policy and law regulations, and expected and unexpected responses from the upper-level leadership and the villagers, namely a 'social interface'. So, when they encounter those social interfaces or situations, they have to take some of them into account while making decisions and taking actions. In this case, some of them might be good at it and some might not be.

Ordinary Villagers:

Villagers in Xinzhai and Longgang village have their own experiences in the implementation of democratized rural governance. In recent years, they had witnessed the implementation of the village elections and the post-election management. They were often guided or monitored by village representatives when voting. They also realized that appointment to posts in the village office was indeed determined by the higher level officials. Grassroots elections are usually conceived by them as simply a gala in which the grassroots cadres direct and perform by themselves, though they do not have to understand the purposes of the democratic elections in rural China. What is more, the great majority of villagers are not involved in key decision making, such as land trade, and in how to redevelop village-owned properties, such as collective land. Even though they were at times involved in these events, they do not have an equal voice in negotiating with local state agents.

Thus, those villagers have constructed their own knowledge and reality of democratized governance. They acknowledge that they are not taken seriously by election candidates and incumbent village cadres. They do not care who would be appointed to the post of village cadres and, to a lesser extent, the village group leaders. Somehow they have internalized political apathy toward village-wide politics on the one hand. That is also reflected in the villagers' everyday conversation and language use. But they indeed care who is able to offer them a helping hand and who is in a position to protect their interests if needed.

On the other hand, they do not rely on democratic mechanisms to solve their problems. In other words, the designation of the democratized village governance still has little impact on their day-to-day life, other than on paper. Villagers are more likely to rely on local social relationships, networking, and organized collective and individual activities to settle their issues. Amongst others, lineage legacy organizations are a kind of collective force entailing strong social ties and networks.

Villagers convert this legacy into power under specific contexts to negotiate with local officials, such as to gain more compensation. Yet the power of lineage institutions is not strong enough to fight against the power constructed by state agents.

Villagers are also aware of the extent to which the village cadres are able to function regarding policy and assigned task enforcement and dispute settlement. They do seek assistance from the village cadres to acknowledge policy messages, get through policy related procedures, and address disputes. They have a capability to ascertain the extent to which village cadres are able to help and make a compromise between varying conflicting values and interests. For example, they clearly realize that the village cadres cannot do much, for example, to finetune policies and tasks and to request more compensation for the villagers. They therefore tend to accept compromises offered by the village cadres.

Likewise, villagers are able to conjure up strategies and construct power even under a disadvantaged position to sort out the settlement of disputes when they find that the lowest-level dispute mediations do not work. Those strategies are often taken to soften the face-to-face confrontation, and balance conflicting values and interests arising out of the social interaction and networking, namely the problematic situations. Moreover, they take advantage of the existing social relationships and even mobilize extensive social ties to construct power to negotiate with local state agents.

Importantly, the villagers' creative strategies and options for action have to be constrained by the social interfaces wherein varying forms of values and interests, local relationships and networks, expected and unexpected reactions from the village cadres and other state agents, policy and the formal law, and power relations interlock with each other. Thus, they need to reconstruct knowledge and reality, reinterpret social values and beliefs, re-establish social relationships, adjust the language usage, and recreate strategies.

1.2 Village-level Governance Settings at the Organizational Level

Village assemblies are designed to be an organ holding supreme power on decision-making, as stipulated in the Organic Law. But this organ in Xinzhai and Longgang village is almost always convened to publicize decisions to the villagers such as decisions about land expropriation made from above. The villagers can only accept the decisions from higher levels and the village office.

Likewise, the village representative assembly is often organized as a training meeting where the village representatives are instructed to disseminate predetermined decisions and top-down policy papers and, at times, engage in following up implementation in their own village groups. Rather than supervising the village office and recalling corrupt cadres, the two forgoing organs in question, it is more likely to be obliged to take the commands issued from the village offices and above.

Village offices, including villagers' committees and village party branches, are the official organs for day-to-day rural management, state control and top-down administration. This official organ embodies the bulk of unofficial social relationships in the villages and beyond. Compared to the Villager Assembly and Villager Representative Assembly, village offices have more capability for vital decision making, task completion, organizational control, and in coping with urgent situations coming from the rapid rural urbanisation. This is because, firstly, they are constituted by a clique of members who are held for responsibilities corresponding to their administrative positions and organizational goals. Second, these village team members have established extensive social relationships and networks with villagers, village representatives, local officials, and beyond. Third, social networks have been transformed or converted to organizational monitoring networks by which a series of policies could be effectively implemented. In short, social relationships, official administrative organizational networks, and monitoring networks overlap with each other. Village offices are nodal points in interlocking social relationships, including fellowship, kinship and friendship, organizational control networks, and supervising networks, which impact on villagers and village cadres alike. Moreover, the township and county offices constrain the scope and intensity of village offices' activities.

2. Structural Forces

2.1 Social Domains and Arenas

2.1.1 Political Settings

Local political structural forces refer to the top-down institutional arrangement of personnel, the centralized system of decision-making, and the bureaucratic-administrative hierarchical control. First, the party state as a whole still desires not to give way to democratic rural governance, so the top leaders of village offices are often appointed by the township government and thus are prone to be accountable to their patrons. Decision making, especially the formation of policy and political decisions, is made by the top leaders of the local governmental functionaries. Those decisions made from above are required to be implemented by grassroots cadres. In particular, the Cadre Responsibility System and Cadre Monitoring Network are an effective means for the county and township governments to control and evaluate the performance of grassroots cadres in fulfilment of the tasks. The hierarchical network of the government functionaries and officials, where normally the power of public sectors and party organizations is not separated, determines the public sector to have singular authority to steer the rules of action both in policy implementation and dispute mediation. When higher-level governmental organs issue policy documents and other instructions, they rarely allow public consultation, deliberation, accountability, and transparency.

Second, in many cases this external state apparatus and intervention have collided with human agents in terms of different interests, values, worldviews, and rules of game. The interests and concerns of social actors, especially villagers, are not taken seriously in the engineered social transformation and changing rural governance. There are huge conflicts taking place between social actors and the state apparatus and its agents regarding the values of social progresses, governance, and justice

being conveyed during the processes of external intervention, such as for land reclamation. The centralized and hierarchical networks of the formal institutions constrain the capability of social actors in taking advantage of social networking and creating strategies. More often than not, the externally regulated and institutionalized norms or principles are more likely to be fixed rather than flexible, and this formal authority dominates the legal framework of the social management and the governance.

2.1.2 Cultural Settings

The lineage legacies and close-knit ties of rural communities not only enable the villagers to negotiate with village cadres but also construct the dual roles of village cadres and lineage leaders. The lineage members can be more effectively mobilized to fight against local state agents due in part to their shared identities and common interests. In the meanwhile, grassroots cadres have to consider the danger of crossing the bottom line of local morals and ethics, such as interpersonal sentiment. Public convention of emotion, reason, and law are a sort of overall guideline for dispute settlement and is greatly associated with interpretations of just treatment.

Those social actors are constrained by lineage networks and cultural conventions. Although social actors are able to take advantage of the cultural legacy for their ends, they also have to take the available social resources into consideration while taking actions and making decisions. The availability of social relationships, such as friendship between village cadres and villagers, affects the opportunities for possible actions and creation of strategies. The rules of cultural convention also often delimit the boundaries for day-to-day interaction and language usage. For example, village cadres are able to utilize the linguistic skills to convince villagers to accept proposals of the land expropriation while showcasing the lived experiences of interpersonal sentiments.

2.1.3 Emerging Power Structure

The emerging village-level power structure has the following characteristics. First, allied team members are admitted to the posts in the village office, where more often than not the village heads and secretaries deliberately pick their favoured cadres. Moneyed elites need personal connections if they intend to join village offices. Thus, it is not surprising that village cadres have to unite together to protect their vested interests. Second, the relational ties among village cadres are greatly associated with the local (extensive) familial networks and business partnerships. The origin of the village cadres to be selected is often made up of family members and friends who are perceived to be trustworthy. Thus, if not impossible, ordinary villagers find it difficult to get into the village office and are likely to be excluded from public consultation and participation.

From the actor-oriented perspectives, this emerging structure is created by the social actors, which simultaneously enables and constrain them in social processes. For example, the emerging power structure directs the routes for the moneyed elites to the village office and shapes the selective format of the villagers' committee members. The incumbent cadres might solely intend to protect their vested interests

at the beginning and might not realize this format had gradually been consolidated. Nowadays, this has somehow become a routine practice for incumbent cadres to select future cadres.

3. Interaction of Human Agency and Structural Forces

From actor-oriented perspectives, external structural forces have to be filtered by human agents, therefore the external projects or interventions would be shaped in a certain way. At first, the emerging power structure is constructed by the perpetuated political and moneyed elites. Political hierarchical control not only determines the selection of the top village leaders but creates room for top leaders to constitute their allied teams in their own right. Thus, manipulation of village elections inevitably occurs as incumbent village leaders acknowledge the top-down arrangement and desire to hold power that supports their vested interests. Once this power structure is formed, collective decision-making and public participation would not be encouraged. This is because village cadres have serious reservations about political reforms that could produce a countering force against the power structure. By doing so the designed rural democratization is internalized.

The political setting, cultural domain and emerging power structure affect the way in which social actors interact with one another. Meanwhile, those social actors are able to construct knowledge and power, take advantage of social relationships and networks, and figure out the strategies for the processes of social interfaces wherein values, interests and norms embedded into various social domains conflict with each other. That, to some extent, has changed the implications of external values and forces over the processes of external policy implementation and dispute resolution. Grassroots officials, especially the village leaders, have the capacity to cultivate variations while confronting external inhabiting forces. The villagers are able to figure out strategies for resisting and problem solving in the policy enforcement and over the processes of the bottom-up petitioning. For both villagers and village cadres alike, those coping strategies cultivated and skills mastered are the manifestation of the agents' capabilities interlocking with quasi-structures and emerging power structure. Yet formal political power seems to be so overwhelming that human agents faced a huge struggle to convey their interests, values, consent, proposals, and decisions.

However, as observed in my research, if not actually impossible, it is still less likely for human agents to use their capabilities, knowledge, and power construction to combat the strong constraining forces of structures rather than to mediate the actual implications. This is because the mediating force that stems from the social relationships and networks, and the power construction of powerless social actors would not result in 'a loss of energy' for the structural forces (Kooiman, 2003). In fact, the great imbalance of power for human agents and the external structural forces or interventions are often seen in Long (2001). In many cases, those powerless or marginalized actors eventually lost the battle with external forces.

4. Limitations of the Fieldwork Research

There are several limitations in this fieldwork. First, the sensitivity of the conversation topics constrains the collection of data. The county and township officials, village cadres, and villagers are often not willing to respond to questions in relation to the unjust treatment of the villagers and personal interests on land expropriation. It was difficult for the researcher to reach out to local county and township officials who were responsible for intervention in policy implementation. Thus, I cannot fully compare the varying perspectives of local higher-level officials, village cadres, and villagers on rural governance as the formers' interpretations of the changing rural governance were not able to be collected.

Second, the selection of samples has a few weak points. This micro-comparative study did not consider other types of villages featured by a different mode of rural urbanisation and successful rural democratization. It is thus fairly difficult to evaluate how rural democratization and urbanisation affects rural governance in a variety of different circumstances. Moreover, the two suburban villages selected in the Hakka-speaking region might limit the representativeness of the research findings due to unique cultural and social characteristics. Further, there is a possibility that the researcher's findings would become obsolete as the local contextualized conditions changes. That implies that the findings can be temporal and inconsistent in a long run.

Third, the simultaneous collection and analysis of the data affects the overall quality of the fieldwork research. Importantly, the researcher himself plays a vital role in determining the width and the depth of the data collection and in analysing the data under specific settings. The researcher's personal judgements cannot be context-free and are value-laden. There would always be a gap between different stakeholders' perspectives on the validity of the data collected. This also begs further questions on how to evaluate the reliability of the data and the analysis, as well as the generalizability of the findings, due in large part to the lack of an 'objective' standard by which to test the validity of the data and the analytical framework.

5. Case Study Representativeness and Research Significance

Governance in Xinzhai and Longgang village represent one type of rural governance in China. These types of villages are usually located in the rural-urban fringe or in suburban areas of small and medium size towns and cities in Guangdong and beyond. If the villages are not industrialized and better-off, and under way to the small-to-medium-sized city urbanisation and expansion, as well as being affected by the internalization of the state-sponsored rural democratization and the lineage cultures, they might encounter similar trajectory as found in my fieldwork study. To be specific, in my village cases the village finances are mostly made up of the collective compensations for the collective land expropriation and trade due to the lack of village-owned enterprises. The quality of life for the villagers is still relatively low, especially when compared to villagers residing in coastal cities. Also, the majority of villagers have migrated to other cities to make a living and are either landless or jobless farmers. Moreover, the moneyed elites are not entrepreneurs who have factories or enterprises and do not have a power to allocate jobs to the villagers.

Some of them actually have greatly benefited from the rural urbanisation and real estate business. Unlike in existing research, the village cadres in the two villages seem to lack influential market power and thus would not be able to play a pivotal part as liaison between the local state and rural public, as found in Chen (2007). It is important to note that fair, transparent, and free village elections have been implemented in many villages across Mainland China. However, in these two villages the elections were not legally enforced, which would affect the way in which power was constructed and the approaches to political participation and decision making. Thus, governance of the two suburban villages would not be a representative case for the whole of China. The mode of rural governance should be different in those villages within the contexts of large or mega cities urbanisation and expansion, industrialization, better-off villages or of the relatively democratic management.

Additionally, rural urbanisation not only does generate many problems but also challenges the efficiency and accountability of village affairs management. Among others, villagers involved are facing varying types of conflicts of interest regarding to the urbanisation issues and do not have many opportunities to convey their values and interests. More often than not, their interests are ignored by the external institutions and state agents and they do not have much room to make decisions in terms of city planning and land expropriation. It is normally observed that the Chinese policy makers are not concerned much about with the policy recipients' perspectives, interests, and values. This is partly related to the official regulations on the local urbanisation, land ownership and transfer, and the institutional arrangements of the centralized policy decision making.

What improvement to rural governance has been achieved and what changes really matter for rural governance? We might ask some questions in this circumstance:

- 1) Is rural democracy or democratization still the ultimate goal for rural governance?
- 2) What indicators or criterion shall be used to define rural democratic governance?
- 3) To what extent does the discourse of liberal democracy or democratic governance help us interpret and explain the changing rural governance and direct the reforms of rural governance in the future?
- 4) If rural democratization is not the only option available for rural governance reform, what other possibilities are available?
- 5) To what extent does rural urbanisation really matter to the improvement of farmers' livelihoods over the small-to-medium sized city urbanisation?
- 6) What consequences will rapid rural urbanisation bring to the rural governance in the future? How are the actors, especially powerless villagers, able to cultivate stronger resisting and negotiating capabilities against external interventions and structural forces?
- 7) How can we constrain and control the power and authority of local officials?

8) What can be done to ensure policy making and implementation do not ignore the perspectives of local life worlds?

The previous research has more or less provided the answers to these questions. O'Brien and Han (2009), and Pastor and Tan (2000) claim that the rural democratic governance must go beyond village elections. It is given that democratic governance not only empowers villagers to participate in village affairs and management but also engenders them power of decision making. Rural democratization is still perceived as one effective means to improve the quality of rural governance. Greater rural democratization and the protection of the rights of powerless villagers are increasingly in demand. In Wang and Yao (2007), and Kang, Cai and Sun's (2009) viewpoints, a greater level of rural democratization is likely give rise to greater provisions of rural public goods. In this sense, the greater level of rural democratization and liberalization and, to a large extent, nationwide democratization and liberalization, shall help achieve 'good governance' (Yu, 2008). My research does not deny that this mode of rural governance is featured in the legal framework and theory of rural democratization and liberalization. However, I found the opposite, that the emerging power structure actually impedes greater rural democratization and liberalization.

Guo and Bernstein (2004) put forward that reform of villagers' committees is not sufficient to tackle the polarization of village-level leadership unless constitutional reform is implemented. Yet they did not propose how to implement this constitutional reform in detail. Schubert (2009) conceives that township government elections are a good means to break the cycle of top-down appointment of village leaders. Their proposals of a series of reforms might be able to empower ordinary villagers and weaken higher-level officials' protection of village cadres' misconduct. Therefore, on my opinions there is a possibility that greater political reform would help reduce the opportunities for power polarization and coercive intervention of powerful bureaucrats.

Moreover, rural democratization and liberalization might be able to alter the ways in which varying types of policy and assignments are implemented in the Chinese countryside. In addition to the villagers' abilities in utilizing social relationships and networks, this engenders another means for powerless villagers to communicate, negotiate, and accommodate the choices and contents of external interventions on rural development and governance. It might also help reduce the possibility of the grassroots cadres' deliberate selection of policy implementation, and of the rectification of inappropriate policy or projects for those recipients (O'Brien and Li, 1999; Björn, 2001; Kennedy, 2007).

Furthermore, local industrialization and rural urbanisation have a massive impact on rural governance. Hu's (2005, 2006) study shows that it is more likely that free village elections are run in better-off villages. However, Oi and Rozelle (2000) point out the rise of economic elites, to some extent, impedes rural democratization in that they deliberately constrain active public participation. In addition, it is observed in my research that the emerging power structure has normalized the isolation of public voices and participation in the rural governance. Looking back to

my conceptualization and indicators of rural China's governance, this partly deviates from my perspective as the pluralistic and multi-level participation is lacking, especially in the formulation and implementation of those so-called harmful policies. What is more, rural urbanisation has witnessed tremendous changes in the rural society. If the small-to-medium-sized city urbanisation were to be promoted in the next decades, more extensive rural urbanisation will inevitably take place. It is suggested that the city planning and urbanisation, as well as problem-solving, also requires the pluralistic and multi-level participation and transparent decision-making processes. That indeed conforms to the mode of my conceptualized rural China's governance, which might mean a reduction of the governmental control of the land market and urbanisation related policy input and output, reform of dualistic land management system and of the cadres evaluation system.

Last but not least, civil society is still conceived by scholarship as a valuable notion to fully understand the rural democratic governance. Within a civil society there is a great number of non-governmental bodies acting as a liaison with the government and public sectors and engendering public authority (Kang and Heng, 2011; Yu, 2008; Lu, 2008; Pesque-Cela, Tao, Sun and Liu, 2009). It respects for citizens' liberal rights and allows for cooperation, coordination, and negotiation between individuals, non-governmental bodies, and governmental sectors. As such, civil society is able to generate strong checks and balances on governmental functionaries and political leaders and to engender the people to have more choices in public consultation and participation as civil society grows. Arguably, lineage institutions and close-knit rural communities are also able to entail multi-level participation, nurture shared public authority, and distribute the public resources while encountering the external interventions. Peng (2001, 2010) and Tsai's (2002, 2007) studies, and my research partly demonstrate this claim. The lineage legacy and close-knit social networks greatly influence rural governance and might not have to contradict the growing civil society and rural liberalization over the changing rural China's governance. That should require further research and investigation.

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Appendix 1:**Research timetable**

To understand leadership transition between the elder generation of village cadres and the young generation	Individual and group interview with a retired village head and his wife: 16/02/12, 22/02/12, 01/03/12
To understand the management of collective properties	Individual interview with one of contractors who is in charge of a village-owned kindergarten in Xinzhai: 04/03/12, 05/03/12
To know more about how village cadres and villagers perceive village elections; to understand how village cadres organize Village Assemblies and Village Representative Assemblies; to know how the village cadres get access to the village self-government	Participant observation and concurrent individual or group conversations with village cadres in Xinzhai and Longgang village offices Xinzhai village office: 13/02/12, 26/03/12, 27/02/12, 12/03/12, 26/03/12, 04/06/12, 15/07/14 Longgang village office: 26/03/12, 29/03/12, 09/04/12, 16/04/12, 19/04/12, 26/04/12, 16/07/14

To observe how village cadres transmit policy information and enforce policy and miscellaneous tasks and their interactions with villagers and village representatives in the processes; to know how village cadres, villagers and village representatives engage in the land disputes	Xinzhai village office: 13/02/12, 26/03/12, 27/02/12, 12/03/12, 26/03/12, 04/06/12, 15/07/14 Longgang village office: 26/03/12, 29/03/12, 09/04/12, 16/04/12, 19/04/12, 26/04/12, 16/07/14 Follow-up individual or group conversation with villagers, village representatives and village cadres who are involved in land disputes in the two villages in particular. Xinzhai village: group interview in a household: 24/02/12 group interview in a household: 14/03/12 individual interview with a village representative: 29/02/12 group interview with a couple who were subject to land expropriation: 18/03/12, 12/04/12, 18/06/12 individual interview with village vice-head: 04/06/12 Longgang village group interview in a household: 20/03/12 interview with a village representative and his wife: 30/03/12, 04/14/12 individual interview with a village representative: 11/04/12 group interview with an elderly couple and other villagers who were subject to a land issue: 28/03/12, 10/04/12, 19/04/12, 07/06/12, 22/07/14 individual interview with village vice-head: 16/04/12, 26/04/12
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to observe how village cadres interact with the villagers in dealing with disputes; to understand knowledge and justice construction for settling disputes among the villagers	Participant observation and concurrent individual or group conversations with village cadres and village cadres in Xinzhai and Longgang village office Xinzhai village office: 13/02/12, 26/03/12, 27/02/12, 12/03/12, 26/03/12, 04/06/12 Longgang village office: 26/03/12, 29/03/12, 09/04/12, 16/04/12, 19/04/12, 26/04/12
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Appendix 2:

Memo for Observation Participant

Date of participant observation: xx/xx/xx
Site of participant observation: e.g. village office
Who: Reasons for coming: Villagers: a brief acknowledgement of their social background, statuses and the issues they raise Village cadres: social background, statuses, performances and the issues they deal with Villagers' representatives: a brief acknowledgement of their social background, statuses, the issues they deal with
Local and central policies have been implemented in the two villages as shown below: Land Expropriation Policy, New Countryside Cooperative Medical System, New Rural Society Pension Insurance and Landless Farmer Insurance; prevention from setting fire on the hill; flood prevention; insect disaster and plant diseases prevention; enforcement of 'one-child' policy and sterilization of women; 'maintaining stability' at the local levels, to be specific, 'no petitions' (<i>ling shang fang</i>) and no protesting;
In the process of participant observation, when combined with concurrent ethnographic interview, I am concerned with these below mini-questions (May, 2005). • What role do village cadres play? Are policy disseminators and implementers concerned about villagers' interest? • What are the characters of village cadres in the villages? Are they rich, prestigious or skill-full local expert etc.? • What role do village cadres play in making collective decisions, in addressing the local disputes and in fulfilling day to day tasks? • Under what conditions do villagers prefer to seek villagers' representatives and village cadres' help? • Do village cadres face challenges and difficulty in handling village affairs? If yes, what sorts of strategies do they use to resolve them?

- What do village cadres perceive relationship between village cadres, villagers, village representatives and the upper-level cadres?
 - Is it helpful for village cadres to mutually support each other?
 - What else businesses are village cadres doing?
 - What role do village party secretaries and village chairpersons play in particular?
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Notes: (to record something new and re-categorize and re-consider sub-topics)

Reflexivity:

Reconsideration: e.g. theory, research topics and timetable...

Appendix 3:

Contracting-out Village-Owned Business

The Longgang village vice-head used to run the village-owned business, a beer club. This business was not profitable before he took over the contract. However, thanks to his successful operation, he not only prevented the club from going bankrupt but also had made it into a bigger and more profitable business for a few years. In 2010 the club had to be demolished due to the public dam construction. Although he was not satisfied with the compensation given by the government, he had no choice but to accept it.

Because the land on which the club was built was village-owned, the village government received the compensation for the land expropriation. The compensation he received was merely for his loss of potential revenue from the business. Aside from the compensation provided by the local government, he required that the village government should compensate his loss in reconstructing the site of the club. Yet the village committee denied his requirement. He claimed that he had deliberately expanded the size of the land, thus the village government obtained more compensation than it was supposed to have.

It is questionable whether the compensation for him was reasonable or not. A village representative, who seemed to know the details about the issue, criticized that the village vice-head actually received a great amount of money and treated the village vice-head as a crafty person knowing how to play tricks. Moreover, this village representative still remembered that in order to collect the reallocation land from the landholders for commercial apartment building, village vice-head persuaded this village representative's brother to exchange their reallocated land with two commercial apartments and one department store in return, despite the fact that he did not agree with his brother's decision. The village vice-head applied this approach to other landholders so that he did not need to pay the transaction fees for the transformation of the land use right at the least. Actually, by conducting follow-up interviews with village vice-head, he seemed to be proud of what he had done as he helped the land-less farmers have their own properties in a way he pooled all the reallocated land together at the beginning. Admittedly, the village vice-head has the ability to apply his political capital to seek business opportunities. Compared to ordinary villagers, generally speaking, village cadres are in a position to grab business opportunities and they are given priority to take over the contracting-out projects in the villages.

Appendix 4:

Commercial Apartment Project

Unlike the comparably better-off village coffer in Xinzhai, which has more collective funds and village-owned properties, Longgang village finances fall short. There was an opportunity for Longgang village government to develop collective property in the near future. The village cadres, especially those having experience in commercial business, had a plan for conversion of the village-owned idle land (approximately 3000 square meters) to commercial use. Unfortunately, the lack of capital input had postponed this commercial proposal for a long time. In order to solve the problem of cash burden, village cadres were seeking property developers or investors (the property developer was found when I revisited the village office on 16 July, 2014).

The general scheme briefly introduced by village clerk was that the village itself as a collective legal body offered the land and the property developers' offered investment, namely bilateral partnership of development. First of all, potential partners with high creditability and trustworthiness should be of great importance. Basically, in village cadres' planning, the village government would make a request on the developers to put a deposit into the bank. But security money offered by the investors was negotiable because the level of mutual trust between the village committee and investors could determine whether the latter really needed to follow the procedures. After the step of transformation of the land use to the commercial investors was completed, the latter should be able to obtain the land mortgage loan from the bank. By doing so, the investors would be more likely to take this commercial partnership.

Secondly, the village government would obtain twenty department stores and a whole floor in return, which was one of beneficial outcomes from this commercial partnership. In addition, the developers sold commercial apartments in the market. The village clerk put forward that village cadres had the possibility to establish business relationships with the developers. For instance, they could just invest a relatively small amount of money into this project if they were unable to be a big shareholder. As expected, they were able to own a few numbers of commercial apartments with the relatively lower costs.

Although some villagers actually had doubted village cadres' intentions to the collective land transaction, this village clerk contended that when village cadres invested their own money to this project they were more keen to supervise the progresses to make it succeeded. Moreover, aside from the expected efficiency in management, the completion of this project would bring more revenue for the village finances. Among other matters, department stores rental alone was able to bring 30,000rmb revenues annually to the village coffers. For example, the conversion of a whole floor into a shopping mall would generate more revenues for the village government. Interestingly, the village clerk emphasized that all decision-making in terms of the land conversion and the related issues had to be agreed on among the incumbent village cadres.

It seemed that village cadres demanded to put this proposal into effect as soon as they could. Unlike Xinzhai village cadres, over the past decade Longgang village cadres did not grab the chance to drive the village-wide collective economics. This should be the main reason why Longgang village administration confronts financial struggles constantly. From Longgang village cadres' perspectives, Xinzhai village had set a good example on how much the affluent village coffers could benefit the village cadres.

It is questionable whether villagers and village representatives would be involved in the village-wide deliberation and consultation or whether ordinary farmers could benefit from the increasing village revenues. The investors might be the village cadres' friends and relatives, and the latter is much more likely to get involved in the joint partnerships as a shareholder rather than a common villager. Moreover, even if Longgang village finances are likely to be better-off, the village cadres are more likely to be primary beneficiaries. It is not uncommon for village cadres to pursue their own interest in the name of developing collective economics. Unsurprisingly, villagers are often excluded from the collective decision-making especially in the aspect of village-level economy.