



Transformation Group Newsletter

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OBSERVATIONS ON CHINA'S VILLAGE ELECTIONS

In November and December last year, with the help of funding from our department, I made a research trip to China for my dissertation fieldwork. The main aim of this fieldwork was to observe China's village elections. I chose one township as my case and observed a total of 18 village elections myself.

Background

Every three years since 1998, approximately 930,000 villages (some 900 million people live in those villages) throughout China have been required to hold direct elections for village chairs and committees. Village elections have been legalized and promoted by the central government largely with the aim of making rural grassroots cadres more accountable and maintaining social "stability" (that is preventing unrest). So far, in most places of China, three rounds of direct village elections have been held since 1998. The elections I have observed were the third round direct village elections of X Township.

What are direct village elections like?

Simply speaking, a direct village election means village leaders are elected directly by villagers' votes (rather than appointed or nominated by local government). Since 1998, villagers have been entitled to go to ballot booth every three years to choose who will be their village leaders. Villagers are supposed to vote for whomever they like and the candidates who win the most votes will get elected and form a village committee.

Usually in a village, the village committee chair, one deputy chair, and one or two committee member positions are subject to elections.

My impressions of village elections in X Township

The role of the township government

Township government officials played a crucial role in the whole process of village elections.

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OBSERVATIONS ON CHINA'S VILLAGE ELECTIONS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Township officials are the organizers of elections, the referees of electoral disputes, and, most importantly, the players behind the curtain. Township government officials have tended to try to influence the elections to get the result they want. But their preferred candidates are not always acceptable to ordinary villagers. In one village, township government officials put pressure on candidate A to let him drop out so that the government-favored candidate B could get elected. However, A defied the government officials and finally won the office by beating B.

The candidates

Candidates tried to solicit votes by a variety of means. Some used posters to publicize themselves, attacking their rivals; some made attractive promises to villagers; some even directly "bought" votes with money.

The villagers

Some villagers were interested in their village elec-



tion while others were not. To lure villagers to participate elections, X Township government gave each villager who voted 10 Chinese Yuan. Villagers may have various incentives when choosing their village leaders. But in a small village community, personal connections seem to have played a prominent role in the way they voted.

An assessment of China's village elections and their ramifications

Those who are aware of China's village elections have sharply divergent views as to their significance and ramifications. Some are sceptical that the Chinese Communist Party will ever permit a competitive election that could threaten its grip on power. Others see the elections as a first stage in the building of democracy in China.

No matter how divergent the views are, it seems to be clear that nowadays village elections at least have transferred the power of choosing village leaders from higher-

level government to common villagers (the interference of township officials notwithstanding). This has sometimes made elected village leaders more accountable and responsive to ordinary villagers than before. But in terms of China's wider democratization, the advances that village elections have made should not be exaggerated.

Wang Guohui

STRENGTHENING AND REFORMING THE UNITED NATIONS

In March 2006 the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, presented his report on a renewed role for the United Nations: 'In larger freedom: towards development, security and human

rights for all". In his words: "Humanity will not enjoy security without development, it will not enjoy development without security and it will not enjoy either without respect for human

rights". Structured around three freedoms: freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to live in dignity, the report outlines means to strengthen the UN as an institution by

means of a compact between developed and developing countries.

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STRENGTHENING AND REFORMING THE UNITED NATIONS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2)

In presenting a comprehensive strategy to address terrorism, the report also offers a new proposal: the establishment of a UN Democracy Fund to assist the establishment of new democracies and in strengthening existing democracies.

The public debates throughout the UK in June and July are working towards discussion and agreement on various issues in time for the Millennium Review Summit in September. On June 1st the Scottish debate held in the new Parliament Building organised by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the United Nations Association opened with a welcome from Des McNulty MSP, Convenor of the Scottish Cross-Party Group on

International Development, and Sam Daws, Executive Director, UNA-UK. Mr. McNulty had to leave shortly after his address to attend the debate on the floor of the House as First Minister Jack O'Connell was announcing Scottish links with Malawi. Tim Morris, Head of International Organisations Department, FCO, then addressed the proposed changes outlined in the report and took direct and challenging questions before the discussion groups began. The three groups centred on: development, peace and security and UN Reform with feedback from rapporteurs outlining the main aspects raised.

At the conclusion, a panel of

academic and policy experts included Des McNulty, MSP, Tim Morris, FCO, Chris Corrin, Glasgow University, Mark Imber, St Andrews University and Sam Daws, UNA. The garden level reception at the Parliament was a lively and engaging continuation of much debate that had just been touched upon earlier in the day. The expectation is that many of these debates will continue in various forums throughout Scotland and feed back into proposals to be taken to the September Summit.

Further details on the event can be found at www.una-uk.org.

Chris Corrin

ANNOUNCEMENTS

GRANTS

Jane Duckett has been awarded a Leverhulme Trust Research Fellowship, for a project on 'Non-governmental organisations and the making of health policy in China'. GBP 18,710, 2006-07.

PUBLICATIONS

Stephen White brought out a coedited volume on POSTCOMMUNIST BELARUS in March (Rowman and Littlefield, with Elena Korosteleva and John Lowenhardt and his coedited collection DEVELOPMENTS IN RUSSIAN POLITICS 6 came out in June (Palgrave and Duke), including a chapter by Sarah Oates on political communications.

Ol'ga Kryshchanovskaya's ANATOMIYA ROSSIISKOI ELITY (Anatomy of the Russian Elite) was published earlier this year in Moscow by Zakharov, where it became what the Russian language inventively refers to as a *best-seller*. A copy is available in GU library.

VISITORS TO THE DEPARTMENT

Sirke Makinen of the University of Tampere was a visitor to the Department in May/June, working on Russian parliamentary parties and the Chechen war **(on which she gave a presentation on 11 May) and on NATO enlargement.**

RESEARCH VISITS ABROAD

Stephen White visited Minsk in the late March, for a round of elite interviews and a focus group connected with his current ESRC grant on Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and EU/NATO enlargement, and visited Moscow in late May/early June, for related library and interview work.

PRESENTATIONS

Stephen White gave a paper on turnout levels and their implications in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus at the BASEES conference in April, took part in a round table on 'Belarus between East and West', and chaired the Saturday evening symposium.

He also presented a paper at the University of Hull in March on 'Classifying communist systems', and spoke on 'Who is Mister Putin?' to the Scottish-Russian Forum in Edinburgh.

Over summer he will be presenting papers at

the Berlin ICCEES congress in late July, and at a conference on political parties in Washington DC in late August immediately before APSA.

Jane Duckett presented a paper, 'Explaining Welfare State Retrenchment in post-

Mao China: the Case of Health Provision', at the Institute for International Policy Analysis, University of Bath, on 18 March.

BREZHNEV CENTRAL COMMITTEE ARCHIVE

Some years ago Stephen White and Evan Mawdsley held a series of grants for the study of the CPSU Central Committee, one of which provided for the interviewing of as many as possible of its surviving members. In the end, working with Ol'ga Kryshatanovskaya and her colleagues in Moscow, we secured nearly a hundred interviews, some of considerable length. The tapes are still in Moscow, but we now have an electronic version of the entire archive, and will be preparing it for deposit in both hard and electronic form in GUL. In the meantime, any inquiries may be addressed to Stephen White.

POSTGRADUATE STUDENT NEWS

Wang Guohui returned from Shandong Province, China, in February. He had been doing field work for his dissertation on post-election village governance and observed the most recent round of elections in over 20 villages in the province.

Ayse Artun published a paper entitled 'Regional

Perceptions of Foreign Policy: Eastern Poland' in PERSPECTIVES ON EUROPEAN POLITICS AND SOCIETY, Volume 6, Issue 1, 2005.

Seongjin Kim (who took his PhD in the Department in 2000) has just published a paper in REGIONAL AND FEDERAL STUDIES, and Younhee Kang (who completed her

PhD in the Department, also in 2000) has secured a contract with Routledge to publish a book entitled BOLSHEVIZING THE SOVIET COMMUNIST PARTY, which will be based on her thesis.

Atsushi Ogushi (who had his viva in January) published an article based on his thesis, dealing with the finances of the CPSU, in the JOURNAL OF COM-

MUNIST STUDIES AND TRANSITION POLITICS in June.

Yeongmi Yun (who took her PhD in 2001) published a second paper recently in SIBIRICA but is reportedly earning serious money as a talk show hostess!

PERSONAL

Tania Konn-Roberts, of the Library, was elected Chair of the Scotland-Russia Forum, and Stephen White became an honorary member of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies at its conference in April.