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Principal, Agent or Bystander? Governance and Leadership in Chinese and Russian Villages

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Principal, Agent or Bystander? Governance and Leadership in Chinese and Russian Villages

FUMIKI TAHARA

Abstract

What does 'local self-governance' mean in post-communist Russia and China? In order to answer this question, the article focuses on village-level governance in both countries by employing a four-fold typology of village leadership in public affairs. In both countries, the withdrawal of state power from local communities and the introduction of legislative 'self-government' has not brought autonomy to the local and community levels. The findings here suggest that the single 'state agent' category of village leadership that emerged under the communist regime is shifting to become one of the remaining three types, 'principal', 'local agent' and 'bystander'. There was a growing tendency towards a non-autonomous type of 'bystander'-style leadership in China and the 'local agent' type in Russia. This article suggests that the development of these local governance styles should not be attributed to a common transitional process departing from the communist past, but is the outcome of four factors that influence village leaders in two countries: administrative distance between local and village level, village social structure, fiscal arrangements and electoral relationships.

THIS ARTICLE FOCUSES ON VILLAGE-LEVEL LEADERSHIP in China and Russia based on case studies from four villages in two countries. (The Chinese cases are Shandong Village in Penglai *xian*, Shandong and Jiangxi Village in Yugan *xian*, Jiangxi. The Russian cases are Tambov Village in Znamenka *Raion*, Tambov and Tatarstan Village in Kamstoe Ust'e *Raion*, Tatarstan.)¹ For comparative purposes, I employ the construction of public works such as irrigation facilities, small-scale roads, gas pipes and street lamps to observe the role entrusted to formal village leaders or village organisations in providing these services.

This article is a result of the ongoing project 'Comparative Research: Major Regional Powers in Eurasia' (2008–2012) financed by the Japan Ministry of Education and Science. The Russian part of this article is mainly based on data collected by my field research from 1 to 16 September 2009. I sincerely thank Professor Kimitaka Matsuzato of Hokkaido University for his kind assistance to my field trip, for interpreting Russian language, as well as for his valuable comments on the earlier version of this manuscript.

¹Out of consideration for privacy, in this article, I employ pseudonyms for village or hamlet names and give only initials for interviewees or persons.

In order to outline chronological and regional variations, I adopted two indexes to classify village leaders, the first being dependence on other actors and the second being access to resources. These two indexes form a four-part typology of village leaders: 'state agent', 'local agent', 'principal' and 'bystander' (Figure 1). Many China scholars have employed a two-fold typology of 'agent' and 'principal' to explain the changes in the role of Chinese village leaders after economic reform (Xu 1997; Oi 1999; Wu 2002). Oi (1999, p. 161) argues that the reform of fiscal institutions in the 1980s has transformed the roles of local officials from that of 'agent' (*dailiren* in Chinese) to 'principal' (*dangjiaren*). She suggests that increased tax revenues and extra-budgetary funds have allowed localities to move beyond the strategies of passive resistance that were characteristic of the Maoist period,² towards an active pursuit of their interests. In my analysis, I decided it was necessary to create a new category, the 'bystander' type (*pangguanzhe*), one who cannot depend on other actors and does not have access to resources. This was because this type of village leader better reflects the present reality in rural China. At the same time, I divided the 'agent' category into 'state agent' and 'local agent' to provide a clear distinction between the village leaders in the past and present. The 'state agent' type, seen in the socialist era was dependent on the state, legitimated only by state authority and their given position. Nevertheless, as a rule they lacked access to resources under the planned economy. Their role was one of 'passive resistance' towards the state and irrational state policies. In contrast, since local agents are legitimised through evaluations of work performance, they are able to choose to access various resources even though this implies a dependence on other actors, and even means a loss of autonomy.

In this article, I will argue that the single 'state agent' category of village leaders under the communist regime is metamorphosing into the remaining three types, the principal, the bystander and the local agent. Whilst Oi (1999, pp. 161–90) predicted that the 'agent' role of Chinese local leaders would give way to the 'principal' leadership role, I will highlight a further diversion of leadership types into the non-autonomous types of bystander and local agent drawing on my research on village leadership in

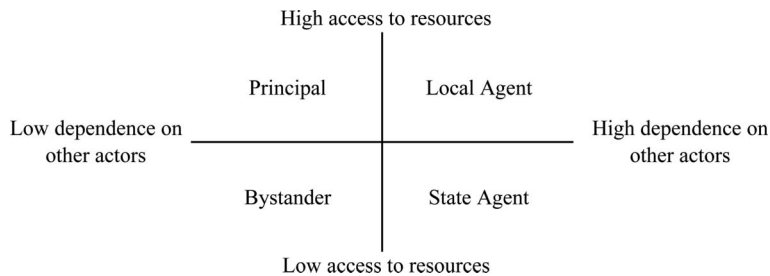


FIGURE 1. TYPOLOGY OF VILLAGE LEADERSHIP.

²For a vivid illustration on the 'everyday forms of resistance' by villagers and rural leaders under the Commune system, see Oi (1989) and Zhang (1998).

Russia and China. First, I will illustrate how the Chinese central government in the reform era after the 1980s expected village leaders to play the role of developmental 'principals' with lower degrees of dependence on other actors such as local governments and enterprises than their Russian counterparts. Second, I will demonstrate that there is a great deal of local variation in actual access to resources by village leaders. In China, the socio-economic resources held or available to the community determines whether the village leaders can become a 'principal', eventually leaving relatively poor, inland villages with no choice but to play the role of 'bystander' in public affairs. Third, I will argue that Russian village leaders still continue to act as 'agents', although they are not agents of the central state as before, but agents of other upper level local government officials or large farmers. For Russian village leaders, high dependence on other political actors guarantees access to resources. Finally, in explaining the variations between China and Russia in village leadership typologies, I will argue that what determines these variations is not the stage in the process of economic transition from planned economy to market-oriented economy, but a set of conditions that comprise administrative and demographic structures, village social structure and fiscal and electoral arrangements.³

Viewed from a broader perspective, this comparative analysis of Russian and Chinese villages raises the question of the meaning of 'local self-governance' in the particular setting of the two major post-communist regional powers in Eurasia.⁴ This question is significant for five reasons.

First, both countries have rural settlements with long histories, which gave them a firm foundation that allowed them to become relatively autonomous village communities. As major regional powers, both countries have extensive territories that are the result of long imperial histories. The central states of Russia and China have controlled vast areas of land rich in natural resources and each oversees huge populations, with a characteristic distribution of peasant households in small settlements scattered across each nation. A common feature of both governments is the long distance politically between the top and the bottom, namely, the central government and village communities. These structural and historical factors can simultaneously explain the limited reach of the central government and the traits of local community autonomy.

Second, within the last century, village communities in both countries have experienced the intrusion and subsequent withdrawal of socialist state power. The

³In his comparative study on political culture, Pye (2000, p. 113) notes that 'keeping in mind Russian developments is of value because Russia has gone further down the road abandoning Communism and hence its experiences may foreshadow what is in store for China'. However, we start from a different perspective.

⁴Major regional powers in Eurasia' in our project mainly include Russia, China and India who are challengers to the uni-polar order of the United States and an EU-dominated international order. Some of the commonalities among these countries are political independence, late growth, economic, military and cultural power to influence neighbouring countries, and a semi-peripheral status which leads them to distance themselves from the norms of freedom, democracy and prevention of nuclear proliferation in international society based on the logic of strength.

establishment and consolidation of communist states in the first half of the last century was a major challenge to the traditional ruling structures in China and Russia.⁵ Following China's rural reform and the collapse of the communist bloc, however, both countries have experienced the relatively rapid withdrawal of state power from village life. Soon after the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) decided in the early 1980s to dismantle the 'People's Communes' that had represented the socialist governing system of rural China, in 1991 the Soviet state as a whole dissolved. As the state's penetration into local governance in both countries diminished during this period, a great number of local areas were left without effective governing systems and social disorder emerged.⁶ The reorganisation of village societies and the remnants of the socialist legacy at work in local self-governance settings is an issue of great importance.

Third, in order to fill the power vacuum left in local governance, both countries have attempted to introduce self-government into local life, a movement that outwardly encourages village-level autonomy. In China, the 'Provisional Organic Law of Village Committee' was passed in 1987, stipulating the Village Committee as the fundamental unit of village self-government (Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi & Guowuyuan Fazhan Yanjiu Zhongxin 1992, pp. 493-497). After this, competitive elections were introduced in rural China, to elect village chiefs and village committee members. In Russia, the shift to local self-governance came with the passage of 'The Federal Law on the Basic Principles of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation' in 1995.⁷ The amendment, which came into effect in 2003 (the 2003 Law, hereafter⁸), identified the village, the county (*raion*) and the city as the tiers of local government that were responsible for the provision of residential services including water supply, local heating, gas supply, road construction, education, medical and cultural services. President Putin strongly supported the introduction of the 2003 Law in an attempt to recentralise the local governance regime (Ross 2009, p. 75).⁹ As I will argue below, the different types of electoral system in each country greatly influenced the roles of village leadership.

Fourth, in both countries the facilitating, as well as the impeding roles played by informal economic arrangements cannot be overestimated. These include what recent studies of both societies have called 'informal practices' or 'informal institutions' (Tsai 2007; Ledeneva 2008). For example, both *blat* in Russia, and *guanxi* in China refer to

⁵A majority of previous studies comparing China and Russia have been concerned with state penetration through revolution and agrarian transformation. See, for example, Bernstein (1971), Nolan (1976) and Smith (2008).

⁶For a Chinese case, see Li (2009, pp. 291-314). The change was definitely more drastic in Russia. The origin of the problem was not a decline in production but the breakdown of distribution networks that had been managed and maintained by the Soviet state. See Allina-Pisano (2008, pp. 28-52).

⁷*Sobranie Zakonodatel'stva Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, No 35, 1995.

⁸See <http://www.consultant.ru/popular/selfgovernment/>, accessed 30 March 2012.

⁹Lankina (2005, p. 145) also suggests that 'the effect of the reform is to place the local governments more directly under regional control'. She also notes that 'the thrust of the legislation further strengthens local governments' dependence on both federal and regional levels of authority. Not only is such dependence likely to lead to greater local inefficiencies, it will also discourage the municipalities from acting as autonomous political players in the federation's intergovernmental system' (Lankina 2005, p. 162).

informal social connections, which flourished during the socialist era in order to obtain daily necessities. Concluding her comparative studies, Ledeneva (2008, p. 141) states that *blat* in Russia and *guanxi* in China were not only the cause or the outcome of the defects of formal institutions but also the solution to them. As I will show below, in their twenty-first century social contexts, these informal practices seem to vary in significance and social meaning between the two countries.

Fifth, we must consider the role of the dominant political party in each country, the CCP and *Edinaya Rossiya* (United Russia) in local self-governance. These parties have not only the dominant ruling position in central politics, but also have penetrated into local society and play a crucial part in rural political life. Although historical timing and the extent of this penetration in each country greatly differ, comparing the roles played by both parties will raise intriguing questions about various social contexts in which 'local self governance' takes place.

Administrative and demographic settings

As pointed out above, one of the common features of the two regional powers is the administrative distance that exists between the central government and rural residents. The chart below illustrates the position of village-level governance within the entire administrative structure. In order to make comparison easier, we have used the analytical concepts of 'region', 'locality' and 'community': regions are located one rank lower than central government and include the provincial (*sheng*) and autonomous districts (*zizhiqu*) in China and the *oblast'* and republic in Russia; localities include the *xian* in China and the *raion* in Russia;¹⁰ while in both countries, community is the bottom level and is the conceptual equivalent of the village, which composes the fundamental unit of residential life. The relationships between Chinese villagers are not only formed by their close geographical proximity but are also entwined with a lineage organisation system that gives villages or hamlets a strong collective identity. In Russia the village (*selo*) traditionally had an Orthodox church as its central focus.

From Figure 2, it can be seen that the population at the 'community' level in each case study is between 1,500 and 2,500. However, since the national population of China is approximately 10 times that of Russia, China's administrative structure is multilayered with 'sub-regional' and 'sub-local' levels added. For example, the area of Penglai *xian* in China is 110,000 hectares, making it roughly equivalent to Znamenka *Raion* in Russia, but there is a striking difference in population between the 450,000 people in Penglai and 20,000 in Znamenka. The number of communities in the 'local' category is 584 in Penglai and 372 in Yugan, whereas in Russia there are only seven communities in Znamenka and 20 in Kamskoe Ust'e. In addition, the administrative

¹⁰The number of *xian* in China was stable at between 1,500 and 2,000 throughout the imperial era (Shiba 1983, p. 186), demonstrating the socio-geographic unity of the locality as well as designating a clear political unit. Recently, many authors on Chinese local politics have turned their attention to the *xian* as a unit of political analysis. See, for example, Rong *et al.* (1998), Zhong (2003), Zhou (2004), Tahara (2004) and Fan (2008). On the *raion* in Russia see Matsuzato (1999, pp. 1367–8) who points out the importance of this sub-regional level politics as a component of a triangular relationship between centre, regions and sub-regions.

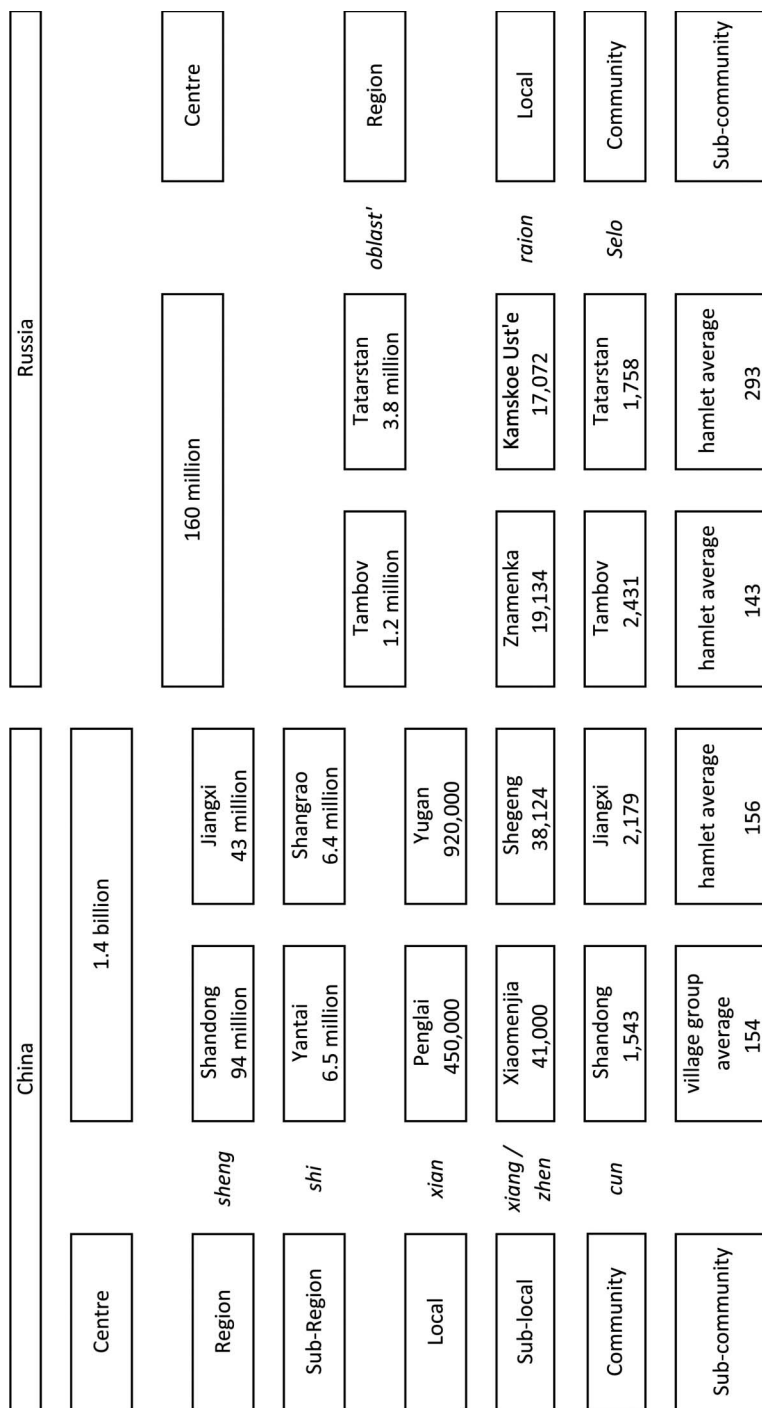


FIGURE 2. LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE AND DEMOGRAPHIC COMPARISON OF MY RESEARCH SITES.

distance between 'locality' and 'community' is greater in China, which requires the *xian* to arrange for a sub-local agent (town or township) to supervise communities. Demographically speaking, Russian 'localities' (*raiony*) are only equivalent to Chinese 'sub-localities' (town and township). The closeness between localities and communities¹¹ would enable a Russian *raion* to maintain much more direct and frequent contact with villages.

In the next two sections, I intend to illustrate the actual state of village governance by presenting case studies in my four research sites.¹² The villages discussed in the next section are roughly representative of the present state of two contrasting local realities in China, the relatively rich and rapidly developing coastal China (Shandong) and the economically lagging and politically inert inland China, which is also the homeland of migrant workers (Jiangxi). The two Russian cases presented in the following section are representative of the typical agrarian ethnic-Russian regions in European Russia (Tambov) and the economically advanced ethnic republics close to Central Asia (Tatarstan). They also represent the general political situation in rural Russia, since both regions are presently strongholds of the United Russia party.¹³

China: polarisation into principal and bystander types

Case 1. 'Self-sufficient' irrigation management in Shandong Village

While community issues vary among villages, most 'issues' in rural China seem to arise from developmental concerns. These concerns are related to how to improve the conditions of agricultural production, with the aim of increasing the income of peasant households. One of the most striking disparities between Russia and China is the position of farmland irrigation. Agriculture in my Russian research sites is characterised by the use of extensive plots of land and the utilisation of huge agricultural machines. Therefore, raising land productivity by means of irrigation rarely becomes a major concern, whereas in densely populated rural communities in China, the increase of land productivity is considered a vital issue to be tackled collectively.

¹¹The terms 'closeness' and 'distance' here refer to administrative structure; they do not necessarily mean physical distance. In the Russian case, the physical distance between a locality and community is as large as in China. The reason why Russia became a major regional power is because it has such physical vastness and is rich with natural resources. People can overcome the limitations of physical distance with careful maintenance of modes of communication and transportation. The concentration of rural resources in central hamlets can make the distance between district and village short, although it would lead to the peripheral hamlets' decline and eventual disappearance. Case 3 in this article is an example which demonstrates typical Russian efforts to overcome this.

¹²One may doubt if it is possible to make a sweeping generalisation just based on these four research sites, however, we can confirm that none of the four sites is an extreme case, none being a model village or situated near large urban centres, and all reflect some important realities of rural China and Russia. I believe the advantage of taking in-depth descriptions of some fairly typical cases is far more than the risk of possibly mistaking a special case for a typical one. Perfectly typical cases do not exist anywhere.

¹³Tambov region was strongest constituency for the communists during the 1990s, while Tatarstan was the leader of Russia's ethnic regionalism.

The actual procedure of constructing irrigation facilities and their management in Shangdong Village illustrate a typical example of the self-sufficient aspect of Chinese villages.¹⁴ Located in the north coast of Shandong peninsula, Shandong Village has around 500 households and a population of 1,543 people, most of whom are engaged in the production of fruit, such as apples and grapes. Entwined deeply in a market economy, most of the peasant households in Shandong Village have embarked upon various kinds of subsidiary businesses, including trucking, handicrafts, small-scale trading and working in village factories. However, since the income from farmland has always comprised no less than half of the annual income, most of the residents have not chosen to abandon fruit production. The fact that most of the villagers are still engaged in farmland management makes irrigation management an important community issue. Since the late 1950s the village leaders have recognised the construction of irrigation facilities as a key factor for development and have taken responsibility for it. The farmland in the territory of Shandong Village falls into two types: one is the flat land that surrounds the hamlet and the other is the hilly land near the east end of village. After the dismantling of the Peoples' Commune in the village in the early 1980s, both types of farmland were distributed to each household equally. The flat part of the farmlands is irrigated by public wells with connected underground pipes, while the hilly part is watered by reservoirs.

The reasons I have termed this irrigation management 'self-sufficient' are, first, the range of residents that these small-scale facilities provide irrigation services to is limited to those who have membership of Shandong Village and second, the resources to construct the facilities were not provided by the government or other external actors. Instead, village leaders from the 1960s until 2000 took the initiative to build them through 'self-reliance' (*zili gengsheng*). The resources for construction were procured from 'collective economies'.¹⁵ Towards the end of the Commune Era, the village leaders enthusiastically built village-owned enterprises including a factory which produced sofas. These enterprises were privatised at the end of the 1990s, but are still paying rent to the village as they occupy collective land. 'Collective economies' also include collective lands that were kept for the village collective to rent out. It is worth noting that leaders in the past were aware of the importance of creating and maintaining collective economies, eventually making it possible for the present leaders to implement many public construction projects.

¹⁴This part is based on data collected in my field research conducted intermittently during 2002–2008. See Tahara (2009b).

¹⁵During the socialist period from the end of 1950s to the 1970s, local administrative units in China, including province, prefecture, *xian*, commune, brigade and team had created and managed state-owned or collective enterprises, although the development varied among regions. Particularly, commune and brigade level leaders actively introduced collective enterprises (*she dui qiye*), which evolved into township and village enterprises (*xiang zhen qiye*) after the rural reform of the 1980s. Other than the enterprises, land ownership in rural areas is also relegated to collectives, namely village and villagers' groups that gave these organisations two main options: redistribution to the villagers or preservation for collective usage or collective management. 'Collective economies' exclusively refers to the enterprises or the lands that provide village organisations with actual income (Tahara 2009b, pp. 30–2).

Case 2. The success and the failure of small-scale road constructions in Jiangxi Village

There are significant regional economic disparities between Chinese villages. Among others, there is a gap between the rich coastal area in the east and the poor inland area in the middle and the west which strongly affects the capability of village organisations to provide public services. Lily Tsai's assertion (2007) that the accountability of 'informal institutions' such as lineages and village temples foster the ability of villages to provide public goods is especially true in inland China, where they have little of the economic resources held by the collective economy in Shandong Village. Jiangxi Village is largely representative of the situation in many villages in inland China.

Unlike the administrative composition of Shandong Village, a large single hamlet, Jiangxi Village's administrative unit is composed of 14 relatively small hamlets. Peasant households make their living from rice cultivation and working outside the village as migrant workers. In the central hamlet of Jiangxi administrative village, most young couples work in factories in coastal provinces such as Zhejiang and Fujian, while men in their forties choose to work in Nanchang, the provincial capital. In recent years, the extra income earned by outside work has enriched the peasant household economy and brought about an expansion of house-building, including some attractive three or four storey buildings in the hamlet. In contrast, some of the roads that connect the hamlet with larger, paved roads are in a state of disrepair as they have not been repaired for a long time and this impedes travelling on rainy days. As a result small-scale road construction has become a community issue in Jiangxi Village. However, since the collective economy of Jiangxi Village is near zero, village cadres have neither the will nor the means to begin paving these roads and the responsibility for paving roads was handed to each hamlet. Here we will look at two cases of success and failure.¹⁶

In the latter half of 2007, Yujia hamlet succeeded in constructing a new 200-metre road 'E' (see Figure 3). Prior to the construction, Yujia hamlet had received the 'New Rural Construction Aid' (*xin nongcun jianshe*) from the local government that was mainly given to pave roads inside the hamlet. At the same time, a larger road 'C' was planned to be paved with concrete. These injections of government finance stimulated villagers to construct the new road 'E' at a cost of 13,000 yuan¹⁷ for the road itself and 30,000 yuan for a bridge (see Figure 3). In the first phase, the hamlet leaders called for a fund-raising effort to collect fees from each household on a *per capita* basis. The amount of money collected, 15,000 yuan, was spent on compensation payments for the land occupied by the new road. In the succeeding phase, the hamlet leaders launched a donation movement and although the money collected from the villagers was still not enough to cover the total costs of construction, they could proceed with the construction on credit.

Hejia hamlet is only 700 metres away from the Yujia hamlet. When I visited the Hejia hamlet in March 2008, villagers were debating a plan for new road and bridge construction 'G2'. The new road would utilise a part of the original ridge 'G1', as well as enlarge the width of the road so that automobile traffic could come into the hamlet

¹⁶This part is based on the data collected during my field research conducted intermittently between 2006 and 2009.

¹⁷One yuan is roughly equivalent to \$0.16.

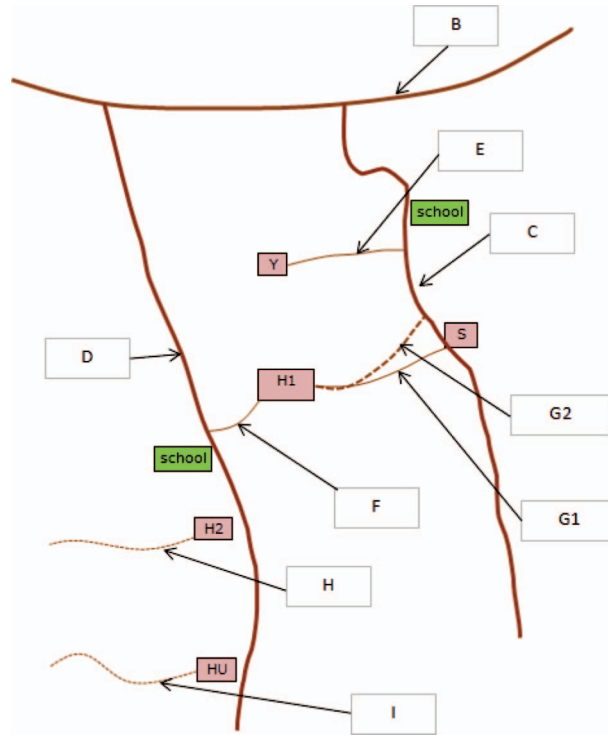


FIGURE 3. JIANGXI VILLAGE, CHINA.

Note: Y, Yujia hamlet; H1, Hejia hamlet; S, Shujia hamlet; HU, HU hamlet; H2, H2 hamlet. Roads are indicated by letters B-I.

directly (see Figure 3). The beginnings of this plan went back to the previous Lunar New Year, when many young villagers had returned from the cities to visit their families. The hamlet chief of Hejia, H.B., was drinking wine with the hamlet chief of Shujia and other villagers. The chief of Shujia hamlet provoked H.B. by commenting that although ‘Yujia hamlet is such a small place, [it] still succeeded in building a road, how come a big hamlet like Hejia could not build one?’ Villagers who had witnessed the exchange between these two leaders circulated the story very quickly and soon public opinion about the need for a new road had been formed. A young man working in Shanghai supported the plan by donating 10,000 yuan before leaving for his workplace.¹⁸

Why did the plan for the construction of road ‘G2’ fail? There are many reasons. Most of the farmlands that ‘G2’ would pass through belonged to the villagers of Shujia hamlet. Although the hamlet chief of Shujia showed a willingness to cooperate with the plan, some of the landowners did not agree to give up the land that would be

¹⁸I myself visited H.B. several times and persuaded him to take the initiative and lead the project. Although the plan initially seemed to progress, it eventually became deadlocked. The source for this account came from interviews with related villagers, as well as from my own observations in March 2008.

occupied by road 'G2' (see Figure 3). Behind the opposition to the plan, there also lies a deep-rooted antagonism between the hamlets of Heija and Shujia which was the result of some events in the past; once in the early 1980s a group of armed male villagers of the two hamlets had a confrontation about insufficient water for irrigation. A similar situation occurred again in 1988.

Russia: from state agent to local agent types

Case 3. Combating winter in Tambov Village

Public goods in Russian villages are supplied in a social welfare context, rather than in a developmental context. The community issues that I observed in Tambov, a typical agrarian region, represent a case in which a demographic catastrophe, the aging of the community, decline of peripheral hamlets and problems resulting from winter weather are closely related to each other. The chief of Znamenka *Raion* recognises that 'the population drain, especially of healthy labourers and of specialists is a natural outcome of industrialisation'. Yet at the same time, he stressed that 'rural economic development programmes, through the maintenance of infrastructure such as gas pipes and roads in itself becomes the strategy to combat the demographic problem'.¹⁹

In Tambov and probably in many other regions in Russia, 'community issues' are largely identical to 'winter problems'. In normal years, people in the Tambov region begin heating their homes and offices in September. Under the worst conditions, the accumulated snowfall reaches two metres high and the temperatures drop to -40°C . During one interview, a female village chief recalled a time when villagers had to get up at 5 am to light the *pechka*,²⁰ as if she was telling a horrible story.²¹

We will take Tambov Village as one case.²² Located in Znamenka *Raion*, with an area of 110,000 ha, Tambov Village occupies 30,000 ha. In this vast area, as many as 17 hamlets have a total of 800 households and 2,431 people. In the biggest hamlet, there lived 800 people, while the smallest hamlet has only six people. The village chief predicted that seven out of 17 hamlets would surely vanish within 10 years, as most people are elderly.

What kind of problems can this type of village community solve collectively? Laying the natural gas piping to heat houses is one of the most important public businesses. In fact, in Tambov Village, only three hamlets out of 17 have built gas pipes and there is no plan to invest money in gas pipelines to the others because the rest of the hamlets are expected to disappear in the near future. Residents of those hamlets are still using firewood, coal and propane. In cases of coal usage, the average home in those hamlets uses up to five tonnes per winter costing R25,000. Tambov Village has 700 'privileged

¹⁹Author's interview with village chiefs and V.F.G., chief of Znamenka *Raion*, 8 September 2009, Znamenka *Raion* office, Tambov.

²⁰Winter heating system powered by firewood or coal.

²¹Author's interview with village chief of Sukhotinka Village, 6 September 2009, Sukhotinka Village, Znamenka *Raion*, Tambov.

²²Data on Tambov Village are from an interview with O.V.S., village chief of Tambov Village, 7 September 2009, Tambov Village, Znamenka *raion*, Tambov.

persons' such as retired veterans or disabled persons to whom between 1.5 and 2 tonnes of free coal is supplied.

Gas pipes are vital for residential life at a basic level, but it is not the village or local residents but the region (*oblast'*) that takes the initiative to lay gas pipes.²³ The cost of building pipelines was paid for by the federal government, regional government and the local residents but the regional government paid the most. In the worst-case scenario for the regional government, residents could refuse to pay their share of construction fees after the completion of construction. Therefore, the region expects the village soviet to persuade residents to support construction. In one of the villages in Znamenka,²⁴ the village chief went door to door before the construction to persuade residents to approve the plan and to pay R25,000 per household.²⁵ After the completion of the gas pipe, an overwhelming majority re-elected her as village chief in 2008.

Another vital public service in winter is snow removal.²⁶ There are two ways of doing this. One is to request the services of a company named '*dorozhnik*' (road protector) located at the *raion* seat of Znamenka. The company is engaged in road maintenance in summer and snow-ploughing in winter. The other option is to ask farmers of agro-firms to use their machinery to plough the snow. According to the village chief of Tambov Village, farmers and local communities have an inter-dependent relationship. First, the village soviet can help farmers, for example, in providing the residential information of shareholders when the farmers need to buy shares and contribute to the local community with snow-ploughing services, fire prevention, and in providing free food for school lunches. In the event of a funeral, they often use their own cars to contact the relatives of the deceased. V.F.G., the present *raion* chief, started his career as a businessperson in 1989, and set up a farm of 600 hectares at Tambov Village. He was the first farmer who showed the willingness to contribute to the local community.

A further problem concerns the connecting of peripheral hamlets with the central hamlet. This is not specifically a winter problem, but it becomes especially difficult in a region with snow. At present, most of the social resources are concentrated in the central hamlet. The 'Social and Cultural Centre' is a general facility which provides a base for many institutions in one building. Included there are the village soviet, a bank, a gymnasium, a library, a hospital and dental clinic, a kindergarten, an auditorium, and a disco. Beside the 'centre' is a home for the aged, which is managed on a regional government budget and which is well-known for its progressiveness. Of course, this centralisation was made possible by funding from public services for the

²³O'Brien and Patsiorkovsky (2006, pp. 137–38) associate the regional gap in the centralised gas system with 'aggressiveness' or 'passiveness' of regional government and local village in initiating construction.

²⁴Author's interview with village chief of Sukhotinka Village, 6 September 2009, Sukhotinka Village, Znamenka *Raion*, Tambov.

²⁵R1 is roughly equivalent to \$0.03.

²⁶The chief of Tambov Village commented to us that she could not sleep well on snowy nights. In particular, she feared fires in snowy conditions. She said 'I am happy that we have less snowfall these years than before' (interview with O. V. S., village chief of Tambov Village, 7 September 2009, Tambov Village, Znamenka *Raion*, Tambov).

peripheral hamlets. In this sense, one of the important jobs of the village soviet is to save the seven peripheral hamlets from isolation. However, in 2008, because the village soviet could not get rid of the frozen snow, the residents of one hamlet were isolated from the outside for about one month. Fortunately, they had a stock of food and could manage daily life by themselves but, since the residents of these isolated and vanishing hamlets are all elderly pensioners, the snow-plough service is combined with the social welfare service for older villagers. On normal days, the social workers or doctors can visit these hamlets regularly and the village stores can deliver daily commodities.

Case 4. 'Community issues' and local politics in Tatarstan village

Tatarstan village in the Republic of Tatarstan has 721 households and a population of 1,758 people. Although it has six hamlets, more than 80% of the population resides in the central hamlet. The ethnic composition of the population is 73% Russian (1,285), 24% Tatar (425), 1% Chuvash (25) and 1% others (23). Other than 721 native households mentioned above, there are 536 non-native cottage dwelling households, many of whom commute to Kazan, the capital city of the republic.²⁷

The winter problems are important here too. However, among community issues, winter problems seem less central than in Tambov for several reasons. First, the geographical distribution of hamlets is relatively concentrated in Tatarstan. The demographic catastrophe, the aging of peripheral hamlet dwellers and the social welfare functions of the infrastructure are not as serious as in Tambov. Moreover, there were fewer cases of the absorption of minor municipalities in Tatarstan. Small peripheral administrative villages are still given access to various public services such as medical care and education. At present, small villages with 750 residents still have at least one medical assistant. Recently, however, the *raion* government advised villages to start to examine the administrative absorption of minor villages. In schools, if the number of students per class falls below 25 in an urban area or below 14 in a rural area, they are absorbed by a larger adjacent school.²⁸

Second, Tatarstan had already completed the construction of gas pipelines around 1999. In contrast to the residents in Tambov, who had to bear a part of the construction costs, the republic government of Tatarstan paid all the expenses for laying the pipeline. Therefore, the role of village chief here did not include the persuasion of residents to finance such public projects. According to a former chief of Tatarstan Village, the first step of the gas pipe project was to call the village leaders to Kazan to inform them about the whole plan.²⁹ Residents were then asked to file applications to be connected to the pipeline, after which an architectural company in Kazan sent staff to design plans for individual households. The actual job of the village soviet was to manage the procedure and especially to act as a point of contact

²⁷ Author's interview with A.V.S., chief of Tatarstan Village, 11 September 2009, Tatarstan Village, Kamskoe Ust'e *Raion*, Tatarstan.

²⁸ Author's interview with Z.G.G., chief of Kamskoe Ust'e *Raion*, 12 September 2009, Kamskoe Ust'e *Raion*, Tatarstan.

²⁹ Author's interview with F.A.S., a former chief of Tatarstan Village, 13 September 2009, Te'nki Village, Kamskoe Ust'e *Raion*, Tatarstan.

with the companies in charge of the construction. The territory of Tatarstan Village was divided into six areas, each of which was contracted to different companies. The contracts were made between the construction companies and the *raion* government, not with the village government. It is worth noting that after the actual building had started, the republic government suddenly ordered a change in the original plan from laying pipes above the ground to using underground pipes. The republic government stressed that the reasons for the changes were twofold: first that the underground pipes were much safer and more durable than the above-ground type and that a chemistry company in Kazan had developed a synthetic resin which made it feasible to utilise underground pipes. At any rate, this event indicates the extent to which the whole project was under the strong control of the republic government, whereas the village government merely worked as an agent for other actors.

After the completion of the gas pipe project, few public goods were in need as urgently as gas pipes had been. Attention then turned to other public works projects such as street lamps, a church, and a temporary home for orphans during the period of 2003 to 2005.³⁰ The street lamps cost as much as R8,000,000. I.A.S., the *raion* chief of the time, was successful in applying for funding from the federal budget for this. When asked if the acquisition had been on the request of villagers, the late village chief answered that it was 'partly' so. The lamps stretch along the street that connects the centre of Tatarstan Village and a professional school located near a Tatar hamlet (Figure 4). As for the reconstruction of the village Orthodox Church, the foundation of the church needed to be relaid, a project that cost R900,000 to R1,000,000. The greater part of the construction costs were borne by the *raion* with only a small part raised from the village. However, the reconstruction project was later scrapped, for two reasons: a reshuffle of the *raion* government that led to a change of policy and the effects of the worldwide financial crisis of 2008. The temporary home for orphans accepts children from a vast area that covers the entire right bank of the Volga.³¹ In this case again, the *raion* chief, Shigapov took the initiative to promote this facility. He went to Kazan to find financial support for the plan and the home opened in 2005. Later, the management of the home was transferred to the federal budget. The example of the temporary home for orphans suggests that the supply of public goods is under the strong influence of local politics which could extend not only to the *raion* level, but also as far as to the level of the republic.

On the other hand, some of the public services were borne out of consideration for the actual needs of the community. For example, the cost of repairing a public fountain was R12,000 and it was taken from the village budget. Originally, a good fountain produced clean water so to this the village chief simply added a wall and a roof. Another example of public projects that were in response to community needs is the inauguration of a market every Wednesday. In order to invite merchants to Tatarstan Village, the village chief went to the *raion* seat to contact them. He asked

³⁰Author's interview with B.S.F., the late chief of Tatarstan Village, 13 September 2009, Tatarstan Village, Kamskoe Ust'e *Raion*, Tatarstan.

³¹The children's parents are generally those who are unable to take care of their sons and daughters due to alcoholism. After a temporary stay of six months, children are allowed to go home if their parents have recovered. If not, the children are sent to a permanent orphanage.

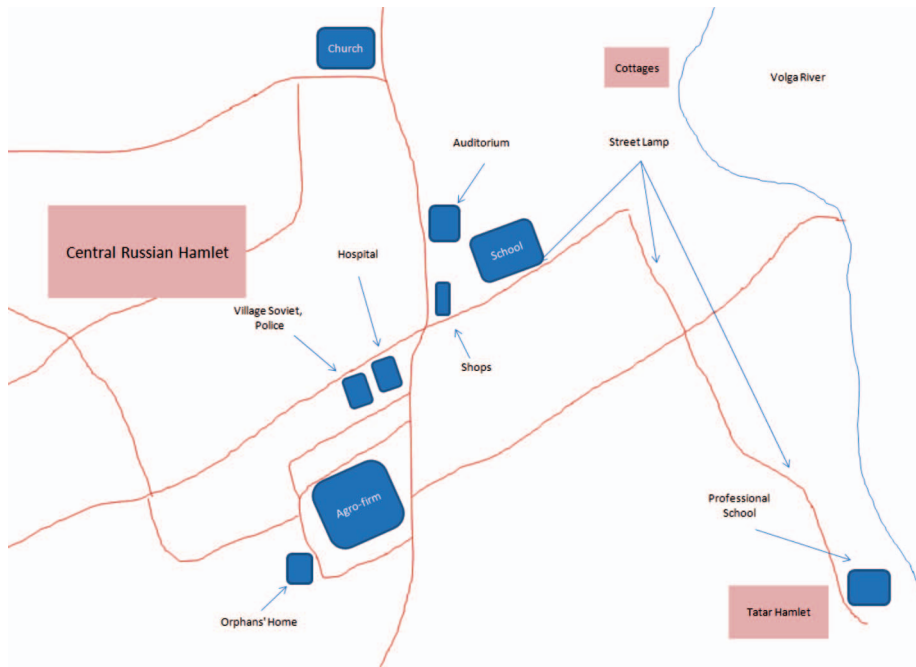


FIGURE 4. TATARSTAN VILLAGE, RUSSIA.

them to sell daily commodities such as cloth that small shops in Tatarstan Village did not have. This plan came from two considerations: an attempt to raise revenue for the village budget by taking a R50 fee from each merchant; and the recognition of the need for the older villagers to purchase commodities near to their homes as many of them did not have easy access to places outside the village.

Resources and the restrictions of village autonomy

As noted at the beginning of this article, I use two indexes to classify types of village leadership, namely, dependence on other actors and access to resources. In this section, I will analyse the following three factors, village social structure, fiscal arrangements and electoral relationships which have determined the extent of dependence and access for village leaders in the four case studies.

Village social structure

As socialist states, both Russia and China had agricultural 'collectives' in the past, but their relation to administrative units was dissimilar. As expressed by the slogan 'Unite administration and the commune!' (*zheng she heyi*), the 'People's Commune' in China was not an exclusive organisation for agricultural production, but also an administrative unit which had clear geographical boundaries. That is, being the manager of a commune automatically meant being an administrative leader as well.

Membership in the two organisations ultimately overlapped.³² This would have strengthened social cohesion inside the Commune organisations, as well as giving formal village organisations (production brigade) unitary power over their territory. On the other hand, the Russian collective farm, the *kolkhoz*, had numerous functions that provided social services and yet the collective farm never combined with administrative units (Patsiorkovski 2002, pp. 118–21). The members of the collective farm did not include all of the community's residents.³³ The village organisation (*Sel'sovet*), as a dependent actor in the Soviet system, was expected to do the bidding of large enterprises like the *kolkhoz* (Patsiorkovski 2002, p. 120).

The path to de-collectivisation, which shaped the current village social structure, depended on these socialist legacies of 'merger' and 'division'. In China, dismantling the People's Commune in the early 1980s accompanied the drastic redistribution of usage rights and an allotment of farmland to each household. Owing to their combined roles as administrative leader and economic manager, village leaders had a good command of their own economic resources. Responding to the peasants' desire for land, a great majority of the villages implemented the work of land redistribution in an extremely egalitarian manner.³⁴ As shown in the Shandong and Jiangxi cases, the peasant household economy in each village became nearly identical, combining small-scale farming with subsidiary businesses and employment, including migrant labour. The equal redistribution of the biggest economic resource, farmland, meant that there was less possibility of outstanding influential individuals emerging and acting separately from the village organisations.³⁵ Still, in Shandong Village, not all resources were distributed to households and the preservation of 'collective economies' enabled village administrative cadres to keep economic power to provide public goods even in the post-communist period. In contrast, in Jiangxi Village, with no collective resources available, administrative cadres remained helpless, eventually becoming debilitated.³⁶ They could only take resources for the provision of public goods from peasant households. What influenced their success and failure was the social cohesion of the hamlet community or the individual leadership of small-scale elites living in the hamlets.

In Russia, the process of de-collectivisation has been long lasting and rather complex. Local governments intended that the collectives should not be dismantled but reorganised into new forms of collective enterprises, turning the original collective farm workers into 'shareholders' rather than landowners (Allina-Pisano 2008). Villagers at first were given a certificate to entitle them to a portion of land but 'the location of the plot would not be identified, and the land would not be allotted, until

³²For an elaborate work on the commune system, see Zhang (1998).

³³In Tatarstan Village in Case 4, only one-third of the villagers worked for the collective and therefore had entitlements as 'share-holders', a relatively extreme example.

³⁴Other than the example of Shandong Village in this article, see also Judd (1992, pp. 339–46) and Li (2009, pp. 269–71).

³⁵It is true, especially in advanced coastal China, that the growth of non-administrative economic elite has been so rapid that it has attracted wide attention (Wong *et al.* 1995). However, it is still unclear if this will be followed by the formation of a conspicuous social class that is comparable to the director of the large agro-firm in Russia.

³⁶An often observed tendency is that the more economically successful the village was in the collective era, the more collective resources the village leaders will have been able to preserve, and *vice versa*. See, for example, Kobayashi (1997, p. 572) and Tan (1998, pp. 18–20).

and unless the shareholder wished either to lease the land to an entity other than the reorganised collective, or to use the land personally' (Allina-Pisano 2008, p. 70). Yamamura (1997, pp. 151–53) gives three reasons to explain why the dismantling of collective farming did not bring about the growth of numerous individual farmers. First, the peasants felt insecure about taking responsibility for the risks of agricultural management. Second, the amount of machinery available was insufficient for individual farming. Third, the collectives had previously provided many social services, which people still urgently needed.³⁷ In my view, however, another important reason lies in the original 'division of labour' in the collective era, which had made administrative leaders unable to dispose of the collective land and assets as freely as their Chinese counterparts did. At any rate, this arrangement of property rights made the social character of the village community rather 'centralised', with the influential directors of gigantic agro-firms or collective enterprises owning and running vast areas of farmland within the village, while the rest of the villagers relied on pensions, family gardens, or other work related to the 'social sphere'.³⁸

Village leaders do not need to contact each household; it is enough for them to ask the directors of former collectives or private farmers for help. Collective enterprises, making full use of tractors or other agricultural machinery, can serve residents and provide public services, for example in snow removal or road construction (Case 3). Residents also hope that these elites will contribute to local public businesses. On this point, one influential director in Tatarstan Village stressed that he does 'not intend to help the municipality but its residents'.³⁹ According to him, municipalities do not have a large enough budget to provide adequate administrative services for residents. That is why these elites play their part, for example, in road repair, water, and snow-ploughing. They also assist in the school garden and the orphans' home and lend out their machines free of charge. The annual budget of this director's enterprise includes expenses for a contribution to the locality amounting to R500,000–R600,000 and comprising 0.5% of gross expenditures.⁴⁰

Other than farmland and agricultural machinery, elite farmers took over some of the important property previously owned by the collectives. After the introduction of the 2003 Law, property such as residential housing and the social and cultural centre

³⁷Yamamura (1997, p. 73) also points out that the idea of reformist intelligentsia seemed to be influenced by the land redistribution policy in China. Nevertheless, they were unrealistic in the Russian context because, it was not enough to distribute land to each household since agricultural machinery were vital for farming in Russia and new farmers needed initial investment for the machinery and other facilities.

³⁸'Social sphere' refers to occupations related to public services such as schools, kindergartens, social welfare facilities for the aged, libraries, post offices, hospitals and retail stores. In my research sites in Russia, approximately 10% to 20% of the population, or roughly 20% to 40% of the labour force is engaged in these jobs. This proportion is relatively high compared to China, where only a small number of households have broken away from agricultural production.

³⁹Author's interview with S.A.Z., director of the agro-firm 'Tenikovskaya', 14 September 2009, Tatarstan Village, Kamskoe Ust'e *Raion*, Tatarstan.

⁴⁰As for the latter, the director explained that, although they offer municipalities no special or reduced prices, since they are not professional builders and the prices are lower in the countryside than in the city, they can provide services at a comparatively low charge.

have been transferred to the local municipalities,⁴¹ but the interview above reveals that the elite farmer who succeeded the former collective still has not given up the social responsibilities that were expected of him.

Fiscal arrangements

Case 1 and Case 2 demonstrated that, in China, resources for public works projects such as irrigation facilities or small-scale roads largely depended on the self-reliance of villagers or village leaders, and they still have only limited subsidies or aid from upper-level governments. The original socio-economic conditions of the village and the hamlets strongly affect the capacity of formal village leaders to provide public works. As seen in Shandong Village, the existence of a collective economy enabled the leaders to provide villagers with various kinds of public services without collecting fees from them. The formation and preservation of this large collective economy was led by a talented and strong leader who was able to take advantage of a coastal location where the market economy was faring better. After the completion of the irrigation pipeline in 2000, as shown in Table 1, in 2008, the revenue of Shandong Village increased through leasing and selling collective economies. They utilised the profit for the construction of infrastructure such as village roads and running water.

Jiangxi Village, in contrast, has no examples of collective economy to provide the village administration with a financial base for running daily activities. In the past, village-level projects could be budgeted by extracting informal fees or creating surtaxes within agricultural taxes. However, after the implementation of Tax-for-Fee reform in 2000 and the eventual abolition of agricultural tax in 2006,⁴² any form of arbitrary extraction of fees by village cadres was prohibited, and the only exception was based on a democratic procedure of communal discussions on each item (*yishiyiyi*). These changes in the financial environment left the formal village organisations without help from collective economies. On the other hand, a recent trend is that informal elites among hamlets are taking over the responsibilities for public services.⁴³ The contrast between two cases of road construction in Jiangxi Village shows that the cohesion of the hamlet community, the leadership and their techniques of mobilising socio-economic resources largely determine the successes and failures of public works provision in inland China.

In Russia, the 2003 Law described above identifies the *raion* and village as 'local municipalities' with rights of taxation.⁴⁴ As shown in Table 1, the legal status of

⁴¹This process of transfer was actually completed during 2006–2007 in Tambov. Author's interview with Head of the Department of Interactions with Local Authorities in Tambov Regional government, 2 September 2009, Tambov.

⁴²For the detail of the reform policies, see Kennedy (2007).

⁴³Not coincidentally, recent scholarship about rural China is paying more attention to the role of 'informal elites' or 'informal institutions' in rural development. Other than Tsai (2007), see also Wu (2000), Tong (2005), Hu (2007).

⁴⁴Village-level municipalities can retain 100% of the land tax, while income tax must be shared across the federation (30%), region and *raion* (60%) and village (10%). Likewise, personal property tax is shared by region (40%) and *raion* (60%). Enterprise tax is all taken by the region and the federation. The above information from my interviews is not fully consistent with the information in Ross (2009, pp. 92–96), who notes that income tax revenues are shared by region (70%), *raion* (20%) and village (10%) and 100% of personal property tax revenue belongs to the village.

TABLE 1
BUDGETS IN TWO VILLAGES (2008)

<i>Revenue</i>	<i>Expenditure</i>
<i>Shandong Village in China, Budget: \$176,470</i>	
Fees from corrugated box factory (15%)	Salaries of village cadres and welfare fees to old villagers and retired cadres (9%)
Fees from sofa factory (11%)	Reconstruction of running water system (25%)
Lease fees from collectively owned shop buildings (25%)	Road construction inside hamlet (42%)
Lease fees from collective farmland (17%)	Laying new irrigation pipes (17%)
Sales of riverbank sand (10%)	Other expenses (7%)
Capital gains of machinery repair factory (22%)	
<i>Tatarstan Village in Russia, Budget: \$188,864</i>	
Independent Revenue (50%)	Salaries of village chief, administrators and accountant (14%)
Income tax	Fire Station expenses (37%)
Land tax	Hospital expenses (supported by subsidy) (27%)
Personal property tax	Environmental maintenance expenses (12%)
Lease fees	Social and Cultural Centre expenses (8%)
Revenue stamp fees	Conscription surrogate expenses (1%)
Conscription surrogate fees from federation	Other expenses (1%)
Subsidies from government (50%)	

Source: data provided by a villager of Shandong Village via email on 19, 24 October 2009 and interview with A.V.S., village chief of Tatarstan Village, 11 September 2009, Tatarstan Village.

Russian villages as local municipalities gave each village a firm financial basis for maintaining everyday activities such as the fire department or medical care. Since the adoption of the 2003 Law, the percentage of independent revenue available to local governments has substantially declined (Ross 2009, p. 82), and villages came to learn that with limited tax resources, they were unable to afford relatively large-scale public construction, especially building infrastructure. As one of my informants puts it, 'under the present system, the local municipality enjoys more autonomy than before and that leads the village into a financial crisis'.⁴⁵

Thus, the village municipality has to depend on resources from upper-level government in order to carry out public projects that are outside the scope of daily activities.⁴⁶

Within the total income of municipal budgets in 77 federal subjects, income from taxes comprised only 29.7%, whilst subventions and other inter-budget transfers made

⁴⁵Author's interview with B.S.F., former village chief of Tatarstan Village, 13 September 2009, Tatarstan Village, Kamskoe Ust'e *Raion*, Tatarstan. Other than him, many chiefs of local municipalities in Tambov pointed out that it was almost impossible to meet their responsibilities with the limited tax resources stipulated by the law. Related to this point, David O'Brien found in his survey that residents' satisfaction with their village dropped in the period between 1995 and 2003, while their satisfaction level with the *raion* rose high enough to be nearly equivalent to that of the village. He attributes this trend to the growing incapability of the village to provide infrastructure in the areas of economic development, health and education (O'Brien & Patsiorkovsky 2006, pp. 157–62).

⁴⁶Lankina (2005, p. 164) suggests that 'local governments will be expected to fund the narrowed list of local functions from their own sources, while federal and regional governments will provide funds for other tasks'. The case is more pressing in the village-level municipalities.

up 57.3% of total revenues (Ross 2009, p. 103). The disparity in resources available for use in laying gas pipelines in Tambov and Tatarstan demonstrates that the greater the dependency on the regional budget, the less necessity to mobilise community resources as a village community. In such cases of greater dependency on the regional budget like that of Tatarstan, the role of village government is one of 'regional agent', which implements tasks ordered from the republic government of Tatarstan. The financial power of the Russian Federation and regions, as well as the administrative closeness between regions, localities and communities, makes it possible to provide almost all of the villages with needed funds rather than allocating financial resources to a relatively small number of villages with a higher priority. Thus, in contrast to Chinese villages, the socio-economic conditions of Russian communities are less likely to affect the capability of villages to provide public services.

Electoral relationships

The high levels of access of Russian villages to government resources, however, are not simply a result of the large-scale of local budgets. Electoral relationships are also a crucial factor in allowing leaders access to resources, as well as making them dependent on the upper level government and thus affecting the mode of the leadership.

One can find two kinds of electoral relationship: first between elected leaders and their constituencies; and second between upper level elected leaders and their lower level counterparts. For example, in both of my Russian research sites, the popularly elected village chief and council members enter a double relationship, one with voters in their villages and one with elected *raion* leaders at the upper level. Elected *raion* leaders have a threefold commitment to voters, elected regional leaders, and elected village leaders. Moreover, electoral procedures above the village level have regional variations: Tambov has popularly elected *raion* chiefs and *raion* councils, while Tatarstan has two delegates from each village. The village chief is automatically appointed to the *raion* council, while the second member comes from the village council. The *raion* chief in Tatarstan is elected from among the *raion* council members.⁴⁷ Because of the overlap of staff, the relationship between *raion* chief and village leaders seems much closer in the Tatarstan system than in the Tambov system.

In building and strengthening both modes of electoral relationship, reciprocal exchanges of benefits and ballots play a key role. With regard to their relationship with voters, since the elected leaders normally have ambitions to be re-elected, they attempt to achieve this by bringing as many local projects as possible to their constituency. In the relationship between levels of elected representatives, the upper level leaders pressurise the lower level leaders to collect as many votes as possible from their constituencies, thus forming a system of the so-called 'machine politics'.⁴⁸ By so doing, the lower level leaders receive various benefits from the upper level, including funds for

⁴⁷See, also Ross (2009, pp. 146–47).

⁴⁸The 'machine' refers to a specific type of political party that seeks to gain office in a competitive democracy but is organised primarily around the material interests of its members. In 'machine politics', the parties try to generate and maintain electoral support either through material and effectual exchange, but among others, by commitment of community members (Guterbock 1980, pp. 3–11).

public construction. These exchanges of money and votes occur more often and to a larger extent in multi-party situations where the major ruling party is in competition with other minor parties to preserve a dominant share of council seats.⁴⁹ The ruling party has great access to government resources and tries to utilise resources in order to mobilise votes through the party network. Therefore, the more severe the competitions are, the stronger the electoral ties become.

Of course, these electoral relationships can function simultaneously both as a resource for and a restriction on the village leader's autonomy. Village leaders are supposed to play the role of developmental principal in relation to their voters, either through construction of gas pipelines or regarding snow removal. This was highlighted in the testimony of a village chief in the Tambov case study who said that she was re-elected as village chief by an overwhelming majority 'after the completion of gas pipe construction'.⁵⁰ On the other hand, the fiscal arrangement of Russian villages requires the village leaders to find resources in line with their electoral relationships with the upper level government leaders. One example is in Tatarstan Village, where the former chief, who is an ethnic Tatar himself, extracted funds from the Republic through this type of electoral relationship to construct street lamps along the road that extends to the Tatar hamlet.⁵¹ Moreover, the reshuffle of the former *raion* government led them to scrap the church reparation project. Obtaining financial resources from outside in line with electoral relationships often means that the scale of public construction becomes large, as well as becoming estranged from the services desired by the community.

In relationships between elected leaders, the provision of funds from the *raion* level was only possible in exchange for political obedience and electoral support from the village level. Through daily, face-to-face contact, village leaders played a crucial role in mobilising the residents of their territory to vote for candidates supported by the major party, United Russia.⁵² In this sense, village leaders functioned as electoral agents. Having membership in United Russia also guaranteed their own political careers. In Znamenka *Raion* in Tambov, four out of seven village chiefs were members of United Russia, while the remaining three were sympathisers.⁵³ In Kamskoe Ust'e *Raion* in Tatarstan, all of the 20 village chiefs in the *raion* territory were members of United Russia.⁵⁴ The formation of the so-called 'managed democracy' in Russia (Wegren & Konizer 2007) has much to do with this party penetration into village society. In my Russian research sites, all village chiefs are called for weekly meetings at the *raion* council office with the *raion* chief. The *raion* chief chairs a semi-annual residents' meeting in all the villages in his or her territory. According to a *raion* chief in

⁴⁹In this respect, Ross points out that the absence of strong nationwide institutionalised parties in Russia has thwarted the development of local democracy (2009, p. 201).

⁵⁰Interview with chief of Sukhotinka Village, 6 September 2009, Sukhotinka Village, Znamenka *Raion*, Tambov.

⁵¹In this case, the electoral relationship overlapped with ethnic relationships.

⁵²For example, a village in Znamenka *raion* in Case 3 has a branch of United Russia and 17 members of the party have various roles, including 'enhancing political consciousness of village youth' or cleaning of the collective graveyard. Author's interview with S.A.D., village chief of Duplyato-Maslovka Village, 4 September 2009, Duplyato-Maslovka Village, Znamenka *Raion*, Tambov.

⁵³Author's interviews in Znamenka *Raion*, 3–8 September 2009, Tambov.

⁵⁴Author's interview with K.K.I., chief of Bol'shie Saltyki Village, 12 September 2009, Bol'shie Saltyki Village, Kamskoe Ust'e *Raion*, Tatarstan.

Tatarstan, ‘the purpose of the residents meeting is to give the village chief a chance to learn ‘how to work for residents’.⁵⁵ In theory, the village is supposed to be an autonomous municipality but in practice, the *raion*-level administrator is still trying to teach the village to be so. Despite having formally equal positions as local municipalities, a vertical relationship between the *raion* and the village political elites exists here. The rigidity of vertical electoral ties seems to be a side-effect of the structural proximity of ‘locality’ (*raion*) and ‘community’, which enabled more frequent and intimate contact between the *raion* and the village but also made the village more vulnerable to upper-level intervention. On the other hand, the vulnerability of the village is also a result of ‘authoritarian diffusion’ (Gel’man & Lankina 2008) supported by hierarchical party networks of United Russia. As Ross (2009, p. 202) states, ‘what may be termed an “electoral vertical” has been created to ensure that Putin’s “party of power” (United Russia) controls all the levers of power’.

In China, only the community level is granted rights to ‘self-government’ and the administrative village is the only arena in which substantial electoral relationships exist.⁵⁶ Moreover, the elected village leaders⁵⁷ only have a relationship with villagers and do not have the other type of electoral relationship discussed above with upper level elites. Some scholars have found a ‘rural China version of pork barrel politics’, central funds appropriated for local projects designed to please the electorate or legislators and win votes (Luo *et al.* 2010, p. 662). They argue that when the village leaders are elected directly, the provision of public goods rises and that when the village leaders are able to implement public projects during their terms of office, they, as the incumbents, are more likely to be re-elected.

In addition to these findings, we should call attention to a remarkable disparity found in the Chinese version of ‘pork barrel politics’, in that the village leaders do not have electoral relationships on which they depend to bring funds in exchange for mobilising the vote ballot. We may attribute some observations in my case studies in China to the lack of the relationships; first, if the village has no collective economies as in the Shandong Village case, leaders resort to personal networks, whether in line with formal institutions or with informal, familial hamlet ties.⁵⁸ Second, as in the case of Jiangxi Village, the function of personal networks is generally unforeseeable (at least in comparison with the electoral relationships) and social relations of the village leaders determine the outcome in terms of public construction. Third, in successful cases, the role of informal leaders, rather than formally elected leaders, is evident.

⁵⁵ Author’s interview with Z.G.G, chief of Kamskoe Ust’e *Raion*, 12 September 2009, Kamskoe Ust’e *Raion*, Tatarstan.

⁵⁶ In fact, representatives elected to the township and *raion* level People’s Congress have also been directly elected by popular vote since 1979. However, these congresses still are rubber-stamp organisations controlled and manipulated by the CCP and the government. Due to their limited power, few people take the congresses or their elections seriously (Zhong 2003, pp. 62–7). Evidently, it is quite difficult to regard these congresses as equivalent to the ones in Russia and other countries.

⁵⁷ Namely, the chief and other members of the village committee, not including the secretary of the CCP branch committee of the village.

⁵⁸ Fan (2008, pp. 120–70) provides a vivid illustration on how *guanxi* (personal connection) plays the central role in *xian*-level politics. For example, the existence of personal relationships with the village leaders becomes a decisive factor for *xian* authorities in selecting project site villages, such as pilot agricultural projects or poverty reduction projects.

TABLE 2
FACTORS AFFECTING THE MODES OF VILLAGE LEADERSHIP

	<i>China</i>	<i>Russia</i>
Administrative distance between local and community	Long	Short
Village social structure	Flat, without influential informal elites	Centralised, with influential informal elites
Fiscal arrangements	Income not guaranteed, but occasionally provided by other actors	Income partly guaranteed, but largely provided by other actors
Electoral relationships	Limited within community	Extending to local, regional, and central level

Fourth, the project leaders, aiming to maximise the possibility of completion of the project, try to minimise the scale of construction. They focus on the projects that are most urgently needed, as the financial resources can only come from community residents themselves. Fifth, even so, in many cases, the results are faulty as seen in the road project of 'G2' by Heija hamlet.

From a comparative perspective, existing studies of Chinese villages seem to have focused too much attention on the intra-village electoral and governance practices,⁵⁹ and in so doing, they have sidestepped the more burdensome but fundamental question of what 'self-governance' is within the schema of the entire Chinese political system. In fact, that electoral relationships are limited to the village and are disconnected from the upper levels of the polity is what makes villagers' self-government unique in comparison to Russia and many democratic countries.

Looking back on Chinese modern history, owing to the great administrative distance between the community and upper level government, state, regional and even local level officials have been unable to control the community directly. Paradoxically, the tendency towards the relatively high autonomy of the community level from local level politics was a feature of the socialist revolution wherein the administrative penetration paralleled the strengthening of the village as a socialist 'collective'. Of course, one cannot deny political upheavals did occur outside villages, including the land reform movement and collectivisation of agriculture in the 1950s, which strongly influenced Chinese villages under the socialist regime.⁶⁰ However, as a comparative study of Russian and Chinese socialist movements indicates, the Chinese socialist movement was characterised by 'participatory mobilisation', which was not intended to break up the traditional human networks in villages. This unity was quite different from the Russian 'command mobilisation' strategy that directly intervened and destroyed human relationships in rural areas (Bernstein 1971, pp. 2–17). Considering these points, the Chinese 'community' within the whole political structure remained a

⁵⁹Existing studies have analysed the election of the Villagers' Committee from several angles, such as the competitiveness of elections, voting behaviour and political participation, election and village power structure, the relationship with township, and the relationship with kinship. For some of the most elaborate recent analysis of village elections in China, see Tong (2004) and He (2007).

⁶⁰For an extreme example of this aspect in which village leaders and upper level officials formed close-knit patron-client networks, see Friedman *et al.* (1991; 2005).

relatively segmented political unit, independent of the upper-level polity (Tahara 2004). Summing up the argument so far, Table 2 shows the factors that determine the character of village leadership.

Conclusion: political implications of the village leadership typology

What does ‘local self-government’ mean in China and Russia? One fact made evident in this article is that the withdrawal of state power from the local community and the simple introduction of legislative ‘self-government’ did not bring autonomy to the local and community levels. The most impressive trend in my discussion is the growing tendency towards a non-autonomous type of bystander and local agent in both countries. The trajectory of diverging village leadership clearly shows this.

In Figure 5, I demonstrate that, despite small regional variations, the single ‘state agent’ category of village leaders from the communist era, is evolving into three new types, the principal, the bystander and the local agent. Among my cases, China’s Shandong Village is the least dependent on others as well as having considerable access to resources. Jiangxi Village is more dependent than Shandong, since Jiangxi occasionally receives some aid from the local government, but generally speaking, low access to resources prevents the implementation of public works. Tatarstan Village in Russia is the most dependent and the most accessible, traits also found in Tambov Village but to a lesser extent.

China’s central government in the reform era has expected village leaders to play the role of developmental principals with greater independence or ‘freedom’ than their Russian counterparts. Developmental goals in rural China are created with the expectation that village cadres will work as entrepreneurs, procuring or mobilising personal resources, such as connections with authorities outside the village in order to

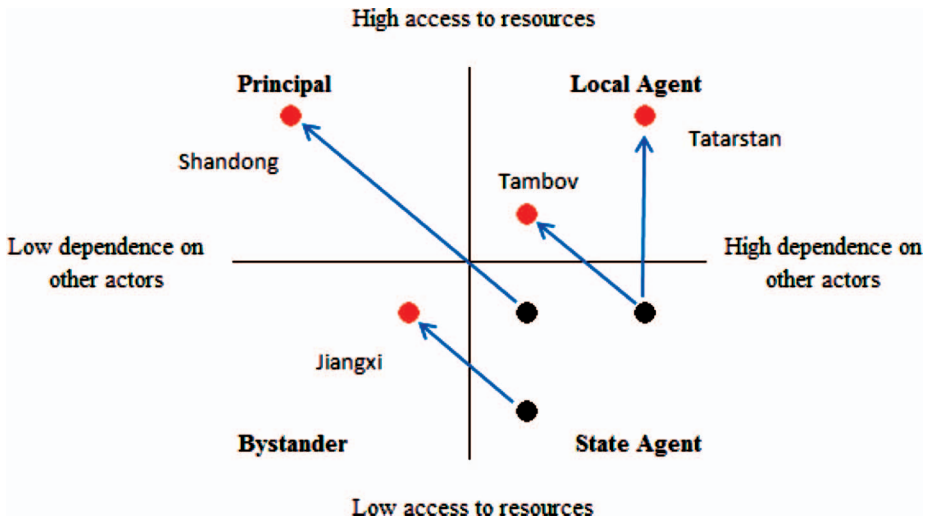


FIGURE 5. DIVERSION OF VILLAGE LEADERSHIP IN MY RESEARCH SITES.

foster the economic growth of the community. However, only a minority of the leaders have such social capital. As shown in the Jiangxi case, Chinese villages in the post-Tax-for-Fee era still receive only occasional aid from the upper level government budgets. The lack of electoral relationships through which Russian counterparts obtain funds also exacerbates the lack of access to outside resources. Thus, a growing number of village cadres and village organisations, especially in vast areas of inland China, are displaying 'bystander' attitudes towards public issues in the community. This will eventually lead the CCP party organisations in rural areas to exhibit less cohesion, as well as politically paralyse the village community.⁶¹ The shrinking importance of the CCP in authoritarian rural China is in striking contrast to the prevalence of United Russia in Russia's ostensibly democratic settings.

Considering these tendencies, one can find that the liberal appearance of 'villagers' self-government' (*cunmin zizhi*) systems actually functions to obscure and conceal its subtle connotations. One connotation is that of 'self-reliance' with the implication that the state cannot do anything for people so they must do it for themselves.⁶² The other is that of indirect control of village leaders through frequent reshufflings that prevent them from developing clientelistic personal ties (*guanxi*) with other influential individuals (Tahara 2006). Through the introduction of periodical direct elections by villagers and villager supervision of village leaders, the state gains a chance to reshuffle members of the Village Committee, which can indirectly prevent village-level leaders from staying too long in their positions, barring them from eventually becoming influential local bosses. In this sense, as long as 'villager self-government' is functioning well, even the 'principal' type of village leader will find it difficult to sustain autonomous power. In summation, through the twentieth century, CCP central leaders have taken an ambivalent attitude towards autonomous grassroots elites. The attitude of the CCP towards grassroots leaders has appeared to be ambivalent, swinging between 'development' and 'restriction' (Tahara 2008).

Interestingly, provisions in Russia's 2003 Law are quite close to villagers' self-government in China in the sense that they stipulate that local municipalities should fend for themselves. The law guarantees the revenue for the daily activities of villages, but funding is minimal. Yet, Russian village leaders, unlike their Chinese counterparts have other actors to rely on, such as upper level local government officials or large farmers. We have shown that these are the outcomes of factors such as electoral relationships or village social structure. As a result, resources provided by other actors inside and outside the village become more accessible but at the cost of the independence and freedom of the formal village leaders. Recent scholarship (Lankina 2005; Ross 2009) has already pointed out the vulnerability of local municipalities to regional power, but I would suggest that the village level municipality is again in a passive position in relation to the local level (*raion*) and regional levels. In this sense, village governance in Russia is not a self-sufficient political arena, but is an integral part of a larger, Russian-style of 'pork barrel politics' that extends as far as the *raion* or the regional government in line with electoral relationships.

⁶¹The decline of party branches in rural China is a result of dwindling membership. It is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit new members from the peasantry. See Zhong (2003, p. 162).

⁶²For a similar reinterpretation of 'villagers' self-government' see Kobayashi (1997, p. 618).

Finally, there are a number of broader political implications of my findings. First, with regard to the role of political parties in local self-governance, my findings confirm that what facilitates party penetration into rural life is the electoral relationship, not the simple existence of a dominant party itself. A major party without electoral relationships (such as the CCP) is less likely to become a channel of resources for local self-government. Therefore, what counts in local self-governance is the outcome of competitive elections and not the dominant party itself. Second, however, election-based public construction tends to be large in scale and out of touch with the specific needs of the host community, whilst need-based public services are generally small in scale and focus on the exact issue problematised by residents. Third, in order for need-based, small-scale projects led by autonomous local self-governance to thrive, the role played by 'communal resources' in the Shandong case should be re-evaluated apart from the socialist context of 'collective economies'. Finally, the growing tendency towards non-autonomous types of local leaders should not be attributed to a common transitional process departing from the communist past, but resulting from factors such as fiscal arrangements and electoral systems. In this respect, it would be possible to make a better informed generalisation about the processes of local self-governance development if further comparative studies are done that take the other major regional power, India, into consideration.

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