



An Assessment of Research on Village Governance in China and Suggestions for Future Applied Research

**Report prepared for the
China-EU Training Programme on Village Governance**

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Executive Summary

This report sketches the state of the field in research on village governance in China and indicates priorities in future applied research from the point of view of the China-EU Training Programme on Village Governance. It finds that studies have primarily focused on mechanisms and institutions which are relatively easy to examine instead of more complex processes of governance. Since there has been continuous innovation in the procedural realm throughout the last 15 years which is summed up in the report this approach has become entrenched. This leaves room for future research which takes a wider view of the context of village governance. Methodologically, single case-studies and the combination of descriptive and prescriptive approaches dominate especially the Chinese literature. Regarding their content, the number of studies on village elections themselves is considerable and a rather solid research basis has been established in this sub-field. Therefore, priority in funding applied research within the programme should be given to those areas where the TA Team has yet to design training courses and where research has been weaker so far. In particular, this means the areas of post-election administration, decision-making and control in village governance and training-related research to enhance the reach of the programme. Research areas of secondary importance are village elections, the social and economic background of village governance as well as comparative and international studies. A detailed proposal for a research plan is submitted in the annex. Besides becoming the basis for tenders on grants and scholarships this list could also serve as a basis for upcoming conference and workshop activities within the programme. Quality applications which contain differing research foci should be considered if their beneficial contribution to the programme is established.

Introduction

Along with the growing prominence of Chinese village elections at home and abroad the last decade witnessed an enormous growth of literature on this topic. This body of literature evolved largely from in-house research by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA)-the administrative agency charged with the implementation of the 1987 “Organic Law of the Villagers’ Committees (experimental)”-in the early 1990s. In organising a number of conferences in the middle of the decade MoCA succeeded in drawing more attention from Chinese and foreign academics to this subject. Especially the passing of a revised version of the Organic Law in November 1998 heralded a new stage in the implementation of reforms in rural basic-level governance as well as in the research thereof. Since then, not only the sheer quantity, but also the quality of academic research conducted in this field has made considerable progress.

This report aims at assessing the existing Chinese and English literature on Chinese village governance and at identifying research areas of relevance in the context of the China-EU Training Programme on Village Governance. The first part of the report gives a systematic overview of existing trends in publications summarising some major findings and introduces some research activities currently underway. A special paragraph is devoted to discussing prevailing approaches and methods. In the second part a number of research areas which the author deems especially promising for this programme are dealt with in more detail. Thereby, possible avenues and methods for research as well as expected contributions to the programme will be addressed. The final section contains a summary of findings and suggestions for future applied research.

A caveat has to be added. Since the amount of publications, especially in Chinese language, is simply overwhelming for a single person, interviews in key research institutions in Beijing have been conducted in preparation of this report. This-as well as discussions with the TA Team-has considerably contributed to a broader perspective on finalised and ongoing research activities. However, the fragmented nature of the Chinese market for academic publications with its proliferation of journals and usually small number of books per edition leading to quick sell-outs makes it impossible not to miss a certain amount of works. Nevertheless, it is hoped for that the systematic pattern established in the next section will be helpful to integrate any other important publication. A select bibliography of major works considered in the preparation of this report as well as a list of interviews conducted are provided in the annexes. For the sake of clarity, references to individual works in the text will be kept to a minimum.

1 Overview of existing literature

Among contending definitions of “governance” one generally applicable to the programme is the one developed by the UNDP: “Governance is viewed as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences.” Studies of village governance in China have variously addressed different aspects of this broad concept, sometimes without explicit reference to other parts or the context of those. Here, this context shall be provided in systematising the literature according to its topical focuses while at the same time highlighting which parts of governance (institutions, mechanisms or processes) have been dealt with.

In contrast to the now common definition derived from institutional economics, *institutions* shall here be defined as organisational actors governed by a set of rules, for example the villagers' committee or the villagers' representative assembly. A regularised feature in the working of local governance will be termed a *mechanism*. Especially Chinese researchers refer to these mechanisms as “systems”, for instance the “system of open publication of village affairs” which denotes means to enhance transparency in village administration (writing village accounts on a black board etc.). We will reserve the term *system* to a larger set of mechanisms, e.g. the electoral system. Finally, *processes* in local governance can be understood as interactions between several actors and/or variables inside or outside the village. An example would be the process of decision-making in village governance which is more than the sum of institutions and mechanisms involved, since other factors such as social status, economic setting etc. are likely to play a part, too. Of course, larger processes outside governance itself-like economic development or social differentiation-will also have an impact on local governance.

1.1 Village elections

Village elections-more specifically elections to the executive organ in village self-administration, the villagers' committee (VC)-are easily the best researched part of local governance in rural China. Early discussions in Chinese academic journals focused on the desirability of those elections as revealed by their effects on social stability and the implementation of state policies in rural areas. This is unsurprising since against the background of a crisis of state authority these dual goals gave rise to the innovation of village elections. Proponents of elections argued that these would enhance a feeling of solidarity between village cadres and voters so that policy implementation would be aided as villagers accepted even unpopular policies as their own. At the same time, elections would provide villagers with leverage against corrupt cadres thus ensuring a more just implementation and preventing social instability. Opponents, on the other hand, feared that elected VCs would not co-operate with township administrations in policy implementation and villages would become even more unruly, worsening social instability. This argument was largely won by proponents and since the revision of the Organic Law in 1998 this strand of literature has become only a trickle. However, at times we still find a more articulate author who goes against the trend of endorsing village elections altogether and raises questions as to the general applicability of VC elections in very poor villages, the ones with high out-migration or those where politics are riddled by factional or clan infighting.

Against the backdrop of the duration and intensity of the debate, it comes as a surprise that we still have no conclusive answer to the question if VC elections help to promote social stability and enhance policy implementation. In fact, most studies tackling these issues are content to make their point based on case-studies which have been conducted in large numbers. However, given the diversity of China's more than 700.000 administrative villages this approach is not likely to ever provide a sufficient basis for generalisations. Only recently have there been more elaborate efforts to measure the impact elections have on social stability. Focusing on protest behaviour, Li Lianjiang, a US-trained and Hong Kong-based political scientist from Mainland China, used two sample surveys to show that villagers are more likely to lodge complaints against perceived mistreatment and ask as well as receive the help of elected village cadres in doing so, if the elections were

conducted in a free, fair and competitive manner. Significantly, this is not the effect intended by the legislation. Moreover, many authors in this strand of literature tend to neglect that there is more needed to explain policy outcomes than just looking at how office-holders are selected. In other words, focusing on the institution of VC and the mechanisms of its coming to office neglects important parts of the process of policy implementation.

Western analysts entering the field in the mid-1990s have tended to look at village elections the other way around. For them not the effects of elections needed questioning, but their institutionalisation begged the question of which factors lead to the adoption of democratic practices in a state under Communist Party-leadership. In the vein of classical modernisation theories of democratisation, some of these authors tried to link the adoption of VC elections to economic development, but did not succeed to establish a direct causal relationship within their samples. Significantly, the relationship where established was not linear, but curvilinear. This shows that the poorest and the richest villages were more unlikely to have VC elections of a given quality (more on that below), whereas the villages most likely to conduct those elections were in the middle ground of economic development. More detailed studies including variables which depicted the economic structure as well as the level of economic development resulted in different ideal-types of villages. In each of those the inner dynamic leading to the adoption or rejection of VC elections could be explained in terms of economic interests of the actors, but neither are these interpretations compelling, nor can the clarity of the previous hypotheses on the relationship between economic development and democracy be retained due to these alterations. In fact, so many other factors came to be integrated in these models that economic development even tended to look a minor contributing factor in explaining the adoption of elections. Instead, bureaucratic influences from outside or situational factors within the villages, like personal authority of a Party-secretary, tended to be more influential.

Both before-mentioned strands in the literature have had to deal with the technical aspects of elections in order to take into account their procedural quality. In fact, we can discern this as the major topic of a third group of contributions to the field of study of village elections which is by number probably the largest. It soon became clear that a one-dimensional distinction of “democratic” versus “undemocratic” elections needs to be broken down into measurable components and that the single criterion if the election had more than one candidate for one post to be filled (i.e. competitive or at least semi-competitive elections) neglected crucial aspects of the electoral system. For instance, the way candidates are nominated and selected, if the anonymity and secrecy of the ballot is guaranteed, if there is a modicum of campaigning as well and if there are safeguards against vote-rigging (sealed ballot boxes, independent election workers, open ballot count etc.) can all have decisive impacts on the degree of fairness and freeness of an election. Therefore, some researchers choose to develop continuous indexes ranging from undemocratic to fully democratic elections instead of a one-dimensional variable. This third strand in the literature on village elections is heavily influenced by electoral practices in Western liberal democracies which were at the start hard to digest for some Chinese researchers. Far from being purely technical issues, they are loaded with particular assumptions about the political process that at times clashed head-on with Chinese political culture and tenets of Chinese socialism. For example, the secrecy of the ballot, an indispensable element of democratic elections in the West, goes against the grain of those who see the will of the people as undivided instead of plural and as generally expressed by the Communist Party. Some scholarly effort was therefore invested to theoretically reconcile secret voting with a socialist society.

However, most studies concerned with these procedural questions limited themselves to practical issues. In fact, almost all of these works combine a case-study approach with a broader description of the election process as contained in relevant laws and regulations. Recently, there have also been efforts to combine this with sample surveys to gain a wider understanding of what elections look like in practice. This approach is warranted because the electoral practices vary widely and constantly there are local procedural innovations. Often these have been first discussed by Chinese researchers and later incorporated in election regulations. As a result a considerable sophistication in election regulations particularly at the provincial-level and below has been

achieved. These now by and large satisfy criteria common in Western democracies, although there are some exceptions (like over-stringent or too flexible criteria for individuals who want to run as candidates). In any event, this descriptive approach to institutions and mechanisms of elections in village governance is very closely intertwined with a prescriptive approach.

1.2 Post-election administration

The inner workings of village self-governance after the VC-election have received somewhat less attention than elections themselves. The two issues explored in most depth in the literature are the relationships between the elected VC and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) branch in the village as well as between the VC and township administration. The latter has been discussed from the outset of village self-governance in the 1980s, whereas the first relationship became a hot topic only in recent years. Since the VC is embedded in these relationships vertically (township-village) and horizontally (CCP branch-VC), they constitute important structural components of the framework in which elected VCs operate. Therefore, we will here concentrate on these institutions. Decision-making and control which are crucial processes and mechanisms in post-election administration will be discussed separately in the following section.

1.2.1 Township-village relationship

Because article 111 of the 1982 constitution officially designated the village-level as a level of self-administration below the basic-tier of state administration, the township or town, the way the two levels interact has gained particular prominence in discussions of rural governance. Many observers in the 1980s saw the perceived lack of the state's regulatory power in the villages as resulting from the new and too loose relations between the two layers. The bulk of literary contributions addresses the problematic legal definition of the relationship as one of "guidance" by the township administration towards the VC and its implementation in practice. Under this guidance relationship the VC is required to assist the township administration in implementing state assigned tasks in the villages, while the township administration has to guide and help the VC in conducting self-administration affairs, but is not allowed to interfere directly into this sphere. However, as numerous researchers have shown, the two spheres of "state/public affairs" and "village affairs" (*zheng/gongwu vs. cunwu*) are often inseparably intertwined in practice causing in most cases a loss of space for self-administration of villages.

Several reasons for this common deviation from the constitution and the Organic Law have been pointed to: (i) Township administrations are themselves overloaded with tasks issued by higher-level governments and lack the resources to implement those in the villages. Therefore, they heavily lean on VCs to carry out those tasks and tightly control their behaviour at least regarding especially important policies since failing to get those implemented would lead to serious consequences for the township cadres. In effect, VCs are treated like appendices to the township government. (ii) Leading cadres at this level only have a limited time span in one position and, hence, are eager to achieve quick successes, mostly in terms of economic progress. Yet, a rash approach often leads to unsustainable or miscalculated investments the money for which has to be gathered from the villagers, often by village-level cadres. This leaves little financial room for villages to invest in public projects of their own and heightens tensions between village cadres and villagers. (iii) Township governments also directly interfere with self-administration. Two aspects of this behaviour are particularly noteworthy: Some township governments take over financial management from villages on the pretext of establishing a more rational management system and preventing corruption. Others ignore or overturn village voters' decisions and directly appoint, dismiss or replace VC-members at will. Although these blatant violations of the Organic Law are certainly becoming rarer since the revision of that law in 1998 ended its "experimental" status, they are still being reported from all over China.

Significantly, the problematic issues raised in the literature remained basically the same since the implementation of village self-administration began. So has the general method of presenting them as deviations from the Organic Law, i.e. an approach focusing on institutions and mechanisms,

instead of analysing the whole process including the economic and social background. In a similar fashion like the one discussed in the previous section, this descriptive approach is coupled with a prescriptive one: Regularly, the observed deficits in governance institutions and mechanisms are addressed with policy suggestions. It is here, that recent years have seen some innovative thinking along with tentative reforms in some localities.

Several policy suggestions aim at aligning the interests of villagers and township administrations more closely and at strengthening the supervision of township administrations to prevent them from undue behaviour which also undermines village self-governance. Firstly, the bold move of establishing direct elections to the position of township head (instead of an indirect election through the township people's congress) has been suggested and in some cases been experimented with. Although these experiments of late 1998 and early 1999 were rather controlled in nature, they were nevertheless stopped by the central leadership at the time. Yet, there are recently some indications that more experiments will be conducted soon. Secondly, it has been suggested to make the elected VC-members *ex officio* delegates to the township people's congress to have the villagers' concerns more directly represented at this level. Thirdly, in an attempt to enhance the supervision of cadres through villagers a mechanism to ensure more transparency in township administration is suggested and has already been widely instituted: the "open publication of township affairs" which means that financial accounts and other important administrative information are publicly posted. Finally, a more controversial measure aims at strengthening the supervisory roles of township people's congresses (TPC) by having the position of TPC-president taken over by the township Party secretary. This reform called "one shoulder bears [the responsibility]" (*yi jian tiao*) is currently being implemented in Guangdong province and discussed in several others. Nevertheless, debate continues and even the applicability of the term *yi jian tiao* to the township-level is contended by some specialists in the field. Since the Party secretary is undoubtedly the most powerful person at this administrative level, proponents of this reform expect that it will raise the profile and boost the supervisory authority of the people's congress, while at the same time making the Party committee more open to communication from below through the TPC-delegates. In the view of Western political scientists, this step is in line with the strategy of institutionalisation on the part of local people's congresses as well as with the strategy on the part of the CCP of using the congresses to supervise the administrative branch of government. However, without reforming the electoral system, opening it up from tight Party controls, it has to be doubted that this reform will lead to more input from below and thus solve the problematic relationship between VC and township administration.

1.2.2 Party branch-village committee relationship

Although tensions certainly existed earlier, the relationship between the CCP-branch in the village and the VC became a more prominent topic only after the revision in 1998 added a clause to the Organic Law which reaffirmed the CCP-branch's leadership functions and at the same time its obligation to guarantee the villager's self-administration rights. This same clause had earlier been contained only in the Party constitution and was thus enshrined in national law. However, this did little to clarify the relations between the "two committees" (CCP-branch committee headed by the Party secretary and the VC) in the villages. On the contrary, more and more field-studies showed growing tensions between the two because after the revised Organic Law was promulgated VC-elections were generally more strictly implemented. Possibly, two effects contributed to this phenomenon: Firstly, the stricter enforcement of the Organic Law provided the newly elected VCs with more legitimacy and encouraged some of them to take a more confident posture against the Party committees. Secondly, the inclusion of the Party in the Organic Law opened the way for more research on its role in grassroots governance.

The core of the problem is that at the village-level two institutions with different constituencies coexist (township Party committee as selectorate in the case of CCP-branch, village electorate in the case of VC), but they are charged with the same tasks. Chinese researchers have distinguished different patterns of village power structures that emerge from this institutional setting. By far the most common of these is that the Party secretary takes on ultimate responsibility for state-set tasks

as well as village affairs, which means that even minor decisions need his approval. The VC, and the VC-head in particular, become completely sidelined in this pattern. The opposite case is so far found to be very rare, as are the cases in which both committees do co-operate smoothly or are both powerless and ineffectual. Which reasons give rise to one or another of these possible patterns has been discussed widely but inconclusively. What emerges from numerous case-studies is that situational factors such as the personality, personal authority and control over resources of the two leading persons, Party secretary and VC-head, tend to be more important than institutional factors.

Therefore, some Chinese academics argue that the major cause of these conflicts rests with a lack of understanding of village governance on the part of village cadres: Both committees had to work towards the “common good” of the village, so conflicts should never arise. This statement implicitly rests on the notion that there exists an objectively and easily identifiable “common good”, a notion which has been doubted by theories of plural democracy. However, most Chinese contributions to this topic are not content with moral appeals, but instead focus on adding or reforming institutional features and mechanisms of conflict resolution. Three suggestions are particularly noteworthy: Firstly, the simplest method would be to institute a clear definition of responsibilities and authorities of the two committees. In fact, some scholars argue that this delineation already exists because Party leadership is never intended to include running of day-to-day affairs but only pertains to generally directing decision-making on village matters as well as political, ideological and Party organisation work. Therefore, administrative tasks should be under the purview of the VC. However, field-studies point out that the above-mentioned problematic relationship between township- and village-levels comes to play a part here, too. Township administrations which can only “guide” VCs can still rely on the direct leadership relation between the township Party committee and the village Party branch which itself is supposed to “lead” the VC. Thus, township administrations often encourage village Party secretaries to take over the direct management of village affairs and to treat the VC as a subsidiary charged only with carrying out the secretary’s decisions. A resolution to this problem is only conceivable if both problematic relationships are dealt with simultaneously.

Secondly, in an effort to align the interests of the village Party secretary more closely with the villagers’ interests a new mechanism called “two-ballot-system” (*liang piao zhi*) has been devised. In general, Party secretaries are appointed from the Party committee or organisation department one level higher and only ceremoniously elected by Party members of their own level in non-competitive elections. Under the “two-ballot-system” all villagers have a vote to cast in a free nomination for this position. The two candidates nominated with the most votes will then compete in an intra-Party run-off election. Thus, the villagers have an indirect say in the selection of their Party secretary, although the township Party committee will still control the process by issuing certain limiting criteria for the nominees. This system was first introduced in Shanxi province already in 1991 and subsequently a number of other provinces (Shandong, Fujian, Jiangxi, Hebei, Hubei, Hunan and Guangdong) began experimenting with it, too. A modified version of the system called “two nominations, one election” (*liang tui, yi xuan*) in which nominations by villagers and Party members are conducted separately and the election is held only among Party members has officially been sanctioned by the central-level CCP organisation department.

Thirdly, another mechanism called “one shoulder bears [the responsibility]” (*yi jian tiao*) first developed in Shandong province is now being discussed widely. In fact, it is at the village-level that the term *yi jian tiao* was originally coined and some specialists claim that it should be confined to its original meaning to avoid confusion: While at the township-level this expression is used for a Party secretary simultaneously holding an office in the legislative branch of government, at the village level it means taking over Party and executive offices at the same time. This has been the general pattern during the era of people’s communes, so the arrangement as such is far from new. Yet, the mechanism to achieve this fusion of responsibilities signals a departure from previous practice: Members of the Party committee are encouraged to run in VC-elections, the Party secretary should compete for the position of VC-head. If they win the support of the majority of villagers they can work in both positions simultaneously. If not, they should also step down from their Party position to free the way for others with more support. The same result can in theory be obtained the other way

around in that the successful VC-candidates who are also Party members run in subsequently held intra-Party elections, and that the VC-head becomes elected Party secretary. Both ways, it is hoped by proponents of this mechanism that the potential for conflict between the two committees disappears. However, this system has also been vocally criticised by some well-known academics until it became official policy with the Document No. 14 issued jointly by the secretariats of the CCP Central Committee and the State Council in July 2002. Since then, critiques became more muted but continued. They point to the impossibly high work-load of doing both jobs, the danger of corruption bred by a set-up in which one person is vested with so much authority and the danger of putting the Party into the front-line of criticism if village-management fails in some respect. Furthermore, they dismiss the popular argument that this mechanism would reduce the financial burden placed on villagers by cutting down the number of cadres as hollow since cadres at this level would only receive rather modest subsidies which have to be set by villagers themselves.

Other researchers see this mechanism as a chance to make the Party more susceptible to villagers' interests. Yet, some take pains to differentiate between the sequence of VC- and intra-Party elections. They argue that first electing the Party committee and secretary and then the VC would strongly bias in favour of the Party candidates since they already received confirmation or, indeed, were rather appointed by the township than elected by village Party members. Significantly, the Central Document No. 14 only encouraged the other sequence of first holding open VC-elections, then intra-Party elections. In practice, however, this seems to have been reversed in some places: Township administrations seemingly jumped at the chance to get rid of independently elected VCs in presenting the voters the new policy as if they were expected to elect the previously selected Party secretary to the position of VC-head. The real extent of this reversal is yet to be gauged, but it is obvious that such a measure would impinge on the meaning of village elections while making post-election administration more tightly controlled by township administrations.

This discussion shows that the institutional set-up for post-elections administration is still undergoing major reforms and that the dynamics at the village-level are hard to understand without taking the context of rural governance into account. Fortunately, this is being more and more recognised by Chinese academics as is shown by some major research projects currently underway. For example, the China Centre for Comparative Politics and Economics (CCPE) and the State Council's Development Research Centre (DRC) both undertake broader studies of rural governance reforms to analyse village self-administration within this context. With funding from the Ford Foundation the DRC began in September 2002 to organise a "rural studies forum" on a regular, almost monthly basis. This valuable forum serves the exchange of ideas and research experiences of several important projects and institutions and discussions are summed up in a bulletin. CCPE is involved in a number of international research projects and has itself conducted research on a broad range of local governance issues. Therefore, it is one of the few institutions which takes a more comprehensive approach to governance issues.

1.3 Decision-making and control

While the participation of villagers in decision-making on village affairs and their control over the conduct of village cadres is certainly an important element in self-governance, this area has received considerably less scholarly attention than the ones discussed above. Furthermore, studies in this sub-field almost exclusively focus very narrowly on mechanisms and institutions which are relatively easy to depict instead of analysing complex decision-making processes in reality. Therefore, there is a wealth of descriptions of how decision-making and control should work in principle, but much less is known on how it is actually conducted. Formally speaking, the village's voters should be convened in a village assembly (VA) at least once a year to receive work reports by the VC and decide on important matters, mostly pertaining to the village's collective property (agricultural land, construction, industries, finances). Since the VA is difficult to organise most villages established another institution called village representative assembly (VRA) of something between 30 and 50 members to be convened more regularly. Although not envisaged in the original Organic Law, the adoption of this institution was strongly propagated by the MoCA and it spread quickly in the first half of the 1990s. It was later included in the revised version of the Organic Law.

The foremost function of these VRAs is decision-making. They can substitute the VA in all but the most crucial decisions like recall of VC-members and by-elections or promulgating village charters and compacts which govern the behaviour of cadres and villagers alike. Secondly, they act as supervisory organs regarding village cadres reviewing their work reports when the VA is not in session. Sometimes VRA-subcommittees are formed specialising on financial auditing; at other times these audit groups function independently of the VRA. Thirdly, at least some authors view VRAs as playing a role in the implementation of state policies and village decisions as well. Others contend that this last function is at odds with the first two and since it is not mentioned in the Organic Law it should not apply. This point of contention highlights the fact that up to date the nature of this institution is rather undefined. This lack of clarity begins with the selection of its members and extends to the rules governing its operations, its exact authorities and functions.

According to all accounts, VRAs are usually composed of those villagers who enjoy most authority within the village. In practice, this means that former or current state employees, Party members and the wealthy as well as maybe clan elders are over-represented, while especially women tend to be under-represented. Delegates are chosen in a variety of ways, most are recommended by groups of households or on the basis of villagers' small-groups (the level below the village-level, formerly the production team). More rarely, delegates are formally elected. In general, the terms of office for VRAs seem to coincide with that of VCs (three years), although this is only specified in a minority of provincial-level regulations. But most provinces stipulate the minimum of times the VRA has to be convened by the VC (mostly twice a year). Some provinces variously require that members of the VC, the Party committee, delegates of the people's congresses or political consultative conferences living in the village participate as *ex officio* members of the VRA. Whereas the application of these regulations is doubted by some researchers on the basis of their field-studies, others find that Party secretaries often chair the VRA in places where this is not intended by local regulations. It seems, however, beyond reasonable doubt that the composition of delegates largely represents elite groupings in the villages. While this is probably desirable regarding the quality of VRA work, some Western observers point to the inherent dangers of such a system. The emerging decision-making structure-dominated by the Party committee, with the VC as a secondary power centre and the VRA as a junior partner to both-has been likened by Sylvia Chan to an oligarchy. Like her, a few other authors are concerned, too, that the expanded participation in decision-making of some in the village will lead to the exclusion of others.

One mechanism to enable all villagers to participate in the supervision of village cadres and provide them with a basis for decision-making has been regularly cited to counter this argument: the so-called "system of publications of village affairs". More critical analysts, however, question if a corrupt or fraudulent cadre would be really compelled to correct or publicise his behaviour when he has to write the village accounts on a chalkboard. More likely, they say, he will go on cheating in this regard as well. Therefore, it seems the "publications" even enshrined in the Organic Law have received more praise than they themselves merit. As a number of authors point out, this mechanism needs to be accompanied by a more forceful outside audit of village accounts and other indicators of cadre conduct to be meaningful. The above-mentioned specialised audit groups are one possibility to solve this problem. Yet, up to date there is a dearth of studies on their operations.

1.4 Social and economic background

In-depth field-research in Chinese villages was among the first areas which Western anthropologists and sociologists engaged in after the opening up under Deng Xiaoping in the early 1980s provided them with an opportunity. Later in that decade they were joined by Chinese researchers after these disciplines had been re-instituted at Chinese universities. Thus, there is a considerable and still fast growing body of literature on the changing rural society. It is here that the predominant case-study approach, sometimes dictated by budget constraints, proves most useful because it enables the researcher to integrate different factors into a dense picture of political life in a village. Much can be learned on the actual operations of village-level administrations from studies looking at village governance from a different angle, like Zhang Weiguos work on birth-control

implementation in a Hebei village. He shows how village cadres are in a delicate middle-man position between township administration and the village society to which they themselves belong.

Increasingly, in-depth case-studies also explicitly address changing power relations under the system of village self-governance. For instance, Xiang Jiquan, from the China Rural Problems Research Centre of Huazhong Normal University in Wuhan, one of the most prominent academic institutions in the field, examines the impact of a re-collectivised village economy on governance in three villages. It becomes evident that the resurrection of the collective after its initial dissolution in the early 1980s inhibited meaningful self-governance and fostered one-man rule by the Party secretary. Certainly, this particular economic background is rare in today's China and other case-studies, like those by Wu Yi or He Xuefeng (both from the China Rural Problems Research Centre) find different factors at work. Yet, without these in-depth studies of rural society it will be hard to comprehend the challenges village self-governance is facing in its implementation, and larger survey research like that on the connection between economy and village politics (discussed in section 1.1) will continue to rely on a lot of guesswork to interpret their findings. Hence, more efforts in this direction will be needed before we can assess more fully the impacts of self-governance on villages with different economic and social structures.

Another subject in village society which Chinese researchers explored are the revived family clan or lineage organisations and their impact on village governance. Most authors argue that clans in general tend to have negative impacts on village self-governance, especially if serious conflicts between different lineage groups erupt around elections. In the absence of a long-standing democratic culture, some authors fear that village elections might lead to disrespect for minority rights. Some field-studies point in this direction in showing how smaller families were economically sidelined after the majority family won the VC elections. However, it may be too early to draw definite conclusions on the impact of clan organisations as other authors argue that they should actually be seen as valuable social assets that could be put to good uses for the communities, e.g. financing schooling or social welfare. Still others hint that clans might come to play a part as proto-political organisations or interest groups once direct elections are extended to the township-level.

Women's political participation and gender-issues can be regarded as yet another important field to study how new forms of village governance integrate in and interact with the social background of rural communities. So far, there is only a handful of more thorough investigations of these issues. One of the centres of such research activities is the Women's Studies Institute of China at the All-China Women's Federation which has also collaborated with Jude Howell from the Institute for Development Studies (IDS). The MoCA has so far regarded women's and gender issues to be under the purview of the Women's Federation only, although collaboration between the two institutions in producing a training manual for VC-elections with special emphasis on these problems can be seen as a sign of change.

The existing literature shows that women participate in formal elections and related political activities on similarly high levels as men, and the differentials that exist between the sexes compare favourably with international experiences. However, when it comes to female representation in institutions like the VC, VRA or Party branch committee the picture is considerably more lopsided. A ratio of 10-20% female members in a VC as found in some localities is considered very high and is rarely exceeded even in villages with high male out-migration. MoCA unofficially estimates the ratio of female VC-heads as 1%. Of course, women's lower representation is in part a function of their educational level which is on average lower than men's. Yet, even controlling for this factor women still seem underrepresented. So other factors are at work, too. Regularly, VCs have at most one female member who then is charged with women's work and family planning, the most unpopular task of basic-level governance referred to by Chinese as "the most difficult thing under heaven". This typical division of labour is seen by most authors as a major constraint on the enthusiasm of women to engage in village politics. Therefore, gender-related studies should always take special political circumstances into account as most authors acknowledge. They also emphasise that other issues

than election and representation are at the heart of gender-inequality in rural China.

The most outstanding of these is the land question. A Chinese village is still conceived of as the collective owner of agricultural land which in most villages is rented out to households according to their size. State policy is to secure these tenure rights through long-term land contracts. This means that newcomers to a village will not be issued a parcel of land at least until a next round of redistribution, sometimes for indefinite time. Since post-nuptial residence is generally viri-local it is mostly women who are excluded from access to land. Reports indicate that especially richer villages which provide collective welfare they do not want to share and land-poor villages more and more often refuse to accept a woman marrying into the community to move her household registration (*hujū/hukou*) and gain access to community property. That these women are in fact disenfranchised may be perceived as a minor problem compared to the economic effect. But it implies that they have no “voice” in village affairs to change this situation. The same applies to the growing number of rural-to-rural migrants who in particular come to work in more developed, industrialised and suburban villages on the Eastern seaboard. Despite the numerous studies on the development of township and village enterprises this aspect of the phenomenon has been largely ignored to date.

Other problems in village governance related to the land and registration systems are apparent, too, in areas with fast urbanisation and industrial development where more and more agricultural land is being converted to other uses. This hollows out the basis of villages because they are based on collective property and necessitates a rethinking of the definition of a village. These transitional processes need to be explored much more in-depth since the few studies partially addressing these issues so far have only superficially dealt with them in terms of voters’ registration. Clearly, someone who gives up his agricultural land and/or his agricultural residence registration will lose villagers’ rights pertaining to VC-elections. But the problems involved are much more far-reaching than that. They pertain to the whole registration system and its inherent logic of a very strict separation between “urban” and “rural/agricultural” population. There is already a sizeable body of literature on this separation, but it still needs to be linked more closely to the literature on village governance.

While all these issues, generally speaking, concern the influences which the socio-economic background has on village governance, a field of study largely left uncharted yet is the opposite effect. In a broad research project initiated by Thomas Heberer and Gunter Schubert at Duisburg University, Germany, the question which impacts VC-elections exert on political culture in Chinese villages is being examined. The focus here is on changes in political values and norms which is of special importance to gauge the long-term effect of governance reforms. The work done by Kevin O’Brien and Li Lianjiang with its emphasis on rural protest behaviour traces another aspect of these changes. Only very few studies have been conducted on the ways in which new governance arrangements influence the provision of public goods and social services. Some of these have also employed too narrow economic indicators to be wholly convincing since much of the socio-economic background was actually left unspecified and treated as a residual variable.

1.5 Approaches and methods

Several approaches and corresponding methods have gained particular prominence in the study of village governance. The academic discipline naturally most involved in research on village governance is political science. Here we can discern at least three important approaches. The single most common approach, also employed by an array of students of Chinese law, could be termed a “systems approach”. Its major concern is the reform of governance institutions and mechanisms as such; i.e. its main question could be read as: “Does the system in itself work?” This “systems approach” is mostly coupled with limited field-research in the form of case-studies which often feature an innovative institutional solution to a particular governance problem. While the question if the system design is workable is an important first step to evaluate a governance reform, this approach can only deliver that much. If the system will ever be applied in the way it was

designed is the topic of another set of studies. This “implementation approach” asks for the variables affecting implementation of new policies in village governance, for the extent that policy was adopted at the basic-level as well as for changes made to the system during its adoption. Therefore, the field-research conducted is usually more large-scale since meaningful empirical testing of such hypotheses needs a larger sample of cases to be studied. On the other hand, this also needs a careful selection of variables to test as has been discussed in the section on village elections. Finally, Western political scientists have analysed village governance reforms under the perspective of democratisation. This “democratisation approach” implicitly or explicitly measures the experiences in China’s ongoing reform process against a trajectory of evolution towards a democratic political system that is assumed to be a historical trend. Quite contrary to its intentions these studies foremost contribution is that they highlight the rather limited nature of substantial political change affected by China’s reforms. As has been recently shown in a detailed study by He Baogang and Lang Youxing on Zhejiang province, these reforms largely aim at stabilising the political system as it stands, reinventing only certain parts of its base. However, this “democratisation approach” also contributes to the debates in the field through introducing a comparative perspective which has so far been utterly lacking in most studies. Moreover, most work by political scientists has been concerned with mechanisms and institutions of governance as defined above. On the other hand, only a minority of studies analyses complex processes in governance and shows how political, administrative and economic authority is actually exercised in Chinese villages.

Anthropological and sociological village studies have done a lot to explore the social background of village governance, as noted above. Their usually narrow focus on single cases is their biggest asset as well as strictest limitation: While it helps us to gain a deeper understanding of village political and social life, we need further tests of hypotheses in larger studies to generalise on the relationships between certain variables. Therefore, those research works can offer a basis to develop “socially grounded” hypotheses which should be of special relevance for economic studies concerned with village governance since economics as such tends to portray actors as dissolved from their social background.

However, it is far beyond the purview of this report to discuss general methodological issues in the study of rural China. It simply needs to be kept in mind that the method chosen needs to correspond to the problem to be studied; if this is the case, then different approaches can all create their valuable contributions to our understanding of the issues at hand. The more crucial question for this report is studies of which topics could deliver most added value from the perspective of the EU-China Training Programme on Village Governance. The next part of the report is devoted to this question.

2 Areas for future applied research

In order to efficiently use the programme's research budget this section sets out to identify the areas in which applied research would bring the greatest benefits to the programme itself. These indications should, however, not be taken as a discrimination towards other topics which might be of more indirect relevance to the programme. To facilitate comparisons, this chapter is largely organised along the lines of the previous with a two topics added. One is the field of comparative and international studies which has so far found no greater place in the literature on village governance in China. And since the programme's main means of contributing to the development of village governance is the provision of training the last section of this chapter is devoted to training-related research.

2.1 Village elections

As of the time of writing, the TA Team has already developed a set of teaching materials on village elections and is applying these in courses in two pilot provinces. Although the research basis on village elections is considered rather strong, the need to clarify some technical aspects of voting through further research arose out of discussions with the TA Team. Therefore, two practical issues suggested by the TA Team for further studies are especially noteworthy. The first concerns the costs of village elections. As the programme aims in particular at less developed provinces and those with high minority populations the costs involved in a VC-election become a matter of great concern and ways of devising cost-effective methods for elections should be explored more deeply. The issue at stake is nothing less than decisive if materials needed to hold elections according to election procedures (e.g. with secret ballots, if need be in minority languages as well as in Chinese) cannot be provided locally. Since election regulations always leave some room to fashion concrete procedures to local circumstances these possibilities should be further analysed (e.g. the number of different ballots required is largely dependent on the voting procedures). Furthermore, most provincial election regulations contain clauses on the splitting of election costs among different layers of state and village administrations. Yet, it is unclear which standards apply in practice, and this should be examined.

Secondly, the question which mechanisms can safeguard the fairness of an election has been raised by the TA Team. The use of a so-called "mobile ballot-box" has been criticised early by Western election observers. However, especially villages which are spread out in mountainous areas depend on such a device to ensure every voter's chance to cast a ballot. Therefore, it was retained, but most provinces now regulate that it should be accompanied by a certain number of impartial observers. Some even allow candidates to nominate additional observers so that even a losing candidate cannot without reason blame his electoral defeat on procedural flaws. Since the acceptance of electoral defeat, i.e. the acceptance of the election process as such, is an indispensable part of democratic political culture this shows that supervisory mechanisms adjusted to local circumstances need to be devised. Future research in this area should be encouraged especially when it takes popular expectations into account since in the end credibility of electoral fairness is in the eye of the beholder.

However, since it is practically impossible to have a ready-made solution for each problem which might arise in practice, the room for further improvements in election regulations is actually limited. Therefore, it is deemed even more important to explore institutional ways how to improve the settlement of election complaints. Only if an impartial and accepted organ to supervise the election process is in place can all future scenarios of electoral complaints be dealt with successfully. Here, an independent election commission at the county-level has been proposed by one researcher. According to Li Fan from the China and the World Institute this commission should be in charge of all elections including those to VCs, to residents' committees in urban areas as well as to people's congresses at different levels. Yet, the concrete rules governing the functioning of such an institution need to be more clearly analysed. The result of these studies on the technical conduction of elections could be integrated into the already existing training courses and provided to MoCA for further consideration where new regulation were needed. Yet, it should be borne in mind that there

still is a considerable amount of in-house reports produced within MoCA and local civil affairs departments, although not all of which is open for publication. To avoid unnecessary duplications of research efforts this unpublished reports should be assessed more fully.

Apart from these technical issues, more research should also be facilitated on larger aspects of VC-elections. One topic suggested by the TA Team is the study of township cadres' influence on VC-elections. This is of particular importance since these are one of the target-groups for training within the programme. Without understanding their mindset on elections and their abilities to influence election outcomes it should be hard to conduct effective training. On the other hand, the courses themselves provide a unique opportunity to study the participating cadres in a low-cost fashion by distributing questionnaires which could be followed-up by conducting several deep interviews with key-informants. The utilisation of these opportunities should be continuously supported, and independent field-studies to supplement their work might be considered as well.

Finally, research should be encouraged which takes a fresh look at VC-elections in ways different from the ones depicted above. For instance a comprehensive assessment of competitiveness in village elections is still a desideratum. Since regulations on the provincial-level leave much room for local election organs to decide on specific procedural questions such an assessment would be helpful to guide these decisions. It would show how different choices at crucial points in the election process affect the range of choice for voters and competition among candidates. Furthermore, accompanying field-studies should clarify how different local settings, e.g. size and geography of a village, exert impacts on these variables. Such a comprehensive assessment would be a valuable contribution to existing training materials and trainees should be encouraged to ensure the greatest openness and choice possible under given local circumstances.

2.2 Post-election administration

Regarding applied research funded by the programme priority should be given for developing a research basis for training courses on post-election administration which will be devised in the near future. Three large components can be discerned here, namely systems and functions of VCs as well as the decision-making process and control to be discussed in the next section. Research on the VC-system should not be narrowly focused on this institution alone, but should include the institutional setting in which it operates. This means in particular the two still problematic relationships towards the township administration and the village Party branch and the ongoing reforms in these respects. But considerably more innovative and helpful for the current programme than studies guided by this "systemic approach" will be research which integrates this institutional set-up in an analysis of VC-functions.

A topic which desperately awaits further study is the financial management in villages. Which role does the VC have to play; which impacts will the currently undertaken "tax-for-fee reform" have on financial management in rural areas; how do township budgets relate to village finances; which safeguarding mechanisms can be employed to ensure transparency and prevent fraud or the loss of collective assets etc. These are all matters of utmost importance to most villagers and therefore to village self-governance if it is to be meaningful. VC-members should be trained to set up village budgets, to devise and implement realistic investment plans, they should know their legal rights as well as obligations towards the township administration and the villagers. Of course, it will be not sufficient to train only those at the basic-level, but ideally training should also be extended to administrative and Party cadres at the township-level who directly have to deal with VCs in control of village finances. Only in this way can the successful adoption of the financial management methods taught be guaranteed.

The same holds true when other topics within post-election administration are concerned, too. In particular, the provision of public goods and services needs to be further studied, so that the programme can develop practical advice to VCs on how to assess and service the needs of

villagers. In particular, educational and health care needs are hard to meet in many rural areas since state funding often needs to be supplemented by local sources to make it sufficient. Where co-ordination through the township administration fails horizontal co-operation between villages should be explored as an alternative. In some cases it might be possible to tap into societal resources which might be extant in the form of lineage organisations etc. It is obvious that insufficient state funding is a major cause of rural educational and health care problems. Yet, in the absence of it, township and village administrations must be encouraged and enabled to find creative solutions.

A third policy area with great potential benefits to explore is economic management and development in the villages. Although the VCs are charged with the management of collective property including agricultural land in some areas separate organs exist for this purpose. In addition, township governments regularly intervene in economic management decisions with development objectives of their own. Research should be conducted to see how these potentially conflicting interests can be accommodated and favourable development results be achieved. These studies could also touch upon the possibility to tap community resources for state-led development programmes.

2.3 Decision-making and control

Since much of the effectiveness of village self-governance depends on the broadening of public participation and the transparency of village affairs research on decision-making processes and control mechanisms should be included in the priority areas of applied research. In particular, the programme should be enabled to find ways of fostering a co-operative relationship between different institutions within village self-governance while enhancing participation of all villagers. This means that we need to learn more about the concrete interactions between the VRA and other village institutions as well as between the delegates and the voters to ensure that enhanced participation of some does not lead to the exclusion of others. In other words, again, the “systemic approach” has to be transcended and a focus be laid on governance processes.

Firstly, relationships between VRA and other village institutions include the relation between VRA and Party branch. Here, we find a fundamental dilemma which needs to be resolved. On the one hand, the VA, or its substitute the VRA, is supposedly the highest decision-making institution in village self-governance; on the other hand, the Party branch exercises leadership over all village institutions. Therefore, conflicts might arise if both come to differing decisions on village affairs. According to the Organic Law the VC is bound by VA and VRA decisions, but no mentioning was made regarding the Party branch. In practice, such cases of emancipated VRAs seem to be rare up to date and most are chaired and to some extent controlled by the VC-head or the Party secretary. Yet, if the VRA is truly to function as an organ of “democratic decision-making and control”, as relevant regulations have it, then the training programme should attempt to foster the smooth co-operation between village institutions. To do so their proper relationships need to be clarified by research including, but not confining itself to the “systemic approach”. Furthermore, this research should clarify the proper functions of the VRA, i.e. if it is to serve as institution for decision-making and supervision only or if it also has responsibilities in policy implementation as some Chinese authors suggest.

Secondly, the relations between villagers and delegates are of ultimate importance to understand how VRAs affect participation levels of villagers in general. Here, not only the feedback mechanisms between VRA and voters should be examined, but research should also include subjective criteria, like the external efficacy of voters, to comprehensively gauge these effects. For instance, studies could trace the relationship between certain delegate selection mechanisms and voters' efficacy or levels of participation and information about village affairs. Similar quantitative research has already been conducted on VC-elections. Other studies could use qualitative methods to analyse the connection between formal authority as vested in village governance institutions and informal authority which might be embedded in family or clan institutions, economic

relations or other components of social status within a village. Some Chinese scholars argue that only if formal and informal authority coincide governance proceeds smoothly, even if this need not be a democratic process in nature. This argument implies trade-offs between efficiency and democracy in village management which should be further examined.

Thirdly, it is well understood that villagers' control over cadre conduct needs institutionalised means of enforcement. Some Chinese scholars point out that the mechanisms of recalling an elected VC-member should be further improved. In actuality, provincial regulations are already by and large quite detailed about the procedural requirements although some progress in standardisation could still be achieved. Other researchers, therefore, argue that the problem of ineffective control lies in the lack of proactive villagers who know their rights and claim them when necessary. One solution could be the specialisation in supervision as already found in some rural areas: Either a subcommittee of the VRA or an independent small group of villagers is charged with the supervision of cadre conduct, including financial management, and to initiate action for a vote of recall if need be. More empirical research should be encouraged to see how the existing arrangements of those supervisory organs work in practice and what can be done to popularise successful experiences.

2.4 Social and economic background

Since the practical applicability within the training programme of in-depth research on the relations between village governance and social and economic background of villages might be limited studies in this vein can be regarded as being of secondary priority. Nevertheless, some efforts in this regard might be worthwhile. In particular, women's participation and gender-issues as well as effects of urbanisation on village governance would warrant such emphasis. Gender-studies could be broadly comparative in nature but should always be designed to take Chinese social realities into account. For example, an international comparison in female participation rates in voting is probably not very meaningful if strong pressures exist within Chinese villages to cast a ballot as some authors report. On the other hand, it still has to be empirically shown that the rate of female representation is positively correlated with women's efficacy. Of higher practical relevance is the study of existing local regulations to guarantee female representation on the VC, e.g. in Hunan and Hubei provinces and a small number of counties nation-wide. The effects of these different regulations on elections could be studied and the results incorporated in the training material on village elections.

Since the land and household registration systems are already widely discussed research topics this programme should best reserve funding for studies in these fields which directly link the existing literature with village governance. A resolution of both of these issues is hardly conceivable to stem from village governance, so the best this programme can hope to achieve is an amelioration of local circumstances. However, research might be encouraged which explores how the now common definition of a village based on collective property of agricultural land is under pressure from processes of industrialisation and urbanisation currently underway and what this implies for the future of local self-governance.

2.5 Comparative and international studies

Comparative studies of local self-governance might bring new insights to the research field of village governance in general and new ideas for its practical operation in particular. Generally speaking, there are two ways to approach comparative studies. Firstly, one could try to study international best practice which is often assumed to be found in economically more advanced countries. Therefore, the TA Team suggested to compare several issues like electoral systems, public policy-making or democratisation of governance between China and the European Union. Certainly, the scope of these comparisons would need to be more exactly defined since EU countries are rather varied in these respects. Furthermore, in the selection of topics for comparison the applicability of the results in China should be taken into account. Funds should be provided to publish results in Chinese language to achieve further dissemination. This is an area which is very

likely to profit from collaborative efforts of Chinese and European researchers which can foster more regular mutual exchanges. However, the projects funded in this programme's applied research component should work output-oriented, since well organised study-tours are more efficient when it comes to exposing individuals to foreign experiences.

Secondly, as a member of the programme's Advisory and Steering Committee, Dong Lisheng, suggested, comparisons with other developing countries' experiences might prove very helpful to gain new ideas in areas where "best practice" in developed nations is not quite applicable to Chinese circumstances. Where a full-blown comparison is too difficult or costly to be carried out, selected case-studies might have a similar effect. Countries to be considered could include Southeast-Asian nations and India and topics should be the ones identified as priority areas in this report, in particular, the roles of village administrations in rural development and the management of the economy. Because of the higher costs involved in international studies the criteria of applicability in this programme should be applied even more strictly.

2.6 Training-related research

Given the focus of the programme on training not only the content of village governance courses but also the means to deliver these contents should be incorporated in the applied research component. Firstly, the programme should make use of experiences of numerous other training projects already conducted or being conducted in rural China on a large array of different topics to find ways of addressing the target groups most efficiently. Therefore, an assessment of such training efforts, many of them funded by international donors, should be undertaken with a view to indicate the methodologies most suitable for the intended audiences and settings. This research on training methodologies could be carried out by a Chinese or Western specialist on education who need not necessarily be familiar with governance issues. More important than that will be his/her qualification to critically assess Western as well as Chinese approaches to training to help the TA Team in designing its (teacher) training. But the assessment should certainly include the training efforts undertaken by some international donors in the field of village governance.

Secondly, the programme could also utilise means of mass communication to distribute the content to a wider audience, i.e. ordinary villagers. Which means would be most beneficial should in advance be determined through research on their relative effectiveness in rural China. Studies could be encouraged which explore the availability of means of mass communication in the rural areas of pilot provinces as well as their reach into village communities. Illiteracy may inhibit the use of textbooks which has been advanced by some donors in the field of village-governance. Local TV or radio stations as well as loudspeaker systems installed in some villages might offer different avenues to reach the audience. This kind of research should also touch upon the question which messages lend themselves to distribution via particular means of mass communication. In particular, the messages and the way of delivery have to correspond. It seems necessary to find multipliers for the messages who can be expected to be disinterested enough to be reliable. For instance, if it is true that a lack of knowledge on the part of voters regarding their right to recall VC-members is a major reason for inefficient supervision, as has been suggested above, then it would be worthwhile to develop devices to spread this knowledge. Those could be in the form of taped programmes for audio- or video-broadcasting in villages to be delivered directly by cadres from the county civil affairs departments. In contrast, cadres at the township-level might use such devices only as they see fit to get rid of VCs which they deem not co-operative enough, and VC-members are likely to suppress such information altogether.

3 Conclusions and Suggestions

This report sketched the state of the field in research on village governance in China and indicated priorities in future applied research from the point of view of the China-EU Training Programme on Village Governance. It has argued that studies have centred on mechanisms and institutions which are more easily examined instead of more complex processes in governance. Future research should be encouraged which takes a wider view of the context of village governance. Methodologically, research should overcome the rather superficial single case-study approach which currently predominates and either provide real in-depth studies or allow for comparison of selected variables in a larger number of cases. Regarding content, the focus has been on village elections much more than on post-election administration. This needs to change to provide the TA Team with a basis on which to develop the material for upcoming training.

Funding from the programme's research budget should be concentrated on the following top priority research areas, and this list could also serve as a basis for upcoming conference and workshop activities the programme might undertake, possibly in co-operation with other donor organisations and foundations:

- **Post-election administration:** functions of the village committee and its relations towards other village-level organs and the township administration, especially in financial management and budgeting and with explicit treatment of the "tax-for-fees" reforms currently underway, in rural development and management of the village economy and in the provision of public goods and services.
- **Decision-making and control:** roles and functions of the village representative assembly, methods for its selection and relationship towards the village committee and the Party branch; effective mechanisms for control of village governance, especially financial management.
- **Training-related research:** training methodologies and their relative effectiveness for training in rural China; means of mass communication and their potential contribution within the programme.

A number of other research topics are deemed important for the programme, too, and should be given secondary priority:

- **Village elections:** remaining technical problems in village elections; influence of township administrations on village elections; factors influencing competitiveness throughout the election process.
- **Social and economic background:** gender equality, women's participation and representation in village governance; influences of urbanisation and the household registration system on village governance.
- **International and comparative studies:** selected issues of local election systems and village governance in EU countries and/or developing countries with similar problems.

Applications for research grants and scholarships should in general be reviewed with regard to their overall academic quality as well as their potential benefits. Therefore, this list of prioritised topics is not meant to prejudice against other research areas as long as applicants can make clear which important contributions their research might have for the programme. Moreover, future training courses might give rise to new research needs.

Appendices:

Proposed research plan

Research topic ❖ indicates top priority	Contribution to the programme	Conducted by
Village elections		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costs of VC elections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Integrating cost-effective solutions into election training to ensure electoral fairness in poverty regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ TA Team/MoCA specialists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Control and supervision mechanisms in elections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Integrating these mechanisms in election training to enhance electoral fairness and acceptance of election results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ TA Team/MoCA specialists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possibilities of improving mechanisms for resolution of electoral complaints (independent election commission etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Input into legislative processes at national and provincial levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ External researchers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influences of township administrations on VC elections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identifying training needs of the target group township cadres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ TA Team/external researcher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive assessment of factors affecting competitiveness in VC elections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Integrating guidelines for choosing election procedures into election training to ensure greatest possible openness and competitiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ TA Team/external researcher
Post-election administration		
❖ Functions of VC in financial management and under the new “tax-for-fee” reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Providing basis to develop training courses on post-election administration of VC-members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ External researcher
❖ Functions of VC in provision of public goods and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Providing basis to develop training courses on post-election administration of VC-members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ External researchers
❖ Functions of VC in economic management and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Providing basis to develop training courses on post-election administration of VC-members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ External researchers

Decision-making and control		
❖ Roles, functions and methods of selection of VRA; relationships to VC and Party branch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Clarifying institutional set-up in village self-governance ➤ Providing a basis to develop training courses in post-election administration for VC- and VRA-members, fostering co-operation at the village-level 	✓ External researchers
❖ Effective mechanisms of control and supervision, including financial management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Providing a basis to develop training courses in post-election administration for VC- and VRA-members ➤ Identifying contents for propagation through means of mass communication to villagers 	✓ External researchers
Social and economic background		
• Gender equality, women's participation and representation	➤ Integrating gender-issues in election and post-election training where appropriate (i.e. nomination of candidates, post-election administration tasks like birth control)	✓ External researchers
• Impacts of urbanisation and industrialisation on village governance	➤ Integrating social background factors in election and post-election training where appropriate (voters registration, post-election administration tasks like land management)	✓ External researchers
Comparative and international studies		
• Comparison of selected aspects of governance between EU countries and China (electoral system, public policy-making etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Including broader perspectives into training courses by providing international examples ➤ Input in political discourse and legislative process through Chinese-language publications of results 	✓ TA Team/external researchers
• Comparison or case-studies of selected aspects of governance in other Asian developing countries (roles of villages in rural development, economic management)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Introducing successful experiences in democratic self-governance or economic development in broadly comparable socio-economic settings ➤ Input in political discourse and legislative process through Chinese-language publications of results 	✓ External researchers
Training-related research		

❖ Training methodologies and their relative effectiveness in rural China	➤ Adopting of efficient training methods, especially for teacher training	✓ External researcher/TA Team
❖ Availability, effectiveness of means of mass communication and possible contents for distribution	➤ Identifying effective ways to enhance outreach to villagers ➤ Spreading knowledge of popular rights in governance	✓ External researchers

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