THE KING ARRIVES: CHINESE GOVERNMENT INSPECTIONS AND THEIR EFFECTS

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This dissertation studies a critical facet of Chinese politics, inspections by higher Chinese government to villages. Principally, it looks at how village economic development determines government inspection decisions and how inspections, once conducted, impact village politics. Specifically, I argue that villages perceived as destabilizing to the Chinese regime, villages with higher levels of economic inequality and villages located at the two extremes of economic development, should see more inspections. In addition, I argue that inspections, in return, drive village politics: they increase village leaders’ governing efficacy and raise villagers’ political awareness. This theory has received strong support from both field work and quantitative empirical tests using the 2002 Chinese Household Income Project dataset.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Chinese regime has stood out by its enduring reign over the Chinese people for more than six decades. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the only ruling party mandated by the Chinese Constitution, still enjoys more than 70, even up to 90, percent approval rate by the Chinese, according to both state and independent measures. When the Arab Spring swept across North Africa and the Middle East in 2011, many were expecting the same wave of democratization to arrive at China’s shores. Yet, the Chinese regime proved effective and resilient in dispersing attempted public gatherings and, as a result, maintained social stability. China, in the language of Heike Holbig and Bruce Gilley, “is fundamentally challenging old assumptions about the (weak) nature and (in-) stability of authoritarian regimes.”

Why does the Chinese regime still stand? I argue in this dissertation that it is a result of the most conspicuous yet overlooked element in Chinese politics: government inspections. Since the founding of the CCP, the inspection system has figured prominently in Chinese politics, grounding high-ranking officials to pragmatic governance and effectively connecting the state to the people. Chinese government inspections, with its high frequency and broad magnitude, can find few counterparts in other non-democracies.

There exist few parallels of Chinese government inspections in other countries. The most similar form of political activity in western democracies is political candidates, including

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1 Part of this chapter has been published as an essay at Books & Ideas, of which I retain the copyright. See Xi Jinrui. “Marketing the Party: Official Inspections in China.” Books and Ideas. ISSN: 2105-3030, 10 November 2016. URL: http://www.booksandideas.net/Marketing-the-Party.html.
4 Heike Holbig and Bruce Gilley, "In search of legitimacy in post-revolutionary China: Bringing ideology and governance back in." German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA) working papers, (2010), pp. 5.
incumbents in office, visiting constituencies for townhall meetings. The difference, however, is that the Chinese do that regularly without having to adjust to election cycles, for there are no elections in China like those in the West. The other parallel example appeared in the historic empires, such as the Egyptian empire, the Roman empire and the Chinese Imperial system. To reinforce the central government’s control over local politics, the Kingdom of Egypt (3000BC-1000BC) attempted to send commissioners down to local areas “to report or interfere” on local affairs. In the Roman empire, the emperor Hadrian was known for his extensive travels throughout the empire, some of which were for administrative purposes while others are not.

In fact, Chinese government inspection is a kind of practice that uniquely distinguishes Chinese politics from politics in many other countries in the contemporary era. For instance, a preliminary visit to websites of state leaders in Vietnam and other similar authoritarian countries would reveal that, while leaders of these countries also attend conferences and deliver speeches, they do not engage in outreach to villages and localities for inspection on a regular basis. The Chinese president Xi Jinping, by contrast, devotes a sizeable portion of his itinerary to visiting local places. North Korea is an exception, for it also conducts similar forms of inspections, albeit in a more top-down command format. Inspections in North Korea are mostly conducted by the central authorities; provincial and county level governments do not routinely conduct inspections of lower levels at their own initiative. While the availability of the Internet can perhaps affect publicity of the leaders’ activities in other countries, my website observation roughly indicates that inspection does not serve as an important avenue for the governance in these other regimes.

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7 Interviews with foreign nationals in the US from Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Turkey and Bulgaria. Show that politicians in these countries have little interest in visiting localities. In Turkey, the president...
In 2013, the Chinese president Xi Jinping spent his New Year’s Eve at a village in Dingxi, Gansu Province called Yuan Gudui, a village rated as one of the most impoverished across China. The president’s action, as observers claim, signaled to the entire nation his uncompromising resolve to combat poverty. Similarly, in a recent inspection to a remote village in Anhui Province in 2016, the President was seen in the state media holding the callous hands of the toiling peasants, inquiring into their struggles against life’s challenges. The emotionally charged peasant, Chen Zesheng, told reporters, “It is our great honor to receive the General-Secretary (President) and we are very proud……Thank you, the Central Party Committee and the General Secretary.” Similarly, Hu Jintao, upon assuming office back in 2003, begun “talking to herders in snowy Mongolia or truding through a famer’s muddy field.8

Xi spent his earlier years before college in a village in northwest China, called Liangjiahe, as part of Mao’s “descend to brigades (chadui)” campaign where young intellectuals were sent to rural areas to participate in agricultural production. This campaign, of course, was often used to purge political oppositions to Mao as well. Xi’s personal immersion in rural China has fostered in him a thorough understanding of struggles of the poor. Nearly forty years later, Xi’s consistent attention to the poor as the president of China has earned him a fond title “poverty-relief cadre (Fupin ganbu)”.9

Data collected by the author from the state media, Xinhua News and People, shows that the current president, Xi Jinping, has become the most active inspector compared to his two predecessors, Jiang Zemin (1993-2003) and Hu Jintao (2003-2013). From 2013 when he first came occasionally visits local communities, but not on a regular basis. Lower level officials do not visit localities at all. Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has a semi-presidential system like France and its president appears to visit localities more consistently than the legislators do.

9 Yue, Xiaoqiao. 2016. “Fupin Ganbu Xijinping” [Xi Jinping, the ‘Poverty-Relief Cadre’] People’s Daily goo.gl/Y5SjVh.
to power to Oct 2016, Xi has conducted thirty-five inspections to various localities. This is much more than Jiang’s total nineteen inspections during his second five-year term, from 1998 to 2005. This also surpasses Hu’s twenty-four inspections from 2010-2013, about the same duration as since Xi came to office. More than thirty percent of Xi’s inspections focus on improving the economy and an equal percentage of them target on national defence and military development. Sixteen percent of these inspections arrive at villages to address issues of poverty, while about an equal percentage of inspections serve as symbolic tours for the president to launch new ideological campaigns. At the same time, Premier Li Keqiang’s inspections are more narrowly focused on economic development, maturing the financial market and ensuring a low unemployment rate.

In particular, Xi’s inspections to desolate villages in remote rural areas have resonated well with the Chinese public regarding anti-poverty programs and improving the livelihood of the poor. According to Netease (网易), for the specific purpose of poverty-relief, Xi has travelled to more than 20 provinces and visited more than 180 villages. The goal of poverty-relief, as set by the CCP, is to lift 70 million people out of poverty by 2020. Figure 1 depicts the selective trips that Xi has paid to impoverished areas around the country.

Figure 1. Xi’s Trips to Impoverished Areas in China. (Source: Netease 163.com)
Inspections, however, are not just a “privilege” for the top Chinese leaders, like the president. Quite the contrary, it is an assumed obligation for officials from almost every level, particularly the head of government. Just a glance over the official websites of any level of Chinese government reveals one of the most prominent features of Chinese politics: inspections. Officials cannot wait to publish their inspection tours as headlines and make known to the people that they are working hard and doing great.

A political practice employed by Chinese dynasties as early as the Qin (221 BC-201 BC), Chinese government inspection system found its regenerated value under the CCP after it came to power in 1949. Learning from the inspection system by the Soviet Leninists, the CCP adopted inspections as one of the most favored approaches of governance. Chairman Mao was a fervent advocate for inspection tours by party members. He argued in the 1930s, during the beginning years of the CCP, that party members should connect to the people by being physically present in their midst and conducting thorough research into local governance (shenrujiceng, lianxiqunzhong). That has become a mandate adhered to by the CCP history by every administration.

Chinese government inspections generally fall into two categories, internal inspections and external inspections, depending on their objectives. Inspections aiming at assessing the performance of party members and government officials are internal inspections, for their target is internal members of the regime. By contrast, inspections that look into social and economic conditions of members of the community are external to the party state. Thus, they are external inspections. While internal inspections are mostly conducted by a specific agency, such as the...
Chinese Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCCDI) or the Supreme People’s Procuratorate of the People’s Republic of China (SPP-PRC), upon all government officials, external inspections are usually initiated and led by the governor of each level of government. For the interest of this dissertation, I only assess the patterns and effects of the second category of inspections, external inspections.

These two forms of inspections thus serve two mutually reinforcing yet distinctive functions. First, inspections are a mechanism for the CCP’s internal policing. Inspections provide one of the most important means for the Party to institute transparency and forestall corruption within. The most prominent example is the recent nationwide anti-corruption campaign under Xi-Li administration. Small but powerful inspection teams are deployed from the central government to headquarters of lower levels of governments to hold accountable officials found guilty of illegal practices. This campaign has thus far removed from office more than 70 provincial government officials, more than those tried in the past three decades combined. A recent report by Global Times, the official international news outlet for the Chinese government, shows that in the three years since 2013, the government has investigated as many as 1 million officials, among its 88 million total. In two years before Sep, 2016, the campaign has extradited 2,210 people from more than 70 foreign countries, among which 363 are government officials. The recovered extortion assets amount to 8 billion yuan (about $1.2 billion).14

Second, inspections are employed to visit ordinary Chinese citizens. The second chapter of this dissertation focusing on external inspections finds that inspections are deployed chiefly to

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14 Central Committee of Discipline Inspection of China. “Baiming hongtong yiyou 35ren luowang guian renyuan zuichang taowang 18 nian” [35 of the One Hundred Who Received Ultimatums’ have been Captured, the Longest at large 18 Years], Oct 31, 2016. People’s Daily. Accessed Oct 31, 2016. goo.gl/pqeqbg.
ensure social stability, to boost the economy and to elevate the common welfare. More specifically, the Chinese government is more likely to inspect villages that house investment projects, villages that are poor and villages that are chosen by the government as model villages. Villages with potentials of investments, such as those endowed with natural resources or located at a transportation hub, attract more government inspections, as the government places great emphasis on economic development. Visiting these villages allows the government to ensure a consistent flow of political and financial support for sustained development in these villages. That the Chinese government is more likely to visit model villages, villages set up as examples in development and governance, suggests that the government attempts to advocate success strategies developed by these models across society to benefit those lagging behind. Lastly, that impoverished villages are also more likely to see inspections indicates that the CCP does care about the poor. This trend is even more pronounced under China’s current administration. Central to China’s nationwide anti-poverty campaign, Xi has paid a number of high-profile personal visits to marginalized villages across China.

1.1 Literature Review and Contribution

The extant authoritarian literature mainly accounts for elite politics and the patronage systems that deliver pork to their respective constituencies. This is most evident in research on Latin American politics where scholars look into how the authoritarian leader purges oppositions in order to keep his followers in line, as well as when this attempt fails, coup overthrows the regime. The literature does not offer evidence on how authoritarian regimes, through carefully planned governance at the local level, could institute accountability to its people. The most prominent contribution of this dissertation to the field of authoritarianism, therefore, is that it reveals that authoritarian regimes, such as the CCP in China, increase their responsiveness to local needs
through strategic governing tactics. In the case of China, the CCP is considerably responsive to its people through government inspections to localities. Such mechanisms as inspections, to a certain degree, enable local people to feel that the government has their best interests in mind and accounts for their grievances. Authoritarian regimes thus gain ruling legitimacy as a result of responsive governance to localities.

The overarching finding in the authoritarian literature in general is that functioning, though perhaps limited, political institutions at the elite level in these regimes play a pivotal role in prolonging the rule of authoritarian leaders. These institutions usually take the form of council, legislatures and politburos. They effectively prevent the emergence of political opposition by instituting more transparent power-sharing mechanisms between the authoritarian dictator and other members in his ruling coalition;\(^{15}\) by coopting political outsiders in the society into the political core and thus reducing the number of dissidents;\(^{16}\) and finally, by overcoming emerging challenges through reforms such as regular succession of power in the top leadership.\(^{17}\)

However, studies focusing on political institutions in authoritarian regimes only discuss the performance of institutions at the elite level. They devote attention to how the regime utilizes these institutions to ensure its survival. It pays little attention, however, to how the regime, by relying on certain institutions, generates effective governance at the local level and achieves high levels of ruling legitimacy. For example, the Ba’ath party rose to political prominence in Syria in 1963 after it helped concentrate power and rally popular support for its office. The elaborated


grassroots institutions, such as party organizations in the rural villages in Syria, help the party govern effectively and stay in power for five decades. In other words, there is significant room for the literature to answer the question of how authoritarian regimes might enhance its ruling legitimacy by enhancing governance at the local level.

In fact, the literature has largely overlooked the important variable of legitimacy altogether in prolonging authoritarian tenure. As Johannes Gerschewshi puts it, “recent research efforts (on authoritarian stability) have gradually lost sight of the legitimation dimension.” Among works that do focus on legitimacy, most have attributed ruling legitimacy of authoritarian regimes to the regimes’ performance. These studies usually focus on the outcome of an effective governance, such as advanced economic development, but not so much on the process of governance. For instance, Zhu Yuchao attributes the durability of the Chinese regime to its effective performance measured as robust economic development. Johannes Gerschewshi’s advocacy for reincorporating legitimacy into research on authoritarianism does not propose any new measures of legitimacy beyond the extant use of GDP, GINI Index, and so forth. While such measures of regimes’ performance such as economic development and income inequality are useful in shedding light on the outcome of the regimes’ governing strategies, it overlooks the processes of governance that contribute to that outcome in the first place.

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This dissertation contributes to the literature by seeking to unpack the processes of authoritarian governance at the local level and how that process helps to generate enduring authoritarian regimes. I contend that authoritarian regimes stay in power thanks to their responsive governance to meet both the goals of the regime and the demands of the populace. I argue that responsiveness of an authoritarian regime to the social and political requests of its people critically matters for the regime’s longevity. For example, some countries during the later stages of the Arab Spring learned to cope with popular unrest via a multitude of tactics, such as repression. These regimes endured as a result, not necessarily because of elaborate institutions, but because of responsive governance. While leaders and regimes in democratic countries derive their ruling legitimacy through the electoral system, authoritarian countries claim less such legitimacy from democratic processes. As authoritarian leaders are not necessarily in office based on free and fair elections, the inherent vulnerability of authoritarianism has pushed these regimes develop other mechanisms to be more responsive to social needs, if they were to last.

In particular, this dissertation highlights the importance of authoritarian governance with the case of Chinese authoritarianism. In the cycling of dynasty after dynasty in the long span of Chinese history, a dynasty excels in its rule, not necessarily due to an established and respected constitutional framework or some kind of highly regarded institutions, but mostly due to its effective governance that actually alleviates popular grievances and fends off intruding foreign armies. In a comparative analysis between the Chinese authoritarian state and Eastern Europe, Chen Cheng argues that China fares better than their Eastern European counterparts in terms of authoritarian stability because, among other reasons, the CCP adapted and built its governance.

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upon its close relationship with the grassroots. Political governance in China is characterized by “highly positive interactions between society and the state.”

One of the examples of authoritarian responsiveness in China is government reaction to media communications, the Internet in particular. Internet did not arrive in China until 1995 and it has become the most important channel for disseminating information, both for the state and for the society. The Chinese regime appears to be sufficiently agile and selective in responding to challenges emerging over the web. Taking advantages of the convenience of microblogs and government website forums respectively, Gary King and other scholars conducted studies on government reactions to Internet information, and found that the Chinese government is especially careful about collective actions and therefore censors web language pertaining to public gathering or protests.

In addition, the literature on responsiveness of the Chinese regime pays keen attention to government responses to situations of emergency. Timely and watchful responsiveness to natural disasters has effectively bolstered the Chinese regime’s grip on power and enormously boosted its legitimacy among the Chinese people. The most glaring examples of the Chinese government selling itself to the public as a competent, benevolent ruler are the disaster responses during the

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2008 Sichuan Earthquake and the 2011 International Evacuation of Chinese nationals in Libya when the Gadhafi regime fell apart. In 2008, an earthquake of magnitude 8.0 broke out in densely-populated southwest China, Sichuan Province, claiming lives of more than 70,000 Chinese. That devastating natural disaster was followed by a prompt reaction from the Chinese government. Within 24 hours, the Chinese government had mobilized more than 100,000 military personnel and numerous civilian groups to the earthquake epicenter for disaster relief. Not long after the Sichuan Earthquake, the dramatic mass evacuation of more than 30,000 Chinese nationals from Libya within only two weeks in 2011 also helped improve the domestic image of the Chinese government in the midst of the boiling Arab Spring. During the Libya evacuation, the Chinese government collaborated with many countries in southern Europe and North Africa for temporary stay for the evacuated Chinese. It employed warships, air force jets as well as civilian transportations to withdraw the Chinese.

The CCP is responsive and finely attuned to popular needs. How well has the Chinese regime maintained its rule through responsive governance on the ground, on a daily basis? This dissertation answers the research question by focusing on how the Chinese regime increases its time in office by responsive authoritarian governance, specifically Chinese government officials’ visits to localities, called inspections. This dissertation investigates how the CCP interacts with the grassroots and translates its ideologies to practice. It evaluates how the Chinese government responds to meet its people’s daily needs through government inspections.


1.2 How Do Inspections Help the CCP Stay in Power?

Minxin Pei wrote it 2005 that “in most political systems, a regime’s capacity to govern is measured by how it performs three key tasks: mobilizing political support, providing public goods and managing internal tensions.” The degree to which inspections are useful for the Chinese regime is, in large part, conditioned by how they contribute to one or more of these three attributes of governance. Chinese government inspections contribute to the CCP’s enduring rule for a number of reasons. First, Chinese government inspections serve as a propaganda institution for the CCP, in some ways quite similar to election campaigns in democracies, to gain ruling legitimacy. Inspections to localities show the Chinese people that the Party has their best interests in mind and strives accordingly to further those interests. Inspecting officials usually inquire into local implementation of policies, such as whether people have received certain pension funds allocated to them by the government. What is also common during inspections is that higher officials ask questions about citizens’ private lives: the sources of their income, and whether or not they are receiving proper treatment for their illnesses.

For poor households, leaders usually offer them some material gifts to subsidize their expenses. In a visit to a village in Gansu Province in northwest China in 2013, President Xi Jinping brought to Ma Maizhi’s house a goat, two bags of flour, one quilt as well as other daily necessities. More subsistence goods usually flow in after the big figures have left. To villagers in the long-forgotten village in the dusty, isolated mountains in northwest China, the president’s arrival, despite the freezing cold, steep and unpaved roads, in addition to his considerate and humble attitude and his heartfelt concern over people’s lives, buys their approval of the president’s rule in

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their hearts and minds, if not more. Chinese government inspections have thus become an indispensable avenue for the CCP to demonstrate its commitment to serve the people and foster a close relationship between them.

The ingrained notion among the Chinese people of respecting the authority has provided a favorable context for Chinese inspections to achieve enhanced public approval for the regime. Particularly, the authority-oriented” (Guanbenwei 官本位) Chinese culture has critically shaped the Chinese understanding of authority as a governing force, not to be challenged or double-checked, but to be obeyed, even at the expense of equity and justice. Almost all the Chinese citizens I interviewed in the summer of 2016 expressed their appreciation for high officials inspecting the grassroots. The arrival of high officials usually infuses a strong sense of hope and opportunity. It is uncommon for the Chinese poor to blame the authorities for their sufferings. They embrace more the mentality of “what we can do for our country” than “what our country can do for us.” Initiatives by the Chinese government to elevate their livelihood, therefore, are, to the villagers, not obligations of the government but an extra “blessing.” Weeks before the former premier, Wen Jiabao, visited Huanxian County (环县) in northwest China in January 2012, thrill and awe already pervaded in that small town and local people waited for the premier with great expectations. Upon the premier’s arrival, local residents thronged to the streets still covered in snow and ice, just to catch a glimpse of Wen’s motorcade procession through the downtown central avenue.

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33 An alternative translation could be “authority inclination.”
35 Interview, 2016
36 Field observation, 2012.
Besides the “authority-oriented” cultural advantage, Chinese government inspections also operate in a context of controlled but favorable media under the CCP. The state media offers the maximum coverage of inspection tours by high-profile leaders. Visits, such as the president’s inspection to *Yuangudui*, are broadcasted nationwide. This is intended to persuade the Chinese people across the nation that the CCP is not an idle, abusive agent hungry for power, but that it exists to serve the people and performs its duties as expected. Most news outlets in China are under state-control. Controlled media has a positive impact on Chinese citizens’ approval of the regime. Even private news firms are not allowed to freely publish content critical of the Party. Most of the time on the media, such as TV broadcast, is primarily reserved for coverage of government leaders’ activities. Taking as an example, *Netease News* (网易), one of the most independent news networks in China, the front page of the website is almost always occupied by articles reporting on the Chinese president and premier. As a result, Chinese government inspections, once conducted and positively reported, garner the most attention from society for the ruling interest of the CCP.

Data analysis in this dissertation finds that that Chinese villagers’ perception of village leadership significantly improves after inspections happen. Villagers tend to “strongly agree” 30 percent more that “the village cadre stands as a spokesman for the peasants (against the higher government once the village does not agree with it)”, mediates village conflicts and develops village economy, when inspections to their village increase from once to fifty times per year, the highest frequency in the dataset, all else equal. Government inspections empower village leaders

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39 [http://www.163.com](http://www.163.com).
to more effectively administer village affairs. Better financed village leadership has more influence on villagers than its poor counterpart in other villages, because it can accomplish more things that immediately impact the villagers’ lives. The political and financial support that inspections bring to village leadership enables it to win support from villagers.

Second, beyond just winning popularity, Chinese government inspections do help the regime legislate effective policies and facilitate their implementation. Leaders of the regime usually take inspection trips to localities to collect local, first-hand information for policy-making. Government inspections appear to have a significant monitoring effect on local governance. In many cases, local governments receive a prior notice of the upcoming inspection, which alerts the local officials to “prepare” special households for their inspecting superiors. The timing of the prior notices varies across levels of government. While some come rather late, very close to the actual date of inspections, others are sent one or two weeks early, giving the local officials more time to get ready. Inspections thus do compel local governments to closely follow decrees from higher government in local governance.

The living conditions of individual households also instantly improve after being visited by a certain high official. This happens partially due to the gifts that inspecting officials bring to them. Perhaps more importantly, what causes improved welfare of households in the inspected villages is the significant amount of attention that local governments pay to these households before and after the inspection happens. This increased attention is usually followed by expedited executions of delayed policies, sudden provision of public goods previously withheld as a form of

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41 Interview 2016.
42 Interview 2016.
in corruption and even intensive “care” of these households to ensure that they are “complaint-free.”

Moreover, inspections provide the most direct and handy path for the Chinese government to hear feedback from the common people, and to accordingly address popular grievances. Instead of waiting for popular dissent to build up and even spiral to a larger scale to capture higher government’s attention, inspections allow Chinese leaders to preemptively prevent potential outburst of mass movements by reaching out to problematic areas. One of the frequently asked questions by inspecting officials is whether there are protests or other forms of social conflict in the village.43

Third, government inspections mobilize the Chinese people for collective actions. Inspections lead to state-controlled forms of participation. Increased interactions between the government and common Chinese citizens diminish the chances of aggravating and, consequently, spreading popular dissent. Both empirical data and interviews conducted for this dissertation confirm that inspections are one of the most powerful stimuli for participation by Chinese villagers in rural areas, including attending public meetings and consulting with village leaders regarding village governance.

Inspections make local officials more available for the grassroots to reach. Inspections pressure local politicians to be more engaging toward the grassroots, making themselves more accessible to villagers. Had inspections not occurred, many of the opportunities where villagers can interact with local officials would be absent simply because local officials do not make themselves available. Because many officials stay out of touch with the public and act as very niu (很牛, arrogance or pride in Chinese slang), it can be rather challenging for an ordinary Chinese

43 Interview 2016.
citizen, without powerful personal connections or impactful credentials, to have an encounter with officials in China. 44 For instance, Liu Huizhen’s decision to become a political activist and campaign for local elections was primarily motivated by the turn-off/unresponsiveness of local government representatives. The 64-year-old female told The Washington Post, “When there are problems, you can’t find your local representative – they keep their office address and phone number secret. So we want to become representatives ourselves.45”

In addition, Inspections provide essential incentives for villagers to properly participate in village politics. Meeting higher officials (Jiandaguan 见大官) may potentially foster personal networks that can benefit individual households. In a personal network-oriented (Guanxihua 关系化) society46, knowing someone in a prominent government position implies, in many instances, shortcuts to access both material benefits and promotional advantages into higher positions.

Fourth, inspections, given their popularity, draw social attention towards the political leaders. This brings unity and conformity toward the political ideology that the CCP propagates. A particular feature of President Xi Jinping’s visits to localities is that he always delivers a speech on national governance while visiting. Some of those speeches later become decrees for party governance, while others later coalesce into the ideological doctrine of the CCP and are written into the Party Statute and the Constitution. The Chinese masses are thus “educated” to remain united by abiding by the CCP’s leadership. For instance, reporting the president’s inspection (as well as other tours including state visits to other countries), the Chinese national media constantly reminds its audience that the entire nation shall unite behind the leadership team under Xi Jinping.

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44 Field observation, 2016.
46 For more information on Guanxi, refer to Pei (2006, pp. 186); Lu (2000, pp. 130).
Quite recently, on Aug 22, 2016 in his trip to Qinghai province, northwest China, President Xi Jinping stressed the importance of national unity as China develops economically.47

That inspections often signal policy commitments of the government was evident when the Premier Li Keqiang visited a Multi-National Corporation (MNC), General Motors (GM)’s China branch in Shanghai on Nov 21, 2016 to advertise to the world that “China is still the most attractive investment destination.48"

1.3 Not Perfect

However, the conduct of government inspections is not flawless. One of the most peculiar shortcomings of inspections, as my research shows, is that government inspections tend to cluster around an extremely small number of localities. In my research, I find that most of these intensely inspected villages are geographically closer to large urban centers and their economies tend to be far better off than those of the average village (Jinrui Xi 2015). While some of this clustering is justified by the higher administrative demand in a more developed village economy, most of it is driven by local corporatist practices where local officials and business groups collude for mutual personal benefits. Conducting inspections is not cheap. Unnecessary inspections are a waste of valuable resources that can otherwise be used to power local economic development. Many local leaders have expressed in interviews the unnecessary distraction excessive inspections have caused to local development. By contrast, some of the most remote and underdeveloped villages have been left unnoticed and unattended.

Second, inspection officials sometimes miss the “blind spots”. To please the inspecting superiors, many local officials arrange inspectors’ itineraries along the path where the villages are

most developed and best governed.\textsuperscript{49} One particular example is when local officials often camouflage the route on which inspectors’ entourage was to arrive with high white-painted walls hiding dilapidated village houses behind the walls.\textsuperscript{50} High officials, as a result, do not always observe the actual development in rural areas. What they see is rather a manufactured, manipulated illusion of prosperity.

1.4 Plan for the Dissertation

Despite the imperfections of the Chinese inspection system, it, nevertheless, remains and will continue to remain a significant part of Chinese politics. Marketing the CCP as a benevolent and capable ruling agent, Chinese government inspections markedly distinguish the CCP from similar authoritarian regimes in the world, both in the processes and the outcomes of Chinese politics. While inspections assist the CCP in maintaining its ruling longevity, they also provide it with an essential means to explore the optimal ruling mechanisms, ideologically and practically, within the unique cultural and social-economic context of China. Even when inspections are nothing more than a political game, it is worthwhile to play it, for the interests of both the Chinese people and the ruling regime.

The second chapter of the dissertation looks at where inspections occur. I argue that the Chinese government make strategic inspection decisions to garner maximum governing effectiveness. Particularly, social stability and governing efficacy are two of the most important variables in the decision making of the CCP on inspection decisions. Villages that exhibit development potentials, such as villages with investment projects, are most likely to see more


\textsuperscript{50} Tianxu Liu. “Caizheng Yali, Zhengfu Xingwei yu Shehui Zhixu” [Fiscal Pressure, Governmental Behavior and Social Order] (Beijing: Zhishi Chanquan Chubanshe, 2010), 117.
inspections than those without because economic development is very important to the Chinese government. Inspections are also more likely to occur at impoverished villages, as the Chinese government is committed to elevating the livelihood of its poor.

Once identifying the characteristics of the villages that attract inspections from higher authorities, the third (and fourth) chapter of the dissertation answers how inspections affect peasant mobilization. Inspections serve as the most immediate and direct vessel for government to get in touch with localities. Proper mobilization of peasants in controlled forms of political participation, such as community meetings and engagement with local officials, offers the CCP essential leverage to monitor and channel social dissent. The empirical analysis shows that inspections do help mobilize Chinese villagers to participate in village meetings and engage with village leadership.

The next empirical chapter further delves into the effect that inspections have on public approval of village leadership. Public approval of the village leadership can be reasonably considered as part of the larger legitimacy research, and it contributes to the literature how the Chinese government wins ruling legitimacy through effective and targeted governing strategies. This part of the dissertation reveals that, as inspections to a village increases, public approval of the village leadership significantly improves, all else equal.

The last chapter of the dissertation concludes the contribution of the research endeavor in the entire dissertation and outlines the future research agenda initiated by this dissertation. It concludes that Chinese government inspections serve as an important administrative tool for the CCP to boost its governance. This strategy is also generalizable to other authoritarian countries. Other countries can improve their governance through diligent and well-designed inspections to overcome the lack of transparency and effectiveness inherent in many regimes.
CHAPTER 2

CHINESE GOVERNMENT VILLAGE INSPECTIONS:
WHERE DOES THE KING SHOW UP?51

2.1 Introduction

A giant billboard resolutely stood at the center of the city, Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu Province, in northwest China. In the picture, the Chinese president, Hu Jintao, shook hands with a throng of citizens passionately welcoming his arrival from Beijing. The enduring smiles on their faces still radiated through the fading colors of the board, and they were poised to withstand the blizzard sweeping through the Loess Plateau, proclaiming the great privilege of the Lanzhou people to witness the president’s steps on this arid soil. “What are the chances,” they seemed to be saying, “that the king would show up here?”52

Government inspection, as in the scene depicted above, is a critical facet of Chinese politics. Yet, it has received little scholarly attention in China, and much less in the West. This article therefore intends to initiate this research agenda by investigating where inspections occur. The overarching question motivating this article is: What are the attributes of villages that attract these inspections? This paper aspires to assess the motives behind them: Are they intended to develop the rural economy, to foster income equality, or both?

Because the supreme goal of the Chinese government is to maintain social stability and stay in power, this paper argues that government inspections are conducted in a manner to best reach this goal. Specifically, I contend that there are incentives for the Chinese government to inspect villages to maximize both economic-development goals and income-equality goals. Thus,

51 This entire chapter has been published at Asian Survey. See Xi, Jinrui. “Chinese Government Village Inspections: Where Does the King Show Up?” Asian Survey. 57,3(2017): 450-474. Usage of this work in the dissertation is given permission from the University of California Press.
52 Field observation, March 2012, Lanzhou, China.
government inspections should be more likely to occur in villages that exhibit development potential as well as those with large income gaps. The empirical findings show that government inspections seem to be related to both development and income-equality factors. Inspections are particularly sensitive to economic-development goals: they are more likely to fall upon villages that house investments. They are also more likely to occur in villages that are impoverished.

Before presenting the theoretical argument for this paper, the following section introduces the different purposes of inspections. Following that, I present a theory, which leads to propositions on what factors should impact inspection decisions by higher levels of government. The third part of the paper empirically tests propositions derived from the theory. The paper concludes with contributions of this study to the field of Chinese studies in general and future research directions.

2.2 Chinese Government Inspections

Government inspections in China serve multiple purposes and occur on an almost spontaneous basis with few set rules. There are two common goals. First, inspections are conducted by officials of higher levels for internal policing, to check on lower-level officials. The Chinese government inspects lower-level governments to make sure that they adhere to the Party’s political doctrine and remain diligent in managing government affairs. This kind of inspection is usually conducted by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the CCP and its affiliates at lower levels of government. The most recent example of this type of inspection is the nationwide anti-corruption campaign staged by the new Xi–Li administration in 2013.53

Second, higher levels of government also make policies, such as environmental protection laws, and then monitor their implementation by conducting inspections of localities.54 While the

first kind of inspection focuses on local government officials, the second type usually goes beyond the party organization of the CCP and reaches down to the grassroots.\textsuperscript{55} Whereas the first kind of inspection is outside the current study, inspections for the second purpose serve as its focal point. Inspecting ordinary Chinese peasants is more than a mundane administrative routine. Instead, it is usually a function of careful political calculations of government officials. Government inspections of villages serve government officials’ symbolic purposes. While visits to model villages (villages with exceptional economic development) showcase their governing competence, visits to poverty- or disaster-stricken villages may foster a philanthropic image for the officials conducting them.\textsuperscript{56}

The hierarchical structure of the Chinese government prescribes that inspections are often led by heads of higher levels of government, such as provincial governors and municipal governors, and they are usually accompanied by heads of the next-lower government.\textsuperscript{57} Inspecting officials tour local industries and households, asking questions about people’s life challenges.\textsuperscript{58} Inspections are a way for the higher levels of government to foster solidarity within the party, and, as such, they tend to cause significant improvements in local governance.\textsuperscript{59} Lower officials are expected to conform to the directives of the higher authorities with due obedience. Alternatively, inspections can also be led by heads of more-specific government departments. Departmental inspections have to be accompanied by heads of lower government leaders as well, but with more specific goals. For example, while the governor of Gansu Province inspects a certain village in Gansu to get a

\textsuperscript{55} Miao, Chengbin, interview by Yuan Wen and Sun Qiuxiang, “Qunzhong Fangtan: Diaocha Yanjiu Xilietan” [Interactions with grass roots: series of talks on inspections and research], Grassroots Net, July 2015, <goo.gl/Vq1H82>, accessed October 15, 2016.

\textsuperscript{56} Interview with the author, June 2016, northwest China.

\textsuperscript{57} Liu, Tianxu. \textit{Caizheng yali, zhengfu xingwei yu shehui zhixu} [Fiscal pressure, governmental behaviors and social order] (Beijing: Zhishi Chanquan Chuban She, 2009), 119.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, 119.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, 119.
general look at village governance, the head of the Department of Agriculture of Gansu Province will solely focus on the agricultural production of that village.

Data collected by the author from the state media, *Xinhua News* and *Renmin Wang* (People’s Daily), show that the current president, Xi Jinping, has become a most active high-level inspector, compared to his two predecessors, Jiang Zemin (1993–2003) and Hu Jintao (2003–2013). From 2013, when he first came to power, to October 2016, Xi conducted 35 inspections in various localities.60 This nearly doubles Jiang’s 19 inspections during his second five-year term, from 1998 to 2005. It also surpasses Hu’s 24 inspections from 2010 to 2013, about the same time span as Xi’s term in office to date. More than 30% of Xi’s inspections focus on improving the economy, and an equal percentage target national defense and military development.61 Sixteen percent of these inspections arrive at villages to tackle poverty, while about an equal percentage serve as symbolic tours for the president to launch new ideological doctrines. In particular, Xi’s inspections of desolate villages in remote rural areas have resonated well with the Chinese public regarding anti-poverty efforts and lifting the livelihoods of the poor. By contrast, Premier Li Keqiang’s inspections are more narrowly focused on economic development, maturing the financial market, and ensuring a low unemployment rate.62

While the data reveal some degree of variation in the intensity and magnitude of inspections among different leaders, they do not indicate significant change in the macro-level objectives of inspections across administrations. Quite the opposite: a consistent theme runs through the CCP history in terms of the focus of inspections. All three presidents have focused on elevating the general welfare of the Chinese people during inspections. Poverty and economic

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61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.
development almost always appear as some of the primary factors for presidents in determining
where to inspect.

2.3 Theory

The principal argument of this article is that the Chinese government makes strategic
choices to inspect villages to achieve social stability and raise regime legitimacy. Deng Xiaoping
placed great emphasis on social stability as the top priority of the CCP. To ensure social stability,
the CCP highlights the importance of both economic development and income equality.

However, China has found it challenging to achieve both goals at the same time. The market-
oriented economy that emerged beginning with the Deng era brought more-efficient resource
allocation and generated consistent double-digit economic growth for three decades. While such
economic growth has lifted the livelihood of the general population, it has also widened the gap
between rich and poor. Income inequality has become one of the chief causes of protests and
other forms of social instability in China.63 While economic development is still important to the
regime, China is increasingly aware of the necessity of remedying income inequality to keep
disgruntled villagers from protesting.64 When China initially opened up in 1978, Deng’s famous
quote was “Let a few get rich first,” (emphasis added), implying that there would be a time for
the rest to get rich, second. As the economy continues to grow, the development-oriented
governance has begun, to a certain extent, to shift its focus to economic equality. Policies
devoted to promoting economic development are accompanied by counterparts facilitating
income equality. According to data collected by the author, the theme of improving the quality of
life of the poor figures prominently in Xi Jinping’s governance, as evidenced in his inspections.

October, 2016.
64 Tiezzi, Shannon. “China’s ‘New Normal’ Economy and Social Stability.” The Diplomat, November 24, 2015,
<goo.gl/2QMf6s>, accessed November, 2016.
As an important administrative avenue for the Chinese government, inspection is a reliable reflection of the policy orientation and governing priorities of the CCP. Since China is determined to further develop its economy and institute income equality, where inspections occur should depend on the attributes of villages that best serve these political goals. The Chinese government strategically inspects villages to minimize destabilizing factors at the local level. Inspection is one of the best strategies to accomplish this goal because, through inspections, the Chinese government accumulates updated information on local popular opinion on the shortcomings of the regime and blind spots that it has failed to accommodate. Inspection provides the CCP with the most direct contact with the people and the most accurate assessment of governance at the local level. One of the most common questions that inspecting officials ask village leaders is whether there are conflicts in the village and what measures village leaders are taking to resolve them. Accordingly, inspection also affords the CCP the most immediate pathway to arrive at the local scene should an emergency occur. In the case of a natural disaster, for example, one of the most immediate ways for the government to mitigate the crisis is to be present at the scene through inspections. My data show that this has been a consistent practice of the CCP. Both Jiang and Hu were promptly accompanied by local officials to the sites of the 1998 Yangtze River flood and the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, respectively.

Economic development is the basis for almost any regime to stay in power, for the wealth residual it generates translates into larger national budgets through taxation, which enables the state to provide basic public services and a broader range of public goods. The Chinese regime highlights economic development as one of its supreme goals. While prominent scholars like

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65 Interview with the author.
Huntington contend that economic development is key to modernization and democratization but also very disruptive of previous social and political order, others contend that economic development is beneficial for social stability. The Chinese regime tends to embrace the latter, given the unique Chinese context, identifying economic development as one of the essentials for maintaining its political legitimacy. China’s official policy has been devoted to promoting economic development and leading China to modernity. Robust economic development is a compelling symbol of the governing competence of the CCP and generates essential political, economic, and cultural leverage for it to remain in office.

The Chinese government is known for its intervention in the economy through such instruments as heavy taxation and incentives for investment. The state also adjusts market forces to enhance profits for private and state-owned firms. One instrument for encouraging industrial expansion is making land available to firms. One path to boosting economic development in rural areas is to set up village development models. Model villages are intentionally chosen by higher governments to be role models of village economic development. Chosen villages are usually elite villages that stand out in terms of economic development and political governance. To be considered as a model, a village primarily has to be rich. For example, in 2004, the criteria to be selected as a model village in Hunan Province were: (1) an advanced economy with individual income per capita higher than RMB 4,000 (about US$ 580); (2) a green natural environment; and

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67 Huntington, Samuel P. Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).
(3) social virtue, including competent village leadership and social stability. In rare cases, the government still designates poor villages as models if they are endowed with either natural resources or other forms of development potential. A model village serves as the motor for village economies, as the Chinese believe that once an example is given, others will also follow.

Inspecting model villages helps the Chinese government achieve a number of goals. First, it showcases governing competency. The Chinese government widely broadcasts these inspection tours, conveying to the public its developmental achievements. Such propaganda efforts not only gain popular trust but exhibit to higher authorities the local government’s performance. Impressing superiors with their administrative accomplishments wins local officials opportunities for promotion. Second, the Chinese government inspects model villages to advertise to poor villages “success toolboxes” developed in these models. Government inspection is an indirect way to encourage underdeveloped villages to catch up. Putting aside what benefits inspection actually has for village politics, the mere appearance of higher government officials raises the profile of model villages and captures public attention in the surrounding villages. Third, model villages are intentionally set up by the government to exemplify the ideals of village development. Intensified administrative attention, as well as aggregated fiscal and political resources, then flows to these model villages, facilitating further development. Inspections are more likely to occur in model villages because that is the political highlight of the administration. More frequent inspections are expected in these model villages because they are simply a result of the intensified energy already poured into these villages by the government leaders.

**H1. Inspections are more likely to occur in model villages.**

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72 Liu, Tianxu, *Fiscal Pressure*. 

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Given the importance of a strong economy, I contend that the Chinese government tends more often to inspect villages where investments land. Investment is an integral part of the Chinese economy.\textsuperscript{73} It facilitates monetary flow and brings new jobs by starting businesses. China has a high demand for job growth in order to absorb the millions of new college graduates who enter the workforce every year.\textsuperscript{74} New college graduates hold high expectations of finding well-paid employment. If they remain unemployed, this cohort could be a destabilizing force in society. It is thus essential for the Chinese government to provide the infrastructural, financial, and political assistance necessary for local governments to attract job-creating investments. Government inspection directly exposes higher officials to local development and provides higher authorities with information necessary to facilitate investment projects. Villages with investments thus attract attention from higher levels of government, and inspections of these villages become more likely. I hypothesize that the Chinese government is more likely to target inspections to villages with high rates of investment in the local economy.

\textit{H2. Inspections are more likely to occur in villages that attract more investment.}

At the same time, the Chinese government has been forthcoming about its resolve to combat inequality. The government has taken great pains to battle poverty across China over the past decade. Its efforts have apparently so far paid off, lifting more than 500 million people out of poverty.\textsuperscript{75} The central leadership has been outspoken on the overwhelming need for redistribution to bridge the gap between rich and poor. The Chinese premier, Li Keqiang, has consistently declared the resolve of his administration to systematically channel wealth from the rich to the

\textsuperscript{73} Tian, Guoqiang, “Deeper Issues,” 59–64.
Likewise, the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, paid personal visits to three poverty-stricken villages across China within the first year after his accession to office during the 18th Party Congress in November 2012, a strong signal of the central authority’s resolve to achieve more balanced economic development. Dingxi, a municipality in northwest China’s Gansu Province identified as an experimental region for the central government’s poverty-relief project, has long been classified as one of the country’s poorest localities. Its village of Yuangudui was visited by Xi Jinping on New Year’s Eve of 2013. Due to the village’s elevated profile, the provincial governor of Gansu Province, Wang Sanyun, later paid many personal visits to Dingxi as well. This is a specific example of Chinese government inspections responding to economic inequality.

Remarkable economic development over the past three decades has indeed enriched both the Chinese people and their government. While the average livelihood of the Chinese has significantly improved, the most prominent downside arriving with economic prosperity is social injustice and people’s dissatisfaction over economic inequality. Feeling the immense challenge of maintaining control over its 1.3 billion people, the Chinese government has raised economic equality to the top of its political agenda and placed public goods provision at the center of its policy platform. In addition to its heavy investment in infrastructure in the past, the Chinese government has launched a new round of infrastructure investment to boost its slowing economy, an indirect approach to benefit the poor by providing the common good.

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77 Xinhua News, “Zuigao lingdaoren zaifang pinkun diqu chuandi shenme xinhao” [Signals by president’s revisit to impoverished regions], November 6, 2013, <goo.gl/462tMq>, accessed October 2015.
Since income inequality has become one of the chief causes of social instability, I initially hypothesized that the Chinese government deploys inspections of villages at the two extremes of economic development.\(^81\) This is because, among other reasons, inspections are an avenue to facilitate redistribution, an approach deemed necessary for maintaining social stability in that it brings satisfaction to the less privileged and provides them with viable means to get ahead. Extremely poor villagers are more motivated to join protests and other forms of collective action because they feel a greater sense of deprivation compared to richer villages. Relative deprivation theory prescribes that the more deprived one feels, the more likely one is to join rebellious actions.\(^82\) Understanding the high potential for social instability from the sharp income inequality between villages at the two extremes, the government should pay more visits to those villages. A state failing to systematically alleviate poverty may suffer grave consequences, such as protests and other manifestations of instability.\(^83\)

Government inspections can facilitate the redistribution process in a number of ways. First, inspections can ensure the provision of government poverty-relief grants. As part of these efforts, inspections help monitor judicious allocation of grant funds to designated village households. Inspections streamline public goods provision by preventing township officials and village leaders from diverting public funds into private pockets. By keeping higher authorities updated on local inequality, inspections are a way to secure a consistent flow of high-level government grants. For example, the Chinese government stations certain party cadres in impoverished villages for

prolonged periods to intensify poverty-relief efforts.\textsuperscript{84} As an important avenue for policymaking of the Chinese government, inspections provide the basic means for government leaders to connect with villagers and gather the most practical and accurate information on what policies would substantively alleviate villagers’ concerns.\textsuperscript{85}

Second, inspections pave the way for redistribution not only within villages but also across villages. The Chinese government strategically inspects extremely poor and extremely rich villages to encourage structural redistribution of wealth from rich villages to poor villages. Inspections not only help sustain the already-developed economies in rich villages but introduce to poorer villages applicable development models derived from rich villages. Villages at the two economic extremes see more inspections simply because the higher levels of government attempt to advertise models of economic success to less developed villages. That endeavor automatically generates a cluster of inspections of villages at the extremes.

While inspections should occur in villages at the two economic extremes because they provide the Chinese government with direct and indirect pathways for redistribution, I also argue that inspections cluster at the two extremes because they may effectively contain the social instability most prevalent in these villages. Inspections effectively prevent protests through alerting the local government apparatus in two ways. Should protests arise in a village due to inequality, government inspection can mitigate such a crisis by (1) holding village or township officials accountable and exposing their corruption; and (2) instilling unity and coherence in the village and township government (particularly the police), getting them ready to respond to emergencies. In the first approach, government inspections placate villagers’ grievances by

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 124.
instituting justice, while the second approach relies on police mass control and even repression. Apart from the efficacy of inspections in combating economic inequality, inspections are targeted in part at village inequality attributes simply because the Chinese government is sensitive to the potential threats of protest arising from these villages. That the Chinese government responds to localities based on the number of petitions and protests occurring in them is supported by many studies. For example, in face of overwhelming local petitions in (unspecified) H Province, the central government ordered that the petitioners be returned from Beijing to their hometown and disputes be resolved by the local government. Following that order, the county, municipal, and provincial governments in that province deployed as many as 42,664 government officials to the grassroots, including villages, to thoroughly resolve the issues motivating villagers to petition.

Lastly, the government may pick villages at the two economic extremes to inspect purely as “image projects” (xinxiang gongcheng)—framing positive government images for the audience. Skillfully framing the government around favorable social issues buys it legitimacy. Visits to exceptionally rich villages, often disproportionately broadcast on the media, is a great way for leaders to show off their administrative achievements, thus strengthening future bids for promotion from above and gaining popular confidence in the administration from below. At the same time, visiting extremely poor villages paints the government as a benevolent caregiver to its people.

H3. Villages of income levels at the two extremes see more inspection tours than those in the middle.

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86 Petitions in China occur in various forms. The most accessible but perhaps least effective approach is to submit a complaint letter to the Office of Letters and Visits, while the approach that many undertake as a last resort is to visit the government headquarter in person (and most of the time as a group). The most extreme and the most influential is to visit officials in the central government, in Beijing.

87 Liu, Tianxu. Fiscal Pressure, 275.

2.4 Research Design

I use data from 2002 collected by the Chinese Household Income Project (CHIP) for the empirical tests in this paper. This dataset includes information on Chinese government inspections conducted by county-level-or-higher government in 961 randomly selected villages. This dataset was collected through face-to-face interviews with village leaders and village citizens across China. The survey sample for this dataset is a random selection of villages derived from the authoritative, nationally recognized household survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics.

![Figure 2. Distribution of Chinese Government Inspections to Villages](source)

The dependent variable for this study is *Inspections*, coded in CHIP 2002 as the average number of inspections a village received per year from 1999 to 2002 (Figure 2). The values of this

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variable all appear to be whole-number values. The majority of villages received less than five visits per year from higher-level governments in the three years prior to the survey. The average was 3.16 visits per year, with a standard deviation of 4.5 per year. The maximum number of visits any village received was 50, and the minimum was zero. Fifteen percent of the villages in the sample received less than one inspection per year from 1999 to 2002.

I use four core independent variables to test four hypotheses: Model, Investment, Income per capita, and Isquare (Table 1). Model is operationalized as 1 if a village is designated as a model village and 0 otherwise. Investment is 1 if a village attracts any external investment project (as opposed to investment by the village itself) and 0 otherwise. According to my theory, villages that attract investment projects attract more inspections because higher-level governments all

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Independent and Control Variables

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<th>Std. dev.</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

stress economic development as a policy goal and as a criterion by which local government performance will be evaluated. Income per capita is an indicator of the level of economic development of a village. The higher its value, the more prosperous this village is. Taking the square of Income per capita generates the last independent variable, \( I_{\text{square}} \). If Chinese government inspections are more likely to occur in villages at the two extremes of the economy, there should be a U-shaped relationship between Income per capita and Inspections, and the squared term would reveal the presence or absence of this nonlinear relationship.

I add control variables to capture potential intervening factors in the model. Ethn accounts for the effect of the presence of ethnic minorities on inspections. China has a diverse and highly mobile ethnic population, which poses a substantial governing challenge.\(^90\) It is very likely that the Chinese government inspects minority villages simply to keep ethnic tensions under control.\(^91\) Ethn is a binary variable coded as 1 if a village is a minority village and 0 otherwise. Sub tests the effect of geographical location on village inspections. Whether a village is located in a large or medium-sized city’s suburban area (coded as 1 if yes and 0 if otherwise) should affect the possibility of higher levels of government descending to the village.\(^92\) Presumably, suburban villages are more likely to receive inspections, thanks to advanced transportation and geographical proximity to higher-level governments. As a complement, I also include Distance as a control

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\(^{90}\) Though the minority population constitutes less than 10% of China’s entire population, it is still huge due to the massive base population.

\(^{91}\) Ethnic minorities consume a considerable portion of the central budget for their governance. Ethnic riots have become the most worrying element to the Chinese regime. The most glaring example is the ethnic riots that have broken out intermittently in northwest China’s Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region since 2009. The most recent were in 2014, in which more than 90 people died and 200 were arrested. For more on Chinese ethnic conflicts and government policies toward minorities, see Jacobs, Andrew. “China Says Nearly 100 Are Killed in Week of Unrest in Xinjiang.” New York Times, August 3, 2014, <goo.gl/I0CKs2>, accessed September 18, 2015; Zhou, Ping. “Zhongguo minzu zhengce jiazhi quxiang fenxi” [Analysis of China’s minority policy orientation], Dangdai shijie yu shehui zhuyi [Contemporary world and socialism] 2 (2010): 135–114; State Council, “Minzu quyu zizhi zhidu zai xizang de chenggong shijian” [The successful practice of autonomous governance of ethnic minority regions in Tibet], September 6, 2015, <goo.gl/ozm3IP>, accessed September 18, 2015; Becquelin, Nicolas. “Staged Development in Xinjiang.” China Quarterly 178 (2004): 358–378.

\(^{92}\) In China, most of these large or medium-sized cities are municipal or provincial capitals.
variable to test the effect of a village’s distance from the county government on the frequency of
government inspections. It is coded in kilometers. This control is necessary because the likelihood
of inspections falling on villages also depends on their distance from the county government.\footnote{It is very unusual for a county-level city to be classified as large or medium-sized city.}
Presumably, the farther a village is from the county government, the more logistical effort that
higher government has to make to inspect it. Thus, distant villages will see fewer inspections.

*Population* captures the impact of village population on inspections. As the higher levels
of governments are sensitive to maintaining social stability, more populous villages may see more
inspections because larger population may cause more conflicts and instability. *CCPmem* is a
control variable accounting for the effect that CCP-member villagers have on inspections. As the
number of CCP members increases in a village, higher governments probably become more at ease
with governance of that village and therefore invest less attention there. As a result, villages with
more CCP members will see fewer inspections than other villages.

The control variable, *Demo*, is included to detect the effect of competitive elections for the
village council on inspections.\footnote{Democratic elections in Chinese villages refer to the Organic Law of Villagers’ Committees, adopted by the
Chinese government in 1987 and stipulating that all village leaders be democratically elected. For more
information, see Wang, Shuna and Yang Yao, “Grassroots Democracy and Local Governance: Evidence from
O’Brien, Kevin J. “Implementing Political Reform in China’s Villages.” *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 32
(1994): 33–59.} This is a binary variable coded as 1 if a village has held
competitive elections and 0 otherwise. I expect villages that have competitive elections to
experience more frequent inspections because competitive elections themselves increase the
monitoring demands on higher authorities. On the other hand, democratic elections could make
inspections less likely by facilitating a better flow of public goods in villages, thus relieving the
central government’s concerns over social conflict.
The control variable *Disas* captures the effect of natural disasters on the frequency of inspections. This is also a binary variable, coded as 1 if a village experienced a natural disaster in 2002 and 0 otherwise. Half of the villages in the dataset experienced natural disaster(s) in 2002. Such villages should attract more attention from high authorities as a part of the disaster-relief process. More important, disasters usually disrupt the normal social order, raising government concerns regarding instability. Inspections thus become more likely in those villages.

*Taxre* is used to control for the possible effect of tax reform on inspections. The 2002 tax reform required local governments to stop extracting taxes and other fees from villagers, in order to relieve villagers’ financial burdens. Instead, the central government began rebating to local governments a portion of the revenue previously generated through those now-waived rural taxes and fees. Inspections may increase simply because higher governments desire to monitor this particular tax reform process. On the other hand, villages that have experienced tax reform may see fewer government inspections because tax reform has rid the township and county governments of their fiscal dependence on the village economy. The shift in the power of local governments over their citizens resulting from this tax reform reduces the incentives for the county government to conduct inspections of villages in its jurisdiction. The time period of the dataset

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96 The tax reform has resulted in a great detachment between the local governments, particularly county-level governments, and villagers, causing further decay of Chinese rural politics. Because county-level governments now do not have to rely on tax revenue from the villagers, their interest in village affairs may accordingly shrink. Lack of incentive to either engage in or monitor village affairs makes inspections of villages by county-level governments less likely. For more details, see Ou, Yangjing, “Weikong xingzheng quanguo chongjie gouzhong daxiang zhengquan texing” [Properties of township-village governance demonstrated in a multi-layered “manipulation-type” power structure], *She Hui* [Society] 31.3 (2011): 42–67; Zhao, Xiaofeng and Zhang Hong, “Congqian rushi kongzhi daotuo qianhua shizhi li—maixiang fuwu xingzhengfu de xiangzheng zhengquan texing” [Coordination-type “withdrawal-type governance” to “manipulation-type governance”: the logic of township-village government operations moving toward serving the people], *Xueyi Yu Shijian* [Studies and Practice] 11 (2012): 73–81; Xun Chen, “Lunhou shuifei shidai jiceng zhili dekun jingyu chulu” [Discussions on difficulties and resolutions of post-tax-reform grass-roots governance], *Qian Yan* [Frontier] 9 (2014): 137–138; Fu, Wei and Changquan Jiao, “Xietiaoxing zhengquan: xianmu zhiyun zuoxia daxiang zhengquf u” [“Coordination-type”
provides an optimal opportunity to test the effect of tax reform, because while this dataset was collected, tax reform was just getting underway. By the end of 2002, 71% of the villages in the sample had had tax reform, while the rest of them had not.

2.5 Findings

The unit of analysis for this study is the village. The number of observation is 795. Because the dependent variable in this dataset is a count variable and is overdispersed, I decided to employ, among others, a negative binomial regression model to test the theory.97 The empirical results are displayed in Table 2.

The first and second models include only independent variables for economic development and economic equality, while the other three models include controls. The fourth model uses robust standard errors, while the fifth is run with a zero-inflated negative binominal regression model.

The Model variable, though pointing in the expected direction, achieves only minimal statistical significance ($p < .1$) in Models 3 and 5 and fails to achieve any significance in Model 4. Model villages do capture some, but not overwhelming, attention from higher authorities. This implies that government inspections, contrary to my theory, are not heavily based on whether a village is a model or not. This surprising finding shows that the Chinese government devotes primary attention not to its branded models but rather to villages of other characteristics. That

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97 Due to the overdispersed distribution of the dependent variable—the unconditional mean of Inspections is lower than its variance (mean = 2.94 < variance = 16.37)—a Poisson model would not be appropriate for this analysis. In spite of the overwhelming number of zeros in the dependent variable, I also decline to use a zero-inflated negative binomial (ZINB) model because the dependent variable is measured as the average number of higher-government visits in 1999–2002. A zero value of the dependent variable does not mean zero inspections in that village in the past three years. It is very likely that the dependent variable is 0 because that village received one or two inspections in the past three years, instead of three or more. A ZINB model would be appropriate if a sizeable portion of villages in the dataset sample could not attract any government inspections while the rest of the villages could, but “chose” not to. I would adopt a ZINB model if I could be certain that the zero values actually mean “no inspection at all.” In the current case, that is not justified. But just to make sure, I conducted a robustness check with the zero-negative binomial model as well (Model 5 in Table 2).
Chinese government inspections do not acutely respond to model villages suggests that officials make strategic inspection decisions. As these villages have received considerable attention from the government already, they may no longer remain its central focus. This finding can also speak to the limited significance of these model villages as a whole. Labelling a village a model village could be a mere administrative chore, with little political significance.

Table 2. Negative Binomial Regression Analysis of Higher Government Inspections to Chinese Villages. (Dependent Variable: Number of Inspections per Year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model1</th>
<th>Model2</th>
<th>Model3</th>
<th>Model4 Robust SE</th>
<th>Model5 Zero-Inflated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>0.173**</td>
<td>0.155*</td>
<td>0.155</td>
<td>0.188*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment</td>
<td>0.396***</td>
<td>0.355***</td>
<td>0.355***</td>
<td>0.324***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income per capita</td>
<td>-0.095*</td>
<td>-0.118**</td>
<td>-0.118*</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isquare</td>
<td>0.014***</td>
<td>0.014***</td>
<td>0.014***</td>
<td>0.012**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethn</td>
<td>0.673***</td>
<td>0.701***</td>
<td>0.675***</td>
<td>0.675***</td>
<td>0.684***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub</td>
<td>-0.142</td>
<td>-0.065</td>
<td>-0.124</td>
<td>-0.124</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>-0.007***</td>
<td>-0.007***</td>
<td>-0.007***</td>
<td>-0.007***</td>
<td>-0.007***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popu</td>
<td>0.072*</td>
<td>0.081**</td>
<td>0.083**</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>0.086*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCPmem</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demo</td>
<td>0.473***</td>
<td>0.481***</td>
<td>0.485***</td>
<td>0.485***</td>
<td>0.495***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disas</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxre</td>
<td>-0.374***</td>
<td>-0.269***</td>
<td>-0.322***</td>
<td>-0.322***</td>
<td>-0.331***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table entries are Negative Binomial Regression Estimates of Inspection Decisions of the Chinese Government. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.
By contrast, the other independent variable for economic development, Investment, achieves positive, statistical significance ($p < .01$) in all models. This is strong evidence that a local government’s ability to attract investment is a highly salient concern in the government’s decision on where to inspect. As shown in Figure 2, villages that have outside investment(s) consistently experience more inspections than villages without outside investment. That is, a village with investment is generally predicted to experience one more inspection per year than one without such investments, holding all other variables constant. The findings on these two independent variables demonstrate that the Chinese government follows a pragmatic approach in conducting inspections. While model villages may be significant political projects, they do not necessarily attract government inspections. Instead, the Chinese government devotes its attention to villages where investments occur. After all, economic growth is, to a large extent, what ultimately determines the political careers of government officials and buys popular consent.

**Figure 3. Predicted Number of Inspections per Year by Village Investment**

The effect of \textit{Income per capita} on the frequency of inspections has statistical significance, but its effect is negative, contrary to what the theory predicts. However, the fact that coefficients for $I_{square}$ are statistically significant tells us that there is a significant and nonlinear relationship between \textit{Income per capita} and inspections. The negative sign of \textit{Income per capita} and the positive sign of $I_{square}$ imply that the relationship between income and inspections is nonlinear. As a village gets richer, it receives fewer inspections. To better capture this relationship between inspections and village economic development, I computed the predicted values of inspections by village income per capita (Figure 4).

\textbf{Figure 4. Predicted Number of Inspections per Year by Village Income Level}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4.png}
\end{figure}


All else being equal, as the annual income per capita of a village increases from RMB 1,000 (about US$ 145) to RMB 50,000 (about US$ 7,250), the number of inspections it receives drops from 3.8 to 0.01 per year. This suggests that Chinese government inspections do focus on impoverished
regions. Though nonlinear, village income levels have a significant but negative impact on
government inspections. This finding does not support my hypothesis that the Chinese government
tends to inspect villages at the two economic extremes. It tends to inspect only the poor ones.

This tells us that the political label of “model village” does not necessarily correlate with
the amount of attention the government devotes to it. Political labelling can simply be a result of
ideological expression of the CCP that does not carry substantial weight in the Party's actual
governance on the ground. This could further suggest that many government projects in China,
such as New Village Construction (Xinnongcun Jianshe),98 can be seen as endeavors to express
the CCP’s political ideology and to create labor-intensive jobs while the Party’s governing focus
is actually placed elsewhere, such as on the issues of generating investment and reducing income
inequality.

Another puzzle from this analysis is that Chinese government inspections do not
necessarily concentrate on rich villages. The analysis shows that inspections total almost zero as
per capita income levels rise above RMB 50,000 (about US$ 7,250), and the frequency of
inspections never bounces back as income level continues to rise. This lends further evidence to
the notion that the Chinese government is guided by pragmatism to encourage economic growth
and bridge income inequality. Government officials are not simply money predators who only
inspect wealthy villages.

A number of controls are also strong predictors of government inspections. The first
positive, statistically significant control variable is Ethn, implying that an ethnic minority village
is more likely to be inspected than a non-ethnic minority village. That is, ethnic minority villages
are predicted to see 2.5 more inspections per year than non-ethnic minority villages, holding other

98 Zhuo, Zhengyuan, Li Xiaoyun, and Wang Xiuqing. Zhongguo shehui zhuyi xinnongcun jianshe yanjiu [Research
variables constant. This confirms my initial expectation that the Chinese government places special attention on the possibility of social instability caused by ethnic tensions and conflicts. I also find that village distance to county government matters: distance makes inspections harder for higher levels of government, and villages farther from the county government see fewer inspections. A village that is 1 km (about 0.62 miles) from the county government is expected to experience 1.19 more inspections per year than a village that is 160 km (about 100 miles) away, holding all other variables constant.

Popu also achieves statistical significance ($p < .05$) in Models 2 and 3 but is not significant in other models. This represents a weak indication that the CCP is more attentive to villages with larger populations. Demo and Taxre are also significant indicators of government inspections. Demo has a positive and statistically significant effect on government inspections, indicating that villages that have held democratic elections are more likely to be inspected. That is, a village that has held competitive elections is predicted to see one more inspection per year than a village that has not, with all other variables held constant. Holding democratic elections is both important and energy-consuming. Higher-level governments monitor democratic processes through inspections. Another explanation for this finding is that higher levels of government fear potential social disturbances associated with democratic elections. This could also cast doubt on the degree of independence of Chinese rural elections, as the higher levels of government could make their presence in villages overwhelming.

Taxre has a negative and statistically significant effect on government inspections throughout the models. Villages that have had tax reform are less likely to be inspected than those that have not. That is, post-tax villages are predicted to see almost one inspection less per year than villages where tax reform has not yet occurred, holding all other variables constant. This, to some
extent, confirms scholars’ concern for the decay of village governance caused by the recent tax reforms in 2002.

Somewhat surprising is the lack of effect of the control variables Sub, CCPmem, and Disas. Whether a village is a suburb of a large or medium-sized city does not affect the frequency of inspections it receives. The absence of association between Sub and Inspections suggests that most inspections are perhaps performed by county governments, not by municipal or provincial government officials. If the county is the primary level of government that sends inspections, then a village’s location in a suburb of a large or medium-sized city would not affect the frequency with which it receives inspections. Further empirical information is needed to confirm this conclusion. The absence of a significant relationship between CCPmem and inspections suggests that the presence of more CCP members in a village has no effect on higher governments’ decisions to send inspections. This confirms the finding by previous scholars that CCP membership does not attract government responsiveness. The CCP, in other words, does not act in accordance with where its members reside, perhaps due to limited influence of village CCP members in buying popular legitimacy for the Party. Disas does not achieve significance either. This might be a function of the small number of significant disasters, such as the Wenchuan earthquake (Wenchuan dizhen), in the sample. Government inspectors do not frequent a village unless it suffers from significant natural disasters.

2.6 Robustness Checks

Robustness checks were performed to detect any potential methodological errors. The Wald test allows me to test the joint significance of certain explanatory variables in accounting for

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99 The data used in this study do not distinguish inspections by which specific level of government is conducting them. The only information available is that they are all conducted by county-level-or-higher governments.

the dependent variable. The Wald test reveals that the entire model is making a significant contribution in explaining government inspections. In Table 2, I also include a zero-inflated negative binomial regression model to account for latent zeroes in the dependent variable that negative binomial regression fails to capture. As shown, the results of Model 5 do not significantly vary from the other models. I also included Model 4, with robust standard errors, in order to detect any model misspecifications. The results do not differ much from Model 3, with classic standard errors, suggesting that Model 3 is a satisfactory model specification for the current analysis.\textsuperscript{101} Some would argue that the dataset used in this project is too outdated for contemporary Chinese politics, and that a snapshot of inspections in 2002 cannot convince us that such a pattern endures after 2002, the Jiang era, into those of his successors.

To empirically address this concern, I conduct another robustness check marshalling a more recent version of the CHIP dataset, CHIP 2007.\textsuperscript{102} Unfortunately, this later dataset is missing some control variables, though not ones extremely important for this paper. CHIP 2007 includes all the variables in the models of this paper except \textit{Taxre}, \textit{Ethn}, and \textit{CCPmem}. \textit{Taxre} is understandably absent in this dataset because tax reform was completed in 2003. The absence of \textit{Ethn} and \textit{CCPmem} does not seriously affect the robustness check because these two variables are fairly constant over time. Ethnic demographics and CCP membership, although changeable, do not radically shift over a few years. Thus, this is an imperfect but helpful and reliable robustness check on how government inspections respond to economic development in Chinese villages. Results using the updated dataset did not significantly differ from the reported findings.


\textsuperscript{102} CHIP 2007: Data obtained from China Institute for Income Distribution, Beijing, 2007, \url{goo.gl/1TP1v5}, accessed October 2015.
The findings on inspections in Jiang’s era, though not yet verified by rigorous empirical examination, appear to be generalizable to that of later leaders. The abiding position of the CCP’s ideology to serve its people and remain well connected with its grassroots support base prescribes that inspections in China are unlikely to deviate from the current track of elevating the poor and developing the economy. If there has been any change in this strategy by later leaders, it is perhaps to reinforce and entrench this trend that began in Jiang’s era. For instance, this current study finds that inspections are mostly likely to happen in impoverished villages in 2002. However, Xi’s poverty-relief campaign, capturing nationwide if not worldwide attention, set in motion a large number of inspections for this purpose. His personal inspection of Yuangudui certainly inaugurated nationwide inspection tours by lower-level officials.\textsuperscript{103} Xi’s inspection patterns thus do not appear to diverge from that of his predecessors, especially in terms of where inspections occur.

2.7 Conclusion

In this study, I have argued that the Chinese government makes strategic inspection decisions to ensure social stability and maintain its ruling legitimacy. To accomplish this goal, the government has to take into account potentially destabilizing social and economic factors, and take action accordingly to tackle these factors. One of the ways the Chinese government responds to these destabilizing factors is to conduct spontaneous inspections of local villages without prior notification. This paper thus both theoretically and empirically assesses the relationship between government inspections and village economic development.

The empirical analysis in this paper suggests that Chinese government inspections are oriented toward economic development and poverty relief. As China strives to generate a world-

\textsuperscript{103} Interview with the author.
power economy, it has also been concerned with growing inequality. This paper has revealed that the Chinese government is acutely responsive to villages endowed with development potential. Particularly, villages that house investment projects attract the most government inspections. The Chinese government is also responsive to village income levels. Although the empirical findings do not bear out my hypothesis that villages at the two extremes of economic development see the most inspections, they do suggest that the Chinese government conducts more inspections in impoverished villages.

In the face of emerging challenges such as protests and other forms of social conflict, central authorities still strive to develop a structural strategy for redistribution to systematically mitigate the destabilizing effect that income inequality brings to society. The CCP does demonstrate its strategy to substantively carry out redistribution policies on a national scale by more frequently inspecting poor villages. It could be that Chinese government inspections have patterns that this paper has failed to observe. This study at least hints to us that Chinese government inspections have succeeded in taking into account both the development requirements and the redistribution needs overwhelmingly nested in its rural villages.

I also conclude from the empirical evidence that the Chinese government is determined, as described in its official documents, to facilitate prosperity for villages with development potential, and to lift up poor villages by strategically allocating administrative resources, such as inspections. The Chinese government does seem to adopt a structural and strategic plan for bridging the income gap between rich and poor villages. Government inspections are rather holistic, casting their scope at the national level. The Chinese government is primarily interested in getting a few villages rich “first” by collectively investing in these villages. But at the same time, officials have devoted considerable attention to impoverished villages.
Perhaps the CCP’s recent redistribution platform under the Xi–Li administration has brought more fundamental changes to government inspection patterns. Thus, it remains an empirical question for future research how inspections have changed in their format and frequency. With little extant research on Chinese government inspections, a large scholarly vacuum is left for future studies to fill. Specifically, it would be important to distinguish patterns of inspections conducted by different levels of government. Inspections by the central government certainly project a different degree of influence from those by lower governments. Another direction future research can take is to discover the impacts of these inspections. What effects might government inspections have on village governance, more specifically, villager participation and public goods provision?
CHAPTER 3
COME ON: CHINESE GOVERNMENT INSPECTIONS AND PEASANT MOBILIZATION

3.1 Introduction

Mass mobilization carries immense power to cause radical political and cultural changes. Mobilized citizens bring to supported regimes tremendous resources to outbid political rivals and to reinforce the regimes’ rule. Once dissatisfied, however, a mobilized population can turn the tides against a regime and offer it no legitimacy to stay in power. Just as the ancient Chinese philosopher, Xunzi, well put it: while water upholds a boat, it can also capsize it (shuineng caizhou, yineng fuzhou).

The CCP came to power in 1949 chiefly because it mobilized support from millions of poor peasants in rural China that the Kuomintang (the Chinese Nationalist Party) had largely marginalized. Acutely aware of the importance of peasant mobilization, the CCP has long sought to mobilize peasants into controlled forms of political participation in the past few decades. Among others, government inspection is one of these techniques for the regime to connect with the grassroots\textsuperscript{104} and rally them behind the party. In Chinese government inspections, higher officials visit localities to monitor policy implementation and ensure social stability.\textsuperscript{105} Inspections provide peasants, as well as local officials, with valuable opportunities to interact with higher officials in person.

The question motivating this paper is how Chinese government inspections affect peasant mobilization. Understanding the relationship between government inspections and peasant mobilization is important primarily because it is an essential component to the development of state-society relations in China. As one of the most direct avenues to touch base with village

\textsuperscript{104} Xi Jinrui, field notes in northwest China, 15 June 2016.
\textsuperscript{105} Xi, 15 June 2016
politics, government inspections can exert an immediate influence on village affairs. The extent to which peasant mobilization is a function of government inspections demonstrates the efficacy of government inspections in weathering rural politics. Thus, inspections partially measure the degree to which village politics is autonomous from state manipulation.

In addition, studying how inspections impact peasant mobilization lends useful policy recommendations. The Chinese government can fashion inspections in patterns that maximize their utility in enhancing the regime’s legitimacy among the peasants. For example, instead of focusing only on villages that are economically prosperous, the state can probably devote more inspection tours to poor villages to achieve more economic equality.

As an attempt to shed light on one key element of Chinese state-society relations in general and peasant mobilization in particular, this study examines the ways in which Chinese government inspections affect Chinese peasant mobilization in village politics. Specifically, I argue that peasant mobilization is a function of Chinese government inspections in that, first, inspections connect peasants more intimately to higher officials, making them feel important; second, inspections push local officials to be more responsive to peasants so that the latter can ask questions and petition their causes at greater convenience; and third, inspections facilitate public goods provision and peasants become more interested in interacting with local officials to obtain their share. This argument obtains strong empirical support from the analysis of survey data, the Chinese Household Income Project (CHIP) (2002) dataset.

To identify the relationship between inspections and peasant mobilization, this paper proceeds as follows: First, after reviewing the received literature on Chinese mobilization, I will illustrate how this project complements the current literature by looking into peasant mobilization initiated and organized by the Chinese government through inspections. This kind of mobilization
has been largely overlooked in previous research on China. A historic analysis of the Chinese inspection system then leads to the second part of this paper where I spell out in details the causal logic between inspections and peasant mobilization. Peasants become more mobilized upon inspections because they feel more emotionally connected to higher officials and local officials become more responsive to them as well. Third, I subject the theoretical arguments of this paper to empirical tests and the findings are thereafter presented. Lastly, I discuss conclusions based on the data analysis with theoretical and practical implications.

3.2 Theory

State-led mobilization, as opposed to voluntary mobilization, usually unfolds in a controlled fashion that best serves the regime’s ruling interest. One good example of voluntary mobilization in China is protest, the form of mobilization perhaps least desired by the Chinese regime. According to a report by Business Insider, labour unrests alone in China have increased almost ten times from 185 cases in 2011 to 2,944 in 2015. By contrast, a classic example of state-led mobilization in China would be Chairman Mao’s Great Leap Forward (1958-1960) where the masses were mobilized by the regime to achieve unrealistic economic and political goals. To catch up with Great Britain’s industrialization in an extremely short timeframe of fifteen years, China in 1950s ventured to force itself to “leap” into industrialization by abandoning essential agricultural sectors and hording its massive labour force to fields and factories of steel production. This man-made “leap” utterly shattered China’s basic economic fabric, leading to a nationwide famine and excessive fatalities.

Existing literature, however, does not adequately address how the regime initiates this type of state-led mobilization. Particularly, few scholars have looked into the mechanisms by which the Chinese government orchestrates state-led mobilization. While voluntary mobilization by citizens’ own volition is important and raises concern to the regime, state-mobilization is of no less significance in moderating rising social conflicts, correcting prevalent administrative malfeasance and ultimately improving the regime’s governance. The current project attempts to evaluate how the Chinese government mobilizes peasants through inspections. Inspections allow Chinese authorities to most directly penetrate into local politics and incite desired changes.

Chinese government inspections are conducted for different purposes. While most inspections happen to enforce discipline among officials, others set out to improve the well-being of the Chinese citizens. The first category of inspections are internal inspections, as they are mainly used to maintain unity and solidarity within the CCP itself. Internal inspections are conducted by a designated department on a regular and lawful basis.

The Chinese Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCCDI), established in 1930s, is one of the most important party agencies for internal inspections, to crack down corruption in particular. The most recent example is the nation-wide anti-corruption campaign staged by the new Xi-Li administration in 2013. According to Youwei, this campaign has tried more than 70 provincial level officials, in contrast to only three in the past three decades. The Chinese government has ordered that auditing inspections be deployed nationwide. Another government agency that conducts internal inspections is the Supreme People’s Procuratorate of the People’s

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Republic of China (SPP-PRC). While CCCDI is an agency internal to the party and responsible for “finding faults” of corrupted party members, the SPP-PRC, part of the state judiciary, offers official legal support to try officials found guilty of corruption. Besides the judiciary function of SPP, it also performs some part of disciplinary inspections on government officials.

The central focus of this study, however, is the second category of inspections--external inspections. They are external because the target of these inspections is not internal members of the Party but mostly the mass public. While an official from the central government in Beijing arriving to audit a township government is a good example of internal inspection, a government official visiting a village in the isolated region in southern China to inquire into peasants’ welfare is an external inspection.

While internal inspection is an indispensable mechanism for the CCP to keep the party together, external inspection is also vital to the CCP to foster a positive public image. In contrast to internal inspections, conducting external inspections involves sophisticated political calculations. External inspections do not occur in all villages. Instead, they take place where the regime’s interests are best served. For instance, higher officials may pay a strategic visit to the most developed and well-governed village under their jurisdiction to demonstrate the competence of the administration, while at the same time they may inspect a particularly impoverished village to reflect their philanthropic ideals.

External inspections have not yet been established as a formal institution. There are few set rules on the frequency, destination, or purpose of these inspections. Conducted on an almost spontaneous basis and motivated by the regime’s political agenda, government inspections are a sensitive indicator of the priorities of the Chinese regime. Where this type of inspections occurs often signals a particular focus of the Chinese government. For instance, Deng Xiaoping’s famous
inspection to the southeast in 1992, often called “Speech in the South (nanxun jianghua)” was a clear signal that China was adhering to the Reform and Opening Up policy promulgated 14 years ago, despite mounting political opposition among the party leadership. The literature has not distinguished external inspections from internal inspections and certainly has yet to closely examine external inspection itself.

External Chinese government inspections have its long historic background. Every emperor since Qin also conducted personal inspection visits to localities. Particularly, Emperor Kang Xi (1654-1722) was among the most diligent emperors in conducting inspections. Emperor Kang gathered information of his administration through personal tours around China. While inspections serve important functions for ancient Chinese emperors to improve their governance, inspections, more often than not, became channels for these royal princes to escape from constraining palatial lives. As noted by Chang (2005), many emperors find personal inspections a liberating but indulging experience. Many of them plunged into sexual promiscuity, which eventually led to the downfall of their kingdoms.

In contemporary China, Mao was a staunch advocate for party leaders to research rural areas through inspections, a form more like scholarly field research. In a historic township called Caixi Township (caixi xiang) in 1930s, Fujian Province, Mao humbled himself to visit local peasants and to inquire about their lives. He argued that party leaders should not act like prestigious

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112 However, inspections by Kang has nothing to do with the popular, fictional Chinese TV show, “Kangxi huangdi weifu sifang ji” [Anonymous Personal Visits by Emperor Kang]; see also Chang, Jianhua. “Kangxi ‘weifusifang’ de lishi zhengxiang” [The Historic Truth of Anonymous Personal Inspections by Kangxi] Tianjin Daily. 2005.
bureaucrats who distance from the grassroots while expecting popular support. Instead, he insisted that the party should maintain a humble poster to serve the people\textsuperscript{113}.

Approximately at the same time in 1925, the Fourth CCP National Congress in Shanghai laid the foundation of the CCP’s long-term strategy of deriving power from the grassroots\textsuperscript{114}. The ideology of Mass Line (\textit{qunzhong luxian}) that the CCP should engage and mobilize the proletariats for revolutionary success was formally written into the Party’s statutes at the Eighth CCP National Congress.

Connecting with Grassroots (\textit{lianxi qunzhong}) has been depicted by the CCP as a critical element of mobilization strategy that entailed its victory in the Civil War against the Kuomingtang following World War II. While the Kuomingtang relied on formal military to battle the CCP, they devoted less resources to grassroots organizations among peasants. By contrast, the CCP strategy was directed at “winning the hearts and minds” of the Chinese people, especially in rural areas, by building extensive grassroots organizations, making themselves available to the people, addressing their needs and listening to their grievances.

In the 1970s, Party Secretary of Lankao County (\textit{lankao xian}) in Henan Province, Jiao Yulu, was lauded nationwide for his exemplary outreach to the grassroots through inspections. He spent most of his time with peasants and sought to most effectively address their concerns in his capacity. As one of the most fervent followers of Mao, he carried Mao’s ideology pamphlets wherever he went. As he liked to quote Mao’s words, “There is no right of speech without research (of the grassroots) (\textit{meiyou tiaocha jiumei youfa yanquan}).” Every Chinese president since 1990 has

\textsuperscript{113} Liu, Jiahe. “Maozedong caixixiang diaocha dui miqie lianxi qunzhong de zhongyao zhishi” [The Important Instruction by Mao Zedong during Inspection to Caixi Township on Closely Connecting to the Grassroots], \textit{Fujian dangshi yuekan}, 10 (2015): 020

visited Lankao to remember his exemplary embodiment of connecting to the grassroots by being physically among them. In his recent visit to Lankao County in 2014, President Xi Jinping again stressed the importance of government officials reaching grassroots through inspections\textsuperscript{115}.

History thus bears witness to Chinese government inspections as one of the most important governing tactics for the CCP to achieve a wide range of administrative objectives. Inspections were and still are one of the most direct ways for the CCP to mobilize the people and embed its core ideology in local governance. Inspections have assumed such a prominent position in Chinese politics that it has, to a certain extent, become a norm for every chief official at all levels of the Chinese government to appear at localities to assess local society.

The above historical account of government inspections thus introduces the context in which inspections demonstrate their visible impact on peasants’ mobilization. First, inspections mobilize peasants by enhancing peasants’ political awareness. Inspection officials arriving at villages usually survey the living conditions of peasants through talking to local residents and show, at least on the surface, their concern about peasants’ well-being. Most Chinese peasants in remote villages stay politically distant. Peasants living in an insulated environment with relative economic independence (most of the villages rely on farming) come in more direct contact with the government when inspection happens in their village. While peasants may still interact with the government regardless of whether inspections occur, their awareness of the importance of the government is substantiated by inspections, as inspections make known to the peasants that government actions can significantly impact their lives.

\textsuperscript{115} Xinhua News, “Zhongyang yaoqiu renzhen xuexi Guanche xijinping lankao diaoyan zhidao jiaoyu shijian huodong zhongyao jianghua jingshen” [The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Decrees A Careful Study and Enforcement of the Spirit in Xijinping’s Speech during His Lankao Tour for Inspection, Education and Instruction], 4 March 2014, accessed 15 Oct 2016, goo.gl/pdXKyD.
Second, inspections increase mobilization because they increase peasants’ political efficacy. Inspections buttress peasants’ political efficacy by making peasants feel important to the regime. Political efficacy refers to the extent to which people believe their actions affect change to the political outcome and it is a powerful predictor of political mobilization in China\textsuperscript{116}. Studies consistently show that political efficacy is positively related to non-voting mobilization, such as paying attention to village affairs and signing petitions to higher levels of government\textsuperscript{117}. People with higher political efficacy are more likely to get involved in more pragmatic administrative activities. Twenty out of the total twenty-two Chinese college students I interviewed during field work argue that one of the effects of inspections is that they make Chinese villagers feel more important and cared for by the government. As these students are all from rural backgrounds and did not come to cities until college, their opinions are good reflections of their parents’, and perhaps even of the entire rural population. In separate interviews with other peasants, I found that they have almost unanimously expressed their hope that higher officials would come and listen to local concerns. Facing the cameras, a Chinese peasant called Chen Zeping reflected on the Chinese President Xi Jinping’s recent visit to his house, “It is our great honor to receive the General Secretary……I am thankful for the Party Central Committee\textsuperscript{118}.”

Similarly, peasants become more engaged with rural politics simply because the state becomes more available and responsive. Under regular circumstances, Chinese peasants I have


interviewed during field work generally find it hard to get in touch with higher officials. “I hope that some higher officials would come and look at the issues here,” one peasant thus casts his hope in inspections to improve the local situation. As the hierarchical political system in China prescribes that lower level officials have to support and entourage superiors who are conducting inspections, inspections effectively improve village governance by making lower level officials, as well as inspecting officials, more available to peasants than otherwise. Thus, inspections bring the otherwise unreachable higher government officials to the doorsteps of the peasants, making it easier for peasants to appeal their grievances. Peasants, as a result, become more active in seeking advices from village leaders.

Third, inspections increase peasant mobilization in the administrative sense. Peasants become more mobilized in village politics just to receive certain goods and benefits that come with inspections. Inspections facilitate provision of public goods mainly through curtailing corruption by local officials. The village leaders in my interviews all agree that one of the benefits that inspections bring to villages is increased public goods. These public goods can be funded either by the central government or local government. The central government may decide to budget certain relief funds to the visited village if that fund falls out of the responsibility of the local government. One of the most frequent questions that higher officials ask rural peasants during inspections is whether they have received the funds that the central government has designated to that village. Learning about the impending inspection, local officials are alerted to cease

120 For example, a look at news reports regarding inspection tours of the Chinese President Xi Jinping shows that Xi is highly concerned with well-being of rural peasants, part of which has to do with whether state funds or pensions have arrived at these designated pockets.
previous corruption behaviors, if any, and start delivering previously withheld public goods (including funds, tax-cut, agricultural equipment) more faithfully to the right hands.\footnote{You, Guangfu. “Zhongguo xianzhengfu xingzheng jiandu: guancha yu sikao” [Administrative Checks and Balances of Chinese County-level Governments: Observation and Thoughts], (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2012), 97}

To claim the increased amount of public goods, individual peasants have to interact more with village leaders to obtain signatures and turn in paper works. They are thus more mobilized in politics, not necessarily due to their heartfelt affection for the government affairs, but due to the fact that they have to interact with village leaders or even higher officials to acquire their share of the public goods that would otherwise not arrive had inspections not occurred. They have to consult with village leaders in order to obtain information on certain policies, on how to fill out application forms, how to direct deposit government pension into their personal account and so forth.

In addition to passive engagement with the government to receive benefits generated by inspections, peasants also proactively engage in politics when they see potential opportunities afforded by inspections to gain personal benefits. Establishing personal relationships with inspection officials is important for gaining personal favor in various forms of village politics, such as to be selected as a pension household (dibao hu). Other peasants make purposeful efforts to engage in village politics, in light of more frequent government inspections, in order to have closer interactions with higher officials who descend to villages for inspections.

Lastly, increased peasant mobilization may be a function of higher government manipulation. Coerced mobilization becomes likely when, for instance, the village government pushes unwilling peasants to attend village meetings where the inspected official will deliver a speech. Another peculiar example for forced mobilization is during construction of public projects. For instance, in 2003, the Chinese central government regulated that the entire China be mobilized...
for forestation of decertified lands. It sets the goal of 23 percent of reforestation by 2020\textsuperscript{122}. This policy soon was implemented in the northwest arid regions of China. Many peasants were told to participate in these labour-intensive projects without consent.

\textit{Hypothesis: Chinese government inspections increase peasant mobilization.}

3.3 Research Design

Dataset used for the empirical tests is Chinese Household Income Project (CHIP) 2002\textsuperscript{123}. This dataset contains information for Chinese peasants’ mobilization behaviors from 961 randomly selected villages across China in the year 2002. In addition to variables on peasants’ mobilization behaviors, the dataset also offers variables on individual characteristics, including peasants’ age, education, experience and so forth.

There are four dependent variables in the empirical analysis: \textit{Seeking}, \textit{Public Meeting}, \textit{Network} and \textit{Attention}. \textit{Seeking} measures the number of times a villager sought advices from village leaders per year; \textit{Public Meeting} measures the number of times that a villager has attended public meetings per year; \textit{Network} measures the number of times per year a villager has tried to build connections with village leaders by inviting them for dinner and lastly, \textit{Attention} measures the number of times a villager pays attention to village publication boards.

Instead of combining these four variables into one, I examine each in separate models, because the weight of each kind of mobilization differs. While seeking village leaders for advices and information may be the most proactive form of mobilization, attending village meetings might happen just because of mandatory attendance. Alternatively, paying attention to information

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\textsuperscript{123} Li Shi, Chinese Household Income Project, 2002, ICPSR21741-v1, (Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2009), accessed 15 October, 2016, goo.gl/eyv8HS.
boards is the easiest form of mobilization. Computation of the correlation between the four modes of mobilization shows that peasants’ mobilization in these four forms are not highly correlated, implying that a peasant reluctant in attending public meetings can be, by contrast, very active in seeking advice from village leaders and participating in other forms of mobilization.

The independent variable and controls for evaluating each dependent variable are essentially the same. The independent variable in this study is *Inspection*, the number of inspections that arrive at a peasant’s village per year. Value of this variable ranges from zero to fifty. Most of Chinese villages receive no more than ten government inspections per year. Ninety-six percent of them receive less than (including) ten inspections per year while only an extremely small number (.06 percent) of villages attract the most inspections, fifty per year (see Table 3).

The first control variable, *Democratic Value*, measures the importance a peasant attaches to village democratic elections. Peasants with more democratic consciousness might try to effect change to the status quo by actively participating in village affairs more. Alternatively, those who embrace democratic values could perhaps be discouraged by the low efficacy of these elections, as critics point out, Chinese rural election could be simply perfunctory. These peasants may, as a result, be less likely to be mobilized. Respondents were asked to rank how important they think democratic elections are from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning the least important and 5 the most important. The control variable, *Democratic Competitiveness*, accounts for the effect that democratic elections have on peasant mobilization. Peasants in villages that have held competitive elections may behave differently from their counterparts in villages of no competitive election. Democratic elections affect the outlook of village politics by readjusting power distribution among village leaders, which in turn leads to villagers’ differential willingness in participating in village affairs.

This variable is coded as 1 if a village has held competitive elections and 0 otherwise.
Government Pension controls for the amount of subsidies that each household receives from the Chinese government. Intuitively, those who receive more government pensions are likely to be more active in village affairs to contact village officials in order to receive their goods and benefits. Income is an important control variable as well in that peasants from rich households act differently in politics from their counterparts from poor households. Relative Income measures individuals’ assessment of their ranking amongst their fellow peasants. Respondents were asked to evaluate themselves in terms of their income standing relative to their fellow villagers, with 5 implying that the respondent feels that his (her) household is much better off compared to other households and 1 the least. Relative income is a proxy for relative deprivation. Peasants feeling deprived could be more active in participating in village affairs to get their share.

The next two control variables are Village Leaders and Model Village. Village Leaders refers to the total number of village leaders in a village. This control variable is essential in that peasants’ mobilization can be a function of how available the village officials are to peasants. More village leaders make village governance more efficient and peasants, consequently, participate more. The control variable, Model Village, accounts for how differently peasants in model villages politically act than their counterparts in non-model villages. A village is identified as a model village when the Chinese government selects it as an example of development to other villages.

Isolation is a control variable to account for the effect that geographical isolation has on peasant mobilization. It is likely that peasants in extremely isolated regions are in more desperate pursuit of change of the status quo and, as a result, they are more apt to be mobilized. It could also be the opposite that isolation has disenfranchised this group of peasants such that they are no longer involved in politics. Proxy for this variable is the duration of time since the village first had access
to electricity. For a long time, many isolated villages in China did not have basic utilities, such as electricity, until very late into the twenty-first century. The time that a village has had access to electricity is a reasonable measure of its isolation. The later it accessed electricity, the more isolated it is. Lastly, I include control for individual level characteristics: age, education, ethnicity, gender, marital status, party member, and migrating experience for each peasant.

3.4 Analysis

The unit of analysis is peasant. The number of observations centers around 5,000 but slightly varies across the models due to missing data. All dependent variables have discrete, count values, as well as excessive zero values (see Table 3). The excessive number of zeros in the dependent variables raises the concern that there might be a sizeable portion of peasants who never had any opportunity to participate in village politics in any form. These peasants should not be treated the same as peasants who do have a chance to participate but instead choose not to. Excessive zero values of the dependent variables thus require researchers to separate the observations that can’t achieve non-zero values in the dependent variable from those that have the potential to do so but won’t. A regular count model, such as the Poisson model, is no longer appropriate for data in this structure, when the variance of the dependent variable is larger than the mean (over-dispersion).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seeking</td>
<td>6648</td>
<td>2.338999</td>
<td>8.016452</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Meeting</td>
<td>7624</td>
<td>5.055745</td>
<td>9.637189</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network</td>
<td>6194</td>
<td>1.47094</td>
<td>3.821237</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>7145</td>
<td>1.310707</td>
<td>2.37263</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspection</td>
<td>7857</td>
<td>2.942854</td>
<td>4.046027</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I use Zero-inflated Negative Binomial (ZINB) Regression model for the empirical analysis. Zero-inflated Negative Binomial Regression suits this analysis because it accounts for the difference between peasants who have no chance to be mobilized in any form and peasants who have some possibility of mobilization. Specifically, the ZINB model computes two processes: with the first one accounting for the probability of observations always achieving a zero value in the outcome variable using logit or probit models, and the second accounting for the probability of observations not always obtaining zero values using a Negative Binomial model. Afterward, the ZINB model computes the overall probabilities of observations achieving any value in the dependent variable124.

Figure 5. Predicted Times of Villagers Seeking Advice from Village Leaders


The most significant finding in the empirical analysis is that government inspections do have a statistically significant impact on most forms of peasant mobilization. The results lend strong support to the argument elaborated in this paper. As shown in Table 4, the relationship between the primary variable of interest, *Inspections*, has a significant positive relationship with three of the four forms of mobilization. It achieves significance at one percent level in the *Seeking* and *Public Meeting* models and five percent level in the *Attention* model, implying that the null hypothesis that government inspections have no effect on peasant mobilization can be rejected with ninety-five percent confidence for these three forms of mobilization. Substantively, when the frequency of inspections increases from zero to ten times per year, the times that a random peasant in that inspected village seek advice from village leaders increase from 1.3 to 2.3, holding other variables at their mean (see Figure 5). When inspections to a village increase from zero to once per year, the increase in times of peasant seeking advice from village leaders is .44, all else equal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variables:</th>
<th>Seeking</th>
<th>Public Meeting Network</th>
<th>Attention</th>
<th>Seeking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection</td>
<td>0.023***</td>
<td>0.025***</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.009**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic_values</td>
<td>0.087***</td>
<td>0.190***</td>
<td>0.146***</td>
<td>0.196***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>-0.531***</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>-0.151</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demo_competitiveness</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>-0.219**</td>
<td>-0.123**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.010***</td>
<td>0.011***</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative_income</td>
<td>0.144***</td>
<td>0.121***</td>
<td>0.192***</td>
<td>0.114***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village_leaders</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.011***</td>
<td>0.012***</td>
<td>-0.005***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Village</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.093*</td>
<td>-0.105</td>
<td>-0.083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>0.049***</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>0.046**</td>
<td>-0.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.244*</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.005***</td>
<td>-0.015***</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital</td>
<td>0.178</td>
<td>0.181**</td>
<td>-0.047</td>
<td>-0.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party_member</td>
<td>0.992***</td>
<td>1.046***</td>
<td>0.959***</td>
<td>0.389***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic</td>
<td>0.455***</td>
<td>0.445***</td>
<td>0.451***</td>
<td>-0.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.076**</td>
<td>0.133***</td>
<td>0.096***</td>
<td>0.105***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant</td>
<td>0.173**</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>-0.186**</td>
<td>-0.088*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_cons</td>
<td>0.921***</td>
<td>1.784***</td>
<td>2.173***</td>
<td>1.337***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
<td>-0.42</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>4752</td>
<td>5352</td>
<td>4495</td>
<td>5092</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table entries are Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial Regression estimates of Chinese Peasant Mobilization. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01


To verify how the effect of inspections on mobilization varies as inspections become more frequent, I compute the marginal effect of inspections conditional on inspection frequency (see Figure 6). It appears that government inspections have the most dramatic positive effect before it
first breaks the once-a-year frequency threshold. Once inspections have become more frequent than once a year, its marginal effect on mobilization remains stagnant at almost zero, except when inspection frequency is at eight times a year.

Figure 6. Marginal Effects of Inspections on Seeking


Likewise, inspection has a positive effect on peasants attending public meetings with significance at the same level. The coefficient for public meeting in model 2 appears to be statistically significant and is positive, suggesting that government inspections stimulate public meeting attendance of peasants. Figure 7 shows the predicted times of peasants’ mobilization in public meetings. Substantively, every increase of inspections to a village from once per year to fifty times per year, the highest frequency in the dataset, a peasant in this inspected village attends public meetings about ten times more, holding all other variables at their mean.
Lastly, inspections have a smaller effect on peasants’ attention to village information boards. Substantively, as inspections to a village increase from zero to fifty times per year, any random peasant in that village will pay attention to the information boards 7 times more, all else equal. The confidence intervals of the predicted values in Figure 9 become increasingly large as the times of inspections increase, suggesting that, as the number of villages that actually receive high volumes of inspections becomes smaller, we are less confident in the prediction.

Government inspection, however, does not achieve statistical significance in the Network model, showing that government inspections do not have any relationship with peasants’ networking practices. However, while Table 4 shows that inspections do not impose significant effect on peasant’s networking efforts, computation of predicted times of peasants networking conditional on inspections reveals a different story. Inspections do not appear to have a linear effect on Networking. The effect of inspections remains stagnant once inspection frequency passes five
times a year, as displayed in Figure 8. But prior to that threshold, government inspections seem to significantly increase peasants’ propensity to network with village leaders. Substantively, as government inspections increase from zero to five times per year, the times that a random peasant in that inspected village dine .6 times more with village leaders, all else equal.

Four models combined reveal an enduring characteristic of government inspections: they have the sharpest effect on peasant mobilization for the first few times inspections arrive. But after a certain threshold, additional inspections appear to have little additional effect on further peasant mobilization. This is probably due to the fact that repeated inspections have lost the kind of fresh appeal to village politics as at the beginning. It could also be a function of established peasant mobilization that leaves little room for further improvement.

However, the fact that the vast majority of villages do not attract inspections more frequent than ten times per year calls for caution in interpreting the results (see Table 3). This indicates that the effect of inspections, unless extremely frequent, on most Chinese villages will likely be modest.

Among all the controls, Democratic Value, Relative Income, Party Member, Ethnic have all achieved positive, statistically significant effect on all four forms of peasant mobilization. The survey question used to measure democratic values of a peasant is phrased as “How important are democratic elections to you?”

Democratic Value has a statistically significant, positive effect on all four forms of peasant mobilization, implying that those who value democracy are more likely to be mobilized by inspections. This is quite counter-intuitive, because democracy adherents are more likely to be disenchanted in face of authoritarian governance such as that in China. Tan Qingshan convincingly demonstrates how even supposedly democratic elections operate under heavy authoritarian influence of the Chinese regime\textsuperscript{125}.

It is likely that Chinese peasants hold a different understanding of democracy. They may simply regard democratic elections as nothing different from administrative chores, such as

attending a public meeting. If this is true, this finding simply means that peasants who put emphasis on village governance become more engaged in politics in light of government inspections. As a result, the practical significance of this variable remains limited.

*Relative Income* has a positive, statistically significant impact on all four forms of peasant mobilization as well. It shows that, the better off a peasant feels, relative to his fellow peasants, the more active that person will be in mobilization, reaching out to village leaders, either in seeking advice or in having dinner with officials. It remains unclear from the data who initiated the dining together of village leaders and peasants. The peasant, in addition, attends more public meetings and stays more in tune with the information boards. Those who consider themselves downcast in the society do not appear on the radar of this analysis as being mobilized by inspections.

*Party Member* also positively affects all four forms of peasant mobilization with statistical significance at one percent level, denoting that it is easier to mobilize peasants who are party members of the CCP. The CCP often quotes the phrase “*juewu*” (觉悟) (literary translation as epiphany but actually implies obedience) when persuading party members to sacrifice personal gains for the collective benefits of the party. For instance, in 2016, a college professor, also a party member, was asked to participate in extra-curriculum party training program. The party chief used the same word “*juewu*” to “instruct” her to comply with the order despite her full teaching load. They are the most active in seeking advice from village leaders, having dinner with them as well as attending public meetings and pay attention to information boards. This is partly due to the fact that CCP members are regularly educated by the CCP ideology to be forward-thinking and representative of the general populace. Their representation is visibly pronounced in all these four forms of peasant mobilization. Although it remains unknown how party members participate in

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126 Xi Jinrui, field notes in northwest China, 15 June 2016.
democratic elections, in petitions, and in protests, but this finding ascertains that party members, if no one else, are the most active in village politics.

Alternatively, this strong association between party membership and participation can be a result of how party-member peasants are selected in the first place. It is very rare for an ordinary peasant to become admitted into party. The CCP usually selects whose who are activists for the party and are able to shape village politics to directions desired by the party. Provided this background, it is understandable that party members are among the most responsive as inspections arrive. In addition, education strongly encourages Chinese peasants to mobilize. The more educated are more likely to engage in four forms of mobilization.

Besides the controls that have achieved high significance across four models, Ethnic also scores statistical significance at 1% level in the first three models. Belonging to an ethnic minority makes one more active in all forms of mobilization except the last one, paying attention to the information boards. The reason why ethnic minority people are more mobilized may be determined not by whether one comes from an ethnic minority but rather by the collective unity of the ethnic minority community. It could well be that most ethnic minority peasants dwell in the same village. In that case, ethnic minority community serves as a mobilization tool to peasants.

Furthermore, Democratic Competitiveness appears to discourage peasants from having dinner with village leaders and paying attention to information boards. The more democratic rural elections are, peasants are less likely to have dinner with (or network) with village leaders. This effect achieves statistical significance at 1 percent level. Having dinner with village leaders is a strong sign of pulling personal strings and competing for illegitimate gains in the Chinese Guanxi-culture. The results of this analysis show that democratic and competitive elections have a

127 Xi, 15 June 2016
128 Xi, 15 June 2016
negative impact on personalist behaviors, such as using personal connections, in village affairs. This suggests that competitive democratic practices are effective in constraining Guanxi-based political activities.

Congruent to the previous finding on networking with village leaders, democratic elections also significantly discourage peasants’ paying attention to information boards. Democratic elections provide incentives for village leaders to communicate more effectively with villagers that the latter do not have to reply on self-efforts to figure things out. Both findings on the effect of democratic elections confirm Melanie Manion’s finding that rural elections improve peasants’ trust in village leaders. This finding, however, goes contrary to Li Lianjiang’s finding that democratic elections in rural China encourage villagers to litigate to village leaders upon finding out faults of the township government.

Village Leaders also has a statistically significant, positive effect on two of the four dependent variables, indicating that, as the number of village leaders increases, peasants are more likely to participate in public meetings and having dinner with village leaders. This finding is intuitive in that more village leaders present peasants more opportunities to interact with them. The positive effect of village leaders on public meetings indicates that more village leaders simply possess more resource to convince peasants to attend these meetings or that more village leaders generate more village collective activities, like sports meetings, which further attract more attendance. By contrast, while more village leaders encourage peasants to attend public meetings and networking, it discourages peasants to keep up with information boards. This is perhaps because of the availability of village leaders that render reading information board unnecessary.

For most Chinese peasants, their low education makes it hard for them to read and write. Rather than paying attention to information boards, an undoubtedly taxing affair for those uneducated, peasants would much prefer to talk directly to village leaders.

To my surprise, village isolation actually has a positive effect on two forms of mobilization: seeking advice from village leaders and networking. Peasants in more isolated villages are more likely to reach out to their leaders for advice and are more likely to network with them. This effect makes sense when we take into account the information shortage in isolated villages. Comparing with villages located at more convenient areas, close to urban regions, geographically isolated villages run short of updated information that their urban counterparts enjoy. As a result, aspiring to be informed of government policies and information, peasants in isolated, remote villages are pushed to interact more with village leaders. My field work supports this empirical finding as well. During my interviews in China, I noticed that peasants at isolated, left-behind villages express a much stronger desire than those in better-off, more urbanized villages in seeing higher officials. Their most earnest expectation is for the higher authorities to take note of and transform the impoverished conditions of their village.

Lastly, the control variable, Migrant, has a negative, statistically significant effect on peasants networking with village leaders. Peasants who have stayed outside their hometown for more than one year are less likely to have dinner with village leaders. It is understandable because network for these migrant peasants at home has shrunk and cooled during their migrant time elsewhere. Despite that their permanent residence still remains in the villages, their chances, as well as interests, of partaking in distribution of public goods significantly decline. Married couples are found to attend public meetings more. This is perhaps due to the fact that married peasants
have settled down as families and therefore are more available for village collective activities. Marital status, however, does not have any effect on other three forms of mobilization.

Male peasants are found to be more active in seeking advice from village leaders than females, probably due to males are in most cases decision-makers. It therefore becomes their responsibility to consult for advices from their leaders. Old peasants are more active in public meetings and reading information boards, a function both of availability of time and seniority. Elderly have more time to attend public meetings and read publication board whereas younger peasants are mainly preoccupied with farm work and feeding the family. At the same time, older villagers likely hold weathering positions in the village. Their more active engagement with politics is thus unsurprising, as they are more seasoned and knowledgeable in village affairs. Elderly peasants, at the same time, appear to be less active in pursing networking with village leaders. Understandably, older peasants are less mobile and they are more likely to be reached by younger villagers for advices on farming, on interpersonal relationships.

3.5 Robustness Checks

In order to best ensure that the models conducted above are offering us accurate estimation of theoretical argument, I perform some robustness checks. First, I conducted the above four models with Negative Binominal Regression and Poisson, the results remain largely the same. To account for potential interaction effects between government inspections and democratic elections as well as tax reform, the model including interaction terms does not show statistical significance the interaction, affirming that the effect that government inspections have on peasant mobilization does not vary between villages that hold democratic elections and villages that do not, between villages that have experienced tax reform and those that have yet experienced.
In order to better control the village context where inspections happen, in addition to the context variables already included (Isolation and Model), I perform robustness check adding controls of village population and village economic development in the model. While both context variables do have statistical significance in the model, addition of these two controls do not significantly change the results of other variables in the model. Specifically, both village development and population appear to discourage peasant mobilization. More populous villages and more developed villages are harder to be mobilized. That peasants in larger villages are harder to be mobilized could perhaps be a reflection of collective action challenges prevalent in larger villages, while that villagers in richer villager are harder to be mobilized may be a sign of self-sufficiency of some households. Relying less on government subsidies and anti-poverty programs, better-off peasants are less likely to interact with village leaders.

3.6 Conclusion

This paper aims to elaborate the relationship between Chinese government inspections and peasant mobilization. I argue that Chinese government inspections provide essential momentum for state-controlled forms of peasant mobilization. This is so because government inspections make the Chinese peasants realize that politics is actually important, as most of them, for various reasons, remain politically distant. As peasants become increasingly aware that their government can drastically impact their well-being in both positive and negative ways, they will participate in politics more actively. Moreover, I contend that inspections increase peasant mobilization due to the fact that government inspections cause a higher inflow of public goods to the village. Chinese peasants have to interact more diligently with village leaders, as well as higher government officials, to access allotted goods. For instance, as these public goods arrive at the

131 Xi, 15 June 2016
village, peasants have to obtain more signatures and proper stamps to receive pensions and subsidies than otherwise. In addition, inspections usually place village governance under closer scrutiny of the higher government. Pressured local officials pay greater efforts to mobilize peasants for political affairs.

Empirical analysis lends strong evidence to this theory. I find that government inspection is indeed an important predictor of peasant mobilization. The more inspections a village receives, any random peasant in that village appears to be more mobilized in reaching out to the village leaders for advices, in attending public meetings, in dining with village officials and lastly in paying attention to information board.

Taking into account the authoritarian reality of Chinese politics where political affairs are mostly, if not all, conducted on a commandment basis by the CCP, this finding is not surprising at all. My field research reveals that Chinese peasants possess very limited autonomy from the government. Their political behavior is, as a result, largely dictated by the political agenda of the Chinese government. This project, once again, dismisses the optimistic projection by some scholars on the potential of democratic resurgence in rural China.

However, the empirical findings show that the effect of inspections on peasant mobilization has a diminishing return as inspections become more frequent. Inspections are the most effective in peasant mobilization at the first few times but become less effective once it’s more frequent than 10 times per year. The effect of inspections is usually the most significant as its frequency moves below 10 times a year.

This implies that the Chinese government inspection would achieve its maximum utility, in terms of facilitating village mobilization, when it maintains a frequency lower than 10 times a year. This is perhaps due to the altered power structure of the peasant leadership as well as a
changed incentive structure of peasants when a village is bombarded by high volumes of higher government inspections. When a village receives an extreme amount of government attention, it is exposed to extra commercial and welfare opportunities that could not be otherwise afforded. High profiles of these villages may tempt village elites and local officials to manipulate village politics in ways that allow local political corporatism to compromise the effect inspections have on peasant mobilization.

The effect of inspections, also, does not necessarily outperform the impact that other variables have on peasant mobilization. For example, when government inspections increase from zero to ten, peasants seek advices from village leaders for only about one time more, holding other variables at their mean. This is about the same as the effect that education has on peasant mobilization. When education of a villager rises from being illiterate to college-graduate or above, the times a peasant pursues village leaders for advices increase for about one, holding other variables at their mean.

Lastly, results of this study have policy implications. Upon realizing the importance of inspections to village governance and precisely estimating the extent of that importance offer a valuable avenue for the Chinese government to strategically deploy inspections to achieve maximum utility. More specifically, the Chinese government should limit inspections to a village to 10 times a year maximum and send more inspections to the unreached villages. That is not only useful for the China to achieve economic equality but also to fortify national integrity and maintain political unity.

Four research directions await further exploration. First, government inspections do not operate in a cultural or political vacuum. Rather, inspections and their impact on Chinese village politics are conditioned by contextual factors such as culture and the influence of the CCP. Thanks
to the unique Chinese culture influenced by Confucius, the Chinese hold high reverence toward their authority, often interchangeably thought as the government. Under the influence of such culture, inspections by the Chinese government, often synonymous with the CCP, can be powerful devices for peasant mobilization, as we would expect any actions by the government to carry considerable weight in sharpening the public opinion and political behavior of the Chinese.

Second, the historic development of the CCP in the Chinese society, though briefly mentioned in this paper, calls for further examination insofar as how it empowers the impact factor of inspections on peasant mobilization. The CCP, skillfully deriving legitimacy from its historic legacy of winning the Civil War and combating the invading Japanese, enjoys a laudable reputation among the Chinese people. Popular support toward the CCP increases the efficacy of inspections by the latter.

Third, who conducts inspections matters as well. Future studies should look into how the effect of inspections varies by which level of government conducts inspections. Inspections by the Chinese president are bound to be more significant than government officials from the county level.

Fourth, should empirical data be available, future research can conduct time series analysis of the impact of inspections on peasant mobilization over time. Analysis in this paper only uses dataset in the year 2002. It is limited in informing us of the more contemporary development of government inspections. Moreover, future research can strive to answer the question of how government inspections foretell the orientations of government policy. Studies can use content analysis to study leader speeches.
CHAPTER 4
BUYING LEGITIMACY: CHINESE GOVERNMENT INSPECTIONS AND PUBLIC APPROVAL OF VILLAGE LEADERSHIP

4.1 Introduction

In its more than five-thousand-year history, China has seen constant changes of its dynasties. Despite a few military coups and internal splits in the inner circles of the royal families, most of these dynasties saw an end to their rule upon losing popular support.132 Peasant uprisings, instead, ousted the incumbents and inaugurated the new revolutionary heroes into office. This repeated practice of failed regimes overthrown by another group of disgruntled peasants, since the early times of Chinese history, renders ruling legitimacy an essential ingredient for a lasting and thriving reign.133 Apart from the regular administration of national affairs in the royal palace, the emperors often set out to tour different localities for strategic purposes. For instance, the emperor Qianlong of Qing Dynasty (1711-1799) was known for his diligent but extravagant inspection tours to localities to ensure social stability and popular satisfaction with his governance.134 The Emperor Wudi of Han (汉武帝，110BC) toured the high places on the mountaintops to pay religious tributes to the gods, because an important part of his ruling legitimacy relied upon the popular belief in his heavenly mandated kingship.135

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132 This stands in contrast to other ancient empires in the world, such as the Roman Empire, whose demise was usually a result of external intervention from, or failure at battle with, a foreign power. In terms of the comparison between the Roman empire and the Han Dynasty, Finer argues that the Roman empire is comprised of more autonomous cities governing on their own, while the Han Dynasty was heavily centralized under the emperor. See Finer, Samuel Edward. The History of Government from the Earliest Times: Ancient Monarchies and Empires, (USA: Oxford University Press, 1997), 497, 523, 536.
134 Zhao, Yuntian. “Qianlong Chuxun Ji” [Record of Qianlong Inspection], (Taipei: Wanjuan Tushu Gufen Youxian Gongsi, 1997).
135 Meng, Xianbin. “Hanwudi Chuxunji” [Inspections Tours of Han Wu Di], (Xi’an: Sanqin Chubanshe, 2009).
In the contemporary China, the CCP conducts inspection tours to boost and maintain public approval. Contemporary government inspections, of course, occur at greater frequencies and with much more proximity to the grassroots than those by ancient emperors. These inspections to localities are intended to police local officials and oversee local governance. Officials in China at all levels are expected to tour areas under their jurisdiction to ensure smooth performance of administrative affairs and proper resolution of local conflicts. Inspections to villages are an important mechanism for the Chinese government to gain legitimacy. However, whether inspections have been effectively utilized for this designated purpose remains less clear. Little do we know how the Chinese government employs inspections to boost its public approval. Are these attempts by higher officials to reach down to localities ever effective in helping the regime stay in power?

Inquiring into the utility of inspections in gaining the regime ruling legitimacy is important for a number of reasons. First, inspections tours are costly. Unless they are meeting the desired goals, inspections should be kept to a minimum. In ancient China, the emperors’ lavishing tours required that roads stretch along straight lines, resting stations be constructed to sizes and scale comparable to the capital’s royal palace.\footnote{Zhao, Yuntian. “Qianlong Chuxun Ji.”} Though inspection tours in contemporary China is much more cost-effective with faster transportation and advanced tele-communication facilities, officials still have to sacrifice valuable time and energy to visit localities. Especially inspections by high-profile officials, such as the premier, take immense administrative resources and cause much disruption to local citizens’ lives.

Second, to the extent that inspections do help the Chinese regime advance its political agenda, understanding the political efficacy of inspections provides us with a unique window to
assess authoritarian governance in China. While political institutions are an important variable in evaluating any given polity, how well the administration governs with these institutions is perhaps more important. The Chinese history offers the most telling evidence. From the Tang Dynasty (618-907) through the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the political institutions, including the extensive bureaucracy, expanded while the dynasties have changed from one to another, indicating that how well a dynasty performs is related to how it has utilized political institutions for its favor. Historians attribute the failure of these dynasties mostly to incapable and irresponsible governance.\textsuperscript{137}

In this paper, I examine how visits by higher-level officials to villages reinforce the ruling legitimacy of the Chinese regime. Specifically, this study delves into how inspections improve public approval of the village leadership. If inspections help increase popular opinion of the leadership among villagers, they serve the CCP’s best interest in enhancing its ruling legitimacy. I contend that inspection tours to Chinese villages significantly boost the public approval of village leaderships by promoting the governing efficacy of village leaders. This causal relationship holds, first, by improving village social welfare and economic development, and second, by securing for village leaders essential political and financial support from higher authorities to better represent villagers’ interests and mediate conflicts among villagers. Using data of 961 randomly selected villages across China, the empirical analysis shows that Chinese government inspections significantly boost villagers’ approval regarding their village leaders.

In the following, I first present the theoretical argument of how Chinese government inspections improve ruling legitimacy of the Chinese regime. Second, empirical analysis tests the

\textsuperscript{137} Craig, Albert. "The Heritage of Chinese Civilization."
theory with multivariate regression models. The study then concludes with a discussion of findings from the analysis and discussion on the future directions of relevant research topics.

4.2 Theory

Government inspections improve popular legitimacy of the village leadership, first and foremost, through enhancing its governing efficacy. In a comprehensive study of county level governments, Chinese scholar, Liu Tianxu, argues that Chinese government inspections bring salient improvement to village governance. Governance improves mainly through timely enforcement of relevant policies and resolving challenges in a timely manner. Inspections serve as one of the most important avenues of policy implementation for the Chinese government. While sometimes abused by politicians to collect illegitimate fees and obtain personal gains, most inspections do bring forth considerable improvement in local governance. My fieldwork also confirms the noticeable utility of inspections in village governance. Most government officials I interviewed agree that government inspections, while flawed in many ways, are useful for bolstering the unity of the village leadership and checking behaviors of village leaders. News stories also abound about visits of the central government officials, especially the president or the premier, have prompted immediate actions of local officials to better people’s livelihood in those inspected areas.

The improvement comes both before and after inspections. Before-inspection improvement is mainly a result of preemptive measures by local officials to ensure a good “image” in front of their superiors prior to inspections. Before inspections arrive, local officials are usually on the alert

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139 Note that the higher the authorities that conduct inspections, the more coverage by TV and online news networks the inspection attracts. In particular, the central government officials and provincial governors do well in publicizing their political activities.
to present competent governance to their superiors in order to secure and promote their positions.\textsuperscript{140} To put smiles on the inspecting superiors’ faces, local officials, often notified “hinted” about the impending inspection, invest extensively on areas under their jurisdiction where the “big figures” are most likely to arrive. For instance, in Dec 2012, knowing that former Premier Wen Jiabao was about to visit their county but unaware of which specific village in that county, local officials in Huanxian County, northwest China, selectively furnished the residence infrastructure of a couple households that, in their opinion, Wen was most likely to inspect. It turned out that Wen only went to only one of them.\textsuperscript{141} Liu Tianxu also reports similar alerted actions by local officials: faking local development by particularly beautifying places where inspecting officials would visit.\textsuperscript{142}

Interviews in northwest China also reveal that inspections give incentives to local officials to interact more with village leaders to familiarize themselves with village development when their superiors inspect. Curious about local development, inspecting officials tend to ask local villagers, as well as officials, whether certain projects are being built, if villagers are receiving granted benefits\textsuperscript{143}. Local officials have to make sure they are well informed of local situations and appear knowledgeable in front of their superiors. Furthermore, inspections encourage better interactions between village leaders and local officials, because local officials seek to build trusting relationships with village leaders and eliminate “negative reports” that could potentially arise to tarnish their superiors’ impression of them and worse, even endanger their entire political career\textsuperscript{144}.


\textsuperscript{141} Field observation, 2012.

\textsuperscript{142} Tianxu Liu, pp.118.

\textsuperscript{143} Interview, 2016. The most popular question these officials ask is regarding the welfare of the people. They do express interest in local stability and conflicts among households.

\textsuperscript{144} Some of these preemptive actions by local officials can lead to unlawful political detention of disagreeing villagers. For example, to keep potential complaints in Gaozhaigou Village in northwest China (even protests)
With high levels of job security and lucrative benefits, official positions in the government are highly sought. Local officials are unlikely to lay back when their superiors are inspecting localities under their jurisdiction. While such announced inspections might expose higher authorities to false information regarding local development, they are still useful in terms of inciting more swift actions by local governments to get things done.

What is more significant is that the local government actions motivated by impending inspections tend to last for a considerable period of time. For instance, the same village in Huanxian County that the former Premier Wen visited in 2012, *Gaozhaigou*, has become the focal point for pilot projects that the Chinese government intends to initiate. It was selected as one of the *Pinpointed Poverty-relief (PP) (jingzhunfupin)* villages\(^\text{145}\). The PP project assigns a particular provincial department to minister the given village’s development. The provincial department overseeing *Gaozhaogou* is the Organization Department of Gansu Province. The constant arrival of the departmental head, Wu Degang at *Gaozhaogou* has induced a sustained influx of government support grants since 2015\(^\text{146}\). Similarly, the Lankao County\(^\text{147}\), for which the Party icon, Jiao Yulu, was the former party secretary (1962-1964), is also a pilot district for the PP project from reaching the arriving provincial Director of Organization Department, Wu Degang, in 2016, local officials at Huanxian County had started mobilizing public security departments of the county government to isolate the dissenting peasants (*Diaomin*) in Gaozhaigou Village before Wu’s final arrival (Interview, 2016).

\(^\text{145}\) Hong Mingyong argues that the PP project and its underpinning doctrine was first mentioned in Xi’s inspection tour to Hunan province in Nov 2013 and then later matured into a systematic anti-poverty methodology and ideology. The goal of this project is to make pointed efforts to meet the local needs for development and for poverty-relief. These efforts include concentrated financial and commercial assistance to impoverished areas to facilitate economic development. See Hong Mingyong, “Tanjiu Xizongshuji Jinzhun Fupin Sixiang de Tichu yu Lilun Jichu” [A Study on the Emergence and Foundation of the Notion of Pinpointed Poverty-relief], Sep 23, 2016, <goo.gl/q8FP2Q>, accessed April 18, 2017. According to *Xinhua*, the first step in this project is to clearly identify poor households and then employ individually-tailored strategies to improve the well-beings of each. As a pioneer in the execution of this project, Guangdong province has built “poverty” profiles for 367,000 houses in as many as 3,407 villages. In addition, the province has budgeted almost 23 billion RMB (about 3.4 US dollars) financial support and stationed 11,524 government cadres in 3,541 groups into villages to keep in direct sight the process. See Xinhuanews. “Jinzhun, Zai Xi Jinping de Fupinguanli Youduo Zhongyao” [Pinpointed, Very Important in Xi Jinpin’s Poverty-Relief Concept], Dec 8, 2015, <goo.gl/jrcZQE>, accessed April 18, 2017.

\(^\text{146}\) Interview 2016

\(^\text{147}\) Lankao county has been visited by every Chinese president since Deng, for its former leader, Jiao Yulu, has set a laudable example for the CCP of reaching out to the grassroots by being among them.
The Chinese state media, *renminwang* (people.cn), has pledged multi-media support for Lankao during this process by setting up a special column to track the progress of the PP project in that county.\(^{148}\) Such concentrated, high-profile support from a state media like *renminwang* is unprecedented. The site reports an invigorated dynamic of the flourishing economy in Lankao.

Government inspections favor village governance by immediately impacting village leaders in more personal ways as well. Inspections empower village leaders to properly implement state policies and offer them essential leverage to settle village disputes. That village leaders usually accompany higher officials during inspections conveys to villagers the authority’s consent and support of this village leadership.\(^ {149}\) This framing effect of inspections on village leaders as the legitimate and recognized government representatives earns village leadership popular obedience. More practically, village leaders can appeal to inspection officials for bureaucratic and financial assistance to overcome governing difficulties in their villages. A bureaucratically and financially equipped village leadership thus enjoys much more efficient village governance.

Government inspections gain for village leadership legitimacy in a structural context where village leaders possess little autonomy from local government, where they usually work passively under orders from the local government and where they are deprived of resources and political clout. Government inspections significantly shift the power balance between village leadership and local governments. Inspections entail more autonomy for village leaders.

First, in a country where officials in prestigious and powerful positions are usually unreachable, inspections bring to villages the otherwise unreachable and unavailable officials from

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\(^{148}\) Available at <goo.gl/Z5fl2x>, accessed April 18, 2017.

\(^{149}\) In the Chinese hierarchy, inspections by higher authorities are usually accompanied by government leaders at lower ranks. For instance, President Xi Jinping’s inspection tours to localities are almost invariably accompanied by provincial leaders of the locality’s province, and municipal leaders of the locality’s municipality. The same is true for inspections by every other level of government.
local governments so that villagers and village leaders can now appeal their grievances to higher authorities at more convenience. Inspections are an important channel for village leaders to articulate to higher authorities the challenges they face in their positions, gaining sympathy both from higher authorities and from the villagers. Petitioning villagers’ grievances to higher authorities, as a result, becomes more effective where inspections are more frequent, because inspections make high governments available to them. By contrast, without inspections, making villagers’ voices heard by higher authorities becomes a more painstaking process. Denied channels of expression, a trivial grievance can spiral into uncontrollable extrajudicial actions, such as mass protests and even riots. The New York Times recently reported that a Chinese villager, Jia Jinglong, killed his village leader, He Jianhua, after he appealed, unsuccessfully to local officials for two years the unwanted demolition of his three-story house, which led to his fiancée leaving him just a couple days before their wedding. Local officials, however, were simply not available for him. Many similar cases fuel protests of massive scales. Government inspection exposes and addresses social grievances in a timely fashion by making higher authorities available to receive village leaders’ input. Good-hearted village leaders usually find it hard to persuade the local government to address villagers’ concerns. In front of inspecting superiors, local officials are unlikely to remain indifferent to village leaders’ appeals.

Second, inspections may significantly alter the power balance between village leaders and local governments. Inspections interrupt collusion practices between village leaders and local officials prevalent in rural China. Inspections push village leaders to conduct village affairs in a more professional fashion according to the guidelines issued by the Party. They are thus more

150 Interview, 2016
152 Interview, 2016
effective in settling villagers’ central concerns. In addition, inspections bring village leaders back on track of institutionalized politics by releasing them from deference by local officials to whom these village leaders have to subscribe unwillingly. Even when village leaders have the genuine desire to fulfill their leadership role and govern democratically with transparency, they are sometimes suppressed by the local officials to do so. Inspections offers village leaders the courage to work against the wishes of their immediate superiors, particularly the township and county officials.

There is an established record of higher governments distorting central government policies in order to raise more taxes for local government expenses.\textsuperscript{153} For instance, a significant portion of social conflicts in China are caused by inappropriate land confiscation. The Beijing News reports that, Sichuan Province alone in the first half of 2016 tried 108 local government officials who have manipulated compensation policies to underpay affected households during the demolition of these houses and extort the remaining monies into personal pockets.\textsuperscript{154} The arrival of higher officials provides the immediate victims of these distortions--village leaders and villagers alike--with essential political cover to speak truth to (even against) local governments. Essentially, bringing together political actors of all levels, government inspections open a window of “cross-examination” among these actors, limiting the possibility of any level of authority concealing information, repressing their subordinates or harboring corruption. Thus, inspections free village leaders from potential manipulations from higher authorities.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[153] O’Brien, Kevin J. and Lianjiang Li. ”Selective policy implementation in rural China." \textit{Comparative Politics} (1999): 167-186
\item[154] Available at \texttt{<goo.gl/6XdJ5J>}, accessed April 18, 2017.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Most Chinese villagers lend more trust to the central government than the local government. Perceiving the central government as a more authentic arbiter of social justice and pragmatic politics, Chinese villagers believe that inspections conducted by these higher governments effectively constrain colluding practices between village leaders and local officials. During my field research, I frequently heard Chinese villagers questioning, “Why don’t they (higher authorities) just inspect them (village leaders and local officials)? The corrupted (local) officials would have been sent to prison if inspections happen.” Chinese villagers generally have the impression that the higher government is very effective, once it is resolved to accomplishing certain things. “No one can go against the government at heightened times (of inspections)”, as one villager in a village outside Beijing said in 2004. While villagers do not necessarily have solid evidence of collusion between local officials and corporate interests (such as companies), such consensus among villagers across China does tell us that higher government inspections considerably weaken local corporatism and return relevant parties to political roles they originally belong. Local leaders should perform their duties in maintaining a judicial and transparent environment for all villages, while village leaders should only function as mediators between villagers and the higher government within the lawful, institutional boundaries. For

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157 China is primarily characterized by a close alliance between business entrepreneurs and the state. Involvement with the latter (either in party membership or other forms of engagement) significantly increases the chances for businesses success (see Frenkiel, Emilie. “Party, Capitalists and Class in China. An Interview with David S.G. Goodman,” Books and Ideas, 29 October 2015, ISSN : 2105-3030, <goo.gl/58czLc>, accessed April 18, 2017. This alliance is similarly prevalent in China’s rural areas. Business leaders, as well as village leaders who strive to get rich, seek to build a reliable (or workable) network with the local government. See also Zhang, Changdong. "Reexamining the Electoral Connection in Authoritarian China: The Local People’s Congress and its Private Entrepreneur Deputies." China Review, (2017) (forthcoming).
instance, village leaders are not supposed to align with local officials against another but to play a role of liaison between local government and villagers.

Third, in addition to being available for village leaders to inform on villagers’ plight, government inspections empower village leaders better govern villages. This is perhaps most pronounced in competently mediated interest conflicts among villagers. These conflicts may range from interpersonal disputes to large-scale group violence. While some charismatic village leaders may be able to mediate village conflicts effectively through personal clout and persuasiveness\(^{158}\), I argue that, all else equal, village leaders of more inspected villages are more capable in conflict mediation than their counterparts in less inspected villages because of the political support these leaders garner from inspections. The most straightforward causality is that government inspections, accompanied by village leaders, indirectly signals to villagers the higher authorities’ recognition of the village leadership, thus legitimizing the village leaders among the villagers. Such power endowment dramatically increases the weight of village leaders’ intervention in village conflicts. Parties to these conflicts are therefore more willing to come to resolutions proposed by these leaders.

Furthermore, village leaders can more successfully reconcile village conflicts because of the economic and political leverage afforded by these inspections. For example, financial assistance may pour into the village collective revenue due to extensive media coverage of a certain high-profile government inspection. The accumulated financial assets have facilitated development of collective enterprises in that village. Increased public goods bring out good words from villagers about the village leadership.\(^{159}\) In addition, placing a large sum of collective revenue

\(^{158}\) Interviews show that, to pick a village leader, local governments usually consider personal qualities, such as fairness and credibility among villagers, and obedience to local governments.

in the hands of the village leaders makes them more important decision makers in village affairs. It is these village leaders who will decide where the collective wealth will be invested and who will be the primary beneficiaries of these investments. Thus, villagers who are parties to a conflict are more likely to yield to the “rulings” of empowered village leaders, because posing oneself as a spoiler in village affairs invites problems in obtaining favor from village leaders in public goods distribution. One of these public goods provisions is nominating a limited number of “poor households” (dibaohu) to higher authorities. Using the decision-making power over which households are to receive government poverty relief grants in a village as a leverage160, village leaders can effectively bring conflicts under control. However, when such power has been deprived from village leaders by corrupted local officials, village leaders lose such governing efficacy. Government inspections streamline provision of such poverty relief funds and these funds further empower village leaders. Even in an event where inspections bring no financial benefit, village leaders can always enhance their mediation efficacy by exporting these conflict cases to higher authorities, as inspections make them accessible.

Lastly, inspections turn village leaders into more effective mediators in village conflicts because inspections increase the chances that village leaders get rich first. During my interviews, most village leaders have expressed heartfelt remarks that village leaders who lead better lives than the village average solicit more obedience from villagers. Their opinions on village affairs usually receive the most positive response if they have managed their personal lives well. By contrast, village leaders who can barely make a living have little influence over village politics. At the same time, my interviews also show that, while inspections do not necessarily bring cash into village leaders’ pockets, they do offer a significant information advantage to these leaders to build

160 Interview 2016
their business and run a more successful career. The information advantage refers to the valuable counselling tips and market updates that inspections bring. Local officials hold strongly the view that the government is in a much better position in assessing the outside markets and offering insights on the potentials for a village’s development. One village leader told me that one of the benefits of being a village leader, despite their extremely low salary, is that they enjoy this type of information advantage to get ahead and make more money.

*Hypothesis: Inspections increase public approval of village leaderships.*

4.3 Research Design

Data for empirical analysis in this study is from the Chinese Household Income Project (CHIP) 2002. This dataset collects information on village governance in 961 randomly selected villages across China. Included in the dataset is the number of inspections paid to a given village as well as variables on village leadership. Most importantly, the dataset records public approval rating of the village leadership by villagers in the year 2002.

The dependent variable for this study is *Pub_app*, public approval of village leadership. Although village leaders are composed of two independent persons--the Party Secretary (*zhishu*) and the Village Head (*cunzhang*)--villagers rate their approval of their leaders as one unitary leadership. *Pub_app* is thus operationalized as an accumulated score of public ratings of three dimensions of village leadership: village leaders’ willingness to stand up for villagers’ interests, village leaders developing the local economy and village leaders mediating village conflicts.

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161 Interview, 2016
In the first dimension, villagers express their opinion on village leaders’ ability to properly and resolutely present villagers’ causes to higher authorities in cases where there is a conflict of interest between the government and the villagers. Since village leaders serve as the liaison between the government and villagers, villagers sometimes worry that their leaders do not faithfully represent their interests to higher authorities. Instead, villagers are concerned that these leaders might collude with higher officials to extract more fees and taxes and withhold villagers’ government pensions.

In each village of the 961 villages, representatives from the ten randomly selected households within each village were asked to rate between 0 and 5 how well “the village cadre stands as a spokesman for the villagers” with 0 as the least and 5 as the most.

This is a salient concern as my fieldwork confirms that there is very limited autonomy for village leaders from township level officials (the next higher level Chinese government). Villagers display a significant level of distrust toward village leaders in terms of the latter’s willingness to stand up for their interests, when these interests are at odds with those of the township government.
Most of village leaders’ decisions are highly controlled by local governments. All of village leaders I have interviewed indicate that their primary goal is not to represent the villagers’ interest in bargaining with the Party, but to govern the villagers on the Party’s behalf.

By contrast, the second dimension refers to the capability of village leaders to foster robust village economies. Village development is an important parameter for both higher authorities and the villagers to evaluate the village leadership. In each of the 961 villages, representatives from ten randomly selected households within each village were asked to rate between 0 and 5 how well “the village cadre makes efforts to help the villagers get rich” with 0 as the lowest rating and 5 as the highest.

The last dimension captures villagers’ opinion on village leaders’ efficiency in mediating conflicting interests among villagers. Being able to effectively settle villager disputes is a very important, if not the only one, role of village leaders. In each of the 961 villages, representatives from ten randomly selected households within each village were asked to rate between 0 and 5 how well “the village cadre mediates the different interests among villagers” with 0 as the lowest rating and 5 as the highest.

The dependent variable is then generated by adding the rating scores of all three dimensions:

$$Pub_{app} = stand + economy + mediation$$

where stand refers to the dimension of village leaders standing up for villagers’ interests, economy is the degree to which villagers think that their leaders develop the village economy, mediation measures how well villagers rate their leaders in terms of the leaders’ ability mediate village conflicts$^{164}$. The normal distribution of $Pub_{app}$ is seen in Figure 10. The addition of the

$^{164}$ The dataset records individual scores of each dimension. For the purpose of the current analysis, I have aggregated them into one value.
three dimensions of public approval is warranted, as they all score higher than 6.5 in the Kronbach’s Alpha test.

The independent variable for all four models is Insp, average number of county-level or higher government inspections per year (1998-2002). The distribution of Insp can be found in Table 5 with descriptive statistics of all relevant variables in this analysis.

The first group of control variables in the model includes three variables measured at the village level: Income per capita, Democracy and Taxre. Income per capita accounts for the effect that village economic development has on village leaders’ public approval. Village leaders in poorer villages might strive harder to develop village economy and, as a result, their public approval ratings rises. Alternatively, rich villages possess more resources to better mediate village conflicts and bring contentment to villagers, and villagers in richer villages may be more content than their counterparts in less developed villages are.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics

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<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>1.47</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (CHIP 2002, ICPSR 21741)

Leaders in villages holding democratic elections arrive at their positions through contested
elections. Electoral politics push village leaders in these elected positions to be more transparent and responsive. Thus, I expect *Democracy* to have a positive effect on the outcome variable. I expect to see higher public approval for the elected village leadership than for a non-elected one. Finally, *Taxre* is also included to control for the potential alienation that the tax reform launched in 2002 has caused between the Chinese government and village leaders. Juan Wang finds that structural fiscal reform has made the Chinese government lose village leaders to the villagers’ side and these village leaders then become key organizers of protests. The distribution of these control variables can be found in Table 5.

Besides village-level controls, I also include idiosyncratic characteristics of both the Party Secretary and the Village Head: *Age, Education, Exp_mgmt, Exp_busi, Time in office, Salary.* The same as its counterparts at higher levels, the village government is also a dual Party-government system with each village government headed by a Party secretary and a village head. Village leaders’ personal profile matters for their diligence in office and thereafter their public approval. Younger village leaders may be more active in their service, simply because they are more energetic and ambitious. However, age may also be a bonus to village leaders in terms of governing efficacy, as older village leaders may wield more influence by seniority in village politics and their experience may make them more effective in their job. Thus older village leaders might enjoy higher public approval. They can be particularly more effective in standing up for villagers’ interests and in mediating village disputes and mobilizing resources for economic development. Education may play a significant part in the leaders’ ability to better articulate complicated situations to their superiors and fellow villagers. Education also endows village leaders with needed temperaments to foster opportunities for commercial activities in villages. Education helps

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village leaders find creative ways to develop the economy and to abide by law in policy implementation.

Village leaders’ experience in management in a company \((\text{Exp}_\text{mgmt})\) or in running a small business \((\text{Exp}_\text{busi})\) may increase the odds of an effective village leadership. Experience in management positions or businesses teaches village leaders to strategically deploy limited resources to achieve maximum utility for village governance. Perhaps more importantly, such experience helps village leaders build connections that can later help him/her develop the village economy. Thus, I expect these two control variables to have a strong impact on the leaders’ public approval. Likewise, village leaders’ time in office may also determine how effective they are managing village affairs. Lastly, village leaders’ salary is another important factor in village leadership. Better paid village leaders are freed from concerns of taking second jobs to make a living. They can instead be more focused on village affairs. Public approval, as a result, may increase as village leaders devote more time and energy to village governance.

4.4 Analysis

4.4.1 Model 1

The unit of analysis of this chapter is the village leadership in each village. The number of observations is 794. The village leadership refer to both the village Party secretary and village governor. Given the normal and continuous distribution of the outcome variable, I perform Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Regression. Results of this analysis (in Table 6) show that Chinese government inspections have a positive and statistically significant \((p<.01)\) effect on the dependent variable, \(\text{Pub}_\text{app}\), across the four models. This implies that inspections significantly increase village leader’ public approval. As inspections increase to a village, its leaders enjoy rising public approval among villagers. Substantively, as the frequency of inspections increases from once a
year to fifty times a year, the largest value in the dataset, the probability that the public approval score of village leaders will achieve its maximum value (in this case -1) in this given village is predicted to increase from 7.35 to 10.27, all else equal (in Figure 11).

The surprising finding is that, as inspections increase in a village, village leaders are more likely to stand up for the interest of the villagers in the case where villagers’ interest conflict with that of the Party. Intuitively, when the Party’s interests are at stake, the inspecting officials should pressure the village leaders to lean toward the Party, not the opposite. This finding, however, suggests that inspections, with its publicity and influence, release village leaders from local interest groups where village leaders might be enticed by local officials to engage in corruption, or willingly collude with the township officials to extract benefits due the villagers. Such release encourages village leaders to go public and speak for the interests of the villagers.

Table 6. Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Empirical Analysis of the Effect that Inspection has on Public Approval of the Village leadership.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
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<td>0.127**</td>
<td>0.114*</td>
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<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>-0.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>Model 3</td>
<td>Model 4</td>
</tr>
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Note: Table entries are OLS and Ordinal Logit Regression Estimates of the Effects that Chinese Government Inspection Have on Village Leadership. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. Source: (CHIP 2002, ICPSR 21741)

This lends evidence to the argument that village leaders obtain more autonomy upon arrival of higher officials. Granted opportunities to be speak candidly to the higher officials about local grievances, village leaders can now take villagers’ chief concerns to the right personnel.

In addition, a few control variables have also achieved statistical significance in the models. In particular, *Income per capita* has obtained statistical significance (p<.01) in the first model which only includes controls for attributes of the village: its economic development, democratic elections and tax reform.

It loses significance, however, when control variables of the characteristics of the Party Secretary are included. It, however, regained significance in the third (p<.5) and fourth model (P<.1). Economic development in the village appears to be important in weathering villagers’ public opinion on the governing efficacy of the village leadership. As a village becomes richer,
the village leadership tends to enjoy a better evaluation from fellow villagers. Substantively, holding all other variables at their mean, as income per capita of a village increases from 1,000 RMB (about $147) to 15,000 RMB (about $2,205), public approval score of the village leadership increases from 7.32 to 8.9. This makes sense when village leaders, with a considerable amount of resources at their disposal, can make more decisive (and most popular) decisions to better the living conditions of the village. During my fieldwork in China, some village leaders complained that there is little they can do to alleviate the despair in their village and that the poverty has provided the village leadership with little leverage in village politics. Whether a village has held democratic elections does not have any effect on the village leadership’s public approval, a sign of low efficacy of these elections.

The Wald test (Prob>F=.0039), giving the comparative weight that each explanatory variable carries relative to others, shows that the core independent variable, \( Insp \), outperforms all the other explanatory variables combined. This indicates the disproportionate significance that this variable of interest carries in the analysis.

Age of the Party secretary and age of the village head have markedly different effects on the outcome variables remains the same in this model. While the age of the village leader has a positive, statistically significant effect on all of the outcome variables, the age of the Party secretary achieves no statistical significance and is in the negative direction. The older a village head is, the higher the approval rating the village leadership as a whole receives, all else equal. The positive effect that village leaders’ experience in business and management positions have on public approval of the village leadership is particularly evident in the case of the Party secretary. It, however, is significantly weaker in the case of the village head.
The above comparison between the control variables of characteristics of the Party secretary and the village head thus reveals that, while business expertise of the Party secretary are much more effective in raising public approval of the leadership, seniority of the village head is more significant in shaping villagers’ views of the leadership. In other words, villagers tend to judge the two village leaders differently in terms of their contribution to the village leadership. Professional credentials of the Party secretary, such as experience in businesses, are more appealing to villagers while seniority of the village head appears to be more effective in gaining consent from villagers. This finding reflects the discrepancies in villagers’ perceptual evaluation of the village leadership. Villagers tend to view an older village head plus an experienced party secretary as the most competent partnership in the village leadership. Thus, to select a village leadership that wins the most ruling legitimacy, the CCP should appoint a party secretary who is well-educated and experienced in management and businesses, while helping someone who is older and highly respected in the village get elected as village head.

I am aware of the potential selection bias involved in this analysis. Selection bias refers to the possibility that the Chinese government selectively inspect villages that exhibit higher public approval. If such bias exists, the causal relationship that this analysis identifies could be compromised or even turned to the opposite direction: instead of inspections causing improved public approval, it could be that public approval determines where inspection occurs in the first place. I argue that this selection bias is unlikely because the data used in this analysis captures a significant time lag between inspections and public approval ratings. The independent variable, $Insp$, is the number of inspections conducted per year during the past three year (1998-2002), while public approval ratings were polled at the time when the survey was conducted, at the end of 2002. Operation of inspections and collection of approval ratings did not happen contemporaneously. As
such, this analysis lends convincing evidence to the causal relationship elaborated in the theory section.

Second, even without such time lag between the explanatory variable and the dependent variable, there are few reasons to believe that such selection bias, if any, would challenge the current results. The authoritarian governance under the CCP demands uniform allegiance from all administrative units to support, at least nominally, the regime’s rule. The CCP does not have to avoid “negative villages” to only inspect those in favor of the party. My field research shows that there is a significant level of regime support across villages, especially taking into account the waiver of agricultural taxes since 2004166 and the marked lift of livelihood among the general population. The most likely calculation that the CCP makes in deciding whether to inspect villages supportive or unsupportive of the regime is determined by how the Party strives to ensure its survival. It is unlikely to shun away from areas of trouble. The CCP would most likely prioritize inspections to problematic, not peaceful or supportive, villages to ensure social stability.

4.4.2 Model 2

In order to parcel out the effects that government inspections have on each dimension of the village leadership (stand up for villagers’ interest, economic development and mediation) and, at the same time, take into account the individual-level characteristics of villagers (Gender, Age, Married, Party_Mem, Minority, Edu and Migrant), I perform an hierarchical model, Ordered Logit regression analysis clustered at the village level. The unit of analysis is individual villager and the number of observations is 7093. An Ordinal Logit model is more appropriate for this analysis, as opposed to the OLS model in the previous examination, because the dependent variables are all

ordinal, discrete values from 1 to 5. In conducting the analysis, I also cluster by village to account for the bias caused by village-level control variables (control of villagers, village leaders and villages) in the model.

The core independent variable, \textit{Insp}, achieves strong statistical significance (p<.01) in the three models with breakdown of \textit{Pub_app} into its specific three dimensions and with controls of idiosyncratic characteristics of villagers (see Table 7).

\textit{Insp} continues to have a consistent positive and statistically significant effect on all the dependent variables, implying that, as the number of government inspections to a village per year increases, villagers’ rating of his village leader significantly improves.

Government inspections significantly improve villagers’ opinion on their leaders’ governing efficacy in all three aspects: petitioning their causes to higher governments, developing village economy and lastly effectively mediating village conflicts.

The substantive effects that inspections have on public approval rating in its three subcategories appear in Figure 12. Inspections impact public approval of the village leadership in very similar ways: they help boost the public approval score of village leadership in terms of standing up for peasants’ interests, developing the village economy and mediating village conflicts. However, the effect on public approval of village leaders developing the economy is the strongest among the three (the slope is the steepest in the last chart in Figure 12).

Table 7. Ordinal Logit Regression Analysis: Effects that Inspections Have on the Three-dimension Breakdown of Public Approval of the Village Leadership with Controls for Individual characteristics (cluster by village).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV</th>
<th>Stand</th>
<th>Eco_Develop</th>
<th>Mediation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection</td>
<td>0.031***</td>
<td>0.037***</td>
<td>0.036***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income_per_capita</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income_per_capita</td>
<td>0.074***</td>
<td>0.032*</td>
<td>0.089***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>-0.082</td>
<td>0.158*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax_Reform</td>
<td>-0.109</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax_Reform</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time_Office</td>
<td>0.010*</td>
<td>0.011***</td>
<td>0.006*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Note: Table entries are Ordinal Logit Regression Estimates of the Effects that Chinese Government Inspection Have on three breakdown dimensions of the village leadership. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. Source: (CHIP 2002, ICPSR 21741)
This makes intuitive sense because economic development in the village tends to be the most visible achievement, as peasants’ annual income rises and better infrastructure is being built. This, as a result, can be picked up by villagers more easily than the other two areas of village leadership. The effect that inspections have on the ratings of village leaders’ ability in mediating village conflicts and standing up for villagers’ interests are almost identical (the slopes are almost the same for both Figures).

Some of the control variables in this robustness check have significant impacts on the outcome variables. Economic development continues to exert a positive, statistically significant impact on all three dimensions, confirming my assumption that the economy does matter for the
public image of the village leadership and the CCP as a whole. Neither democratic elections nor
tax reform plays a significant part in the outcome variable.

Both the Party secretary and the village head’s time in office proves to be a critical factor
in winning public approval. The longer they have been in their positions, the higher approval
ratings they are likely to receive from fellow villagers, all else equal. This could be a function of
the leaders’ familiarity with village affairs: as they serve in office longer, they gain more
experience in helping peasants obtain the proper government assistance and fostering relationships
among villagers. Education of the Party secretary positively contributes to public approval rating
in the areas of developing the economy and mediating village conflicts. Education of the village
head, by contrast, does not have any effect on any of the outcome variables.

Lastly, evaluation of the village leadership does not vary significantly over individual
characteristics of the villagers. How a given villager rates the village leadership is not dependent
upon his gender, age, marital status, education or migrant status. This shows the lack of
individualism in Chinese political culture in general and rural political culture in particular.
Peasants usually do not form individually unique political beliefs or conviction. Their perspectives
on the village leadership are apt to reflect more a communal and general opinion than an individual
one. However, a few individual characteristics stand out as significant factors on public approval
of the village leadership. The most impressive control is party membership. A villager who is a
CCP member views the village leadership much more positively than one who does not belong to
the CCP. This is an expected result taking into account the entrenched influence of the CCP in
rural areas of China and the conformity of political views that the CCP demands unconditionally
from its members.
In addition, minority villagers tend to view the village leadership as more willing to stand up for their interests and develop the village economy, but not necessarily to mediate village conflicts. Aware of its multi-ethnic population and sensitive to the potential ethnic conflicts in its society, the Chinese government has adopted favorable policies to minority groups. As a result, the village leaders may as well act accordingly to be especially accommodative to minority groups. While villagers who have worked outside the village (Migrant) are indifferent toward the village leadership’s capability to stand up for villagers’ interests and its ability to mediate village conflicts, they tend to view the village leadership’s performance in economic development more negatively than those who do not have migrant work experience. Having seen the extraordinary economic development in urban cities, returning villagers understandably disregard the minimal economic development that their village might have gained.

4.5 Conclusion

Both fieldwork and empirical analysis lend strong evidence to the theoretical framework of this study. Chinese government inspections, despite their flaws and superficiality, play an important role in Chinese politics. Diligently touring rural regions of China serves the CCP strategic political interest, as these inspections constantly strengthen the Party’s local foundation and refresh the positive image that the Party has endeavored to construct from its inception. This study argues that Chinese government inspections effectively boost the ruling legitimacy of the Chinese regime. Public approval of village leadership significantly increases as inspections to this village increase, while controlling for other important interfering variables.

Inspections boost the Chinese regime’s ruling legitimacy chiefly by drawing local officials, who may otherwise be far removed from the grassroots, into personal contacts with both villagers and village leaders. Making these officials available to hear appeals from the grassroots alleviate
strains between the Party and the people. Effective communication between them not only helps resolve the forthcoming disputes and confusions but also enhances the emotional affinity that the Chinese peasants accords to the CCP’s contribution to the current Chinese state. Moreover, this causal relationship between inspections and improved ruling legitimacy of the CCP exists because inspections alter the power balance between village leaders and local officials, allowing the village leaders to speak boldly (sometimes against) to the inspecting higher officials. Village leaders can now, without fear of repression from local officials, take grassroots petitions more conveniently and successfully to the right authority. Inspections also empower village leaders with financial and political leverage to govern village affairs more judiciously and efficiently.

The policy implications for the CCP are mainly that the Party should pay inspection tours as many as possible to achieve maximum utility. Given the heavy cost of inspections, the Party has to increase the number of inspections, but keep it below the threshold beyond which the cost outweighs the benefits. It remains another empirical question where this threshold lies. Another important advice for the regime is to pay attention to the make-up of the village leadership. A Party secretary who is educated and experienced in business plus a village head who is older and well-respected would make the most promising village leadership. Coopting peasants into the party still remains important as peasant who are party members view the village leadership more positively than those who are not.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Through a series of thorough empirical studies of Chinese government inspections, this dissertation demonstrates the tremendous utility of responsive governance in maintaining authoritarian regimes’ longevity. Contributing to the authoritarian literature, which has so far mainly tapped into the effect that elite power struggles and patronage networks have in strengthening authoritarian rule,167 this dissertation argues that authoritarian regime can resort to responsive and accountable governance at the local level to foster legitimacy. Authoritarian regimes can adopt institutions that effectively draw the higher authorities near to localities, making the regime relatable and real to the general public. Practices of this kind would effectively alleviate issues of popular distrust and lack of transparency inherent in authoritarian regimes.

As a classic example of an authoritarian state where democratic elections are significantly compromised and freedom of speech is limited, China is a useful case for studying authoritarian governance. Government inspections under the CCP have exemplified a unique form of regime responsiveness. The scholarly endeavor undertaken in this dissertation shows with robust evidence that government inspections are a key player in Chinese politics and they do help the CCP achieve desired objectives. Strategically deployed to places where most needed and where the CCP’s best interest is best served, Chinese government inspections solidify the CCP’s control over popular mobilization and channel popular passions into manageable forms of participation, such as

attending village council meetings and networking with village leaders. In addition, these inspections also help improve the ruling legitimacy of the CCP.

In the first empirical chapter of this dissertation, I look at the underlying rationale of the Chinese government in deploying inspections from higher levels to localities. It has to be noted again that inspections occur not on a registered, scheduled administrative basis but on the basis of strategic political calculations. Where inspections happen is a function of what the chief leader of that level of government intends to achieve. Thus the patterns of inspections reflects the objectives of the government. In this chapter, I argue that government inspections happen in villages that attract investments because economic development remains a priority on the CCP’s agenda. This argument received strong empirical confirmation, indicating that villages with investment projects see more inspections that the villages unattractive to outside investments. I also find that impoverished villages see more inspections, suggesting that the Chinese government does invest their time and energy in lifting people out of poverty in these localities.

What I found surprising in the first chapter's research is that model villages do not necessarily score better than others in attracting inspections. While the direction of the variable of model village is positive, its significance level in impacting the dependent variable is rather low. This implies that, though model villages are branded on surface as flagship masterpieces of the government, they are pretty much left alone after that. The Chinese government shifts its focus to other villages in greater need of its attention, for instance, villages that are extremely poor and villages that are destinations for outside investors. This is another strong sign that the Chinese government is careful with its resources for inspections. Inspections go to places most needed. Another surprising finding is that the number of CCP-member villagers do not affect whether
inspections occur in that village, indicating the modest impact that villager party members have on higher government decisions.

After having identified where inspections arrive, starting from the second (and proceeding into the third) empirical chapter, I begin evaluating the effects that inspections have on politics in the inspected villages. In the second empirical chapter, I assess the effect that inspections have on political mobilization. The forms of mobilization include villagers participating in village meetings, seeking counsel from village leaders etc. I found that as the number of inspections to a village increases, the villagers there tend to become more active in the above-mentioned activities. Inspections essentially provides Chinese villages with motivation for socialization, both among themselves and with village leaders.

The surprising finding in this chapter is that only the first five inspections increase villagers' networking behaviors with village leaders. Inspections' effect on villagers' networking activities after five times a year becomes insignificant. This is surprising because, networking activities, such as having dinner with the village leader, are usually a sign of bribery of favor-currying. According to my finding in this chapter, when higher officials arrive more in the village, such activities actually increase. This could possibly mean that government inspections shake up local politics, pushing the otherwise distant village leaders to more contacts with peasants. Alternatively, this effect is caused by the increase of public goods induced by arriving higher officials. Public goods attract more attention from villagers who seek their share.

The last empirical chapter strives to investigate how inspections affect ruling legitimacy of the CCP among villagers. While the previous chapter looks at how inspections influence political behaviors of villagers, this chapter is more focused upon how inspections impact public approval of the performance of the village leadership. The village leadership here serves as a representative
of the CCP while public opinion functions as a proxy estimate for CCP’s ruling legitimacy. In the entire history of the CCP, it has prided itself in its close relations with the common people. In contemporary China, political leaders in China still highlight their interactions with the peasants. I contend in this chapter that inspections facilitate communication and even friendship-level bonding between the state and its citizens. Thus, inspections significantly improve the ruling legitimacy of the CCP. The empirical analysis using CHIP 2002 dataset strongly supports this argument, showing that as inspections to a village increase, villagers in those inspected villages rates the performance of the village leadership much higher.

There are potential endogeneity problems and selection bias in the empirical evaluation of this dissertation. Endogeneity problems refers to the fact that the dataset used for analysis in this dissertation is only cross-sectional, not a time series. As a result, such analysis can only establish correlation between the independent variable(s) and dependent variable(s), but not necessarily causation that the independent variable leads to occurrence of the dependent variable. As such, this study reveals with confidence a strong association between government inspections and political mobilization and public approval. This level of confidence declines, however, when it comes to in which direction the causal relationship holds.

There might be potential endogeneity problems involved in this dissertation and I first address them theoretically. In a democratic polity where citizen input into the polity (mainly through public opinion polling and competitive elections) weigh more heavily in the outlook of the political practices than in nondemocratic regimes, it is likely that actions undertaken by politicians are weathered by public opinion or media. In the particular context of China where the CCP is much more dominant in politics than the average Chinese citizens, however, it is unsurprising when the causal relationships examined in this dissertation goes only one direction:
inspections by CCP cause popular mobilization and raises public approval of the village leadership. This is even more the case in the Chinese villages. As I noted in chapter 4, my field interviews show that Chinese villagers possess very limited autonomy in their political life. The CCP, by contrast, almost always assumes a dominant and preemptive position in mobilizing peasants and molding their political opinion. The Chinese people in general do not seek regime change\textsuperscript{168} and, as a result, the CCP is not terribly concerned with public opinion when it chooses where to visit. Thus the likelihood that the causal relationships examined in chapter 3 and 4 go the opposite way (political mobilization in villages leads to higher government inspections or the CCP chooses villages favorable to the regime to inspect) is very low. This opposite causal relationship does occur when higher government inspections arrive at villages where mobilization is unsettlingly high, posting a threat to the CCP. This occasionally happens when large-scale protests flood to the streets. But the number of such observations is relatively very low, such that it will unlikely change the results of the current finding. Even with a large number of such cases, it does not invalidate my theoretical arguments.

It is also important to remember that the CCP is highly conscious of social instability.\textsuperscript{169} As theoretically extrapolated in the second chapter, to ensure social stability, the Party sometimes determines to preemptively inspect certain villages. This refutes the notion that the CCP selectively visits villages where they are most welcomed. It might just be the contrary, if any self-selection in inspections, it is those that demonstrate traits of instability. Thus, villages showing low levels of regime support might actually encourage the Party to inspect. Thus, the incentives for the Party to inspect favorable and unfavorable villages cancel out and does not justify the concern of selection

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid, pp, 39.
bias. Second, the problem of endogeneity can also be addressed empirically by employing an instrumental variable. This is primarily accomplished using instrumental variable regression analysis (ivreg command in Stata). The challenge for such methodology is to find an appropriate instrumental variable that does not associate with the dependent variable but only associate with the explanatory variable.

The second potential problem is selection bias. This bias is more likely in the third empirical analysis. I found in the third empirical chapter that inspections significantly improve the public approval of the CCP. As the number of inspections to a village increases, the public opinion of the that village toward the village leadership significantly improves. The potential selection bias associated with this analysis is that the CCP may self-select villages where it enjoys a better popularity to inspect in the first place. Theoretically, I take the readers back to the political reality in China. There is very little political autonomy for the Chinese villagers and there is very few villages where the CCP would likely feel “afraid” or “disadvantaged” to go. A regime chooses to only visit regions with stronger support when the opposition targeted against the regimes in those regions is strong enough to tarnish the image of the regime. This regime only goes to “safe zones” to avoid potential “mine bombs”. In China, however, it is not at all the case. The general public, even more so the villages, look forward to seeing higher government officials. Their dissent, if any, will unlikely pose any tangible threat to the CCP. As a result, there is no point for the CCP to selectively visit a few in support of its rule while avoiding the others.

Taken together, this dissertation not only traces the historic background of Chinese government inspections from its dynastic practices to contemporary development, it also investigates the inner causal logics within inspections. I contend that the idea of government inspections has originated from as early as China’s first Qin Dynasty. Over the centuries, arrival
of higher-level officials, the most prominent of which is the emperor, noticeably weighed into local politics. For instance, when Qian Long, one of the emperors in Qing Dynasty, visited Henan Province, he inspected local development and instructed that local officials to maintain social order and improve people’s living standards. Government inspections in its contemporary format, while remains of the same nature, becomes much more systematic and widespread. Contemporary government inspections spread across different levels of government. Not only is the Chinese president often seen visiting localities, governors of each level of the Chinese government (5 in total) all conduct official visits to localities. These visits become instrumental channels to demonstrate the government’s general goodwill and its diligent actions to translate that goodwill into practice. Contemporary inspections aggregate local information in a much more comprehensive fashion and report to higher authorities for policy-making. The interaction between the state and the people, as a result, grows much closer and interactive.

In addition to the descriptive accounts of government inspections, this dissertation shows that inspections have been and will continue to remain as one of the most critical tool of governance in China. Inspections are deployed strategically to achieve maximum governing utility and serves the best interest of both the Chinese people and the Chinese government. Inspections are effective. They are effective in mobilizing rural peasants into controlled modes of mobilization. Inspections are shown to be effective also in improving the CCP's public image. Higher officials visiting localities usually significantly improve how the villagers there view the party.

This study yields significant policy implications for the Chinese government and authoritarian governance as a whole. According to the research in this study, while government inspections are important, they should not occur excessively. Inspections more than 10 times a

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170 Zhao, Yuntian. “Qianlong Chuxun Ji” [Record of Qianlong Inspection], (Taipei: Wanjuan Tushu Gufen Youxian Gongsi, 1997), pp. 43.
year usually generate minimal marginal return in terms of mobilizing local population and winning public legitimacy. Taking into account the immense cost usually involved in inspections, the Chinese government does have to strategically plan and allocate resources for government inspections. Future improvement on the part of the Chinese government can be made in evenly distributing more to marginalized villages and regions. The Chinese government also has to be cautious about potential corruption harbored at villages where higher officials are particularly keen to visit. Usually these villages are located at transportation-convenient areas, close to downtown suburbs, rich in natural resources and far ahead in economic development. While higher officials' visits to localities can be very useful in many ways, they can become safe havens for political leaders to build corruption networks. Leaders at higher levels may take advantage of their political clout (they are the boss at subordinate localities) at localities to reap personal or even group gains.

The implication for authoritarian states in general is to adopt a similar form of practice that bring the political elites down to the common people. Particularly in semi-democratic authoritarian countries where citizens do have electoral opportunities to choose their legislators and chief executives, such as the Philippines, government inspections can help push legislators to be more responsive. People under these regimes usually desire regime responsiveness.171

The most recent Asian Barometer survey of 14 countries in Asia conducted during 2015 and 2016 shows that Asian populations judge regime legitimacy based on competent governance.172

To carry that out, individual countries have to be aware of the unique context where the Chinese regime has performed government inspections. The CCP excels at government inspections because it, at its inception, started out as a people's organization. Both the organizational unity under the CCP and the historic legacy that the CCP has garnered in the past decades work together to entail the efficacy of government inspections as practiced in China. Potential danger of blindly importing this practice without due consideration of the cultural and political discrepancies between China and other regimes can be that excessive outreach to the grassroots deprives the political elites of the essential resources for higher-up party building and institutional bargaining.

The future development of this research project is to collect more updated and holistic empirical data. One way to accomplish this is to include the questionnaires into an existing social survey, such as the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS), which is currently recruiting questionnaires (the advertisement available here: goo.gl/w8CgBO). New data will not only update this research to more recent years but also enable the research to expand to other questions, such as the different effects that the different levels of inspecting governments have on local politics. This is highly like because Luo Danglun's dissertation research on the effects that different levels of inspecting government officials have on enterprise performance. It shows that, as the title of the government official becomes more prominent (usually the officials come from a higher level of government), the inspected company performs better, all else equal. Future research can delve into the impact that government inspections have on other spectrums of village politics beyond participation and public approval. One of the such research questions is whether inspections encourage or discourage local corruption. Inspections draw higher-level officials closer to

localities and thus provide opportunities for officials and citizens to interact. On the one hand, these interactions are important channels for the Chinese state to tune into local developments; on the other hands, some of citizens seize these windows of opportunity to bribe officials and those in power. More empirical research is needed in the future to clarify how inspections foster or dismantle local clientalism and patronism.

Future research can also tap into the effect that improved public approval has on participation. Presumably, those who are more supportive of the village leadership are more likely to participate in village affairs than those who view the village leadership less favorably. Further empirical studies are needed to answer whether the causal relationships established in chapter 3 and chapter 4 go independently from each other, or whether they actually interact together to produce some third form of political behavior. Lastly, in my future research, I will also seek to address the potentially conditional effect that different types of villages (poor villages and villages with investments) have on the relationship between inspections and village leadership approval.
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