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The Social Origins of State Power in China

by

Daniel Christopher Mattingly

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Political Science

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Kevin J. O'Brien, Chair
Professor Ruth Berins Collier
Professor Peter L. Lorentzen
Professor Noam Yuchtman

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Abstract

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This dissertation investigates the origins of state power and political accountability. How do states exercise political control over their populations and implement policies that have clear winners and losers? Do democratic institutions in combination with a strong civil society strengthen political accountability? I examine these questions in the context of rural China, which combines limited local democracy and vibrant non-state groups such as kinship associations, temples, and neighborhood groups. Many argue that strong civil society institutions and local elections can curb the power of the state and hold government officials accountable. However, in this dissertation I argue that in China, strong civil society groups and village elections have expanded state power and helped officials confiscate wealth.

The first part of the dissertation develops my theory of state power. Drawing on new data from rural China, I show that citizens distrust the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and believe that local party cadres do not represent their interests. On the other hand, the leaders of local civil society, especially the leaders of clans and neighborhood groups, enjoy high degrees of trust and moral authority. I argue that in this context, elected village councils and other participatory institutions are a mechanism for the state to identify local elites with significant informal authority within social groups. Once they join local political institutions, rent-sharing gives these social elites incentives to use their informal authority to help the CCP elicit compliance with potentially unpopular policies.

In subsequent chapters, I draw on a mix of structured case studies and a unique national dataset to show how co-opting civil society elites has helped the CCP seize land from village collectives. These land expropriations have redistributed trillions of dollars of wealth from village collectives to the state and to local elites, and are one of the central political

issues in contemporary China. I show how the leaders of clans, religious groups, and neighborhoods use their informal authority within their groups to elicit compliance with land confiscations. When these civil society leaders are included in village political institutions, land expropriations are more likely and the compensation for these expropriations is lower.

These findings cast doubt on theories that hold that the main consequence of civil society institutions is to enhance political accountability. I argue that grassroots civil society institutions are encouraged and nurtured by the powerful because they reinforce the authority of local elites and because they help elites to control society. I also challenge theories that hold that democratic and participatory institutions curb the power of the state. Instead, these institutions can be used by authoritarian regimes to co-opt civil society leaders, who can help the state implement policies that redistribute wealth from the grassroots to elites.

For my parents, Kristi and Kevin.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Chinese state, for all its seeming power, has long struggled to exercise political control over the countryside, whose population has been prone to defiance, resistance, and sometimes outright rebellion against the state and its laws. For China's authoritarian rulers, controlling rural China and its vast population has been a matter of central importance, not only because peasant revolts have brought down entire dynasties but because, for centuries, the state has funded itself on the back of its farmers.[1] The Qing Emperors, for instance, relied on land and grain taxes for some 80 percent of the silver they collected, but noncompliance was a serious problem, as were revolts over the unaccountable behavior of tax collectors.[2] As part of their effort to govern and control rural China, the Qing Emperors drew up a list of edicts — including reminders to "pay your taxes fully" and to "warn the ignorant and the obstinate" about the law — and required that these rules be posted publicly in each village and read aloud twice a year in a mandatory lecture.[3] In more recent years, the Chinese Communist Party has abolished agricultural taxes, but the state still extracts over half a trillion U.S. dollars per year in revenue from the countryside by expropriating land

[1] On peasant rebellion and revolution, see Skocpol (1979) and Perry (1980). On grain and land taxation, see Hsiao (1960) and Oi (1991). On the more recent importance of land requisitions for revenue, see Hsing (2010) and Rithmire (2015). Despite its reputation for having a strong state, O'Brien and Li (1999) show a problem of widespread non-implementation of policy. Lieberman (2003, p. 66) notes that China ranks a lowly 96 out of the 107 countries in terms of tax collection, which is one barometer of state strength, albeit a highly imperfect one.

[2] Sng (2014, p. 110).

[3] Hsiao (1960, pp. 186-191) and De Bary and Lufrano (2010, pp. 70-72). The sacred edicts were first promulgated by the Kangxi Emperor, but took their final form under his son, the Yongzheng Emperor and were in use to a lesser or greater degree for the rest of the dynasty, which ended in 1912.

from village collectives.[4] Like the imperial grain levy and other forms of taxation, these land takings have fueled corruption, protest, and popular anger over unaccountable officials, which China's current President, Xi Jinping, has warned has the potential to "doom the Party and the state."[5]

A tension between state power and accountability is common to all states. On the one hand, the mark of a strong state is the ability to implement its policies despite the fact that these policies often have losers who would rather not obey the state's mandates.[6] On the other, powerful states have the potential to become unaccountable and "predatory" states that extract from society in order to further the interests of political elites.[7] As James Madison noted, "the great difficulty" of any government is that "you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself."[8]

This dissertation investigates the delicate balance between state power — or the ability of the state to carry out its policies and demand political compliance — and political accountability, or the ability of people to ensure the responsiveness of their rulers. How do states exercise political control over their populations and implement policies that have clear winners and losers? Do democratic institutions like elections in combination with a strong civil society provide political accountability and limit the power of the state?

I examine these fundamental questions about state power in the context of China, where the ruling Communist Party's efforts to mold the country's economy and society test the power of the state, even a famously strong one, to implement its goals and the ability of society to push back against its rulers.[9] The state's control over society and the economy reached its height under Mao and the area of collective ownership of land and industrial

[4]In 2012, the Chinese government generated over 600 billion U.S. dollars in revenue from the expropriation of land and the subsequent auctioning of land use rights. See *Chinese Land Resources Report 2013 (Zhongguo Guotu Ziyuan Gongbao)* (2014).

[5]Edward Wong. "New Communist Party Chief in China Denounces Corruption in Speech." *The New York Times*. November 19, 2012.

[6]Mann (1984) defines "infrastructural power" as the ability of the state to implement its policies throughout the country. See also Migdal (1988), Levi (1989), Lieberman (2003), and Slater (2010).

[7]Evans (1995).

[8]The phrase appears in Federalist 51. See Hamilton, Madison, and Jay (2007, p. 399). This general idea is echoed by Weingast (1993, p. 287), who writes: "The fundamental economic dilemma of a political system is this: A government that is strong enough to protect property and enforce contracts is also strong enough to confiscate the wealth of its citizens."

[9]The ruling Communist Party has essentially total control over the Chinese state, and so some authors refer to a "party-state." Throughout the dissertation, I use the terms party and state somewhat interchangeably.

assets. Yet even in the last three decades of reform, in which the party has partially privatized the economy and increased individual autonomy, the party has undertaken a set of large-scale efforts to control everything from where people live to how many children they have.[10] While the party's efforts at political control are wide-ranging, the specific focus of this dissertation is on China's efforts since the late 1990s to generate revenue for the state by moving tens of millions of farmers off their land. The primary winners of these land confiscations are local elites and the state, which typically sells the land rights for ten to a hundred times the amount they compensate farmers. China's state-led urban and industrial growth during the past two decades has relied on the state's ability to move tens of millions of peasants off their land for a fraction of its value — a remarkable exercise of state power.

One interesting feature of this top-down, state-centric development strategy is that it has occurred at a moment when local politics in China has seemingly become more democratic. Villages in China now elect village committees at regular three year intervals, and not only are these elections becoming fairer and cleaner, these committees have some real if still somewhat circumscribed authority in village politics.[11] Indeed, this spirit of local democratization has evidently seeped even up to the local congresses organized by townships and counties, which are the administrative layers of the state above villages.[12] Complementing these nascent democratic institutions are an increasingly vibrant array of local civil society groups: clans and lineage groups, temple groups, churches, agricultural cooperatives, and neighborhood associations.[13] Many of these groups have witnessed a revival since the reform era began in the late 1970s.

Perhaps this combination of limited local democracy and a vibrant civil society has strengthened bottom-up political accountability and weakened the party's efforts at top-down political control. After all, a common view of local democracy is that it serves popular interests by bringing government closer to the people and placing power in the hands of the people who have the best knowledge about local conditions.[14] Moreover, many argue

[10]The conclusion of this dissertation investigates compliance with China's controversial family planning policies, which the state claims has prevented some 250 to 300 million births (Hesketh, Lu, and Xing 2005).

[11]See O'Brien and Han (2009) and Oi and Rozelle (2000).

[12]See Truex (2014a) and Manion (2016). As I discuss below, in China the lowest official level of the state is the township and villages are self-governing and nominally autonomous. However, in practice the Communist Party still has a number of ways to exercise control over villages.

[13]As I discuss below, I define civil society group as a group with some criteria of common membership that is larger than an immediate family but that does not include the state or business.

[14]For helpful reviews of decentralized governance see Bardhan (2002), Wibbels (2006), and Treisman

that civil society, from social clubs to religious groups, enhances local democracy by creating "social capital" that connects people to each other, helping communities to act collectively and hold their governments to account.[15] Perhaps, then, this combination of democratization and robust local civil society groups has increased political accountability and, where these institutions are strongest, prevented the most predatory forms of local development in China.

For the sake of illustration, consider the case of Beiyan village, which would seem to exemplify this trend towards an increasingly vibrant local democracy and civil society.[16] The village, which is located in Henan Province, has a democratically elected village committee which holds elections every three years as required by law. Local residents can cast their ballots for whomever they would like and, if they want to, can stand for elections themselves. The village also has a vibrant civil society. Villagers are united by their membership in a large lineage group. According to the group's written history, the majority of villagers can trace their ancestry to a single common ancestor, and lineage group norms encourage group members to cooperate with each other, for example by contributing their money, food, and labor for events like weddings and funerals. In theory, this would seem to be a virtuous combination. The village's social institutions encourage villagers to interact with each other and cooperate, while regular elections provide a mechanism for Beiyan's residents to hold their leaders accountable. So it might be reasonable to expect that when development did come to Beiyan, villagers might be able to save their land or, if they wanted to sell it, be relatively well compensated.

Yet these stirrings of democracy and civil society in Beiyan have had perverse consequences: these seemingly inclusive institutions have empowered local elites and the local state. In one recent election, a wealthy entrepreneur stood for the post of village chief. As a successful entrepreneur he had gained an important measure of respect and informal authority within his lineage group, so when he asked villagers for their vote, his social status made him hard to turn down. Once in office, however, he betrayed the trust of his lineage and village. He used his authority over land allocations to requisition a few dozen acres of

(2007).

[15] A prominent example of this argument is Putnam (1994) on the role of civic associations in Northern Italy. See also Evans (1995), whose classic work makes a more nuanced argument that bureaucrats need to mix "embeddedness" in local society with some degree of autonomy from it.

[16] Here and throughout this dissertation I have changed the village name and the names of individuals in the village in order to protect the identites of the people I interviewed. I make an exception for cases that have received extensive media attention, especially Wukan Village, which experienced protests that received broad international media coverage.

collectively owned village land and, with protection and cooperation from township officials, built a factory on it. His social status and informal authority discouraged villagers from organizing against this land expropriation, even though he compensated villagers nothing for the lost land. After all, if they had wanted to organize against another village official, he was the very person they would have gone to in order to help rally the lineage and the village in protest. At the end of his three year term, he decided not to stand for reelection having, in the eyes of villagers, profited handsomely from his single term in office.

This case, and the more systematic evidence presented throughout this dissertation, suggests the need for a tempered view of the power of local democracy and civil society institutions to hold local officials accountable. The threat of being voted out of office does not hold officials accountable if there are large rents from a single term in office. Nor can civil society groups be used to hold officials informally accountable if the leaders of these groups use their moral authority and their control over the flow of information to encourage compliance instead of resistance.

My core argument in this dissertation that a vibrant civil society and local democracy do not limit the power of the state or increase political accountability, as is commonly argued; instead, they help to strengthen the power of authoritarian states. Especially in an authoritarian regime like China, semi-democratic institutions help party leaders identify social notables who have broad influence within civil society groups. Once they join these institutions, the ruling party can co-opt these leaders and give them incentives to use their power to help the state implement its policies; as a result, the social ties created by civil society groups become tools of state control and domination. My major empirical finding is that when the leaders of civil society groups join seemingly democratic political institutions, the state is able to extract more from society, especially by expropriating more land from peasants.

1.1 Key Actors and Interests

My main unit of analysis in this dissertation is the village, and I focus on three key actors: local officials, civl society groups, and civil society group leaders. Of course, this is a much-simplified way of looking at politics. Perhaps most important, it essentially ignores the hierarchical nature of the Chinese state, in which township officials in practice have

control over even nominally autonomous village governments, and these township officials are overseen by county officials, county officials by prefecture officials, and so forth. It also ignores the heterogenous interests within the Chinese state at any given level. However, this simplification has an analytical payoff: it allows me to focus my attention on the dynamics of politics within the village and understand how power relations play out within an administrative unit that has, for centuries, been the most basic unit of political authority in China.

I define civil society groups as a group with some criteria of common membership that is larger than an immediate family but that does not include the state or businesses. I focus on three primary groups. The first are lineage groups, which are kinship groups that have several hundred to a few thousand members living in close proximity, and who are defined by their descent from a common ancestor. They are sometimes also referred to as clans;[17] some have formal organizations and collectively own resources like an ancestral hall but many are informal groupings. The second set of civil society groups are religious. I focus largely on Buddhist, Daoist, and folk religious groups, which often have a temples in a village and may hold religious festivals.[18] The final type are neighborhood groups, which are made up of people living in close proximity in a single village. I make a distinction between these civil society *groups* and civil society *organizations*. Civil society organizations by necessity have formal structures and leaderships. Some of the groups I refer to also have formal organizations, but as I will show that is largely incidental to my argument.

Generally, the members of these groups would prefer state policies that do not redistribute wealth to local elites. To generalize, they would prefer that no land expropriation occur or that the land expropriation substantially increase their wealth and wellbeing. Land expropriations that provide little or no compensation to the peasants who collectively own the land are essentially a heavily regressive form of taxation.

The second major actors are the leaders of civil society groups. These are social elites who, by dint of their capability, success, and charisma have acquired significant social status and esteem within the group. In the case of lineage groups, they may include someone who

[17]Some authors make a distinction between lineages, or *jiazu*, and clans, or *zongzu*. While the difference between the two is often ambiguous, clans are sometimes defined as surname groups that do not necessarily have a common known ancestor. By this definition, I am generally referring to lineages rather than clans.

[18]While Christian churches are important in some areas of China, they are still less common than the Buddhist, Daoist, and folk religious groups I study. The politics surrounding Christianity is unique, so I leave the possible role of churches as a mechanism of popular control for future research.

is the formal head of a clan with a title like *zuzhang* or *zongli*, or a less formal lineage elite who simply has a high degree of social status within the group. In the case of religious organizations, this may similarly include someone with a quasi-formal position, for example a post on the committee governing a temple, or someone who has special moral authority within the group. The same applies to neighborhood groups.

The interests and preferences of these civil society leaders differs based on whether or not they hold office. When they hold office, they are likely to be drawn into local patronage and party networks that share the rents from local development projects. Even in villages far from major provincial cities, millions of dollars can change hands in land deals, and much of it can end up in the pockets of local officials, which provides a powerful incentive outside of the type seen in "everyday" village politics.[19] The amount of money involved gives civil society leaders in office an incentive to want to see land expropriated, even if means it will diminish their moral authority within the group in the future. In other words, for these elites these land expropriations are a one-shot deal. However, when they are out of office they lack any formal means to assure that the state will follow through with its promises, and their incentives change. Now, like the other members of their group, they would rather not be "taxed" by a regressive land taking.

Table 1.1: Key village institutions of self-government in China. Data on leader tenure and institution size from Martinez-Bravo et al. 2011.

	Communist Party Branch	**Village Committee**
Leader:	Party Secretary	Village Chief
Average Leader Tenure:	10 years	7 years
Average Size:	7 Party Cadres	4 Members
Selectorate:	Communist Party	Villagers

The third major actor I focus on are village officials, especially but not exclusively elected village officials. Table 1.1 shows the main bodies of village self-government in China. The two types of key village officials are members of popularly elected village committees, which generally have four to five members and are headed by a village chief. However, an unelected

[19] See He and Xue (2014).

village Communist Party Secretary, who is generally appointed by the township, often wields more *de facto* power over village policy than the village committee.[20] As a result, despite the autonomy of village political institutions from the government, in practice the party branch and village committee are seen in the eyes of the state and party as a single leadership group ("*longdao bangzi*) and higher levels of government exert considerable power over villages.[21] I assume these local officials are primarily motivated by rent seeking, although I discuss in detail the social incentives that act on officials. As discussed above, land expropriations are a lucrative source of revenue for local governments and, consequently, a potentially lucrative source of illicit rents for officials.

1.2 A Preview of the Findings

The central finding of this dissertation is that when civil society leaders join village political institutions, it increases the power of the state to extract, and especially to carry out land expropriations. I show that his holds true, to varying degrees, for the leaders of kinship, religious, and neighborhood-based groups. These land expropriations are a form of taxation that distribute wealth away from villagers and to the local state and elites. As I discuss below, land takings need not be purely predatory, but once social leaders join inclusive institutions, it greatly reduces the bargaining position of villagers relative to the local state. When land takings occur with civil society elites included in the state, villagers lose an important source of income and both qualitative and quantitative evidence shows they express considerable anger and disappointment after they occur.

Why does the Communist Party need these civil society leaders to govern? This may seem puzzling if one thinks of the Chinese Communist Party as a remarkably efficient organization whose local cadres enjoy a high degree of popular support. Using evidence from a unique set of survey experiments, I show how the party is actually ineffective at mobilizing villagers. Moreover, voters in rural China do not trust Party members and doubt that they care about their material interests. Instead, voters tend to trust representatives who have their base not in party ties but in local civil society groups, in particular clans and neighborhoods. I find that folk religious ties are not especially salient in village elections.[22]

[20] Oi and Rozelle (2000) and Guo and Bernstein (2004).

[21] Alpermann (2001).

[22] The same may not hold true in Tibet and Xinjiang, where religion has become a politically salient

The effectiveness of civil society groups and the relative weakness of the ruling party represents both a challenge and an opportunity. When the party can draw the leaders of these groups into the state, they can draw on the informal authority of these leaders to implement controversial policies like land expropriations. If the leaders of these groups remain autonomous from the state, they can be powerful enemies, rallying their groups in opposition to state policies.

I examine lineages, neighborhoods, and religious groups, which are arguably the three most common civil society groups in rural China, which helps me provide a more thorough accounting of village politics, and to gain leverage on what types of social ties are effective instruments of political control. I argue that the political salience of the tie determines whether or not the tie is an effective instrument of political control. Villagers are accustomed to mobilizing along lineage and neighborhood lines, and they have high degrees of trust in the leaders of these groups. So when they appeal to the group to comply with the state, it is relatively effective. On the other hand, religious ties are not very politically salient in China. Moreover, there are prohibitions against Communist Party members participating in religious groups, which are derided in official ideology as "feudal" and "superstitious," which makes it hard to assimilate the formal leaders of these groups into the party. This makes them weak instruments of political control.

1.3 Property Rights and Land Redistribution in China

This dissertation examines state expropriations of collectively owned village land, which is a form of regressive land redistribution. Property rights in the United States and other urbanized democracies often include a bundle of rights that include the right to use, to sell, and to mortgage.[23] As I discuss in somewhat more detail below, the property rights for farmers in China are limited to use rights, whereas full "ownership rights" (*suoyou quan*) over land belong to village collectives and the state.[24] When I refer to expropriation, confiscation,

cleavage, or areas with Christian churches.

[23]Alchian and Demsetz (1973) and Schlager and Ostrom (1992).

[24]Brandt et al. (2002). In other words, farmers have the right to use the land, including rights over the fruits of that use, such as income produced from raising crops and livestock. They also have the right to sublease their land.

or seizure of land, I refer to the alienation of use rights.

The political struggle over land ownership has in many ways defined China's recent history, and land redistributions have determined the country's political winners and losers.[25] As Mao Zedong noted, the "primary task" of the Communist Revolution was "the readjustment of the land problem," by which Mao meant the redistribution of land from landlords to peasants.[26] "Whoever wins the peasants will win China," Mao said. "Whoever solves the land problem will win the peasants."[27] In the decade following the Communist takeover in 1949, the Party kept its promise, and redistributed land from the country's landholding elite to farmers.

The winners, at least in theory, were hundreds of millions of peasants who before the Revolution had no land and little prospect of economic mobility, while the losers were the landlords who lost their property and in many cases lost their lives.[28] Through the 1960s and much of the 1970s, China's peasants collectively farmed the land under a Soviet-style system of brigades and work teams. The system of collective agriculture cannot in itself be blamed for the catastrophe of the Great Leap Forward, which had much to do with bureaucratic and elite politics, yet under collectivization agricultural productivity stagnated in the 1960s and 70s.[29]

China's peasants had to wait until nearly three decades to become the real winners of the reforms that equalized land holdings. The late 1970s and early 1980s marked the end of collective cultivation of the land and the beginning of China's Reform Era.[30] Households were given rights over particular plots of soil, and in time farmers could sell the food they produced on a market that was much freer than before. Landholding remained egalitarian, with each household receiving approximately the same amount of land in practically all of China's 1 million villages. Additional reforms decentralized control over revenue, leading to what Jean Oi calls "local state corporatism," which encouraged the development of rural

[25]Rithmire (2015).

[26]Snow (1961, p. 444).

[27]Ibid., 70.

[28]On the experience of China's peasants under Mao see, among many others, Chan, Madsen, and Unger (1984), Shue (1988), Unger (1989), Oi (1991), and D. L. Yang (1998).

[29]Kung and S. Chen (2011) show that excessive grain procurement during the Great Leap Forward was a function of career incentives for political elites. See Oi (1991, p. 32) for a discussion of grain consumption and productivity.

[30]Kelliher (1992) and Zhou (1996) discuss whether peasant or elite initiative drove the reform process.

industry, and fueled an economic boom that lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty.[31]

However, the 2000s and 2010s witnessed the reemergence of conflict over land redistributions — this time, a regressive land redistribution in which the losers have been smallholding farmers and the winners a new class of local elite. Unlike a typical land market, in China the state monopolizes the lucrative rights to develop agricultural land. The right to convert land's legal status from "agricultural land" (*nong yong di*) to "construction land" (*jianshe yong di*) belongs to solely to the state, and specifically to county and higher levels of government. To develop land, county and higher governments have the authority to expropriate land from village collectives and then transfer the ownership rights to the state. Once the land's status has been transferred to the state and converted from agricultural to construction use, governments can auction the land use rights, typically for an order of magnitude more than they compensate farmers. The profits from land expropriation and conversion have come to account for between 30 to 70 percent government revenue [32] According to an official report from the Ministry of Land and Resources (MLR), in 2012 sales of land use rights generated 4.2 trillion yuan (or 682 billion U.S. dollars) in revenue, a figure that may if anything underestimate the actual amount.[33]

Under the law, officials at the county level and higher have final authority over decisions about land use in China, but village officials play important roles in land expropriations. First, they serve as representatives of the landholding village collectives during negotiations with higher levels of government over land use planning. They frequently work with directly with firms and higher level officials to attract investment to their village.[34] If they succeed, they bargain with higher levels of government or firms over the amount of compensation the village will receive in return for their land. One study found than in 39 percent of cases, village political institutions retained some portion of the compensation, in some instances more than 50 percent of it.[35]

Second, village officials sometimes use their power to reallocate land within the village and set aside land for smaller-scale industrial and real estate projects. As Jean Oi notes, village

[31] Oi (1999).

[32] See Y. Cai (2003). More recent estimates are similar in magnitude, though there is significant uncertainty. As Rithmire (2015) notes, officials treat data on revenue generated from land as extremely sensitive.

[33] *Chinese Land Resources Report 2013 (Zhongguo Guotu Ziyuan Gongbao)* (2014).

[34] Y. Cai (2003).

[35] Deininger and Jin (2009).

political institutions are essentially "socialist landlords." [36] In the 1980s and 1990s, local officials used their power over land rights to ensure that collectively owned enterprises had preferential access to village land.[37] Through the mid-2000s, large scale land reallocations — in which village officials redistributed the land holdings of a large numbers of villagers — were the "preferred avenue" for land expropriations because they could be accomplished by making each villagers' land holding slightly smaller with no direct compensation.[38] However, the Rural Land Contracting Law 2003 placed tighter controls on when village officials could undertake such large scale land reallocations, curbing though not eliminating land takings by village officials for the purpose of land development.[39]

Village officials and village political institutions often benefit directly from land expropriations. One survey found that 37 percent of village's own-source revenue comes from land takings.[40] Land sales are also important opportunities for corruption for local authorities.[41] In one three year period in China between 1999 and 2002, the Ministry of Land and Resources investigated over half a million illegal land transactions, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that village officials can make many times their annual salary in kickbacks from land deals.[42]

Villagers can potentially benefit from land expropriations as well. In what follows, I present quantitative evidence on the consequences of land expropriations. The results show that land seizures are in general not correlated with a significant increase in collective petitioning, suggesting that in most cases villagers remain relatively satisfied with the political status quo after expropriations. Anecdotally, there are cases of farmers clamoring to have their land expropriated, especially in villages close to major cities, where projects are more likely to have funding to compensate farmers well.[43]

Yet the results also show that when co-opted social elites confiscate land, the amount of petitioning surges, indicating dissatisfaction with village officials after the land seizure. There is also some evidence that incomes drop after these land takings. The evidence suggests land

[36] Oi (1991, p. 193).
[37] Ibid., 133n72.
[38] Deininger and Jin (2009, p. 23).
[39] Deininger and Jin (2009) and Hsing (2010).
[40] Deininger and Jin (2009).
[41] T. Chen and Kung (2015).
[42] See Zhu (2005) and Y. Cai (2003). Sun (2015) shows how large scale violations of land laws can go unpunished.
[43] Paik and K. Lee (2012).

seizures undertaken by co-opted social elites are comparatively extractive — villagers are getting a raw deal.

Arguably, the transfer of land from peasant collectives to the Chinese represents the largest redistribution of wealth in human history. Land expropriations transfer the equivalent of a half trillion U.S. dollars of property *each year* from villagers to the state.[44] The size of this transfer of wealth rivals, and perhaps exceeds, the privatization of state assets after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

1.4 When Do Elections Curb State Power?

In this dissertation, I challenge dominant explanations for the origins of state power and the sources of political accountability. The first set of theories that I challenge hold that *democratic institutions like elections curb state power in both democratic and authoritarian regimes*. The general logic behind these theories is that delegating power to a democratic institution like a representative assembly commits potentially autocratic executives — whether they are kings, presidents, or local officials — to refraining from predation. Many scholars contend that even weakly democratic institutions in authoritarian states can commit autocrats to limited authoritarian government.[45]

In a seminal article, Douglass North and Barry Weingast argue that democratic institutions implemented in England after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 curbed the authority of the Crown.[46] They write that the reforms forced the King to cede authority to Parliament, which represented the interests of wealthy elites. Delegating power to Parliament committed the Crown to ending its practice of confiscating property from England's elite, and stronger property rights created incentives for England's economic elites to invest, which arguably set the stage for the Industrial Revolution.[47]

[44]That is, in 2012, the Chinese government generated over 600 billion U.S. dollars in revenue from the expropriation of land and the subsequent auctioning of land use rights. See *Chinese Land Resources Report 2013 (Zhongguo Guotu Ziyuan Gongbao)* (2014).

[45]See among others North and Weingast (1989), Wright (2008), Gehlbach and Keefer (2011), and Martinez-Bravo et al. (2011).

[46]North and Weingast (1989).

[47]Pincus and Robinson (2011) and Cox (2012) recount how a number of scholars have cast doubt on the historical accuracy of North and Weingast's argument. Nonetheless, the broader argument remains influential, even among scholars who debate its historical accuracy.

The view that democracy tames the power of potentially autocratic states and strengthens property rights has been widely embraced. Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson write that the partially democratic reforms of the Glorious Revolution "severely limited the monarchy's powers" and "led to much greater security of property rights because people no longer feared predation by the state."[48] Their formal model proposes that more generally democracy is a way for elites to "credibly commit" to future policies that bring benefits to non-elites, such as policies that redistribute wealth more progressively.[49]

While village councils in China may seem a fair distance from the halls of Westminster, Weingast has extended this theory to suggest that decentralized institutions can strengthen property rights — and he develops this line of reasoning based on evidence from the very local political institutions in China I study. The argument, elaborated over a series of articles, is that decentralized and federal arrangements place limits on the power of the central government to expropriate.[50] A key feature of decentralization in China is that it also induced competition among local governments to attract investment, and therefore revenue, by offering favorable conditions for investors and workers.[51] Jean Oi makes a related argument that decentralization gave local officials in China *de facto* property rights over the revenue they raised, which encouraged them to invest in rural enterprises that lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty.[52] However, Oi does not suggest that these reforms limited state power.

A more recent body of work on authoritarian institutions contends that even weakly democratic institutions such as authoritarian legislatures and parties can limit the power of states to expropriate. Joseph Wright argues that authoritarian parliaments with binding power — analogous to the local institutions I study, which also have binding power — can curb state predation and encourage domestic investment.[53] According to Carles Boix and Milan Svolik, legislatures, parties, and councils lead to the emergence of "limited authori-

[48] Acemoglu and Robinson (2006, p. 2).

[49] Acemoglu and Robinson (2006). See also Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson (2001).

[50] The key articles are Weingast (1995), Montinola, Qian, and Weingast (1995), Qian and Weingast (1997).

[51] This is controversial. H. Cai and Treisman (2006), for example, argue that Montinola, Qian, and Weingast (1995) overstate the degree of authority that local governments have in China, and argue that reform was directed by regime elites in Beijing. More recent literature on decentralization suggests that local institutions may be more prone to benefit elites. See for example E. J. Malesky, Nguyen, and Tran (2014) and Mattingly (2016).

[52] Oi (1992), Oi (1999).

[53] Wright (2008).

tarian government" because they facilitate power sharing between regime elites by reducing the commitment and information problems common to secretive authoritarian regimes.[54] Scott Gehlbach and Philip Keefer argue that membership in the Chinese Communist Party in particular commits the regime to refrain from confiscating the wealth of investors.[55]

This dissertation casts doubt on theories that link quasi-democratic institutions to limited state power — instead, it builds on theories that these institutions are venues for elite cooptation. My findings are consistent with work by Edmund Malesky and Nate Jensen which casts doubt on the empirical work showing a cross-national correlation between authoritarian legislatures and expropriation risk.[56] It is also consistent with work by Maleksy and Rory Truex showing that regimes use these institutions to distribute rents, from greater influence over policy to profitable business connections.[57]

What has been missing from the literature on cooptation is a complete accounting of why regimes coopt elites. The typical argument is that they do so to forestall the threat that elites will organize rebellion. In an important book on authoritarian rule, Milan Svolik writes that dictators face two central problems.[58] The first is the problem of *authoritarian control*, in which rulers must guard against popular challenges to their rule, such as large-scale protests. The second is the problem of *authoritarian power-sharing*, in which leaders must counter the possibility that other elites will challenge their rule and depose them. Without a doubt, Svolik is correct that authoritarian regimes worry about both popular and elite threats to their hold on power. But in addition the problems of power sharing and control, I would add a third major problem faced by authoritarian governments, one that falls short of any immediate threat to their rule — the problem of *authoritarian governance*, which requires implementing policies and ensuring popular compliance with them. My argument is that co-opting elites helps authoritarian regimes exert control and govern, not just forestall unrest.[59]

[54]Boix and Svolik (2013). However, this dissertation also bears out Boix's arguement that "property rights are, generally speaking, strengthened by a balance of power among several actors that makes it impossible for any one of them to expropriate from all the others" (Boix 2003, p. 211).

[55]Gehlbach and Keefer (2011)

[56]Jensen, E. Malesky, and Weymouth (2014)

[57]E. Malesky and Schuler (2010) and Truex (2014b). See also Ang and Jia (2014) for related work on political connections.

[58]Svolik (2012, p. 2)

[59]I also build on a still nascent literature on the politics of land reform in autocracies. In a recent book, textcitealbertus2015autocracy shows how autocracies are more likely to undertake land redistributions that democracies.

1.5 Can Civil Society Strengthen Accountability?

I also aim to complicate and to some extent challenge a second set of theories that hold that *a strong civil society strengthens political accountability.* This idea has a distinguished lineage, stretching back at least to *Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville. In the book he writes of the United States in the 19th century:

> Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types — religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute.[60]

Tocqueville notes that "an association unites the energies of divergent minds and vigorously directs them toward a clearly indicated goal."[61] In doing so, these associations helped to tie together American society, building trust among their members and increasing the stability of American government.

Important scholarship in political science sees civil society groups and organizations as forces that enhance political accountability. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba show in their classic work *The Civic Culture*, based on surveys in five nations (the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Mexico, and Italy), that people who belong to associations have more social trust and are more likely to participate in the political process.[62] Robert Putnam enlarges on these findings in a pair of books that have if anything been more influential than Almond and Verba's classic. Putnam shows how in Italy and elsewhere, participation in civil society — he lists groups such as peasant clubs, religious fraternities, and mutual aid societies — enhances trust and builds social capital. The connective tissues these organizations create in society help to create generalized solidarity and trust, and increase participation and democratic accountability.[63]

Influential work by Lily Tsai has extended this theory to China and the very groups I study, arguing that what she terms "solidary groups" (and I call civil society groups) can create channels for "informal accountability" in places where formal democratic mechanisms

[60] De Tocqueville (1969, p. 513-514) quoted in Putnam (1994, p. 89).
[61] De Tocqueville (1969, p. 190) quoted in Putnam (1994, p. 90).
[62] Almond and Verba (1963, pp. 300-322)
[63] Putnam (1994) and Putnam (2000)

are weak.[64] Tsai argues that when officials belong to civil society groups such as lineage and temple groups, social pressure can give them incentives to perform well in office. She argues that these groups reward officials who provide their village with more public goods and services with additional "moral authority" in the group. These social institutions therefore strengthen local governance. Kate Baldwin argues that unelected traditional chiefs in Africa serve a similar function, serving a constructive role in helping to connect politicians to their constituents, and improving democratic responsiveness.[65]

Tsai's analysis and framing focuses almost entirely on the accountability function of these institutions, but she acknowledges in several places that these social institutions also have an important political control function — that, as I argue, they help officials elicit compliance with unpopular state policies. In her book, Tsai asks us to "imagine the mayor of a small town in the United States with only one church."[66] The mayor regularly attends church and his deep involvement in the church community provides an incentives for him to perform well in office. After all, if he does so, the church minister might praise the mayor during his weekly sermon, and this praise will provide the mayor with additional moral standing in the community. One question here is why the mayor cares so much about his moral standing. To explain this, Tsai goes on to write:

> When [the mayor] tries to implement a difficult state policy — a new requirement, for example, that students of a different ethnic group be bused into the town school — additional standing can help him elicit compliance from his constituents. Moral standing helps the local official by strengthening the belief of citizens in his good intentions. It can make citizens more likely to trust that the mayor is right and defer to his judgment on whether the policy should be implemented. A local official with sufficient moral standing is also more likely to be able to persuade leaders of the community group for help in implementing the difficult state policy. The mayor in our hypothetical town might, for example, ask the minister to talk to particularly stubborn opponents of the policy and draw on his moral authority to convince them to comply.[67]

[64]Tsai (2002), Tsai (2007a), and Tsai (2007b).
[65]Baldwin (2013) and Baldwin (2015).
[66]Tsai (2007a, p. 86)
[67]Ibid., p. 86.

Tsai subsequently draws a parallel to rural China, in which officials embedded in temple and lineage institutions provide more public goods in return for more moral standing within the group, which she notes allows them to elicit compliance with land requisitions, birth quotas, and other unpopular state policies.[68]

While Tsai's argument highlights the political accountability role of these social institutions, some of the evidence she presents is also consistent with my argument that the more important function of these institutions is political control. Tsai's quantitative evidence shows only a weak correlation between temple and lineage institutions and public goods provision, an association that is rather sensitive to modeling assumptions and the deletion of individual data points.[69] Tsai's qualitative evidence, on the other hand, consistently notes that officials themselves cultivate these institutions because they help them to elicit compliance with state policies. Tsai's cases show how officials use their authority within these groups in order to elicit compliance with land reallocations,[70] a state ban on firecrackers,[71] eminent domain,[72] birth control quotas,[73] and tax collection.[74] However, these observations are often made in passing to explain the incentives of officials to cultivate these groups and are not explored systematically.

The view that local civil society institutions primarily serve a function of top-down political control is more consistent with their role throughout Chinese history than Tsai's contention that they serve as channels for bottom-up accountability. Lineage institutions and religious institutions for centuries reinforced the power of local elites and the imperial order. In his classic account of rural China under the Qing, Kung-chuan Hsiao writes that clans were sometimes "made to help in keeping records of the inhabitants, watching their daily doings, reporting suspicious characters and offensive deeds, and apprehending characters wanted by the government."[75] He argues that "in employing the clan to help strengthen its control over the countryside, the imperial government treated the kinship group more as

[68]Ibid., p. 87.

[69]Xu and Yao (2015) also provide an estimate for the effect of clan institutions on public service spending which is more robust but not substantively large, on the order of an increase of 1000 *yuan*, or about $150, in public spending per village.

[70]Tsai (2007a, p. 109)

[71]Ibid.,141

[72]Ibid., 87

[73]Ibid., 175

[74]Ibid.

[75]Hsiao (1960, p. 7)

a supplementary police organ than as a social body."[76]

My argument develops what could be thought of as a "corporatist" rather than "accountability" view of the role of popular institutions. Along similar lines, Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier show how in some countries in Latin America, political incorporation of national labor leaders made labor unions an institution of political control rather than accountability or interest representation.[77] This type of work does not treat interest representation as a given, and instead considers the incentives for social leaders, which may well diverge from the group. Of course, an analogous type of corporatism can also operate on the local level,[78] where officials can attempt to politically incorporate social leaders in order to help the local state exert control and implement policy at the grassroots.

1.6 The Social Origins of State Power in China

How should we think about state power in authoritarian regimes? I take as a starting point Michael Mann's distinction between *despotic power* and *infrastructural power*. Infrastructural power is the ability of the state "to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm,"[79] from taxation to the provision of public goods and services. The major outcome I study is the source of what Mann refers to as infrastructural power, or how the Chinese state exerts political control and commands compliance. Despotic power, in Mann's conceptualization, is the "ability of state elites to make arbitrary decisions without consultation with the representatives of major civil society groups."[80] States can, in Mann's view, potentially have both kinds of power; they can be at once good at implementing their decisions while also making them without consulting with civil society leaders. However, the idea of despotic power raises several questions. First, when do the "representatives of major civil society groups" have incentives to faithfully represent their group? Second, isn't maintaining this sort of despotic order, which implies a high degree of coercion and repression, quite costly to rulers? Does China, or its contemporary authoritarian cousins, really fit the model of a state with despotic power?

[76]Ibid., p. 350.
[77]R. B. Collier and D. Collier (1991). I discuss this more in the conclusion.
[78]Oi (1992) and Oi (1999)
[79]Mann (2012, p. 13).
[80]Ibid.

I argue that the leaders of the most durable authoritarian regimes seek to build a political order that is neither entirely despotic nor entirely democratic, by turning democratic and civil society institutions to their advantage. Faced with the problem of authoritarian governance, officials implement their policies and exert control with the assent of civil society leaders, but the regime gives civil society leaders incentives to use their support and symbolic authority to increase popular compliance with the regime's laws and policies. Unlike Svolik's conceptualization of authoritarian control, I argue that states seek to not just to prevent regime-destabilizing unrest but to govern — to get people to do what rulers want them to do. Unlike Mann's conceptualization of despotic power, I argue that authoritarian states prefer to rule somewhere on the continuum between despotism and democracy. Such an arrangement is possible when collective action is difficult and potentially very costly and when there is some uncertainty about the state of the world (for example, uncertainty the likelihood resistance will succeed). These are conditions which enhance the power of civil society elites.

My argument about the social origins of state power builds on Dan Slater's idea that the co-optation of "communal elites" can play an important role in determining state strength and weakness.[81] Communal elites are in Slater's telling "a society's leading possessors of nationalist and religious authority,"[82] and in the countries he studies in Southeast Asia these include figures like religious leaders and the heads of student movements. They are not all that dissimilar from the clan, neighborhood, and temple elites I examine in this dissertation, although in Slater's cases they use a different repertoire of symbols and operate on a national stage. Along similar lines to my argument, Slater also argues that communal elites possess important symbolic authority — so when these elites have been incorporated into the regime, it "presents opposition groups with tremendous difficulty in mustering the emotive appeals that can help bring swarms of unarmed civilians into direct confrontation with the coercive arms of the state."[83] He argues that communal elites can potentially "[grant] authoritarian regimes a critical imprimatur of symbolic legitimacy, [mobilize] followers to help suppress regime opponents, and [allow] state institutions to insinuate themselves into doctrinal practices."[84] While the elites that Slater discusses have a different set of interests

[81]Slater (2009) and Slater (2010).
[82]Slater (2009, p. 209).
[83]Ibid., 210.
[84]Slater (2010, p.16).

and incentives than the local elites I focus on, and the outcomes he studies are different, these words might well have been written about local elites in China, who are also lynchpins of collective action for their groups, and whose symbolic authority helps the regime elicit political compliance.

One way to look at the informal sources of state power is that states can increase compliance and control by "borrowing" legitimacy from social elites to create the perception of fairness. Margaret Levi's seminal work on state power and compliance with taxation provides a useful framework for thinking about compliance and legitimacy: compliance is produced either through coercion, ideology, or what she terms "quasi-voluntary compliance."[85] She argues that "rulers can increase [quasi-voluntary] compliance by demonstrating that the tax system is fair" and goes on to note that "a perception of exploitation–that is, an unfair contract–promotes non-compliance."[86] As I will show, the endorsement of social elites for land expropriations and other forms of extraction is helpful precisely because it helps solidify the impression that people are getting a fair deal rather than getting exploited. One reoccurring motif in the case studies is that of social leaders campaigning, often door to door, to explain that state policies are fair and merits obedience.

For states attempting to extend their reach and infrastructural power, the leaders of "traditional" groups represent potential allies rather than adversaries. This will hardly come as a surprise to those who study ethnic politics and traditional leaders in Africa and elsewhere. For example, Daniel Posner writes that when the British in colonial Rhodesia wished to tax the populations they governed, they discovered that they did not have a reliable maps or knowledge of where various groups lived, so they turned to the indigenous chiefs and "sought to strike a bargain whereby the rulers would use their authority and local administrative capacity to extract revenues from their subjects."[87]

More broadly, I argue that strong societies can complement state power. This challenges important work by Joel Migdal, who argues that traditional chiefs in African and "strongmen" elsewhere generally undermine state power by creating "weblike" societies that resist state control.[88] These leaders can in fact help state extend its reach so long as their interests

[85]Levi (1989, pp. 50-55).

[86]Ibid., 53.

[87]Posner (2005, p. 27). Posner goes on to elaborate the limitations of this arrangement and efforts made by the British to "rationalize" the chief's authority.

[88]Migdal (1988).

are aligned with that of officials. However, the interest of social elites are not always aligned in this way, and the trick for the state is ensuring a durable alignment of interests. The best way for the state to do so is with formal, quasi-democratic institutions like councils and congresses that give these actors real power within the state; that is, they "credibly commit" to giving power to local elites but not to larger groups.[89]

All of this reinforces the idea that social groups in the developing world are best served by seeking autonomy from the state. This stands in stark contrast to Lily Tsai's assertion that "it is the groups that embed government officials that have a positive impact on local governmental performance, not the groups that are autonomous from the state."[90] It also qualifies Peter Evans' influential view that having officials deeply embedded in social groups improves governance, but that "informal networks based on kinship or parochial geographic loyalties"[91] are likely to undermine formal organizations like states. I find that these informal networks can have the curious effect of increasing the power of formal organizations like the state, in particular when group elites have interests that align with that of officials.

State Power in China

Recent explanations for state power and accountability in China tend to fall in one of two camps. The first camp focuses on the problem that local officials often do not comply with the state's policies and laws. One fruitful line of research within this camp has focused on popular pressures on officials. For example, Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li show how local officials do not implement many of the laws and other rules on the books, and in fact tend to selectively implement the ones that potentially benefit local officials and harm the interests of villagers.[92] However, O'Brien and Li go on to demonstrate how this gap between official policy and the reality on the ground has provided the residents of rural China with new opportunities to use the central state's promises as a rhetorical weapon against local officials.[93] A second line of research has focused on official bureaucratic institutions within

[89]See also Herbst (2014) who suggests that low population density, rather than strong societies, gave African states little incentive to consolidate their power.

[90]Tsai (2007a, p. 17).

[91]Evans (1995, p. 59).

[92]O'Brien and Li (1999). Understanding what mandates the state really prioritizes is a difficult analytical problem. See Birney (2014).

[93]See O'Brien and Li (2006) on peasant "rightful resistance" and Gallagher (2006) and Gallagher (2011) on worker disenchantment with the legal system. See also Y. Wang (2014) on the state's rule of law project

the state. Many of these studies, including work by Victor Shih and others, investigate promotion criteria and attempt to adjudicate whether officials are promoted or disciplined based on their performance or their personal connections and whether this provides officials incentives to comply with certain state priorities.[94] A third and more recent line of research examines how quasi-democratic political institutions help the central state monitor local officials and allows officials to be more responsive to popular needs. Peter Lorentzen, for example, shows how the state cultivates partially free media and uses protests to gather information about official performance.[95]

A second body of work focuses on state efforts tools of political control and compliance. Classic work on the peasant economy by Jean Oi shows how state attempts to exert power and control in rural China, and especially to requisition grain, hinged on the loyalty of local cadres, who were caught between the communities they were drawn from and the state above them.[96] Andrew Walder's scholarship on compliance and authority in the workplace shows how work unit leaders exerted control through the distribution of positive incentives like housing.[97] In fact, this echoes an idea that I develop throughout this dissertation that relatively small inducements, such as symbolic improvements to public goods provision, increases the authority of officials in a way that decidedly works to the advantage of the powerful. More recent work in this vein has focused on forms of "soft repression" in which the state uses social ties to demobilize protesters, including protests over land takings and home demolitions, which is closely related to the phenomenon I describe and in some cases the same thing.[98]

My work seeks to bridge these often separate literatures on the sources of state power on the one hand and the sources of limits on the other. In other words, I seek to examine both sides of Madison's dictum that "you must first enable the government to control the governed;

more generally.

[94]Whiting (2006), Shih (2007), Shih (2008), P. F. Landry (2008), and Shih, Adolph, and Liu (2012).

[95]Lorentzen (2013) and Lorentzen (2014). J. Chen, Pan, and Xu (2015) and Distelhorst and Yue Hou (2014) extend this idea to online feedback mechanisms like the "mayor's mailboxes" (*shizhang xinxiang*) that most cities create on their official web pages. However, Lorentzen, P. Landry, and Yasuda (2014) shows how officials can subvert transparency initiatives. See also Steinfeld (2000) on the incentives for deferring and undermining reform and Heilmann (2008) and Heilmann and Perry (2011) on deliberate strategies of local policy experimentation.

[96]Oi (1991).

[97]Walder (1988).

[98]Deng and O'Brien (2013) and O'Brien and Deng (2015).

and in the next place oblige it to control itself."[99] James C. Scott writes that the state "is the vexed institution that is the ground of both our freedoms and our unfreedoms."[100] The somewhat paradoxical point that I raise is that the democratic and social institutions that many argue tame the state — and I agree that they do this to some degree — also have the effect of taming dissent and resistance and extending state power.

1.7 Research Design

This study is based on evidence from a combination of sources: qualitative interviews, randomized experiments, and a unique village-level dataset. I conducted over 100 interviews during a year of fieldwork in China. These interviews helped me to understand the consequences of including the leaders of non-state groups in village governments for local politics: how government officials and village cadres used their authority to confiscate village land and redevelop it; how villagers bargained with authorities over land development projects; how villagers attempted to organize in resistance to them and sometimes succeeded; how villagers pressed authorities to improve public services.

These interviews helped me to develop some initial surmises, which I tested using a combination of comparative case studies and quantitative evidence. In the structured case studies, I compared villages where civil society leaders joined village institutions with villages where they had not — while attempting to match villages as closely as possible on other relevant factors, such as the level of income and development. These "most similar" case studies helped me to trace the causal effect of including these social leaders in office.

National-level data allows me to make inferences about national patterns. This evidence showed that the process I observed in the qualitative case studies was not limited to the set of villages in which I was able to conduct qualitative field research. When paired with the qualitative evidence, these correlations paint a persuasive picture. Finally, a survey with an embedded set of experiments probe causal mechanisms. The experiments help illuminate what type of civil society leaders have informal influence in rural China and why the Party-state might turn to them for help.

[99] The phrase appears in Federalist 51.
[100] Scott (1998, p. 8).

1.8 Chapter Overview

In what follows, I elaborate on the arguments I briefly outlined in this introductory chapter. In **Chapter 2**, I provide some additional background on the democratic institutions found in China's villages, but the main purpose of the chapter is to advance an argument about the relative power of formal party institutions and civil society groups in rural China. Drawing on new evidence from a randomized experiment, I show that the Communist Party is faced with a potential problem at the grassroots: the ruling party's brand offers no electoral advantage to candidates, and voters believe that Communist Party members will not represent their interests in office. Instead, voters cast their ballots based on candidates' membership in village civil society groups. The weakness of the ruling party at the grassroots and the strength of these civil society groups provides the ruling party with a political challenge and an opportunity.

Chapter 3 outlines my theory of authoritarian governance and shows how in the face of its weakness, the regime benefits from semi-democratic institutions that allow for the selection of political leadership with a base of support outside the ruling party. When local officials also have leadership roles in civil society groups, their authority within these groups helps them govern the village and elicit compliance with unpopular policies like land requisitions. Drawing on qualitative evidence, I uncover two mechanisms. First, co-opted social elites can passively help the state: because they are central nodes in local social networks, their inaction inhibits group collective action against the state. Second, co-opted elites can actively help the state: because they have high degrees of moral authority, their endorsement of state policies can increase compliance. Why do groups trust social leaders who sometimes betray them? A formal model shows how this is not irrational behavior if villagers do not have complete information about the state of the world, which is a key feature of opaque local development deals in China. The model shows that even when villagers face the possibility of crippling betrayal by their leaders, they may still rationally comply.

Chapter 4 turns to empirical evidence for my theory that the political inclusion of civil society leaders strengthens the power of the state. The chapter focuses on kinship groups, also called lineages or clans, which I examine because they are widespread in China and because they share common features with kinship-based groups in other countries, from clans in Central Asia to tribes and lineage organizations in Africa. Qualitative case studies

show that villagers have a high degree of confidence in information supplied by their lineage group leaders. As a result, when lineage group leaders are incorporated into village political institutions, it gives local officials a powerful tool to elicit compliance from villagers for land expropriation policies. Using data from a national survey, I find that when lineage elites join village political institutions, it increases the likelihood of a land expropriation by 14 to 20 percent. Qualitative and quantitative evidence shows how the inclusion of lineage leaders in office diminishes the compensation that villagers receive for land takings.

The subsequent chapters explore the potential limits and broader applicability of the theory. My main argument is that to be effective tools of state control, social groups must be politically salient to be direct tools of control. In **Chapter 5**, I turn to an investigation of neighborhood groups, which are politically salient but lack informal norms that encourage deference to informal authority. Even so, the leaders of these groups still help local officials elicit compliance with land expropriations. This shows the power of the first mechanism outlined above: even when social institutions do not provide group leaders with a high degree of moral authority, their position within group social networks make them powerful arbiters in local politics.

In **Chapter 6**, I look at religious groups, which the survey evidence in Chapter 2 showed are not politically salient. I find that the type of ties these groups create are not effective at mobilizing or demobilizing villagers, and so they are only weak tools of political control. However, I argue that religious groups can potentially strengthen the power of other types of socially salient elites. For example, when lineage elites organize a village-wide religious festival it provides them with additional moral authority. Religious and kinship froups can therefore interact to strengthen the authority of social elites, which when they join the local state can strengthen state control and increase the likelihood of land expropriations.

Chapter 7 considers the evidence on land takings in China in a broader comparative perspective. I argue that my theory has explanatory power beyond China. Traditional chiefs in Africa, the leaders of unions in Latin America, ethnic elites in American cities, kinship and caste elites in India, and clan chiefs in Scotland have all at times helped states politically control and extract from their groups. I argue that co-opted elites play a particularly destructive role during critical junctures in economic history, which provide unusual opportunities for officials to redistribute wealth.

Finally, **Chapter 8** recaps the argument and discusses the long-term implications of

using co-optation as a strategy of authoritarian governance. The strategy has contributed to a fraying of social and political relations in rural China and led to an unequal distribution of wealth and power. I argue that without stronger rule of law, further democratization is likely to empower local elites who have already captured local political institutions. Meaningful reform will be difficult. Although the national leaders of the party have expressed a desire to reign in the power of local officials, they face a version of James Madison's dilemma: having built a state with the power to control the governed, they now struggle to oblige the state to control itself.

Chapter 2

How Local Elections Empower Civil Society Groups

In the summer of 2013, the village of Yuelu on the northern fringe of the Pearl River Delta held its first fair and free election for village office after years of rigged votes with candidates hand-picked by the Communist Party. The village's incumbent leadership had, in the previous year, made a major political miscalculation: they had attempted to sell nearly all of the village's undeveloped land to a property developer without first seeking consent from the villagers who collectively owned it. The announcement of the impending land sale led to large-scale protests in which residents flooded the streets, chanting and wearing identical red caps that said "fight corruption."

Following the protests, officials at higher levels of governments canceled the land sale and called for new elections for the village leadership. Elections in rural China have become gradually more democratic,[1] and Yuelu was now part of that trend. When I visited the village in the weeks leading up to the election, many villagers seemed eager to exercise their newfound voting rights and to install a new group of leaders. As one villager said, "The previous leadership group didn't look after our welfare (*fuli*)."

These new elections would not automatically favor Communist Party members. As in most villages in China, only around a tenth of villagers belong to the Communist Party, so local party leaders cannot count on party members to swing elections — or ensure broad-based compliance with sometimes controversial policies, like those surrounding land development or birth control quotas. Instead, political mobilization in Yuelu occurs through neighborhood

[1] O'Brien and Han (2009).

social networks.

Not surprisingly, then, the elections in Yuelu resulted in the elevation of a group of leaders who controlled neighborhood-based voting blocs. These local power brokers did little to conceal exchanges of goods for votes. The candidates pitched a massive red tent in the village square and held a series of lavish catered banquets for each neighborhood. Later, according to several villagers, the candidates' allies went door to door handing out red envelopes of cash (a *hongbao*) in exchange for promises to vote for the candidate.[2]

In this chapter, I examine political mobilization in China's villages using a mix of evidence from fieldwork and new quantitative data. I develop three major points:

- Despite holding power for more than half a century, *the Communist Party is not very effective at mobilizing villagers.*
- In place of party-based mobilization, *political mobilization occurs through local civil society groups, especially kinship and neighborhood groups.*

To demonstrate these points, I present original data from a survey experiment I conducted in a random sample of villages in southern China. The experiment asked regular villagers to chose between two candidates in a village election while randomly varying the attributes of those candidates, using a technique called conjoint analysis. To my knowledge, this is the first experiment to examine how voters chose between candidates in an authoritarian election. It supports the assertions that the Communist Party is not very effective at mobilizing villagers and that political mobilization occurs through village-level civil society groups. Given the weakness of the party and the strength of civil society groups, the party has incentives to co-opt brokers who control civil society groups, and make indirect use of their power to mobilize.

2.1 Elections in China and Other Non-Democracies

Elected village committees were introduced in some regions of China in the 1980s, and a 1998 law mandated their roll-out across all of China's nearly 1 million villages.[3] Practically all

[2]There was effectively no secret ballot box in Yuelu's election making it possible to monitor votes, at least to a certain extent.

[3]O'Brien and Li (2000).

villages now hold elections for village committees, which consist of 3 to 7 popularly elected members.[4] The debate over the introduction of the laws suggests that the Communist Party introduced village elections not because they were enamored with the idea that elections strengthen political accountability, but because the policy's proponents thought it would help the party govern and control the countryside. In the wake of decollectivization in the 1980s, the party was having great difficulty eliciting compliance in villages with the core rural policies of the time: grain procurement, the One Child Policy, and tax collection.[5] Coercion was proving to be a counter-productive strategy for eliciting compliance. Daniel Kelliher writes that many proponents of introducing elections argued as follows:

> How can the state get villagers to meet the duties for grain, taxes and curtailed births? Bullying and violence have proven counter-productive. It would be better to entice villagers to take over the job of coercion on their own. How? By letting them rule themselves... In effect, proponents say, self-government is a system for getting villagers to enforce unpopular policy upon themselves... Proponents also say that state exactions will go more smoothly because elected cadres are more powerful than appointed ones.[6]

In the following chapters of this dissertation I argue that the proponents of the reform were largely right: so long as these institutions lead to the elevation of leaders with significant informal power within the village, they help the regime implement sometimes extractive policies.[7] However, the focus on this chapter is on painting a picture of the first order consequences of elections. What type of candidate tends to win them? To probe this question, I present evidence from a novel experiment using a conjoint design.

The personal attributes of candidates are essential in village elections in China because these elections involve short campaigns with little policy debate. Surveys of two provinces in the early 2000s found that in most villages the candidates make a speech to villagers or the villager representative assembly shortly before the election, while other forms of overt campaigning, like house-to-house visits by candidates, occurred in only about a quarter of

[4] O'Brien and Han (2009).

[5] Kelliher (1997) and O'Brien and Li (2000).

[6] Kelliher (1997, p. 73-74)

[7] Survey evidence suggests that the roll-out of village elections has also improved villager's views of the regime. See Sun (2014).

surveyed villages.[8] Some scholars of village elections argue that "little or no campaigning" occurs in Chinese village elections because electioneering is both "culturally inappropriate" and unnecessary since villagers all know each another.[9]

Consider again the case of Yuelu village. While candidates plastered the village's public spaces with campaign posters, a voter looking for clues about the policy positions of the twenty four candidates running for office would have been disappointed. Most offered up simple platitudes about the need for village harmony and economic development that echoed Communist Party slogans. "'Live in peace and work happily; collective stability and growth,' that's our motto!" read one poster. Read another: "Our slogan: Build a new prosperous and harmonious village."

In the absence of overt policy-based campaigns or competing parties, how do voters decide which candidate to support? One possibility is that voters may be guided by the candidates' membership in the ruling party — but the existing evidence from other contexts points in several directions. Where parties are weak, as in Jordan,[10] or effectively proscribed from competing altogether, as in Vietnam,[11] some previous studies relying on regression analysis have found that party label exerts no discernible influence on voters at all.

However, another possibility is that voters favor candidates who belong to the Communist Party. Previous scholarship has shown that the Communist Party mobilizes its members quite effectively in village elections, and that Party members are more likely to run for village office.[12] This might lead us to consider the hypothesis that the Party is good at mobilizing non-members.

Yet there is also suggestive evidence that the opposite may be true: Party membership could exert a negative effect. A recent study by Melanie Manion finds that in elections for township Peoples' Congresses, voters nominate Party and other government leaders at a significantly *lower* rate than a separate Party nomination committee.[13] This evidence is consistent with voters penalizing candidates for their Party membership. (It is also consistent with voters having a positive view of Party candidates, but one that is less rosy than the views of a Party committee.) On the whole, existing studies do not provide much clarity

[8] O'Brien and Han (2009).
[9] Pastor and Tan (2000, p. 496).
[10] Lust-Okar (2006).
[11] E. Malesky and Schuler (2011).
[12] P. F. Landry, Davis, and S. Wang (2010).
[13] Manion (2014).

on the role of party ties in elections in China, and so it would be helpful to have additional evidence that directly probes the role of party label in voter choice.

Another important theory about elections in authoritarian regimes is that they are used to incorporate property owners and entrepreneurs into the state. Once these entrepreneurs join a council, ruling party, or other democratic body, they can use their influence to limit state power and protect the property of other capital-owners.[14] Interestingly, in elections for Local Peoples' Congresses, voters nominate self-employed entrepreneurs at higher rates than the Communist Party committee.[15]

However, the electorate for village elections are rural farmers. Middle class voters and entrepreneurs may wish to elect property owners to into democratic bodies, but a reasonable expectation would be that these rural voters would see candidates who are business owners as class rivals, not class allies. In addition, it may be the case that voters prefer well-educated candidates over less-educated candidates from the same class background, such as teachers. The preference for well educated candidates would be consistent with evidence from Victor Shih, Christopher Adolph, and Mingxing Liu, who find that education provides an advantage in advancement for Communist Party members at the Central Committee level.[16] The experiment thus examines the effect of three occupations: entrepreneur, teacher, and farmer.

Social identities also play an important role in elections in both authoritarian and democratic contexts. In rural China, the lineage or clan is generally recognized as the most important social group.[17] Lineage members have a common surname and a common known ancestor, and are generally confined to a narrow geographic area, like a village or set of villages. A number of studies have noted the importance of lineages in village elections. A survey by the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs suggested voting along lineage lines in around 40 percent of village elections in China.[18]

In addition to lineage groups, many villages in rural China also have religious organizations, including temples. Folk religious temples often venerate deities who serve as protectors of the village community. Lily Tsai finds that these temple organizations can play an im-

[14]Haber, Maurer, and Razo (2003), Wright (2008), and Gehlbach and Keefer (2011).
[15]Manion (2014).
[16]Shih, Adolph, and Liu (2012).
[17]Freedman (1966), Manion (2006), and Xu and Yao (2015).
[18]O'Brien (1994) and Kelliher (1997).

portant role in village politics by linking village officials to villagers, and by giving officials an incentive to provide more public goods in return for greater moral standing within the group.[19] This should also give voters an incentive to cast their ballots for candidates who are frequent temple-goers, since they will be more accountable to villagers.

Voters may also be influenced by their membership in neighborhood networks. In particular, they may vote based on whether candidates belong to the same land-holding collective, called a villager small group, which is based on place of residence. In the Mao era these villager small groups were called production teams, and they collectively owned and cultivated the village's land. Officials dismantled the system of collective agriculture in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but while villagers now have use rights to private plots, the land itself remains collectively owned. Since villager small groups continue to control the allocation of land in many villages, they are still a feature in village economic and political life.

The gender of the candidate may also be important. Throughout the world, the number of female politicians is generally lower than the number of male politicians. In 2007, just 17 percent of members of parliament worldwide were female.[20] One potential reason for the low number of female political leaders is some degree of voter discrimination. Indeed, at higher levels of leadership in China, being female is a distinct disadvantage.[21] Given the evident discrimination against female politicians worldwide as well as China in particular, it is possible that voters make their decisions based partly on the gender of the candidate.

Finally, voters may weigh the age of the candidate. Edmund Malesky and Paul Schuler find that in elections in authoritarian Vietnam, voters prefer older candidates.[22] Similarly, Shih, Adolph, and Liu find that age has a large positive effect on advancement in the Central Committee, but the effect is very imprecisely estimated.[23] Yet Melanie Manion finds no difference in the age of candidates nominated by voters and the Party.[24]

In summary, the existing literature suggests that voters in these elections may make their decisions based on some combination of the candidate's party, class, clan, neighborhood, gender, religion, and age. While voters do not make their decisions based exclusively on these candidate attributes, they are nevertheless among the most important considerations.

[19] Tsai (2007b)
[20] Wolbrecht and Campbell (2007).
[21] Shih, Adolph, and Liu (2012).
[22] E. Malesky and Schuler (2011)
[23] Shih, Adolph, and Liu (2012)
[24] Manion (2014).

In the next section, I turn to explaining an experimental design that tests the causal effect of each of these attributes on voters' preferences.

2.2 Design of the Survey Experiment

To test what candidate attributes influence vote choice, I asked villagers in a random sample of villages in a municipality in southern China to chose between two hypothetical candidates to serve as their representative. I used a multidimensional design in which I randomized each candidate attributes simultaneously; such conjoint designs have a long history in marketing and other fields, but have only recently been used in studies of politics, pioneered by Jens Hainmueller, Daniel Hopkins, and Teppei Yamamoto.[25] The aim of the design was to present villagers with the sort of information that they might have about a real-world candidate. As I discussed above, in village elections in China, information is generally limited to basic candidate attributes with no information about policy positions.

To test each of the hypotheses above, voters were presented with information about seven candidate attributes in a simulated ballot. The attributes were gender (male or female); age (35, 57, or 78 years old); occupation (farmer, teacher, or business); religious habits ("never goes to temple to worship" or "frequently goes temple to worship"); clan ("same clan as you" or "different clan than you"); villager small group ("your small group" or "different small group"), and party membership ("CCP member" or "not CCP member"). Party membership was limited to CCP membership to reflect the fact that members of China's officially sanctioned minority parties almost never run openly as minority party members in village elections. Respondents were presented with a mock ballot listing the attributes of each candidate. Once respondents viewed the ballot, they were first asked to select which of the two candidates they would prefer. Subsequently, they were asked to rate on a 1 to 5 Likert scale the degree to which they thought the candidate cared about (*zaihu*) the voters' material interests (*liyi*) and the degree to which they trusted (*xinren*) the candidate.[26]

[25] Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto (2014).

[26] A potential concern with asking multiple questions is some degree of contamination, especially that respondents will have an incentive to make their responses consistent with each other. The results should alleviate this concern. Like several recent experiments that have also asked respondents to assess hypothetical candidates after voting for them, I find that how respondents assess candidate trustworthiness and other qualities is not a simple function of their voting decision.

Each of the attributes was fully randomized with no restrictions, and the order of attributes was randomized for each respondent. Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto (2014) show that in expectation difference in means tests will provide unbiased estimates of average marginal effects for each attribute component. Following their approach, difference in means for a given attribute are calculated by regressing the dichotomous choice variable on a set of dummy variables for each attribute component, excluding one comparison condition. As with most recent conjoint experiments, respondents voted on multiple pairs of candidates, in this case three pairs per respondent; standard errors are clustered by survey respondent to account for with-in respondent correlations.

The experiment was conducted in 2013 in a random sample of 22 villages in an urbanizing municipality Guangdong Province. The survey sites ranged from villages where most residents remained farmers to "villages-in-the-city" (*chengzhongcun*) that had effectively become suburbs of the city, but where villagers still retained rights to vote for their village leadership. Villages were randomly selected using a multistage procedure.[27] Within each randomly-selected village the enumeration team canvassed door-to-door and in public spaces.

It is important to note that the sampling strategy did not produce a random draw of households, but the sample nevertheless closely approximates the characteristics of these villages. The sample was 50 percent male, with a lower middle school education, and a mean age of 54, which reflects a higher degree of out-migration than is typical. While kinship groups are relevant feature of local social life, they are not especially strong; seventy percent of villagers reported that they did not have an active ancestral hall or that they did not visit it. Multidimensional choice experiments are relatively novel in political science, and to date most have been fielded on internet samples drawn from developed countries (e.g. Bechtel and Scheve 2013; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). To my knowledge this is the first to be fielded in a developing country using an offline sample. The attrition rate was low; less than 2 percent of respondents who started the task failed to rate all four pairs of profiles.

[27]Villages were stratified by district and also whether or not the village was on a list of villages the municipality planned to redevelop. Initial research had suggested that redevelopment might influence the strength of clan ties. However, whether or not a village was being redeveloped does not influence the results presented here. To preserve the confidentiality of the qualitative interviews and data, the municipality is not named here.

2.3 Party Ties, Social Ties, and Political Mobilization

Figure 2.1: Point estimates of marginal effect of candidate attributes on vote choice with 95 percent confidence intervals.

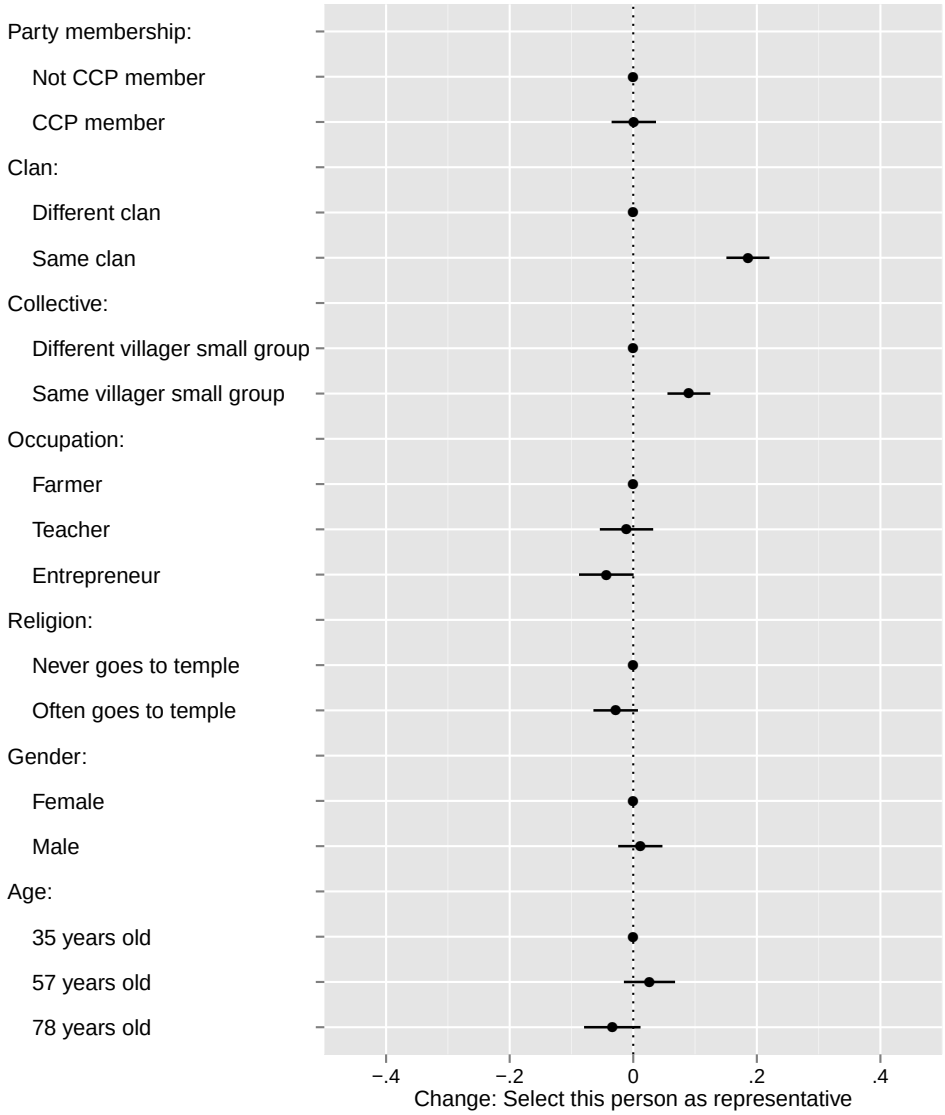


Figure 2.1 presents point estimates and confidence intervals for the conjoint experiment. The reference categories are presented as a dot without a confidence interval, and other categories are shown with 95 percent confidence intervals. The standard errors are clustered

by respondent to reflect the fact that each respondent voted on multiple profiles, similar to most previous conjoint experiments.

The results show that Party membership has no influence on voter preferences. The point estimate is almost precisely zero, and the 95 percent confidence bounds suggests an electoral benefit of at most 4 percentage points, or a cost of up to 4 percentage points. Again, it is important to note that party membership of candidates is limited to the CCP to reflect the fact that candidates from China's minority parties generally do not contest village elections, and are also numerically very small. (If additional parties were added to the list of tested attributes, it is possible that the CCP would be more popular than its potential rivals. However, as long as respondents' preferences are independent of irrelevant alternatives, the finding that voters do not prefer CCP candidates over candidates with no party membership should hold.)

This finding clarifies the role of the Party in elections in China: Party-mass ties are of negligible importance. Membership in the Party neither hamstrings candidates nor provides them with much in the way of a benefit.

By comparison, the candidates' lineage membership exerts a strong pull on voters. Results from the ballot experiments show that voters are 19 percent more likely to vote for a member of their own lineage group. The confidence interval suggests an effect size that is 14 percentage points or higher, which is more than 3 times more than the upper end of the estimate for the effect of party label. The results hold if I restrict the analysis to the first of the three ballots that voters cast or correct for multiple corrections using the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure.

These findings are consistent with a large body of work that underscores the importance of lineage groups or clans in village elections, but provides more direct evidence than previous studies. Interestingly, the effect size is nearly the same among voters who regularly attend lineage hall activities (21.6 percent, SE=3.2) and voters who report never going (17.1 percent, SE=2.1). This suggests that using lineage hall activity as a proxy for clan salience, as some studies do, may significantly undercount politically active clans.

Voters also strongly favored members who belonged to the same land-holding collective, or villager small group. They were 9 percent more likely to support a candidate who hailed from their collective. This large effect size is unexpected, given how little has been made of small group ties in studies of Chinese village elections. The collective tie is relevant even

to members of a younger generation that did not participate in collective agriculture. The experimental results show that the 10 percent effect size holds even for respondents under the age of 40.

The results also show that voters in village elections penalize candidates who are entrepreneurs. Voters are approximately 4 percent less likely to vote for an entrepreneur-candidate compared to a candidate who is a farmer. This could to some degree reflect the stigmatization of private enterprise earlier in the Communist era; however, given the central place of private business in the current economy, this seems unlikely. Instead, it is more likely to reflect the different economic and policy interests of business of farmers and business owners, although this is conjecture.

Religious habits play a less important role in voters' decision-making. If anything, there appears to be a slightly negative effect of being a regular temple attendee on voters' behavior, though the confidence interval overlaps with zero. This is surprising in light of previous work that has suggested that cadres who belong to temple organizations are more accountable to villagers.

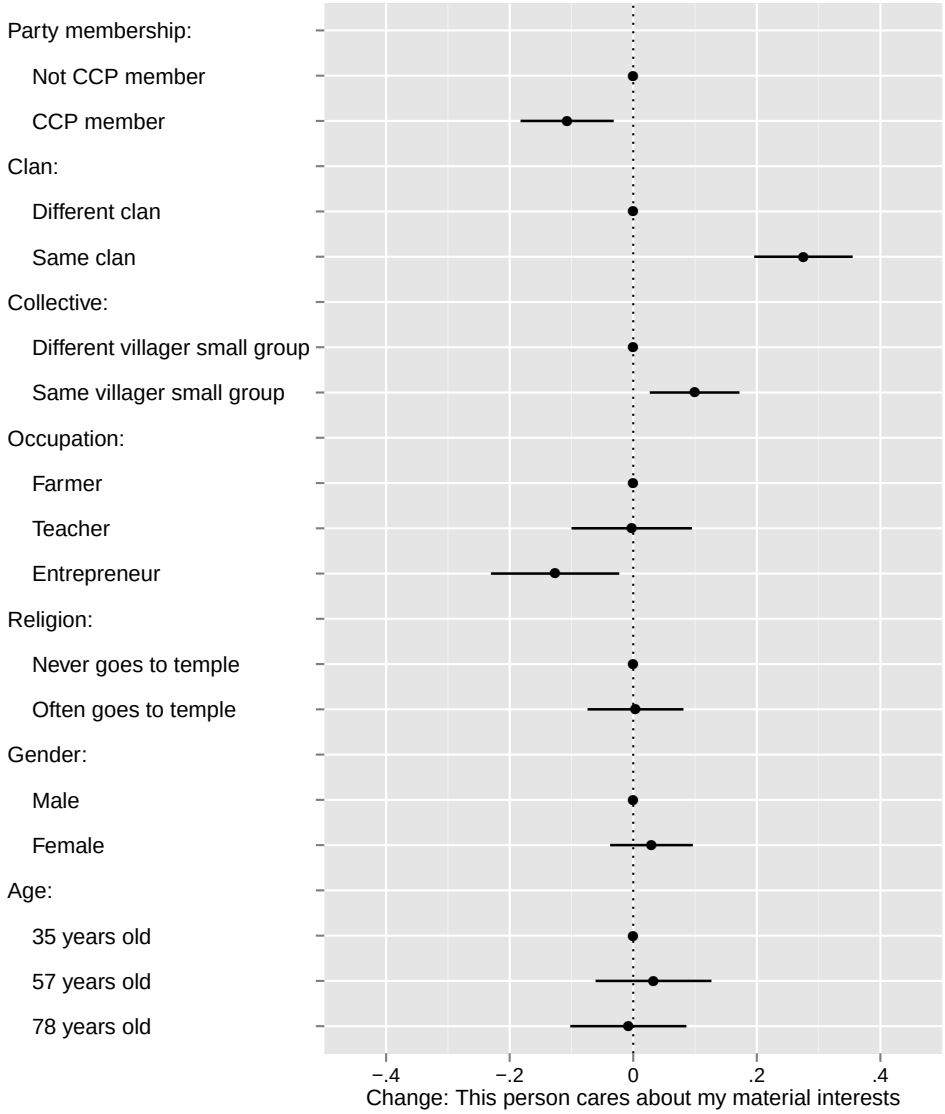
There is also evidence of male voters discriminating against female candidates. In the overall population, being female is slightly penalized by voters, though not at a statistically significant level. Once we break down respondents by sex, however, a divide emerges. Female respondents do not strongly discriminate on gender; female respondents are 2.8 percentage points more likely to vote for female candidates (SE=2.7). However, male respondents are 5.6 percentage points *less* likely to vote for a female candidate (SE=2.4).

Finally, age has no discernible effect on voters' preferences. Voters exhibit a slight preference for middle-aged candidates over young and post-retirement age candidates. This is generally consistent with findings that older candidates are preferred in promotion at higher levels of government in China, and that voters in Vietnamese elections prefer older candidates. However, it suggests that candidates over the retirement age may face a penalty.

The middling performance of Party candidates seems to result, at least in part, from a perception that Party members' interests run counter to that of regular villagers. As a follow-up to the main vote choice question, I asked voters to rate on a 1 to 7 scale how much they thought each candidate cared about (*zaihu*) the voter's material interests (*liyi*). Figure 2.2 presents estimates for this variable.

Voters clearly penalize candidates who belong to the Party. They rate them about a tenth

Figure 2.2: Point estimates of marginal effect of candidate attributes on assessment of whether the candidate cares about the material interests of voters with 95 percent confidence intervals.



of a point lower than other candidates. One interpretation of this result is that villagers think that Party members act to advance their own interests, but that their interests are separate from that of regular villagers.

Voters specifically penalize the Party when it is associated with the local business class.

Voters rate Communist Party members who are also entrepreneurs 0.20 points lower (SE=0.07) than non-Party entrepreneurs, which is a statistically significant difference. On the other hand they do not penalize farmers (estimate=-0.08, SE=0.06) or teachers (estimate=-0.04, SE 0.06) for belonging to the Party.

The Party nominally represents the interests of workers and peasants. Yet unlike China in the Mao era, the Party cannot count on being able to mobilize villagers based on the prestige of the Party alone.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have made three major points. First, the Communist Party suffers from a lack of popularity at the grassroots. Voters do not prefer its candidates in elections and they believe that Party cadres are unlikely to care about their material interests. This presents a problem for the Party, which like any authoritarian regime would like to control its citizens.

Second, the social networks created by civil society groups like lineages or neighborhoods are powerful channels of political mobilization. Voters prefer to vote for candidates who belong to the same kin group or neighborhood. They also believe that leaders who belong to these groups care deeply about their interests.

Given the relative weakness of the Party compared to local civil society, the Party faces a problem of political control. Like any government, the Chinese Party-state wishes to exert control over local politics but the weakness of the Party brand, and the strength of popular groups, creates a serious problem.

Let us return a final time to the case of Yuelu village presented at the beginning of the chapter. In Yuelu, village elections following protests against the village's leadership resulted in the elevation of local elites with power rooted in neighborhood-based voting blocs rather than the Party.

Did the elevation of these neighborhood leaders represent a loss of Party control over village politics? In the short run, perhaps. But in the medium-term, the election did not diminish Party control over the village, it replenished it. The previous leadership had squandered its political support within the village. The new leaders — with their power based on long-standing neighborhood ties — would be more able to rally popular support in favor of government policies.

In the end, the elevation of these more popular leaders into office ended up strengthening the hand of the local government in Yuelu. Two years after the election, a local developer announced they would be demolishing a large portion of the village to make way for a new mall, with no indication that the compensation package would be increased from the deal that villagers emphatically rejected in 2013. With the village's key civil society leaders now part of the government, no one took to the streets.

In the next chapter, I show how the Party can use the power of local elites to its advantage, to ensure broad-based political compliance with its policies and increase the rents from office.

Chapter 3

A Theory of State Power

> Where force is used, authority itself has failed.
>
> — Hannah Arendt, "What is Authority"[1]

Like all authoritarian regimes, the Chinese Communist Party faces a problem of political control and compliance. As the survey evidence presented in Chapter 3 showed, the Party does not command the loyalty of non-members, who believe the Party represents the interests of business elites. How, then, can the country's leaders elicit compliance from the majority of the population and maintain authoritarian order?

One view is that authoritarian states primarily control their populations using coercion. The state can force people to comply with the state at the end of the barrel of a gun, and the state can ratchet up pressure in other ways. For example, one protester I spoke to in Guangdong, who was fighting the seizure of her home, described a sustained campaign of intimidation to force her to comply with the expropriation. Men followed her whenever she left her house, whether to visit friends or go grocery shopping. These men wore simple black slacks and shirts, so she had no way to know if they were plainclothes police or the village committee's more menacing privately contracted "security" (*bao'an*), who had few scruples about using violence. When following the protester around did not result in her compliance, someone in the village leadership sent a message that hinted at the possibility of physical harm. As the protester told me: "One evening they placed at my doorstep some rotting pig heads and pig bones... less than an hour later they came back and placed more pig heads, pig skin, pig ears and tails at my door."

[1] Arendt (1961, p. 93).

However, as a growing literature on authoritarian politics shows, direct repression and intimidation of this kind is rare. Coercion is not only expensive, it risks popular backlash. Carried to an illogical extreme, imagine a state that acted like mafia enforcers, placing pig entrails on everyone's doorsteps as a warning against noncompliance. This type of heavily coercive state might quickly alienate its citizens and push them to revolt. How does an authoritarian state get citizens to comply with its policies without resorting to coercion?

In this chapter, using a mix of qualitative evidence and a game theoretical model, I argue that democratic and participatory institutions at the local level allow the Party to co-opt the leaders of civil society groups, and use social ties as tools of political control and domination. Local elections and other quasi-democratic institutions help officials determine which local elites command the most influence. Once the Party incorporates these local elites into patronage networks, they have incentives to use their informal political influence to encourage popular compliance with the local state's policies, such as land redistribution.

3.1 The Politics of Compliance

My argument is that inclusive institutions — or at least the facade of democracy, inclusion, and responsiveness — can be useful tools of political control for political leaders. These institutions, which range from village councils to advisory committees, help officials draw local notables into the state. If these local notables endorse policies, it makes it harder for the groups they seemingly represent to act collectively and systematically defy the state and its policies.

Imagine the mayor of an American city about to undertake a large-scale program of "urban renewal."[2] The project requires appropriating large swaths of urban land in order to build new public buildings and a network of highways and roads that connect the downtown to the suburbs. The project will involve tearing down a working class neighborhood whose Italian and Jewish residents will need to move elsewhere. The neighborhood's houses are older and some are not well maintained, and since it does not fit his idea of what a developed and prosperous city looks like, the mayor calls the neighborhood an "eyesore" and a "slum."

[2]This hypothetical is inspired by Tsai (2007a, pp. 86), who undertakes a similar exercise. The description roughly parallels the politics of urban renewal in New Haven, Connecticut in the 1960s, as described by Dahl (2005) and Rae (2008). I revisit the case of urban redevelopment in the United States in the conclusion.

This sort of development project has some clear winners and losers, which in this case break down along ethnic and class lines. The winners include local business elites, especially those in the real estate and construction industries that will build the project, and the largely white Protestant residents of outlying suburbs and towns, who will benefit from the new transportation infrastructure. The losers are the residents of the neighborhoods that will be torn down, which are largely Jewish and Italian-American. To find housing with a similar price they will need to move away from downtown its amenities, and they will need to pay more for their commute to work.

Anticipating the possibility of resistance, the mayor creates a quasi-democratic body called the Citizens Action Committee that includes the leaders from the city's important civil society groups. Notably, the committee includes leaders of both the Jewish and Italian-American communities, as well as the President of the most powerful local union.[3] In other words, the committee includes the leaders of the constituencies that stand to lose the most from the development project.

Rather than checking the power of the mayor, the body serves to co-opt the leaders of the community. For example, the leader of the Italian-American community also happens to own a construction company,[4] and he receives assurances that lucrative contracts will flow his way from the redevelopment project. The committee never once rejects any of the mayor's key proposals for the development project.[5]

The community leaders lend their support to the plan and their moral authority helps to forestall mobilization among the affected residents. The president of the union rebukes the young labor organizers who are drawing up plans to mobilize against the project and they sheepishly agree to stop. After synagogue and Sunday mass, as the respective congregations linger and chat, the pillars of the Jewish and Italian-American communities tell their friends they support the mayor's redevelopment project. The young organizers trying to organize a petition drive in these two communities find their neighbors are reluctant to sign. The fact that elders have lent their moral authority to the project gives many people pause.

The support of social notables help the mayor secure the acquiescence of the affected communities to the demolition of their neighborhood. He is able to use eminent domain to

[3]The Citizens Action Committee that had nominal oversight over New Haven's redevelopment plan had a similar composition. See Dahl (2005, p. 131).

[4]Ibid., 131.

[5]Ibid., pp. 124-125.

appropriate their land and homes and remake the city in his image. In the long run, the project does not have clear benefits to the communities that have been displaced, who take on substantial costs in their forced move from the center of the city. In effect, the project regressively redistributes wealth from the lower middle class to the upper middle class.

This case parallels village land development in China. A key difference is that weak rule of law makes it easier to co-opt social elites by providing them with rents. When civil society leaders take up official posts, they can use their combination of moral authority and their control over the flow of information in group social networks to help them control village politics and increase compliance. The case of Beiyan village in the introduction demonstrates how close ties to village civil society aided village officials in undertaking a land expropriation.

The use of *formal* institutions to co-opt social elites is important. It might seem as though local officials might prefer to informally co-opt social elites by buying their favor and influence on the side. However, this type of arrangement is dangerous for all sides. For officials, loyalty is best ensured by integrating these elites into formal state and party networks, where they participate in bonding rituals like banquets with heavy drinking, and where outsiders are not always welcome. (Several interviewees told me that the more important element of building *guanxi*, or connections, is what sometimes happens after these banquets: gambling and hiring sex workers. Since these activities are both illegal, the possibility of mutual incrimination provides all parties with incentives to cooperate with each other, given repeated interaction.) But the incentives for joining formal institutions are perhaps even stronger for social elites, since without joining state institutions they have no formal authority and thus no protection against local officials who might seek to move against them, confiscate their property, and renege on their promises. For these local elites, a position of formal authority is a credible commitment, but a credible commitment to them and them alone, to their political safety. As one told me about the local government: "How else could I trust their promises?"[6]

Elections provide the easiest way to determine which villagers have the most social authority, and are therefore of the greatest use to local officials in projecting state power, but less democratic institutions can also suffice. Competing to mobilize voters is a test of an individual's authority over their fellow villagers. However, once they have proven themselves

[6]This echoes the argument made by Gehlbach and Keefer (2011), which is that formal positions within authoritarian institutions help leaders to credibly commit to restraining from confiscation.

capable, villagers are often drawn into the party.[7] So throughout this dissertation I refer to quasi-democratic institutions to shorthand the combination of democratic elections with authoritarian, party-based control.

Others have also taken note of the way in which social authority increase state dominance, at least in passing. Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li write about a village official in northern China with the surname Wang whose social authority within his lineage helps him to to ensure political quiescence:

> When asked why they had failed to press their complaints [against officials]... several villagers had said it was pointless. Only a few people supported the [aggrieved villagers], and no one had compelling evidence that Wang [the village cadre] was corrupt. It was also commonly assumed that Wang had bought off the township officials, since they frequently drank and gambled together. To cap it all, nearly two-thirds of the villagers shared one surname and Wang was one of the highest-ranking clan elders; even the most disgruntled [villagers] were far from confident they could successfully challenge Wang, particularly since he was the sort of man who would certainly attempt to settle scores if he was not removed from power. "Why risk so much to remove one corrupt cadre," said a villager, "when it's better to be governed by a full tiger than a hungry wolf?"[8]

Of course, it is not just scholars who have taken note: one mark of the importance of these social institutions, and the plausibility of my theory, is that village officials themselves attempt to cultivate them in order to govern their villages. Lily Tsai writes of one village with strong lineage group institutions:

> The moral authority that village officials in Li Settlement have earned through organizing public projects and supporting the creation of a villagewide lineage group has also been invaluable for implementing state tasks such as birth control and tax collection. Villagers in Li Settlement say they know that officials are just doing their jobs. They generally comply with birth control quotas and state tax collection and do not fault village officials for fining the three couples in the last year who violated the family policy... Li Settlement is a particularly interesting

[7] Oi and Rozelle (2000) and Guo and Bernstein (2004).
[8] O'Brien and Li (1995, p. 757).

> case because unlike previous cases, village officials are not only subject to the village lineage group's moral obligations but they have also helped to create or at least reinforce them.[9]

Why does the social status of local officials matter? In what follows, argue that social elites are important both because they have symbolic or moral authority, which they can use to directly pressure villagers, and because they are central nodes in village social networks, and so if they stand to the side it makes collective action more difficult.

3.2 Moral Authority and Political Obedience: The Case of Xiaogang Village

Moral standing and trust are an important resource for political leaders. Survey work by Tom Tyler and Peter Degoey on institutions in the United States, such as the Supreme Court and the police, has shown that "trust [in authorities] consistently influences feelings of obligation to obey organizational rules and laws."[10] As Tyler notes, when a trusted figure of authority encourages compliance, it can induce both a willingness to accept a decision as fair and in the best interests of the group, and also a "feeling of obligation to obey the rules."[11] Lily Tsai notes that "in places such as China, where citizen distrust of the state is high and officials either cannot or do not want to use coercion... moral standing can be an invaluable political resource that helps them to implement difficult state policies such as tax collection and birth control."[12]

As an example, consider the case of Xiaogang Village, in rural Henan Province. In the early 2000s, the village needed to upgrade its electrical power system. The jury-rigged wiring installed in the Maoist era could not handle the demands of a rapidly modernizing village where every home had a television set and modern lighting.

Yet even seemingly mundane matters like upgrading a village's electrical network require compliance and cooperation from citizens. In Xiaogang, tapping into the county grid involved running power lines through farmers' fields. One farmer who field the line would have crossed, Farmer Wu, would have none of it. Installing the utility pole would require digging up his

[9] Tsai (2007a, p. 175).
[10] Tyler and Degoey (1996, p. 336).
[11] Tyler (1998, p. 283).
[12] Tsai (2007a, pp. 89-90).

crops, and once that temporary disruption had passed he complained that the concrete foundation of the utility pole would take up space, making him lose cultivatable land. "It was only a matter of a tiny patch of dirt, but nevertheless, he resisted," a former village official told me.

Personal ties, however, can give the local government a crucial advantage. The village chief considered going to the township government to resolve the dispute, but he worried that course of action was too unpredictable. He thought that Farmer Wu, a volatile personality, might accuse the village committee of corruption — and if that happened, who knows whose side the township might take.

Fortunately for the village chief, a powerful member of Wu's clan was a member of the village committee, so the chief went to this senior member of the clan to ask for help. The clan leader went to Wu and told him that the electrical upgrading project would benefit the entire village, and that the decision to run the lines through the field was a fair and just one. Wu felt an obligation to listen to the elder, both because he faced the threat of social ostracism if he was rude and because, like most villagers, he trusted the elder as an impartial arbiter, whose decisions were fair. Wu stood down and accepted having the line run through his field. As the clan leader told me: "because of my position in the clan (*beifen*) he *had* to listen to me."

At the core of these relationships are status hierarchies that confer legitimacy on leaders and help them elicit compliance with their groups. Writing on the nature of authority more generally, Hannah Arendt notes:

> The authoritarian relation between the one who commands and the one who obeys rests neither on common reason nor on the power of the one who commands; what they have in common is the hierarchy itself, whose rightness and legitimacy both recognize and where both have their predetermined stable place.[13]

Arendt has in mind a much broader idea about the nature of political authority. In rural China, however, it is the "predetermined" and "stable order" of village social hierarchies that can help to increase the authority of local officials.

[13] Arendt (1961, p. 93).

3.3 Information and Collective Action Problems: The Case of Beiyan Village

A second way that local states benefit from incorporating local elites into state networks is that these elites have control over information and they are therefore crucial to resolving group collective action problems. The village of Beiyan in Henan Province, which I discussed in the opening pages of the dissertation, is a case in point. In Beiyan, a lineage leader won an election for the post of village committee chief. He then used his authority over village land allocations to requisition a few acres of land and built a factory on it. He compensated villagers nothing for their lost land. This kind of land taking by a village official is almost certainly illegal. Why did villagers fail to organize against the village chief right away?

The lineage leader's position within village social networks — and especially his role in disseminating information to the group — helps to explain the lack of collective action. As a successful entrepreneur, the lineage leader had proven himself to be capable individual and one with connections to local officials. In the course of everyday village politics, he was a fixer of sorts: the sort of person that villagers would go to in order to ask about local policies and maybe to get a favor done. One villager told me that if they had wanted to organize a petition against village officials, he was who they would have gone to, at least before he joined the village committee himself. For resolving smaller group collective action problems, like gathering contributions for a funeral or wedding, they would go to these lineage elites to help them.

When he used his authority as village leader to take land, villagers lack of information left them divided over what course of action to take. Some villagers wanted to go to the village chief to ask for some compensation. "But we did not know what the compensation standard was," one villager told me. The village chief explained that as a village official he had near-total authority over land allocations, and while he could point to provisions in China's rural land laws that gives village political institutions authority over land contracting decisions,[14] he neglected to mention that this type of expropriation is likely illegal.

In addition to their confusion over the law, he exploited villagers uncertainty about the intricacies of who would benefit from the project. The village official claimed that he

[14]See Article 12, "Law of the People's Republic of China on Land Contracts in Rural Areas." Available at `http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Law/2007-12/06/content_1382125.htm`, last accessed on July 10, 2016.

would not personally benefit from the land taking, though according to villagers it would later emerge that he had an ownership stake in the factory. Few locals received jobs in the factory. "We did not think he would betray us (*beipan cunmin*)," one former village official told me.

Months after the process had started, a group of villagers organized a collective petition, but they did so much too late: ground had already broken on the factory project, and higher-ups in the township and county had evidently given their blessing to the project. Several years later, when I was conducting my fieldwork, the factory was still running, the clan leader had stepped down to tend to his businesses, and a small band of villagers were still unsuccessfully seeking some kind of restitution.

When the social elites who customarily solve group collective action problems are on the sidelines, it makes it difficult to mobilize against land takings with the speed and scale needed to derail them. Of the two mechanisms, this may be the most durable. After all, officials like the clan leader may well lose their moral authority while in office fi their group decides that their actions are unjust. But a leaderless group is still faced with a severe collective action problem, especially in an authoritarian state where collective action is dangerous.

3.4 Autonomous Elites: The Case of Wukan Village

So far I have concentrated on cases where social elites are co-opted. What happens when they remain autonomous? The case of Wukan Village, where I conducted fieldwork, shows how autonomous social elites can become powerful adversaries of the state. Wukan lies on China's subtropical southern coast, a long afternoon's bus ride from the economic powerhouses of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou. In December 2012, thousands of farmers gathered in Wukan's main square and major thoroughfares to protest the confiscation of their land by village and township cadres to protest land seizures, in a protest that ended up receiving global news coverage.

Officials in Wukan had been confiscating land for years. In the 1990s, Wukan's Communist Party Secretary created a corporation dedicated to promoting local "industrial development," and installed himself as the vice-CEO of the company. He appointed the village committee head general manager; a developer from Hong Kong was named CEO. Over the years, the company sold off hundreds acres of village land, reaping some 700 million *yuan* in

revenue (the equivalent of about 100 million U.S. dollars). The healthy profits from this sale evidently went almost entirely to the company's owners and managers, many of whom were village cadres.[15] Villagers were told nothing about the details of these land transactions, and were paid only about 500 *yuan* per household in compensation, or about 75 dollars, which was less than 1 percent of the revenue from the sales.[16] Meanwhile, villagers who applied for permits to use village land to expand their houses were routinely turned down by village officials.[17]

Anger over the land expropriations grew slowly over time, culminating in September 2011 when villagers discovered workers doing construction on a field near the village entrance — and discovered that much of the village's remaining land had been sold. Protest leaders told me that young villagers had been trying to organize villagers to protest land seizures using social media, but since most older villages were not frequent users of QQ and other social media services, this proved ineffective. However, the confiscation of much of the village's remaining land galvanized villagers.

To organize protests, villagers turned not to social media but to something much more old fashioned: the village's lineage group heads. Wukan village has 47 separate lineage groups, each of which has an acknowledged lineage head (*zuzhang*). These lineage heads are generally men in the 50s and older who have proven themselves to be capable leaders. According to villagers I spoke with, they are not elected but often emerge by consensus. Before the protests (and indeed after them) these leaders often resolved disputes within the group and served as representatives of their lineage in dealings with the village government.

The protesters created a lineage council that represented each of the village's lineage groups, and that represented the village in dealings with the local government. With the backing of lineage leaders, protesters took to the streets. After this initial protest in September 2011, the police restored order, but the death of one of the protest leaders while police custody sparked an even larger uprising that December. Protesters stormed the police station and village committee offices, forcing the police and Party members to flee the village. The police then cordoned off the village, preventing villagers from entering or leaving the village. Once it became evident that the standoff would not be quickly resolved, it became evident that some other actor would need to step in to impose order and govern the protests.

[15]See He and Xue (2014, p. 129).

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid. My own interviews in Wukan confirmed this.

Figure 3.1: A lineage group's ancestral hall in Wukan village.

Interestingly, protest leaders and the state both turned to lineage groups.

With the party and police expelled from the village, the lineage council became the *de facto* government of Wukan. Lineage leaders helped to enforce order and ensure that sanitation, water, and other basic services continued uninterrupted (even though the government applied pressure on protesters by cutting off shipments of rice and other basic staples into the village). According to a village committee member I interviewed, they also created a representative assembly with 1 to 5 members from each clan, proportional on the size of the group. This assembly also represented the village in negotiations with the government.

The protest leaders and outside academics and rights activists I spoke to tended portrayed the role of the lineage leaders and the lineage assembly as an essential part of the success of the movement. (Some thought it was the Party itself that pushed for the creation of this assembly, since the assembly imposed order on the village and gave the party a single institution to bargain with and resolve the crisis.) For local officials, these autonomous lineage elites have been formidable forces. As one village official in Wukan told me about his tenure governing the village: "The web of relationships here is so complex, it is essential

to have these lineage leaders to coordinate (*xietiao*) with me."

It is easy enough to see why in the specific case of Wukan village, people trust the lineage elites who stood up for them and fought for more compensation. Why, however, do villagers trust social elites who betray them? Are they being irrational? The following section shows why even rational villagers may have incentives to comply with social leaders even if there is the possibility of a potentially devastating betrayal.

3.5 A Formal Model of Political Compliance

I argue that citizens sometimes comply with their leaders even when they are uncertain of whether or not the leaders will remain loyal to the group or betray them. While this may seem irrational or short-sighted, a simple formal model illustrates how people need not be irrational to behave this way. The formal model is not meant to capture my overall theory, but rather to explain the somewhat puzzling behavior of villagers who comply with leaders in such a high-stakes situation.

The formal model has two interesting and somewhat counterintuitive results. First, it shows that even when the consequences of political betrayal are potentially catastrophic, group members will often comply with their leaders anyway. Second, it shows that rent seeking is more severe in poorer areas with slower growth than in wealthy areas — an otherwise puzzling pattern that is borne out anecdotally in China, where some of the most egregious instances of corruption happen in the most remote rural areas.

The model has three players — nature, citizens, and an official — and consistent with how local development proceeds in China and much of the developing world, they move sequentially. Nature moves first and randomly determines whether it is a period low rents (with probability p) or high rents (with probability $1 - p$) for officials who engage in corruption.

Citizens move second, and they have a strategic choice of whether to comply with the local state's policy or resist it. For the sake of simplicity, citizens are treated as a unitary actor. A key feature of the model is that they have incomplete knowledge about the state of the world. That is, villagers lack information about the state of the local economy: whether they have entered a period of high or low growth, and more concretely whether or not officials will be able to rent the expropriated land for a large sum or a small sum. As the structured case studies throughout this dissertation will make clear, this assumption of

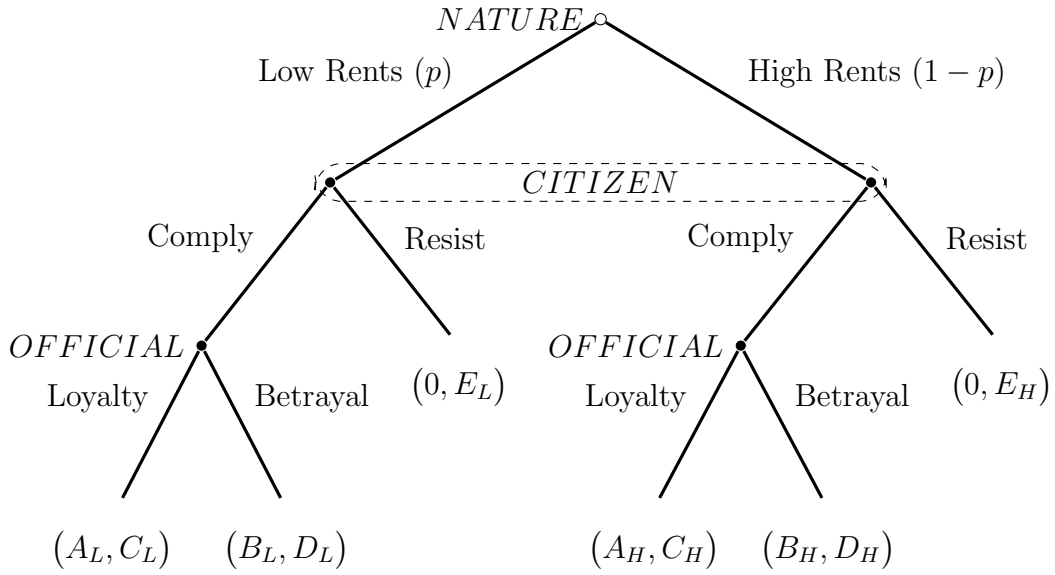


Figure 3.2: A sequential game of political compliance under uncertainty.

incomplete information is well supported by the evidence. These development projects are opaque and citizens complains that they have little idea of how much money is changing hands. In the model, if citizens comply with the policy, the official has the opportunity to make a move. If they resist, the game ends. This reflects the idea that when citizens unite in resistance, they can feasibly block local development projects.

Finally, officials have a choice between providing for the group ("loyalty") and private rent seeking ("betrayal"). That is, officials can remain loyal to their group and share the proceeds from development with them. Or they can abuse their political power and line their own pockets, effectively betraying their group. Figure 3.2 illustrates the structure of the model.

Citizens and officials have differing preferences over the outcomes. Citizens prefer the loyal, good governance outcome above all else. Their least favored outcome is the rent seeking one, in which they comply with the policy and the official then uses this as an opportunity for rent seeking. Their preference ordering is $A_L > 0 > B_L$ and $A_H > 0 > B_H$ using the payoffs notation in Figure 3.2. The preference ordering for officials depends on the state of the world. When the local economy is stagnant and there is low investment, and consequently low payoffs to rent seeking, the threat of informal sanctions is enough to make

them prefer the good governance outcome over rent seeking and resistance. That is, their ordering is $C_L > D_L > E_L$. However, in a high investment state of the world, the threat of social sanctions cannot hold officials to account, and in this case they prefer rent seeking to good governance and the resistance outcome least of all. In other words, their preference ordering is $D_H > C_H > E_H$.

Under certain conditions, there is a unique subgame perfect equilibrium where citizens will play comply no matter what, and officials play loyalty in the low rents state of the world and betrayal in the high rents state of the world. To show this, I solve the game by backwards induction. Since the official operates with perfect information, she will always chose to play "loyalty" when the citizen plays comply in the low investment state of the world, and she will always play "betray" when the citizen plays comply in the high investment state of the world. The citizenry's choice of the comply strategy depends on their beliefs about the state of the world. The expected payoffs for compliance exceed resistance when the following condition is met:

$$p(A_L) + (1-p)B_H > p0 + (1-p)0 \tag{3.1}$$

This inequality can be rewritten as:

$$p(A_L) > (1-p)B_H \tag{3.2}$$

This has a natural interpretation. Compliance will be a subgame perfect equilibrium when the citizenry believes that the probability p of it being a low rent period is sufficiently high that the expected payoff of the "loyalty" payout exceeds the expected penalty of the "betrayal" payoff.

Real world data suggests that this equilibrium and the beliefs it implies are plausible. Suppose for example that the payoff for complying in the low investment state of the world and getting A_L, the loyalty payoff, is worth an additional 1000 *yuan*, or something on that order of magnitude. This is consistent with the estimates from Xu and Yao (2015) for the marginal increase on public spending of having a leader from a large clan in office. This may also incorporate the benefits of vote buying in a typical election, which may pay out several hundred *yuan*. Now suppose that the cost of compliance in a high investment state of the world is on the order of a loss of 100,000 *yuan*. This could be thought of as a rough approximation of the cost of complying with an poorly compensated land requisition, instead

of keeping the land or receiving a high level of compensation.[18] Numbers along these lines suggest a belief that land requisitions occur in around 1 percent of villages each year.[19] This gets the order of magnitude about right, since land requisitions occurred in between 1 to 10 percent of villages each year between 2001 and 2010.[20] While I would not put great stock in the particular numbers used here, the numbers suggest this model at least roughly captures a central dynamic of these land takings.

In short, even though land requisitions can be catastrophic for households, households may still rationally comply with them under conditions of uncertainty. An additional interesting feature of the model is that it suggests that poorer villages might experience more severe corruption. As the size of p decreases, or as the probability of being in the high growth state of the world decreases, it increases the potential size of $\mid B_H \mid$, or the cost of complying with an official. This finding is consistent with some anecdotal evidence that rent seeking in even poor areas can be especially lucrative, as it was in Wukan, which in the context of southern China is a relatively poor village.

3.6 Conclusion

Complying with the state and its policies can be costly, and yet most people most of the time do not violently resist. "There is good reason," James C. Scott writes, "for holding that rebellion is one of the least likely consequences of exploitation."[21] Citizens generally obey the state because states set up systems that make overt displays of resistance unwise.

However, states can also exert control without threats of punishment by co-opting civil society leaders using quasi-democratic institutions. These social elites can help the state elicit compliance directly, by using their moral authority to pressure villagers to obey state mandates. It is often also enough that these social elites have been sidelined by the state, since it exacerbates group collective action problems. This method of imposing authoritarian order can help non-democratic states elicit compliance on the cheap.

[18] See *Landesa China Survey* (2011).

[19] Using the inequality above, this implies that $p(1000) > (1-p)100000$ and the probability of a low growth period $p > 0.99$.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] Scott (1977, p. 93).

Chapter 4

Elite Betrayal: Lineage Groups

The theory of state power suggests that when social elites are included in local political institutions, they help the state to implement key policies. In this chapter, I evaluate this hypothesis using a mix of qualitative and quantitative evidence to examine the role that lineage group elites play in land expropriations. Lineages are in many villages in rural China the most politically salient social identity, as my survey evidence from Chapter 2 showed. This makes a study of lineage groups a natural place to begin my empirical analysis. Since land expropriations redistribute hundreds of billions of dollars of wealth every year, they are also a natural starting point for an examination of the nature of state power in rural China.

I show how the legitimacy of lineage group elites makes them powerful actors during conflicts over state expropriations of village land. Qualitative cases and a survey experiment demonstrate that villagers have a high degree of confidence in information supplied by their lineage group leaders. As a result, when lineage group leaders are incorporated into village political institutions, it gives local officials a powerful tool to elicit compliance with land redistribution. Using data from a national survey, I find that when lineage elites join village political institutions, it increases the likelihood of a land expropriation by 14 to 20 percent. These land requisitions by lineage leaders also lead to widespread political dissatisfaction and lower incomes.

4.1 Lineage Groups and State Power in Rural China

The political logic of land redistribution and of everyday governance are very different. When it comes to public goods and services, civil society groups and the informal institutions they

create can encourage cooperation and accountability. One reason why this is the case is that financial stakes for public goods provision are low. The average village in China spends around $15,000 per year on public goods, which makes the potential payoff from skimming funds off the village budget fairly small. Since cadres cannot gain at most a few thousand dollars from corruption, the threat of social sanctions — or the promise of social rewards — can plausibly hold officials accountable. Moreover, villages set their budgets every year which makes public goods provision a repeated game. This kind of repeated interaction allows for norms to develop over time that reward cooperators and punish defectors.

However, land development upends the logic of everyday village politics. In China, a single acre of expropriated land yields, on average, over a hundred thousand dollars of revenue for local governments.[1] Instead of corruption netting a few thousand dollars, it can net hundreds of thousands of dollars, even for a lowly village cadre. The enormous stakes makes the social punishment for selling out the group ineffective. For that kind of money, villages officials often find that it is worth making a few enemies. In this context, elites have incentives to defect from the group and to use their influence within village social hierarchies to encourage compliance with land requisitions, about which villagers generally have very low levels of information. In other words, strong social institutions can benefit citizens when it comes to public goods yet hurt them when it comes to property protection — suggesting that social institutions serve as both channels of bottom-up informal accountability *and* top-down political control.

Two structured case studies illuminate the role that lineage elites play in exerting political control over their members with land expropriations. The case studies I present here are from villages in the same prefecture in Eastern Guangdong. No two villages can represent a country as large and diverse as China; I present them here because they illustrate the causal process at work in relatively clear terms, and provide some intuition for the basis for the theory.

These two villages are "most-similar" cases,[2] with comparable economic, social, and political conditions. I originally selected these two villages from the survey data because Headwater Village represented an interesting hard case — it lies along a major road to the prefectural capital, is reasonably well off, and yet in defiance of expectations no land ex-

[1]Data on public goods from Martinez-Bravo et al. (2011). Data on expropriated land from *Landesa China Survey* (2011).

[2]Przeworski and Teune (1970).

propriations have occurred. Nearby Peng Village village had nearly identical characteristics. The key difference is that in Headwater Village, influential members of the village lineage group have remained independent from village political institutions, whereas in Peng Village they have joined it.

Table 4.1: Headwater and Peng Village case studies.

	Headwater Village	Peng Village
Annual income in yuan, median	12,000	10,000
Years schooling, mean	5.7	5.9
Competitive elections	No	No
Distance to city	20 km	26 km
Annual religious festival	Yes	Yes
Lineage groups	Yes	Yes
Lineage group elites	*Not village cadres*	*Village cadres*
Land expropriations	No	Yes

Peng Village has a single dominant lineage group, with resources including an ancestral hall and a record of common ancestors called a *zupu*. The village chief has for years been an unofficial leader of the kinship group. Even before he took his position, he had emerged as someone to whom others would go to for information, to resolve disputes, and to consult with on matters like weddings. When asked who the most influential member of the kinship group currently is, villagers generally mentioned the village chief; when asked who the leader was in the years before he joined the village committee, most still named him.

In 2009 the village chief and Party Secretary used their power over the land reallocations to distribute, probably illegally, about 30 plots of farmland to an entrepreneur from a nearby city. The leaders used what one villager called "dirty tricks" (*bianxiang shoufa*) to prevent immediate mobilization against the plan, taking advantage of the village's dense social networks and others' lack of information about the development plan. First, they persuaded other lineage leaders – the heads of the village's "big families" (*dahu renwu*) – that the expropriation scheme would benefit everyone. Once they had the backing of these key allies, they moved on to persuading the "little families" (*xiaohu renwu*) to support the plan. Officials then collected several thousand dollars from nearly every household as a down

payment on a new apartment, an amount which for many farmers represented most of their savings.

However, the housing never materialized, leaving villagers with bulldozed farmland and empty bank accounts.[3] The leaders fled to the nearby township. Villagers suspected township officials protected them because they, too, had benefitted from the scheme. As one villager lamented, the committee chief and Party Secretary treated their kin group members like "lackeys" (*zhushou*) and then betrayed them.

When lineage group elites are included in village political institutions, they use their social power to pressure villagers to support land and other expropriation schemes. Villagers face steep costs to organizing against the local state. They also face high levels of uncertainty about the value of any expropriation deal on the table. Overcoming the collective action problem is difficult under these conditions of uncertainty, especially when socially influential villagers have expressed support for the plan.

However, in the hamlet of Headwater, a few miles down the road, the influential members of the village's dominant lineage group have not joined the government. When asked who the most influential members of the lineage group are, most villagers named one of a small group of men who are not members of the village committee. The key village committee members and Party officers have little social authority or "prestige" (*weiwang*) within the lineage group.

The core of lineage group elites plays an almost daily role in bargaining with the government and even providing private governance. They gather funds to provide a modest stipend for retirees and the poor, and put on a religious festival that requires a high degree of collective organization. When asked villagers who they would go to if they had a dispute with the local government, villagers frequently mentioned one of the lineage leaders. Despite a favorable location near a highway to the prefecture's administrative seat, there have been no land requisitions by village officials in Headwater.

The threat of violent collective action organized by independent kinship group leaders is not an abstract threat for village cadres in Headwater. Indeed, a half hour's drive down the road from Headwater is a village whose tight-knit lineage groups forced the Party Secretary and village committee to flee during violent protests over land expropriations; another hour or so down the road is the village of Wukan, whose lineage leaders organized a similar protest

[3]Deininger and Jin (2009) find that in about a third of land takings, the project is not completed.

that ousted leaders. As a village committee member in a nearby village put it, "You can't get anywhere around here without negotiating (*xietiao*) with the lineage leaders first."

Observable Implications

The theory outlined in the section above suggests that when lineage leaders join village political institutions, they are likely to use their informal influence to pressure villagers to comply with land expropriations. On the other hand, where lineage leaders remain autonomous, the threat of collective action organized by these leaders restrains officials. This theory has several observable implications.

1. Lineage group leaders' endorsement of land expropriation plans should increase villagers' support for these plans.

2. When lineage elites become village cadres, land expropriations should be more likely to occur.

3. Land expropriations undertaken by lineage elites should be more exploitative, leading to more protests and other collective action after the fact.

In what follows, I test each of these observable implications using quantitative data.

4.2 The Informal Authority of Lineage Elites

What underpins the power of kin group leaders? The existing literature suggests that collective action is easier within identity groups because group members share common cultural symbols; because they are more "findable" in social networks; and because they can socially sanction each other.[4] However, I highlight a different mechanism. Informal institutions encourage deference to group elites and as a consequence other members of their group have a high degree of confidence in information supplied by these elites.

Uncertainty about important information is a key feature of land requisitions in China. Villagers lack information about whether they are being offered a good deal. Villagers do not know whether the state is willing to bargain over the terms of the expropriation, and

[4]Habyarimana et al. (2007).

they do not know when officials will turn to coercion. To some extent, villagers may also lack information about the willingness of others to engage in collective action.

Under conditions of uncertainty, lineage group leaders can provide valuable information. When a kinship group leader declares that a property confiscation plan is exploitative, this may persuade villagers that this is indeed the case, and it also signals that a wide range of others in their group may be willing to take costly collective action to protect their property. Yet when they endorse a land expropriation plan, villagers receive a signal that the offer may in fact be the best available, and that other members of their group may be not be willing to engage in collective action.

To test this proposition, I conducted an experiment in a rapidly urbanizing municipality in southern China. This municipality had recently announced a plan to "redevelop" (*gaizao*) dozens of surrounding villages, some of them still agricultural and others highly urban "villages in the city" (*chengzhongcun*). The redevelopment plans called for seizing villagers' land and homes in most of these villages, and the plan had received extensive local media coverage.

Villages were randomly selected using a multistage procedure, stratifying on whether or not the village was on the land seizure list, and by district. Within each randomly selected village the enumeration team canvassed door-to-door and in public spaces. It is important to note that the canvassing did not produce a random draw of households, but the resulting sample nonetheless closely matches the characteristics of the population that remains in these villages. The sample was 49.8 percent female, had on average a lower middle school (*chuzhong*) education, with a mean age of 54. The age of the sample reflects a slightly higher degree of out-migration by young villagers than is typical, but if anything this age bias weakens the results presented below; conditioning on age increases the statistical significance of the estimates.

An experimental manipulation measured whether villagers would be more likely to have confidence in information that came from kinship group leaders about property seizures. The prompt was meant to elicit opinions about the very real possibility that the government would act to seize their property. I randomized whether a statement supporting a property seizure plan was endorsed by either a village official, a lineage group leader, or a villager (which served as a baseline condition). Enumerators read villagers the following statement:

> This municipality has plans to "redevelop" dozens of villages by 2020. Suppose a

> [villager] [lineage leader] [village official] from your village said: "This redevelopment plan benefits us, we should all support it." Do you have confidence (*xinxin*) in this [villager's] [lineage leader's] [village official's] statement? [Yes] [No] [Don't know][5]

Each respondent only saw one prompt, so it was impossible for them to compare the identities of endorsers.[6]

There were several reasons to suspect that the endorsement experiment would not change respondents' confidence in the statement. Respondents faced the real likelihood that their property would be seized, and may have already had solidified attitudes towards existing plans. Respondents lived in an environment where lineage group ties were not particularly strong. In this municipality, lineage groups are salient features of local society, but only weakly so. Seventy percent of respondents reported they had no active ancestral hall or that they did not visit it. Moreover, respondents were presented with a prompt that did not mention a specific kinship group leader whom they knew and respected.

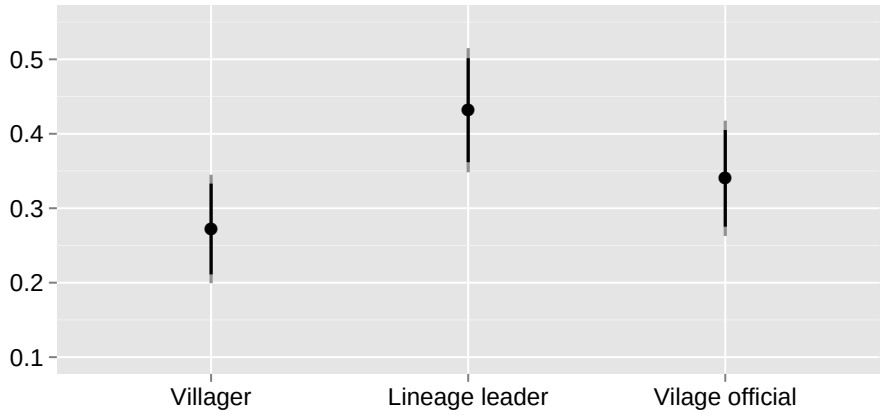
Even with these hurdles, villagers were significantly more confident in messages supplied by hypothetical kinship group leaders. Figure 4.1 shows the percentage of respondents that express confidence the endorsement made by each type of figure. Respondents were sixteen percentage points more likely to be confident in the endorsement of a kinship group leader when compared against a baseline condition, that of an anonymous villager. This difference is statistically significant at the $p = 0.05$ level. Villagers are also more nine percentage points more confident in statements made by lineage leaders than village officials. This difference is suggestive but is not statistically significant at the $p = 0.05$ level, though arguably the political sensitivity of the village official condition may have created a floor effect for this endorsement.

The results of the experiment suggest that villagers are more likely to have confidence in information about property takings from lineage group elites than villagers or officials, though the evidence is not conclusive on the later. I now turn to quantitative evidence that shows that including lineage group leaders in village political institutions is associated with an increase in land expropriations in villages throughout China.

[5]In the prompt, the term used for village official was *cun ganbu* and the term used for kinship leaders was *jiazu zhanglao*, or "lineage elder." Extensive pre-survey interviews suggested that in these villages the influential members of lineage groups were referred to this way. The precise number of villages to be redeveloped has been slightly altered here to protect the anonymity of respondents.

[6]The prompt is similar to a "confidence experiment" implemented by Chhibber and Sekhon (2014) in India.

Figure 4.1: Survey experiment results. Percentage expressing confidence in statement supporting expropriation plan, by type of leader endorsement. Dark lines show 90 percent confidence intervals and light lines 95 percent confidence intervals.



4.3 Elites and Land Expropriations

This section tests the second observable implication of the theory — when lineage groups join village political institutions it increases the likelihood of land expropriations, all else being equal. The implicit counterfactual are villages with active lineage groups, but where lineage leaders do not join village political institutions. Of course, the argument is not that these social institutions are the only determinant of land expropriations, only that they exert an independent causal effect.

I use the national dataset introduced in the pervious chapter to estimate the likelihood of land requisitions when lineage elites join village political institutions. No observational study can conclusively demonstrate a causal effect. However, the evidence shows a strong correlation between lineage leader incorporation and more land expropriations. The association holds when using different sets of control variables and regional fixed effects. The results also pass a placebo test, weakening the case that unobserved characteristics of villages drive the results.

I present least squares regression results that adjust for some of the most important potential confounders. Here, the general model I use is:

$$y_i = \alpha + \beta x_i + \mu z_i + \gamma_i + \theta_j + \epsilon_i \tag{4.1}$$

For each village i in the dataset, y_i is the dummy variable for a land expropriation. The variable z_i is an indicator for whether or not an active lineage group exists in the village, and the variable x_i is an indicator for whether or not the leader of the lineage group is also a village cadre. In most specifications, I also include a matrix of conditioning variables γ_i and province fixed effects, θ_j for each province j. The coefficient of interest is β, which captures the difference between villages with and without incorporated lineage group leaders, conditional on an active lineage group being present.

In column one of Table 4.2, I present results without any of the conditioning variables or fixed effects. Note that the coefficient estimate is the same as a difference in means estimate (this is because all villages with incorporated elites also have an active lineage group). Villages where lineage elites are cadres are 16 percentage points more likely to experience a land seizure than villages where lineage elites remain autonomous. This simple test is important because it demonstrates that the results do not depend on using a specific set of conditioning variables, or indeed any conditioning variables at all.

One rival explanation for the results is that economic and geographic characteristics drive both land expropriations and leader incorporation. For instance, it might be the case that lineage leaders have incentives to join the government in wealthier villages, where it may be more lucrative to be a village official; however, the government would expropriate land in these wealthy villages regardless of whether lineage leaders join the government. Or as work by Scott suggests, it could be the case that the state generally wishes to assimilate social groups and their elites, but it has better information about villages close to population centers and in areas with flatter terrain.[7] These villages are also more likely to experience land expropriations because land close to population centers is more valuable.

A related concern is that the results may be limited to specific regions of China. For example, the results may be driven by southern provinces, which have flourishing lineage groups and local civil societies.[8] To address this, the remaining specifications include province fixed effects.

Column (2) of the table presents results that condition on geographic and economic variables. It shows that including province fixed effects and conditioning on wealth (using the nighttime lights proxy), on distance from county seat, on terrain roughness, and on agricul-

[7]Scott (2009).

[8]Hurst et al. (2014).

Table 4.2: Ordinary least squares regression estimates for effect of lineage leader inclusion, where the dependent variable is an dummy variable for land expropriation occurring in the village.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Lineage leader is cadre	0.164**	0.142**	0.140**	0.141**
	(0.069)	(0.072)	(0.071)	(0.072)
Active lineage	−0.091*	−0.057	−0.044	−0.034
	(0.055)	(0.059)	(0.059)	(0.058)
Wealth (nighttime lights proxy)		0.004	0.003	0.003
		(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Distance to county seat (km)		−0.001	0.00004	0.0004
		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Terrain roughness		0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
		(0.0001)	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
Agricultural suitability index		0.054*	0.044	0.035
		(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.030)
Township control over elections			0.128	0.108
			(0.094)	(0.097)
Distance to township (km)			−0.010***	−0.010**
			(0.004)	(0.004)
Surname fragmentation index				0.159*
				(0.090)
Ethnic fragmentation index				−0.134
				(0.193)
Number of households (logged)				0.039
				(0.034)
Constant	0.151***	−0.001	0.021	−0.287
	(0.021)	(0.094)	(0.095)	(0.223)
Province fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	392	390	390	376

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

tural suitability changes the estimates only slightly. In these specifications, the inclusion of lineage elites in village political institutions is correlated with a 14 percentage point increase in the likelihood of a land expropriation.

Another explanation for the results is that they are the result of differences in the degree to which higher levels of government, especially townships, exert control over villages. Township governments that have high levels of capacity can gather information about villages and then appoint lineage leaders to government; but these may also be the sorts of townships that have the coercive capacity to implement land expropriations. Were this the case, it could that lineage leaders have no independent causal effect on land expropriations. Instead, township leaders might appoint leaders for some other reason, like increasing popular approval of the township government.

The third specification adds controls for the distance to the township government, as well as a measure of township control over village elections. (This measure is the percent of villagers who report that the village committee was appointed by township governments instead of through a fair and free election.) The measure of township control over elections should also to some degree capture control by higher levels of government, since townships implement policy decisions by higher administrative units. The estimate remains essentially unchanged and is statistically significant.

In addition, it could be the case that the social characteristics determine both land seizures and lineage leader incorporation. The fourth specification includes a measure of surname fragmentation, which is a frequently used proxy for fragmentation among different lineage groups.[9] This measure is only an approximation because one surname group can potentially contain multiple lineage segments. The index captures the likelihood that two randomly selected villagers will belong to different surname groups.[10] This specification also includes a measure of ethnic group fragmentation, which captures the likelihood that two randomly selected villagers will belong to the Han majority and a minority group.[11] Finally, it includes a control for the number of households in a village. Again, these results remain essentially unchanged, with an estimate of a 14 percent marginal effect.

One might be concerned that the results are driven by lineage groups that lack formal

[9]Tsai (2007b) and Xu and Yao (2015).

[10]The surname fragmentation index is: $1 -$ (percent of village in largest surname group)^2 $-$ (percent of village in second largest surname group)$^2 -$ (percent of village in third largest surname group)^2.

[11]It is calculated as: $1 -$ (percent villagers Han ethnicity)$^2 -$ (percent villagers non-Han ethnicity)^2.

Table 4.3: Ordinary least squares regression estimates for effect of lineages with formal resources, where the dependent variable is an indicator for land expropriation occurring in the village

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Lineage leader is cadre	0.216***	0.217**	0.209**	0.193**
	(0.083)	(0.085)	(0.085)	(0.086)
Active lineage with ancestral hall or zupu	−0.103*	−0.058	−0.052	−0.049
	(0.059)	(0.065)	(0.064)	(0.064)
Economic controls		✓	✓	✓
Political controls			✓	✓
Social controls				✓
Province fixed effects		✓	✓	✓
Observations	392	390	390	376
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

resources like ancestral halls, which other studies have used to measure lineage group presence. In Table 4.3 I re-run the analysis focusing on lineages that have lineage halls or family histories. The results show that if we restrict our attention to lineage groups that possess these formal resources, the estimated effects are even larger, between 19 and 22 percent depending on the set of conditioning variables.

I include in the appendix additional tests using non-parametric tests like matching and entropy balancing and a placebo test. The estimates remain consistent, and show that the results do not depend on the functional form of the regression model or linear extrapolations. I also include in the appendix tests using alternate measures of the dependent and explanatory variables.

4.4 Extractive or Developmental Expropriations?

The third observable implication of this theory is that villages where lineage leaders have expropriated land will experience more protests than other villages that have experienced land expropriations. When lineage leaders join the village government, it reduces the bargaining power of villagers and, as a result, the expropriations are more extractive. After the land taking occurs, villagers will be upset to discover its unequal terms and will be likely to lodge

some sort of complaint against the village government. At this point, the lineage leaders' influence will be unlikely to quash the collective action, because trust has been broken (in game theoretic terms, villagers are playing a grim trigger strategy). Since the local state has already profited from the land deal, and since local officials may have personally benefited, the complaints of villagers may fall on deaf ears.

Table 4.4: Ordinary least squares regression, where the dependent variable is an indicator for whether or not villagers have participated in a collective petitioning incident.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Lineage leader is cadre	0.000	−0.011	−0.017	−0.016
	(0.051)	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.055)
Land seizure	−0.046	−0.082	−0.088*	−0.088
	(0.050)	(0.053)	(0.053)	(0.055)
Lineage leader X	0.319***	0.362***	0.378***	0.352***
Land seizure	(0.111)	(0.114)	(0.114)	(0.118)
Constant	0.111***	−0.021	−0.025	−0.489**
	(0.019)	(0.084)	(0.086)	(0.204)
Observations	392	390	390	376
Economic controls		✓	✓	✓
Political controls			✓	✓
Social controls				✓
Province fixed effects		✓	✓	✓
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

In Table 4.4 I present evidence showing a strong correlation between land takings by lineage leaders and petitioning. The dependent variable is an indicator for whether or not villagers report having participated in a collective petitioning incident, which are most often directed towards lower-level officials. On the right hand side, I interact whether or not a land seizure has occurred with whether or not a lineage leader is a cadre. I include the same set of controls as with the previous analysis.

Two striking features of land takings emerge. First, land seizures in general are not associated with petitioning. The second row in the table shows that villages where lineage elites are not in office do not on average experience more protests. This hints at the fact that villagers may often find the terms of land seizures to be agreeable, and that land development

brings ancillary benefits like increased non-farm employment.

Second, in villages where lineage elites are cadres, experiencing a land seizure is correlated with a sharp increase in the likelihood of experiencing a protest. The interaction term in the third row is positive and statistically significant across all of the specifications. When lineage elites are not in office, protests occur in only 7 percent of villages where land has been expropriated. Where lineage elites are on office, protests occur in 38 percent of villages where land has been expropriated. It is important to note that the survey does not include information about the content of the petition, so it is possible that these petitions may be about other matters, but the most straightforward explanation of the strong association between the two is that the petitions result from the land expropriations.

In the appendix, I present additional evidence on the correlation between land takings and economic outcomes. The results suggest that most land expropriations lead to improvements in income. However, when these land expropriations are undertaken by lineage elites, there is no increase in income. Instead, the data shows a consistent but not precisely estimated negative relationship between land expropriations by lineage leaders and individual income.

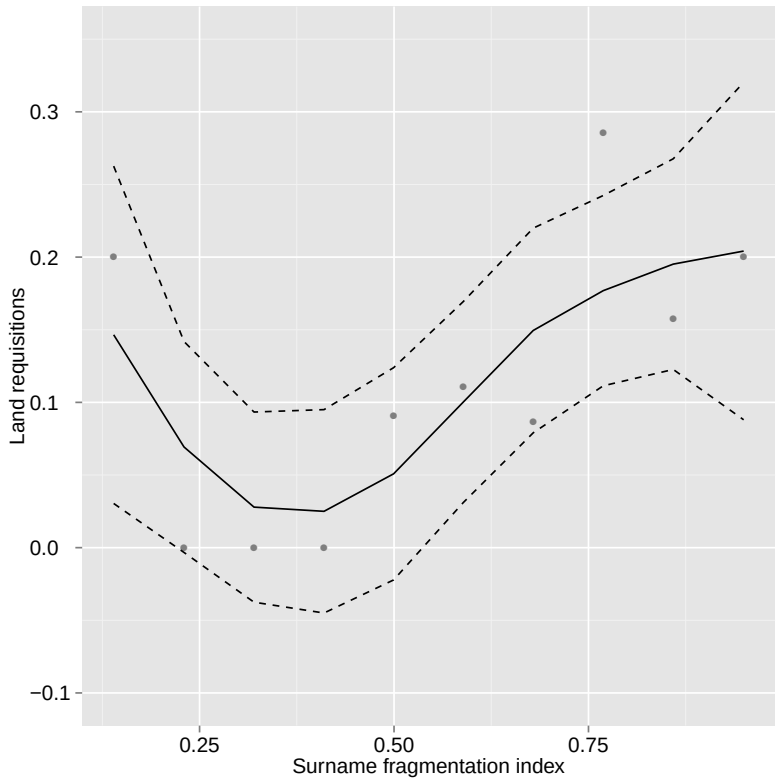
4.5 Who Gets Expropriated?

In this section, I discuss two potential issues that go to the heart of the argument that informal institutions are used by elites to control lineage groups and increase compliance with extractive land policies. First, and most importantly, it may be the case that lineage group leaders do not target members of their own lineage group for expropriation.

If lineage leaders do not target their own groups for expropriation, we should expect that low levels of lineage group fragmentation leads to low levels of expropriation. That is, in villages dominated by a single lineage group there would be very few land seizures. On the other hand, if lineage group leaders expropriate from their own group, we would see high levels of expropriation in villages with one lineage group.

The results provide the most support to the interpretation that leaders target their own groups, and that informal institutions are largely being used as channels of political control. Figure 4.2 plots the likelihood of expropriation against the index of surname group fragmentation, which is a reasonable if imperfect proxy for lineage group fragmentation. The figure shows a U-shaped relationship between lineage group fragmentation and land seizures.

Figure 4.2: Surname fragmentation and land expropriation. Points are binned means and the solid line is a loess estimate using weighted least squares; the dotted lines are the 95 percent confidence intervals.



Of particular interest is the fact that the results show high levels of expropriation with low levels of surname fragmentation. It shows that in villages with a single surname group, expropriations are likely to occur. This is difficult to reconcile with the potential objection that lineage group leaders exclusively target other groups for expropriation. It also does not rule out the likelihood of some degree of targeting in villages with multiple lineage groups. However, the structure of landholdings in villages — where lineage groups are often deliberately mixed into different landholding collectives — makes targeted expropriation somewhat difficult to accomplish.

4.6 Compensation for Land Takings

Returning to the structured case studies, the villages of Rivertown and Wucun in western Hunan illustrate how lineage groups can play an important role in securing better compensation for land expropriations that cannot be prevented. In this case, both villages were the sites of major road building efforts. Yet while farmers in both villages lost land, they were compensated in only one of them.

The two villages I discuss in this section are remote and poor, and in a province not famed for having especially strong lineage institutions. By contrast, the case studies at the beginning of this chapter focused on relatively wealthy villages in Guangdong, which is renowned for having strong lineage groups. Thus, these two case studies also illustrate the broader applicability of the theory to poorer regions with weaker kinship institutions.

Table 4.5: Wucun and Rivertown case studies.

	Wucun	Rivertown
Agricultural income in yuan, median	2,000	1,800
Competitive elections	No	No
Driving time to county seat	1.25 hours	1.5 hours
Lineage groups	Yes	Yes
Lineage group elites	*Not village cadres*	*Village cadres*
Land requisition for road	Compensated	Uncompensated

Rivertown

The remote mountain village of Rivertown lies along a gently flowing mountain stream, about an hour and a half's drive from the county seat. Sheer karst cliffs surround the village on all sides, and two decades ago it was impossible to reach Rivertown by car. Several locals and the village Party Secretary (who was my host) said that I was the first foreigner to ever visit the village, although there is no written record of the village's history before 1949 and no way to verify this.

Until very recently the villagers cultivated rice, but now the villagers grow a tea varietal called *huangjin*, largely because the government pays a 90 *yuan* per *mu* subsidy. Bamboo

shoots are another local specialty. The shoots grow at the top of the valley, requiring a vigorous forty minute hike from the village. Because the shoots sprout on a steep slope, villagers foraging for shoots must cling to mature bamboo trees in order to avoid sliding down the mountain. As if this were not enough, the mountain is covered in aggressive red ants, so foraging for bamboo shoots requires villagers to keep constantly moving from tree to tree to avoid getting covered in painful welts.

Nearly all villagers in Rivertown belong to the Tang lineage. The lineage lacks either an ancestral or written history because literacy came late to his part of China. Nevertheless, there is a sense of group identity reinforced by a strong oral tradition, which holds that the lineage was founded during the Song Dynasty by two brothers from Jiangxi province.

The village Party Secretary is a member of the Tang lineage. He has served in the village government since 1983, and enjoys a great deal of informal authority in the lineage. He has earned this respect by being one of the few men of his generation who can read and write competently, and by being an industrious farmer. He also has a talent for putting people at ease; as soon as I met him, he started to crack self-deprecating jokes about how short he is.

The informal authority of the Party Secretary was integral in getting a paved road built to the village. To be clear, the road has brought significant benefits to villagers. The road opens up the village to local markets, schools, and hospitals.

Yet the cadres compensated villagers nothing for the land they lost in order to accommodate the project. As both villagers and the Party Secretary told me, the project required significant "thought work" (*sixiang gongzuo*) on the part of the Party Secretary in order to persuade villagers who would lose land in order to accommodate the project. According to the Party Secretary, he went around from house to house in order to persuade villagers to give up their land without compensation. His status within the group made such a request difficult to deny.

In rural China, these road building projects are beneficial to the public but can still be a major source of rents for village officials. The general pattern is that higher levels of government initiate a road building project and supply village governments with compensation funds for the lost land. Then only a portion of those funds, or sometimes none of them, actually make their way to villagers. Instead, much of the money finds its way into the hands of local cadres.

This pattern occurred in a village I visited in the same county as Rivertown. In this vil-

lage, the Party Secretary split most of the road compensation fund of 100,000 *yuan* between himself and his younger brother, who served as the head of the village committee. Then he made sure his nephew's company won part of the contract to build the road itself. Villagers who lost the land were incensed over the lack of compensation. As one told me, "We rely on the land to make a living" (*yikao tudi wei sheng*).

In the case of Rivertown, there is no compelling evidence that local cadres embezzled money, but the lack of compensation for villagers was noteworthy. As we shall see in the case of Wucun, villagers are more likely to be properly compensated for this type of project when lineage institutions act as a check against the local state rather than an extension of it.

Wucun

Like Rivertown, Wucun is fairly remote. Getting to Wucun requires an hour and a half bus ride from the same county seat that serves Rivertown. The minibus route follows a paved road through a lush valley and then abruptly swings right onto a pock-marked dirt track that veers at an impossible angle up a mountain. The village is perched at the top.

Wucun is just as poor as Rivertown. About a half the homes in the village are made of carefully masoned slate stone on the bottom half and, on the top, mud bricks. I also counted five concrete homes, built by rich farmers who have gone to cities to work and returned, or who have children who remit them enough cash. Since disrupting bird nests is terrible luck, many houses have swallows living inside.

Nearly all agriculture focuses on wet rice cultivation. Many but not all families seem to own water buffaloes, and many own pigs, dogs, and chickens. The sight of smoked pork (a local specialty called *la rou*) curing on the inside of houses was common, although hardly anyone eats meat at every meal.

As with Rivertown, elections are not free. The township government decides both the Party Secretary and village committee lineup. The ballot box is brought house-to-house and people must write in the preferred candidate while the cadres supervising the election stand over their shoulders.

The Long lineage group dominates Wucun. Although the lineage is divided up into three informal factions, each with its own informal leader, group obligations and rituals strengthen ties among all members of the lineage, even in the absence of formal lineage resources like

an ancestral hall. For example, when a member of the lineage dies, every family must contribute a peck of rice to help feed people for the funeral. There is also an obligatory financial contribution for funerals.

Lineage group elders play important social roles in the village. When there are weddings, funerals, and other big social events, everyone comes to consult the group's informal leader. He instructs them on the proper rites and on practical matters, like how much food they need to lay out for guests; he also helps to solicit contributions from other members of the lineage group. These leaders also mediate conflicts within and, to a degree, between families. Two of the most common disputes include marital strife and conflicts over land boundaries. As one villager noted: "We trust them to resolve things fairly."

Lineage leaders also act as brokers or intermediaries in village politics. As the village Party Secretary put it: "Lineages play an influential role in the village. Within each lineage and sometimes within each sub-lineage faction there is usually an influential person. When I need to get things done I need to go and talk to them and get them on my side first, because they can talk to the rest of their clan and move them along."

These autonomous lineage leaders also supervise the village government — and help ensure that in contrast to Rivertown, Wucun's major road building project compensated villagers who lost land. The road leading into the village was financed partly by villagers, who gathered funds to compensate the farmers whose land would be seized in order to build the road.

In order to get villagers buy-in to the project, the Party Secretary needed the lineage leaders on board. He called a meeting that included the village committee, the leaders of the villager small groups, and the influential members of the lineage groups. He focused on persuading the elders of the Long lineage to back the plan. They agreed to back the Party Secretary, but the meeting also set a precedent that these informal leaders would be consulted about the project.

The supervision of the lineage leaders helped ensure that no corruption took place. The village committee collected several hundred yuan from each villager for the road building project. Lineage leaders spread word about the compensation amounts and contributions, and this information would have made it difficult if not impossible for leaders to skim from the top. In return, the leaders helped officials collect funds from villagers. Their presence alongside village officials, as informal auditors of a sort, helped convince villagers to part

with their money.

What would have happened if village officials had stolen the compensation funds? While we cannot observe the alternate history of Wucun itself, the nearby village of Jiucai, also in Western Hunan, provides a glimpse at the counterfactual. In Jiucai, each lineage group has a formal leader called a *zuzhang*, a position that is reached through consensus within the clan. Just like in Wucun, the village cadres have little informal social authority in comparison to these lineage heads.

Yet unlike in Wucun, the village committee head and the Party secretary took cash from a road building project — and they paid a price. When it emerged that villagers would not be compensated for their lost land, the village erupted in turmoil. A group of local notables organized a mass petition. The lineage leaders gave their blessing to the petitioning effort, which was crucial in erasing any doubts that petition signers had about the safety and wisdom of taking on the local cadres. Nearly every household in the village signed the petition.

As a result of this remarkable level of collective action, driven partly by these lineage leaders, the citizens of Jiucai won. After delivering the petition to higher ups in the county government, the local government removed the village Party Secretary and village committee head from their posts and delivered compensation to the villagers. Had the Party Secretary in Wucun also tried to embezzle funds, it is possible that the lineage elders might have organized their group in a similar fashion. This threat provides an incentive for officials to refrain from corruption.

4.7 Norms of Obedience

In this chapter, I have argued that lineage elites exert control over their social groups, making them powerful figures. In part this is effective because lineage institutions promote obedience and filial piety. To what extent is this strategy deliberate? Do local officials ever attempt to call on these norms strategically?

The case of Meirong, a "village in the city" in rapidly urbanizing Guangzhou, suggests that at least some officials are aware of the power of informal norms. Like many villages in Guangdong, for centuries social life in Meirong revolved around lineages. Three different lineage factions have historically vied for control over village resources. When discussing the history of Meirong's lineage groups, one villager stuck out his hand with his fingers spread

apart. "The lineages here are like my hand. There are fingers, which are separate from each other. Smaller lineage factions are quite important here. But they are also part of a whole (*zhengti*)."

As Guangzhou urbanized, lineage ties were less important than they used to be, but they were still consequential.[12] The village Party Secretary helped nurture lineage institutions and a flourishing associational life. The village committee partially subsidized the purchase of a wooden dragon boat, and encouraged villagers to organize teams for the region's annual dragon boat race. The main lineage halls were also refurbished. In the Reform years, the lineages also held lavish yearly feasts during the Lantern Festival (*Yuanxiao Jie*), which crammed hundreds into the lineage halls in a celebration that spilled out into the streets.

By the 2000s, Meirong no longer had any agricultural land. Instead, villagers used their plots to build five- and six-story houses that they rented out to migrants, allowing villagers to make a decent side income as landlords. To maximize floorspace and rental income, villagers built their houses close to each other — so close it was possible to out the window and shake the hand of someone next door. Accordingly, these houses are sometimes referred to as "handshake houses" (*woshou lou*), and similar settlements have been built in urban areas across China. However, because these homes have been built informally on village land originally marked for agricultural use, property rights are weak and the homes are vulnerable to confiscation.

Because it is close to downtown Guangzhou, the land in Meirong is extremely valuable, and in the early 2010s the village leadership began the process of expropriating villagers's homes in order to redevelop the land underneath it. The village offered a compensation plan in which villagers would receive a new apartment and some cash, although it would only make up for a few years of lost rental income. Some agreed to the compensation willingly but there were holdouts. And so village officials began to use every means at their disposal to persuade the holdouts to accept the compensation deal.

One strategy that village officials used was to call on the informal norms propagated by lineage institutions — specifically those that encourage filial piety. Figures 4.3 through 4.5 show posters plastered around the village by the local government. Interestingly, the posters explicitly encourage villagers to agree to the compensation plan out of respect for their

[12]See Guthrie (1998) and M. M.-h. Yang (2002) for a related debate on whether or not the significance of social ties, or *guanxi*, has declined as China's economy has modernized.

Figure 4.3: "Fighting the relocation compensation shows a lack of filial piety and a hard heart."

Figure 4.4: "Refuse relocation and be censured by the elders; shirk responsibility and people point."

Figure 4.5: "Show respect and filial piety; move early for a better environment and peaceful late years"

elders and filial piety. Each shows a younger (male) villager considering whether to accept the compensation plan or fight for more, while an older (female) villager suffers passively because she is not living in the promised compensation housing.

It is unclear what, if any, effect this particular campaign had on villagers. Some saw the posters as ham-fisted, a ridiculous attempt by local cadres to call on traditional norms and values to get them to sell out. Yet it may have been at least marginally effective for others, especially in the social context of the village. Because of the lineage associations, many villagers would have participated in rituals that reinforced a sense of filial piety, such as Tomb Sweeping Day (*Qingming*) and the large communal dinner held during the Lantern Festival, in which lineage elders often held special positions of respect.

Whether or not these posters were effective, what is more interesting for our purposes here is the evident intent. Local officials know these norms are potentially powerful. And in ways subtle — and, in this case, not so subtle — they call on these norms to exert political control over their constituents.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that lineage elites are important local brokers, whose work is influential during sensitive negotiations over land development. As a result, when these lineage leaders are included in village political institutions, it increases their group's compliance with land takings, making them more likely to occur and, when they do occur, they tend to be more extractive.

One implication of these findings is that grassroots social groups cannot replace formal institutions of accountability. As work by Elinor Ostrom, Lily Tsai, and Avner Greif shows,[13] these groups can to a certain extent help members police themselves, especially in the context of repeated interaction. When these groups are truly autonomous, they can even help curb state predation. Yet the incorporation of the leaders of these groups into state institutions does not represent real political inclusion, but rather a form of co-optation.

These findings stand in stark contrast to a number of recent studies that have linked strong informal institutions in rural China to high levels of public goods provision. This raises the question of who benefits from this evident tradeoff between public goods and property rights. A bargain in which villagers receive more public goods but have weaker land rights is likely to benefit local elites. I discuss this more in the concluding chapter.

The focus of this chapter has been lineage elites and outside of China, there are intriguing parallels with traditional leaders like tribal chiefs. Recent work by Daron Acemoglu, Tristan Reed, and James Robinson finds that chiefs in Sierra Leone exploit their control over local civil society to control local politics and development.[14] Kate Baldwin finds that national leaders cede control over land to traditional chiefs in order to increase electoral support among non-coethnics.[15] Interestingly, Baldwin also finds that voters tend to cast their ballots for political candidates endorsed by chiefs because they infer, correctly, that politicians with connections to chiefs will provide higher levels of public goods.[16] This is broadly consistent with the idea that traditional kinship institutions can help buttress public goods provision, which occurs in a context of repeated interaction and relatively low stakes. But it leaves open the question of what role these elites might play in large-scale land requisitions. Recent

[13] Ostrom (1990), Greif (1993), and Tsai (2007a).
[14] Acemoglu, Reed, and Robinson (2014).
[15] Baldwin (2014).
[16] Baldwin (2013).

work by Lauren Honig finds that it is *autonomous* chiefs with power that is independent of the state that protect their constituents from land confiscation.[17]

A natural question is whether this dynamic holds with other civil society groups that are not organized around the specific norms propagated by lineages in China or, perhaps, similar kinship institutions elsewhere. Could religious groups serve the same purpose? What about entirely secular civil society groups, like neighborhood associations and the like? The next two chapters are devoted to these questions.

[17]Honig (2015).

Chapter 5

The Strength of Weak Ties? Religious Groups

My theory of political control suggests that civil society groups act as channels of control when social elites join political institutions. Religious institutions, however, are something of a special case in China. First, as the evidence from the survey experiment showed, village temple groups are generally not salient channels of political mobilization. In other words, they are not *binding ties* that connect villagers to political entrepreneurs. Unlike lineage groups, there are clear prohibitions against Communist Party members joining "feudal" and "superstitious" religious organizations. Consequently, village cadres in China rarely serve as the leader of a village religious group. It is somewhat unusual, for instance, to see village chiefs or Communist Party secretaries taking a leading role on a village temple council, although they sometimes participate in temple activities as rank-and-file members. As a result, religious groups can only weakly bind constituents to officials in vertical status relationships. Temple groups are only weak instruments of direct political control.

Yet religious groups also can also serve as *bridging ties* that bring together other sorts of groups. For example, suppose a village is divided between several lineages. If the village holds a yearly religious festival, the leaders of these lineages may be required to cooperate with each other to plan the event. This type of coordination gives elites a template for intra-elite cooperation, and this more cohesive elite can then more easily coordinate among themselves to organize collective resistance or exercise collective control over their groups. Thus, the combination of religious and lineage ties should lead to very high levels of political control when lineage elites are included in village governments — or very effective collective

resistance when they are not.

In this chapter, I first examine the role that religious groups play on their own. I show that they are only weak avenues for collective mobilization and political control. Next, I turn to examining the potential role of religious groups as a bridging tie that facilitates cooperation within and between lineage groups. I show that the importance of these religious institutions lies in their ability to reinforce the power of preexisting social elites.

5.1 Temples and Temple Fairs in China

Small village temples in China generally honor folk religious deities.[1] There are many dozens of folk religious deities in China, some of them highly local protectors of a specific village. Some have wide regional appeal, even if they still sometimes function as tutelary deities (that is, protectors of individual places). For example, the God of the South Seas, called *Hongsheng*, is popular in southern China.[2] Others, such as the Queen Mother of the West (*Xi Wangmu*) and the Lord of the Soil (*Tudigong*), are venerated across China. Historical figures, especially Imperial bureaucrats and generals, also sometimes become deities.

Village temples lack clergy and before the Communist era were often run by wealthy local elites who served on temple councils.[3] These elites organized temple reconstruction efforts and collected money for them. They also organized and collected funds for temple fairs — major events that often lasted several days and involved processions, opera performances, music, feasts, dancing, and other pageantry. Some fairs limited participation to those actually born in the village, especially if they honored tutelary gods, but many temple fairs drew hundreds or even thousands of pilgrims from a wide swath of nearby villages.

Chinese folk religion reinforced the legitimacy of both the imperial state and local elites.[4] Many gods held office in a celestial bureaucracy that mirrored and was interwoven with the actual Imperial bureaucracy. Remarkably, living flesh-and-blood officials were sometimes seen as having authority over gods with a lower bureaucratic rank than them.[5] Positions on village temple councils often mixed some degree of practical authority — such as duties

[1]For overviews, see Duara (1988, pp. 118-158), Tsai (2007a, p. 99), and Smith (2004, pp. 136-151).

[2]Siu (1989, pp. 79-85).

[3]See Duara (1988, pp. 118-158) for a discussion of temple structure in northern China and Siu (1989, pp. 79-85) for southern China.

[4]For classic accounts see C. K. Yang (1961, pp. 180-218) and Freedman (1979, pp. 351-369).

[5]Duara (1988, p. 134)

to collect funds for the temple and even organize collective village defenses — with moral authority. In one village in Northern China, for example, prayers for rain were led by the village headman, who would ritually deliver a petition for rain to the head of the celestial bureaucracy, the Jade Emperor.[6] Such an arrangement seems almost certain to have strengthened the informal status of local political elites and the legitimacy of the political system more generally.

Buddhism and Buddhist figures also influenced Chinese folk religion and is important in its own right. In Figure 5.1, I have mapped the distribution of Buddhist temples across China in 1820, plotted against contemporary prefectural borders.[7] The map shows that Buddhist temples appeared throughout the Han areas of China, not merely along the coast or in a few major urban centers connected to the outside world through trade. Many villages had (and indeed to this day continue to have) temples, shrines, and fairs that honor Guanyin, a bodhisattva who is a figure of compassion and mercy, and is venerated by Buddhists across East Asia.

Under Mao, religious life in rural China effectively disappeared from the public sphere, although not for good. The CCP branded practicing religion a "feudal" and "superstitious" activity and promoted comradeship based on class solidarity and party ties. During the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, villagers smashed statues, relics, and ancestral tablets and defaced religious iconography. Local cadres converted village temple buildings into offices, mess halls, dormitories, schools, and even, in one village I visited, a trash dump.[8] The campaigns were effective, at least in changing peasants' public habits for the era in which Mao held power. For instance, one classic account of rural life during the revolution quotes a peasant declaring: "Did the gods ever protect us? No! But since the party came, after Chairman Mao came, we have things to eat, we have clothing, life is better. So we shouldn't believe in the gods. We should believe in Chairman Mao!"[9]

However, following the death of Mao in 1976, religious life in rural China has seen a resurgence. Villagers have rebuilt temples that in Mao's era served as offices, mess halls,

[6]Duara (1988, p. 136).

[7]The source for the underlying data is the *Da Qing Yitong Zhi* via the China Historical GIS project. The data on 1820 temple locations was last accessed at `http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~chgis/` on March 23, 2016.

[8]For descriptions of campaigns against religion and other local customs, see Chan, Madsen, and Unger (2009, pp. 87-90) and Siu (1989, pp. 125-135).

[9]Chan, Madsen, and Unger (2009, p. 89).

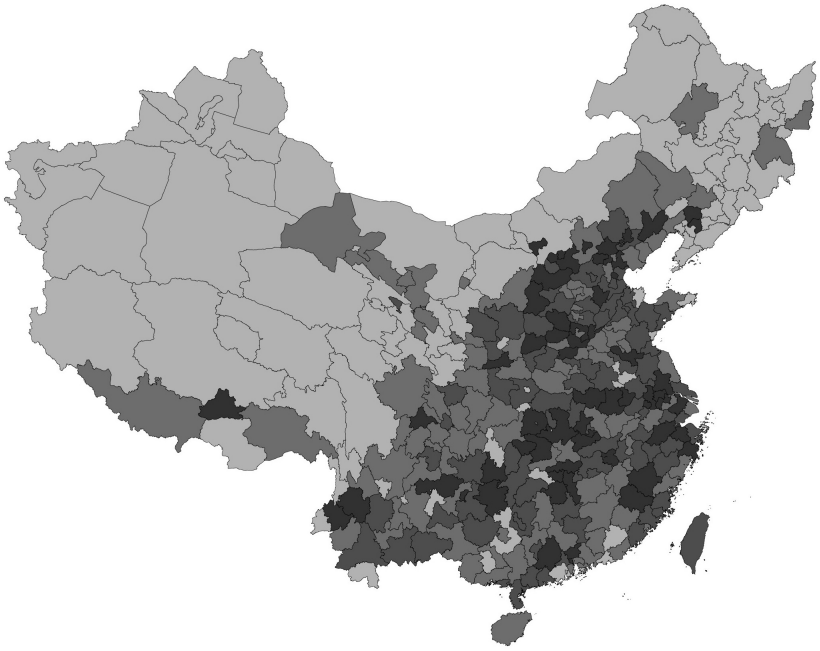


Figure 5.1: The distribution of Buddhist temples in China in 1820. Darker shading indicates more temples.

and pig sties. Villagers once again observe temple rites and hold temple fairs with feasting, dancing, and operas, even if urbanization has dimmed their importance for the younger generation.

The form and ritual practice of these groups has important continuities with earlier eras, but there are some important distinctions. First, these groups have not reemerged in all areas, although where they have reemerged seems highly contingent and nearly random, depending, according to some observers, on the presence of local social entrepreneurs.[10] Second, these groups no longer have the large collective property holdings that they did in the pre-Communist era, or the connection to local landholding elites, since that class has been destroyed. Finally, Communist Party ideology and policy has broken the direct link between religious practice and the state, and has also circumscribed official participation in temple activities. In one well-publicized case in Sichuan, for example, local party officials forced a village head to resign when it emerged he was also the village's feng shui master.[11]

[10]Tsai (2007a, p. 104).

[11]Huaxi Metropolitan Daily Staff. "Village Head Who Moonlights as Fengshui Master: I Think There Is

As Tsai notes: "Temple groups rarely had village officials among their leadership since the state continues to discourage active promotion of 'feudal superstitious activities,' although village officials almost always participated in the group's activities as ordinary members. Lineage groups were more likely to have village officials as leaders since lineage activity is not considered religious."[12]

As I will show, the fact that local officials generally do not serve as the leaders of temple groups has had important consequences. Officials cannot draw on their special status within the group to legitimate their authority outside of the usual state channels. This has diminished the role of folk religion as a tie that can benefit political entrepreneurs and allow them to exercise political control.

5.2 The Weakness of Religious Ties in China

In this section, I examine whether the presence of religious civil society groups increases the likelihood of an extractive land expropriation. Unlike lineage groups, the leaders of temple groups generally do not serve in village office, but it may nevertheless be the case that folk religious institutions empower local officials. Officials who are seen as contributing to temple and temple fair organizations as rank-and-file members may gain respect and moral authority — but may also be held accountable by group norms that encourage reciprocity.

Table 5.1: Chalong and Kaijia case studies.

	Chalong	Kaijia
Annual agricultural income	About 3,000	About 3,000
Competitive elections	Yes	Yes
Distance to city	25 km	30 km
Lineage groups	No	No
Temple fair	Yes	Yes
Cadres participate in temple fair	No	Yes
Compensation for land expropriations	Low	None

No Conflict with My Job" (*Zigong Cun Zhuren 'Jianzhi' Dang Fengshushi Danshiren: Wo Juede Yu Gongzuo Bu Chongtu*). Last accessed at `http://news.huaxi100.com/show-226-799396-1.html` on August 1, 2016.

[12]Ibid., 106.

To examine this question, I use a most similar logic of design, comparing a village that has strong religious institutions with one that does not. These two villages lie in Northern Jiangsu on China's eastern seaboard. While southern Jiangsu is one of China's richest regions, the northern part of the province remains somewhere between poor and moderately prosperous. The villages of Chalong and Kaijia both have broadly similar economic, political, geographic, and social conditions, as Table 5.1 shows. However, a major difference between these two villages is that one has wide participation in temple fairs while the other does not.

Paired Comparison: Chalong Village

The residents of Chalong Village are by no means wealthy, but there are many signs of economic progress. Villagers live in two-story houses built from concrete, and satellite dishes decorate many roof-tops. An elevated track for the country's high-speed rail system passes over the village's wheat fields; several times a day a bullet train roars overhead.

At the same time, economic development and its many benefits have led to externalities, especially pollution. When I walk with farmers to their fields, a nearby steel mill emits a stream of smoke that has a sweet, chemical odor. When the wind shifts, and carries with it the smell of a freshly mulched field, the organic scent of cow manure is a relief. "We don't know what's in that smog," one villager tells me. "And we worry about what is in the soil."

Agriculture in this part of Jiangsu revolves around the wheat harvest. The wheat is harvested by combine tractors that tour through the area and rent their services to farmers. The village committee organizes a group of them to come through, and farmers pay 50 yuan per acre. Everyone waits and watches as the combines mows down row after row; then the harvester stops and pours off grain into sacks. Gesturing to the steel mill and the plume of pollution, a farmer smiles and tells me: "I don't eat this wheat myself."

To celebrate the harvest, farmers place bottles of a special edition of Qingdao beer in a pail, the bottle necks wrapped in silvery foil. The beer warms in the sun while they wait for the combines to finish their work. When the whole field is harvested, the farmers drink together, and someone will generally bring a small box of fireworks. As the combines move from field to field, from village to village, so does the sound of fireworks.

Being a wheat farmer in Jiangsu is not a path to great wealth. In the spring of 2013, farmers told me they expected around 1 *yuan* (about 15 cents) per *jin* (about a pound) of wheat. With an average yield of 500 to 600 *jin* per *mu* of land, about 4 *mu* if land per

Figure 5.2: A combine harvesting wheat in Jiangsu Province.

household, and 2 harvests per year, that works out to 4,000 to 4,400 *yuan*, or a little under 700 U.S. dollars per year. After costs, farmers pocket somewhere close to 3,000 yuan. For most, wheat farming serves as a supplement (albeit an important one) to the income remitted to them by their children, husbands, and wives who generally work in manufacturing or service jobs elsewhere in China. Farming income is also a form of employment insurance for those who have been laid off.

Lineage ties are of little importance in Chalong. It is a mixed-surname village, with dozens of different surnames and none of them clearly dominant. Voting does not occur along lineage lines, and villagers I spoke to were not aware of any families with lineage histories or *zupu*.

Religion, however, is significantly more important than lineage. Peer inside most houses, and you will find shrines and icons celebrating the Bodhisattva Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy, who is very popular in this part of China. Villagers not only worship privately, they participate in the temple fair (*miaohui*) held in one of the nearby townships. In northern Jiangsu, these fairs mix a dose of religious content celebrating Guanyin and Chinese folk religious figures with more secular celebrations. Much like in the pre-Communist era, temple

fairs are an important occasion for commerce. Local shopkeepers set up tents at these fairs to sell all kinds of farm implements — hoes, shovels, pitchforks, everything a farmer needs.

These temple fairs might conceivably bind together citizens and village cadres and provide an avenue for informal accountability. Lily Tsai shows how participation in temple fairs by villagers in Hebei help to "reinforce a sense of obligation to the village community," and cause village officials to "strive to meet the temple festival association's ethical standards and ideals of public service" (Tsai 2007a, p. 142-144). Tsai describes these fairs as being somewhat secular in nature but still having an important religious component, which is similar to temple fairs in northern Jiangsu.

However, in Chalong village officials do not take an active role in the fair, and the local government has been able to expropriate large tracts of land in Chalong with relatively low levels of compensation and without meeting large-scale organized resistance. The expropriations were undertaken by county-level officials to build a steel mill and coal-fired power plant. According to county records, the government expropriated about 1,000 mu of land, affecting about 250 households, or roughly a third of the village (which has a population of 2,300).

Although these land takings helped to develop the local economy, they also left farmers worse off — in the language of economics, these land takings were not Pareto-improving or at the Pareto frontier. The compensation for these land takings did not fully replace the lost income from farming. To compensate for the land, household heads of working age received a stipend (*shenghuo fei*) of 150 yuan per month, which is well short of the 3,000 or so most made from farming. Those over 60 received 210 yuan per month, which is still well short of the lost farming income. Government documents indicated that these payments would end after about decade, depending on the recipient's age.

Although county-level officials expropriated the land, village officials evidently played a key role in attracting the project to the village and carrying out the expropriation. There is nothing particularly advantageous about Chalong's location, and the project might easily have been located in one of the neighboring villages that are just as close to the prefectural seat. According to villagers, village officials worked with township and county officials to try to persuade them to locate the park in the village. To stave off any collective action, locals said that the village Party Secretary hired dozens of "hooligans" (*xiao hunhun*) to come to the village and trample wheat fields and intimidate and beat the villagers who were trying

to organize a protest. Villagers supplied photos of trampled wheat fields and bruised faces to support these allegations; however, it was not possible to verify them and the village officials I contacted declined to be interviewed. In any event, no large-scale protest materialized and the industrial park was built quickly and on schedule.

Perhaps the problem in Chalong was a lack of strong ties between cadres and the villagers involved in temple fairs and other religious activities. Do stronger religious ties prevent land expropriations or improve compensation? The next case study, of nearby Kaijia Village, investigates this possibility.

Paired Comparison: Kaijia Village

By the time I visited Kaijia, the combine harvesters had already come and gone, and everyone was preparing their wheat for sale. The tractors automatically cut, thresh, and winnow the wheat stalks, but mechanical winnowing is often imperfect. So many farmers in northern Jiangsu separate the last stubborn pieces of chaff from the grains by taking a shovel and throwing the wheat in the air. It is a simple and ancient process called wind winnowing: the heavier grains fall the ground, while the light and wispy chaff floats gently away. Next, farmers sun the grains to dry out the last bits of moisture. They do so by spreading the grains in a thin layer on whatever flat, hard surface is available — which generally means roads and parking lots. Farmers in Kaijia carpet nearly every inch of asphalt in freshly-cut grain. On the major county road, farmers spread wheat along the edges even as buses, motorbikes, and cars drive over the grains and speed inches from their heads.

There is widespread participation in Kaijia in a village temple fair. In Kaijia, the local temple fair is quite popular — more so than in Chalong — and has resulted in the establishment of a number of associations that any villager can join. For example, there is a 100-person "drum and gong team" (*luogu dui*) and also a "popular custom cultural troupe" (*minsu wenhua biaoyan tuan*) organized by villagers. These groups practice throughout the year and perform at a temple fair held every March, not long after the Chinese New Year.

The informal accountability model suggests that these associations should be effective at holding officials accountable. The yearly cycle of rehearsals for the temple fair strengthens bonds between neighbors who might otherwise scarcely know each other. In doing so, these groups provide a template for grassroots collective action. The efficient and transparent operation of these groups also provides standard against which the village cadres are measured.

Living up to the standards that these groups set can gives cadres moral authority that can help them perform their jobs.

Yet in Kaijia it appears the group is condoned by local elites precisely because it legitimates the power of village cadres and strengthens their moral authority. In Kaijia, the Party Secretary, surnamed Meng, has taken the lead in promoting the temple fair and the troupes that perform in it. In the Mao era he was the head of the village's Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team, and he organized a series of Maoist musical and theatrical shows that brought him to the attention of local officials. By the mid-1980s he became the village Party Secretary. An entrepreneurial figure, he quickly turned from putting on shows about Mao to putting on shows promoting traditional Chinese culture — the very "feudal" influences that Mao fought against so vigorously. He organized village events for both the spring festival and the lantern festival. He also gave his blessing to the drum and gong team and the cultural troupe. As the Party Secretary said: "I've learned from experience that traditional culture helps bind [villagers] together and increase cohesion (*ningjuli*)."

In Kaijia, the temple fair and other cultural groups have strengthened the popularity of the Party Secretary. Villagers take pride in the temple fair and the active singing and dancing troupes, which have traveled outside of the province to perform and have attracted attention from local newspapers. These groups add to village quality of life and provide outlets for fun and recreation outside of work and television that remain somewhat rare in village life, even in moderately prosperous areas of China. It is not difficult to find villagers willing to credit the Party Secretary for the temple fair and other cultural events, even if he is not formally the leader of these groups. As one villager said: "There have been positive changes here because of this kind of good village official (*zheyang de hao cunguan)*."

Nevertheless, in 2010 the local government appropriated over 400 *mu* of land to build a distillery. The county government officially converted the land from agricultural to construction use. However, it was village officials who attracted investment to the village, who negotiated with the distillery owners over compensation, and who moved villagers off the land.

The Party Secretary's popularity and credibility among villagers helped to forestall large-scale mobilization against the land development, but in contrast to the cases involving lineage groups, the Party Secretary's moral authority and ability to control villagers was comparatively limited. Initially, the Secretary promised that villagers affected by the land takings

would have preferential access to jobs in the distillery, and offered compensation that villagers described as being above what villages in Chalong received. Farmers whose land is being requisitioned sometimes reject relatively generous offers because they fear that local officials will not follow through with them. However, in Kaijia the Party Secretary could call on a reserve of positive sentiment and trust built up over the years he has spent leading the village through its cultural renaissance. Initially, many villagers expressed support for the plan.

At the same time, the Party Secretary's informal authority was far from total. A minority of villagers protested the land takings before they occurred. When earthmovers came to dig up the village fields, a number of farmers stood in front of the machines and refused to move. As in Chalong, the Party Secretary called in allies to get villagers to move by force. According to villagers who participated in the protest, the Party Secretary hired "thugs" (*liumang*) to come and rough up villagers and shout pro-government slogans.

After the land taking went through, villagers complained that they were not compensated. Four years after the land taking occurred, villagers continued to petition the county government for compensation. Publicly available county records from 2014 showed that petitions from Kaijia were one of a small number of pending cases not assigned to an administrator, suggesting that a resolution was not forthcoming. As for the promised factory jobs, some villagers did work in local factories but most workers in the industrial park were evidently migrants from Sichuan Province.

5.3 Survey Evidence on Religion

The case studies suggested that religious groups — such as temple fair performance troupes — may be channels of political control, but that they are not as effective as lineage ties. Village cadres may help to create and nurture these groups, which reinforce their moral authority. However, they generally do not serve as the leaders of these groups, and so they cannot call on norms that encourage obedience and respect for group leaders, and they are not central nodes in group social networks. This weakens the ability of leaders to use religious groups as an instrument of political control. As we saw with the case of Kaijia village, officials could not prevent some amount of villager collective action protesting the project.

In this section, I turn to survey evidence to describe broader patterns across the country. As in the previous chapters, the national survey evidence comes from the CGSS, which collected data in a random sample of villages across 23 provinces in China. The case studies allowed me to make some initial surmises about the relationship between religious groups and political control. The evidence suggested that the nature of religious institutions in China — in which local cadres rarely serve as leaders — made them on their own only weak instruments of political control.

I measure the main explanatory variable in terms of participation in festival activities. The CGSS (Question F9) asks: "Does the village or community in which you are located have cultural/festival activities (*wenhua/jieqing huodong*) in which local residents are the main participants?" An important shortcoming is this measure will also likely capture some non-religious cultural festivals and also exclude temples that do not organize festivals. However, this measure also captures public temple fairs and other village-wide activities, the sort of civil society organization that is are central to the theory. Unlike questions about that ask more directly about religious practices and beliefs, this question is also less politically sensitive.

Festivals and temple fairs happen more often in large, wealthy villages. The data shows that festival participation correlates strongly with wealth, with a 1 standard deviation increase in log income correlated with a 9 percentage point increase in the likelihood a village holds a festival (from a baseline likelihood of 42 percent). A one standard deviation increase in the log population of the village correlates with a 6 percentage point increase in the likelihood of holding a festival. Festivals are also more likely to be held in villages closer to county seats.

To adjust for differences between villages, I use the same regression framework I introduced in the previous chapter. Again, the dependent variable is the likelihood of a land expropriation occurring in the village. I also use regression to condition on observable characteristics of villages and to include province fixed effects that help to account for regional differences. The same caveat applies: because the evidence is observational, regression can only get at correlations and conditional means.

The quantitative evidence is consistent with the theory that collective religious institutions have only a weak effect on political accountability and control. The first column of Table 5.2 shows estimates without any conditioning variables. The estimate is positive but

small and not statistically significant. The positive estimate is not consistent with the idea that religious institutions serve as channels of informal accountability.

Some models provide stronger evidence for a relationship between collective religious activity and land expropriations, although these should be interpreted with caution. The second through fourth columns of Table 5.2 show slightly larger marginal effect estimates and, in the case of the fourth model, statistical significance at the traditional levels. A reasonable interpretation of these models is that once we account for the underlying differences between villages that hold festivals and those that do not, we find that there is a small positive effect of the presence of these religious institutions. However, much like the case studies, the results point towards a positive causal relationship but not with a high degree of certainty.

5.4 How Folk Religion Empowers Clan Elites

Folk religious ties are on their own only very weak channels of political mobilization and control. However, as the case of Wukan showed, participation in events like village-wide religious festivals can create bonds that can bridge divisions between other types of politically salient civil society groups, like lineage organizations. The committees that run temples and organize temple fairs also provide opportunities for members of different civil society groups to build relationships of trust and fellowship, especially in villages where religious events require collecting large contributions of money and labor.

In this section, I return to the structured comparison of Headwater and Peng Gully introduced in the previous chapter. While lineage institutions are crucial in both villages, both villages also hold religious festivals that reinforce the power of lineage group elites. In Headwater, villagers gather every year to honor the Queen Mother of the West; in Peng Gully, it is the Three Mountain Kings. These religious festivals help to bridge lineage groups and strengthen the moral authority of lineage group elites, but outcomes still hinge on whether lineage group leaders are included in local political institutions. However, I first examine to the case of Wukan Village, which provides some intuition for the power of religion in knitting together religious groups, for the purposes of resistance — or control.

Table 5.2: Least-squares regression estimates of the relationship between festivals and land seizures. The dependent variable is an indicator for land expropriation.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Temple fairs and festivals	0.051	0.079*	0.080*	0.084**
	(0.037)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.042)
Active lineage		−0.065	−0.054	−0.045
		(0.059)	(0.059)	(0.058)
Lineage leader is cadre		0.145**	0.144**	0.146**
		(0.071)	(0.071)	(0.071)
Distance to county seat (km)		−0.001	0.0002	0.001
		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Terrain roughness		0.00004	0.0001	0.0001
		(0.0001)	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
Agricultural suitability index		0.056*	0.046	0.037
		(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.030)
Wealth (nighttime lights proxy)		0.003	0.003	0.002
		(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Township control over elections			0.149	0.133
			(0.094)	(0.097)
Distance to township (km)			−0.010***	−0.009**
			(0.004)	(0.004)
Surname fragmentation index				0.160*
				(0.089)
Ethnic fragmentation index				−0.163
				(0.193)
Number of households (logged)				0.039
				(0.034)
Constant	0.129***	−0.065	−0.048	−0.360
	(0.024)	(0.100)	(0.101)	(0.225)
Province fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	392	390	390	376

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Wukan Village and the Power of Religious Iconography

In this section I return to the case of Wukan Village, discussed in Chapter 3, to examine the importance of the *content* of religious institutions and the power of religious iconography. The scale of collective resistance mustered by Wukan's residents, who mobilized seemingly every household in the village, was extraordinary. Yet Wukan's residents faced two barriers to collective action. First, they faced a determined local state willing to use coercion and violence to break the will of protesters. In the initial phase of the uprising, local officials jailed protest leaders, and one of them died in police custody. Once the protests grew, local officials ordered the police to surround the village and deny protesters food and other crucial supplies. A second formidable barrier to collective action was internal to the protest movement: the village's highly fragmented social structure. Clan ties divide Wukan into 47 separate kinship groups, all but the smallest of which have a leader (*zuzhang*) and a clan council (*zongqinhui*). These clan councils resolve disputes within the kinship group and the leaders serve as informal group representatives in village politics. According to an important body of social science theory, these types of social cleavages generally make it difficult to resolve group collective action problems.[13]

Folk religion has knit together Wukan's divided clans. The village hosts over a dozen large temples and a smattering of smaller shrines venerating a mix of Daoist, Buddhist, and folk religious deities, ranging from the Goddess of the Sea (*Mazu*) to Guanyin to the Lords of the Three Mountains. However, these deities do not divide villagers into competing groups. Instead, villagers I talked to noted that villagers might pray to one deity one day and another the next, depending on the circumstances; each god serves a different purpose and can bring good fortune in a different aspect of life. In a study of Wukan's religious life, Yuxin Hou quotes one prominent villager as saying:

> There are loads of different deities involved in the religion indigenous to Wukan. In one temple you'll find offerings to a whole load of different gods. Every year on the birthdays of the gods, when they hold the divinity plays,[14] money just

[13]Classic treatments of this problem include Olson (2009) and Putnam (2000, p. 22), who discusses the challenge of creating "bridging" social capital that unites groups across social cleavages. See also R. B. Collier and Handlin (2009, pp. 67- 92 and pp. 267 - 68) for an important discussion of the problem of "scaling" among working class unions and associations in Latin America.

[14]These are performances held in the seventh lunar month, organized around a central festival honoring Wukan's tutelary deity, who is discussed shortly.

> gets tossed around like confetti. Even when it comes to poorer people, they'll still spend 3,000 *yuan* [about $470 in 2012] making offerings to the gods, so who knows how much the rich people are spending.[15]

Yet what ultimately knits together the village is a festival that celebrates a local deity: the True Immortal Father (*Zhen Xiuxian Weng*) of Wukan. According to village lore, the True Immortal Father was in his mortal incarnation a prodigiously talented doctor who moved to Wukan from Fujian and, in his lifetime, served the poor and helped protect the village from disaster; after dying, he was reincarnated and has since served as a tutelary deity for the village. Residents I interviewed described him as the village's most important god and protector. To honor him, they hold a yearly festival on the Immortal Father's birthday, which occurs during the seventh lunar month. Similar to the deity processions described above, the statues of gods from the village's other dozen or so temples join the birthday celebration, as do the statues of gods from Wukan's neighboring villages. The festival centers around a set of lavishly produced religious plays (*biaoxi*) that are put on for the enjoyment of the assembled immortals.[16]

Putting on this lavish yearly festival for the Immortal Father of Wukan has created a template for collective action that unites the village's fragmented lineage groups. A Deity Council (*shenming lishihui*) — which is composed of members of the village's major clans — organizes the festival, which is a serious undertaking. Each year they raise tens of thousands of dollars of funds from villagers; complicating matters is the fact that much of the funding comes from people who have left the village (since funding these religious plays brings good luck for business). Once the funding has been raised, they must supply food and appropriate costumes, and must also coordinate with nearby villages over the deity processions. Since the council includes members from all of the villages large clans, putting together this logistically complex undertaking serves to knit together the village and provide a template for village-wide collective action that knits together disparate clans.

At the same time, religious symbolism also provided a powerful resource for protest leaders. At several crucial junctures, protest leaders strategically invoked the Immortal Father of Wukan to legitimate the movement. For one, the movement's leaders frequently delivered major speeches to the crowd from the large stage in center of the village named

[15] Quoted in Yuxin Hou (2013, p. 158).

[16] See Yuxin Hou (2013, pp. 159-163) for additional background.

after the Immortal Father (it is one of three such stages in the village, so the selection of the Immortal Father Stage was not a foregone conclusion). Protest leaders also used an unusual feature of Daoist ritual to show villagers how urgent action was. Like many other Daoist spirits, the Immortal Father of Wukan has a "flag of command" (*lingqi*), which symbolizes the authority delegated to him by the Emperor of Heaven.[17] The flag could be invoked to aid the village but only under circumstances of dire need — and according to villagers, it had not been used for over a hundred years, meaning it was never invoked during the tumult of the the warlord era, the Japanese invasion, civil war, or the Cultural Revolution.[18] During the initial failed uprising in September 2012, villagers did not use the command flag and, not coincidentally in the eyes of some villagers, local officials efficiently quelled the protest.[19] Morale in the village declined and fissures began to appear among villagers, some of whom thought another round of protest would be foolish; the prospects for future collective action seemed to be dimming.

To secure the support of wavering villagers, the protest organizers got permission from the Deity Council to invoke the Immortal Father's command flag for the first time in a century. On the morning of the second mobilization in November, villagers told me, they went to the temple housing the deity's statue and prayed to him asking for protection for the protest. According to Yuxin Hou's account, the leaders cast a two-sided religious instrument called a *shengbei* on the ground three times and each time it landed with the lucky side facing up (since there is a lucky side and an unlucky side, there is about a 13 percent chance of this occurring three times in a row).[20] The leaders then invoked the command flag, which took a place of honor at the head of the procession. As the director of Wukan's Deity Council told Yuxin Hou:

> In the end, Xianweng told us that we had to staunchly guard the village of Wukan, we shouldn't leave, otherwise people would die and we'd fail. Because everyone really believed in what Xianweng [the Immortal Father] said, after the village was sealed off and we started protecting it, everybody stuck to what [the

[17] See DeBernardi (2006, pp. 134-136) for a discussion of flags and folk religious practice.

[18] This may well be more legend than fact, but this is a case where perception matters more than fact. The notion that the flag had not been invoked in over a century, even in times of great chaos, added to its symbolic potency.

[19] See Yuxin Hou (2013, pp. 169-171), which provides a more detailed description of these events, which I also established through my own independent interviews.

[20] See Yuxin Hou (2013, p. 170).

> Immortal Father] had guided us to do, that's why after that nothing else bad happened. If it hadn't have been for that, more people would have died. You could put it this way, [the Immortal Father] rescued Wukan. He really is truly incredible.[21].

The case of Wukan shows how religious symbols can be appropriated by local political entrepreneurs whose agenda may not align with the state. Religious institutions do, however, strengthen the moral authority of local elites and reinforce status hierarchies — but much depends on what those elites decide to do with their informal power. The next two sections develop the intuition drawn with the Wukan case with a structured comparison of Headwater and Peng Gully villages.

Paired Comparison: The Queen Mother of the West

The village of Headwater holds a yearly festival to honor the Queen Mother of the West (*Xi Wangmu*), a Daoist goddess who become extremely popular in China during the Tang Dynasty.[22] The Queen Mother holds an important place in the Daoist pantheon: she cultivates the peaches of immortality, which bloom once every three thousand years, and which she feeds to other deities in ritual feasts to ensure their longevity. According to legend, she has also fed the peaches to certain mortal devotees, most famously the Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty.[23]

In Headwater, the deity procession (*shenyou*) honoring the Queen Mother is the village's largest social gathering. Celebrants parade a representation of the Mother of the West between three local villages. Each of the three neighboring villages takes a turn holding the parade, so that each village organizes the festival once every three years. Villagers told me that the villages compete to match or top the quality of the parade and festival held by their neighbors the previous year. In southern China, this type of deity procession is an important ritual. Helen Siu describes a similar parade honoring the god of the south seas in the Pearl River Delta. That procession of the god's idol generally lasted four days, traversing several settlements, with some villages putting on as many as six operas at the same time

[21]Yuxin Hou (2013, pp. 171-172)

[22]See Cahill (1993) for a scholarly overview of the history of the Queen Mother of the West.

[23]Evidently, the peaches did not confer immorality on the Emperor Wu, who died just short of his seventieth birthday. See *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

to serve as entertainment.[24] In Headwater, the parade once similarly required villagers to shoulder a heavy statue of the Queen Mother and walk it for miles down dusty dirt tracks, a backbreaking task. Now, to tour the Queen Mother, villagers place her statue on the back of a pickup truck and drive her slowly down newly-paved roads, proceeded by a line of trucks that delivers blasts of fireworks.

Villagers say that organizing the festival unifies Headwater's three major lineage groups and reinforces the power of the group of elders that head them. Putting on the festival is an impressive logistical feat. Festival leaders must wheedle donations from the village's three lineage groups to pay for food, costumes, fireworks, decorations, a stage, and sound system. They must recruit a cast of hundreds, clothe them in traditional dress and provide them with the appropriate objects to carry, which range from silk banners to replica jade swords. The effort requires months of planning by the village elder's council (*laoren zu*), which is composed of Headwater's lineage elite.[25]

Not coincidentally, the festival reinforces the lineage social elite's authority. During the procession, lineage elders march in a place of honor just behind the deity. The celebration that concludes the day-long festival also includes speeches by key lineage elders, who put their personal stamp on the festival's success. Writing about temple festivals in a group of villages in the same prefecture, Irene Eng and Yi-min Lin note:

> For those who wanted to play a leading role in lineage organizations, the [temple festival] council provided a useful avenue, as according to local tradition the worship of deities assumes greater significance than the worship of ancestors. A prominent status in council affairs could help enhance or reinforce one's status in clan affairs... Since the deity procession is a vital test of their leadership, they cannot afford to make it a less than spectacular event if they want to maintain their influence in the village.[26]

It is much the same in Headwater, where many credit the festival with uniting the village's three lineages. As one leader put it, "even though we are a mixed-surname (*zaxing*) village, we all help each other (*women dou huxiang bangzhu*)."

[24]Siu (1989, pp. 79-82).

[25]The pattern of temple councils being staffed by lineage elites seems to be a general one. In a study of a nearby set of villages, Irene Eng and Yi-min Lin note that "all the leading members of the elders' councils in the villages we studied were also leading members of their clans." See Eng and Lin (2002, p. 1276)

[26]Eng and Lin (2002, p. 1276)

In short, folk religious institutions reinforce the autonomous power of lineage leaders. As discussed in the previous chapter, no land takings have occurred in Headwater village, where local officials must contend on a daily basis with a powerful and well-organized group of social elites. The bonds created by folk religious institutions not only strengthen the authority of these elites, they create ties between villagers who spend weeks practicing and preparing for the village fair. In Headwater, autonomous civil society groups have helped to protect the interests of villagers and their land rights.

Paired Comparison: The Lords of the Three Mountains

In Peng Gully, the village's folk religious institutions reinforce the power of lineage elites and benefit village cadres. Like Headwater and most other villages in the region, Peng Gully holds a yearly deity procession; in this village, the procession honors the Lords of the Three Mountains (*Sanshan Guowang*).[27] The Lords of the Three Mountains are a legendary trio of mountain deities famed for their role in suppressing a rebellion against a Song Dynasty emperor.

The festival mirrors many aspects of the deity procession in Headwater. It includes lavish helpings of food for celebrants, who drink expensive tea and liquor and chew on betel nuts (a mild narcotic). The statues of the Lord of the Three Mountains patrol the village in a prearranged order. On the first day they travel in sequence to the eastern part of the village, and then the south, followed by the northern and western reaches. On the second day the Lords of the Three Mountains parade south, north, west, and east. The deities stop at the main lineage ancestral hall and villagers line the main parade route, lighting candles, incense, and fireworks as the deities pass.[28]

A village elder's council (*laoren lishihui*) organizes the procession and fair. The council gathers contributions from each villager to pay for it: there is a mandatory 3 *yuan* contribution for each adult, and an additional 2 *yuan* must be paid by men who wish to honor the passing gods by lighting a candle and placing it on their palanquin. (In the patriarchal culture of Chaozhou, this is a task generally performed by men.) Men who have recently married must pay an additional 80 *yuan*, for which they receive the honor of helping to carry the gods for part of their journey, which brings good fortune to their new household.

[27] See C.-s. Chen (2001) for an overview.

[28] See Eng and Lin (2002, p. 1259) describe similar practices in other villages in Chaozhou.

Yet, unlike in Headwater, village cadres have substantial influence over the elder's council and give it its marching orders (quite literally, in the case of the deity procession). The village head and Party Secretary do not serve on the council. However, a small group of lineage elites sit on the council and hold its key offices, and these socially influential households also happen to be allies of the village's political leadership. The village head has cultivated these ties through old-fashioned patronage. When influential families want to build new houses, the head has used his power over land reallocations to give cultivated land (*gengdi*) to these families for use as residential land (*zhaijidi*).

Religious institutions reinforce lineage elite's power and in doing so strengthen the power of village cadres. Organizing the festival requires substantial social authority in order to convince villagers to donate money, time, and resources; at the same time it strengthens the council members' moral authority and reputation among villagers. For example, the careful sequence in which the deities parade through the village, which is announced on posters throughout the village beforehand, makes it plain to everyone in the village that all households, rich or poor, have equal access to the deities. All villagers regardless of means also enjoy the same food and liquor. In this manner, the parade reinforces the council members' reputations for being equitable and fair social arbiters (*gongzheng*). Yet, as the previous chapter illustrated, several of these council members later used their moral authority to help convince villagers to give up their land and their savings for a project that was never built, but that instead filled the wallets of village officials and key allies. As one villager put it: "They set a trap to cheat us (*sheju pian women*)."

In many villages in Guangdong local officials have quietly encouraged the revival of deity processions and folk religious institutions, since they sometimes see them as useful for governing the village and exerting political control. Irene Eng and Yi-min Lin in their study of religion in Guangdong note that "since the late 1980s, many village cadres have not only taken a tolerant attitude toward the deity procession but have actually provided tacit support for it, so as to add legitimacy to the authority they hold based in the state system."[29] Eng and Lin note that religious institutions increase the popularity of social elites, who can be powerful allies of village officials who need their help with family planning policies and revenue collection.

The content of Peng Gully's religious institutions — that is, the symbols, narratives,

[29]Eng and Lin (2002, p. 1276)

and rituals used by these groups — also to some degree reinforce cadres' symbolic political authority. For example, the Lords of the Three Mountains are known for their role in quelling a rebellion against the Song state, for which the emperor awarded him an honorary title. The rituals and symbols of the deity procession legitimate secular state authority, rather than defying it, by deifying figures whose most notable achievement was to support the central state against an insurrection.

5.5 Survey Evidence on Bridging Ties

The case studies showed the process by which religious institutions can strengthen the moral authority of ethnic elites, which can actually strengthen the state's control over local society. I now turn to survey evidence to examine whether this pattern holds across mainland China. The evidence is drawn from the same dataset described above, but with a slightly different set of tests. To examine whether religious festivals strengthen the authority of lineage elites, I interact an indicator for village participation in temple fairs with an indicator for whether or not lineage leaders are included in village political office.

The results, presented in 5.3, suggest that religious institutions can benefit local officials when they strengthen the authority of lineage elites allied with the local state. The simple specification in the first column interacts the religious participation indicator with the lineage leader inclusion indicator. It shows that when lineage leaders join village political institutions but there is no festival activity, it does not increase the likelihood of a land confiscation. However, the combination of lineage leader inclusion and temple fairs correlates with a 23 percentage point increase in the likelihood of a land taking. Taken together, it shows that the effect of lineage institutions on land takings is evidently concentrated in villages that also hold festivals. The subsequent three columns gradually add control variables and province fixed effects using the same set of variables used earlier in the dissertation. The result remains substantively unchanged and, with the exception of the final specification, statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ levels.[30]

The quantitative estimates suggest that the ability of local cadres to exert political control through civil society groups hinges on complementary social institutions that strengthen their

[30] As noted before, these results only demonstrate correlations. However, the results are consistent with the theory and the qualitative evidence.

Table 5.3: Least-squares regression estimates of the impact of religious festivals and lineage leader incorporation. The dependent variable is an indicator for land expropriation.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Temple fair *and* lineage cadre	0.232**	0.227**	0.207**	0.199*
	(0.103)	(0.105)	(0.105)	(0.105)
Temple fairs and festivals	0.009	0.039	0.043	0.048
	(0.040)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.046)
Lineage leader is cadre	−0.051	−0.041	−0.021	−0.007
	(0.077)	(0.082)	(0.082)	(0.082)
Distance to county seat (km)		−0.001	0.0001	0.001
		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Terrain roughness		0.00005	0.0001	0.0001
		(0.0001)	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
Agricultural suitability index		0.050*	0.042	0.033
		(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.030)
Wealth (nighttime lights proxy)		0.003	0.003	0.002
		(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Township control over elections			0.138	0.121
			(0.094)	(0.097)
Distance to township (km)			−0.010***	−0.009**
			(0.004)	(0.004)
Surname fragmentation index				0.172*
				(0.089)
Ethnic fragmentation index				−0.164
				(0.192)
Number of households (logged)				0.041
				(0.034)
Constant	0.134***	−0.045	−0.028	−0.360
	(0.025)	(0.100)	(0.101)	(0.224)
Province fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	392	390	390	376

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

moral authority. The optimistic view of Putnam's "bridging" social capital is that it improves governance and accountability by linking groups to each other and facilitating collective action. This turns this idea of its head. Instead, institutions that create social capital, like village-wide religious festivals, can serve as a kind of opiate that increases the popularity and moral authority of social elites and allows them to demobilize their constituents and extract more from them.[31]

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that religious institutions in China are not on their own politically salient. However, religious institutions can reinforce the power of local elites who draw their authority from other types of civil society groups, like clans. Where the leaders of these civil society groups ally with the local state, these institutions help to reinforce state control over society. Where they do not, these institutions can strengthen the hand of political entrepreneurs in their fight against the state.

The findings outlined in this chapter cast serious doubt on Lily Tsai's theory that village-wide religious institutions serve primarily as channels of bottom-up informal accountability.[32] If the theory that religious institutions were channels of political accountability were true, voters in village elections would rationally prefer to vote for cadres who participate in village religious life, and can therefore be sanctioned or rewarded by group members. Yet there is scant evidence that for this either in the survey presented earlier, or in the large literature on village elections in China, which instead highlights the political salience of clan ties (discussed in the previous chapter) and neighborhood ties (discussed in the subsequent chapter), while paying little note of religion.[33]

The cultural content of religious institutions determines their political role. Ritual practice is at the root of the relatively weak bonds created by folk religion in China; members of village temples in China rarely regularly pray together, unlike Christians or Muslims, and so the village does not hold a temple festival villagers may not even be aware of who is observant and who is not. Other religions, like Islam, have ritual practices like group prayer that

[31]For critical takes on Putnam, see among others Tarrow (1996) and Satyanath, Voigtlaender, and Voth (2013).

[32]Tsai (2007a).

[33]See O'Brien and Han (2009) for an overview.

encourage group identification and also deploy symbols that do not encourage deference to state power to the same degree as Chinese folk religion. Consequently, Islam is more likely to stand on its own as an important political force that counterveils the state. Consistent with this, Qiangqiang Luo and Joel Andreas show how Islam has helped to encourage resistance to land expropriations in northwest China.[34]

To the extent that religion is politically salient, folk religious institutions in China reinforce top-down status hierarchies, not bottom-up accountability. In general, the symbols and rituals used in folk religious practice encourage deference to state authority by deifying officials and encouraging respect for authoritarian national rulers. One indication that these institutions serve the state — rather than society, as Tsai argues — is the fact that village cadres themselves have in many places encouraged the revival of folk religious institutions. They do so because religion reinforces the power of local elites and strengthens political control.

[34]Luo and Andreas (2016).

Chapter 6

The Reach of the State: Neighborhood Groups

Kinship, religion, and neighborhood ties shape rural political life in China. The previous two chapters discussed how lineage and religious civil society groups serve as instruments of political control for local elites; this chapter examines the role of neighborhood groups. China's rulers have for centuries recognized the importance of neighborhood ties and their potential utility for the state. Under the Song (960-1279), Ming (1368-1644), and Qing (1644-1912) Dynasties, China's emperors controlled rural society through a decentralized administrative system called the *baojia*, under which 100 neighboring households made up one *jia*, and a collection of 10 *jia* constituted a *bao*.[1] The system required that the leaders of each *bao* and *jia* monitor their neighbors, report on their movements, inform on dissidents and traitors, encourage compliance with the law, and collect taxes. In doing so, the system put neighborhood social networks in the service of an autocratic state.

While the *baojia* system no longer exists, the Communist Party governs rural China through a decentralized system that, much like the old system, turns neighborhood civil society networks into tools of authoritarian control. Local officials divide most villages in China into quasi-autonomous administrative units called *cunmin xiaozu*, or villager small groups, which are the equivalent of village wards. These units are direct legacies of the commune, brigade, and production team structure of collective agriculture under Mao but

[1]The exact numbers in each unit shifted over time but this was the configuration during much of the Qing Dynasty. As I discuss below Imperial state in some periods employed both a *baojia* and *lijia* system, which roughly paralleled each other but had distinct functions. For example, in some periods the *lijia* system was used to collect taxes and the *baojia* maintained law and order.

also have echoes of the old Imperial order. These wards are on average about the same size as a *jia* under the Qing Emperors — and much like the *baojia* system, the leaders of these groups help the regime by collecting information on their neighbors, maintaining order, and encouraging political compliance with the regime's policies.

This chapter shows how the regime has constructed a modern system of political control organized around neighborhood civil society groups. This decentralized, nominally autonomous administrative system enables local officials to draw socially influential neighborhood leaders into positions of political authority as small group leaders. I show how when neighborhood social elites become the leaders of villager small groups, it tilts the politics of land development in favor of local elites. Case study and quantitative evidence show that when local leaders become small group leaders, they use their informal authority to help local officials confiscate land with predatory terms.

Intuitively, it might seem to be the case that centralized political institutions that consolidate political authority in one or a small number of political units makes political control easier. In the case of a village, consolidating authority in the hands of village-level leaders and a small number of neighborhood ward bosses might seem to make it easier for officials to monitor their subordinates and control them. However, a surprising finding from this chapter is that *decentralized* institutions are often more effective tools of political control. Villages with larger number of wards find it easier to confiscate land. I argue that this is because small social networks facilitate control, because the ward bosses have fewer constituents and it is easier to monitor and sanction them.

In outlining the role of neighborhood civil society groups as a tool of authoritarian order, this chapter extends the arguments made in previous chapters about the role of kinship and religion. I previously argued that kinship groups and, to a lesser degree, religious groups serve state ends effectively in part because they promote informal norms that encourage deference to authority and the state. Neighborhood groups have no such set of informal norms or cultural symbols, yet nevertheless still serve as tools of authoritarian governance. This suggests that civil society groups can be tools of political control even without these norms, so long as they have informal leaders who by virtue of their social standing and central position within social networks have influence over a network of followers. This suggests that the argument is not limited to the leaders of "traditional" social groups, but may apply to other sorts of informal political brokers in other contexts, such as the leaders of informal

settlements or the leaders of other types of civil society organizations.

6.1 The Reach of the State Revisited

Local ties have long shaped rural political life in China. These place-based ties strengthen the importance of individual villages and made them into miniature polities of their own, leading to what scholars have described as a "cellularized"[2] or "honeycomb"[3] structure to rural society. One strain of thought emphasizes how local ties put village cadres at odds with the central state, leading cadres to fail to comply with policies that hurt the interests of the community they represent,[4] and other times failing to comply with state policies that harm their own interests.[5] These views of rural politics — of villages as autonomous communities and of village cadres at odds with the central state — downplay the remarkable success of the Chinese state at projecting state power deep into the countryside, which compares favorably to most states in the developing world.[6]

Centuries before the Communist takeover, China's emperors harnessed neighborhood social networks for the purposes of authoritarian control. The *baojia* and *lijia* systems stood at the center of the late imperial state's efforts to extend its authority deep into rural China. Formally, the Qing state did not generally extend much below the county level, and these imperial institutions were, like contemporary village institutions, quasi-autonomous bodies that allowed the state to rule the countryside without costly investment in a large grassroots bureaucracy.[7] The structure of the system changed over time; the number of households in each *bao* and *jia* shifted over time, and in some eras a parallel system called the *lijia* took on many critical functions. However, whatever its structure, the core of the system remained the same. It turned neighbors into spies, sheriffs, and soldiers. Kung-

[2]Siu (1989).

[3]Shue (1988).

[4]For example, Oi (1991) focuses on local cadre's efforts to lessen the impact of grain requisitions on their community in the pre-reform era.

[5]See O'Brien and Li (2006) and O'Brien and Li (1999). O'Brien and Li show that officials have incentives to implement unpopular policies like those around birth control and revenue collection, but only selectively implement more popular policies, such as the village election law.

[6]As Herbst (2014) shows, states everywhere struggle to control the rural hinterlands. The cases Herbst studies in sub-Saharan Africa shows just how successful the Chinese state has been in a comparative context. See also Ahlers and Schubert (2015) on effective policy implementation in China.

[7]Franz Schurmann notes that the concept of "local autonomy" was even enshrined in the 1908 Constitution. See Schurmann (1966, p. 410).

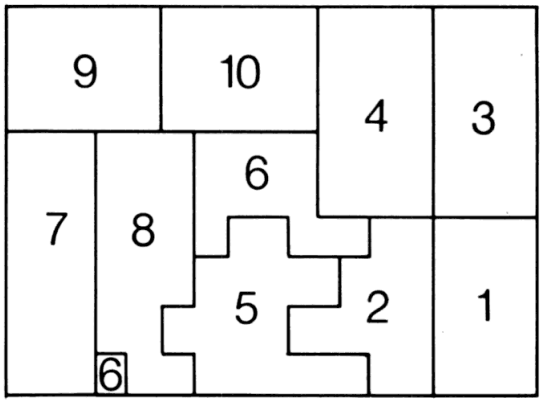
ch'uan Hsiao notes that the system was adopted "for the purpose of controlling the rural areas,"[8] and that neighbors "were made to help in keeping records of... inhabitants, watching their daily doings, reporting suspicious characters and offensive deeds, and apprehending characters wanted by the government."[9] Franz Schurmann describes the system as a form "of organization imposed by the state on the villages for the maintenance of order, the collection of taxes, and the registration of the population."[10]

Ensuring compliance with extractive policies was a core function of the Imperial system of neighborhood control, not unlike the more modern system I describe in the following pages. The Qing, for instance, held the heads of these neighborhood groups personally liable for collecting revenue. When taxes came due, the heads of the groups reminded tax payers of their obligations. The amount owed was "deposited by the taxpayer personally in wooden chests installed in front of the yamen gate"[11] and counted by administrators, but if the count fell short, it fell to the heads of the *lijia* to pay. Hsiao notes that "as a consequence... the entire clan of the person serving his one-year turn [as head of the *lijia*] had to postpone all weddings, and some of the inhabitants were thus compelled to foresake their home villages,"[12] and flee. Plainly, this placed pressure on tax collectors and their kin to meet their obligation, and encouraged the leaders of neighborhood units to use their authority in service of the state.

The Imperial state recognized that further decentralization could, somewhat paradoxically, strengthen central control by allowing the state to take advantage of the strong social networks that bind neighbor to neighbor. Shurmann writes that "when the traditional state was primarily intent on strengthening its exploitation functions [taxation]... it aimed at developing organization within the natural village."[13] In China, a natural village is a geographically contiguous grouping of houses, something that an outsider might intuitively recognize as a single settlement; on the other hand, an administrative village can contain several natural villages. Shurmann notes that by developing ties within the natural village, the state can take advantage of neighborhood ties in a way that is less likely with a larger grouping of several natural villages. This is an important point that I will return — ad-

[8]Hsiao (1960, p. 25)
[9]Hsiao (1960, p. 7)
[10]Schurmann (1966, p. 409)
[11]Hsiao (1960, p. 95)
[12]Hsiao (1960, p. 100)
[13]Schurmann (1966, p. 410)

Figure 6.1: How Chen village neighborhoods were divided into production teams, 1962. Figure reproduced from Chan, Madsen, and Unger (2009, p. 33).



ministrative decentralization by dividing villages into more "wards" can help the state exert control.

The Communists greatly disrupted the old rural order, but the administrative structure they created to replace it had some important parallels. The process of collectivization replaced the administrative village with the production brigade (*shengchan dadui*), and divided each brigade into production teams (*shengchan xiaodui*) based around village neighborhoods. Figure 6.1 shows how one village in southern China divided its neighborhoods into different production teams. These production teams became the focus of peasant life. Teams collectively cultivated their land and had collective responsibility for providing the state with grain levies.[14] As Vivienne Shue notes, these reforms "had the effect of accentuating the salience of the small locality — that is, the salience of the hamlet and the village — for the organization of peasant economic and social life."[15] The Communist system of collective agriculture was even more decentralized than rural administration under the late Qing. Table 6.1 shows the average size of the rural administrative units used by the Qing and the Communists.[16] This reliance on smaller neighborhood social networks helped the state to

[14]See Oi (1991).

[15]Shue (1988, p.132)

[16]Although the table elides this difference, in the Imperial era, the *bao* was distinct from an administrative village, often referred to as a *xiang*. So an administrative village could conceivably include several *bao* and a *bao* might in some cases include several administrative villages. In practice the *baojia* was somewhat irregularly organized since local officials preferred the units to coincide somewhat with natural administrative boundaries.

control rural society and extract more effectively than the more centralized Qing system.

Table 6.1: Rural administrative structure in China in the imperial, Maoist, and reform eras.

Late Imperial Era	Collective Agriculture	Household Agriculture
Bao	Brigade	Village
1000 households	220 households	531 Households
10 *jia*	7 production teams	10 Small Groups
Jia	Production Team	Small Group
100 households	33 households	52 households

Collective agriculture turned the leaders of production teams into middlemen — and in the struggle over the harvest they often used what tools were available to them to help their neighbors. Oi writes that "evasion, illegality, and a 'facade of compliance' became necessary strategies of survival for team leaders who needed to function as both agents of the state and representatives of their localities"[17] Shue concurs that "low-level officials became wily and dogged defenders of their localities, constantly resisting... within the scope that was legitimately and not-so-legitimately available to them."[18] This placed team leaders and other village cadres in an uncomfortable position. While "fellow villagers expected them to behave like traditional leaders, and in fact pressured them to do so, the party did not intend to share power... the political middlemen were soon to become men in the middle."[19]

The reform era and the process of decollectivization did away with the system of production teams and replaced them with "villager small groups" (*cunmin xiaozu*).[20] Instead of cultivating the land collectively, individual households now have long-term use rights to plots of land — but villager small groups continue to formally own the land in most areas. These groups are quasi-autonomous organizations and not part of the formal state hierarchy.

These neighborhood-based small groups, which are the lowest rung of the administrative structure in rural China, have been largely ignored by Western scholars. Oi notes that in

[17]Oi (1991, p. 11-12)
[18]Shue (1988, p. 139)
[19]Siu (1989, p. 136)
[20]In some villages, these are referred to using other terms, such as a village "districts" *pian* or "teams" *xiaodui*. A small minority of villages lack villager small groups or the equivalent. In the China General Social Survey, 95 percent of villages reported having a villager small group system.

the early reform era, "the power of these cadres did not just end... because of their positions and the prevalent clientelist politics in the Maoist period, those who had been cadres may have lost their offices but not necessarily their power."[21] However, in more recent years to the extent that these groups are discussed by scholars at all, it has been to dismiss them. Jonathan Unger, for example, notes that "the villager small-group heads have very few functions and almost no power."[22]

While they are certainly not as powerful as they were in the Mao years, villager small groups and their leaders remain important because they have formal authority over a village's most crucial resource: land. As Unger notes, "farmers take seriously their villager small group's continued ownership of the land."[23] Most villager small groups undertake land reallocations to readjust land holdings, with one survey finding that 95 percent of small groups have reallocated their land.[24] The leaders of small groups are generally but not always elected democratically by their peers, and they often govern by consensus.[25]

Despite being quasi-autonomous, officials nevertheless have some control over the leaders of these neighborhood-based small groups. Officials I interviewed said that while these leaders were often elected, the village Party Branch or village committees could block the election of certain villagers or even potentially dismiss them from office. Village governments sometimes compensate small group heads, which provides an additional tool of control, although the compensation is quite modest. The median village in the China General Social Survey reports paying small group and team leaders a median salary of 200 yuan per year (about $30 U.S. dollars).[26]

The heads of villager small groups also play a crucial role because they serve as the lowest-level link between the Chinese state and society. Indeed, the role of the heads of villager small groups is somewhat analogous to that of the heads of residents' committees in urban China, whom Ben Read describes as the "nerve tips" of the state.[27] When village

[21]Oi (1991, pp. 185-186).

[22]Unger (2012, p. 23).

[23]Unger (2012, p. 23).

[24]Kong and Unger (2013, p. 4)

[25]Unger shows that small groups in Anhui generally require a supermajority vote of all members in order to reallocate land Kong and Unger (2013, p. 11).

[26]This likely overestimates the amount that team leaders are paid and the frequency with which they receive salaries, since it asks about the salaries of "group and team cadres" (*duizu ganbu*) which could be construed to include other village teams and groups.

[27]See Read (2000) and Read (2003).

cadres need to implement potentially unpopular or complex policies, they rely on small group leaders to help them disseminate information about these policies and persuade villagers to comply with them.[28] Two village Party Secretaries I interviewed in Hunan noted, separately, that when they needed to reallocate land for road building projects they called a meeting of the heads of the villager small groups, and asked the heads of these small groups to conduct "thought work" (*sixiang gongzuo*) with their teams to persuade them to voluntarily comply with the requisitions. In one village, the Party Secretary noted that he went door-to-door with small group heads to help persuade people to give up some land for the project. As he noted, the team leaders "are important allies." In many places, this is a matter of official policy. County governments throughout Jiangxi and Zhejiang, for instance, have issued documents noting that the primary duties of small group leaders include "ensuring the smooth operation of important projects, such as land requisitions, housing demolition and relocation, [and] family planning."[29]

The remainder of this chapter investigates the role of neighborhood-based small groups and their leaders. When do neighborhood ties serve as effective channels of political control? I argue that more decentralized administrative structures allow the state to draw socially influential neighborhood leaders into the local state apparatus and exert greater control over village society.

6.2 Neighborhood Ties in Service of the State

The comparison of two nearby villages in Henan illustrates the importance of neighborhood ties as tools of mobilization and control. The two villages are in Xinxiang Prefecture, about an hour's drive from the provincial capital. As Table 6.2 shows, the two villages are very similar on most dimensions, including their population, level of development, and political institutions. For example, both villages hold village elections in which any villager can run and both have politically salient clans.

[28] In addition to land policies, officials view villager small group leaders as potential allies in eliciting compliance with the One Child Policy, and encouraged small groups to appoint households as leaders for promoting birth control policies. See "Village Self-Government Family Planning Regulations" (*Jihua Shengyu Cunmin Zizhi Guifan*). Available at `http://www.china.com.cn/policy/txt/2008-10/12/content_16598517.htm`, last accessed on June 27, 2016.

[29] "Strengthening Team Building Among Villager Small Group Leaders" (*Guanyu Jiaqiang Cunmin Xiaozu Zuzhang Duiqu Jianshe de Yijian*). Author's Collection.

Table 6.2: Wujia and Taiping case studies.

	Wujia	Taiping
Population	1300	1400
Income	2000 yuan	2000 yuan
Fair and free village elections	Yes implemented	Yes
Clans politically salient	Yes	Yes
Village administration	Centralized	Decentralized
Neighborhood elites	Autonomous	Incorporated
Accountability for illegal expropriations	Yes	No

The key difference between the two villages lies in they degree to which they have incorporated neighborhood leaders into local political networks.[30] In Wujia, neighborhood leaders remain autonomous from the local state and local patronage networks, which has let them freely organize against local officials and hold them accountable. On the other hand, the politically incorporation of neighborhood leaders in Taiping has strengthened the power of the local state and tipped the political logic of development in favor of local leaders.

Wujia Village: Outside Accountability

Wujia village sits near a major county road in Xinxiang Prefecture on the dusty North China Plain. In most years, the village plants two crops per year: one of corn and one of wheat. Rice and pork, however, are the staples of the local diet, and the village has five small-scale pig farms. While farmers continue to tend the fields and raise livestock, most nearby villages also have small enterprises that employ a few dozen villagers and migrants. One village close to Wujia houses a factory that makes clothing and a plant that processes agricultural by-products; another has started to build an auto parts factory. In Wujia itself, there is a food

[30]To some degree the administrative structure helps determine the level of political incorporation. It may intuitively seem that centralization facilitates control — but these cases demonstrate how decentralization makes it easier for the local state to co-opt socially influential neighborhood leaders. Wujia village is relatively centralized, with a small number of villager small groups relative to its population size: with 7 small groups in the village, there are 185 people per group. On the other hand, Taiping village has 10 small groups, which works out to about 140 people per group. This difference in structure is not dramatic, but it has contributed to an important difference in the political dynamic in the two villages.

processing plant, a business that rents construction equipment, and a half dozen greenhouses that grow flowers.

Henan is famous for being a leader in information disclosure (*xinxi gongkai*), and the local government has been relatively effective at channeling political conflict into formal channels such as elections, courts, and the media instead of relying on somewhat less formal channels like petitions and protest.[31] Residents reported that they were free to vote for whomever they liked and anyone can run for office on the village committee. A prominent local rights activist told me that petitions are "useless" (*meiyong*), and that "what you need is to go to the courts first and the media second." He explained that the legal action forces bureaucratic wheels to start turning, which forces governments to look at residents' cases. Subsequent media coverage can intensify the government's focus on the issue and help claimants reach a resolution.[32]

However, these formal institutions of accountability have not eliminated patronage, vote buying, and corruption. While voters in village elections can cast their ballot for whomever they like, they generally do so for the candidate who offers the most money for their vote. Vote buying plainly benefits candidates, who have calculated that the value of office exceeds the tens of thousands of dollars that some spend buying voter's support. It can even in some ways benefit villagers, who receive an up-front payment in return for their ballot rather than an abstract promise of future benefits which they may or may not materialize. Yet this type of vote buying also reduces the incentives for officials to provide villagers with public goods and services once in office and encourages officials to treat office holding as an opportunity to seek rents rather than impartially serve the public.

The local rights activist explained that he thought that village cadres could be distinguished based on their dominant patron-client networks. First, he said, are officials who rely on patronage networks outside the village, especially higher levels of government and business interests. These cadres focus on trading political and economic favors among these local elites. A second type are cadres who rely on patronage networks within the village, especially among lineage and neighborhood networks. These cadres focus on distributing rents among their networks of clients who, in return, support them at the ballot box and

[31] See Lorentzen (2013) for a discussion of how authorities allow protests to gather information on grievances.

[32] This activist's view of how to resolve disputes is consistent with Distelhorst (2013) and the idea of "publicity-driven accountability."

make sure they stay in office. A third type of village official has no real patronage network. As he noted, "This type is unusual."

From the perspective of the villager, a common danger is that officials signal they are focused on their village patronage network during elections — especially by buying votes in order to win office — but then once they become cadres they have incentives to turn towards patronage networks among local elites. In 2005, for example, a wealthy village entrepreneur named Wu Qiangguo ran for the village committee. Tapping his substantial (by the standards of rural China) personal wealth, he bought votes with cash and promises that he would work on the village committee towards promoting villagers' interests. Wu handily won the post of village head. Yet once in office he used his authority to requisition a large amount of cultivated village land, 41 *mu*, for a factory and market project. It was almost certainly illegal for the village committee to rent out cultivated land for this construction project, and a former village committee head told me that the village committee members kept all of the rental money for themselves while compensating villagers nothing. Villagers also suspected that Wu had an ownership stake in the market project so that he managed to benefit on both ends of the deal. This whole process greatly angered villagers, and even members of Wu's own clan.[33]

However, Wu Qiangguo had a group of powerful political rivals — a group of politically autonomous, socially influential neighborhood leaders. In making the land deal, the village committee had passed over the small group leaders and other neighborhood elites, and not consulted them or cut them a portion of the rents from the project.[34] This was business as usual in Wujia, where the leaders of villager small groups are not integral parts of elite patronage networks. Since they did not belong to these patronage networks, these neighborhood leaders had no real incentive to side with officials in the dispute over the land taking.[35]

These autonomous neighborhood leaders organized villagers to hold the village committee

[33]Wu Qiangguo was an elite member of his clan, and consistent with what I have argued in previous chapters, his prestige and authority within his clan is one reason he was able to win office and undertake the initial land expropriation. But as I discuss in the remainder of this section, clan politics were not the only important dynamic at work within Wujia.

[34]See Li and O'Brien (2008) for a related discussion on protest leadership.

[35]The relatively large size of villager small groups in Wujia somewhat paradoxically may have made them better tools of anti-state collective action than collective control. One reason officials may have ignored them is that they were too large to be effective at gathering information about villagers and helping officials ensure compliance with tax and birth quota policies.

accountable. Even if there is widespread anger over a land requisition in China, there is sometimes no effective collective organization. In Wujia, things played out differently in part because officials lacked effective control over neighborhood groups and their leaders. Once the one-sided terms of the land deal emerged, neighborhood elites alongside the leaders of villager small group leaders organized villagers, going door-to-door to help rally their brethren in collective protest. The buy-in of these socially influential leaders helped to assuage peoples' concerns that they were taking a risky step by opposing a wealthy local entrepreneur who evidently enjoyed political protection from the township government. In taking collective action in an authoritarian regime, there is often safety in numbers. Being one of a small number of villagers who signed such a petition can make one a target for political retribution; being one of an overwhelming majority of villagers signing a petition would be much safer. The participation of neighborhood leaders helped assure villagers that the protest would be broad-based. In the end, around 80 percent of villagers signed a petition demanding the head's ouster, including former members of the village government. The village committee head was forced to leave office in 2008.

Effective collective resistance organized by these neighborhood leaders has discouraged further illegal land takings in Wujia and helped protect farmers' property rights. When officials requisition land illegally and go unpunished, they have few incentives to stop, especially when the potential rents from selling land are so high. By mobilizing against Wu Qiangguo, the village demonstrated that future leaders would face some form of accountability if they appropriated village land. The comparative success of the mobilization in Wujia has strengthened the bargaining position of villagers, protecting their land tenure, and helping to ensure that in the future villagers will not have their land taken without adequate compensation.

What would have happened if local elites had not rallied villagers to hold the village head accountable? What would have happened if Wujia's neighborhood elites had been more closely tied to local officials? The case of nearby Taiping village examines these questions.

Taiping Village: Neighborhood Leaders and Control

Taiping village is a short drive from Wujia Village, in the same prefecture but just across county lines. Farmers generally cultivate a combination of wheat and corn, and many villages are home to small factories and other enterprises, from plastics companies to agricultural

processing facilities. Farmers in Taiping are not quite poor but not quite "moderately well-off" (*xiaokang*) either, just as they are in Wujia.

Yet unlike in Wujia, the leaders of villager small groups in Taiping have been incorporated into the state. The long-time village head has two tools at his disposal to ensure the loyalty of these neighborhood leaders. First, small group leaders are in practice not democratically elected and instead are selected by the village head in consultation with the village Party Secretary. This ensures that he can select subordinates with right mixture of loyalty (to himself) and competence (especially influence among their small group). Second, once they take office, the village head draws them into local patronage networks. Most consequential of all, he allows the leaders of villager small groups to use excess land within the group for their own purposes, such as building homes and small enterprises. Using land this way is almost certainly illegal, which actually works in favor of the village head. Neighborhood leaders know that if he leaves office the village head will not be able to protect them and their claim to the land will be in doubt, and their investment in it will be lost. As one villager put it, the small groups leaders "owe their allegiance to the village head."

The head of the village committee, Wang Jianmin, used his authority to requisition village land for a factory project. He did so at the same time that the county government was requisitioning land to build a road through the village. The use of eminent domain to build roads is often fairly well-compensated in China (though as previous chapters showed, the compensation does not always reach its intended recipients). In this case, however, the village head evidently attempted to use the project as cover to requisition some extra land near the road without compensation in order to build a factory on it. Villagers not surprisingly noticed that they were not being compensated for a substantial portion of the land they were losing.

The land requisition in Taiping had some striking parallels to Wujia. In both cases, the village head requisitioned a few dozen *mu* of land to build a factory that, in villagers' eyes, had close and potentially corrupt connections to the village head. In both cases, villagers were given no compensation. And in both cases, many villagers expressed anger at the evidently illegal use of village farm land for an industrial project that brought few jobs to the village. Yet in Taiping, there was no broad-based collective action targeting Wang Jianmin, the village head. What explains this failure of collective action?

First, local officials used the coercive power of the state to their advantage. Two villagers

I spoke with told me that they suspected that Wang Jianmin had a villager arrested for relatively trivial matters related to the land conflict, including raising some objections to the project in a public meeting called for the purpose of soliciting feedback. The village head then feigned ignorance of the reason the villager was arrested and offered to help him get rid of his trouble with the government — if only he would support the village head. As one villager put it, with perhaps as much respect as anger, "the village head is particularly cunning."

Just as important, the village head knew that small group leaders were his allies rather than adversaries. As discussed above, the village head used his control over appointments to select loyal subordinates and his control over village land to buy their continued allegiance. When he requisitioned land for the factory project, small group leaders played a very different role than in Wujia. Instead of going door to door to rally villagers in opposition, they went door to door doing "thought work" (*sixiang gongzuo*) to convince villagers to accept the land requisition. In some cases, they promised they would help the villagers negotiate for better compensation and benefits (which never materialized). In the words of one villager, "The village small group leaders bullied us (*qifu women*)."

Taiping village illustrates the high hurdles that villagers face when trying to organize against a powerful local state and the importance of having allies among the grassroots elite. First, local officials have all the coercive powers of the state at their disposal. They can jail villagers who resist the state, even when they do so through evidently institutionalized channels like raising objections in public meetings. This makes it clear to villagers that anyone who stands out has made a powerful enemy. Second, they can use softer tools to convince people not to organize, like having neighborhood leaders weigh in on the side of local officials. Since standing out can have harsh consequences, having local civil society leaders on the side of the state can make organizing all but impossible.

Does the pattern observed in these two villages in Henan hold for the rest of China? The following sections turns to survey evidence to assess the relationship between neighborhood groups and land development across the rest of China.

6.3 Survey Evidence for the Importance of Neighborhood Networks

To examine national patterns I use the same survey data used in the previous chapters of this dissertation. As discussed previously, the data comes from a random group of villages in China with a national sample frame (excluding Xinjiang and Tibet). This allows me to assess patterns beyond the villages in which I conducted qualitative field work.

To measure the main explanatory variable, I examine the degree to which local officials have decentralized power to neighborhood small groups. I measure this as the number of villager small groups per natural village, which is the equivalent of the number of "wards" in each village. I log this number and standardize it. This measure is somewhat coarse. An ideal measure would rely on a census of all residents of each village in the sample and measure the social network centrality of small group leaders. Unfortunately, such a measure is prohibitively expensive in a national survey.

While it is not as fine-grained as one might like, this measure has several advantages. First, it directly captures the idea that the more the state relies on neighborhood networks as a tool of authoritarian control, the more it decentralizes local administration. This echoes Shurmann's argument that when the Chinese state "was primarily intent on strengthening its exploitation functions... it aimed at developing organization within the natural village."[36] It is also consistent with the qualitative evidence also showed how in the more decentralized village of Taiping, officials used neighborhood leaders' social influence to their advantage. A second advantage of this measure is that the number of small groups in a village is not politically sensitive, so officials do not have incentives to misreport it. In the appendix I present results from alternative measures which also show a robust relationship in the theorized direction.

The main analysis, presented in Table 6.3, examines the relationship between neighborhood decentralization and land seizures. My theory would lead us to expect that more decentralized villages would experience more land seizures, since these smaller wards would allow the state to take better advantage of neighborhood social networks. The first column of the table presents results for the bivariate relationship. Note that I have scaled the main explanatory variable to aid interpretation of the results. It shows that a one standard de-

[36]Schurmann (1966, p. 410)

Table 6.3: Ordinary least squares regression estimates of the relationship between the neighborhood decentralization index and land seizures. The dependent variable is an indicator for land expropriation.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Neighborhood decentralization (standardized)	0.053***	0.062***	0.056**	0.056**
	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Distance to county seat		−0.001	−0.0003	0.0002
		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Terrain roughness		0.0001	0.0001	0.00005
		(0.0001)	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
Agricultural suitability index		0.063**	0.053*	0.046
		(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.033)
Wealth (1992 nighttime lights proxy)		0.002	0.002	0.0002
		(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Township control over elections			0.117	0.101
			(0.101)	(0.103)
Distance to township			−0.010**	−0.010**
			(0.004)	(0.004)
Surname fragmentation index				0.290***
				(0.097)
Ethnic fragmentation index				−0.065
				(0.217)
Number of households (log)				0.016
				(0.037)
Constant	0.161***	0.022	0.055	−0.162
	(0.020)	(0.111)	(0.112)	(0.241)
Province fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	348	346	346	333

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

viation increase in the degree of decentralization correlates with a five percent increase in the likelihood of a land expropriation. The results are statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level.

Next, I gradually add control variables to the model. The second column adds controls for plausibly pre-treatment village economic characteristics. These include the distance to the county seat, terrain roughness, agricultural suitability, and a measure of village wealth derived from nighttime lights. I also include province fixed effects to account for geographic heterogeneity. In the third column I add controls for political characteristics, such as the degree to which elections are controlled by the township instead of being free and fair and the distance to the township. Finally, I add in controls for village social characteristics including population and measures of social and ethnic fragmentation. In each of the specifications, the result for the main explanatory variable remains significant and substantively unchanged. In the appendix I present additional results that shows a correlation between these land seizures and lower incomes for villagers.

6.4 Evidence from a Natural Experiment

The least squares regression estimates captured a robust correlation between decentralization and land requisitions. A causal estimate would require some kind of as-if random variation in the degree to which villages have decentralized. Fortunately, however, history as provided us with plausibly exogenous variation in the degree to which villages decentralized their administrative structure. In this section, I turn to estimates using instrumental variables that show a causal relationship between neighborhood decentralization and land requisitions.

The natural experiment relies on the history of neighborhood groups in China. As I discuss above, these groups grew out of the agricultural production teams that collectively cultivated the land in Mao-era China. The production teams trace their origins to the process of agricultural collectivization. After the land reforms of 1950-53, which took land from the hands of landlords and placed it in the hands of peasants, collectivization began in earnest in 1953-4, when farmers pooled their land and organized themselves into agricultural producers' cooperatives. These cooperatives would not take on the name production team until the 1960s, and in some places the teams were reorganized several times, but the organization of the current system has its roots in this early period.

I use weather shocks in during this early period of collectivization to instrument for current levels of village decentralization. The idea behind the instrument is that severe drought during this period caused villages to create smaller collectives in order to more effectively cope with the drought and distribute aid. I measure weather shocks just before collectivization, in 1953, using fine-grained historical data on the Palmer Drought index for each region of China. The first stage equation models the effect of drought Z on village decentralization y_{it}, which I measure as the log number of small groups in each natural village. In some specifications I also include a matrix of conditioning variables X_j. I estimate the relationship between the instrument and the explanatory variable using the following first stage model:

$$y_i = DZ_i + DX_i + \epsilon_e \tag{6.1}$$

The second stage is estimated using the following model:

$$z_i = \beta_1 y_i + \beta_2 X_i + \epsilon_e \tag{6.2}$$

Where z_j is the outcome of interest. The models adjust for several factors that might also plausibly drive the outcome variables. The economic control variables include distance to the county seat, terrain roughness, and agricultural suitability. The main political control variable is the degree of township control over elections and distance to the township. The main social control is the log number of households per village.[37]

For these estimates, I must assume that the drought in 1953 effects present-day land expropriations only through the organization of subvillage collectives. The exclusion restriction assumption is plausible. The drought may have had a strong influence on events of the time, and the most significant event of that era in rural China were ongoing land reforms. However, the effects of the drought are unlikely to have changed the economic trajectory of villages in a way that has persisted through some other channel.

The main results are presented in Table 6.4, which shows the main estimates as well as reduced form and first stage estimates. The first stage estimates, presented in the second row the table, show a strong positive relationship between the severity of the drought and neighborhood decentralization. It shows that being in a drought-effected area caused villages

[37]Unlike the least squares regression estimates, I do not include province fixed effects because of the way in which these estimates leverage quasi-random geographic heterogeneity in droughts.

Table 6.4: Two stage least squares regression estimates of the relationship between the neighborhood decentralization index and land seizures, instrumented by weather shocks during village collectivization. The dependent variable is an indicator for land expropriation.

	2SLS, Instrumented Estimate			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Neighborhood decentralization (standardized)	0.236*	0.305*	0.283*	0.325*
	(0.139)	(0.163)	(0.164)	(0.186)
	OLS, First Stage Relationship to Decentralization			
Weather shocks during collectivization	0.070***	0.070***	0.070***	0.068**
	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.028)
	OLS, Reduced Form Relationship to Land Seizures			
Weather shocks during collectivization	0.017**	0.021**	0.019**	0.022**
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.010)
Economic Controls		✓	✓	✓
Political Controls			✓	✓
Social Controls				✓
F-Test for Weak Instruments	8.782***	7.550***	7.104***	6.138**
Observations	348	346	346	333
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

to organize smaller agricultural producer cooperatives. Logically, this seems like a plausible result of the consequences of drought, since farmers may have wanted more local control and less centralization to cope with the weather shock. The reduced form estimates presented in the third row show the relationship between the drought in 1953 to present day land seizures. The results show a significant positive relationship between droughts and present day land seizures.

Table 6.4 also shows that more neighborhood decentralization is likely to cause more land seizures. The first row presents instrumented results. The results are significant at the $p < 0.10$ level but are in the expected direction and are fairly consistent across different specifications. However, it is important to note that the instrument is somewhat weak. Together with the correlational evidence and the qualitative case studies they paint a picture consistent with a causal relationship. Villages that decentralize are better able to take

advantage of neighborhood social networks as tools of authoritarian control, which allows them to seize land and extract more from the village.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how neighborhood social networks serve the state. When local officials decentralize power to neighborhood leaders, it allows them to harness their social networks for the purposes of authoritarian control. The qualitative evidence showed that when influential neighborhood leaders were integrated into patronage networks, they had incentives to use their influence to persuade villagers not to organize against land expropriations. This allowed local officials them to tip the logic of land development in their favor. The quantitative evidence suggested that this pattern holds across all of China.

There is some indirect evidence that local officials have come to realize the potential effectiveness of these neighborhood groups as a tool of control. The number of small groups per village increased by 35 percent between 1997 and 2008 – this is, it increased from 5.9 small groups per administrative village in 1997 to 8 small groups per administrative village in 2008.[38] This it is consistent with the idea that officials have recognized the utility of these close social ties as a tool of control and repression, especially in the context of an increasing focus on land development, and have adjusted rural China's administrative structure accordingly.

Scholars of Chinese politics often describe village cadres in terms that make it seem as if they are as squeezed between their constituents and the state, but these findings show the limit of this view. In their influential book, Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li show how villagers exploit the words and promises of the central state against local officials, to highlight the failure of local officials to live up to the promises made by officials in Beijing.[39] Yet village

[38]Note that these numbers are reached by diving the total number of administrative villages in China by the total number of villager small groups in China based on yearbook data. However, some villages have not introduced the small group system so the denominator is larger than it ought to be, and as a result this estimate significantly undercounts the number of small groups per village. It also does not match the data in table 6.1 which is from survey data, and excludes villages that have not introduced the small group system. Data from the China Social Statistical Yearbook of 2009, which was last accessed at `http://www.stats.gov.cn/ztjc/ztsj/hstjnj/sh2009/201209/t20120904_72952.html` on June 24, 2016.

[39]See O'Brien and Li (2006). To be fair, O'Brien and Li also note that "like many other states, the Chinese state is less a monolith than a hodgepodge of disparate actors, many of whom have conflicting interests and multiple identities."

leaders are themselves wily actors, adept at dividing villagers and using their own social ties and words against them to engage in "relational repression."[40]

The use of neighborhood ties to demobilize protesters and prevent collective action shows that many types of civil society groups can be used by local elites as a tool of control. The previous chapters focused on long-standing social ties created by kinship and religious groups, which have deep roots in Chinese society and which have norms that promote deference to authority. Neighborhood ties rely on a somewhat weaker cultural foundation and to some degree, they have even been engineered by the Chinese state through the creation of agricultural production teams. Yet they are also effective tools of control, suggesting that the potential of social ties and social capital as a tool of political control may be quite broad.

[40]Deng and O'Brien (2013)

Chapter 7

China in Comparative Perspective

In this dissertation, I have argued that states extend their power by using semi-democratic institutions to co-opt civil society leaders; once local elites join the state, they have incentives to use their authority to help the state implement its policies and elicit compliance. I have advanced this argument by looking at land expropriations and local development. Studying land redistribution in China is important in its own right: China's land policies have transferred of trillions of dollars of wealth from village collectives to the state and local elites. However, while this may be the case, it still may be fair to wonder whether this strategy of imposing authoritarian order applies to other policies in China or to other contexts.

In this chapter, I examine China in comparative perspective. The chapter has two purposes. The first is to show the theory has explanatory power outside of China. I set about to systematically examine cases in several time periods across five continents: these include ethnic elites in American cities in the 1960s, labor union leaders in Latin America in the 1940s, traditional chiefs in contemporary Africa, and clan chiefs in early modern Scotland and India.

My main argument is that co-optation works differently during the course of everyday politics and during critical junctures in history — especially moments of rapid economic transformation.[1] I show how elites in the course of everyday politics help the state to elicit compliance with extractive policies that have relatively low downsides for their groups, such as helping the state collect taxes. However, during critical junctures these co-opted elites can play much more destructive roles by facilitating larger-scale redistributions of wealth.

[1]See R. B. Collier and D. Collier (1991) for a canonical discussion of critical junctures.

7.1 Elite Co-optation During Everyday Politics

In this section, I show how during the course of everyday politics, co-opting social elites helps states to elicit compliance with relatively low-stakes policies like taxation. This increases state power, but in a way that is arguably beneficial. While local elites help the state extract revenue, their groups also often get something in return, such as improved public goods and services. I develop this insight by examining an historical and contemporary case.

Rajas and Taxes in Early Modern India

In early modern India, kinship and caste groups allowed the state to exercise control over the rural hinterlands much in the same way that lineage helps the Chinese state extend its own reach. Caste and lineage groups organized social relations and the distribution of power. Atop of the social hierarchies of these groups were lineage chiefs, sometimes referred to as rajas or zamindars, who commanded small military forces and had hereditary rights to a portion of the harvest.[2] The central state saw these social institutions as potential mechanisms of control — and the chiefs who stood atop them as important potential allies or adversaries. Anthropologist Richard Fox writes that "partly through the ascriptive office of lineage raja, partly through their investiture with state power, the elites of such kin, or caste, groups often presented both the greatest threat of local revolt and the most potent guarantee of the preservation of central authority at the local level."[3]

Like many early modern states, the challenge of raising revenue from an unwilling rural populace often frustrated the Indian state, and its rulers found that co-opting the rajas was a valuable tool of control. Fox writes that "castes were... state defined institutions for revenue collection, and were often delegated police and civil power over a designated area."[4] To control the lineage chiefs, the pre-Mughal (pre-1526) Indian state put in place a system in which the lineage chiefs held official offices and received a fixed percentage of collected tax revenue, but the state also appointed a local fiscal officer, generally from one of the higher castes but not the raja's lineage, who received a slightly smaller cut of the revenue and monitored the chief.[5] However, although this system helped the state collect revenue, it was

[2]Richards (1996, p. 80).
[3]Fox (1971, p. 16).
[4]Fox (1971, p. 16).
[5]Richards (1996, pp. 81-82).

irregular and noncompliance and revolt were serious problems; as historian John F. Richards notes, "the state did not penetrate far below the surface of the average [rural district] prior to the mid-sixteenth century."[6]

The Mughal Empire's attempts to build a more modern state under Akbar the Great (who reigned from 1556 to 1605) — with fuller control over the rural hinterlands — did not do away with these lineage chiefs, but on the contrary required the state to tighten its embrace of them. Akbar's initial efforts used classic state strategies to make the countryside more "legible" to the central state and, therefore, more controllable: this included standardization of weights and measures, the collection of extensive local data on market prices for crops, as well as incredibly detailed plot-level cadastral surveys, which measured the size of plots with bamboo rods reinforced with iron instead of the old hemp ropes, which expanded and contracted with moisture.[7] Initially, after introducing this new standardized taxation system, Akbar elected to directly administer taxes through the central state instead of allowing the lineage chiefs to do so. However, the system was evidently not tenable without the cooperation of the rajas, and after five years the state returned control to the local chiefs; the increased revenue flows evidently benefitted Akbar and the central state.[8]

Maintaining this state required further co-opting the lineage heads — and in order to do so, Akbar flattered, cajoled, and threatened them in equal measure. He flattered the chiefs with assurances that their power and that of their councils had some degree of autonomy and agency, as long as they supplied him with revenue. He cajoled them by providing them with a large share of a growth pot of revenue. And he threatened them, if perhaps only implicitly, with the powerful army he commanded.[9] Richards writes that "over time the new regulation system would gradually convert the zamindars to a service class of quasi-officials, dependent upon the state."[10]

Needless to say, the economies and societies of contemporary China and Mughal India are enormously different, but they employ parallel strategies of state control. In both cases, relatively strong states, at least in their historical contexts, have relied on the social authority of local elites to control their respective populations. The co-optation of these local elites

[6]Ibid., 82

[7]See Scott (1998) on state efforts at making society legible and Richards (1996, p. 84) on state building under Akbar.

[8]Richards (1996, p. 84). See also Fox (1971, p. 98-99) on Akbar's attempts to weaken the lineage elite.

[9]Richards (1996, pp. 86-90).

[10]Ibid., p. 87.

has helped both states elicit compliance with unpopular policies that extract revenue from local communities. In the next section, turn to another context — traditional leaders in contemporary Africa, to show that this pattern is not limited to Asia or historical cases.

Traditional Chiefs and Distributive Politics in Africa

Traditional chiefs in Africa serve a similar role to lineage leaders elsewhere. They derive their authority from their membership in an extended real or fictive kinship group and, much like the lineage heads discussed above, they raise taxes, resolve disputes, and control access to land. While there is significant variation across different countries, chiefly kingdoms in Africa are, however, much larger in scope than lineages in China: instead of having hundreds of members in a single village like a typical Chinese lineage group, they are more likely to have tens of thousands of members spread across dozens or hundreds of villages.[11] The majority of chiefs also inherit their post.[12] Chiefs, sub-chiefs, and village headmen have long been the major institutions of local governance in many African countries.[13]

One view of chiefs in Africa, common among both politicians and scholars, is that they are local despots.[14] As Nelson Mandela remarked to one traditional chief, "the people want democracy and political leadership based on merit, not birth."[15] Work by Daron Acemoglu, Tristan Reed, and James Robinson shows that when chiefs face little competition from other ruling families, they provide fewer public goods and have more arbitrary control over land rights.[16] Interestingly, they also find that places with despotic chiefs "exhibit greater social capital on dimensions such as attendance at community meetings, participation in social groups, and the undertaking of collective actions."[17] They suggest that "this somewhat puzzling finding... arises because more dominant chiefs have been better able to mold civil society and institutions of civic participation in their villages for their own benefit and continued dominance."[18] This view of chiefs and social capital are consistent with the darker view of local elites and social institutions I have advanced in this dissertation.

[11]Baldwin (2015, pp. 20-52).
[12]Ibid., 24.
[13]Acemoglu, Reed, and Robinson (2014, p. 320). In Sierra Leone, for instance, state-run local councils were only introduced by the government in 2004.
[14]For an overview see Baldwin (2015, pp.3-52).
[15]Mandela (1994, p. 160) quoted in Baldwin (2015, p. 3).
[16]Acemoglu, Reed, and Robinson (2014, p. 319-321).
[17]Ibid., p. 323.
[18]Ibid.

However, important recent work, particularly by Kate Baldwin, has challenged this narrative that chiefs are unaccountable and harmful — this line of work suggests that chiefs can instead help improve the responsiveness of elected officials. Baldwin provides extensive evidence that chiefs function as what she calls "development brokers," who help their communities resolve collection action problems and make sure they have access to development projects such as improved roads, clinics, schools, and water wells. (What Baldwin refers to as "development projects" are public goods and not the sort of "development projects" I refer to throughout in this dissertation, such as factories or real estate developments.) Baldwin writes:

> Across much of rural Africa, traditional leaders play a constructive role in organizing the delivery of local public goods. Because of the weakness of the state, elected politicians need traditional chiefs to organize community contributions to complement any funds they obtain for local projects. Their position is much like that of a tax collector in stronger states, ensuring contributions to publics goods.[19]

Baldwin argues that the long time horizons of chiefs and the repeated nature of their interactions with local society give them different incentives than elected politicians. She writes that "traditional leaders have a unique ability to organize community contributions to these projects... because they expect to rule for life and thus have an incentive to make up-front investments in institutions that will improve the ability of their communities to act collectively over the long term."[20] The permanence of these leaders and their position in local politics make well suited to serve their communities in the absence of an effective state.

The evidence for the benefits of traditional leaders in Africa is convincing, much like the evidence for the public goods benefits of traditional social institutions in rural China, but leads to two important unanswered questions. First, is their role on balance predatory or developmental? Baldwin and others provide evidence that they provide public goods, but their ability to tax and extract from local society may offset some or even most of these benefits. Along these lines, work by Kimuli Kasara shows that leaders tend to tax their coethnics more because they are more likely to comply.[21] Since local governance is

[19]Baldwin (2015, p. 179)
[20]Ibid., 10.
[21]Kasara (2007). See also Miquel (2007).

generally not a zero sum game, the most plausible answer to this question is that chiefs behave in ways that are both extractive and developmental, that benefit local societies but that benefit themselves much more.

Second, if the beneficial role of these chiefs depends on their long time horizons, will more rapid rural development change their role to something more clearly predatory? As I have argued, long time horizons do not matter if the prize for defecting from the cooperative strategy outweighs the sum of future benefits. The role of lineage leaders in land development in China should give us pause that this kind of defection is a meaningful possibility. The question is particularly important given large-scale efforts to take customary land in Africa, convert it to private property, and sell it to outside investors. Interesting work by Lauren Honig examines large-scale land deals in Senegal and finds that chiefs with a long history of autonomy from the state prior to colonial rule by the French are better able to resist land conversions today.[22] Like my own findings, this suggests that autonomous civil society leaders can help their groups resist state extraction, but it leaves open the question of whether chiefs can be effectively co-opted and if so what the consequences might be. The next section investigates this by examining the role of kinship leaders in other contexts that have seen rapid economic transformation.

7.2 Elite Co-optation During Critical Junctures

In this section, I illustrate the role that local elites play during critical junctures in history, especially times of economic transformation. I argue that during these moments, elites can play a much more destructive role by helping to facilitate the extraction of wealth and the creation of political regimes that effectively exclude their groups from power.

Scottish Highland Chiefs and the Enclosure Movement

Highland clans in Scotland have many of the same characteristics as lineage groups in China and India. They were based on bonds of real (and sometimes fictive) kinship. Clan members were entitled to own land by virtue of their membership in the kin group, through the right of *duthchas*, but clan membership also obligated them to provide rents to their clan chiefs. Historically, these rents came in the form of food, including grain and livestock, rather than

[22]Honig (2015).

cash.[23] In return, the these chiefs provided their clan with safety and protection. In this way, chiefs also served the central state: "where the authority of central government was weak or spread thinly, order was provided by the authority which chiefs exercised over their clans."[24]

Beginning in the 1600s, the British government sought to bring rural Scotland under greater Crown control — and increase the revenue they could extract from it. In order to do so, they slowly co-opted and assimilated the clan chiefs. The Statutes of Iona, passed in 1609, outlawed important clan traditions and encouraged clan chiefs to send their sons to Protestant lowland schools; they also created incentives for chiefs to collect regular cash rents and participate in lowland markets.[25] While the statues were not always faithfully enforced, this process began to align the interests of clan chiefs and the Crown, and started to transform the relationship between chiefs their clans as well.

The critical juncture for Scotland came when the Crown began to encourage chiefs to consolidate their landholdings in order to put them to more economically productive use. Consolidating landholdings meant, of course, that the people living on it had to be removed; as historian T. M. Devine notes, "eviction and forced removal became an integral part of the destruction of the traditional settlements throughout the Highlands and this was the most direct violation of *duthchas*, the obligation on clan elites to provide protection and security of possession for the people within their lands" [26] The removal of peasants for large-scale sheep farming was, for many, cataclysmic. Devine writes that "the most notorious removals took place on the Sutherland estate and between 1807 and 1821 the factors of the Countess of Sutherland and her husband Lord Stafford removed between 6,000 and 10,000 people from the inner parishes to new crofting settlements on the coast in the most extraordinary example of social engineering in early nineteenth century Britain"[27]

As in China, the Scottish chiefs' co-optation by the state — and their subsequent betrayal of their kin — made it enormously difficult for their clans to effectively resist land redistributions. Historians have tended to attribute this to a mismatch between cultural expectations and actual behavior. Devine writes that "the relentless violation of the values

[23]For example, in one region tenants handed over 30 percent of their barley and 15 percent of their oats to clan chiefs. See Dodgshon (1998, p.63).

[24]Dodgshon (1998, p.32). See also Cathcart (2006, p. 60-75).

[25]Dodgshon (1998, pp.102-118).

[26]Devine (1994, pp. 34-35).

[27]Ibid.

of clanship caused enormous collective disorientation throughout the Gaelic world and hence a basic difficulty in resisting landlord action in any effective fashion."[28] Another historian writes that clan rank-and-file "adhered tenaciously to the traditionalist concept of *duthchas* long after clanship had been abrogated by the conduct of chiefs."[29] He goes on to write that they "seem prisoners of their own culture, thoroughly perplexed, demoralised and disorientated by the process of anglicisation effected by the assimilation of the clan elite into the British establishment."[30] In fact, this also fits with the second mechanism I have advanced: groups require social elites to resolve information asymmetries and coordinate collection action. Without the cooperation, groups often find themselves confused and divided.

The role of clan leaders in 19th century Scotland suggests that this pattern of elite cooptation and betrayal has a long history that extends well outside of China. Much like in China, they helped to facilitate the transfer of wealth away from their group. But is this theory limited to traditional kinship groups like clans, lineages, or tribes? In the next section, I turn to consider the role of local elites and ethnic politics in urban renewal in America, to show the argument's reach.

Local Elites and Urban Renewal in America

> Even though the institutions of local government bear most of the formal responsibility for governing, they lack the resources and the scope of authority to govern without active support and cooperation of significant private interests. An urban regime may thus be defined as the informal arrangements by which public bodies and private interests function together in order to be able to make and carry out governing decisions.
>
> — Clarence Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*[31]

Urban politics in the United States certainly differs from rural politics in China in many respects — not least the vastly different national political regimes they operate under — and yet as Clarence Stone's quotation illustrates, informal arrangements are crucial in both contexts for governance. In this section, I turn from the developing world to the United States in order to examine urban redevelopment in New Haven, a case made famous by

[28]Ibid., p. 41.
[29]Macinnes (1988, p. 72).
[30]Ibid.
[31]Stone (1989, p. 6).

Robert Dahl's classic book *Who Governs?*[32] In New Haven in the 1950s and 60s, a strong mayor, Richard C. Lee, used participatory, quasi-democratic bodies to bring elites over to his side to help elicit the community's acquiescence with redevelopment policies that forcibly displaced a fifth of the city's population.

Mayor Lee was motivated to redevelop New Haven at least in part by a desire to make his city look and feel "modern," using language which is echoed by the efforts of many Chinese officials seeking to "transform" or "remodel" (*gaizao*) Chinese villages. In a letter to Yale art historian Vincent Scully after he left office, Lee wrote:

> New Haven was a mess when I became Mayor on January 1, 1954 — a rotten, stinking, decaying mess. When I think of the gin mills, the pool parlors and flop houses which dotted our main avenues... The old days, which I remember very well, were the stinking, rotten slums of Oak Street; the decaying, dilapidated, abandoned structures which disgraced our central city.[33]

To remake New Haven, Lee sought to tear down these "slums" and replace them with gleaming new infrastructure: public spaces, highways, and civic buildings. Scully and many others would ultimately regard this far-reaching redevelopment program as a social and aesthetic disaster.[34]

Whatever its ultimate consequences for the city, the implementation of Lee's plan was a remarkable exercise in state power, especially in a liberal democracy. New Haven's redevelopment required the relocation of some 30,000 individuals, willing or not, from homes that some families had lived in for generations.[35] Altogether, New Haven relocated 20 percent of its residents from their homes over the course of about a decade, starting in 1956, in a redevelopment scheme that disproportionately effected African-American families, and to a lesser degree New Haven's other "ethnic" out-groups, especially the Catholic and Jewish communities.[36]

How did Lee elicit popular support (or at any rate widespread acquiescence) with a redevelopment program that disrupted the lives of a fifth of the community? The centerpiece of the mayor's urban regime were a set of councils and committees that played an advisory role,

[32]See also Chapter 3.
[33]Rae (2008, p. 335).
[34]Ibid., p. 312-432.
[35]Ibid., p. 340.
[36]Ibid., p. 340-342.

especially the Citizens Action Commission (CAC) and its sub-committees. These councils had no meaningful formal power, and served mainly to help coordinate New Haven's social and business elite and rally their support for the project. Dahl writes that the commission's "members had been shrewdly selected to represent many of the major centers of influence or status in the community."[37] Lee ultimately appointed over four hundred of New Haven's elites to the CAC and various other urban renewal committees. The members were "drawn mainly from the educated, activist, middle-class segments of the community"[38] including leaders from the black community as well as key clergy and religious figures. These local elites were placed on these committees not to provide meaningful feedback to the Mayor in the decision-making process but, Dahl writes, because these civic leaders "were counted on to form a group of loyal supporters who would help enlist a community following."[39] This was a strategy that Lee found effective in other areas of city governance. For example, he was careful to appoint to the school board members drawn from the Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and African-American communities, partly in order to help him support in each of those groups for his proposals.[40]

These participatory institutions helped to win the buy-in of elites for New Haven's redevelopment, but after the projects had been completed the mayor faced substantial backlash when the costs for the affected communities became apparent. Racial discrimination had prevented some African-American families from finding new homes (one relocation official lamented that "when you answer an ad [for rental housing] in the newspaper, all you hear is 'no children, no pets, and whites only'"[41]) and many had ended up in public housing. Partly in response, the mayor set up a separate government-funded organization called Community Progress, Inc. to help provide services to the poor. In a similar fashion to the redevelopment councils, "the organization had, from the outset, hired as its own staff many of the people living among the poor who might have become critics of its programs."[42] However, this was not enough to prevent others in the black community from organizing against the mayor, who found himself on increasingly tenuous footing.[43]

[37]Dahl (2005, p. 131).
[38]Ibid., p. 131.
[39]Ibid., p. 134.
[40]Ibid., p. 150.
[41]Rae (2008, p. 338).
[42]Ibid., p. 349.
[43]Ibid., 348-355.

The dynamics of New Haven's urban renewal parallels redevelopment projects in many Chinese villages, in which initial acquiescence is followed by popular anger. Even a bad deal can sound good when trusted local elites and the state sing the same tune about the benefits of the project for the community.[44] However, the consequences of these deals for the distribution of wealth and power often become evident before too long. In New Haven, many black residents forced from their homes would have been confronted with the fact that the city government had made grand promises only to place them in substandard public housing in conditions of concentrated poverty and racial segregation. In China, villages who have lost their land with little compensation soon discover that officials have built themselves rural "mansions" or bought themselves new Audis.[45] While there are important differences between the two contexts, the importance of informal buy-in from local elites runs through both cases.

Controlling Workers by Co-opting Labor Leaders

A somewhat less direct parallel to the type of co-optation and control I have focused on in this dissertation are attempts to control labor movements through systems of state corporatism.[46] Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier write that after the initial political incorporation of labor movements in Latin America, "state control of the working class ceased to be principally the responsibility of the police or the army but rather was achieved at least in part through the legalization and institutionalization of a labor movement sanctioned and regulated by the state."[47] State incorporation of the labor movement in countries like Brazil involved "repressing preexisting unions and replacing them with highly constrained, state-penetrated

[44]Moreover, as Julia Chuang notes, when resistance does arise the state generally attempts to "bureaucratize" conflict in order to mute it. See Chuang (2014).

[45]This highlights a key difference between these two cases: rule of law. It is clear that many village officials in China benefit financially from these land deals. This is likely the case in the United States but likely to a lesser degree.

[46]While the focus here is on Latin America, Andrew Walder's study of political authority and compliance in Chinese factories demonstrated how at the grassroots the Communist Party relied on personal ties to exercise control over its workers. In Walder's telling, one of several ways that the party exerted control over workers was through informal leaders whose moral authority gave them significant sway. Walder notes that some veteran workers in factories served as informal "masters," who because of their skill, charisma, and longstanding ties cultivated large followings among other workers. Workers describe them as having "a strong sense of personal dignity" and "a sense of moral authority" (Walder 1988, p. 178). As Walder notes, "shop leaders, in these cases, have to work through or around masters, coopt, or manipulate them, in order to ensure that their orders will be followed" (Walder 1988, p. 178).

[47]R. B. Collier and D. Collier (1991, p. 3).

labor organizations that would avoid class conflict and instead 'harmonize' the interests of capital and labor."[48]

Co-opting labor movement leaders helped states and parties to control the working class. For example, the Accion Democratica (AD) party in Venezuela initially used repression to deal with the labor movement. However, these laws were quickly repealed, and as Collier and Collier note, the party rapidly moved to "control derived from party ties and influence... prominent among these last was the co-optation of union leaders who also occupied party and electoral posts."[49]

In general, state corporatism at the national level sought to politically control the labor movement by institutionalizing and bureaucratizing it. The large size of working class movements in Latin America meant that unlike in the cases I have studied, leaders did not enjoy personal relationships with their groups. Most labor movements leaders also lacked the kind of symbolic authority held, for instance, by national religious leaders and other communal elites, such as those studied by Dan Slater in Southeast Asia.[50] These differences aside, the co-optation of labor's leaders in Latin America had broadly similar consequences and aims: namely, political control and demobilization.

7.3 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that my theory has explanatory power beyond China. The logic behind the case selection was to gather evidence from the five largest continents and across several time periods. The evidence showed that co-opted elites help states implement policy and extract from their groups in countries as varied as India, Scotland, Zambia, and the United States. However, this is far from a random sample and I present a somewhat cursory treatment of each case; future work might investigate other cases more systematically.

The main argument I advance is that the co-optation of civil society elites has different consequences during different moments in history. During the course of everyday politics, they increase the power of the state to extract from the group but do so in a way that also some brings benefits to their group, such as improved public goods and services. However, during critical junctures in history their role becomes more clearly negative for the groups

[48]Ibid., p. 169.
[49]Ibid., p. 263.
[50]Slater (2009) and Slater (2010).

they seemingly represent, as they facilitate larger transfers of wealth or the creation of political regimes that bring few advantages for the group.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

> In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.
>
> James Madison[1]

> The fundamental economic dilemma of a political system is this: A government that is strong enough to protect property and enforce contracts is also strong enough to confiscate the wealth of its citizens
>
> Barry Weingast[2]

The essence of politics is that in a world with scarce resources, political leaders must make decisions that have losers and winners, and while the winners of these policies would gladly comply, the losers often have incentives to resist the state and its mandates. Governing therefore requires a strong state that can implement policies even if complying with them is costly. Unfortunately, as Madison and Weingast note, a powerful state that can govern the governed also has the potential to become a predatory state that uses coercion to enforce policies that benefit political elites at the expense of society. The tension between state power and political accountability is one of the central problems of governance.

In this dissertation, I have argued that state power in rural China comes from an unlikely source: local civil society. My argument is straightforward. Citizens distrust the ruling Communist Party, at least at the local level, and believe that party cadres do not care

[1] Hamilton, Madison, and Jay (2007, p. 399).
[2] Weingast (1993, p. 287).

about their material interests. On the other hand, the leaders of local civil society groups, especially clans and neighborhood groups, enjoy high degrees of trust and moral authority.

Elected village councils and other participatory institutions help the state implement policy by exploiting popular trust in social elites. That is, they serve as a mechanism to identify citizens with significant informal authority within their group. Once they join local political institutions, one might expect them to use their political authority to help protect their group and to limit state power. However, these political institutions can also be used to integrate social elites into patronage networks, and once they have been co-opted, social elites instead have incentives to use their informal authority to help the state implement its policies, sometimes at the expense of their group.

My main empirical chapters showed how co-opting social elites has helped the local state to implement land policies that have effectively redistributed trillions of dollars of wealth from village collectives to the state and local elites. I showed how the leaders of clans and neighborhood groups (and to a lesser extent religious groups) used their informal authority to facilitate land expropriations from village collectives. When these elites are included in village political institutions, land expropriations are more likely and compensation is lower. I also showed how co-opted elites have helped states elicit policies in a wide variety of other contexts, which demonstrated the explanatory power of my theory.

My findings cast doubt on theories that hold that the main consequence of civil society institutions is to political accountability. One influential argument in this vein, by Lily Tsai,[3] is that citizens can use their social connections to officials to motivate them to provide more public goods and services. However, I argue that status also matters a great deal in these relationships. When social institutions encourage deference to group authorities, and when these group authorities have been co-opted by the state, they can serve not just as channels for bottom-up accountability but for top-down control. These institutions are nurtured by the powerful in part because they reinforce their authority.

I also challenge theories that hold that democracy curbs the power of the state. An influential line of work by Douglass North, Barry Weingast, and others[4] argues that democratic institutions credibly commit rulers from confiscating property by delegating power to a democratic body that represents society's interests. The elected local councils and other

[3]Tsai (2007a).

[4]North and Weingast (1989).

participatory institutions I study in rural China have binding power, and based on these theories we might expect that they would act to prevent local party leaders from confiscating land. However, political representatives do not automatically have incentives to act in the interests of their group. When elites are included in political institutions, they can and sometimes do have incentives to side with the state, and they can help to expand executive power rather than limiting it.

These findings also contribute to our understanding of elite co-optation in authoritarian regimes. Previous work has shown how co-optation at the national level helps the regime to reduce potentially destabilizing conflict between national elites who might otherwise pose a threat to the regime's hold on power.[5] I have shown how the logic of political co-optation at the local level is rather different. Co-opting *local* elites with *local* institutions does not forestall a potential coup or popular uprising; instead, it helps the regime govern and implement policy.

My findings also shed new light on the nature of state power. First, in contrast to Joel Migdal's theory that strong societies tend to lead to weak states,[6] I show how a strong society can in fact complement a strong state. Second, in contrast to Mann's idea that "despotic" states govern without the consent of civil society,[7] I show how authoritarian regimes can co-opt civil society leaders and use civil society as a tool of state power.

What do my findings suggest for political development in China? In the next section, I consider the possible paths of rural development in China. Following that, I discuss the potential implications for China more broadly.

8.1 The End of the Village?

The large-scale land redistribution that has taken place over the past decade and a half is China's third great rural revolution of the modern era, and it might well be its last. The first occurred in the 1940s and 50s when peasants swept the regime into power and then redistributed land from local elites to farmers. The second occurred in the 1970s and 80s when the party decollectivized land and set the stage for China's rural economic

[5]For important treatments, see Blaydes (2010, pp. 48-63), E. Malesky and Schuler (2010), and Svolik (2012, pp. 53-119) .

[6]Migdal (1988).

[7]Mann (1984) and Mann (2012)

"takeoff."[8] The final phase has been counter-revolutionary, or at least a reversal: it has seen the redistribution of land from households and collectives into the hands of the state and local elites.

For better and for worse, this economic transformation has upended the long-standing social and political organization of rural life. The often destructive role that traditional elites can play makes it clear that we should not romanticize these social arrangements. "Traditional" rural institutions are often hierarchical and generally patriarchal; they encourage deference to local authority and suspicion of outsiders; and they persist in no small part because they benefit the powerful. As I have highlighted in this dissertation, these social institutions confer status on elites who can exploit this fact to control their groups and dominate local politics. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that these institutions have a positive side: they encourage villagers to have faith in each other and to cooperate, and their slow destruction has led to a breakdown in trust. The erosion of these institutions has undermined the social fabric of rural life. As one villager in Henan put it: "In the last five years, people in our village have gone from caring about community and clan to pure self-interest."

One resident of an urbanized village in Guangdong described the process to me as "the end of the village." The villager mostly had in mind the possibility that in a generation's time, the name of his village might no longer appear on any maps. We were having this discussion outside of his lavishly renovated lineage hall, which might have been taken as a symbol of the ongoing vitality of the village and an interest in preserving its legacy for future generations. However, the ancestral hall was conspicuously empty of anyone under seventy, and it was surrounded by shops and apartment buildings whose occupants mostly walked quickly past us. Most people between 20 and 50 had migrated elsewhere for work, and fewer and fewer returned each year for the Lantern Festival feast put on by the lineage association. Already, he explained, the village mostly had life on only in the memory of the elderly.

Does the current process of land redistribution, which has echoes of the enclosure movement in England, mark the end of the village and its traditional moral economy? If so, we should probably not mourn its passing for too long. Traditional village life mixed fellowship, trust, and solidarity with exploitation, chauvinism, violence, and poverty. As China's agrarian society slowly disappears, it is worth consider that for many, the life that they are

[8] Oi (1999).

choosing to live outside of the confines of the villages is rich and full of opportunity.

8.2 Implications for the Future

What does all of this bode for the future of Communist Party rule in China? Is the political equilibrium I have described likely to change? I have argued that local democracy has strengthened local state power — or the ability of the state to carry out its policies and demand political compliance — by providing a mechanism for co-opting local notables with the influence to control their constituencies. Yet while local elections have empowered local elites and improved compliance with state mandates, the reforms have also failed to create meaningful political accountability.[9] One obstacle is that township and village officials manipulate election results by limiting who can stand for office, monitoring votes, and even committing outright fraud. A second is widespread voting buying that undermines incentives for villagers to vote out corrupt officials. Both of these issues have at their core a weak rule of law that does not punish vote buying, rigged elections, or corrupt officials.

This system of authoritarian control has in some ways already sown the potential seeds of its own destruction: sharing rents helps the state to co-opt local elites, but sharing rents also creates popular anger that in the long run undermines confidence in the officials and the party. Even for lowly village cadres, the rent-seeking opportunities have been staggering. In Wukan, a village that is hours from the nearest major city, officials sold village land for tens of millions of dollars while barely compensating villagers anything.[10] In another village in Zhejiang, in which local officials built a large apartment complex, village cadres divided up 316 of the apartments between themselves, turning each of the officials into potential millionaires.[11] This type of large-scale corruption by local officials is a staple of news reporting in China, and appears to be widespread.

Xi Jinping has made it clear that he believes that this type of rent-seeking behavior has led to widespread popular anger at party officials, and that it represents a serious threat to

[9]The evidence for the effect of elections on accountability is mixed rather than strong. See O'Brien and Han (2009).

[10]See 3.4 and He and Xue (2014, p. 129).

[11]See Xinhua News Service (*Xinhua She*). "A Case of Collective Corruption of Village Officials in Zhejiang, Xinqiao Village: They Divided Up Apartments Worth Approximately 100 Million Yuan," (*Zhejiang Xinqiaocun Cunguan Jiti Tanqu An: Zhufen Jiazhi Jin Yi Yuan Fangchan*). Available at: `http://news.xinhuanet.com/legal/2015-11/10/c_128412188.htm`. Last accessed July 25, 2016.

the party's hold on power. Shortly after he took over the post of Communist Party Secretary in 2012, Xi told a gathering of the Politburo:

> In recent years, the long pent-up problems in some countries have led to the venting of public outrage, to social turmoil and to the fall of governments, and corruption and graft have been an important reason... A mass of facts tells us that if corruption becomes increasingly serious, it will inevitably doom the party and the state. We must be vigilant. In recent years, there have been cases of grave violations of disciplinary rules and laws within the party that have been extremely malign in nature and utterly destructive politically, shocking people to the core.[12]

Xi has memorably stated that the party's anti-corruption efforts should "strike both tigers and flies" (*laohu, cangying yiqi da*), or prosecute both high-level and low-level officials. A great deal of international media attention has focused on Xi's efforts to hunt tigers, like former Politburo member Zhou Yongkong. Yet the more critical task may be swatting flies. As Roderick MacFarquhar has noted, "it is the flies, the lower-level cadres, whose predatory activities affect [Chinese citizens'] everyday lives."[13] Indeed, ninety percent of the cases publicized by the CPC's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) concern flies and not togers.[14]

Despite Xi's dire warning that rent seeking may doom the party and the state, and despite China's history of peasant-led revolution, it is worth remembering that peasants rarely drive regime change. The "cellular" structure of rural China along with its vast size,[15] makes it difficult to coordinate people across villages. Mao's peasant revolution succeeded in

[12]Edward Wong. "New Communist Party Chief in China Denounces Corruption in Speech." *The New York Times*. November 19, 2012.

[13]Roderick MacFarquhar. "China: The Superpower of Mr. Xi." *The New York Review of Books*. August 13, 2015. Available at: `http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2015/aug/13/china-superpower-mr-xi/.`

[14]Data collected by the Asia Society's ChinaFile project showed that as of July 2016, 1601 of 1778 cases publicized by the CCDI targeted flies, defined as officials below the deputy provincial level. The figure is suggestive of the fact that most corruption is undertaken by lower-level officials but should be interpreted cautiously. A number of issues make this figure difficult to interpret confidently: it is unclear what cases are publicized by the CCDI; it is unclear what the denominator is, or what proportion of officials are 'flies' rather than 'tigers'; and it is unclear what the relative corruption rates and opportunities are at each level. See China File, "Catching Tigers and Flies." Available at: `https://anticorruption.chinafile.com/`. Last accessed July 25, 2016.

[15]Shue (1988).

part because the Nationalists did not have effective control over much of rural China which allowed Mao to spend decades organizing peasants at the grassroots. This is effectively impossible now, since the Communists have an effective monopoly on violence even in the hinterlands.

Cities are much more likely to be the site of regime-ending rebellion. This partly because urban population densities make it easier for protesters to coordinate and partly because cities are usually the seat of power for a regime.[16] This kind of urban unrest is certainly a concern of the Chinese Communist Party, which in 1989 faced down protesters flooding the streets of many of China's major cities.[17]

If rural land redistribution poses a threat to the regime it is through its link to urban labor. For decades, migrants in China's cities have known that if they lose their jobs they can still go back to their villages and farm their land. As Ching Kwan Lee writes, "the consensus [among migrants] is that land functions as informal social insurance... migrant workers see the land as a birthright to which they are entitled, a functional equivalent of the state provision of grain and pensions given to urban residents."[18] Losing this land places urban migrants in a precarious position. If the economy turns sour, they have more of an incentive to take to the streets.

Any attempt to reign in official rent-seeking also has the potential to create a threat more dangerous than that of popular unrest, by creating an angry constituency *within* the ruling party. As Milan Svolik notes, when authoritarian regimes are toppled, only about a tenth of them fall to popular uprisings while two thirds fall to coup d'états, which making a system of rent- and power-sharing central to the survival of any authoritarian regime.[19] It was in some sense easy to enact reforms in the 1990s that had the effect of redistributing land from the powerless to the powerful, but undoing those reforms, and taking away a lucrative source of income from regime insiders, will be quite challenging.

China's political elites have fallen victim to the paradox posed by James Madison: having built a state with the power to control the governed, they have found they cannot oblige the state to control itself. Is the answer to this problem to expand the scope of elections for political office? This is not clear, at least at the local level, where further democratic

[16]Bates (1981).
[17]Wallace (2014).
[18]C. K. Lee (2007, p. 209).
[19]Svolik (2012, pp. 4-5).

reforms seem likely to empower local elites. China's political economy has allowed these local elites to accumulate power and wealth, and as long as candidates can buy votes or offer other types of particularistic benefits, these institutions will continue to favor the wealthy and the powerful. In this light, it is hard to see how extending elections up to the township and county levels would do much more than strengthen the power of local elites, at least without stronger rule of law.

In the end, the most effective check on state power is not more elections, or stronger ties between local officials and civil society, but an adversarial relationship between civil society and the state. Independent civil society leaders can mobilize their groups, and threaten officials with the kind of broad-based social mobilization that evens the balance of power between the local state and society. This type of meaningful political autonomy is something that the ruling party would likely to be loath to grant. But it is this kind of balance of power between governments and the governed that protects the interests of the powerless and limits the reach of the state.

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Appendix A

Additional Figures and Tables

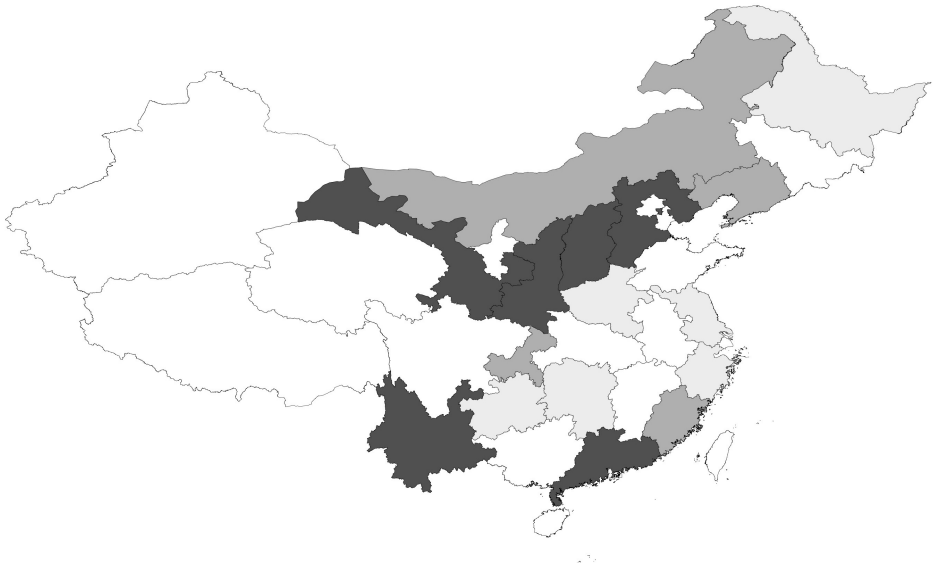

Figure A.1: Festival participation in China by province in 2005. Darker shading indicates higher levels of participation.

Table A.1: Percentage of villagers reporting participation in festival and religious groups by region.

		Festival Groups	Religious Groups
North	Shaanxi	0.43	0.09
	Shanxi	0.29	0.00
	Hebei	0.17	0.02
	Inner Mongolia	0.14	0.01
	Liaoning	0.12	0.04
	Heilongjiang	0.08	0.02
	Jiangsu	0.08	0.03
	Shandong	0.05	0.03
	Jilin	0.00	0.03
Central	Gansu	0.21	0.03
	Chongqing	0.14	0.00
	Henan	0.07	0.04
	Hunan	0.05	0.01
	Hubei	0.05	0.00
	Anhui	0.05	0.06
	Sichuan	0.03	0.04
South	Yunnan	0.39	0.03
	Guangdong	0.34	0.20
	Guangxi	0.13	0.01
	Fujian	0.10	0.02
	Zhejiang	0.10	0.09
	Guizhou	0.07	0.01
	Jiangxi	0.02	0.08

Table A.2: Ordinary least squares regression estimates for effect of land seizures in highly decentralized villages, where the dependent variable is average income.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Village decentralization	9.632	90.469	89.765	105.664
	(71.686)	(67.460)	(67.629)	(67.817)
Land expropriation indicator	863.729***	559.412***	571.403***	469.150***
	(188.153)	(165.622)	(166.975)	(170.557)
Expropriation X Decentralization	−283.823	−307.852*	−294.650*	−175.161
	(185.662)	(157.826)	(157.808)	(162.391)
Distance to county seat		−10.821***	−10.702***	−9.729***
		(2.956)	(3.079)	(3.075)
Terrain roughness		−0.078	−0.105	−0.233
		(0.320)	(0.320)	(0.330)
Agricultural suitability index		−127.061	−117.651	−104.800
		(92.672)	(92.705)	(92.946)
Wealth (1992 nighttime lights proxy)		20.643**	19.634**	14.505*
		(8.529)	(8.539)	(8.563)
Township control of elections			−544.867*	−518.903*
			(293.698)	(293.060)
Distance to township			1.180	0.506
			(12.028)	(12.244)
Surname fragmentation index				752.408***
				(281.452)
Ethnic fragmentation index				594.961
				(615.221)
Number of households (log)				206.601**
				(104.616)
Constant	1,770.517***	2,132.372***	2,200.237***	595.818
	(71.553)	(318.353)	(324.221)	(682.360)
Province fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	346	344	344	332

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.3: Ordinary least squares regression estimates for effect of land seizures in villages with embedded cadres, where the dependent variable is average income.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Lineage leader is cadre	293.450	120.852	109.746	173.142
	(194.384)	(178.379)	(178.093)	(175.923)
Land expropriation indicator	753.228***	488.148***	509.595***	461.181***
	(194.384)	(172.482)	(173.093)	(174.566)
Expropriation X Lineage cadre	−47.289	−113.977	−165.076	−291.482
	(428.387)	(371.848)	(371.487)	(374.126)
Distance to county seat		−10.872***	−10.411***	−9.422***
		(2.797)	(2.918)	(2.871)
Terrain roughness		−0.368	−0.384	−0.508*
		(0.283)	(0.282)	(0.287)
Agricultural suitability index		−106.350	−101.097	−92.025
		(87.845)	(87.590)	(86.708)
Wealth (1992 nighttime lights proxy)		22.622***	21.664***	17.591**
		(8.040)	(8.021)	(7.896)
Township control of elections			−623.075**	−530.518*
			(282.811)	(279.042)
Distance to township			−2.909	−4.757
			(11.313)	(11.451)
Surname fragmentation index				943.220***
				(258.616)
Ethnic fragmentation index				−24.607
				(556.504)
Number of households (log)				215.695**
				(97.619)
Constant	1,745.150***	2,511.933***	2,615.849***	800.132
	(71.564)	(277.198)	(282.037)	(646.513)
Province fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	390	388	388	375

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01