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These attempts to win back people's trust and support have been developed since 1995.

Lai Hairong

- 1 In late 2001 to early 2002, about 2000 townships in Sichuan province implemented semi-competitive elections ¹, which was a great development concerning political restructuring in China. Township level is the fifth level among the six levels of authorities in China: the centre at the top (*zhongyang*), 32 provinces (*sheng*) at the second level, 333 prefectures (*diqu*) at the third, 2,861 counties (*xian*) at the fourth, about 43,500 townships (*xiang zhen*) at the fifth, and about 800,000 villages (*cun*) at the bottom ². This article tries to examine the development of these elections, its causes, and its impacts on the evolution of the Party-state system at lower levels in China, especially in the province of Sichuan ³. It is based on fieldwork carried out across this province, mainly in the first half of 2002. The provincial authority, three prefecture authorities, four county authorities, and ten townships in Sichuan were visited ⁴. To make a comparison, the author visited also Shenzhen in Guangdong province in February 2002: there, semi-competitive elections were implemented at Dapeng township in 1999. However, in 2002 when township authorities were supposed to be re-elected, Shenzhen brought a halt to the experiment. Interviews were also carried out in Wuxi prefecture in Jiangsu province where semi-competitive elections had never been implemented (see Table 1).
- 2 Besides fieldwork in Sichuan and other provinces, some cadres with the central authorities were interviewed, which helped the author gain a better overview on semi-competitive elections in townships across the country. In addition, other research projects in which the author was involved ⁵ and existing literature on rural issues in China ⁶ also provided important and useful information.
- 3 First, this article will present a picture of the development of semi-competitive elections at township level in Sichuan province, and briefly in China as well since 1995,

when the first such elections took place. It will then look at how these elections came to be and the impact they have had.

- 4 By the end of April 2002, elections at township level in Sichuan were concluded ⁷. According to the statistics provided by a provincial Party organ, 40% of the townships—more than 2,000 townships, implemented semi-competitive elections. Elections were held for positions of township vice-governor and governor, and in some cases, township Party vice-secretary and Party secretary. There are a total 16,000 leadership positions in township governments in Sichuan ⁸. According to the same statistics, one-third of the positions—about 5,000 township governors and vice-governors—were competitively elected ⁹.
- 5 The first township semi-competitive elections took place in 1995 in Sichuan. Since then, the number of township semi-competitive elections have steadily increased. Township positions open to semi-competitive elections also spread steadily to higher ranks (see Table 2). The author went to four sites: Shizhong county (Suining prefecture) implemented semi-competitive elections for a township governor and nine township vice-governor positions; Ya'an prefecture for all township positions in all its 175 townships; Nanbu county (Nanchong prefecture) for 43 township governors and 201 township vice-governor positions; Bazhong prefecture for all township positions in all its 284 townships.
- 6 Table 1 : Sites and positions interviewed

Sites	Positions					
	Organization department	Party committee	Governor	Party secretary	Governor	Citizen
SUINING PREFECTURE (Sichuan)	1	1	1			3
Shizhong county	4					
Buyun township					2**	9
Guixu township				1	1	
Xinglu township				1	2**	
Baoshitownship				1	1	5
Dongchao township				1	1	
Yongding township				1	1	
YA'AN PREFECTURE (Sichuan)	4	1				
Yucheng county	2	1	1			
Bingxi township				1	1	
Nanbu county (Nanchong prefecture, Sichuan)	4					1
Beiquan township				1	1	
Panlong township				1	1	
BAZHONG PREFECTURE (Sichuan)	3					
Nanjiang county	2	1				
Nanjiang township				1	1	
SHENZHEN (Guangdong) *	1		1			3
Dapeng township	2				1***	
WUXI PREFECTURE (Jiangsu)		1	4			
Yixing county		1				
Zhangzhu township					1	

NB: Figures in this table represent the number of interviewees at given positions.

* Shenzhen is a vice-province (*fushengji shi*).

** Interviews with incumbent township governor and his rival in the election.

*** Interview with a vice-governor.

- 7 These elections were not evenly distributed across the province. Table 3 shows the number and ratio of townships that implemented semi-competitive elections in the four sites of the present study. Compared to the average ratio—40% of the townships—

that implemented semi-competitive elections across the province, real ratios were extremely different. Interviews at provincial level confirmed that in some places, for example in Chengdu prefecture, the ratio of townships that implemented semi-competitive elections to the total number of townships within the prefecture was far less than 30%. In some counties within the prefecture, only one or two townships implemented semi-competitive elections ¹⁰.

- 8 This uneven distribution was sharper when examined nationwide. Compared to other provinces, Sichuan is the only province in which township semi-elections gained a considerable momentum ¹¹. In other provinces, there were very few and scattered township semi-competitive elections. In 1998-99, the best-known was the election at Dapeng township (Shenzhen, Guangdong province) ¹². In the same year, there were elections at a township in Xincai county, Henan province ¹³, and in a few townships in Putian prefecture and Longyan prefecture, Fujian province ¹⁴.
- 9 In 2001-2, the best-known in provinces other than Sichuan was an election for Party secretary at Yangji township (Jingshan county, Hubei province) ¹⁵. There have been other, less publicised elections: 12 for township governors at Xianning prefecture, Hubei province ¹⁶; one for township vice-governor at Gongcheng township (Gongcheng Yao nationality autonomous county in Guangxi) ¹⁷, and two others: one for township governor at Qing township (Guiyang prefecture, Guizhou province) ¹⁸ and another at a township within Jilin province ¹⁹. Except for these, the author did not find any other reports on township semi-competitive elections in other provinces than Sichuan.
- 10 However, this is not the exact picture of what is happening across the country in terms of the development of township semi-competitive elections. Since the township semi-competitive election is, so far, an innovation, and is not widely accepted within the system ²⁰, some localities conceal the events both from higher levels and from the public. Even if they did not, it is still likely that some semi-competitive elections will remain unknown to the public due to two factors. One is that as information is forwarded through the administrative levels, a critical stance at different stages to semi-competitive elections may gradually annihilate innovative elements. The other is that the centre and/or the 32 provinces have to deal with tens of thousands of townships, and so with tens of thousands of issues. Therefore as long as a new practice does not greatly shake the system or engender any great impact on the society it may remain unknown to the public ²¹. Thus, the elections known of in provinces other than Sichuan do not provide a complete picture.
- 11 In the traditional practice of township elections, positions such as township governor, vice-governor are at county Party committee's nomenklatura—in Chinese terminology, cadre management system. This means, that it is the county Party committee, in practice the standing committee of the county Party committee (consisting of about five to nine members) that decides on the candidates for each position in the township. The decisions are then forwarded to township Party committees and through them to township people's congresses that should decide on the candidates ²². Since members of township peoples' congresses are also at the township Party committees' nomenklatura, there is little chance for candidates suggested by the Party to be opposed by members of people's congress.
- 12 The new practice introduced competition to township elections by adding an open self-nomination. It also added a voting procedure by an enlarged electoral college—say, primary election—at each township before the county Party committee would select

from among them the candidates for township positions. “Self-nomination” is not the only way of making nomination since local authorities encouraged primary candidates to be nominated both by non-Party temporary group of residents, and by individuals themselves. But in fact, due to the underdeveloped civil society or horizontal connections among people, cases of primary candidates nominated by groups of residents were rare. “Self-nomination” turned out to be the dominant way of nominating primary candidates. The “enlarged electoral college” usually includes a few (five to ten) county cadres, all members of township people’s congress, all township government staff, all village main cadres (village Party secretaries, village commissioners), and some resident representatives who are basically selected by village cadres. In the old practice, township people’s congress consisting of about 35 to 45 representatives is the electoral college. In the new one, the enlarged electoral college consisted of about 150 to 300 people.

- 13 After primary candidates have been voted by the enlarged electoral college, usually the one who got maximum votes would be automatically accepted by the county Party committee as the formal and final candidate to be passed to the township Party committee, through it to township people’s congress, and to be elected to the given position ²³. Generally, before voting, each candidate is required to give a speech about his/her possible programme for the position and defend his/her programme in front of the enlarged electoral college. In previous practice there were no such interactions between candidates and electors. Very often, electors voted for candidates who they did not even know.
- 14 Thus, a semi-open and semi-competitive primary election has been added to the previous closed election. The primary was emphasised, and in some cases competition was fierce. In addition, residents’ participation in the township elections has also increased with the added voting procedure by the enlarged electoral college.
- 15 Tables 4, 5 and 6 show that quite a large number of primary candidates run for each position, which was impossible when candidates were decided by closed meetings by the five to nine member standing committee of county Party committees.
- 16 No detailed statistics were available in Ya’an prefecture. But all township main positions—governor, vice-governors, Party secretaries, and Party vice-secretary—were open to semi-competitive elections at all of the 175 townships within the prefecture. There were a total 1,040 positions ²⁴, and 2,103 self-nominated primary candidates ²⁵.
- 17 When there were too many self-nominated primary candidates, a written exam was held by the election commission ²⁶ to reduce the number of candidates who would later have to defend their programmes in front of the enlarged electoral college. For example, in Suining prefecture, as shown in Table 4, with the exception of Buyun township, there were an average 30 people competing for each position. The election commission organised a written exam. The top six primary candidates went forward to the next round. Questions asked in the exams were basically the central authority’s policy on rural issues, related laws and regulations, agriculture and economic development, and so on.

Table 2 : Evolution of townships semi-competitive elections in Sichuan

	1995-1996	1998-1999	2001-2002
Number of townships that implemented semi-competitive elections	10*	295**	2000
Township positions opened to semi-competitive elections	Vice-governors	290 vice-governors 203 governors 3 Party secretaries	Vice-governors governors Party vice-secretaries Party secretaries**

NB: * Incomplete statistics. According to the provincial authorities, the first semi-competitive elections at township level took place in 1995-96. About 10 townships have implemented semi-competitive elections for township vice-governor.

** Incomplete statistics.

*** In 2001-2, a large number of townships in Sichuan held semi-competitive elections. Detailed data on which townships implemented competitive elections for what positions were not available.

Source: Edited by the author based on his interviews

- 18 Nanbu county authority also organised such exams. Their purpose was not to reduce the number of candidates, but rather to ensure that candidates had basic knowledge about political and economic life in rural areas. Written exams were not held in other regions. In Ya'an prefecture and Bazhong prefecture, pre-selection through written exams was considered unnecessary ²⁷.
- 19 That people unknown to the closed group of county Party leadership began to be able to take part in competition for township governors and even Party secretaries, did not mean free elections. Competitive primary elections were followed by highly controlled final elections. And elections had further prescribed constraints: 1) competitors had to be cadres ²⁸ of Party and state apparatus (with the exception of Buyun township), ordinary citizens had no access to nomination; 2) election campaign was forbidden (with the exception of Buyun township); 3) upper age limits were set; 4) lower education limits were imposed.
- 20 As to the first point, in the localities where the author conducted the fieldwork, only cadres at county authority, township authority, and "three positions" at village level could participate in competing for positions of township governor and Party secretaries. "Three positions" at village level refers to the head of the villager committee, village Party secretary, and village accountant. They are not paid from the state budgetary fund, but obtain a small amount of subsidies from township's extra- and/or off-budgetary funds. They are not formal cadres in the Chinese context. However, they are the most important institutionalised links between ordinary residents in villages and township authorities.
- 21 There were variants in regulations setting out which positions cadres were allowed to participate. For example, in Shizhong county (with the exception of Buyun township), in Nanbu county, and in Bazhong prefecture, only township vice-governors, township Party vice-secretaries, and cadres at this rank were allowed to compete for positions of township governor and township Party secretary. Ordinary cadres could only compete for positions of township vice-governor and township Party vice-secretary. In Ya'an prefecture and Buyun township, competition and openness in the elections were greatly increased. In Ya'an prefecture, there were no requirements on ranks: any cadre was allowed to compete as primary candidate for any township position. At Buyun, even ordinary citizens could be primary candidates for the position of township governor.

- 22 Competitive elections at township level thus differed from the old way of appointing township governors by county Party committee. Nevertheless, except in one township, no ordinary citizen has been elected township governor and/or vice-governor. Competitive elections in Sichuan's townships did not change the discrepancy between people outside the Party-state network and those inside.
- 23 Secondly, though all primary candidates, according to election regulations, were required to give speeches and defend their programme in front of an enlarged electoral college. Campaigns were forbidden ²⁹. Local cadres reported that the reason for forbidding campaigns was to prevent election fraud. Campaigns were considered an instrument by which primary candidates could corrupt electors. Convincing or not, the forbidding of campaigns reduced greatly the intensity of competition and openness.
- 24 The third constraint is an upper age limit for primary candidates. As shown in Table 7, this limit is quite low. This criterion is the opposite of that usually seen in other countries: election regulations generally set a minimum age for candidates for positions in authorities to ensure sufficient social experience and political maturity. The last constraint worth mention is the requirement for primary candidates to be educated to a high level ³⁰ (see Table 8).
- 25 Within the four study sites, Shizhong county, Nanbu county and Bazhong prefecture had implemented two, and in a few cases even three, semi-competitive township-level elections ³¹. As Ya'an prefecture held such elections for the first time in 2001-2, we will examine only the first three sites.
- 26 In Shizhong county (Suining prefecture) in 2001-2, semi-competitive township elections were implemented for the second time. Compared to those in 1998-99, there was greater openness and competition was more intense ³². In 1998-99, according to the regulations issued by Shizhong county authority, primary candidates had to be cadres working within the county. In 2001-2, cadres working in the other three counties within the prefecture could also be nominated. This new measure expanded the sources and the numbers of competitors for each position, (see Table 4), and intensified competition.
- 27 In Bazhong prefecture, township semi-competitive elections were implemented for the third time in 2001-2 at some of its townships. Local cadres in charge of appointments reported that a tendency of increasing openness and intensifying competition could be detected. Initially, both cadres and ordinary citizens believed that the new practice was merely a formality. When unexpected results emerged with the continuous implementation of competitive elections, public interest grew. More cadres directly and ordinary citizens indirectly took part in the semi-competitive elections.
- 28 Positive developments sometimes paralleled negative. Semi-competitive elections in Buyun township were implemented in late 1998 for the first time, and in late 2001 the second time. Buyun township is always mentioned as an exceptional case. It was a direct election voted in by all township residents above the age of 18, rather than an indirect election where only the township people's congress had a vote. There was no restriction on the origin of those nominated for candidates. Campaigning was allowed.
- 29 However, the township or county authorities did not give up all means of monitoring Buyun's elections. The Party could still influence elections through a preliminary election in which an enlarged electoral college ³³ voted. This interim process played an

important role in decreasing the intensity of competition when semi-competitive elections were implemented for the second time in 2001.

- 30 In 1998 at Buyun township 16 persons were nominated as primary candidates. One of these was nominated by the township Party committee (actually the county Party committee) and was not required to go through the voting process of the enlarged electoral college. The college consisted of 161 persons who were township cadres, village cadres, and resident representatives selected by village cadres. The Party committee's delegate automatically went forward and had to compete with the two candidates elected by the enlarged college.
- 31 From December 20th to 28th, the three candidates waged intense campaigns ³⁴. Thirteen debates were held during that week. 20,000 (Buyun township had a voting population of 6,200 in 1998 ³⁵) heard the debates. 650 asked questions to the candidates ³⁶. At last, the candidate nominated by the Party committee won the election by a narrow margin. He got 50.4% of the votes ³⁷.
- 32 In 2001, a semi-competitive election was implemented again for the position of township governor. But intensity of competition was greatly decreased. In 2000, Buyun's superior authority, Shizhong county Party leadership was reshuffled. The former Party secretary who was enthusiastic about implementing township semi-competitive election was shifted to another position outside the county. The new Party secretary of Shizhong county was ambivalent about holding the elections again. He delayed the decision until the deadline. By the time he made a decision, cadre and residents' hopes were already dampened ³⁸.

Table 3 :Proportion of semi-competitive elections in the four areas of fieldwork

	Shizhong county (Suining prefecture)	Yuan prefecture (5 counties)	Nanbu county (Nanchong prefecture)	Bazhong prefecture (4 counties)
Total number of townships	33	175	80	284
Number of townships implemented in semi-competitive elections	10	175	80	284
Proportion of townships that did semi-competitive elections	30%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Edited by the author based on archives obtained during fieldwork study.

Table 4 : Number of self-nominated primary candidates for a township vice-governor position in 2002 in Shizhong county

Townships	Baoshi	Hengshan	Fengshi	Guanying	Xinqiao	Majia	Sanja	Lianhua	Hesha	Buyun
Number of primary candidates	25	34	28	34	35	44	26	31	32	7

Source: Organisation Department of Suining Party committee

- 33 Of similar importance was that in the 2001 election, the incumbent cadre sought a second term in the position of township governor. He had been nominated by the Party and did not have to go through the selection process. Since he was also a newcomer, he did not have much influence on the selection process. At the 2001 election, the incumbent township governor and other primary candidates were all put to the vote by

the enlarged electoral college. The enlarged college, consisting of township and village cadres and voter representatives selected by village cadres, on whom the incumbent township governor had a strong influence, elected two candidates for the next step—competing for the votes of the five thousand voters³⁹. The two successful candidates were the incumbent township governor and an ordinary cadre working at the same township—therefore subordinate of the incumbent governor. The township's peasants without exception reported that the one who was most likely to challenge the incumbent was one of those defeated. It was also said that the incumbent, who had a significant influence on the enlarged electoral college, managed to have his strongest rival pushed out and a weak candidate allowed through⁴⁰. Since the incumbent was obviously in a much better position than his rival, many people took it for granted that the incumbent would win the election. The intensity of competition decreased greatly. Only six debates were held. Interviewed peasants reported that, the audience at the debates was much smaller than at the 1998 election. The intensity of the debates was much weaker⁴¹. The incumbent won the election⁴².

- 34 Buyun township's semi-competitive election was not the only case where openness and intensity of competition declined. This also happened in Nanbu county. In 1998, Nanbu county implemented semi-competitive elections for the first time in 79 townships for 178 township vice-governor positions. Elections that year simply required that the one who gained the most votes from the enlarged electoral college⁴³ would be accepted as formal candidates by the county Party committee. Within the electoral college, the votes of the county leadership were weighted 40% against the 60% of other electors⁴⁴.
- 35 In 2001, Nanbu county authority implemented semi-competitive elections at all its townships⁴⁵ for positions of 200 township vice-governors and 43 township governors. By that time regulations had changed. In the enlarged electoral colleges, the weight of county leadership increased to 60% against the 40% for others⁴⁶. As a consequence, openness and intensity of competition declined. The practice in the semi-competitive elections in these townships to an extent the reverse of practice previously.
- 36 As mentioned, the initiators of township semi-competitive elections were county Party committees, and in some cases, prefecture Party committees. County and/or prefecture Party committees presented the reform ideas, designed operative procedures for the primary elections, organised and supervised each step of the primary elections. They were the ones who confirmed the results of the primary elections and concluded the final elections. In other words, the whole procedure was led, regulated and monitored through direct participation of county and/or prefecture Party committees. The increase and decrease of openness and intensity of competition, the increase and decrease of the number of townships open to semi-competitive elections, and spreading of semi-competitive elections to positions of higher ranks were all decided by county and/or prefecture Party committees. The management of the unusual elections smoothly fit into the routine operation of the Chinese Party-state, since it is the county Party committee that holds the nomenklatura responsibility over township positions⁴⁷. It is the task of the county Party committee, or in some cases, of its immediate superior to decide how to appoint cadres to township positions, provided the way of appointment does not violate the respective principles set by the central Party committee. Therefore, reasons for the development of township semi-competitive elections should first and foremost be found by examining county and/or prefecture Party committee motivations.

- 37 On examining primarily the motivations of county and prefecture authorities it was significant that none of the semi-competitive elections was reported to have resulted from any demand for them from ordinary citizens⁴⁸. During my fieldwork, cadres of different county and prefecture authorities reported different motivations.
- 38 In all the counties and prefectures the author visited, local cadres said that the implementation of competitive elections was to enforce people's voting rights as stipulated in the Constitution. Though the reforms increased the transparency of the system as well as people's participation in the political process, and we may agree that the aim of the organisers might have implied the enforcement of people's rights, these motivations do not explain the restrictions, setbacks, reversals, etc.
- 39 In an interview on December 29th 2001, Mrs Zhang Jingmin, the former Party secretary of Shizhong county, who initiated the first township competitive elections in 1998, explained: "Shortly after I was promoted to county Party secretary, corruption was discovered in the Xinqiao and Baoshi townships of cadres embezzling money collected from peasants. The peasants' trust in cadres and township governments was in crisis. I became determined to carry out some reform experiments—to implement semi-competitive elections for governor at Baoshi township and for Party secretary at Xinqiao township, to win back the people's trust in and support for the township authorities"⁴⁹.

Table 5 : Primary candidates for township semi-competitive elections in Nanbu county

Total number of governor positions opened to semi-competitive elections	Number of governor positions opened to semi-competitive elections	Number of primary candidates for governor positions	Total number of vice-governor positions opened to semi-competitive elections	Number of vice-governor positions opened to semi-competitive elections	Number of primary candidates for vice-governor positions
80	43	235	201	201	433

Source: Edited by the author according to *Nanbu xian xiangzhengzhang houxuanren gongkai jingzheng ziliao huibian* (Collected Material on Semi-Competitive Elections for Candidates for Township Governors and Vice-governors in Nanbu County), Organisation Department of Nanbu county Party committee, November 2001.

Table 6 :Primary candidates for township semi-competitive elections in Bazhong prefecture

Positions	Party secretary		Governor		Vicegovernor	
	Number of positions	Number of primary candidates	Number of positions	Number of primary candidates	Number of positions	Number of primary candidates
Localities						
Bazhong prefecture	134	250	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
At three experimental townships	3	7	3	6	8	13
Among them : Nanjiang township	1	3	n.a.	n.a.	3	7

NB: Semi-competitive elections in townships in Bazhong prefecture were not only implemented for the positions of township governor and vice-governor, but also for township Party secretary and vice-secretary. When fieldwork was carried out there in January, semi-competitive elections were only held in part of the townships. Therefore, statistics in the above table are incomplete. According to cadres in Bazhong, all positions at all the 285 townships within the prefecture would be elected in a semi-competitive way in early 2002, which was confirmed by interviews with provincial level in April 2002. However, interviews at provincial level did not provide accurate figures.

Source: Edited by the author according to the related reports by local authorities in Bazhong.

- 40 Mrs Zhang's account confirmed the story told by an earlier interviewee in the county. In September 2001 in Shizhong county, a county vice-governor said that, after corruption at Xinqiao and Baoshi townships was uncovered, peasants took direct action against township cadres. They refused to pay taxes, and to make any contribution to projects initiated by the township authorities. Authorities at those two townships were hardly able to do their jobs ⁵⁰. The county Party committee envisaged that, through the implementation of semi-competitive elections, peasants would become involved in choosing the leadership and therefore accept the new leadership elected with more direct and/or indirect peasant participation.
- 41 At Bazhong prefecture, a similar political crisis caused by financial problems with the township authorities seemed to be the driving force behind the implementation of semi-competitive elections. Cadres of Bazhong prefecture complained fiercely but unsuccessfully about the huge amount of debt that township authorities and villages had ⁵¹. According to an account published in the magazine issued by prefecture authority, in one region within the prefecture, township debts to peasants totalled 112% of the township revenues in 2000 ⁵². According to the same report, "since village authorities and township authorities never pay debts due, authorities are losing respect. Peasants consider township authorities liars. Debtors come every day demanding payments. Cadres at townships and villages are also frustrated: they have not received their salaries for months; they cannot focus on jobs due for they are overburdened by debtors. Many cadres give up jobs at authorities and migrate to other regions" ⁵³.
- 42 The Bazhong prefecture authority saw township semi-competitive elections as a way of solving the problems. As stated in a Party archive ⁵⁴, prefecture and county authorities hoped that competitive elections would provide cadres for township positions who were capable of handling the problems, were trusted by peasants, and were willing to work in rural areas.
- 43 In Nanbu county, township semi-competitive elections seemed to result from two pressures—peasant protests against township cadres increased in the 1990s, and cadres at county reported that groups of peasants complained to higher levels about the misery imposed on them by the township cadres. In some cases, peasants organised sit-

ins in front of the county Party committee office building, demanding that the county authority dismiss some township cadres ⁵⁵. Peasant resentment reached above county level. In 1996, township people's congresses rejected four from among the 14 candidates nominated by the county Party committee. This behaviour was unprecedented ⁵⁶. Semi-competitive elections through which participation of peasants was indirectly increased, and which allowed ordinary cadres a stronger say on appointing main cadres were seen as a way to ease resentment.

- 44 The other pressure was to increase the township authorities' ability to raise extra funds for investment. Raising these funds was imperative, due to a big investment project led by the county authority. Nanbu county authority decided on October 6th 1997 to build a power station. Costs amounted to 650 million yuan, a huge sum for a county in western China. The county authority did not have the resources for the project. And, since it was not a project included in the state economic development plan, there was no chance of support from higher levels. They had to rely on "internal" resources. The county Party secretary interpreted the situation the following way: "in Nanbu county, economic life in the 1990s changed enormously. The market has been playing an increasing role. As such, the township authorities need cadres with new talents, new approaches, and new skills to solve the problems facing us" ⁵⁷. Semi-competitive elections well fit those aims.
- 45 This was confirmed by an interview with the vice-director of the organisation department of Nanbu county Party committee: "With the change in economic life, cadres appointed in the traditional way could not adjust to the new situation. They generally were too old, and had old-style thinking; they typically were good at accumulating *guanxi* (connections) with higher-ranking officials, rather than dealing with the market. Moreover, promotion based on *guanxi* negatively affected other cadres' initiative" ⁵⁸. The time had come to change the appointment system. Township semi-competitive elections were considered as an alternative.
- 46 In Ya'an prefecture, there was little resentment from peasants as seen in other areas and raising extra funds seemed to be the sole driving force for the elections. Initiator of the reform project—Mr Wei Hong, the then Party secretary of Ya'an prefecture Party committee—explained: "We expect that ordinary citizens' political enthusiasm and participation brought about by the reform (of competitive elections at townships) would engender positive achievements for (economic and social) development in rural areas, which is what the Party has been hoping for for years" ⁵⁹.
- 47 A top priority in Ya'an prefecture was to greatly improve infrastructure in rural areas. However, in Ya'an prefecture, both township, county and prefecture authorities were short of resources. Unless covered by extra resources from outside the Party-state structure, there was no hope of achieving the goal. Leadership appointed by upper levels did not have initiative to raise funds. Those in other positions, who would have initiatives, had poor chances of promotion due to the closed nature of cadre appointments. Moreover, the authorities were alienated from their citizens. Therefore, both in Ya'an prefecture and partly in Nanbu county, ambitious investment projects confronted by the lack of financial background drove county and prefecture authorities to implement township semi-competitive elections, in order to involve citizens both in the process and in resource contribution ⁶⁰.
- 48 Since the purpose for the semi-competitive elections was to relieve the township authority from crisis, or to increase the township authority's ability to attain extra

resources, the aim of fundamental systemic change was out of the question ⁶¹. Semi-competitive elections at township level in China, especially in Sichuan, were rather a self-adjustment to the Party-state system. Restrictions on primary candidates' origins, on campaigns, on electoral colleges, and the inclusion of channelling by pre-selection into the traditional process, not speaking about the whole organisation and regulation of these elections, ensured that semi-competitive elections would not break the boundary of the Party-state network.

- 49 In addition, the restrictions on age and education seemed to serve the purpose of replacing old cadres with young ones who were better equipped to navigate in the new economic and social life. The Chinese nomenklatura seems to have evolved into a system in which cadre promotion is based on the length of a given cadre's bureaucratic life. However, length of bureaucratic life in many cases represents incompetence rather than wisdom, especially when the possibility of acquiring resources within the network is declining, and attaining sufficient resources from market is a pressing problem.
- 50 Interdependency between lack of resources and semi-competitive elections was also underlined by another interview. According to local cadres, the immediate result of semi-competitive elections at Baoshi township in 1998 was peasants' full co-operation in tax payment. Therefore, we can argue that in 2001, when a new round of elections took place, a deep crisis was partially relieved, leading the county authority to implement township semi-competitive elections with less intensity and openness.
- 51 A similar case worthy of note was in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. A township semi-competitive election was initiated there in 1998 but was halted in 2001. The author's interviews in Shenzhen showed that the semi-competitive election at Dapeng township was not aimed at any problems in particular ⁶². It was, according to local cadres and citizens, more like a decoration or a political show. Therefore, when the issue of township semi-competitive elections became controversial ⁶³, local cadres gave up the new practice. In other words, in places where no crisis emerged, township semi-competitive elections were vulnerable to critique and therefore were not sustained.
- 52 In Sichuan province, local authorities not only did not halt the reform started in the mid-1990s, but instead escalated greatly the implementation of township semi-competitive elections. The escalation, according to cadres at provincial level, was basically due to the fact that tensions between township authorities and residents were much greater in Sichuan than in other provinces. Implementation of semi-competitive elections at township level was badly needed even if controversial among cadres in the central authority ⁶⁴. Indeed, townships in Sichuan were in very deep crisis: county and township authorities had been accumulating huge deficits ⁶⁵, peasants were increasingly vocal against the authorities ⁶⁶, both peasants and cadres had been yearning for investment and rapid economic development ⁶⁷.

Table 7 :Upper age limit for primary candidates

Size and positions	Governor				Vice-governor			
	Shizhong county	Ya'an prefecture	Nanbu county	Bazhong prefecture	Shizhong county	Ya'an prefecture	Nanbu county	Bazhong prefecture
Age limit	40	40*	45	45	n.a.	35**	45	40

NB: *In Ya'an prefecture, if a primary candidate is an ordinary cadre, he/she should not be over 40; if an incumbent township governor nominates himself/herself as a primary candidate for a second term, he/she should not be over 45.

**Ordinary cadres in Ya'an prefecture wishing to compete for township vice-governor should be younger than 35; those who were already township vice-governor wishing to compete for the same positions should not be over 40

Source: Regulations on township competitive elections issued in the above-mentioned four areas.

- 53 As to the unevenness in terms of the regional distribution of township semi-competitive elections, differences emerged between provinces (e.g. Sichuan, Wuxi and Shenzhen) and also within provinces (e.g. within Sichuan). For example, in rural areas near Chengdu prefecture, capital of Sichuan, township and county authorities were facing far fewer difficulties in raising revenues to cover their expenditures. Peasants had more opportunity to make a good living due to the relative economic boom in and closeness to the capital city. They did not bother themselves too much to monitor township cadre behaviour. As a consequence, tensions in areas near Chengdu and some other prosperous cities were lower than those in remote and relatively underdeveloped areas. This picture coincides with the picture that a much larger proportion of townships in remote and relatively underdeveloped prefectures implemented semi-competitive elections and a much smaller proportion of townships held elections in Chengdu and similarly prosperous prefectures⁶⁸. In other words, the uneven regional distribution of crisis and tensions parallel the uneven regional distribution of township semi-competitive elections.
- 54 Did township semi-competitive elections bring change and if they did, what kind of change did it bring and what impact did it have on the nomenklatura over township and village positions? If the elections changed the relations between authorities at various levels, to what extent did they change: the relations between Party and state at township level; and the relations between authorities, especially township authorities, and ordinary residents?
- 55 As to the impact on the nomenklatura, the county Party committee's nomenklatura over township positions is still there. However, with the introduction of the semi-competitive elections, the centralised power of the county Party committee's standing committee in making appointments for township positions is partially decentralised to cadres at lower levels and even to a part of the residents⁶⁹. In other words, county Party committee nomenklatura responsibility over township positions was partially diffused. Bigger change was brought about by semi-competitive elections at township level on the township Party committee's nomenklatura over village positions. The author's study found that in townships where semi-competitive elections were implemented, village elections were organised in a freer and more open way. Township authorities intervened less in village elections. In some cases, free elections were held. Township Party committees did not have a pre-emptive plan for who should be elected as heads of villager committees, showing township Party committee nomenklatura over

village non-Party positions withdrawn. In some villages, Party secretary positions were open to competitive elections in which not only ordinary Party members but also some non-Party residents were involved in the voting. In these cases, township Party committee nomenklatura over village Party positions was also withdrawn. In some other villages, the withdrawals were done in a more radical way. After heads of villager committees were elected in a free and open way, in case the elected heads were Party members they were automatically appointed as village Party secretaries; in case they were not, they would be asked to join the Party and then were appointed as Party secretaries⁷⁰.

- 56 Concerning relations between Party and state at township level, a few changes were reported. Institutionally, township governors elected in a semi-competitive way work under the leadership of township Party committees. However, township governors emerging from semi-competitive elections “were generally more self-confident”. Meanwhile, “township Party secretaries showed them more respect”. “In a few cases, competitively elected township governors pursued more power, leading to conflicts with township Party secretaries”⁷¹.
- 57 The impact of township semi-competitive elections on relations between county authorities and township authorities is more complicated. Different cadres made various assessments of this. Interviewees in Ya’an prefecture and Shizhong county believed that semi-competitive elections at township level did not change the relationship between county and township authorities. Cadres in Nanbu county believed the contrary. Especially in 1998, when the “county Party did not monitor the elections sufficiently”, “a proportion of the cadres elected in townships semi-competitive elections began to be passive in complying with directives from the county”⁷². Interviewees at provincial level confirmed that, after the implementation of semi-competitive elections in townships, “county authority power over township authorities decreased, and township authorities gained more autonomy.”

Table 8 : The minimum education requirement for primary candidates

State and positions	Governor				Vice-governor			
	Shizhong county	Ya'an prefecture	Nanbu county	Bazhong prefecture	Shizhong county	Ya'an prefecture	Nanbu county	Bazhong prefecture
Minimum education required	Senior high school	University under-graduate education	University under-graduate education	University under-graduate education	n.a.	University under-graduate education	Senior high school	Senior high school

NB: *In remote townships, the requirement for a minimum level of education could be decreased to senior high school.

Source: Regulations on township competitive elections issued in the above-mentioned four areas.

- 58 Concerning the relationship between township authorities and ordinary citizens, the interviewees reported bigger changes. Firstly, “since residents’ participation in selecting cadres increased, tensions between cadres and residents declined, relations between cadres and residents were more harmonious”. Secondly, township authorities were more motivated and more under pressure to increase transparency in governmental affairs⁷³. Thirdly, in a few cases, “cadres emerged from semi-competitive elections paid more attention to citizens’ and ordinary cadres’ wishes. In some cases, when tasks assigned by upper levels were in conflict with residents’ interests, the cadres sided with residents”⁷⁴.

- 59 These changes were probably caused by the fact that in semi-competitive elections a cadre's possibility of being promoted to township leadership positions was greatly influenced by the residents and ordinary cadres. In many townships, competition for elector votes was intense. Precise data on how many cases there were of unexpected results—in local cadres' words, "winners previously unknown to Party committees emerged from polls"—were not available. In Ya'an prefecture it was estimated that 20% to 30% of winners were previously unknown to the standing committees of the county Party committees. Estimation by cadres at provincial level was that one-third of the winners were not known to the organisations holding cadre responsibility over township positions. These unexpected winners encouraged more cadres to respect their colleagues and residents. On the other hand, unexpected election outcomes also shocked some of the cadres who formerly only followed directives from higher levels. In Ya'an prefecture, Party secretaries at two townships gave up competing as primary candidates after calculating that they could not gain enough votes from resident representatives and ordinary cadres. By doing so, they in fact gave up the opportunity of having a second term in the position. That township cadres were discouraged from competing and the fact that they gave up leadership positions because of elections was unprecedented.⁷⁵
- 60 Less dramatic election outcomes could also have an impact. For example, when a winner did not get the expected amount of ballots, he/she would also have to rethink his/her policies. This was the case in Buyun township in 2001. At the 2001 election, people had already taken it for granted that the incumbent township governor would win the election. The incumbent township governor was in such an advantageous position compared to his rival, that some cadres, including the incumbent himself, thought that it would not be a success if he got less than 70% of the ballot ⁷⁶. However, the incumbent got less than 51% of the ballot. His apparently hopeless rival won more than 49% of the vote. Among the 5,000 ballots, less than 100 votes separated them ⁷⁷. Cadres at county level believed that in the past three years, the incumbent in many cases did not pay enough attention to residents' opinions when making decisions. Some of his policies were also implemented with little transparency. Thus he alienated a large proportion of the residents. Voting for his rival was actually a protest against the incumbent ⁷⁸.
- 61 All in all, township competitive elections, especially the unexpected outcomes, drove township cadres to put more weight on residents' opinions when making decisions. They seemed driven to seek a new balance between compliance with the authorities at higher levels and respect for residents' interests. And the balance tipped slightly for the residents with the implementation of township semi-competitive elections.
- 62 However, this was only one side of the story. Township semi-competitive elections were implemented at the next-to-lowest level within the whole Party-state. The system was and is still there, checking the unfolding of the impact of the township semi-competitive elections. Probably the most powerful factor in evaluating any possible impact, is the unchanged parts of the nomenklatura. Appointment is only one part of the Party committees' four major jobs concerning cadre responsibility. Semi-competitive elections at township level changed county Party committees' way of appointing to township positions. However, the following three powers over township cadres did not change: cadre review, cadre exchange, cadre demotion.

- 63 For each position, the county Party committee would have a list of tasks that each cadre should achieve. This list of tasks also stipulates according awards and punishments. In all the areas the author visited, county Party committees without exception gave township positions enormous tasks ⁷⁹, which greatly reduced the room for competitively elected cadres to manoeuvre. Especially, it made it very difficult for elected cadres to refrain themselves from intervening in peasants' economic and political lives, even if they wished to.
- 64 Cadre exchanges also greatly impeded the unfolding of any election impact. Cadre exchange is an important part of the cadre management system in China ⁸⁰. The county Party committee has the right to and actually must constantly shift a cadre from one position to another. In places where the author visited, cases of competitively elected township cadres being shifted to other positions were reported ⁸¹. Consequently, by disconnecting elected cadres from their constituents, any possible impact was impeded.
- 65 Cadre demotion is a power of veto held by county Party committees over township cadres elected in a semi-competitive way. In this study's research sites, no demotion of competitively elected township cadres was reported so far. However, in other provinces at village level, many cases of township Party committees dismissing freely elected heads of villagers committees have been reported ⁸². Similarly, competitively elected township governors and/or Party secretaries were subject to the same demotions.
- 66 The second important factor hindering any impact might be those organisations attached to township authorities but in the meanwhile under the direct supervision of county authorities ⁸³. Since these organisations were still under the direct supervision of the county authorities, competitively elected township vice-governors, governors, Party vice-secretaries, and Party secretaries had limited power over them ⁸⁴. Room for them to manoeuvre was further compressed. Thus, any effects that the competitive elections might have had were impeded.
- 67 Semi-competitive elections in townships in Sichuan have grown steadily and swiftly since 1995: the number of township semi-competitive elections have increased enormously; positions opened to semi-competitive elections have also been spreading from vice-governor, to governor, and further to Party vice-secretary and Party secretary. Causes for this development involved the county Party committees' hopes of relieving townships from deep crisis. They envisaged that through semi-competitive elections, township authorities would win the support of residents, capable cadres would be put into suitable positions, and extra resources would be absorbed into township budgets.
- 68 Impacts of these elections include a decentralisation and weakening of county Party committees appointment responsibility for township positions, in a few cases abolishing or weakening of township Party committee nomenklatura over village positions to a greater extent. Meanwhile township authorities gained more autonomy from counties, and residents began to have a greater influence over township affairs.
- 69 However, the Party-state still prevails, and all its unchanged parts have been following the unfolding of possible impacts brought about by the semi-competitive elections at township level.
- 70 Moreover, the effects of this kind of election can be reversed to some extent, as we saw with the decrease in openness and intensity of competition in the Buyun township, and in Nanbu county. In the former, the county authority was less motivated to implement

township semi-competitive elections once tensions were eased and pressures relieved. In the latter, local cadres said that after the 1998 semi-competitive elections, some cadres began to pay too much attention to ordinary cadres' and citizens' interests rather than implementing the directives of the county authority⁸⁵. To ensure the county authority's control over townships, the county Party committee decided to re-weight the voting ratios, decreasing that of ordinary cadres and citizens and increasing that of the county leadership.

- 71 However, reversion in some places would probably be out-weighted by a wide spread in other places. In 2004-5 when the next elections are held in rural areas, semi-competitive elections might spread to townships across the country, especially in western and northern China, in which a large proportion of township authorities are in similar deep crisis as those in Sichuan. It seems rather a matter of how widely township semi-competitive elections would spread and how intense the competition would be than whether or not these elections will spread. Upper level officials have not been able to contain crisis at township level, though they had wanted to and tried to. It might also be the case, for the same reasons, that upper level authorities would not be able to contain the spread of semi-competitive elections at township level, even if they want to and try to. Naturally, if higher-ranking authorities could see the development of township semi-competitive elections as healthy and beneficial, their development would be greatly facilitated.

NOTES

1. We use the term "semi-competitive elections" because these elections are far from being free and competitive elections as one sees in many countries.
2. See statistics announced by Ministry of Civil Affairs in 2001: <http://www.mca.gov.cn/news/news2001041601.html>. Villages and townships have been under constant restructuring. The general tendency in the 1990s was that number of townships decreased. About 50,000 townships in the early 1990s were merged into less than 43,500 townships by the early 2000s. This is also the case for villages. However data concerning the exact change in the number of villages were not available.
3. During the research, the author was fortunate to have help from many people. First of all, Dr Maria Csanadi at the Institute of Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Secondly, the author's colleagues at the China Center for Comparative Politics & Economics. Cadres at local Party and state organisations, especially those in Sichuan, helped a lot during the field work. Sarah Cook's program at Ford Foundation's Beijing office provided financial support for the field works part. The author also benefited a lot from the stimulating academic environment of Collegium Budapest. The author hereby expresses his gratitude to all the above-mentioned people and institutes.
4. There are 21 prefectures, within them 180 counties, and within them 5,225 townships in Sichuan. See Ren Jie: *Sichuan—zhongguo xibu gailan* (Sichuan—an Overview on Western China), Beijing, Nationality Publishing House, 2000, p.15.

5. They were: 1) Joint project with Maria Csanadi, "A Comparative Study on Transformation of Party-state at County and Prefecture Levels in China". Fieldwork sites were in Shanxi, Sichuan and Jiangsu provinces. 2) "Innovation and Excellence in Local Governance in China", directed by professor Yu Keping, director of the China Center for Comparative Politics and Economics. Field-works sites were in Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan provinces. 3) "A Comparative Study on Political Reform at Township and County Levels", directed by Jingben Rong, editor in chief of *Journal of Comparative Economic and Social Systems*. Fieldwork sites were in Henan and Jiangsu provinces.
6. One of the most important paper on township elections is "The Politics of Introducing Direct Township Elections in China" by Lianjiang Li, *The China Quarterly*, No. 171, Sep. 2002, pp. 704-723. Li thoroughly examined the background and the dynamics of introducing a couple of cases of direct township elections in China in the late 1990s. The findings of my own study in Sichuan and other provinces confirm some of Li's analysis. While Li shed lights on the interaction between local authorities and central authorities on the initiatives of making township semi-competitive elections, I would focus on the social, economic and political background of the localities where township semi-competitive elections were implemented. One major point of Li's that my fieldwork confirms is that, in Li's words, "It also suggests that the current cadre management system may enable mid-level leaders to introduce political reform at a lower level without seeking prior approval from their superiors".
7. Sichuan has 84 million people living in 5,225 townships. The average population in a township is 16,000 residents. See Ren Jie, *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 15.
8. Generally, a township government has one governor and two vice-governors; in cases of townships with large populations, three vice-governors sit in government.
9. The statistics were not publicly announced. This data came from the author's fieldwork.
10. Source: Interview.
11. See for example, Shi Weimin, *Gongxuan yu zhixuan* (Public Election and Direct Election), Peking: Social Sciences Publishing House, 2000. He reported that in 1998-99, Mianyang prefecture in Sichuan implemented semi-competitive elections at 11 townships for township vice-governor and governor.
12. Countless Chinese reports on this case are available. One of the most detailed accounts could be found in *Jiceng minzhu de zuixin tupo* (A Latest Breakthrough in Grassroots Democracy), edited by Yu Keping, Peking: Central Compilation and Translation Press, 2000.
13. Source: interview in early April 2002 in Peking.
14. Source: interview in Sichuan.
15. Countless Chinese reports on this are available. One of the easiest ways to access them is to visit www.ccrs.org.cn
16. See www.zaobao.com.sg. February 28th 2003.
17. See www.xinhuanet.com: *China Tries Direct Election at Township Level*, April 8th 2002.
18. Source: interview with Guiyang prefecture people's congress, March 21st 2002.
19. Interview in late April 2002 in Peking. Interviewee did not give details about in what county, at what township, and for what township position the semi-competitive election was implemented.
20. One example for its controversial status: in the summer of 2002, central committee of the Party issued a directive (document No. 12) warning localities not to implement

direct elections in township elections at the end of that year, as some localities did in 1998-99.

21. There have been cases of semi-competitive elections taking place earlier, though unknown to the public. For example, fieldwork found that at Lingshan township within Bazhong prefecture, the township Party secretary was directly elected by Party members living in that township. This was earlier than that in Yangji in Hubei, which has been widely publicised.

22. Voting by the township people's congress is a necessary process because the law on organising local government demands it. See Office of Laws at State Council: *Xinbian Zhonghua renmin gongheguo changyong falü fagui quanshu* (Newly Compiled Laws in Peoples' Republic of China), Peking: China Law Publishing House, 2001, p. 68; *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo difang geji renmin daibiao dahui he difang geji renmin zhengfu zuzhifa* (Law on Organising Local People's Congress and Local Government at All Levels), article 21.

23. See regulations on township semi-competitive elections issued by Shizhong county Party committee (document No. 51, May 12th 1998), by organisation department of Ya'an prefecture Party committee (document No. 27, September 13th 2001), by Nanbu county Party committee (document No. 64, November 12th 2001), by Bazhong prefecture Party committee (document No. 44, November 20th 2001).

24. Figures are the author's estimates. Usually, there is a governor, two vice-governors, one Party secretary, and three Party vice-secretaries (the township governor is one of the vice-secretaries) at each township.

25. See document No. 36 issued by the organisation department of Ya'an prefecture Party committee on December 25th 2001 (*Zhonggong Ya'an shiwei zuzhibu 2001 nian zuzhi gongzuo zongjie*).

26. The Election Commission for township elections is a provisional organisation subordinated to county Party committee, aiming to supervise township elections that happen once every three years. Usually, it includes county Party secretaries, main cadres at the Organisation Department of the county Party committee, county governors, and chairpersons of the county people's congress.

27. Interviews in Ya'an and Bazhong prefectures.

28. In China, people working for authorities were categorised as cadres (*ganbu*). Cadres at county and township authorities were those people whose salaries were covered by the state budget. All other people outside the authorities were categorised as ordinary citizens (*laobaixing*).

29. Primary candidates were not allowed to advertise, to criticise other competitors' capabilities or programmes, to ask electors not to vote for others, etc.

30. In China, undergraduate education is a high level of education. Most people, especially those in rural areas, do not go higher than senior high school.

31. According to related laws, the township authorities should be re-elected once every three years. This research examined elections in three election years in Sichuan: (late) 1995-(early) 1996; (late) 1998-(early) 1999; (late) 2001-(early) 2002.

32. With the exception of Buyun township semi-competitive elections.

33. The function of the enlarged Electoral College at Buyun township was different from all other cases. It had to choose two candidates from all primary candidates. These two candidates took part in the next step, in which all residents voted. The candidate winning the majority resident vote was voted by township people's congress to the position of township governor. At Buyun township, the last part of the process was only a formality.

34. “Intense” is a relative term. Compared to the fact that there had been no campaign seen by voters before, it was intense. Compared to the campaign at the second time of election (in 2001), it was also intense. Naturally, in this election, there were no advertisements on the radio, on the television or in the newspapers.

35. According to law and registration requirements, Buyun township had about 11,000 voters. However, more than 5,000 voters had migrated to urban areas inside and outside the province to find jobs.

36. Many reports on Buyun’s elections are available. Data here were from Shi Weimin, *Gongxuan yu zhixuan*, op. cit.

37. His two rivals obtained 31.5% and 17% votes respectively. According to the regulations, if no one got more than 50%, a second round of voting would be organised, in which the one who got most ballots would win.

38. Interviews in Shizhong county:

39. Compared to the 1998 election, fewer voters attended the Buyun township competitive election in 2001.

40. The author was at the township on December 31st 2001. Peasants told the author, the one who was most likely to defeat the incumbent was a township resident but then serving as a cadre in a neighbouring township. He was also the one who was in second place in the competitive election in 1998. Interviews.

41. Interviews.

42. But he won with a very narrow margin, which was an unexpected outcome.

43. The enlarged electoral college consisted of county leadership, and ordinary cadres and citizens. No position of township governor was open to semi-competitive election in 1998 in Nanbu county.

44. They were township cadres, village cadres, and resident representatives selected by village cadres.

45. There were a total 80 townships within the county.

46. See regulations issued by the county for procedures and way of calculating votes.

47. See Maria Csanadi, *Party-states and their legacies in post-communist transformation* (Chinese version: *Shuanxing: toushi xiongyali zhengdang-guojia tizhi*, Changchun: Jilin People’s Publishing House, 2003) for a detailed account of nomenklatura in Party-states.

48. In the 21 interviews with ordinary residents of townships where semi-competitive elections were implemented, to the question “Did you hope township governors and vice-governors would be elected in a free and competitive way?” 17 interviewees answered “Yes”; 4 interviewees answered “Do not have a clear idea about this”; no one answered “No”. To the question “Did you demand of cadres at any level by phone, or any oral or written message to implement free and competitive elections at your township?”, all 21 interviewees answered “No”. In the 61 interviews with cadres, to the question “Did any ordinary citizen ask you by phone, or any oral or written message to implement free and competitive election at township?”, all 61 interviewees answered “No”.

49. Interview. See also Lianjiang Li, *The Politics of Introducing Direct Township Elections in China*.

50. Interview.

51. Interviews in Bazhong prefecture.

52. Wen Wu, "Dui tiexi pian qu xiangcun zhaiwu qingkuang de diaocha ji sikao" (Investigation and reflection on rural authorities' debts in Tiexi region), *Jinri Bazhong* (*Bazhong Today*), 12, 2001, p. 42.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Xiangcun huanjie xuanju gongzuo zongjie* (Summary of Election Works at Rural Areas), by Bazhong prefecture Party committee, December 20th 2001.
55. Interviews in Nanbu county: Detailed information on dates and frequencies and scales of the complaints and demonstrations was not provided.
56. Interview.
57. *Fu Wenchao tongzhi zai quanxian xiangzhen huanjie xuanju gongzuo huiyi shang de jianghua* (Comrade Fu Wenchao's Speech at the Meeting on Township Election Works), printed by general office of Nanbu county Party committee, October 26th 1998.
58. Interview.
59. *Wei Hong tongzhi zai quanshi xiangcun huanjie gongtuigongxuan xinwen xuanchuan gongzuo huiyi shang de jianghua* (Comrade Wei Hong's Speech at the Meeting of News Reporting Works on Competitive Elections at Rural Areas), propaganda department of Ya'an prefecture Party committee, November 19th 2001.
60. I did not find the exact mechanism/strategy by which cadres emerging from semi-competitive elections were able to obtain extra resources from peasants. I give an account of the link between semi-competitive elections and attainment of extra funds with some hesitation because of the lack of knowledge on exactly how it operated. Nevertheless, since the Party archives frequently referred to it and the interviewed cadres often mentioned it, I find it hard to ignore this link.
61. According to Lianjiang Li, one motivation for local leaders to introduce township semi-competitive elections, is the sustaining of their own careers. Since in poor regions that lack resources, a cadre's path to promotion through economic success is impractical, some of them explore alternative paths to promotion by pioneering political reforms such as township semi-competitive elections. (See Lijiang, Li, *op. cit.*). A few of my interviewees did refer to it. The problem, however, is why political reforms as controversial as this would be perceived as meritorious.
62. Interviews in Shenzhen. In Shenzhen, the author did not hear reports of peasant demonstrations, or other forms of complaint against the township authorities, etc. The township authorities in this prefecture not only did not collect taxes from peasants, but instead gave subsidies to most of them, thanks to the revenues from industrial and commercial activities operating within the townships. However, the author does not imply that there were no problems at Dapeng township. Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of township authority, there was at that moment no problem needing to be solved through competitive elections.
63. As mentioned before, Document No. 12 issued by the centre tried to restrict the development of township competitive elections.
64. Interview. In Autumn 2001, Sichuan provincial Party committee organised a special meeting discussing the issue of the coming township elections at the end of the year. The meeting concluded with the issue of a document that urged each county within the province (except for those in ethnic minority regions) to select at least one-third of its townships to implement semi-competitive elections.
65. There are no official statistics on localities' deficits, since localities are not allowed to cover their expenditure with deficits according to regulations in China. However, countless reports directly tell or indirectly hint to the public about the existence of

huge deficits accumulated by localities. Data attained during fieldwork for the author's joint project with Maria Csanadi, "A Comparative Study on Transformation of Party-state at County and Prefecture Levels in China" shows that, financial crisis in rural areas in Sichuan was graver than in other two provinces—Shanxi and Jiangsu.

66. In all of the counties and prefectures the author visited, there were cases of peasants suing township authorities, and peasants, especially the younger generation, migrating to urban areas or other provinces.

67. This is visible in most interviews.

68. Ya'an prefecture and Bazhong prefecture in which 100% of their townships semi-competitive elections were implemented (as shown in Table 3) happen to be relatively underdeveloped regions in Sichuan. Chengdu prefecture, where probably less than 10% of its townships implemented semi-competitive elections is the most prosperous region in the province.

69. In local cadres' words, old practice was characterised as "to select cadres from a small group of people by another smaller group of people"; new practice was characterised as "to select cadres from a large number of people by another large group of people".

70. In Ya'an prefecture, the prefecture Party committee suggested inviting heads of villager committees who were not yet Party members to join the Party. However, changes in township Party committee nomenklatura over village positions were not the unique consequence of township competitive elections. In many places, both inside and outside Sichuan province, village free elections had already greatly weakened township Party committee nomenklatura over village positions. The role played by township semi-competitive elections in this respect was to facilitate the weakening or withdrawing of township Party committee nomenklatura over village positions.

71. Interview. These changes, especially the conflicts between Party positions and non-Party positions, are common at village level since competitive elections have been introduced to villages in the 1990s. Countless reports on this type of conflict at village level are available.

72. Interview.

73. Interview.

74. Interview.

75. In local cadres' words, it was an "earthquake" among the cadres in the prefecture.

76. Interviews.

77. On December 31st 2001, the author witnessed the vote and the calculation of the ballot.

78. Interviews with cadres at Shizhong county authority. At the township during the interviews, peasants expressed a strong resentment towards some of the incumbent's policies and their implementation with little transparency. In fact, some of the policies were not within the control of the incumbent. They were directives from upper levels, independent from him.

79. For example, tasks assigned to a township vice-governor in Nanbu county include: tons and planting acres of grains, of cotton, or oil-bearing crops; forestation; infrastructure construction for roads, irrigation, etc.; to prevent production accidents; to collect a certain amount of tax, raise a certain amount of funds; to develop a certain amount of TVEs; environment protection; birth control; civil affairs; religion; education; public safety... See *Nanbuxian fuxiangzhenzhang niandu fenguan gongzuo mubiao*

zerenshu (Goals must be achieved for each township vice-governor in Nanbu county, Nanbu county government, 1999).

80. The cadre exchange programme in China is an institutionalised routine operation. It has deep roots in the long history of imperial China. Cadre exchange was supposed to prevent a cadre from forming a strong personal power network by constantly moving him/her from one place to another. After 1949, the Chinese Party-state continued the practice.

81. For example, the governor at Baoshi township elected in a competitive way in 1998 was shifted to the position of Party secretary at another township after serving in the position of Baoshi township governor for the first of his would-be three years.

82. For example, in Qianjiang county within Hubei province, according to a local resident's investigation, 187 (thus 56.8%) freely elected heads of villagers committees were "illegally" dismissed by township authorities (since according to written law on relations between township and village authorities, township authorities do not have the right to appoint and/or dismiss village cadres. However, in practice, most township authorities have it with the practice of *nomenklatura*) in 1999-2001. Later, provincial authority made the same investigation in the same county. Its conclusion was, 119 (thus 36.28%) heads of villagers committees were dismissed "without engaging in proper legal procedures". See Li Yong, "Qianjiang anliu" (Dark Wave in Qianjiang), in *Caijing*, No. 22, 2002.

83. For example, agricultural office, financial office, industries office, youth league office, etc. are attached to township authority, but the personnel issue and main activities at these offices were supervised by corresponding offices subordinated to county authority. Township Party committee and government only have influence on their routine operation.

84. For example, Buyun township was the case. Competitively elected governor could do little to those organisations attached to Buyun township but under the supervision of Shizhong county authority. See Zhang Jingmin, *Wo dui Buyun zhixuan yiji xiangguan wenti de sikao* (My Reflection on Direct Election at Buyun Township and Related Issues), January 21, 2001, working paper.

85. Interviews. Data on how many township cadres and in what way they were passively handling directives from the county authority were not provided.

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