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Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy, 2017; 22(4):547-559

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/13547860.2017.1307022>

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20 November 2019

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Vital Factors for Chinese Rural Development: The Reach of the State and Lineage Identity in Villages

Introduction

This is a case study of a village that has two aims 1) to analyse how the factor of the reach of the state on the one hand and the factor of the village lineage identity on the other affect local governance and 2) to demonstrate how local governance so affected by the two factors impacts on village economic and social development. The paper does not claim that generalization of the whole of rural China can be made of this case study. However, a case study like this will not only show diversity and complexity of local governance in rural China but also significance and implications of such village politics beyond one village. As the village, Gao Village (Gao 1999), is located in Jiangxi Province, an agricultural area similar to second tier provinces of Anhui, Sichuan, Hunan, Hubei and Henan, what happens in the village is at least indicative of this vast area of central China. The paper argues that the reach of the state is crucial for good local governance because functioning of local governance, including village elections, is affected by village lineage identity and that the state has to intervene, not to dismiss village lineage identity, but to counterbalance too much influence of lineage politics.

Research Background and Data Collection

In *Gao Village* (Gao 1999), a cross and trans-disciplinary study that documents the change of Gao Village from 1949 to 1997, critical conclusions include: rural life was Spartan, but education and health care had improved dramatically, mostly in the two most controversial periods, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, especially the latter, as all over rural China (Pepper 1996). After the collective system was dismantled, young villagers started to leave for the southeast coast to work as migrant workers, and, like migrant workers from other rural areas (Chan 2014 and 2002 Dorothy 1999, Gao 1997, 1998 and 1994, Chang 2008), they had to endure sweatshop working conditions with very low wages for many years. But migrant working income, together with more widely available modern technology such as fertiliser and insecticide, has made it possible for material life to improve dramatically.

For roughly 15 years since the dismantling the collective system, the state returned production freedom to rural households but retreated drastically from providing public goods. At the same time it remained intrusive in many areas. The first 15 years of the post-Mao era roughly corresponds to when and where *Gao Village* is left off. In *Gao Village*, village election was only mentioned by passing because it was not significant. Since then genuine election has been practiced. In *Gao Village*, village lineage identity is analysed as playing an important role in village life and local governance. How does election interact with lineage identity now? In what way does village election affect local governance? Does it improve governance capacities for rural development? What is the current state of affairs of the reach

of the state? With these and other questions in mind, my research on Gao Village has been continuous and this study is a result of many years of investigations involving telephone conversations with my brothers and sisters, their children and relatives, group Weixin (Wechat, a very popular social media in China) account with the family clan, regular visits to the village and migrant working cities of Shenzhen, Xiamen and Guangzhou (on average one visit every two years, either to the village or to cities of Gao villager's migration destination, or both, with the latest visit to Gao Village in February 2015), participation in village activities such as weddings and temple ceremonies, and conversations with almost every one of the 400 or so villagers on one occasion or another, and interview many of them for specific questions.

The Changing Reach of the State and Their Impact on Development

The reach of the PRC state in rural China, such as in Gao Village, can generally be described in terms of three periods: the Mao era, the first 15 years and the second 15 years of the post-Mao era.

The Reach of the State in the Era of Mao

The era of Mao is the period when the state reached rural villages the most, very often too intrusively and sometimes too brutally. It was the first time in China's history that the villagers were treated like citizens of a state and two levels of local governance, the Commune (*gongshe*), the Production Brigade (*shengchan dadui*) were run by state agents. The lowest level of governance, the Production Team (*shengchan xiaodui*) was run by the villagers themselves. The state agents not only supervised production activities and distribution of incomes, but also organised education and health care. It is also during this period that public space began to appear. In Gao village there was the first time, and last time, a sports ground in the middle of the village, and sports meets and theatrical performance were organised. Young people got together to perform and to play sports and to participate in local militia training. It is also during this period, that substantive grass roots democracy was experimented with: every member of a production team participated in the evaluation of every member's labour contribution to the collective in terms of work points, taking into account physical ability and labour attitude. It has to be pointed out that it was during the two most radical periods, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution that the state reached the area in education and health care most. A primary school in the Gao Village area was established during the Great Leap Forward, and a middle school campus was established in the Gao Village area during the Cultural Revolution.

There were, of course, serious problems caused by excessively state intervention such as those during the years of Great Leap Forward, when there was hunger and starvation, and when the system of management of a production team was yet to be established. For any changes of such nature to take place in a country that has such long and entrenched traditions and a country where the population and land ratio is so precarious it would be surprising if it had no ups and downs. When Gao villagers were about to get used to the system the regime in Beijing, and hence the policies, changed.

The Reach of the State during the First 15 years of Post-Mao Period

Once the collective system was dismantled the state retreated drastically by not only stopped interfering with production but also stopped providing public goods. The irony is that for the first 15 years of the post-Mao era, the retreat of the state from rural China in terms of providing public good did not mean a less intrusive governance. The state had the village officials to collect taxes for the government, to levy the villagers to pay their education and health care, in addition to pay salaries of the state agents, and worse still, to implement sometimes brutal and sometimes violent family planning policy. The three layers of governing structure still remained, but under different names: *Xiang* government, which was the new name for the Commune, *Cun weihui* (village committee) which was the replacement name of Production Brigade and *Cun xiaozu* (village team) the new name of the Production Team. This intrusive and sometimes ruthless governance interested only in extraction from but no investment to the rural sector was typical of the first 15 years of the post-Mao reform. The villagers still remember this first 15 years as the period of “three forceful demands”: *yao liang, yao qian, yao ming* (forceful demand of grain, money and life), the last referring to forceful abortion.

The Reach of the State during Second 15 Years of the Reform Period

Within the context of these policies, the disparity between the urban and rural increased rapidly in those years in spite of the extra income added to the rural sector from migrant workers. To the credit of President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, by the beginning of the 21st century, the Chinese government started to address the issue by eventually abolishing all agricultural taxes and levies in the rural sector. This is the first time in China’s more than 2,000 years of history that there would be no agricultural tax. Furthermore, the state has gradually introduced agricultural subsidies since 2004. Currently the subsidies, paid directly to the households in Gao Village so as to avoid rent seeking from the State agents, are 40RMB per *mu* of dry crop land and 188 RMB per *mu*¹ of rice paddy. The return of the state provision of public goods also include medical care and other social services, the details of which are discussed below to demonstrate how the state reaches Gao Village.

Medical care and Social Insurance

By 2010s, the state also started to introduce the medical care and social insurance policies to rural China like Gao Village. These days, one of the few tasks for the Gao Village head to do is annual collection of social and medical care insurance payments from the villagers. The fees set for medical care insurance for 2013 when the program was initiated in the Gao Village area was 50RMB per person per year, 70 for 2014 and 90 for 2015. The policy is such that the villagers cannot claim medical expenses when they see a local doctor or any doctor for long term illness or for everyday complaints such as flu or a cough. They can only claim about 70% of the cost when they are hospitalised, like a surgery or accident treatment, and have to be at a designated hospital, the nearest being about 15 kilometres away. Some cynical villagers complain that doctors inflate the cost if you claim medical rebate. In early

¹ One *mu* is the equivalent of 0.0667 hectares.

2015 when I accompanied the Gao Village head to visit households from door to door while he collected the fees, I was convinced that most villagers were willing to pay. The villagers, gradually, came to see the benefits after witnessing the consequences of a couple of motor accidents, and also the cost of another villager who had to have surgery operation. If it were not for the medical care insurance, these villagers would have to pocket 40 to 50 thousand RMB, which meant bankruptcy for the family.

Like medical care insurance social insurance has started only in recent years for the rural sector and is different from that in the urban sector. Payment for the social insurance policy, for urban township residents is higher, and the benefit therefore also higher. One Gao villager was lucky and clever enough to use the name of a distant relative who had a town resident status but had not enough money to purchase a policy entitled to him. This Gao villager paid the policy in the name of this town person which cost 40,000RMB three years ago, as a one payment policy. Two years ago, when this Gao villager became 60 he started to collect the payment of 950RMB a month. This Gao villager has already collected more than 20,000 from a 40,000RMB thousand investment, which is not a bad deal. Nonetheless, this Gao villager was lucky to have the cash at that time and clever enough to take up this insurance opportunity designed for the urban residents. For rural residents, the threshold set for social insurance premiums is low, and is only 100RMB per person, per year. The benefit is of course also low; 55RMB a month when it was started in 2011 and increased to 70 a month in 2015. Men can start receiving payments at the age of 60 and women at 55. For the Gao villagers who are young, their benefit would be much higher if they started the policy now. A couple of Gao villagers that I interviewed did not want to bother about social insurance payment. Their rationale was that something like 30 years from now was too uncertain. This is a totally understandable position to take given the uncertainty and unstableness of Chinese governance in the past.

The village head has to visit the village household from door to door to collect the fees and has to do it during the Chinese Spring Festival period when most of migrants come home. As I witnessed the village head had two spread sheets; one for the medical care insurance policy and one for the social insurance policy and he filled in the head name of the household (usually a male) when the villagers pay. In a few days, all the young villagers will disperse to their migration destinations and the village will be quieter with only the elderly and children around. If it happens that the village head cannot find the person he is looking for in the family when he moves from door to door, then the fee is most likely not collected, even though the family is willing and has the money to pay. There is no meeting called, no letter or notice written or given by anybody from the state to explain the policies. There is no form to fill and the village head does not even write a receipt for the payment.

On the one hand, the policies designed by the state is really a huge step forward for rural people like Gao villagers. It is sign that the rural people are citizens of the state as well as an indication that the state admits its responsibilities to look after them when they are old or in a desperate situation. On the other hand, both the policy content and the ad hoc collection process illustrate how limited the state reaches the grass roots these days. Though the fact that there are different policies between the urban and rural residents is discriminatory enough by

the standard of modern governance, to have a social insurance policy for the rural residents at all is a step forward for the reach of the Chinese state. However, the state still has a long way to go in that not only it cannot enforce an effective social insurance policy for migrant workers from rural China at their working destination, if and when there is a policy, but also with ad hoc procedure that fails to enforce an effective policy at their place of origins.

Environment and the State

One of the major and serious environmental issues that is not addressed is that water and soil pollution is getting worse because of the chemicals used for agriculture. There are no fish to be caught in local creeks or ponds, which used to be a great pastime for children and a nutritious source of food. Another distressing phenomenon that one cannot fail to notice when travelling in rural China is the rubbish everywhere. Used plastic bags and bottles of chemicals are abandoned in the rice paddies, all kinds of industrial and human consumption waste are littered along the roads, paths and village corners. However, in 2014 this started to change in Gao Village. The villagers have been told of the problem and the *xiang* government, urged by upper authorities, has started to do something. There are two rubbish dump sites built in Gao Village, though they are just simple square enclosures, with three sides made of concrete walls, only one meter high. Each household is allocated a rubbish bin to collect rubbish and the two poorest Gao villagers are paid to collect rubbish. One villager collects rubbish along the main street that runs through Gao Village, and for whose work, 1500RMB a year is paid. The other villager, a woman, is also paid 1500RMB to collect all the household rubbish and move them to the rubbish dump sites, from where, at the *xiang* government level, a truck is arranged to regularly transport the village rubbish to a designated rubbish dumping site. The budget for such expenditure comes from a levy collected from each household. The villagers are not told or taught to sort rubbish into categories for recycling but that does not seem to be a big problem because there is a vibrant rubbish collecting industry by individual entrepreneurs who will collect the recycling rubbish to sell.

The initiative by the state to deal with the rubbish is again a welcoming step towards the right direction. It is a good arrangement also because the two poorest villagers get some employment and payment. One could argue that generally two factors play an important role in environment protection: One is technology and the other is awareness. In current rural China in particular and China in general it requires the Chinese state to bring two factors into play. What is good and what is bad for the environment has to be explained and be promoted to the Gao villagers. What technology is required to deal what environmental problems has to be on the agenda. All these require the efforts and even intervention from the state. The next big challenge is for the state to take initiative in both raising awareness and in providing the technological guidance to tackle the overuse of chemicals which pollutes the soil and water.

The Elderly and the State

Traditionally and mostly today in Gao Village the Chinese look after their elderly in the family. In the era of Mao there was what was called a Wubao Hu (Five Guarantee Households), a program designed to look after childless elderly, with resources, however

meagre, from the state. However, that program was disappeared following the dismantling of the collective system. Recently the state is back, to certain extent, in looking after the elderly. Not far from Gao Village the *Yinbaohu Xiang Jinglao yuan* (Yinbaohu Township Old People's Home) was set up. Any Yinbaohu township resident at the age of 70 or above is entitled to live in the Home at the cost of 1800RMB a year in 2015.

The old people's home set up by the state does not seem to have much an impact on Gao villagers. On the one hand, those who may need the program mostly cannot afford it. On the other, the problem of the separation of the young and abled Gao village migrant workers from their family elderly and small children (*liushou ertong*--the left behind children) means that the elderly have to look after the young. Again the state needs to take dramatic measures in dealing with the divide between the rural and urban in terms of citizen status.

Governance Capacities and Stronger reach of the State

Clearly, the reach of the state during the second 15 years of the post-Mao era has greatly benefitted economic and social developments in rural China like Gao Village: 1) the abolition of all kinds of taxes and levies and 2) the return of the state investment in public goods. Gao villagers are happier and there is a visible reduction of tension between the state and the villagers, compared with the period of the first 15 years of the post-Mao era, as documented in *Gao Village* (Gao 1999 and 2014). During the first 15 years of the post-Mao era I encountered numerous complaints and anger every time I visited Gao Village. In 2015 what the villagers told me, even the poor ones, was how their life had never been better.

However, this is not the same as to say that local governance is already very good. On the contrary, local governance is far from being modern in the sense that it is transparent and accountable, even though village elections are genuinely implemented. Empirical evidence from my research in Gao Village seems to support the argument that good governance with sufficient capacities for economic and social development requires even stronger reach of the state. The articulation and justification of such an argument is related village tradition and way of life, specifically lineage identity. Any extent and form of the reach of the state has to be premised on the concrete socio-economic conditions at any specific time and location, which are sometimes referred to as social environmental factors.

Before we discuss the concrete situation in Gao Village we need to explore a few theoretical issues related local governance and state capacities. One issue is how to measure good governance and another is how to insure good governance. Only a few years after his famous declaration of "the End of History", with the advantage of the hindsight of what has happened in the Middle East and some notable failures of the Obama Presidency, Francis Fukuyama, proposes three requirements for a good government model: good governance, accountability and the rule of law (Fukuyama 2014). In this proposal for a three dimensional governmentality, Fukuyama still holds the importance of democracy since democracy is generally considered the best way to hold a government accountable and accountability can certainly contribute to good governance. However, Fukuyama realizes that democracy by and of itself does not guarantee good governance. There could be bad governance in democracies

and good governance in non-democracies (democracy in the conventional sense that is being practiced in the West). The assumption here is that an important measurement of governance is that it has to have sufficient capacities for economic and social development because the Obama Presidency failed in many ways to have such capacities.

China is not considered a democracy, but it has been practicing elections at village level for many years, as documented and discussed by an extensive literature (He, 2000, 2002 and 2007, Oi 2000, Lu 2015, Sun et al 2015, and Teets and Hurst 2014). For the purpose of discussing local governance (Heilsmann et al 2011) in Gao Village, there is therefore the issue of whether democracy at grassroots level contributes to good governance. Many scholars conclude that village elections in China are conducive to good local governance whereas some other scholars argue that there is an issue of what social environmental factors are required to be in existence for village elections to be conducive to good local governance (Zhang et al, 2015 and Wan and Yao 2007). Along these lines of argument, if and when village elections are considered democracy, then whether this kind democracy is conducive to good governance is dependent on local social environment. One of the important social environment factors for villages like Gao Village is lineage or clan identity.

A recent study by Tsai (Tsai 2002) shows how lineage identity is an important factor in affecting local governance capacities. By comparing two sets of four villages of comparable economic conditions in Jiangxi and Fujian², Tsai suggests that two villages are better at raising resources for public goods development, not because they have democracy while the other two do not; nor because they are wealthier. As Kevin and Li point out, for many years since the post-Mao reform, there was no incentive for the local state agents to provide public goods for the villages because projects as such are “soft and non-binding”. (O’Brien and Li 1999). If a local government has the capacities to organise villagers and to raise funds for public goods development that surely is good governance.

A conclusion that can be drawn from these four villages of two pairs comparison is that lineage identity is a social environmental factor in local governance. A single surnamed lineage village has an unambiguous identity and as a result easier to organise activities than a village of different lineages. A community, in this case, one village committee, with one dominant lineage, has more solid clan identity and is easier to organise than a committee of different lineage of equal influences. A governance institution can perform effectively if it can produce collective action and accountability, but as Lu argues, the relative effectiveness of that institution is contingent upon the social environment (Lu 2015). Just like what the

² Tsai first has a comparative study of two villages in Jiangxi and discovers that the village with single lineage organises activities such as fundraising for public goods whereas in the multi lineages village there is absence of such activities because there is distrust between the villagers and village cadres. Tsai then presents a comparison of two village committees, the River Bridge and West Gate in Fujian. While both village committees are multi-lineages, but one village committee, the River Bridge, consists of several small villages of different surnames (or hamlets as Tsai calls it). On the other hand, the other village committee, the West Gate, though also consisting of villages of several surnames, has the Wu surnamed villagers as the majority, comprising about 80% of households. West Gate has more solidarity and organises more activities and was able to raise funds for public goods.

situation is like as presented by Tsai's study of four villages in Jiangxi and Fujian, one of the most important factors of the social environment in the Gao Village area is lineage identity.

Village Lineage Identity Constraints for state capacities

In the Gao Village area, all villages are lineage villages. Every lineage village has the same surname which comes first in naming and every male of the same generation has the same second name. There have always tension, disputes and even physical fighting between lineage villages over land and water resources. Usually the bigger lineage villages exercise bullying behaviour and can sometimes get away with murder.³ In the era of Mao, the fight against entrenched lineage influence was hard but attempted, but even the return of the state during the second 15 years of the post-Mao era has not expressed its attempt to contain lineage politics in the Gao Village area. .

One example from Gao Village's neighbouring Xu Village is a good illustration. Xu Congxi does not belong to Xu Village anymore for all practical purposes since he has urban resident status and has a house in Poyang Town. He lives and works with his wife in Guangzhou and their only child daughter now lives in Australian. Nonetheless, Xu requested a large piece of land, something like 1500 square metres to build a house (with a swimming pool, the first in the area) in Xu Village. The influential lineage members decided to allocate the land as requested. When the Xu Village Head objected to this idea on the basis that such a large allotment had never been allocated to anyone, let alone to someone who practically was not a Xu villager, he was vetoed by the influential lineage members. Thus, the head of the village, who is an elected "governor" of the village and as a state representative at the grassroots level, had no say in important matters such as land allocation, when in theory rural land in China is collectively owned. This would never have happened in Mao's era.

That Xu Congxi has had such support from the Xu Village lineage power holders has something to do with two facts. The first fact is that Xu is perceived to be a successful son of the village, from being an orphan to becoming a self-made richest in the village, with a daughter who is not only university educated, but overseas educated, very rare in the area. Congxi brings prestige to Xu Village. The second fact is that Congxi has donated 50,000 RMB for the construction of the Xu Clan Hall. That is the highest individual donation and therefore his name is number one carved into a stone tablet in the hall entrance.

There are several interesting and important points about the Xu Village Lineage Hall and other halls around the area. The first point is that Xu Village did not have a lineage hall in the pre-1949 Revolution years. It is not a restoration of tradition after the revolutionary damage, as some might think. The second point is that this reinventing of tradition has been done in a China that is run by the supposed Communists, and some influential members of the lineage committee that planned and supervised the building of the hall are members of the CCP. One of them was a former head teacher of the local high school who has since retired. The third

³ For an example of how a big village got away with murder in the post-Mao era see Mobo Gao *Gao Village: A Portrait of Rural Life in Modern China*, Honolulu Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2007, p. 116.

point is that tradition has a modern embellishment: Both Xu Family Lineage Hall and Cultural Activity Centre have been written above the entrance door of the hall.

The hall is important for the community as it provides a public space for cultural activities. Upon the opening of the hall, the Xu Village lineage committee paid a theatrical company to put on performances continuously for five days and five nights. It was open and free to anyone. Sometimes the hall might be packed with people and sometimes there might be just a few in the audience. The show went on, irrespective of whether there was an audience. It was a show to show the glory of the Xu clan, a show to be remembered for generations to come, and to consolidate lineage identity. In February 2015, Jiang Village had just completed its lineage hall that was larger and taller than the Xu Village Hall, obviously to outdo the latter which is half the size of the former in terms of population. The theatrical performance by a company invited from Lianyu of Poyang went on for seven days and seven nights, again to outdo Xu Village, to win face and gain glory and to be remembered for generations to come.

Local Governance in Villages and Lineage Politics

The previous section describes how the re-invention of tradition is being made and how identity is being consolidated by the building of lineage halls, theatrical performances and anniversaries. The example of Xu Congxi is described to demonstrate how lineage politics influences local governance. There are further evidences.

The administration at the lowest level in rural China is *cun xiaozu* (village team) which usually governs one village of the size of Gao Village of around 400 people.⁴ The “governor” is the village head, who really does not have much of a work to do in the village, as there is no tax or levy to collect, and education is not in the realm of village govern. There is now even not much to do about family planning for a number of reasons. The Chinese government has relaxed its policy on the issue even before the official announcement of ending the one child per family policy in 2015, and for a couple to have two children is no longer a problem. Perhaps for the very reason that there is very little work that requires the village head to do there was very little reward for being the head, with a salary of only 1500RMB a year. The young and able Gao villagers have almost all left as migrant workers and hardly anyone of the retired, the elderly and women wants to bother about anything beyond their own family affairs. The village head is supposed to be chosen by elections but more often than not there is nobody who wants to be the head of the village, in which case there will be no election called and the village head will be appointed.

Above Gao Village, the second layer of administration is *qinglin cun weihui* (Qinglin Village Committee), which covers several villages. Each village committee has a chair person (*zhuren*), and four committee members including one women member for Women Affairs. The committee members are not appointed but must be elected. Anyone can nominate someone and there is pre-election selection to screen the least popular candidates until eventually there are two candidates for the position of Chair and four candidates for each

⁴ It has to be reminded that a village population to the local administration includes migrant workers who live and work in urban centres away from home.

membership of the committee. In theory, this is genuine democracy by popular vote and once the election campaign starts to take place, the candidates attempt to lobby for votes, mostly with gifts such as wine, cigarettes.

However, the fact that all villages are lineage villages plays a crucial role in the final result. Qinglin Village Committee consists of a Gao surname Village, a Cao surname Village, a Xu surname Village and Jiang surname of three villages. The Jiang lineage has the largest number of people and Xu has the second largest number of people. It is no coincidence that the Party Secretary, who in theory and by the Chinese Constitution has the supreme power, of the Qinglin Village Committee is from the Jiang lineage and the Chair of the Village Committee is from Xu Village. In general and in theory, the chairperson of a village committee and the CCP party secretary run the affairs together with other committee members. The division of labour in general is that the village committee head runs the day to day administration while the party secretary makes sure that the CCP policies are implemented. In practice who is the more powerful of the two positions depends on the personality of the position holders and their lineage power behind them. If one wants to, the person from the largest lineage village can exercise more power irrespective of whether that person is the party secretary of village committee chair.

Even though the Party Secretary is not elected by popular vote but by appointment from the *xiang* CCP committee, the appointee is most likely to be from a larger village. For the *Xiang* CCP committee to appoint someone from Gao Village as the Party Secretary is not only “undemocratic” since Gao Village has the smallest number of party members but also makes administration practically difficult because a small village does not have the necessary influence. For the current Qinglin Village Committee, in 2015 the Women Affairs member is a Gao villager, but only because the elected woman from the Jiang clan declined to take up the position.

During the era of Mao when most radical anti-traditional policies were attempted, measures were taken to break down the entrenched lineage interest and influence. For instance, even for the *Guantian shengchan dadui* (*Guantian* Production Brigade), which covered a small area of only three villages, Gao, Cao and Xu, among which Xu was about the size of Cao and Gao combined, the Party Secretary of *Guantian* was Gao Changyin, the Chair was Wang Biaohua, the former from Gao Village and the latter from another village outside of *Guantian*. This was designed to counter the potential domineering lineage influence of Xu Village. As democracy is supposed to elect one of “us”, someone from outside the area should therefore in theory not be considered. At least that is how the local government is formed currently. So practically, the practice of democracy makes lineage politics not only more prominent but also more legitimate.

Lineage Politics in State Allocated Resources

Salaries are low for the local state agents but too bad considering how little they have to do for their work. In 2015 the Party Secretary and the Chair of the Village Committee each earns about 20,000 RMB and a committee member over 10,000 RMB, paid by the state. However,

apart from the salaries and any prestige vested in the positions, there are opportunities for the state agents to benefit their own lineage village.

When and if some of the subsidies or investments do come to the grassroots level, lineage politics plays a role in its allocation. Some state investments on rural China are in the name of New Socialist Rural Construction, the program of which includes projects such as building roads and modern toilets with a sewerage system. At Qinglin Village Committee where Gao Village is a part, the two largest lineage villages seem to have the better New Socialist Rural Construction results. Jiang Village has built straight streets with a sewerage system and Xu Village has proper roads crisscrossing the village plus a ring road around the village. Gao Village, however, has only one road in the middle of the village, which had been built from different funding before the New Socialist Construction program even started, as it is a main road through this area leading to the country town Poyang, to Jingdezhen, Nanchang and Jiujiang and beyond. The rest are just dirt paths, muddy in the wet weather and dusty when dry. Gao Village does not have a sewerage system either. In other words, none of the funds from the state designated to Qinglin Village Committee for the purpose of New Socialist Construction seemed to be allocated to Gao Village. From the Gao villagers' point of view, their village is too small to have a say in the funding allocation.

Conclusion

This study of Gao Village presents a case for two important arguments: 1) the extent and form of the reach of the state impacts local governance capacities for rural economic and social development and 2) village lineage politics plays their roles in state capacities. One cannot but notice the irony: grassroots democracy is designed to improve local governance, but the one person one vote village election actually legitimises lineage politics which impacts state capacities for good governance, in terms of, for instance, allocation of state resources for economic and social development.

There are other related subsidiary conclusions. One is that for the first 15 years of the post-Mao period, Gao villagers gained freedom in terms of production activities and freedom of movement to become migrant workers, local governance was intrusive and exploitative. The second conclusion is that since the beginning of the 21st century, the state has to some extent returned not only with public goods but also subsidies for agricultural development which have improved local governance. The third conclusion is that lineage activities are on the rise in the Gao Village area to the extent that even traditions are being reinvented in the absence of other ideologies. Lineage identity can be a positive influence for the villagers, for it gives them a sense of identity, solidarity and belonging, which assist social cohesion in times of difficulty (like when they are far away from home as migrant workers), uncertainty or even political disorder. However, lineage influence need to be guided and channelled by the state so that lineage influence can be counterbalanced for fairer local politics, just as lineage halls can be used as a public space for cultural activities. Finally, local governance transparency and accountability are not something that can be ensured by a simple form of "one person, one vote" popular election. This kind of formal "democracy" cannot ensure accountability and transparency, not only because of the increasing corrupting influence of money, "*dou shi*

youqian ren de youxi" (all is a game for the rich), as one villager from Xunde in Guangdong complains (Zhou 2015)⁵ but also because of traditionally entrenched lineage influence.

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⁵ There are more than 40 thousand townships covering more than 700 thousand villages in China currently. In May 2006, about 100 students with their supervisors from the Sociology Department of the Media Institute of Nanjing University, together with the Research Office of Jiangsu Provincial Propaganda Bureaus and the Media Centre of Jiangsu Broadcasting Station carried out a survey of 20 villagers, with 940 valid return questionnaires, plus 156 in-depth interviews. This is the report of that survey.

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