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Come by the wind: Li Fan's story in Bunyun election

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Come by the Wind.
Li Fan's Story in Bunyun Election

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Come by the Wind.
Li Fan's Story in Bunyun Election

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Abstract/Zusammenfassung:
Der Artikel beschreibt die Erfahrungen des chinesischen Politikwissenschaftlers Li Fan im Zusammenhang mit der ersten direkten Wahl, die in der Gemeinde Buyun in der VR China abgehalten wurde. Li Fan dokumentiert die Abläufe und beurteilt die Bedeutung dieser Wahlen, die weltweit stark beachtet worden sind. Eine vorangestellte kurze Einleitung von C. Göbel und A. Senz ordnet die Wahlen in den Kontext politischer Reformprozesse im heutigen China ein.

The article describes the experiences of the political scientist Li Fan with the first direct election in Buyun township, P.R. China. Li Fan gives details about the processes before and during the election and reviews the relevance of this election, that has been recognized worldwide. A short introduction by C. Göbel and A. Senz put this township election in a wider context of political reform in today's China.

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List of Content

I. Introduction (C. Göbel & A. Senz)……..1

II. Come by the Wind. My Story in Buyun Election (Li Fan)

Preface…….5
The Doorway……...7
Journey Begins……8
A Public Selection…….10
The Decision…….13
Preparation……....16
Primary Election……...19
Election begins…….23
Sudden Change…….28
Reflection……..34
Conclusion……...……37

I. Introduction

The Buyun township election was widely noticed in and outside China because this election was perceived as the first direct one at the township level. So far direct elections had only taken place at the village level, which does not belong to the formal administrative structure. The Buyun election demonstrated the popular will for more political participation and showed that farmers were not too uneducated to understand and use democratic instruments also at the next higher level. In this respect they also represent the culmination of a process that has started a long time ago.

In the past 20 years, the rural areas of China have gone through major economic, social and political changes. These changes have led to many conflicts especially in the villages, such as inequalities in economic development and abuse of power culminating in illegal fees, graft and corruption. The so caused disturbance of the former rural order in China increased the tension between the government and the farmers. To calm down political disapproval in rural areas the Chinese political leadership introduced village elections in the late 1980s in order to strengthen local self-administration and the so-called village autonomy. The aim of this measure was to restore the party's legitimacy in the countryside, to install accountability and to stabilize the rural areas by giving the villagers a say in choosing their representatives. The implementation of the village elections was meant to solve the difficulties stated above within the villages, as so far they could not be solved sufficiently from the outside. The delegation of responsibilities to lower levels was a strategy of relief by the national government. In the meantime, local elections were extended to urban areas, too.

According to the new law the members of the village committees in the around 900.000 villages in China could be elected by all farmers of the minimum age of 18. The implementation of the elections started slowly but speeded up after the revision of the law in the late 1990s. Today, they have widely been implemented and are well recognized.

The main tasks of the village committees are seen in the responsibility for all official matters in the village, the management of conflicts inside the village and the promotion of economic development. Aside from this, the committees are also interpreted as an intermediary institution between the villagers and the higher administrative levels. This means that the committees are meant to support the implementation of the official policies on the one hand and negotiate for the villagers with the upper political level on the other hand.

In general, the results of the village elections show that the party is still strong in the rural areas and that its strength may even increase if more participation is given to the people. The control party and state hold over the villages is best shown in the existence of party committees or cells in every village. They are responsible for the implementation of the

overall political direction whereas village committees are meant to perform administrative functions only. The law states the village committees as independent institutions, but in fact also the higher administrative levels, for example the townships, try to influence their work. The townships see in a better control over the villages a way to easier fulfil the plans they themselves receive from their superior institutions. Apart from building up the infrastructure, townships are responsible for collecting taxes, disbursing funds from the central government and overseeing land leases. Therefore, direct elections at township level, which is the next institutional level above the villages, would be a quantum leap. It would obviously be a step towards more local autonomy.

Buyun town in Sichuan province – the first publicly well-recognized direct township election in China – for this reason gained international fame and became a symbol of "grassroots democracy" in China being pushed up another level. Judged by the rigid standards that the term "democracy" entails, this election can at best be termed semi-democratic. Filtered by a "cultural examination" and "primaries" in which less than 200 selected persons cast their vote, only two "publicly selected" candidates competed for the office. The third candidate had been chosen by the county Party Committee months before and went through neither of these procedures. In the process, rules were bent, and the author hints at the possibility of candidate intimidation and vote manipulation. The Party candidate won the election.

Yet as Li Fan's insider's account makes clear, the Buyun elections are of great political significance and represent only the first step towards a more accountable and transparent political system. There could be no better explanation than his detailed rendition of the events that led to and followed this election for the fact that the outcome as it was the absolute maximum that could be asked for. While the party's concern of loosing control by direct elections was soothed, the reformers managed to introduce electoral procedures that became a model. Exactly because the local reformers made compromises, the road to further political reform has been opened. Furthermore, to belittle the results of the election would be to belittle the high stakes these reformers have waged to put their ideals into practice.

Being directly involved in the devising, planning and execution of the elections, Li Fan presents a gripping rendition of the process that led to this election. Being one of the protagonists in devising and realizing this election, he presents a complete picture of the political environment that both facilitated and impeded the execution of the election, the decision-making processes of the protagonists who devised and implemented the election, the election itself, and its aftermath. Li Fan explains how he helped to initiate the Buyun elections, taking the semi-public selection of township chiefs in Sichuan's Shuizhong district to a higher level of accountability and transparency. He portraits in detail the motivations and fears of the district cadres involved and how he worked to persuade them to initiate the direct

elections. The formal and logistic preparations for the primaries and the elections, and the attitudes of both the candidates and the electorate during the campaigns are described vividly, as well as the sudden turn in events when the provincial Party committee sought to reestablish control over the process or at least limit the damage that could result from a non-Party candidate being elected. Finally Li Fan provides an analysis of the role of the national and the foreign media in dispersing and interpreting the Buyun elections, and reflects on the implications these elections have for the future path of China's reforms.

Besides supplying the reader a host of new and important information on the Buyun elections, Li Fan's account also offers a glimpse into the mechanisms of reform processes in China. As his story makes clear, China is far from being a monolithic polity where decisions are made in the Politburo to be passed down the administrative ladder for implementation. Both Li Fan and the cadres of Shizhong district involved in the Buyun elections liken their situation to that of Xiaogang Village, where peasants spontaneously and without backing from above went back to family farming and set the precedent for the agricultural reforms of the early 1980s. Indeed, both the economic reforms and the direct elections for villagers' committees originated in the countryside, were implemented haltingly and selectively, and only after their success was proven did they become nationwide policy.

The Buyun elections fit this pattern, and Li Fan provides an insight into the strategies, but also the risks and stakes involved in initiating such a break-through. Politics, as his description makes clear, is not only merely a power-game advanced for personal gain, but involves persons with ideals who are risking everything they have to realize these ideals.

As the story elucidates, important „people behind the curtains" in Beijing, as Li Fan calls them, might be willing to give reforms a try, but they cannot initiate them themselves for fear of loss of political face should they fail. Rather, they make clear that they acquiesce in limited rule breaking at the local level in order to test policies without being personally responsible. If the policy is deemed successful, it might be adopted nationwide, and praise falls on those who have supported it. If it is deemed a failure, the actors initiating them can be punished for disobedience. The supporters in the Central Committee, although they might lose political face, at least will not lose their posts. Communication is essential in this process. Li Fan describes the fence-breaking by the Shuizhong cadres as a multi-layered process that involves finding and exploiting legal loopholes, personal networking and forging coalitions at all levels, clever information management, and a lot of improvisation.

How difficult it is to distinguish between success and failure of a policy can be seen from the political drama that unfolded after the primary elections in Buyun, which no Party candidate passed, and which ended only when the candidate designated by the Party (who did not compete in the primaries) won the popular election. Interestingly, the normative interpretation

of the election was subject to fierce competition in the "ideological marketplace", and the non-Chinese media played a major part in swinging Party opinion towards a decidedly positive attitude.

Born in the same year as the People's Republic of China was founded and the son of a senior Party official, Li Fan first studied history at Beijing University and then spent five years studying politics at the Ohio State University. After his return to China, he briefly worked for the government-affiliated China Center for International Studies before founding the "World and China Institute", an independent think-tank concerned with China's economic and political reforms as well as her international relations. He has published several books and articles on the topics of interest groups and local elections and is known as one of China's important democracy activists.

His writing style is personal, capturing, sometimes thrilling and often entertaining. When he explains to us the special atmosphere during the preparation of the election and the election itself, when he tells us about his sentiments and hopes, he goes beyond an academic analysis of the developments. His article underlines that in order to carry out this township election the courage of all persons involved was needed and also that the people involved had a good sense for the potential historical meaning of their work. He shows, too, that in some way even a kind of conspiratorial handling was necessary to prepare and enforce the elections.

He also reveals his personal motivations and ambitions, which he holds for the promotion of political reforms in China. In his conclusion, he formulates a clear call for elections at all political levels in China and the conviction that the democratization of China must be the aim at every end of political reforms not for ideological reasons but because of his understanding of democracy as a way to provide a better systemic performance to the people.

We are pleased to present the following important article to a wider public and thank Mr. Li Fan for his willingness to publish his article in the Duisburg Working Papers on East Asian Studies. In order to preserve the documentary value and guarantee the genuine rendition of Li Fan's account, we have not made any additions or alterations in the article.

Christian Göbel & Anja D. Senz

II. COME BY THE WIND

— My Story in Buyun Election

Li Fan

My book on the story in Buyun Election was published in China in the summer of 2003. At the same time, I prepared the English version of the book. I cite some parts of the English version as the briefing of the story here. Wish all readers can enjoy this story. Welcome comments for sure.

PREFACE

It was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon on January 14th., 1999. A dusty wind blew through the chilly winter streets of Beijing. There were not many pedestrians because of the extreme cold. I walked up to a newspaper stand at the corner of street near where I was living and asked the girl who was selling newspaper, “Do you have the *Southern China Weekend*[i]?” “It just arrived', she replied, giving me a copy of the newspaper. I came to the same newspaper stand early in the morning for the newspaper which circulated one day before the regular time, but this girl told me that the latest issue would only arrive around 3 o'clock in the afternoon. When I got the paper, I quickly scanned the headlines on the front page, but there was nothing particular that I wanted to read. I then turned to the second page where there was a lengthy article entitled *The Direct Election For The Township Chief* covering the whole page. After I quickly went through it, I felt pretty relaxed since I had been feeling nervous for the past few days. 'It has been finally published', I told myself, I felt extremely happy. “Give me 20 copies.” I asked the girl. She glanced at me, apparently thinking my behaviour was strange, she probably asked herself why this man wanted to buy so many newspapers, but she immediately gave me 20 copies. Up to then, I could be sure that the news about the first ever direct election for the township chief in China would be published after all, and be not censored. Before reading the newspaper, I was worried that the article written by a journalist from Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province, would be blocked, as far as I knew, several people tried their utmost to stop the article being published.

The story which occurred in the countryside told how the local people in a barren and remote tiny town in Sichuan Province chose their own township chief. Except for a few

people who were concerned about this, this story would not cause much attention among the people, I believe. The place was too far away from the urban people's lives. Most of the people would have thought that it would be an old-style story talking about how the peasants voted and appealed to make their own choice and how the peasants, sometimes, will occasionally win. But what did this have to do with the people's lives in the cities? Actually, the publication of this article caused a big stir in China. Only five days later on January 19th. 1999, a state-representative newspaper, *the Legal Daily*, published by Judicial Ministry, launched an article on its front page. Although it used pen name, in fact, it was written by the editorial department. The large scale of the title of this article was frightening, *Democracy Is Not Allowed To Surpass Law.* It criticised the story about the township election that appeared in the *Southern China Weekend*, and said that the election violated China's Constitution. However, this criticism actually caused increased attention and interest in the election. No one was focusing on this story before, but it was now becoming hotter and hotter. The town of *Buyun* and the term of Buyun Election is gradually becoming increasingly well-known in China, and throughout the world. The US *Time* magazine issued a special volume commemorating the 50th Anniversary of founding of the P. R. China at the end of September, 1999. This article selected 50 places which had a big impact on China's history within the past 50 years. Buyun was on their list, bringing great honour for Buyun. Although some people may point out that the evaluation was focused on from American angle, it did not reflect the conclusion of the Chinese people and that matters in China should not necessarily evaluated by Americans. In reality, however, no matter who would draw such a conclusion, no matter how China's history will be written about, whether Buyun will be mentioned or not, it is not important. The most important aspect of this is, this event actually occurred in China, democracy in China is now on a new path. Meanwhile, the election also showed that pushing ahead with progress of democracy really has strong social and political bases within China. Some senior officials from the Chinese Communist Party probably would say China doesn't need democracy, the ordinary Chinese people cannot or do not want to have democracy, if they start to take part in democracy, China would become disordered. The story of Buyun refuted the saying that the Chinese people do need democracy, they are qualified to undertake democracy and they can do it well. Even up to now, Buyun, it is impossible to find it out on China's atlas, has become known to all. The Buyun Election has become an important experiment during a course in which China is stepping towards democracy.

For various reasons, I planned the Buyun Election with local leaders, and participated in the preparatory and administrative works and knew the entire process of the election. Even years after the election, some people kept on asking me similar questions, such as, how did the election in Buyun come into being? How did you get involved in it? What kind of role did

you play? Was the election in Buyun a democratic one? When will another Buyun appear in China? Will China allow a national democratic election to be held?

Within the past years, since the Buyun election was held and various types of people have asked about it, whether for research, or due to the concern of the future of China's democracy, Buyun has become one of the key issues of our institute. Memories of days and nights when I was involved in the election at Buyun flashed across my mind. I often recall those simple and kind peasants, those enterprising and promising candidates, those brave local leaders who turned the election into reality by taking risks themselves, those supporters behind the curtain, and the people who sang high praise about it. They are the founders of China's democracy. I hope, by writing about the story of Buyun Election to show my incomparable respect and admiration for them. I hope this will record the real situation of the Buyun Election and, of course, I also hope this account can make more and more people realise how China's democracy, within its numerous difficulties, is gradually and bravely forging ahead.

THE DOORWAY

Sometimes, when I look-back, I think should never have become involved in the social sciences. Instead, I should have studied science or engineering. But history changed my life. Since the universities closed during the Cultural Revolution, I had no time to enter the university and actually lost the chances to learn more about the engineering and mathematics. In 1969, many high school students went to countryside to accept the “re-education” from the peasants, and I jointed the military and became a soldier.

By a chance, I met a history professor, Wu Ze, from Chinese Eastern Normal University in Shanghai, and began to borrow books from him. Subsequently, I became interested in history. After returned from military life, I continued to interest in Chinese history. In 1978, after entrance exams to university were revived, I was admitted into the History Department of Beijing Normal University as a graduate student. After graduated in 1982, I decided to take a position in the Political Science Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), and it was there that I embarked on the study of political science.

In October 1984 I went to Ohio State University to have further studies in sociology and political science. I was very interested in the political development of the developing countries, because I considered it would be used on the China’s case. I returned to China in 1989 and continued research on political science at the China Centre for International Studies under the State Council. My work there was to have studies on the issue of Sino-US relationship and Taiwan to Mainland, but I still was interested in the broad domestic issues

and published many papers related to them. Like many other scholars and state employees in the early 1990s, I was drawn to “diving into the sea” (xia hai) -- going into business on my own -- and in 1992 I left my secure research post to strike out on my own. I worked for two companies first and then I set up a non-profit and non-government research institute, the World and China Institute-WCI, in 1994. The mission of the WCI is to research economic, political and cultural issues to promote China's reform and opening to the world.

The Institute's research is academically rigorous, but also engaged in practical issues. I became interested in grassroots democracy in the countryside in 1996. Many friends of mine in the United States started to do research in this area, and it was their enthusiasm that piqued my own interest. During the same year, an overseas academic institution proposed cooperating with WCI on examining grassroots elections in the countryside. By this chance I read more and more materials about this topic and contacted many people in this field, and I came to believe that these elections held great significance for China. I became convinced it was a topic that should not be ignored. They marked an important change showing that democracy in China was evolving from an intellectuals' dream into a reality. After finishing a report on these elections, I continued to pay great attention to them and monitored any new developments. In 1997, when the WCI conducted a study of civil society in China, a chapter in the report was devoted to grassroots democracy. Since then, during the many forums held by our institute, grassroots elections have been a frequently discussed topic. At that time, I concluded the township direct elections, even higher, will come to China sooner, on which because the impact of the grassroots elections.

Some people may argue that conclusions I draw about the development of democracy in China are too optimistic and divorced from reality. I don't entirely want to argue with them. Maybe some ideas I was wrong, but just because I had this point of view, when the direct election was coming into the true, I could take it, and I could push it from ideas to become the reality. I met town of Buyun by a chance, and I could take this chance to make the history. This was coming from the preparation that I had before the event came to be true.

JOURNEY BEGINS

On July 25, 1998, World and China Institute organized a seminar at the Xihua Hotel in Beijing. It was the second of our series of seminars on current thinking trends in China, and the topic was “liberation of thought and political reform”. During the discussion, the issue of grassroots elections came up. Ma Licheng, a famous reporter of People’s Daily said there was a case of township direct election happened in Sichuan province.

A few days later, Ma Licheng faxed me some materials about this election. They were reports published in the Suizhou News, a local newspaper in the Shizhong District, Suining City in Sichuan and they described reforms to the cadre system there. The reforms included holding a trial election in Baoshi town. This form of election was certainly a step forward. But it was not a direct election; it was an indirect election, albeit an improvement on the prevailing selection process. The township chief was finally decided by the members of the town People's Congress. The current Chinese constitution regulates the Chinese government chiefs in every level are elected by the People's Congress, rather than the population directly, by this way Party can easily to make control in reaching the goal of "Party manages the cadres"(Dang Guan Gan Bu). The reform in Baoshi town made a progress that allowed more people, even some representatives of peasants, to be involved in the process of selecting cadres.

After reading the reports, I called Ma Licheng, he gave me the telephone number of the Party Secretary of district and told me she was a woman named Zhang Jinming.

It was September before I finally spoke to her. She told me that Shizhong district was still using just indirect elections, not a direct one. The election at Baoshi was called a "Gong Xuan (public selection)[1]". And she said I was welcome to come to Shizhong and watch one election in township chief which will be held in the earlier of November.

And that was the way I started out on the journey to a direct election in Shizhong.

I took a plane to Chengdu on October 28, 1998. Ms. Zhang Min, secretary of Zhang Jinming came to get me on October 30, and we drove off to Suining city.

At that time I had two objectives in coming to Sichuan. First, I wanted to have a look at the experiments in political reform in Suining. Second, I wanted to explore the possibilities for holding a direct election of a township chief. I thought that a direct election could be easily achieved and would happen soon some where in China. For both reasons, I was eager to soak up as much knowledge as possible about Shizhong.

With detours for road construction, it took us about six hours to reach Suining. Shizhong district is a big, hilly farming region, and with a population of over 1.3 million, it is one of the biggest county-level administrative units in China.

It was dark when our car reached the Suining Hotel -- the government guesthouse -- but the district leaders were all there waiting for us. The party committee secretary and the deputy

[1] The term of Gong Xuan used to translated as the public election. It was the way of government to have the reform of cadre selection in Sichuan Province 5 years ago. By this way, the process of selection of cadres was more open than "the operation of black box" before. Actually, the term of public election is not really for this meaning, the best translation is the "public selection". Therefore, the Gong Xuan's real meaning is the public selection, by which party still manages the cadres but let more open for the public. Later, when township elections were going, the term of Gong Xuan had been translated as the Public Election. Originally the Gong Xuan should be the public selection, rather than the public election. The public election was used by me first in English when I later talked to the foreign medias for the story.

secretary, the head of the district government, the heads of party organization office -- in charge of official party appointments -- and propaganda office were standing outside the hotel waiting to greet me. I had no idea what Ma Licheng had said to them about me, but, obviously, they attached great importance to my visiting.

That evening, the officials briefed me on their ideas for Gong Xuan in Shizhong. Reform of the official appointments in Shizhong District had started back in the 1980s. It now had already chosen 13 senior officials through open selection, including two township chiefs, two township party secretaries, and a district medical bureau chief.

Their 'Gong Xuan' were intended to select cadres openly and publicly, but they were not real elections; rather, they were reformed means of selection. The traditional way the Chinese Communist Party chooses cadres is by appointment from above only. To make appointment more open to the public was certainly a reform, but it still left party leaders in control of official appointments.

But the reason I was in Suining was less flashy: I was there to see a trial public selection for township chief. That first night in Suining, Zhang Jinming said she hoped I could go to see a village committee election with them the next day, and then a township public election on November 2, three days later. I eagerly agreed, because until then all my research on village committee elections had been on paper; I had never seen a real one in the field.

A PUBLIC SELECTION

On October 31 a village committee election was held in Yingshui village in Hengshan town. When we arrived there, all villagers sat and waited for us. Red flag were flying, and some voting boxes were put on the two sides of the stage. The two contestants in the election were the incumbent chief and the village granary keeper. In the end, the granary keeper won by quite a large margin. This was a competition certainly, but not a good election even by MCA's （Ministry of Civil Affairs）criteria in the procedure itself. The most significant problems were there were no debate and no questions raised by voters. For a good election, it needs to have them. That was my thinking that time. But I kept my misgivings to myself.

This election of village was not my interest when I was in Suining, I was waiting for the public selection. The public selection of a town government chief had process set up by Shizhong district. The following is the details of process according to Baoshi experiences in the earlier time. First of all, the Party Organization publicly ask the people to register, but there are some serious conditions; After registering, they would be asked to attend the cultural examination. After the cultural examination, most of the candidates would be

eliminated. The open speech is the third step, candidates should have speech about what they want to do as the selected chief and answer all the questions raised from the public. Afterwards, viewing from the situation of speech, participants of the meeting would select the candidates by voting. The fourth step is to take vote by the township People's Congress members only, and the new township chief will be then chosen. This is the process of so called public selection.

On November 2, Shizhong district held another public selection for town chief in the town of Hengshan. In the morning, when we droved half-hours to Hengshan, there was a festive atmosphere. The selection meeting was held in the small, aging town auditorium. Representatives at the meeting included cadres from every village in the town. The later statistics showed there were total 768 participants in the ballot, including 224 from villages, 259 party representatives, 50 township leaders, 92 township officials, 21 school teachers, 10 retired cadres, and 36 district and city leaders. They composed a “big selecting group” to take vote after debates of 6 candidates. The winner will be taken to the People’s Congress to be chosen formally for the chief.

The “debate” was very important to the selection's outcome. The six candidates drew lots to decide their order of speaking, and then each took his turn to address the voters, usually discussing economic conditions and what he would do for Hengshan. Afterwards, the candidates answered questions pulled out from a box of them submitted beforehand.

The “debate” was a peculiar event. All of the candidates were inexperienced public speakers. Some were halting and cautious, some looked and sounded like they were reciting books…

When the process ended, of the 768 participants present, 653 voted, including 22 invalid ones, the fourth candidate was the winner by a big margin with 398 vote.

The next step of the selection was to convene the town’s 78 People's Congress delegates to vote whether No.4 candidate. There was a twenty minutes break before the next step. I walked and tried to get some peasants to talk. Zhang Min came up and told me there would be another meeting and I could participate. On entering the meeting room, I felt something odd. The atmosphere was stiff and nervous…

After a while, I became to know the facts. The public selection had a process that after the vote of “big selecting group”, there is another step that was the Shizhong District Party Committee might to make the decision to send a Party-recommendation candidate to the town People’s Congress in embodying the principle of “Party manages cadres”. This process was not showing for the public. This meeting should decide if the NO. 4 candidate is the Party-recommend candidate for the People’s Congress of town, and of course this candidate would be the new chief. But question was that the winner was not the Party member. It’s never

happened before. I knew it was the touchstone for Hengshan's selection if it's the reform or not. If it's the reform, just follow the rule to go. After the some hesitated-discussions, this meeting decided to send the elected-candidate to the congress.

When the election assembly was convened again, there was only one candidate, No.4, Deng Shaobin, as the recommended-candidate by Party Committee of Shizhong, to be voted for the chief. All of the votes were for Deng, so he eventually became the township chief of Hengshan town.

This result stunned me. The new township chief probably would be China's first non-Party township government chief for a long time and also he was possibly the first elected non-party member township chief. In fact, the appearance of the non-Party member township chief in Hengshan did not appear in any periodicals in China later. A lot of articles mentioned Hengshan's selection but did not mention this matter.

That afternoon, I was arranged to take tour for a famous Buddha temple. Chen Yangrong, director of Propaganda Department, accompanied with me. Chen and I had a long conversation that time.

Talking was from the election in the morning. Chen asked me, what problems were remained, and Shizhong would overcome it later. I told him my points of views. "One problem is about the fairness. The point is whether Baoshi or Hengshan, even no local people were among the candidates. It's unfair to the local people. The second problem is how to convene the public selection meeting. So many people on scene are from the outside, never live locally, neither knows the candidates, and how can we be qualified to vote? We should stipulate clearly who can vote, who can't. There should be a rule."

"It's better do the direct election rather than taking so much effort in the process of public selection. The direct one will solve all the questions mentioned before. Your public selection has been in the half way of direct election. Based on it, push forward just one step, you can get the direct election. It's very easy to get there."

Chen Yangrong showed great enthusiasm to the conversation. At supper, I talked about this idea to other leaders of Shizhong district.

"Do you think the direct election better?" asked from Zhang Jinming.

"Shizhong district's public selection was good, but the direct election is the trend of development and the natural result of Chinese village grassroots democracy. In my opinion, the township chief direct election will appear pretty soon in China. I got to know from those doing this, many places have been brewing direct election, and estimably there will be breakthrough soon. If you don't go upper and upper, somebody else may surpass you."

Zhang didn't say anything. I didn't either. I wanted to give the local leaders more time to think it over and prove it a good idea. I did not want to urge them. It was an uneasy decision to be made anyway.

In the morning of November 4, the Shizhong district held a meeting to generalize the experiences they did before. The meeting was processing in the meeting room of Shizhong District People's Congress. All the 13 cadres who were by the Gong Xuan, included two town chiefs took part in the meeting.

I gave a speech in the meeting. I talked about three issues. One was the situation of the nation's political reform, specializing on the development of Chinese village grassroots democracy and its influence on the nation and the world. The second was to say the institutionalization was the key of Chinese political reform. The third was my view to the reform in Shizhong district, absolutely affirmative.

During the meeting, I sat next to Zhang Jinming. She told me this afternoon around 3 o'clock she would come to my hotel room to discuss about the direct election in township and asked me wait there.

THE DECISION

Five of them -- Zhang Jinming, Yang Huadi, Deputy Secretary of Party Committee, Chen Yangrong, Ma Shengkang, director of Party Organization Department and Zhang Min -- arrived at the time we'd arranged and we got right down to discuss the direct election of township chiefs.

Zhang Jinming came straight to the point: "The Gong Xuan in Shizhong District was over. Today, we'll discuss direct elections in town. Let's see whether we possible to do it or not. Actually, if Teacher Li had come here earlier, we could have had a direct election instead of a public one." She then turned to me, "Teacher Li, could you fill us in on the national situation first?"

Her preference for direct elections was apparent from the beginning.

I also did not waste words: "Concerning the national situation, the development of basic-level democracy in villages is a wonderful development. The Third Plenum of the Party Central Committee will agree to promote democratic elections at the village level even further. Some officials from the MCA and the National People's Congress have already been advocating direct election of township chiefs."

I told them Shenzhen had applied to the NPC to get approval for such elections, but failed. The Politburo had talked about the matter at its annual summer meeting retreat to the

seaside resort town Beidaihe, but those were closed-door sessions. At least, though, it suggested that township elections were on the Politburo's agenda. I felt that election of township chiefs was just around the corner. The situation was ready for a breakthrough; like a traditional paper window, it could be easily punctured. Voices both inside and outside the Party were increasingly calling for expanded elections. A breakthrough was inevitable in the next year or two.

"But here are some risks in carrying out direct elections," I continued, "because the higher authorities haven't fully backed them. We should be mentally prepared."

I explained that local officials needed to be prepared for the possible fallout from holding a direct election. For acting without approval from higher party authorities, they could be severely punished, perhaps losing their jobs or even being expelled from the party.

Taking personal responsibility for a possibly failed reform effort weighed heavily on everyone in that room. They not only had to worry about themselves, but also the families that depended on them for a livelihood. I knew their thoughts and worries. I knew the risks. But I knew the potential gains were far too great to let pass by.

Zhang Jinming asked the others their opinions: "Should we do it or not? The leaders of the Shizhong District Party Committee are all here. If all of you agree, we'll do it, just like Xiaogang Village[2] did." The room was silent. No one dared speak first. I looked at them, and knew what they were thinking. They were after all, members at the lowest level of government, daring to challenge the highest leaders of the country. It would require men and women of exceptional spirit.

Zhang look around and pointed in turn at each of her colleagues, asking only "Yes or no." First she asked Yang Huadi, because he was the deputy party secretary.

"Do it!" shot back Yang, a former soldier who carried himself with a soldier's straightforward bearing.

Chen Yangrong and Ma Shengkang agreed.

"Now that all of you have agreed, let's just do it." Zhang said. She then turned to me, "Teacher Li, you see, all of us have taken a clear stand to do this. We've made a very important decision, so what are your suggestions to make this election a success?"

I knew the way ahead was long and difficult, but was elated that we had passed the first hurdle.

"You are all working as local officials and I once worked in the State Council, so we all know how the government works," I said. "To make sure this election a success, we need to fulfill only one condition----no reporting to higher authorities. They're too timid to act

[2] Xiao Gang Village was the first place to break the limitation of Mao's period and to let peasant do the rural economic reform in 80's.

themselves when they get this report. If they disapprove, we can do nothing. And they certainly won't dare approve it. First, do not report. That's how I succeeded before."

The need for secrecy was already evident. Zhang said she had met chief Yu of the Suining Municipal Party Organization Department. He was asking around about rumors that I was in town to organize a direct election and strongly urged her not to continue. To throw this snooping bureaucrat off her trail, Zhang denied that I was around.

"So from today on we must make it a rule that no one is allowed to report this thing to the municipal party committee," Zhang told us.

With that touchy subject out of the way, we proceeded to the details of organizing the election.

First, we needed to select a town and investigate conditions there. We set four conditions for selecting the town. First, it should have a small population, making it easier to manage a general election; second, it should be remote, making it easier to keep the election secret and avoid interference; third, the local officials would have to be progressive; finally, clans should not play a big role in local politics.

Mr. Ma already had a place in mind. The town was called Buyun. At the time I didn't catch its name, because of the local cadres thick Sichuanese accent sometimes obscured their words, but later Buyun was to be famous across China.

We agreed that the polling day should be December 31st, to be in line with government scheduled transition of leadership. We needed time to prepare many things, including selecting the town and preparing the election regulations. In all, we would need one month. So we decided the sign-up day for candidates was December 5, which was the earliest day that we could start the election.

We agreed to share the work. The Shizhong District would select a town, and I would do two things back in Beijing: draft the election regulations, and consult with Ma Licheng about how best to promote the scheme during and after the process of election.

As the meeting ended, the atmosphere in the room relaxed. We knocked hands together – Three Musketeers style – to seal our pact. I don't know if they sensed the historical importance of the meeting, but I did.

That night, I began to draft the regulation for the direct election in accordance with the discussions that afternoon. The first draft was divided into several chapters, including the process of nomination, campaigning, voting and vote-counting, as well as appeals and verification. It is a quite simple election regulation, expressed roughly, and thus would require more improvement later when I back Beijing. But anyway, the basic principles had been formulated, and would be the foundation of our experiment.

On the morning of November 6th, Zhang and Chen saw me off. I handed over copies of the two drafts to Zhang. All the documents were written on letter-heads of the World and China Institute, in my original handwriting. There were some modifications made by Zhang on the first draft. If someday later Buyun would become the Xiaogang village of reforming of the Chinese political system, this document would be a historical record. This embodied the commitment and resolution of the original six people who took part in the meeting to decide to carry out, without the permission of the higher authorities, the first township direct election since the CCP came into the power.

PREPARATION

I arrived in Beijing on the 10th. In the following a few days, I kept exchanging ideas with experts and scholars who studying Chinese and foreign law and election. They thought, according to the Chinese current laws, there was provisions for primary election, but how to do it has no regulation, so we had a loophole to go through, which means, we could elect a candidate through the way of direct election and submit him or her to the People's Congress to pass. This was actually the way of direct election without giving others any handle, which can protect the local cadres effectively. The election regulations were improving on the basis of the original one referring to the discussion with these experts. Many friends said this was a great significance change when they were talking to me. They let me make sure to succeed and if so, the course of China political reform would expedite.

On November 18th, Zhang Jingming phoned me from Chengdu. That was our first contact since we were apart. She was attending the whole-province county Party secretary meeting organized by the Sichuan Province Party Committee, sending the spirit of the Third Plenum of CCP Central Committee. I could hear from her voice in the phone that she was optimistic because the “public selection” of the Shizhong District had had tremendous impact in the whole province.

Afterwards, Zhang faxed me the modified election regulation, which was based on the one on November 5. It was altered, title from “the Direct Election of Township Chief Scheme” to “the Election of Township Chief Candidate Scheme”. According to this, what was produced by all-citizen direct election was the township chief candidate. The township people's congress would vote for the candidate formally. But the congress was required to “embody the popular will, respect the result of the all-citizen direct election and ensure the candidate to be elected.” The candidate's work experience was reserved. The age ceiling of

the candidate by the Party recommendation was 45 and of the candidate by the election district joint meeting was 50.

Zhang introduced the general situation of town of Buyun in this fax, that is, there were ten villages, population 16.4 thousand (among them 15.428 thousand agricultural population), 11.527 thousand people bearing the right to vote, 4 thousand people were working outside. There were 51 deputies to the township People's Congress. Generally speaking, there was no impact from clans. I phoned Zhang Min that night. She told me she had been to Buyun before and the four leaders there were all good, so it would be nice to carry out the election there and anyone of them elected would be fine.

Zhang Jingming usually contacted me at night when she was in Chengdu. Unusually, on the noon of November 19th, she gave me a call suddenly to tell me the great change. "On the meeting this morning, when the vice-secretary of the Party Committee of Sichuan Province, the member of the Party Central Committee, Qin Yuqin, was giving a report to the meeting, she said: 'We may launch the pilot project of township chief direct election in place with the proper condition.'" She told me she would have a meeting later, so she would talk to me in detail at night.

I was astonished of the difference between what I learned from Sichuan and Beijing. I wondered if there had been any change taken place and I didn't know. Immediately I put down the phone, I referred to the related resources to know more about the situation that what on the opinion of the central government and whether there was any change. Some inside friends told me the Standing Committee of the Politburo did consider on the direct election at township or county level, but unfortunately, they vetoed it. They thought at least it couldn't be on now. However, it suggested this issue had been in the agenda of the central government. Shenzhen did submit a report on such a direction election, but the National People's Congress rejected the request. So the situation what was learnt from Sichuan government did not exist in Beijing.

Some experts told me, no matter what the upper authorities thought; now that the Party Committee of Sichuan Province had such a positive attitude, why not go straight to the direct election without approval by the people's congress. From the legal aspect, we might let the township chief submit the nomination of the vice-chief and connect the township chief and the people's congress by being voted through by the congress.

The second day, I got the election regulation based on our original rule altered by the experts and scholars. With the second draft by Zhang, I began to prepare a new one. The experts and I thought it needs advancing. Altogether, from signing-up to the end of the voting, best there is more than one month. In this way, the election would go on pretty well and not in a rush. Through the analysis, there were some new opinions on some other issues, so I

explained the alteration of the questions for the altered regulation to leaders from the Shizhong District in a letter on 23rd. All together I send a fax to Shizhong.

On the night of 27th, Zhang Jingming phoned to tell me she had made up her mind to adopt our regulation, which was deemed pretty good. She believed this election needed support from the people's congress without doubt, so she had talked to a vice-Chairman of the District People's Congress and the director of Law Working Committee of District People's Congress about the direct election. They hesitated at the first moment, but they changed their minds after they read the speech given by Secretary Qin.

Zhang told me she also had talked to the Party Secretary and Chairman of the People's Congress of Buyun. They agreed their willingness and support to carry out the election and had sent report to the District Party Committee already, which had given an official reply, by the District Party Committee, to approve the election in Buyun. Consequently, local preparations could be started. They should be advanced to December 1st as the sign-up day. Other schedules would be the same. Another important task was to notify the absentees who are working the outside town promptly about the election, and call whom they might come back and participate it. As all the work was in swing, the District Party Committee made a decision to establish a Small Leading Group to lead this pilot project, which was composed of the vice director of the People's Congress of District, who is the chief of this small group, plus the director of the Legal Working Committee of the Congress and two directors ----Ma Shengkang and Chen Yangrong, and Zahng Min. Since Yang Huaidi would be responsible for the whole elections in the Shizhong District, he would not be in charge of the daily work for the election in Buyun.

In order to keep secret, she had Chen Yangrong make the regulation that except for the journalists of the district newspapers, no journalists from outside could enter Buyun and interview this issue. It was stipulated that only 5 press cards would be issued.

On 30th, after the public announcement in Buyun, the registration began.

On the morning of December 1st, after 8:00, Zhang phoned me abruptly to tell that the vice-chairman of the Municipal People's Congress got the information that the direct election was going on in Buyun from the mouth of the district congress and called her to halt immediately. I felt worried on hearing that and my first reaction is "can we report to the province now?" I hope to get the support of Secretary Qin maybe. It was my view to quote the words of Secretary Qin to control the city.

"Unnecessarily, I've informed Buyun to hand out all materials and let Chen deal with it." It seemed she was calm. She said she would contact me in the evening making me know more details.

I was still anxious about this matter, I couldn't wait so long, and I phoned Chen afternoon. He gave me a firmly positive answer as if nothing ever happened.

"I was right back from Buyun. The election has been on comprehensively. Letters are ready and will be handed out right now. Don't mind what happened in the morning, thing will go on as planed."

I felt relieved with my admiration for their bravery and wisdom.

PRIMARY ELECTION

I arrived back in Suining on the night of December 13. The primary election was due to start two days later, on the 15th. So far, our plan had gone forward step by step with no major hitches. The Sichuan provincial government had given the green light for the election, though we nevertheless had to keep a low profile. We could barely even consider what the reaction in Beijing would be if words of our plan reached there.

I met with Chen Yangrong that night. He said preparations had gone well so far. After the district and township governments had been consulted many times, they decided that each village would send three villager delegates and three village cadres, and there would also be five members from the Buyun People's Congress Standing Committee. Together, these two groups would contribute 71 members to be the Election Constituency Joint Meeting. Now they also decided to include all production team leaders in each village and heads of township government departments and directing cadres for the party. Altogether there would be 171 members of the Meeting.

I told Chen my views: "Since there are quite a lot of registered-candidates in the primary election, the votes may be much dispersed. It will be hard to win over others if the successful candidates win just 8 or 10 votes. So increasing the number of election college delegates makes sense. But we also need to prepare more rounds of voting. We have regulations based on a simple majority principle, and that will bring problems. To boost the selected candidates' legitimacy, we may have to hold runoff elections. We can talk over the specifics together. In my opinion, if someone gets 51% of the votes, that result can be the final." Chen agreed to talk over this issue with Zhang later.

Late that night, Zhang Jinming came to my hotel. She said it seemed there were no big problems. She arranged for me to observe the preparations for the primary election in Buyun. I told her my idea about having several rounds during the primary election. Afterwards, she agreed to have a second round.

Zhang said, “The Election Constituency Joint Meeting can settle this question. We'll see what they have to say. They're holding a preparatory meeting tomorrow and we can go along.” The purpose of the preliminary meeting was to decide how to elect two formal candidates from 15 candidates. Zhang explained to me that the current thinking of the Election Constituency Joint Meeting was to allocate each speaker 30 minutes' speaking time, including time to answer two questions. I thought this was a good idea.

Buyun lies 60 kilometers southwest of Suining. The road there passes the towns of Hengshan and then Baima. From Baima to Buyun, the road is a narrow, dirty one that becomes impassable in heavy rain.

Our vehicle went through the center of Buyun town and stopped by the township government building. Buyun is not big; it has some housing, and there is a small square in the center, which is an intersection of three streets. On both sides there are stores, mostly selling farm products, some small restaurants, and shops renting VCD disks. It looked to be a poor town. The Buyun government office was located in the same smallish, three story building.

After Zhang Jinming introduced me to Qin Jiping, Secretary of the Township Party Committee, we settled down in his office to discuss the next days’ primary election. We decided to choose the candidate with more than one third of the votes in the first round as the official candidate. If there was more than two, there would be a second-round vote.

At lunchtime, Zhang Jinming pointed to a person at the opposite table and said, “That's Tan Xiaoqiu, the Party-endorsed candidate. He's the deputy-secretary of the Township Party Committee, vice township chief, and was designated township chief of Buyun by the Sizhong Party Committee three months ago. If we didn’t use direct elections, he would certainly be the chief. Now things have changed. He won't take part in tomorrow’s primary election, but directly try out in the final three-candidate contest.”

Initially, our idea was the Communist Party candidate would also be chosen by an election similar to the public selection, only without cultural examination. But when I back in Beijing I found out they had ignored this step and simply appointed someone. I decided not to force the issue because it might embarrass them. I later found out that Tan had been decided by the Standing Committee of District Party Committee many months before, and no one could alter this “collective decision”.

Tomorrow's primary election would take place on the playground of Buyun Middle School, with desks in the middle for delegates and classrooms on both sides used as secret ballot rooms.

This was my first trip to Buyun. Cadres here didn’t know me before. They knew I was from Beijing as a professor, but didn’t know what role I was playing for the election. They often asked me a question, if there was this kind of election before in China. Someone said

they heard this kind of election held in Henan province before. I told them no one was done before; the Buyun election was the first one certainly.

They were delighted to hear that. It was clear that officials here grasped the importance of what they were doing; they were excited and enthusiastic -- probably in part because Qin Jiping and Zhang Jinming used this pioneering message to mobilize them. I felt they had a heavy sense of historic responsibility. Later, Chen Yangrong told me when they talked to Qin Jiping about this election first time, Qin immediately understood the significance of this event to Buyun. That's why Qin did not hesitated in agreeing to have elections in Buyun. On my first day in Buyun the excitement of the people was infectious. Everything was ready.

On the morning of the 15th, delegates of the Electoral Constituency Joint Meeting arrived one after the other. In the center of the playground there were many desks, one for each delegate's identification card. The front of the playground had a stage, and we observers were given observer cards a color different to the delegates' cards, and we were seated on a long bench in the back of playground. Classrooms on both sides of the playground had been opened, and red banners above their doorways proclaimed "secret ballot room." The primary election was open to the public, and police were present to keep order. I was impressed by the orderliness of the entire process.

As the director of the Township Election Committee, Qin Jiping chaired the meeting. The order in which the candidates gave their speeches was decided by lot. There were fifteen candidates; nine were Communist Party members, and six non-party members; five were township officials, four were primary or secondary school teachers, one was a village committee chief and another was a village party secretary, one was a migrant back from Guangdong, three were businesspeople. There were four women among them. All of were younger than 45 years old.

After Qin's opening speech, the first speaker was a woman teacher from Buyun Middle School named Liu Fengbing. She was a non-Party member.

The seventh one was Zou Kun, a deputy secretary of the Township Party Committee. His speech was very polished. He showed a clear perception of the problems in Buyun, and he offered his own solutions, expressing them lucidly and persuasively.

The last candidate was a chemistry teacher at Buyun Middle School, Zhou Xingyi. He was not a party member, and his speech was different from others. He did not say anything directly about town's problems; on the contrary, he offered examples of how poor residents, including some disabled ones, had become wealthy by their own efforts. He answered one question by saying: "Buyun should have its markets. If I'm made chief, I'll find markets in Chengdu or other places. For employment, you might also come to me, and I will make it."

Because he was the last speaker, and also a teacher, his take on problems was different, and his fighting words immediately enlivened the rigid atmosphere of the election. He won a warm round of applause from the audience.

After the speech, there was the meeting for each village. Half an hour later, delegates from the villages meetings came back to their seats and prepared to vote. The staff distributed a ballot to each delegate, and delegates could fill in the names of the two candidates they chose. Every one sat on the chair to write ballot and no one to go the “secret ballot room”.

When the counting started, the atmosphere was nervous, silent, as if people were too tense to breathe. Before the blackboard, leaders from Shizhong district and township were craning their necks and waiting for the results. As votes were announced, no delegate uttered a single word. Unexpectedly, the first winner, with 75 votes, was the last speaker, the teacher Zhou Xingyi. The second was the fourth speaker, the village committee director Cai Ronghui, with 58 votes. The third one was the first speaker, the school teacher Liu Fengbing, with 57 votes.

This result went well beyond the expectations of Shizhong's leaders. I knew they expected Zou Kun to be made the chief candidate. They assumed he was more competent than Tan Xiaoqiu, so they made Tan the party-backed candidate. They anticipated Zou Kun would be elected in the primary election and compete against Tan in the deciding election. The defeat of all the township officials reflected the views from the peasants. They were dissatisfied with them and with the township government, but the district and township leaders were not aware of it.

According to the election regulations, after two official candidates were chosen by the joint meeting, they joined a party-endorsed one in a final, deciding election. Zhou Xingyi and Cai Ronghui, the victorious popular candidates, were undoubtedly happy to go through to this round, but Tan Xiaoqiu -- the party-endorsed candidate -- looked more nervous. Therefore, the three candidates all stood on the stage and were introduced by the election committee as the formal candidates. The winner of the deciding round would be one of them.

When the primary election was over, Zhang Jinming at once called an enlarged meeting of the Township Election Committee to discuss the situation. However, the officials were upset about the defeat of the township cadres like Zou Kun and Liu Shiguo, another deputy secretary, and they discussed how to ensure the victory of the Party-endorsed candidate, Tan Xiaoqiu.

I well understood the feeling of those district and township leaders. Carrying out the first direct-election of the township chief, without the permission from higher authority, could not fail. If either Tan Xiaoqiu or Cai Ronghui was elected, it would be possible to ease the pressure on district and township leaders, but if Zhou Xinyi won that might provoke warnings

that township elections would cause the party to lose control, leading to the halt of such elections.

Zhang Jinming summed up proceedings and then asked that the contest regulations for the remaining three candidates be finished tomorrow. She suggested the township establish a think tank for Tan Xiaoqiu; ask the district leaders to strengthen their leadership of the Buyun election.

ELECTION BEGINS

On the morning of the 16th, the deputy director of the Propaganda Department, Zhou Guangning, told me the election committee of Buyun was meeting and they had called in the three candidates. He urged me to go with him and see what was going on there.

When we arrived in Buyun, Qin Jiping was organizing the Township Election Committee meeting. Three candidates were sitting there too.

An important topic in the meeting was the contest rules for the three candidates. I explained there was a clause in our election rules saying that the election committee would not make the contest regulation itself; the three candidates would decide on the rules themselves and sign their names on them to show their consent.

But in the end the rules were actually fixed by Qin Jiping during the meeting. The main rules were: The candidates could not attack each other personally, could not enter villages without permission from the election committee, and should get approval from the Township Election Committee for their speeches. Qin Jiping specially said: “The clause about needing permission to enter villages has nothing to do with the Party-recommended candidate. He is the current leader of township government which has responsibility for the whole town.”

I was not happy with the atmosphere in the meeting, but it was not convenient for me to speak out. I felt Qin was nervous because of yesterday's primary election; he was under heavy pressure because all the township cadres failed. So he directed his pressure at Zhou Xingyi. I could feel Zhou get an uneasy under such big pressure. He twice said he had better not be the township chief and stay a teacher.

At noon, the main members of the district election small leading group arrived in Buyun after finishing a meeting in the district. They were Chen Guangjin, the vice chairman of Distrct People’s Congress, Chen Yangrong and the chairman of the District People's Congress Legal Affairs Committee, Mr. Feng. Immediately after their arrival, they exchanged ideas with Qin and other township leaders. Qin Jiping reported on the election rules for the three

candidates. Chen Guangjin and Chen Yangrong expressed their disagreement with the rules. They felt that the Party-recommended candidate should be treated the same as others.

I suggested, “Under the original regulations, the election rules for three candidates should have been negotiated by themselves and then reported to the election committee for approval and implementation. What we're doing now is handing the election committee all the work. It's not right. We should allow them to discuss the issues. Even if the committee drafts the regulation, it should ask for the candidates' approval, because this is an important document. This is also a legal document. Maybe there will be some candidate who wants an appeal. This document can be used then."

They agreed with me and made some amendments. Chen Yangrong asked Qin forward it to Zhang Jinming and Yang Huadi immediately after the amendments were made. I emphasized the rules were subject to the three candidates' agreement.

After that, we discussed the schedule for the election. In our plan, there were no activities from the 27th to the 29th. Voting was on the 31st, and no campaigning would be banned on the 30th. But I thought there should be a drive to raise voter awareness and enthusiasm on the 29th. We modified the timetable, arranging a rest day between and planed a press conference for the 28th or 29th. We also thought having all three candidates give election speeches in each village would be a good idea.

At last, it seemed that the shock of the party candidates' failure in the primary election had been eased after several days and we could continue the election as planned.

The major official election campaign is the debates among three candidates, it started December 20. As we have planed, we arranged 13 debates totally, two debates each day, one village in the morning, another village in the afternoon, altogether 10 debates, and one for the township neighborhood committee, two debates open for the public at the days of market in town. The first one started from village Nine. There was a specific report about this debate on the newspaper of *Southern China Weekend.* This morning's debate virtually focused on Zhou Xingyi. I was also very much concerned about him. Because he won the first votes in the primary election which caught all of our attention to see whether he would still gain the lead in the official campaign. However, Zhou Xingyi appeared very nervous this time. I saw his hands and lips trembling. He came down the stage and said to me after the debate, “I worked overtime last night, so I had only one-hour sleep, I couldn’t remember anything." Today, voters were not so polite to him, seemingly to examine him on purpose. Maybe villagers wanted to check whether he had the ability to be a township chief, and they might just place a hard situation to him. Some peasants asked him, “You should know the agricultural

production if you over a township chief. So do you know what are the 24 solar terms[3] and what should be done in every term?" Zhou Xingyi seemed suddenly confused, standing there without any reply. Another asked: “What are the varieties of rice?” Neither did he answer it. Among them, a middle-aged woman grabbed the microphone and asked Zhou Xingyi angrily: “May I ask you, Principle Zhou, why the tuition fee of Buyun Middle School is so high? Why do they charge students for several hundreds Yuan so frequently? For such an exceeding fee problem, what will you do with it when you are made chief?" Zhou's answer was not satisfactory, because it didn't hit the point. Zhou Xingyi was not the school principle actually, but because the local people were respectful to teachers, they called them “principle." Apparently, this woman vented her arguer about the exceeding fee on him. In face, for an ordinary teacher, such a thing didn't matter much. I said to him when he came down, “Why your reaction's so bad today. You may say you are not the principle, so it has nothing to do with you, and you absolutely object to exceeding fee charges. If you become the township chief, you will solve this problem.” He forced a smile, not answering me. It was easy to tell me that he was under big spiritual pressure.

The second day debate was held in the auditorium of the township government building, which gathered neighborhood committee. Questions from the school teachers focused on the education, while from the township entrepreneurs focused on the economic development. In this meeting, the targets of the questions have been transferred to Cai Ronghui and Tan Xiaoqiu, in stead of Zhou Xingyi. Among them was a private-owned entrepreneur. He sought out his own mobile phone and asked candidates on the stage: “What's this? This is a mobile phone. In the south-east coast area, people all use it to make money, but in here, this is only a bar of iron, useless at all. Which one of you can solve this problem, I will vote for him.”

On December 22, I didn't go to Buyun. Zhang Jinming came to hotel to meet me. We discussed many things about the election, and both thought that the election would go on the fair. We decided to establish the secret ballot booths on the election day in all of polling stations. We also discussed about the possibility that Zhang at this stage of election to report to the Suining Municipal Party Committee. In my sense, if at this time we report to municipal that would be better to reduce the pressure on the Shizhong leaders, and also municipal leaders couldn’t stop the process of election because the election was getting the final days. Zhang agreed to report to the party secretary of Suining municipal.

The next morning, Zhang Jinming and I went see the election debate in Fangjiaan village. After watching a while, Zhang Jinming called Qin Jiping and Chen Guangjin come to the backward of the playground and sitting down on the small bench. She told Qin Jiping: “Now

[3] The solar term is the traditional calendar for Chinese, according the moon change, also it’s called the lunar calendar, which divided one year to be 24 term to fit the grain planting.

we want to take preparing work for the voting day. We should set up the secret ballot rooms in the voting day in whole town." She continued, "We can pull some screens from the district committee and then fix them up. That's it. Besides screens, we can also use some simple measures, such as gunny-bags or curtains as long as be sure people can't catch sight of others votes while casting them." She asked Qin Jiping make some voting boxes, on the front of which there should have the national flag.

Today there were two rounds of debates, one in the morning, the other one in the afternoon. In the morning debate, the questions masses raised surprised me. One of them was to ask candidates standing on the stage: "Could you three please answer what is the policy of Chinese sustainable development?" No of those candidates could answer with him. Cai Ronghui could be the brave one, even though, he made wild answers, not witting the point. I was rather shocked by those questions bearing some knowledge, which have been appeared in the prior debates. The same case happened in the afternoon debate. The meeting-place was well organized. The village Party secretary looked very young, as if only thirties. The village committee director was a woman, over forty. I thought those two people were high standard. They advanced unusual questions, which seemed they had their own opinions. I was shocked again. It seemed there were full of competent and great persons in such a remote place, who couldn't be belittled. From the peasants' behaviours, I didn't think the peasants could not conduct democracy; on the contrary, they were able to do. I also believed they could do it well.

Today it occurred to me suddenly that, we should shoot a series of special film, defending for our own elections. Buyun election was certain to be controversial in the future. A large number of people said it was illegal, or it was too early to be conducted.

"We must defend ourselves. We should have the masses say the election is good or not and fair or not." I told Chen Chunping. We found some young people to have an interview. Chen Guangjin also jointed us.

"What do you think of this sort of election?" I asked them.

"Good." One said.

"Why it's good?"

"Because masses themselves choose government chief."

"This way this year is really good. Other ways before were not so good." Another peasant said.

Other peasant replied in unison: "This sort of direct election is good absolutely."

They said: "It's nice to elect by this way. When we had the township chief in the past, people didn't even know what the chief looked like. Neither did we know his ideas. Therefore, we lacked initiatives, and the elected person wouldn't speak for the people. In this election,

not only the township chief will meet us face to face, we also get to know what the candidates will do after being elected. That's well done.”

Some people said: “The past township chief came to the town in a journey manner. They didn't talk to us and we couldn't meet him. Now, it's good to have them answer our questions obediently and they shall say ‘thank you’ after they make the answer.”

Some people worried: “They just said they would do something, but we didn't know the fact. Might they cheat us after election?”

Some peasants had questions: “Do the candidates mean what they have said? Might they possibly cheat us?”

Chen Guangjin answered them: “We have a stipulation about the realization of what they have said. That is, if they couldn't attain and cheat us, we can recall them.”

“Is this election determined by peasants?” one asked.

“Yes. The final person should be the on peasant elect.” That was my answer.

A woman said: “What if my vote won't be elected?”

“It's not up to you only, but up to the whole people's votes in the township. All the opinions of the people will be gathered together. Then the final one will come.”

“Do you think people can choose a better chief by this means of election? As a village director, do you think peasant care about this matter?” I asked the director of the village chief.

“All the peasant care about it. The people were very concerned about the direct election of the township chief. They talk about it wherever they go.” She answered.

“How many people are going to came on 31, the voting day estimably?”

“All the people will come.”

On 26, I went to observe the election debate with Chen Yangrong. We were in Village fourth in the morning and Village tenth in the afternoon. The village tenth is where Cai Ronghui lives. This village had more than two thousand people and was the second largest village in Buyun town. The debate was held in the primary school playground.

When Cai Ronghui saw me, he said: “Teacher Li, why didn't you come and help me. Do you want to leave me alone?”

“Well, I didn't come here in the last two days because of my illness. But I don't think the situation is factorable to you after I heard some debates. You always say you're the native people, native villager, bla-bla-bla, It's too much, not good for you. Why did you apply self-reliance of Chairman Mao. What you've said like you won't ask for fund from above and outside and it depends on Buyun people's own effects doesn't work. Buyun people themselves are very clear that resources were very limited here, so was the fund, otherwise, why so many people went to other places to work? Therefore, when you talk about the economic

development, you should say more about your ability to get the fund from outside and the government, and it's no problem, you can look for it if you are elected the chief. You can also say, you will help Buyun find external investment and government loans, only in this way, you're possible to win."

He did not make a word. I thought that was his strategy of the campaign set by himself, which could hardly be changed. It seemed his think tank was not wise. Because he only uses the strategy of native villagers, actually all from Cai family, they didn't know things happening outside the village.

During this afternoon's debate, Qin Jiping came towards me and Chen Yangrong, discussing the timetable of next few days.

"We can let the candidates go to whichever village they want, make their choice, explain their work to voters, answer questions for voters on scene and communicate with voters." Chen and I said.

"OK." Qin said. Then he went to the front and spoke of our ideas. After a short while, he came back, saying: "None of three candidates wants to conduct these election campaign."

"You must tell them, this is also a vital component of the campaign. If they don't go, it's equal to giving up a good chance to win and their election might fail." I said to Qin.

"Tan Xiaoqiu is willing to go, but the other two not." He said.

I understood because there was never election campaign in China before. Even in the village committee election, people just merely regarded debate as the election, therefore, when the election activities besides the debate got started, all the people became strange about it and didn't know what to do. So I said to Qin: "You may tell Cai Ronghui and Zhou Xingyi, if only Tan is going, he will win certainly."

When the debate was over and Chen Yangrong and I were leaving for the city, Zhou Xingyi came to me and said: "I'd rather not go to the villages."

"You should go."

"No, it's useless. I can't be elected anyway."

SUDDEN CHANGE

When I returned the city on the night of December 26, I gave a call to Zhang Min. She told me Secretary Zhang has been back from Chengdu, because the party leader of Suining municipal was having a meeting in Chengdu, Zhang might go there to meet him. I phoned Zhang Jinming to her home. Her husband said she went to wash her hair at that moment and she would be right back. But from then on, I could never contact Zhang Min by any means;

neither would anybody answer my phone to Zhang Jinming. At night, Chen Chunping came to visit me. He also tried to contact Zhang Min, but failed completely. Chen and I analyzed the situation and estimated that it boded ill rather than well. There were two possibilities. One was Zhang Jinming had so much pressures that she had to deal with all the election activities in a low tone. The other was the upper didn't allow her to do so but she insisted. They did not want to leave the plight to me, so they would not notify us two any more.

About 11 o'clock at night the telephone rang pressingly. I hurried to pick up the receiver. It was Zhang Jinming. “At present, because it's very difficult to operate, the province and municipal have stipulated to block the news strictly. Today the municipal also sent someone to check the situation in Buyun and is going to appoint a work team there. I have big pressure, so it's hard to say much of the situation, but I think you can understand.” She emphasized, “The province and municipal both say, this matter mustn't be intervened from the outside, especially from Beijing.” It seemed this sentence is directed to a certain point. After a pause, she said: “If you go on showing up, we're afraid of being difficult to cope with the matter. You know how much pressure is on us.”

“I know it's hard for you and how much pressure is on you as well. But it's me that did this from the start. Therefore, from this point, I won't be away. I will stay here by 31st . I want to know all the development of this election. But you may say I have left and I may change to another hotel. I hope you could exchange ideas with me and inform me everyday development. I will give you my opinions, but you don't have to listen to.” I continued, “There are three factors to be a successful election. One is to elect a good township chief; Second, to mobilize the masses; Third, to do the procedure well. Now, we face the third phase. We must do the procedure well; otherwise all that has been achieved is spoiled.”

“What's the development next is what I can't interfere with.”

“If we have it done badly or disorderly, nobody could say something then. At that time, it's merely a failed election.”

As I could sense, she couldn't even breathe because of the great pressure on her.

I told her later still on the phone, however, an unsuccessful election will result the Chinese township chief direct election in postponement of three to five years. So we should tell the local cadres, under the condition that anyone of the three candidate can be elected, the procedure must be done properly. This is not about being democratic or not, but the procedure. If there is chaos, even fighting on the voting day, this election has to be seen as a failure.

I asked: “Can I go to the election on 31, the voting day?”

“Since district will send persons in every village there, meanwhile, the municipal will go and the municipal congress's vice-director and the directoe of the organization department

will go. Maybe much more people are going there. I am afraid you will knock into each other."

"You should think about making an arrangement." I said.

She did not answer me directly, but said: "You made a great contribution to Buyun election. Leaders in Shizhong district won't forget you. History won't, either." I didn't want to hear such a comment at all. I just wanted to watch voting.

The second day, I didn't go out. I stayed in my room, reading and writing. Chen Chunping came in late evening. "I want to have a look in Buyun." I said to him. He protested at first, but then he showed me he was willing to arrange a vehicle.

In the early morning of the voting day, 31st, when I got up, I found my right foot swollen and painful. I was unable to walk. The illness happened every period of time. Every time it's swollen severely and caused my disability to walk. But it happened to appear at the most crucial time; I was very anxious, but hopeless. Meanwhile, the weather was not favourable either. It has been raining from last night. Since I came to Suining, it has never rained. It seemed to go opposite to my will. I wanted to know what was going on in Buyun. Chen Chunping came and said that the ordinary car couldn't run to Buyun because the raining but it's not easy to get a jeep. I asked Chen phone Buyun first to check the situation there, then we decide if we need a jeep. He contacted the journalists of Suining TV station now was working in Buyun. They told him the voting went smoothly. According to the finished voting in town and nearby two villages, the voting went quietly and the votes were scattered. The voting in other villages have be completed or were going to be completed. After Chen Chunping's introduction, I felt more relieved. I thought I didn't need to go to Buyun. If I went there now, hurrying there, all the voting must have been finished. It was meaningless.

At night, Chen acquired the final result. Today the valid votes number added up to 6144. The three candidates gained their votes as follows: 3130 ballots for Tan Xiaoqiu, 1995 for Cai Ronghui and 1056 for Zhou Xingyi. Tan got 50.4% of the total, narrowly more than half. So he was elected as the township chief.

From the result of the voting, as I had estimated, there should be no problem Tan could be elected. But the difference between Cai Ronghui and him was a little bigger than I imagined. According to the statistic numbers of the voting result, the actual registered voters were 11349. But this was not a real number, because there were over 4000 people out of the town. So far, nobody knew the accurate number of people and the eligible voters in the town. Later Cai Ronghui told me it was about 7100. Someone said the number was nearly 6700. Thus, no matter which number would be used, the actual vote ratio should be more than 80%. For such a result, I was quite satisfied. After the completion of voting, the next step of work should be moved to the relationship between the township congress and new township chief.

In the election regulation we designed, at first, the sentences we used were blurred. Although we have been determined to conduct the direct election, but how to connect to the People's Congress was not set yet. Once they used an indirect way of election. I insisted on the direct way to deal with the relationship, but I also considered the risks local cadres would take. I gave the right of the final decision to the local. Then, they and I thought unanimously we should deal with the relation by the direct election, which meant using a means to confirm the relation, but must be a new one. In the final fixed election regulation, the direct election was adopted. But under the current condition, the province and municipal have interfered. I was not clear about whether Zhang Jinming would insist on our originally regulation. Because I knew, including the province committee, many people in the municipal and district all thought the newly elected chief would be submitted to the congress to be passed in form. This was a legal, but compromised way. Zhang Jinming and I both upheld the elected to be the new chief, not the chief candidate unnecessarily the congress's voting. In this aspect, I fully understood the great pressure. After the voting, that was my concern. I was worried Zhang Jinming could not hold on, and then we had to change our plan.

On January 2, Zhang Min told me through Chen Chunping that Zhan Jinming faced a heavy pressure, mainly at the facet of the Congress. The People's Congress of District persisted in considering it illegal, requiring Tan Xiaoqiu be voted by the Town People's Congress. Zhang disagreed and held on to our original one.

No one came to me On January 2 and 3. Neither did Chen Chunping. I was not willing to be driven by them like this. So I made up my mind to go to Buyun on 4, Town People's Congress would have meeting on that day. I did not want to join their convention, but to know the real fact happening in the last several days from the populace as I was not there, especially the voting day. I did not like to be kept in a drum. I thought my attitude was responsible for myself and Buyun election.

On the morning of 4, I reached Buyun. It was a fair day, crowd going back and forth, so I was not caught by others' attention when I was on the street. I had a different feeling. When I went back there, it seemed everything has changed, everything was refreshing. I felt so excited.

I asked the people for their opinions about the election along my way. When I talked to those people, Zhou Xingyi came up to me, asked me to go to his place. In fact, I was going there to get more information.

Zhou Xingyi told me, during the debate in town on 27, someone advanced to ask him quit the election. On 28, some people scattered around that Zhou Xingyi had quit the election, but Zhou expressed his resolution to hold on. On 29, He went to each village and called on people to vote for him, but there were some persons from the township following him. On that day,

the persons from the township indulged in unbridled propaganda that Zhou Xingyi had quit, letting people not vote for him. He thought it was triggered by Tan Xiaoqiu.

At the moment, Cai Ronghui came here. As soon as we met, "They say the election regulation has changed later on? When was that?" I asked him.

“After 27, it changed. It's requested by the Sichuan Provincial Party Committee that the votes must reach more than half of the total. If not, the second round should be done.”

“This change caused tremendous problems, created huge pressure on the township. I think the township also played tricks in it, making some votes for Tan Xiaoqiu. On 29 and 30, every household of cadres of the township, village and community established ties to pull votes for Tan Xiaoqiu.” Then he said, it’s not the time for China for carrying out the direct election, people have so low cultural level.

I expressed my opinions when I was having lunch in Zhou Xingyi's place.

“Although the Buyun election has its problems, it doesn't mean the Chinese direct election of township chief should not be conducted any more. The current point is still the electoral procedure and the system. If we can't deal well with it, we can't make a good direct election.” I said.

“The direct election is really necessary. Because of it, the populace have a place to speak. It's good for improving the relationship between the government and populace. In this sense, this should be promoted.” They both agreed with me.

I planed to leave after I returned to Suining. Things there have been almost completed, the next major battle field was Beijing. On that night before leaving, I wrote a letter to Zhang Jinming, expressed my analysis to some issues, my collection of the situation in the last a few days and my point of view.

The next morning, I was ready to leave my hotel to the railway station, Zhang Jinming called me. She said she dared not to see me because of the organizational order. If I had followed her advice to go to Chengdu, she would have reported the news here to me. But as I stayed in the city, she dared not to do so.

“I know the problem was caused from Sichuan Provincial Party Committee put their hands in, they directed wildly. They Changed the regulation instantly, that's why some chaos happened in the election day.” I said.

“This is why I phone you. When you go back to Beijing, please never mention the Province Party Committee.”

“Ok, I won't in favour of you.” I asked her: “How did the township People's congress convention begin?”

“We applauded to pass a resolution to affirm the validity of the election.”

“This is the best outcome we can expect.”

“I've finished my task. What's the future development will be determined by the organization.” She said in the phone.

So I left Suining. Sitting on the train to Chengdu, I pieced all the events after 27 together as follows…

These were events after 27 as I have known. Shizhong District and Zhang Jinming did not want me to know those changes. I guessed there were two reasons. The first reason was that the province and city requested Zhang Jinming block the news tightly, never to confide anything to others, especially to people from Beijing. It was actually directed to me. The second reason was that, they were not willing to let others know the problems in their election. They hoped the first direct election of the township chief was perfect, so it was inexorable for them to hide some issues. Honestly, they should have known that as the first experiment, problems were inevitable, so it was normal to summarize and find out questions on the purpose of better performance in the future. But the local cadres had too strong will to strive for the first in China; it made them reluctant to face their existed problems.

I felt complicated when I was leaving Buyun on train. The first time I came to the public selection and then left was on November 6 and today was January 6, which means exactly two months. During the two months, how great changes have taken place in Suining. An election was completed; at least this was the first direct election of the township chief since the CCP took power. No matter how big problem happened in the election, how many quarrels took place, roughly the election was successful. This event would probably have its historical position in the future. This election went on regardless of the approval of the central government or the support of the province and city. It functioned as a tremendous breakthrough to the political system. This illustrated the Chinese political system reform has met the ultimate chance to be done. There has been the opportunity and foundation. It was not a surprise to see many problems in the election. No one has done it before.

I left Buyun with a pleased as well as heavy heart in response to the historical responsibility that the major battle field of the promotion of Chinese township chief direct election was going to switch from Suining to Beijing. In Suining, almost everything was done by leaders of Shizhong, while I was only responsible for giving some suggestions as a consultant. However, in Beijing, all things would be dealt with by me. I wondered what attitude Beijing toward this election. It was an uncertainty. The outlook seemed bleak and not optimistic. But I had to move on as designed, no way back.

REFLECTION

I stayed in Shandong for a couple of days after I left Suining. During this period, I kept in touch with Tang Jinaguang, a journalist of *Chengdu Commercial Post*, who stayed in Buyun for two days to observe the election, discussing the issues in the news release. I arrived in Beijing on January 10. On 12, Tang gave me a call to say the report had been completed. But he did not think it could be released on *Chengdu Commercial Post*, because its leader were a little scared and still hesitated at that moment. Therefore, he intended to transfer it to *Southern China Weekend*.

"I'd rather not give it to *Southern China Weekend*. Because the experiment was practiced in Sichuan, it's better report it in Sichuan. If we give it to *Southern China Weekend*, some people will think we use the press to impose them. It might have negative effect." But Tang told me: "leaders of the newspaper told me precisely the Propaganda Department of the Provincial Party Committee has notified the news, there is no way to report on *Chengdu Commercial Post*, neither on any newspaper else within Sichuan. So far this is the last chance." In this way, all of our publicity plan designed before might be upset probably no report all, which was not good for Buyun. We needed to work out a solution. I said: "If so, I don't object to reporting on Southern China Weekend."

The news was released on January 15 by *Southern China Weekend*.

But a fly on the ointment was the photo was wrong. It should be Tan Xiaoqiu's, but it became Zhou Xingyi, so that Zhou Xingyi's photo would go nationwide. *Southern China Weekend* was a very popular newspaper in China at present. It was said that its issue volume was 200 million copies, which had a great influence in the whole nation. Actually, directly going to *Southern China Weekend* was not a good way, which was different from our first plan, but under that circumstance, we already had no choices, but to wait and see the reflection. Anyway, it was better to report the news than be blocked.

Besides help with *Southern China Weekend*, on my back, I began to communicate with other press reporters. They all had a good impression of the election and would like to publish my article or interview me. It seemed no problem to go on.

At the noon of 19th, a journalist Shi Weiqin, from Ministry of Civil Affairs, called me, and then Gao Wangling did, telling me an article was issued in the front page of *Legal Daily* today to criticize the Buyun election. They said the content of the article was about the election's illegality, regarding in spite of masses' zest, it was not complied with current constitution.

Some sources told me too that day, government and People's Congress of Sichuan Province had reported to the National People's Congress to judge the Buyun election was

illegal, because of its violation to the constitution, they don't support it. However, since Tan Xiaoqiu is the inside-fixed township chief by party recommended, so they acknowledge the result of the election, not remove." So far, the National People's Congress has not made their reply.

Next day, I read that article of *Legal Daily*. Yes, it criticized the Buyun election seriously, but on the other hand gave some good words too, therefore it looked like contradicted itself. Different People would have different opinions about this article. In my sense, the major purpose of this article was to stop the township chief direct election from expanding nationwide. In relation to whether the article was sweet-sounding or not did not matter. The meaning of the article reflected the opinions of top leaders. However, it could not criticize the democracy in public, particularly because such an influencing event had happened, therefore there was contradiction in the expression of the language.

At noon, I had lunch with journalists of *Associate Press*. They had known Buyun election beforehand and looked for information from others. Originally I hesitated whether I should meet foreign journalists at that time, but one of my friends told me to participate for sure. “If you don't, so many foreign reporters may think the election is falsified. If you go, it becomes more convincing.” He said.

Later one of them and another reporter from *Philadelphia Inquiry* went to Buyun for interview secretly. The journalist from *Associate Press* sent out the report about Buyun on January 26, as the first foreign news report. Then the global major news media around world have all reported the landed news from Associate Press, which set off the international attention. Buyun was coming to the world.

In this period of time, the foreign journalists kept looking for me, including *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, *New York Times* and *Australia Broadcast Company*, etc. A journalist from *Washington Post* went to Baima County, 10 kilometres from Buyun. Then these journalists reported the news one after another. The reporter from Hong Kong newspaper *South China Morning Post* also called from Hong Kong, making telephone interviews. As long as the news sent by foreign news agencies, tremendous repercussion took place at abroad. Objectively speaking, those reports had some influence on China's domestic status quo in the early 1999; the highest Chinese leaders would read them. These reports are all positive ones, singing highly on Buyun Election. Because those reports made the top leaders also had to think over how to face the case, they did not dare to deny without careful consideration. Therefore, this case also proved what I previously said to be correct. Indeed, the overseas press helped a lot for Buyun.

All of the foreign and Chinese news caused great attention in overseas. My friends in the States also paid attention to this event constantly. Someone asked me for more information.

Also some friends wrote to me and showed their worries about me. They thought I was able to connect the locality, the entire nation and the international, which might cause trouble. In my opinion, the more vigorous and positive overseas reflections were, the more pressure could be alleviated on Sichuan local leaders and me.

On February 8, Zhou Xingyi paged me. I answered him immediately. He was very excited; telling me journalists from CCTV interviewed Cai Ronghui and him. Two days ago, this journalist again informed him from Beijing that the program of the election was scheduled to be broadcasting in the CCTV Channel Two on February 26.

I did not believe such a thing, so I called CCTV without any delay and found the journalist, Zhang Shouguo, whom was spoken of by Zhou Xingyi.

“What's the matter of the program about Buyun election?” I asked him.

“Last month, I filmed some in Buyun and collected some footage of the election. I submitted to my bosses. They're preparing to broadcast.” I was much surprised at it. The Central Propaganda Department had stipulated not to issue any article about Buyun election on periodicals. I was wondering why CCTV was going to broadcast it. Therefore, I asked him: “do you know the notification of the Central Propaganda Department and the article in *Legal Daily*?”

“The article in *Legal Daily* argues from the law aspect, while our program focuses on the process of the election, nothing to do with the law.”

“Has it already been approved by the CCTV station?”

“I'm in charge of filming, not broadcasting. Now it has been arranged to be broadcast. As for what the station thinks of it, I don't know. But it's said the Central Propaganda Department has been solicited for their opinions about this program and the upper has nodded, moreover, there is some discourse given by directors in the NPC in the program.” He said.

“As I've known, more people praised Buyun election. Therefore, it's better for us broadcast it ourselves than foreigners report it irresponsibly.”

On February 26, I saw the 15-minute program about Buyun election on CCTV at 6:30.PM. A lot of footage filmed in the election process was used in this program and some interviews to the related persons. It was mainly about the process and gave the election a title as the first case of the direct election of township chiefs in China. At the end of the program, an assistant researcher of NPC Legal Committee gave comments on the election. He said that according to the current constitution, there was still problem in the election, but it had the positive significance to expand the village democracy; Now it was the time for the legal people to learn from the China's practice. I was very glad to hear this conclusion. It was necessary to amend the relevant laws.

Two days later, I saw another report about Buyun election on *Washington Post*. The main content was that CCTV had broadcast Buyun election, which suggested Chinese government and the CCP had admitted Buyun election. The article quoted my conversation with the journalist from that newspaper.

In the earlier of March, Huasheng Monthly published my paper of Buyun election. They were going to deliver to the People's Congress session. In the People's Congress session, the question of the Buyun election we planed to directly raise to Premier Zhu Rongji was not realized, but a journalist from Denmark asked him a relative question: how to deal with the expanding of rural election to other levels. Zhu's answer was very good, "the sooner the better." After the meeting, Hong Kong's journal, *Asia Week*, published an article of interviews with quite a few representatives and members of CPPCC during the session, many members thought "the township direct election is a sooner-or-later thing; It will be the trend within three to five years; The constitution needs amending."

"The experiment in Buyun was still being generalized. This is spontaneous by the masses, not the central government." Liu Ji, the vice director of Chinese Social Science Academy said on the interview. "I didn't go there to explore the election. If I have chance, I'll go there and see whether it's done too hastily. Choosing a village chief, a hundred people will come, who are trustable, who are not, villagers are very clear. But choosing a township chief is much more complicated. Who's the best to be a township chief, township people will understand and get familiar with him. In addition, how illiterate people elect is a problem worthwhile our research. But I don't agree that we carry out the election in the whole China straightly. We don't have such an experience. Just an experiment in a township is practical."

Later *Asian Wall Street Journal* had a report which interviewed with the governor of Sichuan Province on the session. Governor said that this election was illegal, not to be expanded in other places, but not to remove the position of the elected town chief. That's the official result of Buyun election. This was a bureaucratic and flexible way that every side could accept. Of course, I was glad to have to accept the result too. The work of election seemed finished, as a scholar, I need to turn to focus on the research and theory.

CONCLUSION

When we turned to the research, the first question that needs to be answered is how the Buyun election occurred and what is the implication of it. My opinion was based on these: The Buyun election was in occasion. Under the situation that the Central did not allow to have the township chief direct election, if there had been no such brave leadership of the

Shizhong District local cadres, if they had not cooperated with the liberal intellectuals in Beijing and reform orientated senior cadres in Beijing, or if there had been no non-interference from Sichuan province and Suining city, there would not have been this election. But the three conditions coming together were almost impossible in China again. Therefore under this circumstance, there will no second Buyun election in China.

But from another aspect, the Buyun election is the natural consequence produced in the process of reform-openness and the embodiment of the demanding of democracy in the past two decades. Because the Chinese people never had the experiences of real and democratic election, the drive for the election was not from the inside, it was the natural results that Chinese people contacted the outside world since the reform-and-openness. From the Openness, various political elections and democratic movements were understood by Chinese. That is the great atmosphere for making the Buyun election.

From the view of concrete situation, the Buyun election is the consequence of the embodiment fixed by local cadres, peasants and intellectuals. In the case of Buyun election, the local leaders of Shizhong district did not have a formal report to their higher offices, but the two-level leaders of province and municipal knew the events very clearly, and in Beijing MCA and other high ranking cadres also knew very clearly too what happened in Sichuan province. Shizhong district did not report does not mean they did not know it, but they did not stop this election, and otherwise wanted it to be realized. These people behind the curtain played very important role in promoting the Buyun election.

For the implication of Buyun election to the political reform, the Buyun election tended to introduce the mechanism of free election into the selection of government chiefs, which means to introduce the election system into the political system reform. Not only the government executives need to be elected, the party leaders need to be elected by the members, the highest leaders of China need to be elected by people as well. In this way, the election can be introduced and integrated into the Chinese political system reform and becomes the core of the reform.

During the election, I often asked myself a question if the current Chinese condition suitable for democracy, or in other words, what are the conditions for Chinese democracy? Many scholars abroad consider there is strong relationship between economic development and democracy. But when I was in Buyun, my feeling was strongly, at least under the current situation of China, economy is not related to the democracy closely for this case. Buyun is very poor, but the poor condition of economy did not have the negative influence on the election; Buyun people were enthusiastic and seriously participated in the election. So I can say that the determination of carrying out the election was not for the reason of economy. My view is that the education level is the most important factor to influence the development of

democracy in Buyun as well as in China. The too lower level of education cannot do democracy, but the question is what level education is suitable for the Chinese democracy, by which people can participate the democracy well? My conclusion is that junior-high-school level is enough.

Whether traditional culture has influence on the democracy is another question that people often argued. Many consider that the tradition of Chinese culture is the autocracy, people like following the leadership of government, and instead of thinking on their own that they need to elect the officials of government and supervise them. Indeed, these words are right in some ways. Through one decade of the village election, it ever had a great influence on the Chinese political culture, at least in the countryside. Chinese did the democracy is not based on peasants' democratic consciousness, but based on the interests. In village, a good chief will give an ordinary family a big change for their daily life, even the entire life. Having this understanding, I have some confidence for the development of future democracy in China, which need not treat the democracy as the ideology, but as the better means that can solve the concrete problems and bring the concern for their own interests. In this way, Chinese people can establish the democratic consciousness and develop democracy in the future.

The above is generally about the situation and democratic development, which related to another big concern, that's the under the current situation in China, how to develop the democracy and the political reform. We need to have a thinking to get a strategy of Chinese political reform. This strategy is not only based on my own experiences but also is from the generalization of the lessons that political reform had in the past years. Based on these, how to do the tactic work for political reform is another important issue we must take into consideration.

From the strategy on how to carry out political reform, in my sense, that's to establish a framework of double-track. The so-called double-track is originally from the strategy of economic reform, which will match for principles of political reform. From the beginning, the economic reform was so hard to get forward from step to step. Therefore, the path of economic reform took was called the "double-track" later. There were two tracks, one was the state control and the planning economy, and another was the free market. The economic reform will not care very much about the state planning, the State Planning Committee can still control and planning the economy. Economic reform didn't have to touch it, the State Planning Committee still controls state-owned economy on the one hand; but on the other hand, besides the planning economy, China needs to develop the market-oriented economy, which is another track. Following on the process, there was the new economy system based on the market besides the old economic system. This new system was active, flexible, and

easy to connect to the foreign market and got the far high economic growth and quality. And later, this new system shown the strong life and finally the two tracks became into the merger and the market economy accepted by all. New system replaced the old. The political system reform may take the same way to go forward. To develop the new system and make the old system be stable, and then as long as the new system becomes stronger and shows that's the better system than old, then China can accept the new system at all.

This is still the simple thinking, this thinking has just begun and there is not the deep one until now. Our institute intends to have more research on this topic. When I consider the political reform in the double-track way, there is a question continually encouraging my thinking, also it is very difficult.

About how to start the political reform under the current situation, there are four perspectives that can be considered. The first is the local election, which I had already had discussion before. The second is the legal reform, what many places are doing, but still more things need pushing forward. China entered WTO, for this entry China needs to have more legal reform. The third reform can consider from the NGO's perspective. The fourth perspective is civil rights. Currently, there are many weak social groups, such as the peasants and layout workers. These weak social groups are taking some actions to express their interests and demands, which are very normal civil rights in democratic countries. Therefore, to encourage the enlargement of civil right activities of weak groups will enlarge the political freedom and democracy.

These four sides are the starting points, consistent with my principle and double-track of the political reform strategy, for the Chinese political reform. From this angle that is from the whole situation of China's political reform strategy and static, the meaning and experience of Buyun election are very useful. By this election, people had the chance to vent their spleen, and then society will get more stable. Tan Xiaoqiu had a very famous word in his campaign, "I will firmly stand on the people's side in the Buyun, if the interests of town have conflicts with the higher government." This word embodies the principle of double-track strategy. Some may model it to do their work if the election has the real good consequences. That is the implication and experiences of the Buyun election I think.

After Buyun election, many people said Buyun was the Xiaogang village in the future political reform. It seems like that many people say the meaning of Buyun election as Xiaogang to the economic reform. So many people think it as this; I would not to oppose it. Perhaps, Buyun election is the real Xiaogang of the political reform in China, because it is suitable for the principle of the strategy and static of Chinese political reform.

At the end of 20th century the whole world had a democratic revolution. Many dictator governments were stepped down by the ballot revolution. This ballot revolution has already

influenced on China. 21st century will be the century that China will come to the democracy, which will bring about the ballot revolution. Buyun is the prelude of this ballot revolution.

That's the wind from the world. We will take the wind coming over the China.

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