

A Survey Study of Voting Behavior and Political Participation in Zhejiang

BAOGANG HE¹

School of Politics and International Studies, Deakin University, Australia

Abstract

Two existing models are used to conceptualize the constrained and limited participation in the communist system. The mobilization model suggests that participation was so mobilized by the party/state that it was largely meaningless, while the disengagement model supports the idea that many communist citizens adopted non-participatory behaviors such as non-voting as a means of protest. This paper attempts to demonstrate the importance of a third model – the emergent democratic culture model. The survey results show that the participation index is in proportion to the number of elections in which a villager is involved; and a growing number of voters in Zhejiang are developing citizen-initiated participation, with rights consciousness.

This research finds that the level of participation is influenced by three major factors: the perceived worth of the election itself, regularity of electoral procedures, and the fairness of electoral procedures. It also finds that parochial political culture and political apathy still exist, and the emergent democratic consciousness falls short of an ideal democratic standard. While a highly democratic culture helps to develop village democracy, the apathetic attitude continues to support the authoritarian leadership and structure in many villages. The paper also gives an account of survey research in rural China and offers a thoughtful critique of the use of voting and non-voting as the sole indicator of political participation.

Two existing models are used to conceptualize the constrained and limited participation in the communist system. The mobilization model suggests that participation was so mobilized by the party/state that it was largely meaningless, while the disengagement model supports the idea that many communist citizens adopted non-participatory behaviors such as non-voting as a means of protest. While Tianjian Shi's study finds

¹ Baogang He is Professor in International Studies, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. The author would like to thank four anonymous referees for their very useful comments and criticism.

the inadequacy and limitations of the mobilization model,² Yang Zhong and Jie Chen suggest that villager participation in elections in Jiangsu fits the disengagement model. Although both the mobilization and disengagement models hold some degree of validity in some limited cases, they are not totally explanatory of the situation in China, where what Kent Jennings calls ‘autonomous’ participation is emerging. This paper attempts to demonstrate the importance of a third model – the emergent democratic culture model; that is, a growing number of voters in Zhejiang are developing citizen-initiated participation, with rights consciousness.

In order to demonstrate that there is some validity in using the emergent democratic culture model, we need to give an account of survey research in rural China and offer a thoughtful critique of the use of voting and non-voting as the sole indicators of political participation. Following the classical work of *The Civic Culture*,³ this paper will provide a number of tables detailing the general trend of voter behavior and political participation. This approach is different from that of some academic papers, which provide very sophisticated regression analysis to test an existing theory or hypothesis, but offer readers minimal insight into general trends. Such highly acclaimed and legitimate analysis nevertheless narrowly focuses on one or two issues, which can be likened to developing detailed knowledge of one specific tree without recognizing the forest.

This paper studies voter behavior and villager participation and makes a contribution to the literature on political participation in rural China in the following ways. First, it examines the advantages and disadvantages of the methodological strategies that have been used to study the political participation of villagers, and outlines my methodological strategy for measuring this participation. Second, it presents research findings on the political participation of villagers in Zhejiang, examines the participatory activities of villagers, and investigates the voting behavior and participation of villagers in the election process. Third, it considers the key determinants of political participation.

1. Survey

Sinologists have studied local political participation throughout the 1970s and 1980s.⁴ Since the 1990s, China’s specialists have utilized survey methods developed in modern social science in their studies of political participation. In his study of villager participant acts, Kent Jennings recognizes the emergence of a democratic culture at the local level and finds that the autonomous political participation of villagers is higher

² Tianjian Shi, *Political Participation in Beijing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 268–70.

³ Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

⁴ See James R. Townsend, *Political Participation in Communist China* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, Fourth Printing, 1972); Victor C. Falkenheim (ed.), *Citizens and Groups in Contemporary China* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1987); John Burns, *Political Participation in Rural China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

than commonly expected and that their actions are just as rational and strategic as their Western counterparts.⁵ David Zweig's (1999) survey confirms that villagers strongly support the 'democratic idea' in rural China.⁶ Yang Zhong and Jie Chen's study of non-voting behavior shows that villagers with higher levels of internal efficacy and democratic orientation tended to avoid village elections.⁷ This type of behavior can be interpreted as further evidence of the emergence of a participant culture. Nevertheless, others such as Guan and Liu find that Mainland Chinese political culture remains dominantly traditional and authoritarian.⁸ Based on three surveys carried out in 40 Chinese cities in 1988, 1991, and 1993, Torstein Hjellum was unable to reach a definitive conclusion on whether there is an emergent participant culture in China.⁹

Survey work on participation and village elections¹⁰ in China have been dominated by Western scholars or Western trained Chinese scholars (see Table 1).¹¹ The field sites of most surveys on village elections were village, township, county, city, or province.¹²

⁵ Kent Jennings, 'Political Participation in Chinese Countryside', *American Political Science Review*, 91 (2) (June 1997): 361–72.

⁶ David Zweig, 'Democratic Values, Political Structures, and Alternative Politics in Greater China', *United States Institute of Peace Peaceworks* (44) (July 2002).

⁷ Yang Zhong and Jie Chen, 'To Vote or Not to Vote: An Analysis of Villagers' Participation in Chinese Village Elections', *Comparative Political Studies*, 35 (6) (2002): 686–712; and Jie Chen and Yang Zhong, 'Why Do People Vote in Semi-competitive Elections in China?', *The Journal of Politics*, 64 (1) (February 2002): 178–97.

⁸ Kuan Hsin-chi and Lau Siu-kai, 'Traditional Orientations and Political Participation in Three Chinese Societies', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 11 (31) (May 2002): 297–318.

⁹ Torstein Hjellum, 'Is a Participant Culture Emerging in China', in Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard and David Strand (eds), *Reconstructing Twentieth-Century China: State Control, Civil Society, and National Identity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 216–50.

¹⁰ The focus of the paper is on political participation and vote behavior in village elections. As for the study of village elections, see Kevin O'Brien, 'Village Committees: Implementing Political Reform in China's Villages', *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* (32) (July 1994); Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, 'Accommodating "Democracy" in a One-Party State: Introducing Village Elections in China', *The China Quarterly*, 162 (June 2000): 465–89; Tianjian Shi, 'Village Committee Elections in China: Institutional Tactics for Democracy', *World Politics*, 51 (3) (April 1999): 384–412; Deniel Kelliher, 'The Chinese Debate over Village Self-Government', *The China Journal*, 37 (January 1997): 67–75; Baogang He, 'Village Elections, Village Power Structure and Rural Governance in Zhejiang', *American Asian Review*, 20 (3) (Fall, 2002): 55–89; Baogang He, 'Are Village Elections Competitive?', in Joseph Y. S. Cheng (ed.), *China's Challenges in the Twenty-First Century* (Hong Kong: The City University of Hong Kong Press, 2003), pp. 71–92; Baogang He, 'Kinship, Village Elections and Structural Conditions in Zhejiang', in Wang Gungwu and Zheng Yongnian (eds), *Damage Control: The Chinese Communist Party in the Jiang Zemin Era* (Singapore: Times Media Private Limited, 2003), pp. 142–72; Baogang He, 'Village Citizenship in China', *Citizenship Studies*, forthcoming 2005.

¹¹ As far as I know, the Chinese scholar Min Qi was the early pioneer in carrying out social survey on Chinese political culture. See Min Qi, *Zhongguo zhengzhi wenhua: minzhu zhengzhi nanchan de shehui xinli yinsu* [Chinese Political Culture: The Origins of Social-Psychological Difficulty in Democratic Politics] (Kunming: Yuanan renming chubanshe, 1989). Generally speaking, those who produced excellent writings on village elections such as Xu Yong tend to be skeptical of the results of most indigenous Chinese surveys due to the unprofessional survey workers, political control of the work, and cost constraints.

¹² The size of Chinese provinces is equal to or even bigger than a nation-state in Europe. Cross local-provincial surveys can be seen, therefore, as equivalent to a cross-national study. A study of the

Table 1. *Surveys on democratic culture and village elections*

	Kent Jennings	Jean Oi and Scott Rozelle	Baogang He and Youxing Lang	David Zweig
Year	1990	1996	1998	1999
Field site	4 counties	8 provinces	4 prefectures in Zhejiang	Aihui and Helongjiang
Survey organization	Beijing University	A team of social scientists in Beijing	Zhejiang University	Unspecified
Interviewees	Rural individual	Villager leaders	Villagers	Villagers
Survey worker	Well-trained advanced undergraduate and graduate students	Not specified	Well-trained advanced undergraduate and graduate students	Unspecified
Size	1,270	160 (?)	1,245	2,637
National or Local?	Local	National	Local	Local
Method	Face-to-face, approximately one hour one person	Unspecified	Face-to-face	Unspecified
Random method?	A combination of purposive and accidental/convenience, Selecting 4 out of 30 counties	Random	A combination of purposive and accidental/convenience, plus random sampling of individuals	Random
Main issues	Local government and political participation	Village elections, Village assemblies	Village elections	Cultural value and trust
	Liangjiang Li	John Kennedy	Yang Zhong and Jie Chen	Guo Zhenglin
Year	1999	2000	2000	2002
Field site	T county in Jiangxi	34 villages, Six counties in Shanxi	12 counties in Jiangsu	26 villages three areas in Guangdong
Survey organization	Universities and party school in Jiangxi	Northwest University, Xi'an	Anonymous research institute	Zhongshan University & Guangzhou Academy of Social Science
Interviewees	Villagers	Villagers	Villagers	Villagers
Survey worker	From universities and party school in Jiangxi	Twelve graduate students	Well-trained advanced undergraduate and graduate students	Undergraduate students
Size	400	408	1,162	1,852

Table 1. *Continued*

	Liangjiang Li	John Kennedy	Yang Zhong and Jie Chen	Guo Zhenglin
National or Local?	Local	Local	Local	Local
Method	Face-to-face	Face-to-face	Unspecified	Unspecified
Random method	Selection of township, Random sampling of villagers	Random	A multistage sampling procedure	Unspecified
Main issues	Village elections	Village elections	Village elections	Village elections

Sources: Jennings, 'Political Participation in Chinese Countryside'; Jean C. Oi, 'Economic Development, Stability and Democratic Village Self-Governance', in Maurice Brosseau, Suzanne Pepper, and Tsang Shu-ki (eds), *China Review 1996* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1996); Baogang He and Youxing Lang, *Between Democracy and Authority: An Empirical Study of Village Election in Zhejiang* (Wuhan: Central China Normal University Press, 2002); Zweig, 'Democratic Values'; Liangjian Li, 'The Empowering Effect of Village Elections in China', *Asian Survey*, 43 (4) (2003): 648–62; John James Kennedy, 'The Face of 'Grassroots Democracy' in Rural China', *Asian Survey*, 42 (3) (2002): 456–82; Zhong and Chen, 'To Vote or Not to Vote'; Guo Zhenglin, 'An Empirical Study of Political Participation in Rural China: An Analysis of Village Elections and their Effects in Guangdong', paper presented at the International Conference on Local Democracy and Local Governance, the National University of Singapore, Singapore, February 2003.

Because these surveys were of different sizes and were carried out at different times and in different localities with different questionnaires, it is not possible to compare them in any significant way.

It is difficult to carry out a higher quality social survey in China. The control mechanisms of the Chinese government restrict what social scientists can do in their survey design. Some questions concerning political opposition, for example, are sensitive and risky. Most social surveys are done through Chinese universities and cheaper undergraduate or graduate students are utilized. Foreign and/or Western trained Chinese scholars tend to use their own connections that facilitate survey work but bring inbuilt bias to the data. In addition, national surveys tend to interview individuals in big cities so as to reduce the cost, but as a result such surveys are systematically biased toward urban sensitivities.

Both control and cost considerations make it difficult to carry out the probability random sampling at the national level. Usually researchers first select a province, city, or even a township on the basis of purpose and convenience and then apply the probability random sampling method. Indeed, most surveys listed above are the probability sample

differences and similarities, and patterns of village elections in provinces is much more complex than any cross-national survey study.

of a local population but not of the larger population. They provide descriptive statistics for the selected localities. They do not have an inferential validity and may contain over/under-representation of specific types of individuals. As Melanie Manion sharply points out, 'Clearly a sample of Chinese interviewed in a locality or localities selected for convenience does not reliably represent a large population of interest.'¹³ Nevertheless, most surveys on village elections can be treated as case studies from which a great deal can be learned about the patterns, features, and trends of village democracy.

Social survey is a relatively new phenomenon in China. There are problems of questionnaire and response bias. Unprofessional behaviors do exist, including occasionally the filling in of the survey by field workers, or helping the interviewees to complete the survey. To deal with these problems, monitoring mechanisms including telephone checks or a revisiting interview should be in place. Initially in carrying out my survey in 1998, I encountered three main problems. First, student survey workers sometimes conducted their interviews while accompanied by village cadres, whose presence contributed to a tendency towards saying 'good' things. Second, a few villagers failed to understand the questions and thus gave invalid answers. Third, occasionally, husbands completed the questionnaires for their wives, brothers for sisters, or vice versa. Sometimes discussion took place when completing the questionnaires. Once these problems were identified, the student survey workers were instructed to overcome them by separating village cadres from the interviewee, or reading the questionnaire aloud for some interviewees if necessary, and by prohibiting the interviewee from filling the questionnaire for others.

2. Methodological considerations on the indicators of political participation

Measuring political participation is another difficult problem. Previous studies have used various measures to capture villager political participation. For example, Jennings studied three modes of 'autonomous' participation: cooperative action such as attending local party meetings and working with others in solving local problems; voicing opinions to cadres by writing letters to officials to offer opinions or suggestions; and contacting representatives. Similarly, Bai Gang examined the full range of participant acts, including electoral participation, decision-making, administration, and supervision. By contrast, Tianjian Shi used voting behavior as an indicator for participation and found that the people who tended to vote were the ones who had stronger internal efficacy and supported democratic values.¹⁴ Yang Zhong and Jie Chen confined their study to those who actually cast their vote at the central polling station.¹⁵

¹³ See M. Manion, 'Survey Research in the Study of Contemporary China: Learning from Local Samples', *The China Quarterly*, 139 (September 1994): 764.

¹⁴ Tianjian Shi, 'Vote and Nonvoting in China: Voting Behavior in Plebiscitary and Limited-Choice Elections', *The Journal of Politics*, 64 (4) (November 1999): 1115–39.

¹⁵ Zhong and Chen, 'To Vote or Not to Vote', p. 692.

The focus on voting or non-voting has a methodological advantage in the sense that we are able to employ a regression analysis to handle concrete statistical figures on voting behavior. Nevertheless, there are several methodological disadvantages. First, casting a vote is not necessarily a good indicator of political participation because many activities such as protest and participation in village representative assembly can and should be seen as forms of political participation. The focus on voting or non-voting excludes the study of other types of political participation, such as participation in village management and supervision, which are crucial but where we often lack statistical data. Second, by the late 1990s various mechanisms were being used to induce people to vote in village elections so turn-out rate was higher, and the question concerning non-voting was therefore meaningless in the area in which I conducted my survey. Third, non-voting can be interpreted, as it has been by Zhong and Chen, as a protest vote or a form of participation by which villagers resist unfair and manipulated elections. For example, in one village where problems such as corruption have shaken some villagers' faith in politics and in the party itself, the villagers refused to participate for fear that their participation would be seen as helping 'the bad guys'.¹⁶ Nevertheless, some forms of non-voting cannot be equated with participation and, indeed might be taken as a sign of disinterest in village elections (see section on apathy in village elections).

The voter turnout in Zhejiang village elections has been high. Take Huashe village in Shaoxing County as an example. It is a prosperous village, and in 1998 had a population of 1,796, six collective enterprises, assets of 16,720,000 yuan and an annual per capita income of 5,688 yuan. The voter turnout in the village has always been above 90 per cent. And, in 1989, 986 people went to the ballot box; 979 votes were cast and the same number was collected. There were 44 absentees, leaving a total of 935 people who actually cast their votes. In 1996, the population in that village was 1,762, 1,148 of who were eligible voters. All 1,148 voters cast their votes, yielding a 100 per cent voting rate. Of the 1,148 votes collected, 23 were invalid, leaving a total of 1,125 valid votes.¹⁷

Another village surveyed was Dongjia village in Lanqiao Township, Hangzhou. It had a population of 2,257, 1,523 of whom were engaged in agriculture. In 1996 the annual per capita income was 5,364 yuan, which was an above average figure. In the 1996 village election, there were 1,731 eligible voters. There was a voter turnout rate of 87.8 per cent, with 1,511 people casting their vote.¹⁸ In 1998, Huiping Township held elections in its eight villages. Of the 3,194 voters that made up the whole township, 3,080

¹⁶ Jing Yan, 'Cong huanjie xuanju kan xian jieduan nongmin zhengzhi canyu' ['Village Election and Current Political Participation of the Villagers'], MA Thesis (School of Political Science, Zhejiang University, 1998).

¹⁷ Cheng Haiyan, 'Shaoxingxian huashecun cunminweiyuanhui xuanju diaoca baogao' ['Studies on Village Election in Huashe Village, Shaoxing County'], Summer Study (School of Political Science, Zhejiang University, 1999).

¹⁸ Wang Zhenghua, 'Qianxi nongcun xuanju wenti de zhengjie 1996 nian dongjiacun cunweihui xuanju diaoca' ['Problems in Village Election: a Case Study of Dongjia Village Election in 1996'], Summer Study (School of Political Science, Zhejiang University, 1998).

(96.5 per cent) cast their votes. The first vote elected village committees in five of the eight villages, with the other three being elected in a second vote. In other words, all eight villages elected a committee.¹⁹ In the 1996 election, held in Nan-er village, votes were cast by 1,205 (96.5 per cent) of the 1,249 eligible voters.²⁰

In other parts of rural China, Lingfen municipality of Shanxi province had a voter turnout rate of 87.5 per cent and the rate in the 301 villages of its Hequ County was 86.4 per cent. In the 26 villages of Yangcheng Township, Wushe County, Henan Province, the rate was 95 per cent. The average provincial rate in Fujian was 97.3 per cent and, of the 875 villages in its Putian municipality, over half had a turnout rate of 100 per cent. Of the 302 villages in Xianyou County, 254 had a rate of 100 per cent.²¹ In Lishu County, Jilin Province, which was nationally renowned for its *haixuan* system (direct nomination), there was also a high voter turnout that reached 93.1 per cent in 1988, 94.3 per cent in 1991, 95.1 per cent in 1994, and 98 per cent in 1998.²²

Voter turnout is generally considered an important indicator of political participation. As Melanie Manion claims, 'vote turnout may indicate mass interest in elections, since villagers who remain uninterested are likely to vote'.²³ Indeed her conclusion about electoral connection relies on the 'unreliable and controversial' figure of high voter turnout. Does a high voter turnout necessarily correlate with a high level of political participation? Many factors, other than the genuine interest of villagers, can contribute to a high voting rate.

First, local governments take effective measures to ensure a high voter turnout. Local officials regard voter turnout as an indication not only of the voters' interest in politics, but also of their support for township governments. In Shangdong's Huantai, for instance, a village needs to achieve 1,000 points to become an official model village. This works by township leaders assigning a certain number of points for each step of the electoral process. A voter turnout rate of over 90 per cent is assigned 20 points.²⁴ In order to achieve this quota, government officials take pains to ensure a high voter turnout in all elections, sometimes organizing a second vote despite the additional financial burden and workload this might entail. Other measures aimed at increasing

¹⁹ Zhang Hong, 'Cong cunmin zizhi shijian fenxi huipingxian cunmin minzhu yishi zhengqiang de biaoqian ji yuanying' ['Village Autonomy: Manifestations and Causes of a Higher Sense of Rural Democracy among Villagers of Huiping Township'], Summer Study (School of Political Science, Zhejiang University, 1998).

²⁰ Xie Zhuofeng, 'Guanyu nongcun jichen xuanju de jidian sikao 1996 nian nanerchun cunweihui xuanju diaoca' ['Reflections on Village Election: A Case Study of Nan-er Village'], Summer Study (School of Political Science, Zhejiang University, 1998).

²¹ Bai Gang, 'Cunmin zizhi: Zhongguo nongmin de zhengzhi canyu' ['Village Autonomy: Political Participation of Chinese Villagers'], working paper (1 February, 1996), p. 10.

²² Zhang Jing, 'Lishuxian cunweihui huanjie xuanju guanca' ['Observations of Village Election in Lishu County'], *Ershiyi shiji (21st Century)*, 50 (Hong Kong) (December 1998): 145.

²³ Melanie Manion, 'The Electoral Connection in the Chinese Countryside', *The American Political Science Review*, 90 (4) (December 1996): 742.

²⁴ Weixing Chen, *The Political Economy of Rural Development in China, 1978–1999* (Westport: Praeger, 1999), p. 127.

the voter turnout include allowing a family to send a member to the ballot as its representative; creating a mobile ballot box to collect votes from door to door; and allowing proxy voting.²⁵

The second is an economic factor. Villagers often receive an allowance for their voting activity, as compensation for missing work. In Zhejiang Province, the sum varies from 2 to 60 yuan. In Wuyun it was normally 40 yuan.

Third, village committees sometimes contact the so-called migrant workers outside the village to seek their opinions about village affairs. When there are important events, such as village elections, the migrant workers are asked either to come back to vote in person, or to cast a postal or proxy vote.

Fourth, informal organizations and institutions such as factions and kinship networks play a role in mobilizing villagers to vote for his or her 'man'. Those who vote on kinship or factional lines are called 'face ticket', meaning their vote goes to those with whom they have a good '*guanxi*'.

Clearly, therefore, the level of voter turnout is affected by the various factors outlined above. Using a cost-benefit analysis, it is easy to identify the advantages and disadvantages of voting in Chinese village elections. The tangible benefits of voting are that voters can remove corrupt leaders whom they do not like; each voter gets a certain amount of money as a compensation fee; and voting for someone in a closed village helps support and strengthen personal relationships. Additional potential benefits include voter expectations that there will be rapid village development under elected village heads. The costs of not voting include non-receipt of the compensation fee, weaker personal ties, and being disregarded by village cadres. When the benefits of voting are greater than the costs associated with not voting, a high voter turnout can be expected.

High voter turnout does not automatically constitute a criterion for success, or an index for political participation. This is not really surprising when we make some comparisons between voter turnout levels in different countries. For instance, the turnout rate is low in the elections held in places such as Burma and the Philippines, while the turnout rate is high in communist societies because of political mobilization and economic incentives.

More importantly, the value of the high voter turnout rates is doubtful if we consider practices such as sending a family member to the ballot as a representative and casting invalid votes. An example of this occurred in Nan-er village. It had a voter turnout of 96.5 per cent, but 158 or 13 per cent of the votes were invalid. When the 269 absentees who cast their votes but did not tick any candidate were added, the number grew to 22.2 per cent, leaving the total of valid votes at only 74.9 per cent. In the election for the village head, 1,249 ballot sheets were handed out. Of the 1,205 collected 936 (77.8 per cent) were valid votes, 158 (13 per cent) invalid and 111 (9.2 per cent) absentees. Exactly the same numbers and percentages were found in voting for village committee

²⁵ Bai Gang, 'Village Autonomy', p. 11.

members.²⁶ In the 1996 election in Dongjia village, the voter turnout rate was 87.8 per cent. In the election for the village head, 1,731 ballot papers were handed out and 1,511 collected. Of these 1,137 (75.3 per cent) were valid votes, 219 (16.5 per cent) invalid and 155 (8.2 per cent) were absentees. The last two categories represented 24.7 per cent of the total votes. The only candidate standing won 829 votes, which was 73.1 per cent of the valid votes, but only 55 per cent of all the votes collected. On average candidates for committee membership achieved 55 per cent of the valid votes. Individually they received 73 per cent, 66.7 per cent, 59.8 per cent, and 34.7 per cent respectively of the valid votes, but only 55 per cent, 50 per cent, 46 per cent, and 25 per cent of the votes collected.²⁷ Thus, the high voter turnout rate becomes less impressive when one takes into account the fact that there were up to 25 per cent of invalid votes and absentees.

Zhong and Chen have realized the problems associated with using voter turnout rates to measure political participation levels. As a result, their study excluded all proxy votes and only counted people who physically attended the central polling station. Based on this revised measure they found that approximately 48 per cent of eligible voters reported that they actually went to the central polling station to vote. According to the survey I conducted in Zhejiang, about 53.3 per cent of the respondents stated that they went to the central polling station to cast their vote. Zhong and Chen argue that their method is a more accurate and reliable way to record voter turnout. While I share their skepticism about high voter turnout levels, their method has its own drawbacks. For instance, a general meeting and central polling station is sometimes located in one 'natural' village. Residents of that 'natural' village can get to the polling station within one to five minutes, while it takes other village residents much longer, often over half an hour, to reach the polling station. In other words, voter turnout at the polling station is determined not only by the villagers' interests in village elections, but also by the distance between the villagers' residence and the polling station and their willingness to travel to cast their votes.

In conclusion, both general turnout rate and the special voting rate at the central voting station have methodological problems in measuring participation. Moreover, since many political, economic and societal variables contribute to voting behavior, subjective factors such as voters' belief in democratic values are by themselves not sufficient to explain voting or non-voting behavior.

Below, I will describe a different measurement I have developed for assessing the level of political participation in village elections. The purpose of the research matters here. If the researchers' purpose is to explain voting or non-voting behavior, it is important to distinguish subjective from objective factors and examine the influence of subjective factors. My aim, in this paper, however, is to demonstrate

²⁶ Xie Zhuofeng, 'Reflections on Village Election'.

²⁷ Wang Zhenghua, 'Qianxi nongcun xuanju wenti de zhengjie: 1996 dongjiacun cunweihui xuanju diaoca' ['Problems in Village Election: a Case Study of Dongjia Village Election in 1996'], Summer Study (School of Political Science, Zhejiang University, 1998).

the emergence of democratic and participatory culture through measuring the level of political participation and political consciousness. For this purpose, I have employed a special approach to measure the level of participation, which synthesizes objective and subjective factors. In other words, it includes not only voter activities, but also their attitudes towards and knowledge of elections. In my view, both categories are necessary if we are to measure political participation effectively. While acknowledging that the use of subjective knowledge and attitudes as indicators of participation is fraught with danger due to the increasing influence of behaviorism in the standard Western literature, some scholars do take these subjective items seriously in their study of political participation and political culture.²⁸ Subjective knowledge and attitudes do influence people's voting behavior especially in the Chinese context where subjective attitudes towards elections are vital in determining their political participation behavior. There is a close correlation between citizens' perception of fairness of village elections and the level of their participation (see Section 6). Notwithstanding, the problem associated with using subjective knowledge items is, of course, recognized. For example, it is very probable that certain respondents may over-estimate their knowledge levels. Additionally, only a few citizens have a high level of knowledge of electoral laws and this is so throughout the world, not just in China.

Recognizing the advantages and disadvantages of using subjective knowledge, I use seven variables as the indicators of participation including: self-registering as voters, casting a vote, participating in the selection process, engaging in public debate over the choice of candidates, filing complaints to officials about the violation of rights, voters' attitudes toward elections, their attitudes toward candidates, and their understanding of electoral law. Using these seven variables instead of a single one is beneficial in decreasing the level of measurement error.

The participation index that I have constructed is a coding of several attributes that are associated with an elector's attitude towards elections and his or her behavior in an election. These attributes include levels of understanding of electoral laws, attitudes towards the need to know candidates prior to elections, and the campaign events an elector attends. For questions 10, 14, and 20, a measure of degree is assigned to the corresponding attributes. For example, we assign a score of 3 to 'know well' in the case of knowing electoral law, 2 to 'know in general', and so on, as shown in Table 2. Question 12 is a multiple response question about campaign activities, such as attending electoral meetings, nominating candidates, participating in the deliberations that decide on the final set of candidates, speaking for candidates on election day, and going to vote. Here the score is based on ticked choices.

²⁸ Participation is seen as a function of cognitions and beliefs. See Lester W. Milbrath, *Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?* (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Company, 1965), pp. 64–72; also see Christopher Arterton and Harlan Hahn, *Political Participation* (Washington, DC: The American Political Science Association, 1975).

Table 2. Scores assigned to questions 10, 12, 14, and 20

Question		1	2	3	4	5*
10	Understanding the electoral law	3	2	1	0	
12	Attending campaign events	1	1	1	1	1
14	Knowing Candidates	3	2	1	0	
20	Attitude towards vote	3	2	1	0	

Table 3. Participation indices and the number of elections voters participated in

No. of Elections participated in	Average political participation indices
1	9.46
2	9.83
3	10.84
4	11.34
5	13.43
6	12.39

The participation index is formulated by adding up all the scores assigned to responses to the above four questions. For example, if an elector believes that he generally understands the electoral law and chooses number 2 as his response to Question 10, he is assigned a score of 2 for this particular question in Table 1. If he only took part in the election and did not attend any other campaign events, his score for that question would be just 1. If he answers Question 14 by choosing number 3, that is 'it is sort of necessary to know the candidate before an election', his score turns out to be 1 according to Table 1. If the elector considers his or her own vote to be important, he or she gets a score of 2 for Question 20. All the scores for individual questions were then added up to obtain a total score of 6, namely $2 + 1 + 1 + 2 = 6$, to find the participation index of the elector.

3. The trends of political participation

There is no doubt that villagers now participate in politics with more awareness and interest. It might be hypothesized that those who have three rounds of electoral experience are likely to possess a higher participation index than those who have only one or two. This hypothesis is confirmed by Table 3, which indicates that, with the exception of the sixth election, the voter participation index is directly proportional to the number of elections in which they have participated.²⁹ In other words, the index rises in proportion to the number of elections participated in.

²⁹ There is an exception in Linhai. The first two elections revealed certain difficulties and inner problems, and, as a result, the third and fourth ones were suspended. However, the fifth election was conducted again due to the pressure from the center and media. Moreover, people's initial enthusiasm tends to be

Table 4. *Why did you vote?*

Answers	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Right and responsibility	843	67.7
To get those I trust elected	414	33.3
My sacred duty	373	30.0
Just following others	73	5.9
At the request of cadres	64	5.1
For other reasons	76	6.1

Note: This was a multi-choice survey and each respondent was allowed to select more than one answer.

Table 5. *Villagers' views on the importance of voting*

Views	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Very important	413	33.2
Important	507	40.7
Not important	114	9.2
Making no difference	197	15.8
No response	14	1.1
Total	1245	100.0

Our survey found that most villagers (67.7 per cent) regarded voting as their right or responsibility and nominated it as their primary motive for voting. The second ranked motive was 'to get those I trust elected' (33.3 per cent). In addition, 30 per cent of respondents regarded voting as a 'sacred duty' (see Table 4) and almost 90 per cent of respondents saw elections as either 'important' or 'very important' (see Table 5).

The favorable attitude of villagers towards democracy is confirmed by other surveys. For instance, a 1999 survey of 2,637 individuals in four counties in rural China, conducted by David Zweig, reveals a strong democratic tendency among the respondents. In response to the statement, 'If the existing cadres are capable and trusted, there is no need for democratic elections', about 55 per cent 'disagreed somewhat' or 'disagreed strongly'. Only 23.9 per cent 'agreed somewhat', while only 12.4 per cent 'strongly agreed'. In response to the statement, 'I know what goes on in my village, therefore I have the right to participate in village affairs', 24.4 per cent 'strongly agreed', and 39.3 'agreed somewhat'. Only 15.8 per cent 'disagreed somewhat', 14.4 per cent 'didn't agree very much', and 6.1 per cent 'strongly disagreed'.³⁰

high at the beginning of an election. If there is free choice not to vote, the turnout rate will be much lower.

³⁰ Zweig, 'Democratic Values', p. 41.

Table 6. *Participatory activities by villagers in Zhejiang, 1998*

Activities	Number	Percentage
Going to vote	663	53.3
Attending electoral meeting	429	34.5
Nominating candidates	333	26.7
Participating in deciding on final candidates	234	18.8
Introducing candidates	121	9.7

Table 7. *Participation in election-related activities in rural China, 1999*

Activities	Number	Percentage
Participating in propaganda to encourage people to vote	542	20.6
Nominating candidates	346	13.1
Voting for village committee members	2,092	79.3
Participating in village assembly or party's members' assembly	259	9.8
Never participating in anything	263	10.0
Don't know	65	2.5
No Answer	20	0.8

Source: David Zweig's 1999 Survey of rural China; Zweig, 'Democratic Values', p. 43.

Both Zweig's and my surveys demonstrate that a significant number of villagers have participated in election-related activities and possess democratic learning (Table 6 is drawn from my survey, and Table 7 comes from Zweig's).

4. Patterns of voting behavior

How did the villagers decide whom to vote for? And, why did they vote for that particular candidate? Chinese authorities and independent studies have produced summaries that outline the values or criteria adopted by voters when casting their vote. In the Huaihua region of Hunan province, for instance, it was found that villagers chose their leaders according to six criteria, displaying preferences for those who:

- were knowledgeable and competent in science and law;
- demonstrated a capacity to lead villagers towards prosperity through hard work;
- were considered honest, enterprising and knowledgeable in the field of economics;
- appeared to be caring, fair-minded and even-handed;
- were principled;
- were willing to listen to the people.³¹

³¹ Cheng Zhiyuan and Liu Dongjing, 'Nongmin xingzhong de tianping hunan huaihuadiqu nongcun an liuxuan yu liubuxuan de yuanzhe xuanju dangjiaren' ['The Villagers Have a Scale: Village Heads in

Table 8. *You voted for the candidate for village head because (s/he)*

Reason/criteria	No. of people	Percentage (%)
Will represent my interest	83	6.7
Will speak for the common people	678	54.5
Will do a good job for the Party	462	37.1
Will take a leadership role in developing village economy and welfare	711	57.1
Will represent kinship interests	47	3.8
Will speak on behalf of people in the same trade	40	3.2
Is well respected	119	9.6
For other reasons	135	10.8

Note: This is a multiple-choice survey and respondents were allowed to select more than one answer.

Table 9. *How did you decide which candidate(s) to vote for?*

Reason	No. of people	Percentage (%)
1. Knew about candidate and decided for oneself	480	38.6
2. Decided after briefing by candidate	64	5.1
3. Sought others' opinions, then decided	88	7.1
4. Followed them around	21	1.7
5. Followed leaders' directions	14	1.1
6. Voted for those from my own kinship group	19	1.5
7. Voted for those considered fair and impartial	431	34.6
8. Ticked in order of candidates' names	28	2.2
9. Saw no difference between candidates	79	6.3
10. No response	21	1.7
Total	1245	100.0

Villagers used these criteria to judge candidates. On this basis, it appears they were unlikely to select those who were known to abuse village power, or those who were considered autocratic and conservative.³² Tables 8 and 9 draw on my survey data to indicate the voting criteria of villagers.

Drawing on the above data and remarks written on the back of our survey papers, we classified voting behaviors into three groups: the competence-oriented, the morality-oriented, and those oriented towards self or kinship-interest.

Huaihua, Hunan Are Elected with Six Criteria'], *Xiangzheng luntan* [Township Forum], no. 4 (Beijing, 1994), p. 13.

³² Chang Yumin, 'Shenmeyang de ganbu zhui bu shou nongmin huanying?' ['Who Are the Most Unpopular among Villagers?'], *Xiangzheng luntan* [Township Forum], no. 4 (Beijing, 1994), p. 14.

(1) *The competence-oriented*

To answer the open question, 'Do you have any suggestion for village election?' in our questionnaire, a doctor in Liuaoy Township of Samen County suggested, 'Candidates for village heads should be able to lead the village to prosperity, have good education and be knowledgeable.'³³ A teacher in Liuaoy commented that, 'They should speak for the people and be able to lead the villagers to more wealth. During their term of office, what counts is their achievements rather than who is the boss backing them.'³⁴

Data in Table 7 indicates that 57.1 per cent of respondents selected a candidate based on the belief that, 'S/he can lead the village to prosperity and more communal welfare.' When choosing village committee members, particularly the village head, voters tended to put competence in work as a first priority. Often villagers believed that a man who has been successful economically would be able to play a leading role in bringing about wider social and economic development.³⁵

In the 1980s and 1990s, capable rural entrepreneurs became increasingly influential in village affairs and this had a significant impact on voter behavior in village elections. In October 1993, for example, in the village election held in Yaoyu Township, Yuncheng municipality, Shanxi province, 40 per cent of the 28 elected leaders were first-timers, and 35.7 per cent of these were directors of private enterprises.³⁶

It is natural that villagers, who are concerned to protect their own interests and ensure village development, hope that competent people will manage village affairs. This is born out in the 1999 village election in Laofangqiao Township, where voters had expected a village entrepreneur to become the village head. The man was certainly competent and resourceful, and villagers believed that he would be able to improve the village economy and their own living standards if he became head.³⁷ A similar case was found in Yuyao, where an able entrepreneur from another village wanted to run for the position of village head in X village. According to the village electoral law, he was ineligible to run for the position because he was an outsider. Nevertheless, the villagers wanted to elect him as village head and they pressured the township leaders to 'bend the law a little bit' and let him run for the position.³⁸

The new rich are influential not only as candidates, but also as voters, for they are able to influence the voting behavior of other villagers. Some peasants follow the voting choices of the rich. In the village of Yijiacun, for example, some peasants said,

³³ Sources from an open item in our questionnaire for voters, 'Do you have any suggestion for village election?'

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Xu Yong, 'Gufenzhi jueqi zhong de cunzhi moshi zhuanghuan' ['The Emergence of Share-holder Economy and the Transformation of Village Governance'], *Huazhong shifandaxue xuebao [Journal of Central China Normal University]*, Social Science edition, no.2 (1998), p. 5.

³⁶ Shao Xingliang *et al.*, 'Yiminweitian' ['The People Are the Most Important'], *Xiangzheng luntan [Township Forum]*, no. 4 (Beijing, 1994), p. 11.

³⁷ The interview with the cadres of Party and government office of Laofangqiao township, Yuyao municipality, August 1999.

³⁸ The interview with the cadres of Party Organization Dept. of Yuyao municipality, August 1999.

'We will vote for whomever they (the new rich) vote for.' As a result, the elected village committee appeared to represent the will of the new rich. When interviewed, another peasant replied, 'To be honest I have no idea of who is a better candidate. But we must be right if we pick the richest guy in the village.' This demonstrates that wealth has become a criterion according to which some villages cast their votes.³⁹

(2) *The morality-oriented*

Several answers to the open question 'Do you have any suggestion for village election?' in our questionnaire clearly demonstrated the morality-based model. A villager in Tangxia Township, Reian municipality, said that, 'Village heads should be trustworthy and will speak for the people. They should be practical, should care about the communal interest and will work hard for the local economy.'⁴⁰ 'They must follow the party's principle of serving the people. Not to abuse power for self-interest' (a villager in Wuyun Township).⁴¹ 'They think of the people. No abuse of power, no bullying over villagers and no currying favor with leadership above' (A teacher in Liua Township).⁴² 'They ought to be fair-minded and even-handed. Not to be too selfish' (a villager in Wuyun Township).⁴³ 'They should be well-known and well-respected in the village; and should be elected by the villagers' (a villager in Liua).⁴⁴

Data from Tables 7 and 8 indicate that 9.6 per cent of respondents selected a candidate because s/he was 'well-respected', 54.5 per cent did so because the candidate 'will speak for the people', and 34.6 per cent said they would vote for those with 'good characters and a fair mind'. People in this category tend to view candidate selection from a moral perspective and this approach has a long tradition in Chinese political culture. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of Confucianism was the selection of officials who were scholars and who had high moral standards.

(3) *The self or kinship interest-oriented*

This group voted on the basis of maintaining and promoting self-interest or kinship interest. When asked how they decided which candidate to vote for, 19 (1.5 per cent) respondents to our survey ticked the item 'vote for people from my own kinship' (see Table 8). Asked the reason for voting for a candidate as village head, 10.5 per cent of respondents indicated they voted on the basis of self or kinship-interest, with 6.7 per cent selecting the item 'S/he can represent my own interest' and 3.8 per cent opting for 'S/he will represent the interest of my kinship'. In other words, they suggested that they would not participate in an election if they did not see any benefits

³⁹ Chen Xiang, 'The Impact of the New Rich on Village Election', 1999 summer field work report.

⁴⁰ Sources from an open item in our questionnaire for voters, 'Do you have any suggestion for village election?'

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

for themselves or their families. In such instances, organizational, administrative, and economic strategies were employed to get these villagers involved in the election.⁴⁵

Voting for candidates based on kinship ties means that lineage considerations outweigh those of policy, character, and concern for village affairs. Such behavior is not compatible with a modern approach to village citizenship. A modern village citizen can be understood as one who cares about village affairs rather than kinship ties. Thus, the movement away from lineage loyalty constitutes an indicator for the formation of modern village citizenship. From the above data, it is clear that lineage considerations have only a limited effect on voter behavior. For example, the majority of survey respondents indicated they did not take kinship ties seriously when casting their votes. Neither did elected village heads think their success was dependent on lineage voters: they did not see lineage interest as strategically important to maintaining their positions. Generally, this indicates that, to a large degree, villagers and village heads in Zhejiang exercise a rational interest calculation that transcends kinship divisions, and that villagers and village heads are becoming modern village citizens (see the section on village citizenship).

5. Apathy in village elections

We should be aware that a democratic culture co-exists with a parochial political culture. Anyone who carries out informal interviews or chats with villagers will encounter a number of villagers who don't care about elections and village democracy; they take non-democratic behavior as normal, often as something deriving from their customary way of life. Some villagers experience a degree of political apathy. Indeed, this is just as much a problem for Western democratic societies as it is for non-democratic societies. Most citizens even in democratic societies do not live up to the ideal of participatory citizens held by classical liberals.

As shown in Table 3, some people (5.9 per cent) voted just because others did, while others (5.1 per cent) voted at the request of cadres. In other words, passive voting was evident among 11 per cent of voters, who appeared relatively indifferent politically. When asked what they thought about the importance of their vote, 9.2 per cent of villagers said they did not think their vote was important; and 15 per cent said they thought their vote made no difference. In total, and as shown in Table 4, 25 per cent of respondents displayed an attitude of indifference towards the electoral process.

In addition to those people who appeared indifferent, there were others in parts of Zhejiang, who behaved irresponsibly. For instance, some villagers failed to take seriously the Taoxufeng village election, held in March 1999. Some wrote on the ballot papers that they would vote for 'the First Emperor of Qin', 'Clinton', or even dirty words.

⁴⁵ Jing Yan, 'Village Election and Current Political Participation'.

Others drew a turtle or the like on their own or others ballot papers.⁴⁶ Some villagers found excuses to vote through representatives. Others, who knew nothing about the candidates and did not even bother to listen to candidate briefings, just voted blindly.

Some peasants even allowed the person who carried the vote box to vote on their behalf. In this regard, Xu Xu, a peasant in Huamin Village of Kaihua County, gave the following account. 'On the day of the election, village leader Yunxiang and his men gave me three names and asked me to circle one, which I did. I did not give much thought to that. I care only about my meals and money.' Wang, a vegetable grower, said, 'Now the land is tilled by each individual household; who gets elected makes no difference to me. Anyway I can only depend on myself for my daily bread.' A wealthy peasant, indeed a millionaire, shared Wang's view, 'I only hope that the party's policy will remain unchanged and individual economy will always be encouraged. I don't care who gets elected.'⁴⁷

Zhaozhai is a wealthy village in Yiwu municipality that has 137 households. In the 1996 election only 43 households went to the ballot, and some did so perfunctorily. Some villagers said, 'Officials give orders and we are supposed to follow. How could we, the order-takers, appoint officials?'⁴⁸ In this case, the villagers appeared to have little idea that democracy actually means they have the ability to elect their own leaders.

In July 1998, Zhang Zhongsheng conducted a field study in a village of Kuoshan township on the relationship between the village committee and the village party branch. The 30 respondents to his study could be divided equally into three age groups: the aged, the middle-aged, and the young. In terms of gender, there were 15 males and 15 females. In the aged group, he found two men who were fairly knowledgeable about the relationship between the Party and the village committee. Two other men knew the village committee existed, but did not understand its function. One old man knew about the party branch, but did not know about the village committee. Four old women had no knowledge at all of the village committee. In the middle-aged group, one man was quite familiar with both institutions, while four men and one woman had knowledge of the committee. The other four women knew nothing about it. In the youth group, four men and two women knew there was such an institution as the village committee, but had no idea what its functions and responsibilities were. The other man and three women knew nothing about it. In fact, they thought the committee

⁴⁶ Song Peihua, 'Cunminweiyuanhui minzhu xuanju wenti diaocha' ['Democratic Election of Village Committee: Case Study of Tao-Xu-Feng Village in Hemudu'], Summer Study (School of Political Science, Zhejiang University, 1999).

⁴⁷ Fu Xia, 'Huamin cun xuanju zhi wo jian' ['My View on the Election in Huamin Village'], Summer Study (School of Political Science, Zhejiang University, 1998).

⁴⁸ Cao Liwei, 'Renzhongdaoyuan_kan cunminweiyuanhui xunju de wenti jiqi wanshan' ['A Long Way to Go: Problems in the Election of Village Committee and Solutions'], Summer Study (School of Political Science, Zhejiang University, 1998).

Table 10. *The index of political participation by rural social stratification*

Rural social stratification	Average participation index
Cadres	14.75
Teachers	10.26
Managers of rural enterprises	14.17
Workers in rural industries	9.97
Entrepreneurs	11.56
Businessmen	10.80
Workers in private sector	11.55
Specialized households	10.58
Farmers	9.78
Others	9.70

was just another name for the party branch.⁴⁹ Similarly, our survey shows that only 5.4 per cent of the respondents had a good knowledge of the electoral laws, 29 per cent had a little knowledge, and 40.1 per cent knew nothing at all. In addition, 39 per cent of respondents could not remember how many elections had been held up to 1998.

A case study, conducted by Wu Yi, concluded that villager political participation is polarized. 'On the one hand, there are the village elites, who through a control of all social resources have gained direct access to power and are the dominant forces in the governance of the village. On the other hand, there are the common villagers, who have little access to communal resources and are on the margin of village power. The latter now have even less participation in communal affairs than they did during the period of the people's commune, when many aspects of the communal life were politicized and participation was frequently required.'⁵⁰

Our survey shows that, while the general index of political participation on the part of rural cadres is 14.75, that of common villagers is 9.7. This seems to accord with Wu's conclusion. However, we can also see a 10.26 index of rural teachers and an 11.56 index of rural entrepreneurs. The former constitutes an intellectual elite and the latter an economic elite in villages. The participation of these two groups falls between cadres and commoners. Thus, we can say that there is stratification rather than polarization in village political participation (see Table 10).

From the above table, it clearly demonstrates that participation is influenced by class strata. Cadres and managers of rural enterprises have the highest participation index, while ordinary farmers have the lowest score. It means that infancy village

⁴⁹ Zhang Zongsheng, 'Cunmin weiyuanhui yu dangzhibu guanxi de fenxi' ['Analysis of the Relationship between the Village Committee And the Part Branch'], Summer Study (School of Political Science, Zhejiang University, 1998).

⁵⁰ Wu Yi, 'Cunzhi zhong de zhengzhi ren: yige cunzhuang cunmin gonggong canyu he gonggong yishi de fenxi' ['The Political Man in the Governance of the Village: Analysis of Awareness in Participation and Communal Sense'], *Zhannue yu guangli* [Strategy and Management], no. 1 (Beijing, 1998), p. 96.

democracy is largely pushed by the old class of villager cadre and new class of the new rich of rural enterprises.

6. The determinants of participation

As previously noted, other scholars have already undertaken work on political participation. For instance, Jennings uses variables such as age, gender, education, and membership to explain different types of participatory acts. In explaining voting or non-voting behavior, Zhong and Chen use subjective variables such as internal efficacy, democratic value, attitudes toward corruption, and levels of attention towards public affairs. I do not want to repeat what they have done in this chapter. Instead, I will take the index of participation as the dependent variable, and examine what Jennings calls, but does not study, ‘some contextual properties’ as independent variables. It is my understanding that contextual properties should include the village power structure, the role of the village elite, the regularity of election procedures, the perceived worth of elections, the competitiveness and fairness of elections, the level of economic development, and literacy standards. The following contextual properties can be understood as key determinants of political participation.

The fairness of electoral institutions and rules. If villagers see elections as a formality, or as being manipulated by the village party secretary, they feel their votes are worthless and therefore adopt an indifferent attitude towards elections. In other words, when township leaders or the village party secretary try to manipulate the electoral process, villagers will likely perceive the election as nothing but ‘fake democracy’ and be reluctant to participate. It is no wonder, therefore, that Zhong and Chen found that villagers in Jiangsu, who had higher democratic values, did not vote when party secretaries controlled the nomination process and when candidates were not allowed to have electoral campaigns. I encountered something similar during my research trips in Zhejiang, when survey respondents were asked to assess the fairness of electoral institutions and rules. By analyzing the survey results, we were able to examine how the villagers’ assessment of electoral fairness impacted on their participation in village elections.

The value of elections. Another key determinant is whether villagers perceive elections to be valuable political activities. In some cases, elections are perceived to have little or no direct benefit to villagers and their welfare. If voters believe they cannot get rid of those they don’t like or if elected village heads feel they cannot achieve certain aims on their own, participation levels are likely to be lower. A particular story helps illustrate this point. Villagers in Xingsheng Township had displayed some interest in earlier elections. Their enthusiasm cooled, however, when they discovered that the village committee played a relatively insignificant role in village life and was unable to accomplish anything substantial so that certain problems such as corruption and poor

service were unresolved despite a change of leadership.⁵¹ In order to gauge how villager perceptions of the value of elections affect their participation index, we asked survey respondents to assess the value of electoral institutions and rules.

An economic theory of participation. According to this theory, participation is merely a function of economic development and conditions. Those who are preoccupied with moneymaking do not see how elections will affect their goals.⁵² In rich and commercialized villages, there are many more opportunities for earning money outside of those villages. As a result, many adopt an ‘I-don’t-care’ attitude, which is what we discovered in Ningbo. One case study revealed that eight out of ten respondents from villages, where annual family income is only about 2,000 yuan, no longer expected material benefits from the village and were not interested in village elections. Their aim was to increase their family income through their own hard work and initiatives.⁵³ We will test this theory by examining how economic variables such as family income and the number of village enterprises relate to the level of political participation.

Literacy. Finally, literacy and education levels have an impact on elections and the extent of participation. In this respect a particular story illustrates how illiteracy impacts on electoral participation. In the 1999 Chengzhou municipality village elections, the voter turnout was 92.3 per cent. Unfortunately, many of the voters were illiterate or semi-illiterate, and some could not write down their names, while others did not know how to indicate yes or no in the right places on the ballot paper. Ultimately, there were so many errors that four voters in Zhongye village went to the leadership to request that those ballot papers not properly filled in be deemed invalid.⁵⁴

In examining the respective influence of these variables on political participation, I will first look at the correlations, based on the assumption that these variables are not inter-related. The higher the correlation, the more the factor influences political participation. The results demonstrate that participation is influenced by three major factors: the perceived worth of the election itself (0.30), regularity of electoral procedures (0.19), and the fairness of electoral procedures (0.17). In other words, if the election is deemed to be fair and legitimate and follows regular procedures, there will be a higher degree of political participation, and vice versa. Literacy (0.13), family income (0.12), and gender (– 0.11) also have some impact on elections, but to a lesser extent than the previous three. Finally, the number of village enterprises (0.036) is shown to have little impact on participation levels.

⁵¹ The interview with the party secretary in Xingmin, Rei-an municipality.

⁵² Fu Xia, ‘My View on the Election in Huamin Village’.

⁵³ Hu Liwei, ‘Ignorance during Election: An Investigation of Village Election in Siyuncun, Yangcunqiao Township’, 1998 summer field work report.

⁵⁴ Qiu Zhengjun, ‘Cunguan zhijie xuanju, gai xi hai shi you?’ [‘Direct Election of Village Head: Good or Bad? On the 1999 Village Election in Chengzhou Municipality’], Summer Study (School of Political Science, Zhejiang University, 1999).

Table 11. Multiple regression coefficients

Variables	Coefficient	Std. Error	Sig
Intercept	1.563	1.224	0.202
Gender	-0.075	0.284	0.15
No. of village enterprises	-0.009	0.085	0.779
Average family income	0.074	0.000	0.018
Literacy	0.097	1.224	0.002
Election procedure	0.105	0.284	0.001
Worth of election	0.300	0.064	0.000
Fairness of election	0.022	0.503	0.510

Note: Dependent Variable: the score of political participation.

The above analysis does not take into account the inter-relationship between the variables and its impact on participation. In this case, a multiple regression analysis would be better (see Table 11). As space does not permit a full examination of all the figures, we will limit ourselves to the analysis of coefficients. The higher the coefficient of the variable, the more influential that variable is on political participation. The worth (0.3) and procedure (0.1) of the election are still major factors. However, in this case fairness only has a beta of 0.022 and a significance level of 0.51. This is because of interaction effects. The factors of literacy (0.097), family income (0.074), and gender (-0.075) are lower than the worth and regularity of elections. The number of village enterprises (-0.009, significance level is 0.779) does not contribute much to the level of participation.⁵⁵ It is clear now that the number of village enterprises does not have a direct impact on the index of political participation.

7. Conclusion

Through developing a comprehensive index of participatory culture, the survey results show that the participation index is in proportion to the number of elections in which a villager is involved; and that a democratic and participatory culture has taken place. Villagers' participation is one of the forces that have transformed formal democratic institutions into functioning ones. Concerned with a fair distribution of village wealth, many villagers demand the regular and frequent holding of village representative meetings. In this way political participation becomes meaningful and villagers empower themselves by using formal democratic institutions to minimize corruption and to demand a fair distribution of village wealth. The villagers'

⁵⁵ In West Java, Indonesia, it is found that income and mass media exposure have a stronger influence than economic independence/dependence and a much stronger influence than age and occupation on voting, and the number of administrators or the size of the village bureaucracy has a negative influence on voting. Dwight Y. King, 'Associational Activity and Political Participation of Villagers in West Java, Indonesia', *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, 11 (1) (1983): 85.

participation in regular elections and village representative assemblies reconfirms the early conclusion made by Townsend that political participation will be 'a less revolutionary, less populist, more institutionalized and more bureaucratic political style' and that 'the political awakening of the Chinese people will still stand as one of the most significant political changes in modern China'.⁵⁶

This research finds that the level of participation is influenced by three major factors: the perceived worth of election itself, regularity of electoral procedures and the fairness of electoral procedures. It is clear that in order to raise the level of political participation of rural voters, it is essential to improve the electoral system and the institutions themselves so that villagers will appreciate the worth and significance of elections. It is also important to improve electoral procedures to ensure villagers have full rights and the opportunity to nominate candidates. In order to guarantee their fairness there should be little or no manipulation of elections. To help mitigate this villagers have invented *haixuan* through which to directly nominate their own candidates.

Despite the emergence of a democratic culture, parochial political culture and political apathy still exist, and the emergent democratic consciousness falls short of an ideal democratic standard. The contradictory co-existence of democratic and non-democratic political cultures is one of the factors that contribute to the variations of village democracy in China. While a highly democratic culture helps to develop village democracy, the apathetic attitude continues to support the authoritarian leadership and structure in many villages. As Gadsden and Thurston point out, 'The lack of a democratic political culture is obvious at several levels. The complex web of personal and political relations that permit township officials continuing power over the lives of villagers is one example. At the village level, local emperors not only exist but are also often elected.'⁵⁷ As long as there is a significant sizeable percentage of villager citizens who are active, autonomous, and participatory, village democracy can take root and develop even if there is passive peasantry.

A long time ago, Milbrath asserted, 'moderate levels of participation by the mass of citizens help to balance citizen roles as participants and as obedient subjects' and 'balance political systems which must be both responsive and powerful enough to act'.⁵⁸ Indeed, the Chinese government has advocated what it calls 'orderly participation' to strike a balance between participation and discipline. Too much participation will threaten the CCP's regime, but equally, too little participation will undermine the legitimacy of the CCP.

⁵⁶ Townsend, *Political Participation in Communist China*, p. 218.

⁵⁷ Amy Epstein Gadsden and Anne F. Thurston, 'Village elections in China: Progress, Problems and Prospects' (International Republic Institute, Washington, DC, January 2001), p. 19.

⁵⁸ Milbrath, *Political Participation*, p. 153.

Appendix: Note on the survey

I selected Zhejiang as a case study precisely and primarily because it is not regarded as the most successful area in China for village elections and democracy. Indeed, Zhejiang used to be well behind Jilin and other provinces in terms of the three yardsticks (a larger number of candidates than available positions, competition, and secret ballot) set out by the Ministry of Civil Affairs to measure the soundness of elections (see Appendix 'Cross-Provincial Comparisons of Village Elections Implementation').⁵⁹ Village elections in Zhejiang were not seen as national models of village democracy and as such were considered less likely to possess artificial elements than official examples.⁶⁰ Consequently, I was able to overcome the bias inherent within the official models and get an accurate understanding of the actual development of village elections and democracy. It must be made clear, however, that the development of village elections and democracy in Zhejiang cannot be taken to represent China as a whole. Village elections have been developing unevenly across the country and there are vast regional and local variations.⁶¹ For instance, some elections fail in villages that experience decay and poverty and where the party organization is predatory. It must also be stressed that, although the case study of Zhejiang is not fully representative of China, democratic elements present there may help us to come to grips with a peaceful and evolutionary model of democratic transition that might contribute to the future of China's political development.

A secondary reason for selecting Zhejiang was my ability to understand local dialects without much difficulty. Thus I was able to easily organize survey work and research teams. Having grown up in Hangzhou, the capital city of Zhejiang, gone to one village in Jiande county, Zhejiang, between 1975–77 as an intellectual youth and completed my undergraduate study in Hangzhou University (now a part of Zhejiang University) from 1977 to 1981, I was often seen as a native by local officials and villagers. This enabled me to gain access to and understand information and material quickly and easily. At the same time, I maintained an external point of view that prevented me from being involved in internal village politics and helped me to develop an objective perspective.

⁵⁹ Jude Howell, 'Prospects for Village Self-Governance in China', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 25 (3) (1998): 96.

⁶⁰ Prior to 1983, Zhejiang was slow to undertake economic reforms, and the provincial leadership was reluctant to implement agricultural decollectivization policies. Under pressure from the centre, the Zhejiang leadership mobilized university staff members to implement decollectivization. (As a lecturer in Hangzhou University I was sent to the countryside in 1984 to talk to township leaders about Beijing's new agriculture policy.) In the mid 1980s, when Beijing decided to decentralize foreign trade, Zhejiang's leadership again had a nervous reaction.

⁶¹ Thurston has studied the varieties of village self-government. See Anne F. Thurston, 'Muddling toward Democracy: Political Change in Grassroots China', *United States Institute of Peace Peaceworks* (23) (1998). Jie Chen and Yang Zhong have emphasized the importance of regional differences in local elections. See Jie Chen and Yang Zhong, 'Why Do People Vote', pp. 178–97.

With the help of a research team comprising two staff members and seven students from Zhejiang University, I conducted three surveys in Zhejiang Province between October and November 1998. Villagers, village chiefs, and township leaders were surveyed separately and four geographic areas were covered: Wenzhou (2 villages in Tangxiang), Shanmen (7 villages in Liuaotownship), Lishui (3 villages in Shuiger, 5 villages in Wuyun), and Shaoxin (4 villages in Chengdongxiang). There are variations between these villages and townships. Private economy dominates in Tangxiang township in Wenzhou, and Liuaotownship in Shanmen. Shuiger and Wuyun townships in Lishui are very poor and underdeveloped. By contrast, Chengdongxiang township in Shaoxin are quite rich with well-developed collective enterprises. Around 1,800 questionnaires were distributed to villagers from the villages selected, of which 1,500 returned, and 1,245 villagers' respondents were useful. In addition, we gained the 111 respondents to the village chief survey, and the 115 respondents to the township leader survey.

The survey methodology took the form of face-to-face interviews with villagers, village chiefs, and township leaders. The survey adopted a simple random sample in the target population for village chiefs and township leaders, and proportionate stratification was used for the survey of villagers. In each township, we considered a certain ratio of respondents based on the categories of gender, generation, kinship, and economic development. Where cost and convenience were considerations, judgmental or purposive sampling was adopted as well as quota sampling. Student interviewers were given quotas of different types of people with whom they should conduct interviews. The survey data together with numerous interviews, official documents, and 70 students' summer investigation reports from Zhejiang villages, are able to represent the general trends and status of elections in Zhejiang.