

# VILLAGE ELECTIONS IN CHINA

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## ROUNDTABLE

BEFORE THE

### CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE COMMISSION ON CHINA

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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JULY 8, 2002  
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# CONTENTS

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	Page
STATEMENTS	
Thurston, Anne F., associate professor of China Studies, School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University, Washington, DC ...	2
Liu, Yawei, associate director, the Carter Center's China Village Elections Project, Atlanta, GA .....	6
Dugan, Elizabeth, regional program director, Asia and the Middle East, International Republican Institute (IRI), Washington, DC .....	9
APPENDIX	
PREPARED STATEMENTS	
Thurston, Anne F .....	34
Liu, Yawei .....	37
Dugan, Elizabeth .....	40



## VILLAGE ELECTIONS IN CHINA

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MONDAY, JULY 8, 2002

CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE  
COMMISSION ON CHINA,  
*Washington, DC.*

The roundtable was convened, pursuant to notice, at 2:30 p.m., in room SD-215, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Ira Wolf, (Staff Director) presiding.

Also present: John Foarde, Deputy Staff Director; Chris Billing, Director of Communications; Matt Tuchow, Office of Representative Levin; Jennifer Goedke, Office of Representative Kaptur; Amy Gadsden, U.S. Department of State; and Holly Vineyard, U.S. Department of Commerce.

Mr. WOLF. Let me welcome everyone to the eighth issues roundtable of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China. These roundtables are being held because the Commission Chairman, Senator Baucus, and our Co-Chairman, Representative Bereuter, have instructed the staff to delve deeply into a number of very specific issues of concern to the Commission.

This format provides an opportunity to focus on important issues dealing with human rights and the rule of law in China.

We have two more roundtables scheduled during the summer—on July 26, a roundtable on China's criminal justice system, and on August 5, an open forum where anyone—any group or any individual—can speak for 5 minutes about any issue of concern. Of course, anyone who wants to appear at the open forum needs to check our Website and register.

Today we will address village elections in China—the background, how they have been carried out, information about technical assistance, advice, and monitoring from American groups who are represented here today, and the implications of village elections on human rights, the rule of law, and governance in China.

Let me introduce the staff members here today. I am Ira Wolf, Staff Director. John Foarde is the Deputy Staff Director. Jennifer Goedke works for Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur. Holly Vineyard is from the Department of Commerce and works for our Commissioner, Under Secretary of Commerce Grant Aldonas.

Chris Billing is our Communications Director and the Commission's expert on the media, the Olympics, and many other areas of concern to the Commission. Amy Gadsden works at the State Department for our Commissioner, Lorne Craner, the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Affairs.

Let us begin. We have three presentations today. First is Dr. Anne Thurston, who is associate professor of China Studies at SAIS, Johns Hopkins University.

Second will be Mr. Liu Yawei, associate director of the China Village Elections Project at the Carter Center. And, finally, Elizabeth Dugan, the regional program director for Asia and the Middle East at the International Republican Institute [IRI].

Anne, we will start with you.

**STATEMENT OF ANNE F. THURSTON, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF CHINA STUDIES, SCHOOL OF ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (SAIS), JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON, DC**

Ms. THURSTON. I want to thank my friends and my colleagues here on the Congressional-Executive China Commission for the opportunity to share with you some of my experiences with village elections.

I have been observing village elections in China since 1994 and have both spoken and written about my observations. I brought one of the pieces I did in 1998 and have some copies for those of you who may want it.

My two fellow panelists—friends, and colleagues, Elizabeth Dugan and Liu Yawei—both direct on-the-ground, concrete programs in China. My contribution today will be to provide some historical background about how village elections came into being in China, to give a broad overview about what we know about how successful those elections have been, and also to say something about how significant those elections have been, both for the people in rural areas who participate in them, and also for their implications for possible political evolution in China.

Let me start by saying something about how these village elections came to be introduced into China.

The process, as some of you know, traces to the demise of the people's communes or the collective system of agriculture in China, that began in the late 1970s and was completed by the early 1980s.

One of the unintended consequences of this process of decollectivization is that many villages in China began to face serious problems of leadership. Those problems were generally of two types.

In some villages, previous village leaders were able to take advantage of the new economic opportunities afforded by decollectivizations and they thus left their positions of leadership and searched for other, more lucrative pursuits.

In villages of this type where the leaders actually left, many villages were faced with a vacuum of leadership. This vacuum, in some cases, also resulted in a breakdown of social order: the rise of banditry, of lawlessness, and the rise of violence, for instance.

In other cases, some villages came under control of what the Chinese often call "local emperors,"—strong men who are capable of exploiting and bullying, and generally making life miserable for the ordinary people under their control.

By the mid- to late 1980s, many people thought that rural China was in a State of potential crisis. Above all, the Chinese Com-

unist Party [CCP] was worried about the potential for instability and chaos in these rural areas.

At the outset, there was considerable disagreement within the higher reaches of the Communist Party about what to do about this potential for chaos and instability. Some people naturally wanted a strengthening of Party leadership within the village. They wanted a sort of tightening of top-down controls.

Others, though, began to suggest that perhaps the best way to restore order in Chinese villages was to institute village elections. What they reasoned is that by instituting popular elections, village leadership would fall to more popular, more respected members of the village community.

Moreover, there was also the thought that if those people who were elected at the village level were not members of the Party, then perhaps they could be recruited into the Party, thus infusing the Party with—at local levels, in any case—a new respect.

So the debate surrounding village elections as it played itself out was not really about the “good of democracy” as an ideal, but rather a very practical question about whether elections could, in fact, promote or would impede stability or chaos. The question was: What effect would village elections have on this potential for chaos?

In the end, those people who argued that elections would promote stability won. In 1987, the Chinese National People’s Congress passed an Organic Law on Village Elections, which promoted village elections on an experimental basis.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs [MCA] in Beijing was responsible at the national level for overseeing implementation of these village elections and every province was responsible for coming up with its own concrete regulations governing how each province would carry out these experiments.

By 1998, more than a decade later, these experiments had been going on long enough and with sufficient success that they were mandated finally into law. As of 1998, all villages in China have been required by law to hold competitive elections.

At that time, in 1998, the guidelines for how to carry out village elections were also more clearly and thoroughly spelled out. Most of these measures, as we read them, move village elections further along the democratic spectrum.

Candidates have to be chosen by the villagers themselves rather than by outsiders; secret ballots are required; and the number of candidates must exceed the number of positions to be chosen.

One of the great frustrations of anybody working on this issue of village elections is that we simply do not know yet how widespread they are or how well and how universally they have actually been implemented.

There are some 930,000 villages in China, and some 900 million people live in those villages. But the number of villages visited by foreigners like those of us in this room is painfully limited.

My own experience has also been very limited, but I have, nonetheless, seen a broad spectrum of types of village leadership in China, and also different ways of choosing village leaders.

I want to mention the various types of leaders that I have seen in China, but dwell particularly on the more positive side of what I have seen.

First, the local emperors who came to power with the collapse of communes still exist in some parts of China. There is little doubt about that.

Second, many villages continue to exist in the same vacuum of leadership they found shortly after decollectivization. Third, I have also seen cases where these local emperors are actually elected, ostensibly democratically.

Finally and most importantly, and what I want to talk about a bit here, is that I have also seen elections that, by any measure anywhere in the world, would be recognized as genuinely competitive, fair, and democratic.

If I could generalize about some of the most successful elections I have seen, I would say, first—and pretty obviously, I suppose—that the issues confronting the electorate and addressed by the candidates are very local, practical, and economic.

The rural voters behave in exactly the way that democratic theory says they should behave, which is to say they vote in their own self interests. They want very simple things. I mentioned some of those things in my longer statement.

Most of the people who I have seen elected have been younger, entrepreneurial, better educated, and generally significantly richer than the older generation of collective leaders.

Whether these newly elected village leaders are members of the Communist Party or not seems not to be an issue with the voters, although in my own experience—and I think probably in the experience of everybody else here who has witnessed village elections—most often the newly elected leaders are members of the Party, simply because Communist Party members have more connections at higher levels, and thus they have a greater ability to make things happen at the village level.

We do not really know the percentage of village leaders being elected now who are members of the Party, but we know that figure is pretty high, probably as high as 80 percent nationwide.

It is hard, given the limited number of elections that we have observed, to say why some elections are successful and some are not, although it seems to me that the key is generally in leadership.

In order for elections to be successful, you really have to have significant political commitment at every step of the political ladder, from the top, which is to say the Ministry of Civil Affairs, to the province, to the township, right down the chain to the village.

I would also say, and I think others who have observed village elections would agree, that elections are also very much a learning process. With good leadership, with experience, they do tend to get better over time.

One of the most important things I have learned observing village elections over the years is that the technical details that we take for granted about how to organize an election are by no means obvious to the Chinese. Election officials have to be properly trained.

Here, I would commend heartily the work of both the IRI and the Carter Center for what they have done in training election officials at several levels of the election hierarchy, and also in directly monitoring those elections, which gives them also an opportunity to



make recommendations for improvement in how elections are carried out.

So the question is, what difference did these elections at the village level make? I think, certainly, they are definitely a major advance over the previous ways of selecting village leaders in China. They present rural people with choices that they did not have before. They give them a real voice in the selection of their leaders. They provide a sense of political participation, of community, of empowerment.

Moreover, there is some evidence—although I think we need a lot more research on this—that governance in villages that have had competitive elections does improve, that finances become more transparent, that corruption declines.

Above all, though, it seems to me that by giving rural people the experience of electing their local leaders, elections at the village level are putting in place the mechanisms for elections of higher-level officials. That, of course, is the final question.

The question is, can we expect elections at the village level to begin working their way up, which is to say, to the township, the county, the province, and eventually the national level? This is, of course, how Taiwan began its long-term process of democratization.

There is pretty universal agreement both in China and among western academics that reforms that actually begin this upward movement from the village, to the township, to the county, to the province, and so on is going to have to be instituted from above, which is to say from China's top leadership.

We all know that China's current leadership has been decidedly conflicted about the issue of further democratization there. We also know that China is currently in the process of a major leadership change, which also means that this is not the time for political innovation. That is to say, full-blown democracy is not likely to come soon to China.

But, having said that, I think the note that I would like to close on is that I have been going to China for some 24 years now, and never at any time since I have been going to China have I heard more sentiment in favor of democracy as I do now.

Among China's intellectuals, in particular, I think there is a general understanding that democratization in the long term is both necessary and inevitable. The question is—and it is a very big question for everybody—how to proceed along a more democratic path without risking the chaos and instability that so many people in China fear.

Many people in China, like people in the United States, believe that democratization is tied to China's continued economic development, and also to the spread of economic benefits from urban to rural China, and from the coastal to the inland areas.

But to conclude, I will say that in the meantime, before this process actually gets under way, I think that the Chinese Government's continuing commitment to village elections offers us in the United States a rare opportunity to cooperate with China in a very positive way in their long-term, but still uncertain, political evolution. Thank you all.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Thurston appears in the appendix.]

Mr. WOLF. Thanks.  
Mr. Liu Yawei, please go ahead.

**STATEMENT OF LIU YAWEI, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, THE  
CARTER CENTER'S CHINA VILLAGE ELECTION PROJECT, AT-  
LANTA, GA**

Mr. LIU. Thanks. Thank you for inviting me to speak about China village elections.

I am going to skip the first part of my statement because Dr. Thurston has sufficiently covered it. The second issue I am going to talk about in some detail is the impact of China village elections, and third, a little bit about the Carter Center's activities in China.

A general objective assessment of the consequences of the village community elections in China, what we call the enormous preliminary exercise of democracy, is as follows: That it has provided a safety valve to the hundreds of millions of Chinese peasants who are angry and confused as their life is often subject to constant exploitation and pressure.

Second, it has introduced legal procedures of elections into a culture that has never entertained open and free elections. Third, it has cultivated a new value system, a much-needed sense of political ownership among Chinese peasants that do not have any leverage in bargaining with a heavy-handed government.

However, the popularity of these elections, the loss of influence and power on the part of officials at the township and town level, and the fear that these elections will eventually dislodge the embattled Party apparatus from the villages has triggered a backlash that is so ferocious, that it may render these elections into a hollow and meaningless practice.

The assault seems to have come from two sectors: the political sector and the academic sector. While the motivation for the political attacks is easy to comprehend, the charges are lethal in the Chinese political discourse.

There is, seemingly, a systematic effort to label village elections as a source of evil forces that are: (1) undermining the Party's leadership in the rural areas; (2) affecting rural stability; (3) turning the rural economy upside down; and, (4) helping clans and other old forms of power and control to grow in the countryside. These attacks came from the political sector.

The scholars' criticism might be well-intentioned, but is equally detrimental. These scholars tend to argue that village elections are government-imposed, that they have unexpectedly destroyed traditional rural fabrics of self-government.

What Chinese peasants really need are farmers' alliances and free disposal of their land. No country has ever seen any meaningful democracy taking hold from the bottom up.

So, in this context, thousands of Chinese officials, particularly from the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the local Departments of Civil Affairs, are fighting very hard to keep this small opening of political reform alive. They are becoming a little pessimistic, but never, ever hopeless.

As of now, all eyes are trained on the upcoming 16th Party Congress, whose endorsement of grassroots democracy will be another

clarion call for bolder, and more expensive forms of popular choice and accountability.

The second issue, is the impact of China's direct village elections. One could hardly exaggerate the impact of direct village elections. Yes, these elections are conducted only at the level of China's self-governing social and political units.

Yes, the right to cast a ballot is only exercised by the supposedly most stubborn, conservative, and backward group of the Chinese people. Yes, the very powerful government can still render the popularly elected leaders powerless. However, it is going to be very hard to take away a right that has been granted to any particular group before.

A Chinese scholar recently commented, "True, Chinese peasants are not terribly enthusiastic about exercising their right to cast ballots nowadays. But, if one wants to take that right away, the situation will be rather explosive."

Furthermore, over the past 14 years direct village elections and villager self-government have become accepted as a valuable alternative to the otherwise arcane and opaque manner of selecting government leaders and people's deputies.

In many places, the candidates for the Party positions are required to receive a direct popularity test. A low approval rating will disqualify the candidates for running for the Party positions.

In 1998 and 1999, during the last round of township/town people's Congress deputy elections, new experiments of selecting township government leaders appeared in no less than three provinces, including an unprecedented direct election of a township magistrate in Buyun, Sichuan Province.

Although these experiments were either declared unconstitutional or unsuitable to be implemented, they created a sense of hope and urgency. Many officials were preparing to introduce new procedures to expand the nomination process and make determination of formal candidates competitive and transparent. This anticipated boom of political experiments did not take place due to a Party circular in July 2001.

Despite this, on the last day of December 2001, Buyun township went ahead again with its own direct election of a township magistrate. One province in China introduced public elections of magistrates in 45 percent of its 5,000 townships and towns by June 2002.

More locales are going to use this so-called public election method to choose township leaders. It is said that one county in Sichuan Province used the same measure in picking a county magistrate.

A scholar boldly predicted recently that one measure to be adopted by the Party's 16th Congress will be the direct election of Party leaders at the grassroots level. All these progresses are being made in the context of direct village elections.

Finally, no matter how democratic China is going to become and what forms of electoral systems China is going to adopt, voter education, voter registration, nomination and determination of candidates, the use of secret ballot booths, are all going to be great problems and logistical nightmares that could lead to potential political violence and instability.

The practice of direct village elections involves close to 600 million out of the 900 million Chinese voters. They have always experienced these procedures and are getting more and more familiar with the standardized procedures. This will become the single most valuable asset in China's quest for greater democracy.

Which way to go from here? No one has a definitive answer. The flurry of experiments of the selection of township magistrates in 1998 and 1999 were carried out under Jiang Zemin's call for promoting grassroots democracy at the 15th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1997. It is only logical to go down this road if the so-called "three represents" are implemented according to its true essence.

If Jiang is determined to write the "three represents" into the Party charter and claim it to be his legacy, there is little doubt that China will back away from the small steps it has taken toward greater political reform.

The last topic is the Carter Center's China Village Elections Project. The Carter Center initiated the China Village Elections Project in 1997. After a successful pilot phase, a 3-year agreement of cooperation was signed with the national Ministry of Civil Affairs in March 1999.

This agreement allows the Carter Center to work primarily in four Chinese provinces to install computers and software to collect village elections data, to conduct training of election officials at all levels, and the elected village committee members in any province in China to observe village elections everywhere, to help conduct civic education, and to invite Chinese election officials to observe United States elections and the elections that are monitored by the Carter Center in other parts of the world.

In addition to working with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Carter Center is also working with the National People's Congress, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and other NGOs [non-governmental organizations] in the area of designing electoral procedures for the county and township people's Congress, for the township and county magistrates, in empowering the People's Congress system in China, and other areas of cooperation.

The Center has provided substantial assistance in conducting civic education, printing civic education materials, and spreading information through the Website. We are about to launch another Website called "China Elections and Governance" in the near future.

The Center has also been coordinating its work in China with other American and Western organizations, including IRI, the Ford Foundation, NDI [National Democratic Institute], UNDP [U.N. Development Program], and particularly the European Commission [EC].

China is a significant nation whose international responsibility, domestic stability, and economic prosperity will directly impact the Asia-Pacific region and the world. All these things cannot be sustained without an open and transparent political system through which the government derives its legitimacy and the people hold their leaders accountable.

No single group of nations can initiate this most important sea of change in China. China will have to do it by herself. However,

the involvement of the Western government and the NGOs, in sowing the seeds of reform, sustaining the change, and consolidating the gains is indispensable.

Imposing Western values on China without considering China's unique circumstances is counterproductive. Ignoring China altogether in its cautious and sometimes confusing quest for greater democratization is outright erroneous. Working outside China is helpful. Providing assistance inside China is safer and all the more effective.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Liu appears in the appendix.]

Mr. WOLF. Thank you. Liz Dugan.

**STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH DUGAN, REGIONAL PROGRAM DIRECTOR, ASIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST, INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE [IRI], WASHINGTON, DC**

Ms. DUGAN. Thank you. For me, it is an extreme honor to be invited to be invited to participate on this panel, and I thank you very much for that invitation.

It is also a distinct privilege to serve with such well-respected colleagues and experts in this field not only here in the United States, but most certainly on the ground in China.

I have a prepared statement which is available, but I think if I can I will just speak a little more informally about some of the more important thought that I would like to make.

IRI has been working on electoral reform issues in China for about 8 years now. We have been active in 10 provinces. We have observed more than 50 elections. These election observation missions that we conduct are really not as significant as some of the other activities that we have, but we try always to present those officials who are responsible for administering these elections with a set of recommendations that are meant to help them strengthen the process that they have already started.

We have also been very much involved in training of election officials and of newly elected village chairmen to help them understand better about how they can be responsive in their new roles and how they need to be held accountable to the voters who put them in place.

Another activity that we have tried to enact are regional networking conferences, which allow for cross-fertilization of ideas among provincial leaders who, again, have taken on this task and responsibility of creating electoral reform efforts.

I mention, also, training and field work for domestic monitors. These, of course, would be the Chinese themselves who have some experience in the whole realm of elections throughout China and who now can go and observe and make their own recommendations. We have found this to be a particularly successful effort because it is Chinese to Chinese.

I want to speak briefly about one particular village election experience which I think allows an institute like IRI to demonstrate a real sense of the progress that we have seen in China.

Then, if you will indulge me, I will speak briefly about urban election experimentation that is taking place in China now and which I had a chance to observe firsthand in May.

In Fujian Province, IRI had its first experience as an international observation team in 1994. We used Fujian Province as perhaps the best example of how we have been able to track progress over the course of time.

As you know, village elections are on 3-year cycles, so we had a chance to observe, in two counties, these elections in 1994, and then again in 1997 in the same counties.

In 2000, we returned for the third time. This obviously is the best kind of indicator of progress and this is what we were able to note. The technical process has taken root.

There still is room for improvement, there still is room for strengthening, but the very fundamental things have not only been rooted in Fujian Province, but they have been implemented in a very across-the-board way.

It is useful for us to kind of see that it does not remain static. It is hard for us to know this in other provinces because we have not had, as I say, this consecutive election monitoring experience.

While it is true that elections vary in their level of competitiveness, what we also saw in Fujian, and I have seen in other places as well, is that challengers are winning. Not always is the Party candidate being returned to his seat. Write-in candidates are allowed on ballots. These are all signs of some sense of real competitiveness there.

It is clear to us that the demand for reform is great. There have been expressions of a desire to see direct elections at higher levels, at the township level, as Liu Yawei has mentioned. This has been voiced to us by not only villagers, but also by local officials.

The pace of reform is not clear, and I think this is a sentiment that we all feel strongly. It is very hard to determine how quickly, or in fact how slowly, some of this may happen.

Support for reform from Beijing is a wild card at this point. The outcome of the 16th Party Congress this fall is clearly a bit of an unknown variable for us. As Anne Thurston has suggested, this is not a time when a commitment to political reform or innovation is going to take place. It will not be for some time to come after the results of the Party Congress have had a chance to settle in.

Let me speak, briefly, about these urban elections that I mentioned to you. For the past 2 years or more there have been 12 pilot cities that have been allowed to experiment with elections for urban residence committees.

In the history of the People's Republic of China [PRC], the primary organizing unit in most large Chinese cities was the work unit, or the *danwei*, which provided the cradle-to-grave social services known collectively as the "iron rice bowl."

Although urban residence committees existed, positions on those committees were appointed by the municipal Party apparatus and held primarily by the elderly, many times barely literate people. Functions of these committees were limited to menial neighborhood tasks and snooping into the urban citizens' lives.

China's cities have been undergoing massive social and economic change in recent years. With more and more state-owned enterprise failures and increasing unemployment, the *danweis* have become less important, in good part because they have become less effective in many cities.

Simultaneously, the influx of migrant workers into urban areas has dramatically altered the urban landscape. Crime has increased, as have street protests and labor unrest. Residents committees, as they were formerly conceived and structured, no longer meet the needs of China's city dwellers.

The Chinese Government decided to permit elections for urban residence committees on an experimental basis in the interest of modernization and social stability. This is the same rationale, as Anne so thoroughly pointed out, that was first used to permit village elections more than 10 years ago.

It is worth noting, though, that in the absence of detailed central government directives on urban elections, local officials have a great deal of autonomy in designing and implementing them. There is a lot of variety.

The hope, I believe, is that younger, more qualified individuals will run for positions on the committees and that elections will make these residence committees more accountable to urban citizens.

The effort in Guangxi Autonomous Region, as elsewhere, is brand-new. The people who are driving the effort have not organized elections before. But this experiment also suggests to me hope and urgency of the same kind that Liu Yawei suggests in his remarks. These urban officials are using the village regulations as their model, and they are most certainly headed in the right direction.

It is clear that there need to be new applications of that village model in the urban setting. In the interest of time, perhaps I will not discuss that at great length now, but would be delighted to address it during one of the questions. But let me say that whatever those applications may be, they will stem from nothing more than a learned competency and a technical understanding.

So, let me try to make some summary points here before we move on. The first one takes a page right out of Anne Thurston's book, because she taught me so much about all of this and she was a really fine mentor—still is.

Anne Thurston taught me that elections are not intuitive, and she has already made the point herself.

They are learned skills. Training, therefore, is essential. IRI is beginning to learn also that, during this training, we need to focus not only on the how-to, but on the why.

The majority of provincial officials that we have had the privilege to work with are very committed to trying to not just fill a box by complying with the 1998 law in village elections. They are dedicated to implementing sound practices and finding ways to strengthen what has always been put in place.

Guangxi was a very good example. In Yunnan Province, we had a chance also to observe elections. Yunnan was the last province to initiate village elections, and they determined that they would spend as much time as they could learning from the mistakes of other provinces before they would put their own rules in place.

I think that the Chinese have a luxury of some time that is not existing in other countries that are trying to put on elections. They have time to craft regulations that will limit the opportunities for

manipulation and defrauding of the voting process. There is a long road ahead, there is no question about it.

But the exercise of democracy is no small thing. It is hard to quantify the results, despite demands to do so. I know this is something that Liu Yawei also deals with on a consistent basis. There is anecdotal evidence that exists. But, in our minds, the genie is out of the bottle.

This process that villagers, and now urban dwellers, and perhaps township dwellers also are beginning to experience, is one that brings to them an evolution of the habit of selecting your leaders and the habit of holding them accountable.

I will leave it at that. I appreciate your kind attention.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Dugan appears in the appendix.]

Mr. WOLF. Thank you all very much.

Let me start out. In earlier roundtables, some of the panelists spoke about their concerns with the low level of United States Government financing of NGO activities in China, especially assistance in the area of legal reform.

They were worried that the legal standards and principles that the Chinese were learning were more European-focused than American. They saw that as something that was not particularly in our own national interest.

They were asking for more American Government support for American NGOs and other U.S. organizations, such as U.S. law schools working in this area in China. I am wondering if there is any parallel with the work you are doing with village elections.

Go ahead, Liz.

Ms. DUGAN. Thank you. If I understand you correctly, you are asking whether there is a perceived need or an actual need for U.S. Government funding.

Mr. WOLF. At the national legal reform level, Americans involved in assisting believe that there is not enough American involvement, and therefore legal reform in some areas are going the road of non-American models, that is, European models or perhaps Australian, Canadian, Japanese, depending on where the money is coming from. I am wondering if there is any parallel to that at the village election level.

Ms. DUGAN. I will start off here, and then Yawei, you correct me if you think I am wrong. It is my inclination to say that American involvement in village election reform efforts with Chinese partners is probably the deepest of any other. We are not exclusively there, but more so than the European Union [EU], more so than Norwegians, Dane. I am trying to think of some other groups that I have run into along the way.

We are very, very interested in trying to find ways to cooperate with those groups and make sure that we have coordinated our efforts so that whatever program we are putting in place is not a duplication of effort, or most certainly is not working at cross purposes. But I think it is safe to say that our efforts there are as broad as any other group's, if not broader.

Mr. LIU. I agree with Liz, that the American organizations are working very closely with the Chinese Government. That includes IRI, the Ford Foundation, and the Carter Center.



But in terms of the amount of funds available to these NGOs, and also a list of promised funds, the United States Government is not close to the European Commission. The EU is launching a huge project on rural governance and they are setting up 10 training centers around China to conduct training of elected village officials, as well as election officials at all levels.

Although the EC is a big bureaucracy, it takes time for the two big bureaucracies to iron out all of the differences. It took them 4 years to finally hammer out the details of the cooperation, which is going to start in August.

Ms. THURSTON. I would echo what both Liz and Yawei have said. I mean, certainly the EU has a lot more money to spend in China. I think its problem has been, it also has a lot more bureaucracy to cope with. So, it has been very, very slow getting off the ground. Once it does, they do have the money and they do have the commitment to work with the Chinese.

I want to say a couple of other things, though, about the way you phrased this question. You phrased it in the context of efforts at legal reform in China and the possibility that maybe what is happening is that the legal reforms may be more like Japan, or more like Europe.

I think my sense is that what both IRI and the Carter Center are doing, and what we should be doing, is providing the Chinese with the tools to make their own decisions. The last thing that China wants is an "American form of democracy."

I would also say that I think there is considerable skepticism in China in terms of working directly with the American government, and therefore what we need is more money going to NGOs like IRI, the Carter Center, and other NGOs as well to work outside the government, but on issues that the government would also support.

Mr. WOLF. Thanks.

Next is John Foarde.

Mr. FOARDE. This question is also for any or all of the panelists.

I take it from what Anne and Yawei said that we have not really observed very many village elections of the many that we hope are going on out there.

How much is the Ministry of Civil Affairs or the government generally receptive to additional observer groups from Carter Center, or anywhere in the United States, do you think?

Mr. LIU. If I may, I think the MCA has no problem with receiving any Western or American delegations to observe elections. So far, I do not think any official American delegation has observed residence committee elections.

There was one attempt by Congressional Members to observe it, but due to weather, the plane never landed. I think we asked some of the diplomats from the U.S. Embassy to observe elections in the past several years, but other than that, there is no official observation. The MCA is open to all foreign observation of the elections.

Also, though the election cycle in China is every 3 years, there are no nationally restricted dates. So, just about every month, there are elections in China somewhere. So if you do go and contact MCA, they will make it possible for foreign observers to see these elections.

Ms. DUGAN. I concur with that remark. We have had nothing but fine support and coordination with the Ministry of Civil Affairs. I think they are very interested in being able to demonstrate that this exercise is going on.

Mr. FOARDE. So we would not be pushing the envelope to be able to come forward and say we would like to see more elsewhere in China, and we would like to possibly see some at the official level, that is, having officials from the United States observe them during an official visit?

Ms. DUGAN. I can think of no reason why they would decline.

Ms. THURSTON. I think the problem is usually a logistical one, where elections are taking place, when, and who from the Ministry is available.

Mr. FOARDE. The further away from Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, the harder to get to, probably.

Ms. THURSTON. Yes. Although once you have made the contact, as IRI has, sometimes the easier it is to work with them.

Ms. DUGAN. Right.

Mr. FOARDE. Let me change subjects just slightly and ask any of you who want to respond if you have any sense of what the new generation of Chinese leaders that we expect to come forward over the next year or so feel about or think about the village election process, either anecdotally or by rumor, or anything they might have said in public. Any sense at all?

Mr. LIU. Let me respond. I think the next generation, that is, the generation that is going to emerge at the 16th Party Congress, I do not think they have paid sufficient attention to the issues of rural elections or introducing these electoral measures to higher levels of the government, although they began to take them into consideration.

I think we probably will not see any bolder or deeper reform measures being taken up until maybe the next generation in about 10 years. I think there is a growing critical mass in the middle level of the Chinese officials that this is something, as Anne said, is inevitable that has to be adopted.

Mr. FOARDE. But I take it that you agree with Anne when she says that the general consensus in China is that it has got to come from the top down and not be a bottom-up process. Is that right?

Mr. LIU. No. I think the pressure will have to come from both sides. There is pressure from the bottom, such as social unrest, unemployment, a decrease in income for the peasants, the growing protest movement. These are the pressures from the bottom. Then it is going to push, and the top will have to respond.

But the problem is in the middle, particularly at the lower middle level the township and county officials, that are most resistant to these kinds of elections.

Mr. FOARDE. I am out of time, and we have other colleagues who want to ask questions. So, let us keep going.

Mr. WOLF. All right. Next is Jennifer Goedke with Representative Marcy Kaptur.

Ms. GOEDKE. Thank you all for being here today.

My first question would be for Anne or Yawei. You both spoke about motivating factors for the voters, including self interests like local infrastructure or pricing of household needs.

Are there any motivating social concerns that you are seeing, anything like health care rights, workplace rights, political freedom, anything along those lines, or are you seeing that it is much more related to self interest of a local community?

Ms. THURSTON. Good question. I mean, it is actually a very interesting one, and one that I think we need to know more about. People in rural areas are not actually losing their health care now as people in urban areas are, as the *danwei* begins to fold.

That is a major issue in Chinese cities, and it should be an issue in the countryside. But I have not seen an election where that is the case. That does not mean that it will not happen, cannot happen.

Similarly, with political freedom there is, as Yawei I think has pointed out, a growing sense of rights, that the laws governing village elections are being made public, so people know that they have a legal basis for demanding that elections be carried out according to the law.

In my own personal experience, it is quite a few steps further up the ladder to think in terms of one's own individual rights, human rights, civil rights, and that sort of thing.

I tell a story in a larger piece that I wrote about trying to get a sense in villages of whether there is some sense, even if it is not called human rights, of something that is inalienable, that cannot be taken away from you, that is yours, that you absolutely need and deserve.

When I have asked that question, the answer has always been the same: roads. That is, what people think is very practical. What they deserve, what they need, what is their right, is more roads.

Mr. LIU. Yes. I think the issues during the elections are always economic treatment, but also about education, about road building. At the most recent village elections we observed, all five candidates talked about the WTO [World Trade Organization], to the surprise of all of the observers.

This was in a remote village in the Shandong Province. So, they do not talk about political freedom.

They very rarely talk about the Party. National politics are irrelevant here, so it is always issues that are very close to them.

Ms. GOEDKE. For Elizabeth, we were talking about some of the mass emigration from the countryside into the urban areas. Are you seeing the influence of experience in village elections, people who are coming from the countryside into urban areas with this expectation for something, not necessarily widespread democratic elections, but something from their past experiences?

Ms. DUGAN. Sort of the importation of that experience. I have no evidence to suggest it, but ultimately it occurs to me—it is an interesting question—it may be too early to really have a sense of how that will work.

But, again, it speaks to the habit of voting, the understanding that this is how we choose our leaders. To find themselves in an environment in which they no longer have control over that, it may supply some impetus for an acceleration of that upward movement.

Ms. GOEDKE. Thank you.

Mr. WOLF. Thanks.

Holly Vineyard with the Commerce Department.

Ms. VINEYARD. Thank you.

Several of you have mentioned the connection between village elections and economic prosperity. I was wondering if you could draw out that link a little more.

Is one driving the other? I would be very interested in that, as well. I am very curious about the comment that the WTO has become an issue in local elections. Any additional comments you have on that would be welcome.

Mr. LIU. In terms of the WTO, the village that we observed happened to have some vegetable gardens that exported vegetables to Japan and other countries. That is why it became an issue.

In terms of whether the economy is driving the elections or the elections are driving the economy, I think Amy wrote an article a long time before about the impact of economic development. It is not very clear. I do not think there is sufficient data proving that one way or the other.

In provinces like Guangdong where they are economically very developed, they were very late in adopting village committee elections. Once they adopted it, it went very far. Now the government, the Party, is coming down on the elections in Guangdong, so it is becoming more and more backward. So, the relationship is not very clear.

But one thing that is clear, is that in areas that are economically well-developed, there are always funds available to conduct elections. This is becoming a growing issue, where the funds are going to come from to conduct these elections, particularly the township and county elections.

In poorer areas, they do not even have the funds to conduct elections. In Fujian and Guangdong, there are always available funds to conduct these elections. It is a huge, costly business to run elections. The joke is, every time you have a round of elections you will be able to build several highways throughout China.

Ms. THURSTON. Can I add to that? I think the theory that says that political democratization goes hand in hand with economic prosperity also suggests that the standard of living, the annual yearly income, needs to be much, much higher than it is in China today before you really begin to see this correlation. I think that is probably one of the reasons we may not be seeing the correlation at the village level.

But I would also say, in my own experience—and I think there is other research being done now by other academics in the China field—there may be some correlation between the nature of ownership in the village and the types of elections they have.

I think one of the dangers, is that in some areas of China there is a concentration of ownership at the village level in a very few hands. That is also an opportunity for the sort of corruption of elections at the village level.

I mentioned that I have seen elections where the local emperor gets elected, and that is often because he has access to a lot of resources that he can use then to work in the peasants' self-interests, which is more money, where they can actually distribute the profits from some of these collective enterprises to their own political benefit, and that is a danger.

Ms. DUGAN. I might just add, briefly, my experience in observing elections in the villages of China is that the kinds of issues that the candidates talk about, sometimes in a very articulate fashion, sometimes maybe not so sophisticatedly, but they tend to be the same kinds of things. The roads, of course. Always, the roads. Clean water supply. Schools.

It occurs to me that it is so very similar to those very local elections that we know here in the United States, and that the issues are rooted in exactly the same things that people living in small towns here in the United States care about, too.

Ms. VINEYARD. Interesting. Thank you.

Mr. WOLF. Thanks.

Mr. FOARDE. I will remark while we are talking about this, that this means that Tip O'Neill was not wrong when he said that, "All politics is local," and the corollary to that was, "All local politics is public works."

Ms. THURSTON. That is true. Roads.

Mr. WOLF. Chris Billing.

Mr. BILLING. I was wondering if any of you have any good anecdotes that would help us get a sense of what it is like on the scene during these elections. What are the people saying? Are they all wearing tattered suits and coming in horse-drawn carriages, and that sort of thing? Maybe, Anne, you could start, but I would love to hear from all of you.

Ms. THURSTON. Oh, I love anecdotes. Well, actually, the visual setting of these elections looks different in different parts of the country. In some parts of the country, the village elections take place in a schoolyard. All of the villagers arrive long before the foreigners get there.

You get there, and they are all lined up in their chairs that they have brought from home. You see a variety of clothing. The elderly people are generally wearing the tattered, old, blue uniforms that they have worn for probably centuries, and the younger people are dressed very brightly and colorfully. It also is a very festive sort of occasion. I love the visual impact of these elections.

Again, it does look different in other places, because in some places there are literally polling stations. They are open from early in the morning until sometime in the afternoon, and people come one by one, or small group by small group over the course of the day to vote. That looks very different.

The one anecdote that sticks in my mind, which is also an anecdote that suggests what tremendous power some of these higher-level units have—and I am not sure it is even appropriate to tell it here—but I think I was with IRI, and I think maybe Amy and Liz were there. I cannot quite remember. But we were at an election where the election was being held outdoors in a schoolyard.

The word that the foreigners were coming to observe the election had gone out long before we got there. People from villages around wanted to come and observe the foreigners observing the elections, but there was a sort of perimeter beyond which the villagers from other villages could not enter. But, as the elections went on, and on, and on, these villagers from other villages got closer, and closer, and closer.

And as they got too close, one of the upper-level officials just turned around and he went like that [gesturing] to these people who were coming closer and closer, and they all started moving away. That, to me, was a little bit frightening in terms of how much power these people still have just with the wave of their hand.

Ms. DUGAN. I would like to tell a story of when I had an opportunity to participate in some of the training that we do for newly elected village chairmen. There was an election I observed in Shanxi Province.

Some 410 voters in this particular village participated in the election this day, and it was what they call a "sea election." We would think of it as a primary, the first step in voters actually determining who the candidates will be that appear on the general election ballot. I had never seen one of these elections before.

Now, the villagers all gathered in this election meeting schoolyard setting, as Anne described. And, theoretically speaking, each of the 410 villagers could have nominated themselves on the piece of paper they were given for the position of chairman, for example, and you would have 410 different nominees that were put forth.

But, of course, it does not really end up working that way, because there are natural leaders that emerge in a village and people know kind of who they would turn to to trust and to keep their confidence. So, the results came and 273 ballots were cast for candidate X, and 219 for candidate Y.

We presume, of course, that one of these two is the currently seated chairman. In fact, no, the incumbent candidate, who also was the Party branch secretary in this particular village, had received 9 votes, which I think was a pretty clear message from the voters in that particular village on that particular day.

I cut my friend Yawei off here from telling his own story, but maybe there will be another question of the same nature. At any rate, I would like to express that story of two village chairmen who have just come into their own new seat and need to understand that if they want to be reelected and serve the village on a more continuous basis, that the voters do have the power to send a very clear message.

Mr. WOLF. We will give you a minute, Yawei, for an anecdote.

Mr. LIU. All right. Thanks.

A very quick one. This last election we observed in Shandong, where they talked about the WTO, the incumbent lost the election and the Party secretary was elected. So, Chuck Costello insisted on talking with the two candidates who lost the election and who won the election.

The incumbent basically said, "I was less capable." I think what he did not dare to say, is really the government supports the Party secretary to be elected. So, therefore, he was not even in the running for that position.

But the winning person, the Party secretary, when asked why he was able to beat the other guy, said, "Because I understand the marketplace better than the other guy." So, you see that economics are in play.

A second anecdote which is very interesting, is when we did the training in Ningxia last year, the MCA sent observers which

worked with IRI a lot. He went there and told them, your nomination process is totally screwed up. It is going to create problems.

The township Party secretary said, "You city dwellers, you do not know anything about what is going on over here. I promise, this election is going to be smooth. There are not going to be any problems." But, by the end of the day, no candidate won enough to be elected. The voters just exploded.

One of the voters went up to the platform and grabbed the microphone and said, the whole process was fraudulent. They were almost on the verge of having a fist fight in a schoolyard, because they could easily get the chairs and start beating on each other.

Interestingly, all the provincial officials disappeared from the scene. So, the MCA, the Party secretary, and the township had an emergency meeting and then declared, these are my cell numbers, fax numbers, home numbers: please report to me in the next 3 days what went wrong. That calmed the situation. This was last year in Ningxia.

Mr. WOLF. Thanks. Amy Gadsden.

Ms. GADSDEN. I have a bunch of questions, and you can feel free to answer any of them.

Liz, you mentioned in your anecdote, and one of the things you pointed out, was that governance is as important or more important than the elections themselves. I was wondering if any of the panelists would comment on the impact of elections on governance at the village level.

The second question I have has to do with the relationship between the village committee and the Party committee. One of the things that the election process has done is revealed a lot of the problems between those two committees and the unclear delineations of power or authority between those two branches of government at the village level, and how some of those problems are coming to the surface now as elections have taken hold.

A third, related question—again, feel free to answer any or all of these—is how have elections changed political discourse in China more generally, not necessarily with regard to villages and village governance, but in terms of how the Chinese themselves are looking at politics and political change.

I think one of the things that we have done as foreigners observing elections is sort of filter it through a lens of, "what does this mean for political reform?"

Would you talk about whether the Chinese themselves filter their experience with elections through this same lens or whether they see elections as part of another phenomenon, or lack of phenomenon, for that matter?

Ms. THURSTON. Actually, I want to answer one of these questions. Of course, you could answer all these questions, too, Amy.

I think that one of the things that we as NGOs do not really know, because most NGOs come in, observe elections, and do not usually stay afterward to see what happens.

I think a next step, a next very important and certainly very interesting step, would be to return to villages where we have observed elections, and then see what happens to governance. We are working on a very nice presumption that somehow governance gets better with elections, but I do not think we know that for sure. I

think it would be very nice to start trying to learn that. I think that there are academics now who are beginning to try to investigate that.

Ms. DUGAN. I will pick up on the bead and echo clearly what Anne says, that there is a lot that happens that we maybe guess at, we do not know empirically.

Amy, you will remember that we actually did have a chance to go back and visit a village committee that had been elected in Heqing County in Yunnan, where we had actually observed the election and gone back and had a chance to speak with them.

They were also new to that process. It was hard to get any real depth of either, yes, this is what we have learned and here is how we are taking it, applying it, and really we have made a lot of progress, or we do not have any idea what we are doing and we are really just foundering here.

It was kind of a difficult interview, so it is hard to get this kind of data, no question about it. But I do think it is an important thing to try to get at. The training that we do for governance, we try to make it as broad-based and moving out to all the counties as we possibly can so that at least people have some rudimentary tools they can use.

Mr. LIU. I will address the second question, which is the relationship between the Party branch and the village committee, which has a lot to do with governance.

You could have perfect elections, but who has the power?

Who controls the purse, is the ultimate issue in all villages.

Now it is the growing contention and conflict between the popularly elected villager and the non-popularly elected Party secretary that are going against each other.

It is this very issue that is pushing village committee elections to the verge of being reversed, because you have the Organic Law, which says the villager assembly has the ultimate power in making decisions, and then you have people working for the grassroots Party organizations which say that the Party branch controls all decisionmaking processes in China.

So you have a national law against the Party's internal working measures. No one dares to say that the Party's working measures are less important than the national laws. This is an inherent problem that has to be dealt with down the road.

In terms of political discourse, just one thing. I think there is a growing envy on the part of the urban dwellers, that our peasant brothers and sisters are directly electing their immediate leaders. What about us? We are being left behind. Are we going through another cycle of the countryside encircling the urban centers? So, they felt they were left behind.

Mr. WOLF. Thanks. Matt Tuchow.

Mr. TUCHOW. The Congressional-Executive Commission on China is charged with developing an annual report, and in that report, making recommendations to Congress and to the President on how to go about promoting rule of law, including democratization in China. I am wondering if you have some recommendations for us on what those recommendations in the report should look like.

Ms. DUGAN. Is it for all of us?

Mr. TUCHOW. For all of you, yes.



Ms. DUGAN. Well, let me start here. The answer is, yes, please recommend that we are as fully funded as we can be. What I would love to have the opportunity to do, is to respond to you in a more comprehensive fashion after I have given it some very serious thought.

What occurs to me, based on IRI's longstanding experience in China in trying to work with reformers there, is that the road left ahead is a long one and there are boulders in it, but there are many ways to maneuver around those boulders and there are many, many opportunities to not only accelerate the kind of program that we have begun and that Carter Center has been involved in, that NDI does, and the other NGOs, and Ford Foundation, not only accelerate it, but expand it. To be honest with you, the only thing that holds us back is the dollar signs.

Ms. THURSTON. I would certainly echo that. One thing I would say, and it is very trite to say, but there are 1.3 billion people in China. There are 930,000 villages. There are 900 million people in the Chinese countryside. What we are doing right now is a tiny, tiny drop in the bucket.

It is a huge country with lots of people, lots of problems, and lots of opportunities for cooperation. Yes, it takes money. It would certainly take a lot more people here on the American side, too, to cooperate at a broader level. But the opportunity is certainly there.

Mr. LIU. Yes. I think the report has to acknowledge that there are meaningful village committee elections in China and that these elections should be supported.

Members of the Administration, Members of Congress, and their aides, each time they go to China, need to raise this issue. They need to say, we want to know more about these elections, just to raise the profile of this issue.

Instead of criticizing that you do not have human rights, why do you not just go ahead and say, we heard you have elections. Could we talk a little bit more about these elections? Could we observe these elections?

I think the Chinese saying is, "It is easier for the foreign monks to burn incense." The Chinese officials can talk about this, but they will not get the necessary attention. But once a visiting American Congressman or Senator raises this issue, then this is an issue that the leadership is going to look at.

In terms of funding, I have already said it. I think the Carter Center's experience is that we are extremely short-funded. We have to beg United States and European corporations to give us funds.

Most of these corporations say, what you are doing is very risky. We do not want to be portrayed as an organized company that is getting involved in providing funds for political activities. So, it is pretty hard for us, but we are determined that we are going to continue our work there.

Mr. TUCHOW. I think I speak on behalf of Ira and John in saying that if you do have further thoughts on recommendations, we would welcome them.

Mr. WOLF. Absolutely. We would certainly appreciate any material you want to provide to supplement your presentation.

Are women candidates emerging in village elections, or is this mainly a male activity?

Ms. DUGAN. Let me give you the good news. Invariably, we see women candidates emerge for perhaps one of the member positions. Usually there is a chairman, a vice chairman, and some number of members. It is not unusual to see women emerge as candidates for member, or sometimes vice chairman, not as often for chairman.

But in these two urban election committees, the elections that I had a chance to view in May, in the first election the incumbent was a male challenged by a female. He won reelection.

In the second election, two females. The older one won. They were both highly articulate. They were both very well experienced, very impressive presentations to the voter population who had assembled.

It was very compelling to me to see that they were the two candidates that the resident representative assembly had put forth in this one particular urban community of some 2,000 voters.

Mr. WOLF. I know you have not observed hundreds of thousands of villages, but as an off-the-cuff estimate, are 99 percent plus of the candidates males?

Mr. LIU. That is correct. I think less than one percent of the village committee chairs are women. But in most cases, there is a woman member on the village committee. That woman is usually the chairman of the women's federation in that village. But in Shandong Province, what we saw is there are no women who came out to run.

In Hunan, the provincial measure stipulated that the village committee will have to have one woman member, otherwise they will just keep voting until they get one elected. So, the provincial stipulations are different.

In some places there are people saying, we have got to have one woman member. In other places, they just do not give any attention to this. But, overall, the women are drastically under-represented at the village committee level.

Mr. WOLF. Can I get some examples of the most seriously fraudulent problems you have observed in the elections?

Ms. DUGAN. In my experience, fraud is not the issue. You do not see purposeful fraud committed, you see incompetencies, people who are the election workers, but they do not understand why a certain thing needs to happen or how it needs to happen. Again, let me go back to my experience in Guangxi with these urban elections.

Mr. WOLF. I would rather stick to the village elections, please. If it is not fraud, do you observe cases of heavy-handedness, corruption, fixed elections, pressure from the establishment—all the kinds of things that election observers are supposed to be observing? Did you see any of this or does none of this exist in the villages that you have observed?

Mr. LIU. We have seen township officials onsite giving, sometimes, subtle or naked messages to the voters. For example, in 2000, in one place where we observed the election, the township minister was saying, to elect the Party secretary as the chair will actually save you money because you are combining the two positions together and it is going to reduce your burden. That is, of course, a veiled attempt to manipulate the voters' decisionmaking process.

Others that we do not have opportunity to observe but we have read and heard of, are making empty promises during the campaign speeches or when they were making the tours inside of the village, such as, if I am elected I am going to help you reduce the fees you are going to pay to the government.

But a growing number of people are talking about vote buying, that is, making actual cash payment, or taking people to dinner, and some other offerings such as packs of cigarettes, and those things. The MCA's approach to this is, if there is vote buying, that is an indication of competition. It is better than no competition.

But the law itself is insufficient in terms of defining what can be characterized as vote buying, because there are no clear definitions as to what can be considered as vote buying.

Mr. WOLF. Thanks. John.

Mr. FOARDE. I think sometimes we say the words "observe elections" or "monitor elections," but do not really understand what we are talking about.

Could you, for the record, give us a sense of what specific activities you do when you are out in the field as either monitors or observers, if there is any difference?

Ms. DUGAN. Certainly. When we first arrive at, usually, the county level—or let me start at the provincial capital. We meet with the provincial Bureau of Civil Affairs, who are involved with local governance issues, and usually have a relatively thorough briefing from them about the nature and history of elections in that particular province.

At the county level, sometimes township, we have a chance for a more in-depth briefing about the particular elections that we will have a chance to see and what is happening in those particular villages, and some of the very raw data regarding them.

We try to have as full an understanding before we actually go to the election site of what is the economic base, what issues are driving this particular election, what do the voters in this particular village care about, so you have got a kind of foundation to stand on.

The process itself of observing the elections, as Anne has already started to describe, usually they are at a schoolyard. It is a meeting. It begins at 9 o'clock in the morning.

There is a great sense of rite, of ceremony regarding these elections, a very ordered presentation of steps that are taken, with great ceremony in demonstrating that the ballot box is empty, and in the passing out of ballots, in the summoning of voters.

Then, in a way that is unique and also helps to ensure that there is a transparency in the process, most of the time after the ballots have been cast the counting and the marking of ballots under each candidates' name is done in the same public area, and the voters remain and they watch that process.

Then there is the announcement of the results, and what we might call "peaceful transition of power" so the new village committee is presented with their certificates then and there. That usually is the sum total of the observation process itself. Again, we are missing a step, and that is what happens next.

Ms. THURSTON. And also what happens before the primary, the selection of candidates, which we do see sometimes.

Mr. LIU. Yes. One of the things we try to do is to find out exactly what happened before the election, the nomination process. We want to see the records. We want to see how many candidates were nominated by the villagers and how they were reduced to the official roster of candidates. So, that is one thing we try to find out.

On the election day, of course, in all elections, foreign organizations get to observe. There is a certain level of pre-election preparation for the Westerners to come. There will be officials visiting right before us to make sure that the setting is good, that the villagers are all going to come out.

Occasionally there will be a cash payout to the voters, or at least a bottle of water, instant noodles, those kinds of things, to get them to come over.

Two other things we observe on the election day will be the number of proxies, and also how the roving ballot boxes are used, particularly at elections at higher levels. The abuse of proxies and the use of the so-called roving ballot boxes are just intolerable. That reduces the quality of the elections.

It basically makes the election a charade when you just allow one person to carry nine votes or more without checking the voter IDs or authorization. When you get a roving ballot box to households, there is no integrity to that voting process at all. So, these are the two issues we try to find out each time we go there.

Ms. THURSTON. This also sort of touches on—I did not get to respond to Ira’s question—the issue of fraud. I think the fact is that the presence of foreign observers has a significant impact on how the election works and impact to the good. I mean, people are very, very careful and very attentive to make sure that all the rules are being followed as they are watching.

Mr. WOLF. Holly.

Ms. VINEYARD. Thanks.

How do you measure the effectiveness of what you are doing? Maybe this is related, but have you seen any signs, in the areas that do not have local elections might be clamoring to have them?

Mr. LIU. By law, all of the villages—I think as of now the number is reduced to 730,000; a lot of the villages merged—all have to have elections. If there are no elections, that is illegal and the villagers can report it. Of course, there are areas where there were no elections being held because the local officials were opposed to it. But they have to have it. The MCA and the local Department of Civil Affairs can go down there.

But the problem is that the law itself does not have any muscle. That is, if a village does not carry elections and this is a problem of the township officials, there is no way for the Ministry of Civil Affairs or the local Department of Civil Affairs to deal with it. In the law, there is no measure or penalty and the court will not take up any suits filed by the peasants.

So now it is very clear to the MCA scholars that the law will have to be revised to make it useful and applicable, so when the violations do occur the perpetrators can be punished, as required by the law.

Ms. DUGAN. The first question you asked is the bane of my existence: how to measure whether what we are doing is making a difference, what kind of impact does it have, because it is very hard

to come up with empirical data to support it. There is no profit and loss statement at the end of the month to let us know whether things are working. The anecdotal evidence is what propels us.

To a certain degree, our experience in Fujian also was buoying, because recommendations that we had made from our first observation took root. They were put in force. We got to go back and see, 3 years later, that they took that seriously.

They took it to heart and they made it part of the body of regulations that they use now in Fujian province. So things like that, perhaps, give you some sense of being able to measure the effectiveness of what it is we do, but it is a very, very difficult thing. I thank you for the question.

Mr. LIU. I want to add to what Liz just said on the Fujian model. Before, elections in Fujian were always held in a schoolyard and people would have to come. But then the officials were invited by the IRI and other U.S. agencies to observe U.S. elections, and then they adopted the polling station method.

That is, it will be open at 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning and it will close at 5 o'clock, which is being applied to all models. I mean, that is one thing they have learned through this interaction between U.S. involvement and the officials over there.

Also, the unlimited access. The IRI, the Carter Center, the Ford Foundation being able to see the elections, to participate in internal discussions, the meetings, I think is another measurement of the success, and also the way they take our recommendations very seriously.

In the revision of the law, they did take into consideration all the recommendations by the foreign observers. I think these are all, again, anecdotal reflections of the success that United States agencies have had in China.

Ms. THURSTON. Can I just add, you mentioned places that do not have elections. Yawei is saying that now, mandated by law, every village is supposed to have elections.

I do not very often get the opportunity to go down to villages without somebody from the Ministry of Civil Affairs or a provincial level Ministry of Civil Affairs office taking me there, but I have on a number of occasions been able to be taken down to villages by Chinese friends.

I have to say that in those few cases that I have had that opportunity, I have gone to villages that did not seem to have village elections. Sometimes there were just too many contradictions, it was too complicated, we could not do it, so the Party secretary is serving also as the head of the village committee.

The other sense I have gotten, which I think that you do not get when you go down to look at village elections, is the strength of informal leadership at the village level.

The people that we are seeing being elected are, as I have said, generally young, they are entrepreneurial, they are go-getters. But I have been struck, in the villages I have been to with friends, of how much respect the older members of the village get.

In two cases I am thinking of, both of those older people had also been head of the collective during the time that the village was a production brigade. So, there is a lot of informal leadership that

takes place at the village level too that we really do not have the opportunity to see.

Mr. WOLF. Thanks. Chris.

Mr. BILLING. One school of thought says that the Chinese Government allows these elections in order to give the peasants an opportunity to let off some steam and perhaps to avoid social unrest that way.

Do you think there is a viable threat of that in the Chinese countryside, and are the elections successful in appeasing the peasants? Perhaps, Yawei, you could start.

Mr. LIU. Yes. I think it certainly has played a role of releasing the peasants' anger and frustration to a certain extent, because you are sort of giving them an opportunity to vent their anger by either electing a new leader or recalling the leader that is incompetent or corrupt.

But, again, I do not think this is going to solve all of the problems. The government does work very hard to prevent the farmers from forming any cross-border or cross-region organizations.

One of the things I said that the scholars have been talking about, is that despite the nature of these elections, no matter how direct they are, the people who are elected are ultimately servants to the government because the township government is using them to serve the purpose of family planning, raising revenue, taxes, and all that.

So what the scholars are suggesting is that we need to have farmers' alliances, making them truly independent, making them able to bargain with the government. This is something the village committee elections and the elected village committee members cannot accomplish.

Ms. THURSTON. I think that is a really good question. In terms of my own personal observation of the Chinese countryside, one of the things that distresses me right now is that there is a sort of disconnect between what we are hearing now about the increased level of violence and protest in the Chinese countryside and going down to observe village elections.

I mean, you are not observing violence and protest in the countryside when you observe village elections. Since we do not have figures and numbers, it is very hard to know where the balance lies and how significant and important that protest may be. So, that is another plea for more research in the Chinese countryside.

The one case that the Ministry of Civil Affairs used to use a number of years ago was the incidence of protests in Renshou County in Sichuan. The argument of people at the Ministry of Civil Affairs was that the people from Renshou County who had gotten together to protest had not participated in village elections and they were being taxed without their permission.

But when they tried to go next door to the counties on their outskirts and solicit participation in their protests by people from those counties, they were refused because people in those counties had held village elections and they were voting their own taxes.

So, this is a case that used to be used many years ago by the Ministry of Civil Affairs to suggest that participation in village elections would mediate against violence and protests.

Mr. WOLF. Amy.

Ms. GADSDEN. No questions.

Mr. WOLF. Matt.

Mr. TUCHOW. I wanted to come back to the ultimate question, which I think Anne Thurston raised in her remarks earlier. That is, how do you believe China should move to a more democratic and open society without creating uncontrollable chaos and unrest?

Ms. THURSTON. Well, that is a book. That is a big, huge question. I think the first answer is that we have been addressing here very specifically questions of village elections, but China has a tremendous set of problems, sort of grassroots level problems, that it has to face and it has to overcome in the next 5 to 10 years.

I think that a lot of the protests, a lot of the unrest that we are seeing in China today is a result of the fact that the government has not been able to solve some of these problems, and the problems are problems of unemployment, or unemployment in the cities, surplus labor in the countryside, growing inequality between urban areas and rural areas, between the coast and inland areas, this transition that the country is going through in terms of going from state-owned enterprises into private and joint venture companies. But there are just a whole lot of very upsetting, destabilizing things taking place in China right now.

I also have to say that, much as I would like China to move more quickly in a more democratic direction, the more time I spend there and the more time I see the extent of their problems, and again just the vastness of the number of people in that country, the more I think that China really does have to go very carefully, step by step.

So my bottom line would still come back to, somehow you need this gradual merger or this gradual sort of coming together of the top and the bottom. Yawei mentioned that you cannot take this away from people at the grassroots level now, but you still, in the end, are going to need the cooperation, the initiative, and the leadership from the people at the top in order to begin moving these elections upward.

But I think that that is what ultimately has to take place: You gradually do have to begin to move these upward to the township, to the county, to the province, and hopefully to the national level.

Mr. LIU. I think this often raises the issue that if we go democratic, then the country is going to be turned upside down. It would be chaotic. It will be running amok. It is a myth that we all have to debunk.

That is, if we are going to introduce universally accepted democratic measures, then China is going to go chaotic because our people are not very well educated, they do not know how to choose.

I think that is a very elitist view from top down in China to a lot of the urban dwellers, saying the Chinese peasants are not very civilized. You give them 5 bucks, they are going to vote for any person you tell them to vote for.

I think the MCA officials have a very clear view on this, that it does not matter how less well-educated these peasants are, they know where their interests are and they know how to cast a ballot. If they are given the opportunity to cast an unfettered and free ballot, they will be able to make their choice in a very wise way.

Ms. DUGAN. Yawei is 100 percent correct in that, that though they may not be highly educated, they know what is in their hearts, they know what it is that they want. This process that we have all had the privilege to observe is one that does not produce immediate results. As I mentioned before, it is not for the impatient. So, it will take a long time.

I think Anne is correct. I think in some conversations that I have had with the Chinese you are left a very distinct impression that they are highly concerned about not following the Russia model, and to steer clear of that, of moving too fast in one specific direction. That is to say, as they move forward it will be incremental, it will be slow.

Mr. TUCHOW. Do the peasants see this as in any way related to Western democracy or the West, or do they just see this in the small confines of their village?

Ms. THURSTON. I think if you use the word "democracy," they see that as related to the West and they see it related to the United States. For all of the sort of anti-American sentiment that you see or you hear about in China today, certainly there is also a lot of very pro-American sentiment as well, both in terms of our economy and in terms of our politics.

I would, by the way, like to echo this. I have to say that some of the people in China who I admire the most are people down there in the countryside who have overcome difficulties the likes of which you and I could not even imagine. I mean, families starving to death.

They are always one step ahead of what the government will allow. Despite the fact that they are not educated, they have just done remarkable things for themselves and their families. I think that they do not, by any means, get enough credit from people in China's urban areas who do tend to look down on them.

Mr. WOLF. Thanks.

Given the powerful role of the Chinese Communist Party, its political and economic strength, constitutional power, why would one expect that grassroots activities such as helping promote village elections, occupational safety and health training in individual factories, legal clinics in a few locations, or trying to teach women what their rights are under Chinese law, would have a measurable impact on the political dynamics and the political and social structure of the nation?

Ms. THURSTON. That is a good question. I would have to think about it. One answer, and I think I said it in at least part of my written piece, is that it seems to be that, in the long term, what these village elections are doing is putting in place the structure by which elections could be held at higher levels.

I mean, so long as the process of expanding and improving upon village elections continues, when the time comes and you do begin to see them move upward, all of the technical details have sort of already been ironed out, the structure is in place. So, in that sense it is good preparation.

Mr. LIU. I think all of these things, though they are minor, if you consider the population and how big China is, cumulatively, I think they have a huge impact on the future transformation of China.



Another anecdote over here, is we invited the Ministry of Civil Affairs officials to observe the U.S. Presidential elections in 2000. In other circles, people were talking about it being a joke, but the officials that we invited were saying, we do not see it as a joke. We see the supremacy of the law. It is an election that comes out by the court.

I mean, all these people, when they were in Atlanta, they were watching TV until 2 o'clock in the morning. They keep talking about how these issues are being resolved. That is, you have to obey the law. It does not matter whether you are president or vice president, it is not going to make a difference in the court. Everyone is equal.

It is these visits, these trainings we do in China. We have trained 300, IRI probably trained more. These are the trainers. They go down, they train others. It is mushrooming. It is a chain reaction. I think, overall, the impact can never be exaggerated.

Ms. DUGAN. Well, I concur. It is a difficult question. But I think of it a little bit like squeezing toothpaste out of a tube, and there is no really easy way to put it back in once it is out there.

To the extent that, again, there is just this engendering of empowerment that takes place and people get used to it, and they have a general understanding that this is their right, this is due them, to be able to select their own leaders and participate in this process, it is not without its own value.

Mr. WOLF. Well, if, in the coming couple of weeks you think about this or could refer us to some people who have, in a fairly rigorous way, addressed this issue, please let us know.

I think it is important that we on the staff be able to explain to our Commissioners who, rightfully, are looking at the use of Federal funds going into grassroots activities in China in the future with some skepticism, why this is money well spent.

The question is, how to get a rigorous analysis of the impact of these programs on our broader goals?

John.

Mr. FOARDE. No questions.

Mr. WOLF. Holly.

Ms. VINEYARD. Following up on Ira's point there, I am wondering, would it be a useful exercise to have some of the Commissioners who sit on this Commission go to China to observe a local election? Would that be, do you think, helpful for them to understand the process or would it get in the way? Would it be helpful in having a brighter spotlight shining on the good works that you are doing?

Ms. DUGAN. I think it would be a very useful exercise for a number of reasons, not the least of which is, in my experience, people who do not spend time in China receive most of their information about what is happening in China straight through Beijing.

The usefulness of being able to be out in the middle of nowhere in China to observe this process just brings you a little bit closer to real information. So, I would wholeheartedly support such an effort, and we would be delighted to try to help make the arrangements for it.

Mr. LIU. I would echo Liz, that it would be extremely useful if there is time and opportunity for Commissioners to go to China to see the elections. I think it can be done.

Also, when the Chinese officials come, either invited by the IRI or the Carter Center, I hope there will be meetings between the Commissioners and the MCA officials, or even between the officials and the aides over here.

We are going to bring a group at the end of October, early November to see the mid-term elections over here. That would be a great opportunity for you guys to look at these officials who are trying so hard to implement this grassroots democracy.

Ms. THURSTON. I would obviously echo that. China, I think, in general is a country that really has to be seen and experienced in order for us even to begin to understand it. I think the same is true of village elections.

I mean, my suspicion is that very few people can even conceive of what a Chinese village looks like or how it is organized, and very few of us in the United States could. I just think the importance of being there, observing, feeling, and seeing what it is like would be very important to anybody who is interested in this issue.

Ms. VINEYARD. Thank you.

Mr. WOLF. Chris.

Mr. BILLING. Yawei, you mentioned Buyun in your testimony. What do we know now about what happened there, and what can we learn from Buyun County in Sichuan Province?

Mr. LIU. In the Buyun case, of course, there was a direct election of a township magistrate in December 1998. Thereafter, it was declared as being unconstitutional. Then there was endorsement by a legal daily in China saying this is the Xiaogong Village of political reform. Xiaogong Village is the village in Anhui Province that divided the land among the peasants themselves in 1979 and started the household responsibility system.

The last day of 2001, the Buyun township had another "direct election" of a magistrate. This is despite the Party circular banning such activities. But they became a little bit more creative this time.

Instead of having the voters directly electing the magistrate, they were asking the voters to nominate one candidate to be submitted to the township People's Congress. So, therefore, it is a quasi-direct election because the voters directly elect only one candidate to that position.

This person who was elected last time got reelected, but with a very small margin. The challenger almost beat him, although he said he was going to win this hands-down. He was going to win 75 percent of the vote. Instead, he only won 51 percent of the votes, a clear indication of competition and a clear indication that the voters thought he himself used his position to maximize his influence and tried to get the voters to cast his ballot. So, there is a reaction to his efforts.

There probably will be more cases in China in the near future to model their elections after Buyun. We are still holding our breaths to see if that is going to spread.

Mr. TUCHOW. Is the central government actually trying to stop that from happening?

Mr. LIU. There is no clear warning from the central government, other than the circular issued July 2001, saying that all indirect elections are going to be strictly in accordance with the Constitution and the organic law of local governments.

So, basically they stopped it in the name of the law. But local officials are still challenging this, although in a very creative and original way, without jeopardizing their career.

Mr. WOLF. Matt.

Mr. TUCHOW. I am wondering if you could just say a word or two more about urban elections, and particularly the unique challenges that they create. I imagine, if it is one work unit and not another, that may create some competition, animosity, or jealousy among one another. I am wondering if you have observed unique issues relating to urban elections.

Ms. DUGAN. Thank you for the opportunity. It is a very new thing and it is being done very differently in a lot of different places. In Liuzhou, where we had a chance to observe, one of the elections had many different work units represented in the voting constituency, in another one, only one.

The interesting thing to my mind about these urban elections is that, though the voting populations are much larger, 2,000 in one of these cases, 4,000 in another, these are, as a general rule, much larger than you would find in a rural village election. But you are also dealing with a much more concentrated geographical area.

As a result of these two variables, one thing that occurs to me—which is anathema to Chinese in our experience—is that campaigning, telling voters what it is that you intend to do for them and letting them understand how to make their choice on election day, becomes much more important. In a village of 300 or 400 people, all right, I will give it to you, those villagers know who the candidates are. They know what they stand for. This is like just one big neighborhood.

In these residence committees, or what they represent, you are talking about more people that are not going to know every candidate. It becomes impossible for a candidate to be known by that many people without taking the effort to reach them somehow. So, that becomes a very important element.

I think that no longer does the sense of having an election meeting actually work in the villages for everybody to come and congregate, and there is a place for them to sit, there is enough room for them. You cannot do that with the urban areas. There is not a place large enough to hold the entire voting population.

So, polling stations become another sort of important element that needs to be included as they begin to put down these regulations that will guide the fashion in which these elections are administered. Those are a couple of things I might offer.

Mr. TUCHOW. Have some of these urban elections taken place in the biggest cities, like Shanghai and Beijing?

Ms. DUGAN. They have, but not in the same way that they are being experimented with in places like Shenyang, which I speak about in my more formal presentation, and in Qingdao. Guangxi is the first province to really take it on as, we are going to do this province-wide. But I do not answer your question. I apologize.

In Beijing, they do have, in a fashion, an election for these neighborhood committees, but it is not a direct election as we have come to know it. It is certainly not being mirrored in these exercises, this experimentation that is taking place.

Would you agree, Yawei?

Mr. LIU. Yes. The Ministry of Civil Affairs is also in charge of urban elections and they are about to revise the law, called the Organic Law of Urban Residence Committees.

I think the officials in Beijing and officials in provinces are divided on what is going to be the focus of this law that is going to be revised, whether it is going to focus more on electoral procedures or it is going to focus more on service to be delivered to these urban residence committees.

The voters are different, as Liz mentioned earlier. They all belong to a work unit, but at the same time, they have to return home. All their services used to be provided by the work unit, so they do not have this tie with this urban committee.

So the officials, I think, argue very heatedly as to the core of this law that is going to be revised, whether the focus is going to be on elections or trying to organize these committees in such a way that services to women, to old people, to children, to the sanitation issues can be delivered as soon as possible and in a money-saving way.

Ms. THURSTON. May I add? I stopped by a year ago just sort of unannounced to a residence committee in Beijing and talked with a woman there, and she actually was a laid-off worker. She was in her early 40s. She had lost her job. She was then being trained by the City of Beijing in a sort of service capacity. After that, she expected to be elected to this position. So, it is an evolving thing, obviously.

But at least my experience in Beijing was that there are a lot of new issues being faced by these neighborhoods and that some of these committees are being set up to serve people as they face some of their problems.

Mr. WOLF. Well, we have had you here for 2 hours. We appreciate you giving us your time and your insights. I think all of us learned a lot. And it is useful for our Commissioners as they put together their annual report. So, thank you all.

[Whereupon, at 4:32 p.m. the roundtable was concluded.]

# APPENDIX

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## PREPARED STATEMENTS

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ANNE F. THURSTON

JULY 8, 2002

I want to thank my friends and colleagues on the staff of the Congressional-Executive China Commission for the opportunity to be here today and to share with you some of my experiences with village elections in China.

I have been observing village elections in China since 1994 and have both spoken and written about my observations over the years.<sup>1</sup> Since my two fellow panelists and colleagues, Elizabeth Dugan and Liu Yawei, each direct active, on-the-ground programs related to village elections in China, I think my contribution to today's hearing can best be made by providing some historical background to how village elections came into being, by giving a very broad overview about what we know about how successful those elections have been, and by saying something about how significant these elections may be both to the rural people who participate in them and to the possible evolution of the Chinese political system. I should also point out that I have traveled to China with both the International Republican Institute and the Carter Center as part of their ongoing efforts to monitor and advise on the electoral process at the village level. I have the utmost respect for the work of both these organizations.

Let me begin by saying something about how village elections came to be introduced in China. The process traces to the demise of the people's communes, the collective system of agriculture, that began in the late 1970s and was complete by the early 1980s. Most people who study rural China now probably agree that the dissolution of collective farming was the result of both top down and bottom up efforts. In the greatly liberalized political atmosphere that followed the death of Mao Zedong and the rise to power of Deng Xiaoping, it was Chinese farmers in areas that had suffered greatly from Maoist rule who first began disbanding their collective farms. In a matter of years, all of the Chinese countryside had followed their example.

In the initial few years after collective farms had been disbanded, only the fruits of decollectivization seemed apparent. Agricultural production shot up. So, too, did the incomes of most of China's farmers.

After a few years, however, some of the unintended and less beneficial consequences of decollectivization began to be evident. First, the earlier increases in agricultural production began to level off. Second, and more important from Beijing's perspective, villages began to face serious problems of leadership. Those problems were basically of two kinds. In some villages, previous village leaders were able to take advantage of the new economic opportunities afforded by decollectivization and left their positions of leadership for other, more lucrative pursuits. Villages were thus left with a vacuum of leadership. This vacuum in turn often resulted in a breakdown of social order—the rise of banditry and lawlessness, and an increase in violence, for instance. In other cases, villages came under control of what the Chinese often call local emperors—strong men capable of exploiting and bullying and generally making life miserable for ordinary people within their control.

Both Chinese who were early advocates of village elections and Western scholars who have studied the period agree that by the mid-to late 1980s, rural China was in a State of potential crisis. Above all, the Chinese Communist Party was worried about the potential for instability and chaos in rural areas. Anyone who has studied China for any length of time soon learns how greatly both the Chinese leadership and the Chinese people fear chaos and thus how important stability is to virtually everyone in China.

There was at the outset considerable disagreement within the Chinese leadership about how to counter this growing instability. Some people naturally wanted a strengthening of party leadership within the village and a tightening of top down controls. These people, aside from being fundamentally anti-democratic, were afraid that without tightened party controls, enforcing such not-very-popular policies as family planning and grain procurement might be impossible to implement. Others, however, including some of China's senior revolutionary leaders who were generally

<sup>1</sup>See, for instance, *Muddling Toward Democracy: Political Change in Grass Roots China* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1998); and with Amy Epstein Gadsden, *Village Elections in China: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Washington, DC: International Republican Institute, 2000)

considered quite conservative, suggested that the best way to restore order was to institute village elections. The faction who favored elections seemed genuinely afraid that without the institution of elections, China's peasants might revolt. By instituting popular elections, they reasoned, village leadership would at least fall to more popular and respected members of the village community. Moreover, if those elected were not party members, perhaps they could be recruited to the party, thus infusing the party at the local levels with a new respect.

Thus, the debate surrounding the issue was not about the "good" of democracy as an ideal but rather whether elections would promote or impede chaos. In the end, those who argued that elections would promote stability won the first round. In 1987, the National People's Congress passed the Organic Law on Village Elections which promoted village elections on an experimental basis. Elections were not mandatory under the new law. They were simply encouraged. Nor were the instructions and regulations as to implementation very well spelled out. The Ministry of Civil Affairs in Beijing was responsible for overseeing overall implementation, but it could only provide guidance and direction. Each province was responsible for coming up with its own concrete regulations.

Implementation of these guidelines was, not surprisingly, stalled after June 4, 1989, when the army moved into Beijing to quash the peaceful protests that had been going on for weeks. But efforts to implement village elections were revived in the early 1990s. By 1998, these experiments had been going on long enough and with sufficient success that they were mandated into law. Since 1998, all villages in China have been required by law to hold competitive elections. At that time, the guidelines for village elections were also more thoroughly spelled out. Most of these measures move village elections further along the democratic spectrum. Candidates must be chosen by the villagers themselves—not, for instance, by either the party or higher level township officials. Secret ballots are required. And the number of candidates must exceed the number of positions to be chosen. On the other hand, the leading role of the party has also been firmly reasserted.

One of the great frustrations of anyone trying to make sense of these village elections is that we simply do not know how widespread they are—how well and how universally they have actually been implemented. Nor, it must be pointed out, do we have any real idea how widespread the protests and occasional violence that we still hear about in the Chinese countryside is. There are some 930,000 villages in China. Some 900 million people live in them. The number of villages visited by foreigners is painfully limited. I hesitate to hazard a guess, but surely the number could not be more than several hundred.

My own experience has also been limited. I have nonetheless seen a broad spectrum of types of village leadership and ways of selecting village leaders:

First, the local emperors who came to power with the collapse of the communes still exist in some places. Usually they are able to exert control because they are also very rich, are in control of much of a village's resources, and are able to influence higher levels in the government and party hierarchies.

Second, many villages continue to exist in a vacuum of leadership. When, for instance, I have had the opportunity to visit Chinese villages with friends rather than through official sponsorship, it seems I invariably happen upon villages which are suffering crises of leadership, villages where elections, if they have been held at all are only pro forma, and the village leader is generally weak and ineffectual.

Third, I have seen cases, too, where the local emperors are actually elected, ostensibly democratically. These are instances, for instance, where the second candidate seems to have been put there only for the sake of complying with election regulations and where the village chief who is running for re-election also controls a major portion of the village resources, some of the profits of which he may distribute to villagers, perhaps because he is magnanimous but also as a way of insuring his re-election.

Finally, and most important, I have also seen elections that by any measure anywhere in the world would be recognized as genuinely competitive, fair, and democratic. I should also say that I have seen such elections while accompanying both the IRI and the Carter Center.

If I could generalize about the most successful elections I have seen, I would say first, that the issues confronting the electorate and addressed by the candidates were (not surprisingly) local, practical, and economic. The voters behaved the way democratic theory says they should have behaved: they voted in their own self interest. They wanted very simple things. They wanted stones placed under their dirt roads so they could still be navigated in the rain. Better yet, they wanted a paved road that could take them quickly to market. They wanted cheaper prices for plastic sheeting so they could build greenhouses to grow crops in the winter. They wanted better ties with the county seat so they could get more licenses to market their

produce there. They wanted better schools and educational opportunities for their children. They wanted fewer taxes and fees. And they wanted their leaders to be people who could make those things happen.

Most of the people I have seen being elected have been younger, entrepreneurial, better educated, and richer than the older generation of collective leaders. Whether these new leaders were members of the communist party or not seemed not to be an issue with the voters, though most often in my experience the new leaders were members of the party—simply because communist party members generally have more connections with higher levels and thus more ability to make things happen at the village level. We do not really know what percentage of village chiefs are also party members, but the figure is high—perhaps as high as 80 percent nationwide, though in some places it is lower—only 60 percent, I have been told. Remember that the party is also using village elections as a tool for recruiting popular new members.

It is hard to say why some elections are successful and others not. The key, from my own experience, is leadership. In order for elections to be successful, you need commitment at every step of the political ladder, from the top, which is the Ministry of Civil Affairs, to the province, to the township, to the village, right down the political chain. I would also say that elections are a learning process. With good leadership and experience, they get better over time.

One of the most important things I have learned observing village elections over the years is that the technical details of how to organize an election are by no means intuitively obvious. Election officials have to be properly trained. The details of election procedures must be taught, supervised and learned. Here I would again commend both the IRI and the Carter Center for the work they have done both training officials at several levels of the election hierarchy and in directly monitoring elections, which gives them an opportunity to make recommendations for improvement.

What difference do these elections make? Certainly they are a major advance over higher-level appointments of village leaders, election by acclamation and non-competitive elections. They present rural people with choices they did not have before, give them a voice in the selection of their leaders, and provide a sense of political participation, community, and empowerment. Moreover, there is some evidence, though we certainly need more research, that governance in such villages has improved, finances have become more transparent, and corruption has declined. Above all, by giving rural people the experience of electing their local leaders, elections at the village level are putting in place the mechanisms for elections of higher level officials.

And that is the final question. Can we expect elections at the village level to begin working their way up—to the township, the county, the province, and eventually the national level? This is how Taiwan began its long-term process of democratization, starting with the grass roots, at the village level, and working gradually upward. This, of course, is also the hope of many reformers in China and certainly the hope of champions of Chinese democracy in the United States and other parts of the world.

But there is nearly universal agreement, both in China and among Western academics, that reforms of this type will have to be instituted from above, from China's top leadership. China's current leadership has been decidedly conflicted about the issue of democratization. Jiang Zemin on the one hand has called for socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics and on the other warned against the possibility of chaos were China to introduce Western-style parliamentary democracy.<sup>2</sup> And as we all know, China is currently in the process of a major leadership change, and there is increasing nervousness in China as the time for those changes to begin approaches. In recent days, we have begun hearing about Jiang Zemin's growing reluctance to give up some of his posts. This is not a time for political innovation in China—nor can we expect much political reform in the early months and possible years after the leadership transition is in place. Full-blown democracy is not likely to come soon to China.

<sup>2</sup>Compare, for instance, the following two statements: Without democracy there can be no modernization. We will ensure that our people hold democratic elections, make policy decisions democratically, carry out democratic management and supervision, and enjoy extensive rights and freedoms under the law. The overall goal of our political restructuring is to build socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics while upholding and improving our basic political system. (Jiang Zemin, October 30, 1997); and Should China apply the parliamentary democracy of the Western world, the only result will be that 1.2 billion Chinese people will not have enough food to eat. The result will be great chaos, and should that happen, it will not be conducive to world peace and stability. (Jiang Zemin, August 8, 2000)



Having said that, I nonetheless hear more sentiment in favor of democracy in China today than ever in the 24 years I have been visiting there. Among China's intellectuals in particular, there is a general understanding that democratization in the long term is both necessary and inevitable. The question is—and it is a very big question—how to proceed along a more democratic path without risking the chaos and instability that everyone in China fears. No one seems to have an answer to that question, but many believe that democratization is tied to China's continued economic development and to the spread of economic benefits from urban to rural China and from the coast to inland areas. In the meantime, however, the Chinese government's continuing commitment to village elections offers us in the United States a rare opportunity to cooperate with China in a very positive way in their long-term, albeit uncertain, political evolution.

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#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF YAWEI LIU

JULY 8, 2002

Thank you for inviting me to speak about China's village elections and The Carter Center's efforts to provide advice and assistance in improving the quality of these elections since 1997. In my statement I will briefly talk about three issues:

1. The current status of China's villager committee elections;
  2. The impact of direct village elections on other forms of elections in China;
- and
3. The Carter Center's growing involvement in China's slow but firm quest for greater choice and accountability.

#### THE STATUS OF CHINA'S VILLAGER COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

Following the collapse of the people's commune, the Chinese countryside slid into anarchy, instability and chaos. The peasants first began experimenting with various forms of self-government in the early 1980s. These creative initiatives were soon seized by the central government in order to maintain social stability and raise revenue. After tenacious battle led by a few reform-minded political leaders, the self-governing procedures were written into a law that could only be passed by China's National People's Congress on a provisional basis in 1987.

It took another decade before the Organic Law on the Villager Committees were implemented in earnest and finally revised in 1998 to include universally recognized procedures that guarantee electoral openness, fairness and competitiveness. For the first time, all administrative villages in China, totaling about 730,000, have to conduct direct elections every 3 years. For the first time, local Party committees cannot openly intervene in the nomination phase. For the first time, more and more elected village chairs begin to challenge the Party's control in the villages. For the first time, more villagers complain to the officials at higher levels of government about violations of the Organic Law than anything else.

The relatively objective official and academic verdict of this enormous preliminary exercise of democracy is as follows:

1. It has provided a safety valve to the hundreds of millions of Chinese peasants who are angry and confused as their life is often subject to constant exploitation and pressure;
2. It has introduced legal procedures of elections into a culture that has never entertained open and free elections; and
3. It has cultivated a new value system, a much-needed sense of political ownership and rights awareness among the Chinese peasants that do not have any leverage in bargaining with the heavy-handed government.

The popularity of these elections, the penetration of the rights awareness among the peasants and the urban dwellers, the loss of influence and power on the part of the officials at the township/town level, the fear that these elections will eventually dislodge the embattled Party apparatus from the villages have triggered a backlash that is so severe and ferocious that it may render these elections into a hollow and meaningless practice.

The assault seems to have come from two sectors, political and academic. While the motivation for the political attacks is easy to apprehend, the charges are lethal

in the Chinese political discourse. There is systematic and almost conspiratorial effort to label village elections as a source of evil forces that is (1) undermining the Party's leadership in the rural areas, (2) affecting rural stability, (3) turning the rural economy upside down, and (4) helping clan and other old forms of power and control to grow in the countryside.

The scholars' criticism might be well intentioned but equally detrimental. They tend to argue that village elections are government imposed, that they have unexpectedly destroyed traditional rural fabrics of self-government, that what Chinese peasants really need are farmers' alliances and free disposal of their land, and that no country has ever seen any meaningful democracy taking roots from the bottom up.

Thousands of Chinese officials are still fighting very hard to keep this small opening of political reform alive. They are becoming a bit pessimistic but never hopeless. After all, in the current climate of the rule of law in China, it takes the National People's Congress to repeal the Organic Law in order to abolish these elections. As of now, all eyes are trained on the upcoming 16th Party Congress whose endorsement of grassroots democracy will be another clarion call for bolder and more expansive forms of popular choice.

#### THE IMPACT OF CHINA'S DIRECT VILLAGE ELECTIONS

One could hardly exaggerate the impact of direct village elections. Yes, these elections are conducted only at the self-governing social and political units. Yes, the right to cast ballot to directly choose their immediate leaders is only exercised by the most stubborn, conservative and backward group of the people in China. Yes, the much powerful government can still render the popularly elected leaders powerless and turn them into governmental servants.

However, it is going to be very hard to take away a right that has been denied to any particular group before. A Chinese scholar recently commented, "True, Chinese peasants are not terribly enthusiastic about exercising their right to cast ballot nowadays. But, if one wants to take that right away, the situation will be rather explosive.

Furthermore, over the past 14 years, direct village elections and villager self-government have been gradually accepted as a valuable alternative to the otherwise arcane and opaque manners of selecting government leaders and people's deputies. For example, in many villages, the candidates for the Party branch positions are required to receive a direct popularity test. A low approval voting will disqualify the candidates from running for the Party positions. Many provinces have adopted this so-called two-ballot system.

In 1998 and 1999, during the last round of township/town people's Congress deputy elections, new experiments of selecting township government leaders appeared in no less than three provinces, including an unprecedented direct election of a township magistrate in Buyun, Sichuan Province. Although these experiments were either declared unconstitutional or unsuitable to be implemented, they created a sense of hope and urgency. Many officials were preparing to introduce new procedures to expand the nomination process and make determination of formal candidates competitive and transparent.

The anticipated boom of political experiments did not take place due to a Party circular which declared,

"In the past, a few areas proposed to experiment with the direct election of township/town magistrates and in a few isolated places there were direct elections of township/town magistrates by all the voters. This violates the relevant articles of the Constitution and the Organic Law of Local Governments. During this round of election of township/town level people's Congress deputies, the election of township/town magistrates must be conducted strictly in accordance with the stipulation of the Constitution and other laws."

Despite this, on the last day of December 2001, Buyun went ahead again with its own "direct" election of a township magistrate. One province in China introduced public elections of magistrates in 45 percent of its 5,000 some townships/towns by June 2002. More locales are going to use this so-called public election method to choose township/town leaders. It is said that one county in Sichuan used the same measure in picking a county magistrate. A scholar boldly predicted recently that one measure to be adopted by the Party's 16th Congress would be the direct election of Party leaders at the grassroots level. All these progresses are being made in the context of direct village elections.

Finally, no matter how democratic China is going to become and what forms of electoral system China is going to adopt, voter education, voter registration, nomination and determination of candidates, the use of secret ballot booths, the applica-

tion of the proxies and roving ballot boxes are all going to be great problems and logistic nightmares that could lead to potential political violence and instability. But the practice of direct village elections involves close to 600 million out of the 900 million Chinese voters. They have already experienced these procedures and are getting more and more familiar with the standardized procedures. This is indeed a democracy seminar promised by Peng Zhen, China's leading advocate of direct village democracy. This will become the single most valuable asset in China's quest for democracy.

Which way to go from here? No one has a definitive answer. The flurry of experiments of the selection of township/town magistrates in 1998 and 1999 were carried out under Jiang Zemin's call for promoting grassroots democracy at the 15th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. The following is what he said,

"The most expansive practice of socialist democracy lies in increasing the basic-level democracy and guaranteeing the people's rights to engage in direct democracy, to manage their own affairs according to the rule of the law and to pursue their happiness. All basic-level governments and popular organizations of self-governance in the cities and the countryside should perfect the democratic electoral system, practice political and fiscal transparency, allow the broad masses to debate and determine matters of public concern and interests and conduct democratic supervision of government officials."

It is only logic to go down this road if the so-called "three represents" are implemented according to its true essence. If Jiang is determined to write the "three represents" into the Party's Charter, there is little doubt that China will back away from the small steps it has taken toward greater political reform. Nonetheless, any expansion of direct democracy is going to be extremely difficult since it will deprive the power and influence of those who are using the current cadre selection system to augment their own selfish pursuit.

#### THE CARTER CENTER'S CHINA VILLAGE ELECTIONS PROJECT

The Carter Center initiated the China Village Elections project in 1997 during President Carter's visit to China in 1997. After a successful pilot phase, a 3-year agreement of cooperation was signed with the national Ministry of Civil Affairs in March 1999. This agreement allows the Center to work primarily in four Chinese provinces to install computers and software to collect village election data, to conduct training of election officials and elected villager committee members in any province in China, to observe village elections everywhere, to help conduct civic education, and to invite Chinese election officials to observe US elections and elections that are monitored by The Carter Center in other parts of the world. In September 2001, President Carter observed a village election in Zhouzhuang, Jiangsu and opened an international conference on village elections in Beijing attended by over 150 Chinese and international scholars, NGO workers and officials.

In addition to working with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Center also works with the National People's Congress that, besides making and amending laws, supervises all elections above the village level. In 1999, the Center was invited to observe a township election in Chongqing. Recently, a team from the Center has worked together with a political reform study group from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the National People's Congress participated in the work of conducting several township election pilots, reviewing the problems of township and county people's Congress deputy elections and offering suggestions to the possible revision of China's Election Law and the Organic Law of Local Governments, the two paramount laws whose amendment will fundamentally change the procedures of all direct and indirect elections in China.

The Center has provided substantial assistance in printing the National Procedures on Villager Committee Elections, the waterproof copy of the Organic Law on the Villager Committees, the electoral procedure posters, and a total of nine research and work experience books on rural elections and governance. The Center is supporting the maintenance of the most informative website on China's villager self-government and grassroots democracy and will soon launch another Chinese/English website on Chinese elections and governance.

The Center has been coordinating its work in China with other American organizations such as the IRI, the Ford Foundation and the NDI. It has also shared its working experience with government agencies and NGOs from Canada, Great Britain, Spain and other Western countries. It has been in direct communication with the UNDP whose village elections related project was completed in December 2001 and with European Commission whose ambitious rural governance training program begins in August 2002.

China is a significant Nation whose international responsibility, domestic stability and economic prosperity will directly impact the Asia-Pacific region and the world. All these things desired by her own people and the people of her close and distant neighbors cannot be sustained without an open and transparent political system through which the government derives its legitimacy, the people hold their leaders accountable, and the global community conduct its relationship in a reliable manner. No single or group of nations can initiate this most important sea change in China. China will have to do it by herself. However, the involvement of Western governments and NGO's in sowing the seeds of reform, sustaining the change and consolidating the gains is indispensable. Imposing Western values on China without considering China's unique circumstances is counterproductive. Ignoring China altogether in its cautious and sometimes confusing quest for greater democratization, choice and accountability is outright erroneous. Working outside China is helpful. Providing assistance inside China is safer and all the more effective.

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PREPARED STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH DUGAN

JULY 8, 2002

IRI in China The International Republican Institute has conducted programs to encourage legislative, legal and electoral reform in China since 1993. Institute delegations have observed more than 50 local elections for rural village committees in China since 1994, and IRI was the first international organization to do so. In 1995, IRI began to sponsor workshops for election officials to discuss the Ministry of Civil Affairs' regulations for conducting elections and new guidelines for training materials, emphasizing the importance of secret ballots, multi-candidate elections and transparent vote tabulation. The Institute has supported these kinds of programs in Fujian, Guangxi, Hainan, Hebei, Henan, Shanxi, Sichuan, Jilin, Liaoning and Yunnan provinces.

In 1997, IRI began working directly in several provinces to train newly elected village committee leaders, and subsequently assisted provincial officials with the drafting of implementing methods and regulations for the 1998 NPC law governing village committee elections. Additionally, IRI has worked to provide information and support training for election monitors in 1996, 2000 and 2002. Since 2000, IRI has held regional networking conferences for provincial officials from several provinces, and in 2001 IRI began training Chinese election officials in effective campaigning techniques.

IRI now also claims the distinction of being the first international organization to observe urban community elections after a staff delegation visited the industrial city of Liuzhou, located in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of China in May 2002. Due to the strong commitment of local leaders to the principles of accountability, transparency and the rule of law, urban elections in Guangxi are considered to be among the most advanced and democratic in China.

WHAT ARE URBAN ELECTIONS IN CHINA?

Urban community elections have been occurring on an experimental basis in China since 1999. In that year, 12 pilot cities were allowed to hold elections for positions on urban residence committees, the lowest level of State power in Chinese cities. In some cities, a number of residents committees have been combined into what are called "urban community committees" and elections are held for positions in the bodies. The law governing urban elections was first passed in 1989 and was patterned on the experimental village committee law of 1987.

For most of the history of the People's Republic of China, residence committee leaders were appointed by the municipal Party apparatus, and the primary organizing unit in most large Chinese cities was the work unit, or danwei, which provided the cradle-to-grave social services known collectively as the "iron rice bowl." Although urban residents committees existed, positions on those committees were primarily held by elderly, often barely literate women, and functions of the committees were limited to menial neighborhood tasks and snooping into urban citizens' private lives.

China's cities have been undergoing massive social and economic change in recent years. With more and more state-owned enterprise failures and increasing unemployment, work units have become less important and less effective in many cities. Simultaneously, the influx of migrant workers into urban areas has dramatically altered the urban landscape. Crime has increased as have street protests and labor unrest. Residents committees as they were formerly conceived and structured no longer meet the needs of China's city dwellers.

## WHAT IS THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT'S INTEREST IN ALLOWING URBAN ELECTIONS?

In the interest of modernization and social stability (the same rationale first used to permit village elections more than 10 years ago), the Chinese government decided to permit elections for urban residents committees on an experimental basis. It is worth noting that in the absence of detailed central government directives on urban elections, local officials have a great deal of autonomy in designing and implementing them, and there is a lot of variety. Myriad types of urban elections are now occurring in approximately 26 urban areas across the country. The hope is that younger, more qualified individuals will run for positions on the committees, and that elections will make these residents committees more accountable to urban citizens.

One example is Shenyang, capital of Liaoning Province in northeastern China's rustbelt, with widespread unemployment and increasing labor unrest and crime as well as corruption among the political elite. The municipal government there was supposed to pay SOE workers a bonus in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Communist revolution, but was unable to do so, prompting large street demonstrations. In response, the mayor of Shenyang made three trips to Beijing in 1999 to petition the Ministry of Civil Affairs to include Shenyang on the list of cities allowed to conduct urban community elections on an experimental basis. Permission was eventually given. In Shenyang's Heping District 363 neighborhood committees were merged into 144 communities and elections for positions on the community committees have been held. Shenyang has a system of indirect democracy, in which candidates (one more than the number of positions on the committee) are selected by an election committee made up of officials from the district government. Not everyone is permitted to vote in community elections; housing complexes within the communities elect representatives, and those representatives elect the members of the community committee. Though it is far from a perfect system of direct democracy, it nonetheless gives residents more of a voice in their local government than they have ever had in the past.

## HOW DEMOCRATIC ARE CHINA'S URBAN ELECTIONS?

As is the case with village elections, the degree to which urban elections can be considered democratic varies widely by region. In some cities, elections for community committees are indirect and the process is deeply flawed and far from "one person, one vote." Instead, lists of candidates are prepared by an election committee controlled by the municipal government, and elected representatives from residents committees then vote on those candidates. It's important to keep in mind, however, that even the very limited franchise described above represents a quantum leap forward from previous periods, when residents committee members were chosen exclusively by the municipal government and Party branches.

In other cities, the nomination process is much more open, and elections are direct, using secret ballots and generally following the procedures guided by the Village Committee Organic Law. Urban elections tend to be less democratic and less prevalent in cities where the danwei structure is still firmly entrenched. In those cities, it is difficult for citizens to see any direct connection between residents committees and their own interests; the community committee doesn't control any benefits that people value, so they do not value the community committee. Elections tend to be more democratic in rustbelt cities like Shenyang, where many SOEs have gone under and unemployment rates are high. Urban elections also tend to be more developed in medium-sized cities, like Liuzhou (Guangxi Autonomous Region) than in major metropolises, although the reasons for this are not entirely clear.

## VILLAGE ELECTIONS AND URBAN ELECTIONS: WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIZATION IN CHINA?

It may be obvious that the ruling party in a one-party State isn't apt to do things that it doesn't believe are in its own interests. For that reason, many have argued that village elections are controlled by the Party and little more than window dressing. But the fact remains that elections have now been held in most Chinese villages, and peasants have found themselves empowered to organize, criticize authorities and in some cases even dismiss corrupt or incompetent leaders. Local elections and the right to freely nominate candidates are becoming increasingly institutionalized, and Chinese villagers are more and more familiar with their rights under the law and are willing to defend those rights by protesting, submitting petitions and going to court. Since their inception, rural elections have often had unintended consequences: As Chinese peasants have become accustomed to choosing their own leaders, they have often become less susceptible to party control and more

willing to defend their rights to autonomy and self-governance. It is likely that urban elections will have some of the same effects as they mature and spread. In rural China, the Party's attempts to reassert control by installing Party chiefs as village committee heads and Party branch and township government attempts to interfere and encroach upon village government affairs have been resisted by villagers, although not always successfully.

Beyond just minimizing the importance of village elections in themselves, for years critics have claimed that their implications for larger political change in China were negligible. But now urban communities are holding elections using laws that are based on and almost identical to the Village Committee Organic Law. Direct popular elections with such procedures as open nominations, secret ballots, more candidates than posts, and open vote tallying now exist not only in rural villages, but in urban areas as well, and this is a significant step forward.

Like village committees, urban residents committees are not officially part of the State structure and thus they lack formal coercive power. However, they do provide many services that are important to residents. The social and political surveillance functions of the committees have greatly declined in importance as the State has retreated from micro-managing private life. Functions of the communities now include elderly care, job retraining, day care for children, sanitation, dispute resolution, literacy classes, landscaping and environmental improvements, and public safety and security, and may also include managing local neighborhood enterprises.

Some residents and community committees also lobby the district or municipal government on behalf of residents. For example, in one community the committee lobbied the municipal government to force the police to shut down a noisy karaoke bar in the area; in others, residents committees have compelled property management companies to undertake repairs, or pressured the district or municipal governments for street lighting and pollution abatement. Additionally, the committees offer legal education and services, discussing new laws passed down from higher levels, and also provide advice about citizens' rights under the law and how to file a lawsuit, as well as daily life services such as beauty parlors, home repair and takeout food. Some committees have telephone hotlines so residents can call in and report problems, and some conduct surveys to see how satisfied residents are with the performance of the committee.

#### WHY IS IRI IS INTERESTED IN CHINESE URBAN ELECTIONS?

IRI's commitment to supporting both village and urban elections is grounded in the same rationale: These elections provide a democratic training ground and hold local leaders accountable to their constituents. It is also our belief that elected leaders will use their popular mandate to enact policies that will be beneficial to the citizens who elected them.

It is IRI's intent and plan near-term to provide training in the Guangxi Autonomous Region to those responsible for administering urban elections in the province, enabling them to have a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms and the rationale of transparent elections. We are also prepared to conduct programs for newly elected residents committee chairmen, with an eye toward providing them with tools and techniques to perform their duties in a responsive and responsible way.

In our longstanding work with elections in China, IRI has been most deeply impressed with the willingness and eagerness of local and provincial officials to root systems of direct elections. Guangxi was no exception. There, as elsewhere, we have cultivated relationships with officials who are dedicated to reform. We concede that China doesn't have a strong historical tradition of democracy, and a democratic political culture has to be built from scratch. But organizations like IRI can—and will—help with that task.

As the Chinese are trying to institutionalize the rule of law for their own reasons, we see a close relationship between the rule of law and the development of a Chinese public that understands their own rights and responsibilities as citizens of a modern state, including participating in free and fair elections, the significance of self-governance, transparency and accountability and the mechanisms to enforce compliance on the agents of the state. All of these things are crucial building blocks for democracy at higher levels. Democracy may not come to China as quickly as we would like, but when it does, an important part of the pressure for change will come from the grassroots level.