

The Standardization of Villager Committee Election Procedures Survey Analysis of the 5th Round of Villager Committee Elections in 40 Villages from Five Counties in Jilin Province

Sun Long and Tong Zhihui

I. Survey Background, Purpose, and Methodology

Chinese villager committee elections have entered a phase of legalization and standardization, as indicated by the formal promulgation of the Organic Law on Villager Committees in 1998. Jilin Province is the birthplace of the *haixuan* method of villager committee elections. *Haixuan*, or “sea election,” means that candidates are not predetermined by higher-level government offices or leaders but nominated by villagers having the right to vote. Final candidates are then determined according to the number of nominations each individual receives. (Wang Zhoutian, 1995) As early as 1986, a portion of Lishu County, Jilin Province began using the *haixuan* method. By the 4th round of village committee elections in 1997, 86.8% of all villages in Jilin Province had moved to the *haixuan* method. (Jilin Province People’s Congress Internal Affairs and Justice Committee, et al., 2001) In November 2000, the Standing Committee of the People’s Congress in Jilin Province ratified the *Jilin Province Measures for the Election of Villager Committees*, standardizing many procedures in villager committee elections. Under the guidance of these Measures, the 5th round of villager committee elections in Jilin Province were held between November 2000 and March 2001.

To determine how well the election procedures had been implemented in the villager committee elections, in July 2001 the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) Department of Basic-Level Governance and Community Construction conducted a survey of 790 cadres and villagers in 40 villages randomly selected from five counties in Jilin Province. Funds for the survey were provided by the Carter Center.

The selection of sample villages was entrusted to faculty at the Department of Sociology, Northeast Normal University. First, five counties or county-level cities in the province were selected from a total of 60 to serve as sampling frames. They were Dehui, Huadian, Gongzhuling, Tonghua, and Dongfeng, containing a total of 1279 villager committees. Within each sampling frame, eight towns/townships were selected, yielding a total of 40 sample villages.

The selection procedure, based upon the principle of multi-stage random sampling, is described in more detail below:

Stage 1: Five municipalities were selected from nine total in Jilin Province. They were Changchun, Jilin, Siping, Liaoyuan, and Tonghua.

Stage 2: One county was selected from each municipality. They were Dehui, Huadian, Gongzhuling, Dongfeng, and Tonghua.

Stage 3: Two or three towns/townships were randomly selected from each county. Altogether 11 towns/townships were selected in the province. Two towns/townships were selected from Dehui, Huadian, Gongzhuling, and Dongfeng. Three towns/townships were selected from Tonghua.

Stage 4: Several villager committees were chosen from the towns/townships. Four villages were selected as sample villages from each of the eight towns/townships in Dehui, Huadian, Gongzhuling, and Dongfeng; eight villages were selected from the three towns/townships in Tonghua.

To administer the survey, we chose 20 male students in their third year (98th level) from the Department of Sociology, Huabei Normal University, using faculty recommendations, academic transcripts, interviews, etc. to make our selection. The students received survey training from the Department of Sociology, Northeast Normal University, as well as a basic understanding of villager committee elections, sociological survey questionnaires, and the specific questionnaire used to survey the Jilin Province villager committee elections. Further explanation of the content and importance of this survey on villager committee elections was provided by staff at the Jilin Province Office of Civil Affairs and the Carter Center.

The survey of each village included the following three components:

1. Approximately five village cadres were selected to answer the Villager Committee Election Questionnaire I, which survey administrators filled out.
2. Approximately fifteen villagers were randomly selected to answer the Villager Committee Election Questionnaire II, which survey administrators filled out.
3. Survey administrators filled out the Villager Committee Election Results Survey Form using the data from the election records of the 5th Round Villager Committee Election in each village.

The survey began on July 12 and ended on July 18, 2001. Survey administrators visited villagers in their homes and village cadres at the villager committee offices. A total of 204 cadre questionnaires, 586 villager questionnaires, and 40 Villager Committee Election Survey Forms were completed, all of them valid.

II. Overview of Survey Samples

A. Profile of Sample Counties

Table 1: Profile of the Sample Counties

	Dehui	Huadian	Gong Zhuling	Dongfeng	Tonghua	Jilin Province
Area of the Administrative Region (km ²)	3,459	6,466	4,058	2,522	3,725	187,400
Population at the end of the year (ten thousands)	90.3	44.1	103.0	40.2	25.2	2,657.6
Number of Villager Committees	308	179	414	229	160	10,133
Net Average Income Per Capita (yuan)	2,385	2,498	2,319	2,308	2,582	2,260
Average Expense Per Capita (yuan)	1,758	1,026	2,020	1,672	1,817	1,347

Source: *Jilin Province Annual Statistics* (2000), pp. 3 – 8, pp. 436 – 443, Chin Statistics Publisher, 2000.

From the table above we know that the five sample counties are fairly representative of the province with regard to population and the area of the administrative region. However, with regard to per capita income and expenses, the sample counties rank in the middle and upper layers of the province.

The five sample counties, Huadian and Dongfeng in particular, adopted the practice of villager committee elections earlier than other counties. The first villager committee election in Huadian was conducted in November 1989. Candidates were selected through three methods: nomination by village groups, nomination by ten voters freely associated, and nomination by the Party branch in the village. Dongfeng held its first election in March 1989, for which the local Party branch nominated all candidates. But the second election in Dongfeng, held in August 1992, adopted the same multi-method nomination process used in Huadian. In 1999, both Huadian and Dongfeng were chosen by the MCA as models of villager self-governance and standardized election procedures, representing the high level of China's villager committee elections. (Liu Xitang, 1999)

B. Makeup of Sample Cadres and Villagers by County

160, 161, 162, 160 and 153 questionnaires were collected in Dehui, Huadian, Gongzhuling, Dongfeng, and Tonghua, respectively, among which there were 61, 43, 41, 30, and 29 questionnaires from the cadres.

Table 2: Makeup of Sample Cadres and Villagers by County

	Number of Cadre Questionnaires	Percentage	Number of Villager Questionnaires	Percentage
Tonghua	29	14.2	118	20.1
Huadian	43	21.1	118	20.1
Dehui	61	29.9	99	16.9
Gongzhuling	41	20.1	121	20.6
Dongfeng	30	14.7	130	22.2
Total	204	100.0	586	100.0

III. Analysis of Election Preparation and Mobilization

A. Formation of Village Election Committees

The Village Election Committee (VEC) is the institution that directs the villager committee election in each village. The VEC's authority over election procedures and the rational selection of VEC members are two prerequisites of an open and fair democratic election. According to the stipulations of the *Jilin Province Measures for the Election of Villager Committees*, each VEC consists of five to seven people elected at either the villager representative assembly (VRA) or the villager assembly (VA). The incumbent villager committee presides over the election of a new VEC. According to questionnaires answered by 204 village cadres in 40 villages, 34.3% of them responded, "VECs are elected at VAs;" 58.3% of them answered, "VECs are elected at VRAs." *See Table 3 below.*

Table 3: Village Election Committees – Methods of Formation

	Percentage
1. Selected through Voting at VAs	34.3

2. Selected through Voting at VRAs	58.3
3. Selected through Voting by Villager Groups	2.0
4. Determined by the Village Party Branch	0.5
5. Jointly Determined by the Village Party Branch and the Villager Committee	2.9
6. Appointed by the Town/Township Government	1.5
7. Other	0.5
8. Don't Know	2.0

96.5% of persons surveyed selected only one of eight possible choices. As indicated by the table above, more than half of village election committees are selected through voting at VRAs, while more than one third are selected through voting at VAs. This demonstrates that the method and procedures used to form most VECs are in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the *Jilin Province Measures for the Election of Villager Committees*.

When asked, “What position does the VEC chair hold in the village?” 65.7% of the 204 village cadres answered, “Party branch secretary;” 16.2% answered, “Village Committee chair;” 14.7% answered, “Other Positions,” and 3.5% either answered “Don’t Know” or did not answer. The VEC chair presides over the VEC and thus has a large impact upon the villager committee election. The *Jilin Province Measures for the Election of Villager Committees* does not specify who should assume the position of VEC chair. As shown in the survey results, most VEC chair positions are held by village Party branch secretaries. This shows that local Party branch secretaries have a relatively high level of prestige among villagers and that villagers identify with their Party branch secretary.

14.7% of persons surveyed indicated that the VEC chair held a position other than Village Committee chair or Party branch secretary, e.g. the village elementary school principal, whose relatively high degree of culture earns a relatively high level of prestige among villagers.

B. Determination of Voter Eligibility and Voter Registration

39 villages in the survey provided the following three sets of statistics: 1) the number of residents over 18 years old in the village; 2) the number of voters in the village; and 3) the number of registered voters in the election. The data indicate that in 33 of the sample villages, accounting for 84.2% of the valid sample villages, the total number of voters equaled the number of residents over 18 years in the village. In 29 of the sample villages, accounting for 74.4% of the valid sample villages, the number of registered voters in the last election equaled the total number of voters in the village. As seen from the data, over 3/4 of villages used age as a criterion to determine voter eligibility for the villager committee elections. In ten villages (accounting for 26.4% of valid sample villages), the number of registered voters in the election was less than the total number of voters. This owes largely to the frequent migration of rural residents looking for work or conducting business, who thus did not register to vote during the election.

**Table 4: Voter Registration
(N=39)**

	Number of Villages	Percentage of Valid Sample Villages
Total Number of Voters Equals the Number of Residents Over 18 yrs.	33	84.2%
Total Number of Voters Less Than the Number of Residents Over 18 yrs.	6	15.8%
Number of Registered Voters Equals Total Number of Voters	29	74.4%
Number of Registered Voters Less Than Total Number of Voters	10	15.6%

When interviewed, 78.9% of village cadres said that voters had no complaints with the list of voters (*mingdan*). Only 13.7% of village cadres admitted that voters had disagreed with the list of voters. This indicates that voter registration in most villages was conducted in a standardized manner that generally satisfied villagers. An important factor was the specificity of voter eligibility criteria in the Jilin *Measures*, as laid out in the twelfth stipulation: “A voter’s age on the election day shall be calculated using the birth date given by his/her voter identification card or (if he/she has no voter identification card) by the *hukou* (residential permit) record.” To a certain degree, this stipulation has decreased the number of disputes over voter eligibility.

The issuance of voter identification cards is an important measure for clarifying voter eligibility and supporting the standardization of elections. The *Measures* stipulate clearly that “The VEC shall issue voter identification cards to voters.” Of 586 valid sample villagers interviewed, 81.7% answered, “The voter identification card was delivered;” 15% answered, “The voter identification card was not issued;” and 3.3% either answered “Do not remember” or did not answer. This shows that the majority of villages complied with procedure of issuing voter identification cards. Nevertheless, some villagers that live far from their village center or work in urban areas did not receive their voter identification cards. These results point out the need to explore other methods of issuing voter identification cards, methods appropriate to a rural population and the new context of migration.

C. Nomination and Determination of Candidates

Preliminary candidates are selected by voters. The determination of final candidates is a critical step, to a large extent determining the outcome of elections. The *haixuan* method of nominating candidates marked an important milestone in the development of Chinese villager committee elections, attracting the attention of both Chinese and foreign scholars in the mid-1990s. The core breakthrough was that higher-level government offices or leaders no longer predetermine the candidates in an election. Instead, all villagers with the right to vote can freely nominate candidates. Final candidates are then decided according to the number of nominations each candidate receives. The Jilin *Measures*, passed in 2000, affirm that “candidates for villager committees elections shall be directly nominated by villagers with the right to vote.”

In Jilin Province, the process of determining candidates for villager committees consists of two phases: the nomination of preliminary candidates and the confirmation of final candidates. The survey of the village cadres and villagers in 40 villages indicates that the villagers were in fact granted the right to nominate preliminary candidates. 90.4% of the cadres surveyed answered that the preliminary candidates for villager committees were nominated by villagers.

**Table 5: Methods of Nominating Preliminary Candidates
(Multiple Choices Allowed) N = 204**

	Frequency	Percentage
Self-nomination	7	3.4
Nomination by Voters Freely Associated	9	4.4
Nomination by the Village Party Branch	2	1.0
Nomination by the VEC	0	0
Nomination by Villager Small Groups	1	0.5
Nomination by the VRA	8	3.9
Nomination by the Town/Township Government	3	1.5
Nomination by Individual Voters	184	90.2
Other	3	1.5

Table 4 indicates that “Nomination by Individual Voters” was the primary method used in nominating preliminary candidates. Moreover, in a general sense “Self Nomination” and “Nomination by Voters Freely Associated” also belong to the category of nomination by individuals. Nomination by organizations was rare, as indicated by the responses to “Nominated by the Town/Township Government,” “Nominated by the Village Party Branch” and “Nominated by Villager Small Groups.”

51.1% of the 580 villagers interviewed answered that they took part in nominating preliminary candidates. 46% said that they did not take part in the nomination. See Table 6 below:

Table 6: Did You Take Part in the Nomination of Preliminary Candidates for the Village Committee?

	Took Part	Did Not Take Part	Do Not Recall	Total
Number of People	298	268	17	583
Percentage	51.1	46.0	2.9	100

The percentage of villagers who took part in nominating preliminary candidates was far less than the percentage of village cadres due to three reasons: First, as members of the village elite, cadres more actively took part in nominating candidates. Secondly, the villagers did not understand the detailed nomination procedures. Thirdly, some of the villagers interviewed happened to be those who did not take part in the nomination of preliminary candidates.

Generally speaking, the nominations were dispersed among many preliminary candidates. Therefore, choosing final candidates from the pool of preliminary candidates was a critical procedure. The *Measures* do not stipulate the means by which final candidates are determined. The results of the survey indicate that final candidates for villager committee elections were determined predominantly by three methods: 1) primary elections held by the VA; 2) the number of nominations each preliminary candidate received; and 3) primary elections held by the VRA. See Table 7.

Table 7: The Determination of Final Candidates for Villager Committees

(Multiple Choices Allowed) Unit: %

	Village Cadres Interviewed N = 204	Villagers Interviewed N = 586
Primary Elections Held by the VA	51.0	48.0
Primary Elections Held by the VRA	12.7	16.6
Determined by the VEC	0.5	0.3
Determined by the Party Branch	0.5	1.2
Determined by Number of Nominations Received	40.7	50.7
Determined by the Town/Township Government	0.5	0.7
Other	0.5	0.5

The responses of village cadres and villagers differed over the methods used to determine final candidates. According to village cadres, the most important method used to determine final candidates were primary elections held by the VA, followed by the number of nominations each candidate received, followed by primary elections held by the VRA. According to villagers, the most important method used to determine final candidates was the number of nominations each candidate received, followed by primary elections held by the VA, followed by primary elections held by the VRA. This small discrepancy may be due to village cadres' belief that "Primary Elections Held by the VA" best conforms to the spirit of the law, of which villagers are only weakly conscious.

Another important principle in determining final candidates is the principle of fielding multiple candidates for each position. Multiple candidates for each position give villagers more freedom to choose and express their wishes. The *Measures* stipulate that "the number of candidates for villager committees shall exceed the number of positions;" that "the number of candidates for villager committee chair and vice-chairs shall exceed the number of positions by one;" and that "the number of candidates for villager committee members shall exceed the number of positions by two or three." The survey results show that these principles were observed during the elections. See Table 8 below:

Table 8: Number of Candidates for Villager Committee Chair

	Village Cadres Interviewed N = 201	Villagers Interviewed N = 584
One Candidate	3.5	8.0
Two Candidates	87.6	71.6
Three or More Candidates	8.0	10.1
Do Not Recall	1.0	10.3
Total	100	100

D. Methods of Communication Between Candidates and Voters

Today's villager committees evolved largely from the production teams (*shengchan dadui*) that existed during the era of "people's communes" (*renmin gongshe*), which were rather large. Among the sample villages, the largest had 3340 people and even the smallest had 387 people. As a result, many villagers have little knowledge of or contact with each other; the villager committee is more a "society of half-familiar people" than a model "society of familiar people." (He Xuefeng, 2000) At the beginning of an election campaign, villagers are typically unfamiliar with a number of the candidates. Therefore, the communication between candidates

and villagers leading up to an election is very important, even playing a decisive role in the election's outcome.

**Table 9: Methods of Communication Between Candidates and Voters
(Multiple Choices Allowed) Unit: %**

	Surveys of Cadres N = 204	Surveys of Villagers N = 586
Home visit	4.4	8.9
Speeches delivered at VA on village management	48.5	37.4
Speeches delivered at VRA	73.0	49.3
Speeches delivered at election meetings	12.3	11.6
Introduced by the VEC on radio and TV	0	0.9
Introduced by supportive villagers	1.5	0.3
No introduction	4.9	12.5

As seen in Table 9, communication between candidates and villagers was characterized by the following features: First, methods of communication were relatively simple. Speeches delivered at villager representative assemblies were the major means of communication. Second, most communication between candidates and villagers was public. Personal methods of communication, such as home visits and introductions by supportive villagers, were infrequently used. Third, candidates communicated more often with members of the village elite, such as villager representatives, than with villagers.

The discrepancy in the responses of cadres and villagers may be due to differences in their beliefs about the law. Some village cadres may have believed that home visits were illegal, whereas villagers were unlikely to have had such worries. Similarly, some village cadres may have avoided the response “no introduction,” believing that such a response would indicate their noncompliance with the spirit of the law.

IV. Analysis of Voting Rules and Procedures

A. Voting Locations

Voting is a serious political activity. China, like other countries, stipulates that voting must take place at fixed locations. At the same time, some countries and communities have supplemented stationary voting locations with mobile ballot boxes, for the sake of voters' convenience. In some parts of China, villager committee elections have been carried out entirely through mobile ballot boxes. Although the use of a mobile ballot box is convenient for villagers, it makes the implementation of a secret ballot difficult. With the passage of the Organic Law on Villager Committees in 1998, it was declared that voting for villager committee elections would take place at fixed locations. The Jilin Province *Measures* stipulate that “Voting should take place at election meeting locations. Villager groups that are far from election meeting locations can set up voting stations with permission from the villager representative assembly. Each voting station should have one person in charge of ballot delivery, one person in charge of ballot registration, and two people in charge of scrutinizing ballots.”

Results from the surveys of village cadres show that most village committee elections in Jilin Province took place at fixed locations. See Table 10.

However, according to village election records, mobile ballot boxes are still used in eight villages, or 20% of the 40 sample villages. In these eight villages, the number of ballots collected through mobile ballot boxes represented an average of 15.8% of all collected ballots. In one

village, the number of ballots collected through mobile ballot boxes represented 42% of all collected ballots.

Table 10: Voting Locations N = 204

	Number of Responses	Percentage
Election Meeting Locations	133	65.2%
Voting Stations	98	48.0%
Mobile Ballot Boxes	27	13.2%
Don't Know	1	0.5%

B. In-Trust Voting

If for some reason a voter cannot be present at one of the designated voting locations, he may entrust a friend or relative who has voting rights to vote on his behalf. Chinese law stipulates that a voter who will be out of town during the voting period can entrust another person to vote on his behalf, but he must obtain permission from the VEC and provide a written letter of trust. No voter may be entrusted to vote on behalf of more than three other people.

The Jilin Province *Measures* stipulate that “an illiterate or disabled person who is unable to fill out a ballot may entrust another person to vote on his behalf. Voters who will be out of town during the voting period can entrust other voters (not including candidates standing for election) to vote on their behalf. No voter may be entrusted to vote on behalf of more than one person.” According to village election records, in-trust voting occurred in 14 villages, or 35% of the 40 sample villages. In these villages, in-trust votes represented an average of 12.5% of total votes. In one village, in-trust votes represented 36% of total votes.

Of 204 village cadres surveyed, 67.7% responded that a villager could be entrusted with no more than one vote. 24.4% responded that a villager could be entrusted with two or more votes.

C. Receiving Ballots

92.6% of the village cadres surveyed said that a voter had to show his voter identification card in order to receive a ballot.

The *Measures* stipulate that a voter must show a letter of trust in order to receive a ballot held in trust. According to the survey, 20.6% of village cadres answered that it is not necessary for a voter to show a written letter of trust in order to receive a ballot held in trust. 3.5% of the village cadres answered, “The law dictates that a letter must be shown, but no one checked.”

Table 11: Is it Necessary to Show a Written Letter of Trust When Receiving a Ballot Held in Trust?

	Yes, and Someone Checked for the Letter	No	Yes, But No One Checked for the Letter	Don't Know
%	73.4	20.6	3.5	2.5

D. Marking Ballots

Voting by secret ballot is a basic principle of villager committee elections. 86.6% of village cadres answered that secret ballot marking rooms were set up at election meeting locations and voting stations. 58.0% of villagers answered that secret ballot marking took place at election meeting locations. 29.0% of villagers said that secret ballot marking took place at voting stations. Thus, the responses of village cadres and villagers corroborate one another, indicating that the

secret ballot obtained a high degree of support. However, it is worth noting that the secret ballot was not uniformly used, since some villages did not set up secret ballot marking rooms and others relied predominantly on mobile ballot boxes.

Table 12: Methods of Voting N = 586

	Number of Responses	Percentage
Secret Ballot Marking Rooms at Election Meeting Locations	340	58.0
Secret Ballot Marking Rooms at Voting Stations	170	29.0
Public Location	42	7.2
Proxy Vote	3	0.5
Mobile Ballot Boxes	62	10.6
In-Trust Vote	9	1.5

When village cadres were asked, “Can you vote for someone who is not a final candidate?” 86.7% answered “Yes,” 12.8% answered “No,” and 0.5% answered “Don’t Know.” This further demonstrates that voters are able to express their will during elections.

According to 96.6% of village cadres surveyed, the great majority of villages hold simultaneous elections for the positions of villager committee chair, vice-chair, and members.

E. Number of Voting Rounds Per Election

When village cadres were asked, “In this election, how many times did you have to vote before all positions were decided?” 31.0% answered “Once,” 57.6% answered “Twice,” 7.4% answered “Three or More Times,” and 3.9% answered “Don’t Know.” These results show that in most villages, one round of voting per election is not enough to decide all positions, reflecting intense competition.

V. Analysis of Election Results

Since no material was collected about the elected villager committee members or the candidates that lost, this article does not provide a basic description of the newly elected committee members. This section provides an analysis of the 5th round of villager committee elections in Jilin Province, focusing mainly on the publication of election results, the voting rate, the percentage of invalid ballots, and the percentage of votes won by the villager committee chair and vice chair.

A. Counting Ballots and Publishing Voting Results

The public counting and publishing of ballots and election results is an important indicator of the democratization and standardization of villager committee elections. When village cadres and villagers were asked, “How were ballots counted?” 58.6% of village cadres and 55.1% of villagers answered, “The ballots were counted before all the voters,” 39.9% of village cadres and 33.4% of villagers answered, “The ballots were counted before villager representatives.” If both situations are considered public, then 98.5% of village cadres and 88.5% of villagers considered the ballots to have been counted publicly. This indicates that in the 5th round of villager committee elections in Jilin Province, ballots were basically counted publicly.

Table 13: Methods of Counting Ballots**Unit: %**

Methods of Counting Ballots	Responses from Village Cadres (N=204)	Responses from Villagers (N=586)
Counted Before All Voters	58.6	55.1
Counted Before Villager Representatives	39.9	33.4
Total	98.5	88.5

When asked, “Was the election result published immediately?” 94.1% of village cadres answered, “The result was immediately published after the election.” 4.4% of village cadres answered, “The election result was not published immediately after the election but published on the same day.” Only 0.5% of them answered, “The result was published on the second day or later.” This indicates that the results of villager committee elections in Jilin Province were largely published immediately after the election.

B. Voting Rates

The voting rate is the percentage of total voters that actually cast votes. The *Measures* stipulate that an election is only valid if more than half of total voters actually cast votes. According to village election records, in 9 villages out of 40, the voting rate was 100%. The lowest voting rate was 73%. The average voting rate in the 40 sample villages was 94.2%.

Table 14: Voting Rate

Voting Rate	Number of Villages	Percent of Total Villages
71 – 80 %	4	10.0
81 – 90 %	5	12.5
91 – 99 %	22	55.0
100%	9	22.5
Total	40	100.0

The survey of villagers confirmed these results. Of the 586 villagers surveyed, 95.1% said they voted in the election, 4.6% said they did not vote, and 0.3% did not answer.

As seen above, the voting rate in village elections was fairly high, probably due to the following factors: first, the principles of direct nomination, secret ballot marking, and anonymous voting were well implemented, making voters feel that their votes would be effective. Second, fielding multiple candidates per position made the election more competitive. As a result, candidates and their supporters took measures to mobilize voters. Third, in-trust voting made it possible for villagers who were out of town to entrust other people to vote on their behalf. Fourth, the *Measures* established clear rules about the voting rate required to validate an election, and the township and village election organizations helped to promote the elections and mobilize voters.

C. Percentage of Invalid Ballots

According to village election records, 8 villages had no invalid ballots. In 10 villages, the percentage of invalid ballots was less than 1.0%. In 18 villages, the percentage of invalid ballots was between 1.1% and 5.0%. In 4 villages, the percentage of invalid ballots exceeded 5.1%. These numbers indicate that voters in most villages marked their ballots properly. Four factors account for these results: first, rural literacy rates and education levels have risen significantly. With the creation of the in-trust voting system, some voters began to entrust their votes to more educated villagers, thus reducing the number of invalid ballots. Second, the growing feeling

among villagers that their votes are effective has greatly reduced the number of ballots marked carelessly. Third, voters have become increasingly familiar with election procedures. Fourth, election workers provided detailed explanations.

D. Percentage of Ballots Won by the Villager Committee Chair and Vice Chair

According to the survey results of the 39 valid sample villages, the lowest percentage of total ballots won by the villager committee chair was 51%. In two sample villages the percentage of total ballots was 99%. The average percentage was 73.3%. See Table 15.

Table 15: Percentage of Ballots Won by the Villager Committee Chair

Percentage of Ballots	Number of Villages	Percentage of Villages
51 – 60 %	10	25.0
61 – 70 %	7	17.5
71 – 80 %	4	10.0
81 – 90 %	9	22.5
91 – 100 %	9	22.5
N / A	1	2.5
Total	40	100.0

23 of the sample villages did not provide any data about the number of ballots received by the villager committee vice chair, probably because no such position exists in those villages. Also, the data collected in 3 of 17 sample villages had errors. Therefore, we only obtained data about the villager committee vice chair in 14 villages. In 2 of these 14 villages, the percentage of ballots won by the vice chair was between 51 – 60 %. In 5 villages, the percentage was between 61 – 70%. In 3 villages, the percentage was between 71 – 80%. In 2 villages, the percentage was between 81 – 90%, and in another 2 villages, the percentage was between 91 – 100 %. In these 14 villages, the average percentage of ballots won by the villager committee vice chair was 74%; the highest percentage was 100%; and the lowest percentage was 52%.

Table 16: Percentage of Ballots Won by the Villager Committee Vice Chair

Percentage of Ballots	Number of Villages	Percentage of Villages
51 – 60 %	2	14.3
61 – 70 %	5	35.7
71 – 80 %	3	21.4
81 – 90 %	2	14.3
91 – 100 %	2	14.3
Total	14	100.0

E. Other Questions

Two other questions were included in the survey. One question asked whether voting subsidies were granted; the other asked whether a member of the villager committee had ever been recalled. Both considerations are strongly related to electoral procedures and have a certain degree of influence over election results.

As shown in earlier surveys, a high proportion of villages used subsidies in prior elections to motivate voters to participate and to ensure a certain voting rate. See Table 17 below:

Table 17: Were Voting Subsidies Granted?

	Village Cadres	Villagers

	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	14	6.9	9	1.5
No	171	83.8	552	94.2
Don't Know	16	7.8	0	0
No Answer	3	1.5	25	4.3
	204	100.0	586	100

The survey results show that subsidies were not widely used. Only 6.9% of all surveyed village cadres and 1.5% of villagers indicated that subsidies were granted. Two factors explain this finding: First, no subsidy was needed to provide extra motivation for voters to participate in the elections, due to the effect that direct nomination, voting by secret ballot, and the public counting of ballots had upon voters' belief in their voting power. The increasing competitiveness of elections provided additional motivation to vote. Second, since this question touches on a fairly sensitive subject, the response of cadres and villagers may not provide an objective picture of reality.

The Jilin *Measures* contain a few stipulations about the removal of villager committee members. For this survey, village cadres were asked, "Has your village ever recalled a village committee member?" 8.4% of cadres answered, "Yes," 84.7% answered, "No," and 6.9% answered, "Don't Know." We thus know that the removal of villager committee members is not a common occurrence, although it has happened in some villages.

VI. Analysis of Election Competition

A. Competitiveness Index

Based on the data obtained in the survey, this article creates an index of competitiveness, Y , with a range from 0 to 1. The formula for Y is: $Y = 1 - (X_1 - X_2) / X_0$. The larger the value of Y , the more competitive was the election. X_0 is total number of valid ballots; X_1 is the number of ballots won by the 1st place candidate for villager committee chair; and X_2 is the number of ballots won by 2nd place candidate.

Since X_0 , X_1 , X_2 are included in the results published after every election, this formula provides a practical and objective method of calculating the competitiveness of elections.

B. Analysis of Competitiveness

For this analysis, we divided the sample villages into three categories. The first category includes villages with a high degree of competition, with an index of over 0.667. The second category includes villages with a moderate level of competition, with an index between 0.333 and 0.667. The third category includes villages with a low degree of competition, with an index below 0.333.

28 sample villages provided the total number of valid ballots, the number of ballots won by the 1st place candidate for villager committee chair, and the number of ballots won by the 2nd place candidate. As shown in the table below, villages with a high, moderate, and low degree of competitiveness respectively represent 42.9%, 28.6%, and 25.0% of the sample villages. This indicates a fairly high level of competitiveness in the 5th round of elections in Jilin Province.

Table 18: Indices of Competitiveness in 28 Valid Sample Villages

	Number of Villages	Percentage
Below 0.333	7	25.0
0.333 – 0.667	9	32.1
Over 0.667	12	42.9

Total	28	100.0
-------	----	-------

C. Different Degrees of Competitiveness in Villages of Different Sizes

For this analysis the sample villages were divided into large and small villages, determined by whether the village population size exceeded 1,000. See Table 19.

Table 19: Competitiveness of Elections in Villages of Different Sizes

Level of Competition	Villages with Population Size Less than 1000	Villages with Population Size Greater than 1000
Low	7.1 (1)	42.9 (6)
Moderate	35.7 (5)	28.6 (4)
High	57.1 (8)	28.6 (4)
Total	100.0 (14)	100.0 (14)
Gamma = -.594, p < 0.05		

The value of Gamma in the table indicates a significant negative relationship between village size and competitiveness. The larger the village population, the lower the level of competition. As shown in the table above, 57.1% of villages with population less than 1000 had highly competitive elections. Only 28.6% of villages with population over 1000 had highly competitive elections.

We believe that the negative relationship between village size and competitiveness can be explained by two factors: the character of social relations in villages and elite mobilization. Social groups can generally be classified according to how closely residents interact with one another, either as a “society of strangers” or as a “society of acquaintances.” Villagers are likely to interact as “acquaintances” when the village size is small and as “strangers” or “semi-acquaintances” when the village size is large. In smaller villages, voters have more information about candidates, reducing differences in prestige, ability, and social influence among candidates and thus increasing the level of competition. Moreover, candidates in smaller villages are more likely to become aware of the increased competition and campaign more vigorously, further increasing the level of competition. In large villages, by contrast, nominations are scattered and candidates are often very different from each other in terms of prestige, ability, and social influence. Under such circumstances, competition for ballots is likely to be less intense.

One of the authors of this article previously analyzed the phenomenon of village elites mobilizing villagers during elections. (Tong Zhihui, 2001) Elite efforts to stimulate the interest of villagers in village management benefit everyone, since contending management strategies are the substantive basis for competition among candidates. In small villages, elite efforts to mobilize villagers are appropriate and effective, since the interests of villagers and village elites are quite similar. In large villages, where the interests of elites and villagers are often quite different, elite efforts to mobilize villagers are not nearly as appropriate or effective.

VII. Conclusions and Considerations

A. Major Conclusions

First, generally speaking, election procedures have reached a high level of standardization, evidenced by the extent to which the basic principles set forth in the *Jilin Province Measures for the Election of Villager Committees* have been implemented. These basic principles include: the *haixuan* or “sea election” election model of direct nomination by villagers, fielding multiple candidates per position, voting by secret ballot, and the public counting of ballots.

Second, different procedures have achieved different levels of standardization. Voter registration, the direct nomination of candidates, and the public counting of ballots have been highly standardized. Campaign and voting procedures have not been standardized to the same extent, for a number of reasons: 1) neither the Organic Law on Villager Committees nor the Jilin *Measures* provide detailed guidelines regarding campaign procedures; 2) mobile ballot boxes remain an important voting method in some villages; 3) secret ballot booths were not set up in some villages; and 4) a voter identification card or written letter of trust was not required for a villager to receive a ballot in some villages.

Third, the voter participation rate is high and elections are competitive. In the 5th round of villager committee elections in Jilin Province, the average voting rate was 95%. The main reasons that the voting rate was high include: the direct nomination of candidates, voting by secret ballot, and public voting, all of which made voters feel that their participation in the elections would be effective.

Fourth, the villager representative assembly is very important in elections. Most village election committees were formed through voting at villager representative assemblies. In some villages, candidates promoted their management strategies at villager representative assemblies. Ballot counting and the publication of results were also largely supervised by villager representative assemblies, probably because VRAs were able to do so more effectively and at lower cost than village assemblies.

B. Some Thoughts on the Standardization of Village Elections

Although the direct nomination of candidates and the public counting of ballots have reached a relatively high level of standardization, the standardization of other procedures leaves much room for improvement, including: the formation of village election committees, the verification of voter eligibility, the birth of candidates, as well as procedures for campaigning, voting, counting ballots, and removing committee members. We believe that further work on the standardization of village elections should concentrate on campaign and voting procedures.

Regarding campaign procedures: (1) The law should clearly stipulate that final candidates for villager committees are allowed to campaign formally. The survey results show that communication between candidates and villagers was generally simplistic and informal. (2) The law should define what constitutes an illegal campaign act. For example, what constitutes bribery in an election campaign? If money is sent, how much money constitutes bribery? If a gift is sent, under what circumstances would the gift constitute bribery?

Regarding voting procedures: (1) Voters must show their voter identification cards when receiving ballot, and a written letter of trust must be provided when receiving a ballot held in trust. (2) Restrictions should be placed on the use of in-trust voting. (3) In order to insure voting secrecy, the use of mobile ballot boxes should be limited, and secret ballot booths should be set up at voting stations.

C. Some Suggestions for Improving Survey Research on Village Elections

We believe that the following aspects of research on village elections need improvement:

(1) *Questionnaire content:* We should merge the content of village cadre questionnaires with that of villager questionnaires. When surveying villagers and village cadres, we should add questions about their background. The survey should also include questions about the village being surveyed, such as village economic conditions, industrial structure, income per capita, and the distribution of surnames. While most of the survey should concentrate on objective questions,

some subjective questions should be added as well, including villagers' impression of the elections and the effect of election results.

(2) *Sampling procedure*: The survey results would be more meaningful if we were to implement a strict multi-stage random sampling procedure. Quota sampling should be used first to determine the appropriate survey ratio of villagers to village cadres.

(3) *Statistical analysis*: To better understand the relationship among different variables, we should implement bi-variable and multi-variable analyses. To develop a more nuanced understanding of village elections, we should also add qualitative analysis to our quantitative analysis.

Bibliography

Civil Affairs and Law Committee, Jilin Province People's Congress, Ministry of Civil Affairs, Jilin Province. "Sea Election is a Fresh Democratic Model Created by Villagers," *Compilation of Materials about Basic-Level Democratic Construction in Rural Area in 2000*, pp. 364 – 368, *Xiangzhen Luntan Journal*, Village Office, Department of Basic-Level Politics and Community Construction, Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2001.

Fei, Xiaotong. *Xiangtu Zhongguo, Shengyu Zhidu*, Beijing University Press, 1998.

He, Xuefeng. "Society of Semi-Acquaintances," *Political Science Research*, Issue 3, 2000.

Liu, Xitang. *Statistical Analysis and Project Evaluation of Village Elections in Three Provinces and Nine Counties*, not published, 1999.

Tong, Zhihui. "Elite Mobilization in Village Elections," *Sociology Research*, Issue 1, 2002.

Wang, Zhongtian. "To Respect Villagers' Wishes, To Explore Democratic Elections," Zhang, Hou'an, Xu Yong, eds., *The Stabilization and Development of Rural Politics in China*, pp. 1083 – 1102, Wuhan Press, 1995.