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Negotiated Authoritarianism: Older People's Associations and Social Governance in Contemporary Rural China

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Abstract

This study seeks to explore the role of older people's associations (OPAs) in 'social governance' in rural China. Specifically, it examines the role OPAs play in mediating disputes and implementing contentious policy at the grassroots. Previous studies of OPAs' role in grassroots politics have provided 'top-down', state-directed accounts of their activities. Yet these approaches overemphasize the state's role in such processes and passivize the agency of societal actors. Building on Joel Migdal's State-in-Society approach, this study will provide a more dynamic prism through which to view this topic, arguing that just as the state affects society, the reverse is also true. Specifically, this study will seek to understand how OPAs respond to the kinds of authority and obligations that local states channel through them, and ask whether such interactions provide OPAs with an opportunity to negotiate with officials over the outcomes of state policy. This study hypothesizes that reliance on OPAs for stability maintenance will provide elderly actors with leverage to negotiate with the state. This study is relevant for understanding authoritarian resilience at China's rural grassroots, and for addressing questions about state-society relations in China, in particular whether the Party-state can continue to mobilize the social energy of local communities without weakening its grip on power. This study draws on over 23 months of fieldwork in Beijing, Fujian, Yunnan, and Shaanxi between 2012 and 2016. It has engaged in long-term participant observation in 30 rural villages and has drawn on 176 structured interviews, 115 semi-structured interviews, and 21 focus groups.

Dedicated to

my parents, Helen and Philip Robins

Draft Table of Contents

Abstract **2**
Draft Table of Contents **4**
List of Figures **9**
List of Tables **9**
Acknowledgements **10**
Chapter One: Introduction **12**
1.1 Introduction 12
1.1.1 Aims and Argument of this Study 12
1.1.2 Research Methods 16
1.1.3 Outline of Chapter One: The Introductory Chapter 16
1.2 Literature Review: The Micro-foundations of Authoritarianism 17
1.2.1 Justice from Above or Below? 20
1.2.1 Section Summary 27
1.3 Conflict Governance and Stability Maintenance: The State's Perspective 28
1.3.1 Social Management 28
1.3.2 Social Governance 30
1.3.3 Section Summary 33
1.4 Older People's Associations: A Social Governance Case Study 33
1.4.1 'Bottom Up' Approaches 35
1.4.2 Contentious Approaches 36
1.4.3 'Top-down' Approaches 38
1.4.4 Section Summary 40
1.5 Research Questions 40
1.6 Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses 41
1.6.1 State vs. Society 41
1.6.2 State-*in*-Society 42
1.7 Note on Terminology 44
1.7.1 'Social Control', 'Social Order', and 'Social Order Maintenance' 45
1.7.2 'Stability Maintenance' and 'Social Stability' 45
1.7.3 'Social Management', 'Social Governance' 46
1.8 Dissertation Outline 46

1.9 Conclusion 51
Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework 54
2.1 Introduction 54
2.1.1 Chapter Overview and Argument 57
2.2 State-Society Relations in China: A Genealogy of Ideas 59
2.2.1 The 'Civil Society' Concept 60
2.2.2 The 'State-Corporatist' Approach 69
2.2.3. Beyond the State-Society Dichotomy 76
2.2.4. Problems and Gaps 83
2.2.5. Section Summary 86
2.3. Theoretical Framework 87
2.3.1. Defining the State-*in*-Society Approach 87
2.3.2. State-*in*-Society in a 'Strong State' Context 91
2.3.3. Section Summary 94
2.4. Defining authority 94
2.4.1. Authority as 'Power' and 'Legitimacy' 95
2.4.2. Different Types of Authority 96
2.5. Traditional Authority and Social Control in China 98
2.5.1. Ritual and Social Control in Confucianism 99
2.5.2. Patrilinealism and Senior Authority in Imperial China 101
2.5.3. Destruction of Traditional Values in the 20th Century 102
2.5.4. Reform-era Resurgence of Traditional Culture 105
2.5.5. Section Summary 109
2.6. Conclusion 110
Chapter Three: Research Methodology 113
3.1. Introduction 113
3.1.1. Chapter Overview 114
3.2. Research Design 114
3.2.1. A Qualitative Approach 114
3.2.2. Case Study Method and Fieldsite Selection 116
3.2.3. Fieldsite Descriptions 122
3.3 Data Collection and Analysis 125
3.3.1. Data Collection Timeframe 126
3.3.2. Participant Observation 126

3.3.3 Semi-structured interviews 134
3.3.4. Policy/Documentary Analysis 139
3.4. Conclusion 142
Chapter Four: OPA Establishment, Regulation, and Structure 143
4.1. Introduction 143
4.1.1. Chapter Overview 144
4.2. Establishment and Typologies 145
4.2.1. OPA Establishment 145
4.2.2. OPA Typologies 147
4.2.3. Committee and Decision-Making Structures 155
4.2.4. Section Summary 158
4.3. Motivation behind OPA establishment 161
4.3.1. China's Ageing Society 161
4.3.2. Rural Community Care 163
4.3.3. Elderly Ideological and Propaganda Work 165
4.3.5. Section Summary 169
4.4 Supervisory Structures and their limitations 170
4.4.1. Supervisory Structures 170
4.4.2. Supervisory Limitations 176
4.5. Regulatory Environment 177
4.6. Conclusion 181
Chapter Five: OPAs and Embedding Traditional Authority in Rural China 184
5.1. Introduction 184
5.2. Embedding Traditional Authority within OPAs 186
5.2.1. Influence within the Kinship Network 187
5.2.2. Patriarchy and Seniority of Elders 195
5.2.3. Gender 201
5.2.4. Education and Employment Status 202
5.2.5. Moral Character, Respect, and Trust 210
5.2.6. High Levels of Wealth 216
5.3. Conclusion 217
Chapter Six: OPA - Local State Cooperation and Extending State Reach 220
6.1. Introduction 220
6.1.1. Chapter Argument 220

6.1.2. Chapter Outline 222
6.2. Village infrastructure development: a decision-making dichotomy 223
6.2.1. Land, Infrastructure, and Development 223
6.2.2. Changing Land Use and Land Conflict 226
6.2.3. Section Summary 229
6.3. Harnessing Authority and Trust 230
6.3.1. Defining Trust 231
6.3.2. The Case of LH Village Public Square 232
6.3.3. The Case of JG Village Road 239
6.3.4. Township Official's Mediation Tactics 241
6.3.5. Section Summary 243
6.4. Harnessing Local Knowledge 244
6.4.1. Expanding the 'Emotion Control' Network 244
6.4.2. Knowledge of Local Affairs 248
6.4.3. Organizing the Grassroots 249
6.4.4. Section Summary 251
6.5. The OPA as an Avoidance Strategy 251
6.6. The OPA as a time-saving device 253
6.6.1. Section summary 260
6.7. Conclusion 260
Chapter Seven: Negotiation, Cooperation, and Positive-Sum Interactions 263
7.1. Introduction 263
7.1.1. Chapter Outline 265
7.2. Infrastructure and OPA-State Negotiation 265
7.2.1. Playing the Rules 266
7.2.2. Channelling Grievances 273
7.2.3. Withholding and withdrawing support 277
7.3. Preferences for Village Level Mediation over the Court System 284
7.3.1. Basis in existing socio-legal theory 284
7.4 Conclusion 299
Chapter Eight: Conclusion 301
8.1. Introduction 301
8.2. Areas of Originality 302
8.2.1. The OPA as an Institution 302
8.2.2. The Micro-foundations of Authoritarian Resilience 303

8.2.3. Stability Maintenance and Social Governance....304
8.2.4. Demography and Gerontology....305
8.2.5. Theoretical Originality....306
8.3. Main Argument and Key Findings....307
8.3.1. Structure and Function of OPAs....308
8.3.2. OPAs, State-Building, and Stability Maintenance....309
8.3.3. OPA - State Negotiation....313
8.4. Implications for Chinese Politics and Future Academic Research....315
8.4.3. Ageing and Older People's Associations....316
8.4.1 Modernisation and the Chinese State....319
8.4.2. 'Social Governance' and Authoritarian Resilience....322
Bibliography....326
Primary Sources....326
Secondary Sources....327
Appendix 1: List of Villages....347
Appendix 2: List of Focus Groups....348
Appendix 3: List of Structured and Semi-Structured Interviews....349

List of Figures

Figure 3.1[1] Village 'Yaogu' Drum Team
Figure 4.2 OPA Committees
Figure 4.3 A Selection of OPA Centres
Figure 4.4 OPA Ideological and Propaganda Work
Figure 4.5 Central Level Bureaucratic Structures on Ageing
Figure 4.6 OPA Hierarchical Supervisory Structure
Figure 5.7 Example Village: Concentric Spheres of Influence
Figure 5.8 Personal Biographies: Mr Ye
Figure 5.9 Personal Biographies: Mr Xue
Figure 5.10 Personal Biographies: Uncle Bo

List of Tables

Table 3.1 Comparison of Key Provincial Statistics
Table 3.2 Fieldsite Locations
Table 4.3 OPA Function
Table 4.4 Chronology of Institution Establishment
Table 5.5 Composition of the OPA Committee

[1] The first number refers to the number of the chapter it is located within (i.e. 3.4. = chapter 3). The second number refers to its sequence number in the list of overall figures (i.e. 3.4. = figure 4 in the thesis).

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Aims and Argument of this Study

This dissertation represents the first and only full-length study of older people's associations (OPAs) in China, an immensely important institution for negotiating disputes and resolving conflicts in China's rural areas. In doing so, this thesis gives us an original insight into the mechanics of how politics works at grassroots level, and how state and society interact within a semi-authoritarian system. While some studies of OPAs do exist,[2] this is the first study to explore OPAs as an institution and to examine, in depth, the key role they play in rural politics and society in rural China.

[2] They tend to be limited to single journal articles, case studies of one location, and largely address OPAs as an example through which to explore other phenomenon. For example, Kevin O'Brien and Deng Yanghua use one case of an OPA in Zhejiang to explore environmental activism and different protest tactics in three different journal articles. Deng, Y. O'Brien, K. (2014) 'The Society of Senior Citizens and Popular Protest in Rural Zhejiang', *The China Journal,* No. 71, pp. 172-188; Deng, Y. O'Brien, K. (2013) 'Relational Repression in China: Using Social Ties to Demobilize Protesters', *The China Quarterly*, No. 215; O'Brien, K. Deng, Y. (2015) 'Repression Backfires: Tactical Radicalization and Protest Spectacle in Rural China', *Journal of Contemporary China,* Vol. 24, No. 93, pp. 457-470

This study demonstrates that OPAs are organisations that have been established and promoted by the state in Chinese villages for state aims. OPAs are institutionally connected to state structures through a hierarchical bureaucratic arrangement that allows policy directives to filter from the central level to the grassroots. As such, OPAs do not represent a 'civil society' organization in the same way that self-constituted groups do. Rather, they are a product of Chinese state-building. That is, the desire to create institutional channels to incorporate particular groups, perform specific state aims, ameliorate societal problems, and act as the state's 'nerve tips' in an effort to make the lives of societal actors visible, legible, and controllable. This study argues that a key aim of the state in establishing OPAs has been to incorporate and institutionalise traditional authority figures within a state-linked organisation, to better facilitate stability maintenance, 'social governance', and the resolution of contentious disputes in rural communities.

Drawing on case studies of land conflict, infrastructure development, and intra-societal conflict at the rural grassroots, this study traces how OPAs negotiate disputes and maintain stability in villages as well as how they cooperate with local officials in fulfilling these tasks. This study argues that OPAs are able to perform a dispute mediation function more effectively than grassroots officials because the people embedded within them are perceived as possessing the legitimate authority to regulate social relations within their local communities. That is to say, OPAs tend to be comprised of older men, who are well educated, previously held high status positions as cadres or teachers, who are influential within their kinship networks, and are generally perceived as possessing good moral character. These characteristics reflect those that have traditionally generated authority

and regulated social relations in villages throughout Chinese history, that is, kinship, patriarchy, the educational status of a gentry class, and the moral standards of a society characterized by familiarity. This thesis, therefore, argues that embedding individuals with these characteristics within OPAs enables the state to harness their traditional authority for stability maintenance purposes.

To make these claims, this study draws on Joel Migdal's[3] State-*in*-Society approach as a theoretical framework. This approach suggests that states compete with other social organisations – such as families, religious groups, and villages – to become the dominant authority within their territory. Yet, getting people to submit to state authority is a challenge because local organisations and local authority figures are often perceived as being the legitimate arbiters of local social relations. As such, in many parts of the world, state leaders have faced impenetrable barriers to state predominance, with local values, customs, and norms proving difficult to displace. Although barriers to state predominance and competition for authority are often most obvious in 'weak' and 'fragile' states, 'all states [even strong ones, like China,] have had limited capabilities at *some time*, or with *some groups* or on *some issues*.'[4] As such, in contexts where barriers to state predominance remain in place, rather than *supplanting* local authority and social control mechanisms altogether, some states have instead sought to build alliances with the leaders of these local authority networks and to use them to further state agendas. This thesis argues that this best explains the embedding of local authority figures into OPAs, as well as their use to enhance the state's stability maintenance efforts. That is to say, in an effort to extend state reach to the rural grassroots and to pursue their stability maintenance

[3] Migdal, J. (1988) *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
[4] *Ibid.* p. xiv [my emphasis]

agenda, local officials have sought to build alliances with OPA committee members in order to harness their authority and enhance the state's persuasiveness when governing conflict. In pursuing such a strategy, the state notes the limits of its own power by recognising that it cannot just impose its will on the grassroots directly, nor simply supplant or eradicate the traditional norms. Rather, only by pursing state agendas through the institutions and norms of local society, can they set roots and become an engrained part of rural life.

Yet, although building alliances with local authority figures, such as OPA committees, can extend state capacity in some respects, it is also risky because doing so bolsters powerful societal actors that can use their status to challenge or circumvent state authority and reshape state aims. As such, this thesis argues that state alliances with OPAs often provides the OPAs with political opportunities and leverage to negotiate with the state over the process and outcome of such disputes. In doing so, the OPAs examined in this study were able to circumvent state authority, negotiate state policy, deflect state aims, and sometimes act as a channel through which village communities can transmit their grievances to the local state. However, unlike Migdal's approach, I would argue that this kind of negotiation and accommodation at the grassroots does not *necessarily* have to lead to a loss of power for the political centre (as it did in the cases he explored in the Middle East and North Africa). Rather, this thesis argues that in strong state contexts like China these negotiations often have the effect of creating more power for *both* sides.[5] This is because they allow the state to implement contentious policy and resolve conflicts

[5] Kohli, A. Shue, V. (1994) 'State Power and Social Forces: On Political Contention and Accommodation in the Third World', in, *State Power and Social Forces*, eds, Migdal, J. Kohli, A. Shue, V. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p.323

quickly without them spiralling out of control. This is at the same time as allowing societal actors to negotiate with the state, feedback grievances, influence policy implementation, and provide a mechanism for holding local state officials to account at the grassroots. It is this 'mutual empowerment' and 'state-societal duality' that this thesis argues is a key component of how the party-state in China maintains its durability and adaptability. It is also part of the explanation behind the paradox of how a strong, resilient authoritarian state can co-exist with robust and authoritative societal forces.

1.1.2 Research Methods

To build this argument and make this case, this study has drawn on 23 months of on-the-ground fieldwork in Beijing, Fujian, Yunnan, and Shaanxi between 2012 and 2016. It has employed long-term, ethnographic field methods including participant observation and intensive interviewing. In addition, 176 structured interviews, 115 semi-structured interviews, 21 focus groups, as well as hundreds of informal, unstructured conversations were conducted while living in village communities and shadowing the activities of OPA committees. All of these interviews were conducted by the author in Mandarin. This study has also drawn extensively on Chinese language sources and particularly Chinese government policy documents to understand government policy on OPAs.

1.1.3 Introductory Chapter Outline

The remainder of this introductory chapter brings together ***a literature review***, a brief summary of the ***theoretical framework and argument***, and an outline of ***how this thesis is structured***. In the literature review, this chapter outlines the literature in three key areas. It will first look at the literature on grievance and conflict in contemporary China. It will then focus on state policy towards stability maintenance and how the state has sought to

localise social control efforts and include informal actors and social organisations in such processes. Finally, the literature review will examine the existing literature on OPAs to show that they are relevant as a case through which to explore grassroots stability maintenance. After that, this introductory chapter will briefly outline the research questions, hypothesis, and theoretical framework used within this thesis. Finally, it will give an outline of the structure of this dissertation and each of the chapters within it.

1.2. Literature Review: The Micro-foundations of Authoritarianism

Sweeping economic and social reform in China over the last forty years has brought a profusion of change to Chinese society and offered up plenty of cause for popular grievance and conflict.[6] The dismantling of the old socialist system brought an end to the cellular social structures of the work unit (*danwei* 单位) and the agricultural collective (*nongye jiti* 农业集体) that had previously constrained movement, employment and identity,[7] while maintaining a basic social safety net. Along with deepening market reforms, the breakdown of these structures altered the very fabric of society rendering it more complex, fluid and socially differentiated.[8] At the same time, the depth and speed of social change presented the general populace with both a wealth of new opportunities and a tremendous array of risks.[9] In rural China, these risks have been keenly felt. Peasants have been denied fair prices for their crops, have been subject to inequitable tax

[6] Shue, V. (2004) 'Legitimacy in Crisis?', in, *State and Society in 21st Century China*, eds, Gries, P. Rosen, S. (New York: Routledge) p.59

[7] For a discussion of the shift in social identity from 'person of the work unit' to 'social person' see: Bray, D. (2005) *Social Space and Governance in Urban China: The Danwei System from Origins to Reform*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press), chapter 7

[8] White, G. Howell, J. Shang X. (1996) *In Search of Civil Society: Market Reform and Social Change in Contemporary China*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

[9] Shue, V. (2004) 'Legitimacy in Crisis?'

assessments and arbitrary levies,[10] and have suffered forced land grabs and resettlement without adequate compensation.[11] Rapid urbanisation and industrialization has changed their landscapes and livelihoods, while economic growth has often led to the pollution of their land and water,[12] forcing many rural villagers to trade their health for development.[13] In response to these challenges, rural peasants have used a diverse repertoire of resistance and collective action[14] from sit-ins and petitions, to public demonstrations and suicides giving rise to a rich field of study on popular grievance in contemporary rural China. Framed around issues of rights consciousness,[15] resistance,[16] and class formation,[17] these studies have demonstrated Chinese society's remarkable capacity and willingness to challenge state authority.[18]

[10] Some of these problems were alleviated by the 1994 fiscal reforms that recentralised the taxation system and reduced the local state's ability to raise taxes and set arbitrary levies. For more on the 1994 tax reforms and their implications see: Wang, S. (1997) 'China's 1994 Fiscal Reform: An Initial Assessment' *Asian Survey,* Vol 37, No. 9, pp.801-817; Zhang, L. (1999) 'Chinese central-provincial fiscal relationships, budgetary decline and the impact of the 1994 fiscal reform: an evaluation', *The China Quarterly,* Vol. 157, pp.115-141.

[11] Shue, V. (2004) 'Legitimacy in Crisis?' pp.59-60.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] For more on this and rural pollution more broadly, see: *The China Quarterly* special edition on 'Dying for Development', ed, Lora-Wainwright, A. (2013) Vol. 214; Lora-Wainwright, A. (2013) *Fighting for Breath: Cancer, Healing and Social Change in a Sichuan Village*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press); Lora-Wainwright, A. Zhang, Y. Wu, Y. Van Rooij, B. (2012) 'Learning to live with pollution: the making of environmental subjects in a Chinese industrialized village', *The China Journal,* Vol. 68, pp.106-124

[14] Ministry of Public Security figures show a staggering increase in the volume of popular protests from 10,000 in 1993 to 60,000 in 2003 to 180,000 in 2010. Cited in: Lee, C. Zhang, Y. (2017) 'Governing the Counter-movement: State, Market and China's Bargained Authoritarianism', in, *To Govern China*, eds, Shue, V. Thornton, P. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

[15] Bernstein, T. Lu X. (2003) *Taxation without Representation in Contemporary Rural China,* (New York: Cambridge University Press); O'Brien, K. Li, L. (2006) *Rightful Resistance in Rural China,* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

[16] Perry, E. Selden, M. (2010) *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance,* (London: Routledge); Hsing, Y. (2010) *The Great Urban Transformation: The Politics of Land and Property in China,* (New York: Oxford University Press).

[17] Lee, C. (2007) *Against the Law: Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt,* (Berkeley: University of California Press); Chan, C. Pun, N. (2009) 'The Making of a New Working Class? A Study of Collective Action of Migrant Workers in South China,' *The China Quarterly,* No. 198, pp.287-303.

[18] Lee, C. Zhang, Y. (2017) 'Governing the Counter-movement'.

Yet, for the most part,[19] the Chinese state has been remarkably successful at containing these incidents of social unrest and pre-empting them from developing into dissent that transcends location or issue boundaries.[20] Thus, if the puzzle of the Chinese state in the 1980-90s was one of explaining its capacity to fuel economic growth, the puzzle since the 2000s has been one of explaining the Chinese state's capacity to maintain stability despite a wide array of conflicts and mobilization episodes.[21] As Ching Kwan Lee and Zhang Yonghong note, the China studies literature depicts an 'adaptive'[22] and 'resilient'[23] authoritarian state on the one hand and an assertive society on the other, while failing to adequately explain how this paradoxical duality persists.[24] While the authoritarian resilience literature points to features such as the co-optation of elites, control of the media, and a professionalised bureaucracy, these studies take social stability as a given, rather than as the subject of enquiry.[25] As such, they leave unexamined the question of *how* the government accomplishes social stability and, specifically, how state-society *interactions* during moments of conflict shape stability maintenance.[26] Although a small number of scholars, Lee and Zhang most notably,[27] have recently noticed and sought to

[19] Such as during the 2008 Olympics, 2009 Urumqi riots, and the Arab Spring in 2011. Cited in: *Ibid.*
[20] Perry, E. (2007) 'Studying Chinese Politics: Farewell to Revolution?' *China Journal*, No. 57, pp.1-22.
[21] Lee, C. Zhang, Y. (2017) 'Governing the Counter-movement'.
[22] For more on 'adaptive authoritarianism', see: Chen, T. (2010) 'China's Reaction to the Colour Revolutions: Adaptive Authoritarianism in Full Swing,' *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp.5-51; Shambaugh, D. (2008) *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaption,* (Berkeley: University of California).
[23] For more on 'authoritarian resilience', see: Nathan, A. (2003) 'Authoritarian Resilience', *Journal of Democracy*, Vo. 14, No. 1, pp.6-17.
[24] Lee, C. Zhang, Y. (2017) 'Governing the Counter-movement'.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] Lee and Zhang have been the first scholars to do this in two articles on stability maintenance in Guangdong. While their studies are ground breaking, they focus heavily on the state's role in such process and describe a process of the state 'buying stability' from protestors. Given that their research only explores one aspect of how the state maintains stability, more research on this is still required. Lee, C. Zhang, Y. (2013) 'The Power of Instability: Unravelling the Microfoundations of Bargained Authoritarianism in China, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 118, No. 6, pp.1475-1508; Lee, C. Zhang, Y. (2017) 'Governing the Counter-movement'.

redress this omission, there is still much work left to be done. As such, the question of how the state maintains stability in the face of unrest at the grassroots – known elsewhere as the 'micro-foundations of authoritarianism'[28] – is the key topic upon which this thesis is based.

1.2.1 Justice from Above or Below?

This section looks at the literature on popular grievance and conflict in China. It shows that rural villagers have largely sought help to address grievances from two sources – higher level authorities (in what is termed 'justice from above') and from actors within the village ('justice from below'). Yet, for a variety of reasons, scholars have tended to focus on 'justice from above', while within-village mediators have been neglected. Furthermore, despite quantitative studies showing that 'informal actors' – such as relatives or villagers held in high esteem – are important actors in mediating conflict, this is not reflected in the existing literature which tends to focus on the role of state actors in mediation processes.

Justice from Above

In order to understand how the state has managed instability at the grassroots, it is pertinent to understand the literature on popular grievance and conflict. The cornerstone of this research has been Kevin O'Brien and Li Lianjiang's seminal monograph *Rightful Resistance in Rural China.*[29] Their account of rural collective action shows how villagers exploit divisions within the state, pitting a seemingly benevolent and responsive central state against predatory, despotic local officials in their fight against injustice at the local

[28] *Ibid.*
[29] O'Brien, K. Li, L. (2006) *Rightful Resistance*.

level.[30] Villagers are depicted as seeking out 'elite allies' from amongst the higher authorities, including the court system, who are far removed from local cadre networks and thus, they believe, more likely to be sympathetic to their grievances. In their efforts to appeal to higher authorities for intervention, villagers adopt strategies of 'rightful resistance' displaying loyalty to the centre and using its policies and laws to advance their claims.[31] This method of dispute settlement has been termed 'justice from *above*', where higher levels of authority are sought out 'to obtain ['justice', that is,] satisfactory help with efforts to resolve grievances'.[32] As O'Brien and Li contend, 'if villagers are able to reach higher levels either directly or through visiting journalists, relatives outside the village, passing inspection teams, or even through visits by provincial or national leaders, their chance of gaining a hearing and redress may improve'.[33] In an effort to attract the attention of the higher authorities, the tactics of 'rightful resisters' are invariably 'noisy, public, and open'[34] and follow the oft-quoted adage that 'a major ruckus leads to a major resolution, a small ruckus leads to a small resolution, and no ruckus leads to no resolution' (*da nao da jiejue, xiao nao xiao jiejue, bu nao bu jiejue,* 大闹大解决，小闹小解决，不闹不解决).[35]

However, O'Brien and Li's research is focused on a particular type of grievance and a particular type of popular contention: that is, grievance against the state and direct appeals to higher authorities. Indeed, as O'Brien and Li acknowledge, by selecting 'extreme cases

[30] Michelson, E. (2008) 'Justice from Above or Below? Popular Strategies for Resolving Grievances in Rural China', *The China Quarterly,* No. 193, pp.43-64, p.44
[31] *Ibid.*
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] O'Brien, K. Li, L. (2006) *Rightful Resistance.*
[34] *Ibid.*
[35] Michelson, E. (2008) 'Justice from Above or Below?'

of the dependent variable'[36] they have employed a selection bias to explore this particular type of popular contention in depth, as opposed to exploring whether rightful resistance is representative of broad trends in rural conflict and contention across China. As such, their research, while illuminating and ground-breaking in its particular sphere, pays scant attention to a whole panoply of grievances and methods of conflict resolution that do not percolate up to higher legal and administrative levels of the state. Indeed, Ethan Michelson[37] points out that studies of disputes in China generally suffer from both 'forum bias', that is the restriction of scope of analysis to disputes brought to formal legal and administrative settings (e.g. petitioning *xinfang* 信访), and 'grievance bias', that is the disproportionate inclusion of the most intractable grievances that elude local resolution.[38] One can surmise that some of the reasons for this are linked to accessibility. Larger, nosier protests are more likely to enter the public domain (via the media, the internet, or public records) making them searchable, countable, and easier to study than those that are quieter and subtler in nature. However, if one's research design only captures the noisiest, most troublesome problems that have escalated into full-blown disputes brought to higher authorities, then by definition, one is ignoring the problems that did not escalate and were successfully resolved at an earlier stage.[39] Subtle but powerful forms of grassroots resistance such as foot-dragging and false compliance will be missed.[40]

[36] O'Brien, K. Li, L. (2006) *Rightful Resistance,* p.114

[37] Michelson, E. (2008) 'Justice from Above or Below?'

[38] On selection bias in studies of Chinese collective action, see O'Brien, K. Li, L. (2006) *Rightful Resistance,* p.37. For a defence of selecting 'extreme cases of the dependent variable' see Collier, D. Mahoney, J. (1996) 'Insights and Pitfalls: Selection bias in qualitative research', *World Politics,* Vol. 49, pp.56-91, p.71.

[39] Michelson, E. (2008) 'Justice from Above or Below?'

[40] For more on day-to-day forms of resistance, see: Scott, J. (1985) *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

Claims brought to higher levels may also disproportionately involve the local state and be disproportionately collective in nature. For example, a village-wide land dispute caused by cadre corruption is likely to be noisier, more intractable, and draw more attention than a neighbourhood dispute concerning a leaky water pipe on one side of a boundary damaging property foundations on the other. As such, this type of selection bias exaggerates assessments of the severity of local problems (which are often much smaller-scale), overemphasizes the state-societal nature of rural conflict (as opposed to intra-societal conflict), and is biased against assessments of dispute resolution capacity at the local level.[41]

Justice from Below

Ethan Michelson presents an alternative account of 'justice from *below*', whereby disputes are shown to be effectively resolved by local actors within the village. Using a large-*n* survey across five provinces, Michelson explored the relative popularity and effectiveness of the 'justice from above' (township-level or higher) and 'justice from below' (within the village) hypotheses by asking respondents about their experiences of third-party mediated disputes. Although there were differences between grievance type in terms of how problems were solved,[42] his results found that an overwhelming majority (67%) of grievances brought to third parties for mediation were solved within the village compared with 32% by higher authorities.[43] In a 1999 survey, Zweig[44] similarly finds that

[41] Michelson, E. (2008) 'Justice from Above or Below?'
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] 36% were brought to informal relations; 31% to village leaders; 9% to the legal system; 5%t to the police; and 18% to intervening government agencies. *Ibid.* p.48
[44] Zweig, D. (2002) *Democratic Values, Political Structures, and Alternative Politics in Greater China*, Peaceworks No. 44. (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace) p.45

disputes in the countryside[45] are more commonly solved through mediation within the village. Furthermore, in Michelson's survey respondents reported greater satisfaction with the process and outcome of mediation at the village-level than those with involvement from above. Consequently, scholars of conflict and collective action would do well to focus more of their attention on what happens *upstream* of the collective action process, exploring grievances at the micro level that may be abandoned, resolved locally or may eventually be pursued at higher levels.[46]

The Importance of Micro Level Research

While Michelson's survey is helpful for locating the prevalence of direct appeals in a broader context of contention and for highlighting the importance and prevalence of grievance resolution at the village level, his survey can still be criticized on a number of grounds. First, while Michelson's research tells us that village level dispute mediation and resolution is happening, it does not tell us much about the actors involved nor how they interact with one another. Although Michelson breaks down 'justice from above' and 'justice from below' into subcategories, 'local actors within the village' is only broken into two – 'village leaders' and 'informal relations'. The category 'village leaders' includes 'village cadres, village heads, village party secretaries, production team leaders, village committee members (including accountants), [and] village Women's Federation representatives.'[47] While the 'informal relations' category seemingly includes everyone else in the village such as 'family members, relatives, friends, neighbours, acquaintances,

[45] Formalised methods such as the legal system tend to be more popular and more accessible in urban areas. For more on this see: Read, B. Michelson, E. (2008) 'Mediating the Mediation Debate: Conflict Resolution and the Local State in China', *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* Vol. 52, No. 5, pp. 737-764.
[46] Michelson, E. (2008) 'Justice from Above or Below?', p.59
[47] *Ibid.* p.47

as well as villagers without official authority but with great local esteem and unofficial authority'.[48]

There are a number of problems with these distinctions. In villages, these categories can easily become blurred. Those who have observed the complex webs of interpersonal relationships in Chinese villages will know that categories of 'relatives, friends, neighbours [and] acquaintances' will, for most people, easily overlap with most, if not all, of the 'village leaders'. For example, for one villager, the party secretary may be your nephew, the small-team[49] leader your neighbour and friend, and, just from living in the same proximity, you may be well acquainted with and/or related to (closely or distantly) all of the village committee members.

Michelson also notes that respondents were not specific in their descriptions of the third-party mediators in the 'village leader' category, often simply using the generic term 'village cadre' (*cun ganbu* 村干部). However, this could easily be conflated with 'villagers without official authority but with great local esteem and unofficial authority' (which appears under 'informal relations'), since retired village officials are often still referred to and thought of as village cadres while no longer possessing a formal role. From here, one might suggest that some of the sub-categories within 'informal relations' are not sufficiently similar to be grouped together. The prevalence and satisfaction of mediation by a 'relation', an 'acquaintance' or a 'villager…with local esteem' might each tell us something quite different about the nature of mediation at the local level. However, Michelson's survey provides no information on the prevalence or satisfaction of third

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] Villages are split up into small teams (*xiaozu* 小组 *or dui* 队*)* and are a remnant of the old production team system.

party mediation by each of these subgroups, nor whether one type of villager is more involved with mediation than the others. The 'informal relation' category could theoretically be dominated by 'villagers…with local esteem' or by family 'relations'.

Michelson's article also raises questions about the process of dispute resolution. Why and how are village officials involved in the dispute mediation process when a whole literature points to a lack of trust towards them? Do village cadres seek help from other actors in the village when they are involved with mediation? Or does the process of resolving a conflict involve multiple actors working together and passing the problem back and forth? For example, might a village head start the process of mediation, then ask a relative to help, and failing that ask a group of the most esteemed members of the community to intervene? In providing a quantitative overview of conflict mediation at the grassroots, Michelson's study represents only the first part of the story. These other elements of the 'justice from below' hypothesis require further exploration.

Encouragingly, the literature on mediation in China has started to direct its attention towards the practice of dispute mediation at the micro level by looking at disputes *as they unfold*.[50] Nevertheless, much of this analysis has been preoccupied by the role of the local state and grassroots officials in conflict mediation processes. While scholars like Ben Read, Neil Diamant and Wall, Blum, and Jin, have actively sought to move the mediation debate away from formal mediation practices via the court system, they have still tended

[50] Read, B. Michelson, E. (2008) 'Mediating the Mediation Debate'.
[50] *Ibid.*; Wall, A. Blum, M. Jin, D. (2000) 'Response to Diamant's 'Conflict and Conflict Resolution in China'', *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* Vol. 44, No. 4, pp.547-551; Diamant, N. (2000) 'Conflict and Conflict Resolution in China: Beyond Mediation-Centered Approaches', *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* Vol. 44, No. 4, pp.523-546; Read, B. (2012) *The Roots of The State: Neighbourhood Organisation and Social Networks in Beijing and Taipei,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

to focus on state institutions such as Residents' Committees and Village Committees as well as on the role of district or town-level officials. As such, despite our knowing (from Michelson's research) that informal actors play a key role in dispute mediation and resolution, precious little research exists on exactly how they perform this function at the grassroots. Thus, the informal-side of the 'justice from below' equation has been serially neglected. Furthermore, those scholars that have addressed the process of unfolding grassroots conflict have focused almost exclusively on urban areas leaving a dearth of research on mediation in rural villages where informal actors look to be most important.

1.2.1 Section Summary

To conclude this section, the debate between grievance resolution from above or from below has indicated that scholars would do well from focusing more of their research upstream of the collective action process to focus on conflicts at the village level as they initially unfold. While Michelson has shown that most disputes are mediated and resolved at the village level by a variety of local actors, subsequent research has failed to pick up on the informal side of the mediation equation. This has left an imbalance in the literature on grassroots mediation that is preoccupied with state mediators at the expense of analysis on unofficial and informal ones. This dissertation seeks to contribute to rectifying this imbalance. In particular, as the section on 'older people's associations' in this introductory chapter will show, it seeks to focus on mediation activities by 'villagers…with local esteem' and informal authority locally.

1.3 Conflict Governance and Stability Maintenance: The State's Perspective

The utility of focusing research on both micro-level analysis and the role of informal actors in conflict resolution is also underscored when looking at how *state policy* has sought to deal with conflict governance and 'stability maintenance' (*weiwen* 维稳) over time. That is to say, while the idea that social instability should be avoided at all costs has become a core tenet of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) governing mantra,[51] *how* stability should be maintained has shifted considerably in form and direction over the years. Specifically, since opening-up, one can see three distinct policy approaches - the strike hard approach, the 'social management' approach, and the 'social governance' approach - towards how the state has dealt with stability preservation. This section traces the two most recent of these approaches to show how efforts to govern conflict and maintain stability have evolved to place more emphasis on the role of the grassroots state and social forces.

1.3.1 Social Management

While the 'strike hard campaigns' of the 1980s were decidedly centralised in nature, the 'social management' (*shehui guanli* 社会管理) approach to stability maintenance has concentrated firmly on grassroots government.[52] Initially articulated under Hu Jintao in 2003, social management proposed a 'people-centred' and 'service-centred' approach to

[51] In 2011, the party-state budgeted over RMB 624billion on public security, exceeding military expenditure for the first time. ECPR (2013) 'The Politics of *Weiwen*: Stability as a Source of Political Legitimacy in Post-Tiananmen China', *European Consortium for Political Research Report.* [Accessed online on: 21/07/16 at: ecpr.eu/filestore/paperproposal/94e6e2c5-c31a-4cd8-8759-266d21ccb81d.pdf]

[52] Gong, W. (2011) 'Ten Major Relationships in the Innovation of Social Management', cited in: Lee, C. Zhang, Y. (2017) 'Governing the Counter-movement'.

resolving the masses' legitimate and rational grievances.[53] As such, core responsibilities of the stability maintenance agenda were shifted downwards to the local state thereby localising social control efforts and laying down the principle of 'jurisdictional management' (*shudi guanli* 属地管理).[54] That is to say, in an effort to prevent social conflicts slipping through administrative or geographical gaps in government oversight, the local state has become the bastion of stability maintenance efforts. Central to this has been infrastructural expansion of the stability apparatus at the local level. This has included the establishment of political and legal committees (*zhengfawei* 政法委) at the township-level and the creation of the Comprehensive Management of Public Security (CMPS) initiative to put stability maintenance on the agenda across departments and throughout the *tiao-kuai* (条块)[55] system.[56]

Additionally, the cadre evaluation system, which rewards or punishes lower level officials for their performance in key social stability indicators, has been designed to ensure stability maintenance remains a top priority for local state officials.[57] Specifically, failure in key policy areas – such as the failure to prevent social disturbances within one's jurisdiction – results in both personal and departmental punishments such as the loss of bonuses or promotion opportunities for officials or negation of their departments' accomplishments in other policy areas.[58] As Lee and Zhang argue, this allows a cascade

[53] Fewsmith, J. (2012) 'Social Management as a Way of Coping with Heightened Social Tension,' *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 36, pp.1-8.
[54] Lee, C. Zhang, Y. (2017) 'Governing the Counter-movement'.
[55] The *tiao-kuai* system refers to the quasi-federal system of administration in China. Tiáo refers to the vertical lines of authority from the ministries of the central government. Kuài refers to the horizontal level of authority of the territorial government at the provincial or local level.
[56] According to official statistics, the number of CMPS centres across China reached 100,000 by 2009, and employed around 1.3 million paid personnel and more than 3 million volunteers. ECPR (2013) 'The Politics of *Weiwen*'.
[57] Lee, C. Zhang, Y. (2017) 'Governing the Counter-movement'.
[58] *Ibid.*

of bureaucratic pressure to fall most heavily on the lowest ranks of the state hierarchy – rural township and urban street officials – 'whose job it is to build connections with local people, arrive at the scenes of social unrest, negotiate with aggrieved citizens and gather information on local communities'[59] so as to prevent grievances spiralling out of control.

1.3.2 Social Governance

Since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, there has been a shift in the stability maintenance discourse from social management to social governance (*shehui zhili* 社会治理). In mid-2012, the Central Party School began publishing articles that strongly criticized social management and suggested that the dominance of state institutions (i.e. judiciary, police, officials) in preserving stability had resulted in coercive tactics overshadowing non-coercive ones. Critics suggested that the security-focused nature of social management was not just flawed, but actually a threat to the long-term legitimacy of the CCP.[60] Yet, unlike the shift towards social management, the shift towards social governance has not involved a radical reorganisation of the stability maintenance apparatus. Rather, it has been subtler in nature, building on existing structures and extending stability maintenance efforts to incorporate other social forces.

Writing in Central Party School publication, *Study Times*,[61] Chen Jiagang points to four key differences between social management and social governance. First, while social

[59] *Ibid.*
[60] Mattis, P. (2012) 'Resolving Contradictions in Social Management', *Jamestown Foundation,* China Brief Vol. 12, No. 18. [Accessed online on 26/07/17 at: http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1 &tx_ttnews %5Btt_news%5D=39865#.V5dqI-lRGM8]
[61] Chen, J. (2012) cited in: Hoffman, S. Mattis, P. (2012) 'Social Governance under Xi Jinping: China's Proposed 'State Security Council', *China Policy Institute Blog.* [Accessed online on 26/07/16 at: http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/chinapolicyinstitute/2013/11/21/chinas-proposed-state-security-council-social-governance-under-xi-jinping/]

management is a government-centred approach to managing society, social governance contends that 'no single body can monopolise the practical process of regulat[ing] and manag[ing]'[62] society and societal discontents. Second, while social management makes the state superior to society, social governance considers effective governance 'a cooperative process between different bodies'[63] such as social organisations and the private sector. Third, while social management is a 'top-down' 'control method', social governance places more emphasis on reaching consensus through 'negotiation and dialogue, in order to make public policies meet the interest of the whole society.'[64] Finally, where social management has relied on 'government authority and dictation of orders', social governance pushes state officials to 'guide more and control less', thereby allowing social organisations to take on more responsibility for stability maintenance and social control. Thus, while the pressures of preserving stability remain with officials at the grassroots, the *process* of governing social discontent under social governance should, in theory, involve more 'consultation' (*xieshang* 协商) with informal actors and social organizations.[65]

Nevertheless, it should be noted that, given that the shift towards social governance has been accompanied by a consolidation of power and tightening of party-state control more generally under Xi Jinping, reforms should not be understood as increased space for a 'civil society' in the way that some western observers might hope for. Rather, as Hoffman and Mattis argue, 'this should be understood in context of the CCP's primary interest, which is to stay in power… [As such, T]he CCP's strategy involves instituting

[62] *Ibid.*
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] *Ibid.*

governance reforms aimed at pre-empting public demands for political reform.'[66] Thus, efforts to mobilize social organizations for stability maintenance purposes should be understood as an effort to extend state capacity and enhance the durability of the CCP.

Indeed, as we already know, the Party-state has a history of establishing and cultivating social organizations to extend state capacity [67] rather than allowing them to emerge spontaneously of their own accord. As Jessica Teets and Timothy Hildebrandt argue,[68] contrary to traditional expectations,[69] such organizations serve to strengthen the state, rather than weaken it.[70] Yet, while social organizations have played a legitimizing role in the past, they have usually done this by filling service provision gaps where the state has, for lack of will or resources, retreated.[71] In contrast, they have played a much more limited role in stability maintenance and dispute mediation, which has been dominated by state agencies. Thus, in order for diversified participation in governance to work, the formation and proliferation of grassroots social organizations with both governing and mediating capacity is required. Whether such grassroots organizations actually exist or can be mobilized quickly, however, has been questioned by academics and policy makers

[66] *Ibid.*

[67] Such organisations can be defined as those that engage citizen participation while remaining institutionally connected to the state and subject to its intermittent attempts to realize state aims. Read, B. (2009) 'Introduction: State-linked Associational Life – Illuminating Blind Spots of Existing Paradigms', in, *Local Organizations and Urban Governance in East and Southeast Asia: Straddling State and Society*, eds, Read, B. Pekkanen, R. (Abingdon: Routledge).

[68] Teets, J. (2014) *Civil Society under Authoritarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Hildebrandt, T. (2013) *Social Organisations and the Authoritarian State in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

[69] Models of civil society in the liberal tradition make necessary the link between civil society and democratisation. For more on this, see a discussion of the civil society concept in Chapter Two of this thesis.

[70] For more on the legitimizing effect of state-led civil society see: Dickson, B. (2000) 'Cooptation and Corporatism in China: The Logic of Party Adaption', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 115, No. 4, pp.517-540.

[71] Teets, J. (2014) *Civil Society under Authoritarianism*; Hildebrandt, T. (2013) *Social Organisations and the Authoritarian State.*

alike.[72] As such, if the party-state is serious about social governance and a consultative approach to managing societal discontent, the key challenge for the CCP is to establish such organizations at the grassroots and ensure stability maintenance discourse matches the reality on the ground.

1.3.2 Section Summary

To conclude this section, a dearth of literature exists on the role of informal actors and social organisations in mediating and resolving disputes at the rural grassroots precisely at a time when state policy on social governance points towards an increasing role for such actors. While approaches to stability maintenance have shifted over time from the centre to the grassroots, most recently under 'social governance' the state has sought to diversify stability maintenance efforts to incorporate social organisations into the process. Yet, inclusion of social forces in stability preservation efforts does not necessarily point towards an increasingly liberal space for social organisations more generally. Rather, the role of social organisations in social governance is likely to be carefully managed by the party-state and involve state-established or state-guided organisations. Furthermore, the lack of a historical role for grassroots social organisations in governing stability and mediating conflict has led some commentators to question whether the state is really serious about social governance and whether state rhetoric on stability maintenance matches realities at the local level.

1.4 Older People's Associations: A Social Governance Case Study

[72] Hoffman, S. Mattis, P. (2012) 'Social Governance under Xi Jinping'.

Although scholars have raised questions over whether organizations exist with the capacity to fulfil the social governance agenda at the grassroots, I would argue that we have seen the emergence of at least one such organization – the older people's association (OPAs, *laonian xiehui* 老年协会). While some grassroots social organizations have received attention from China scholars, others, such as OPAs have been largely overlooked. Although OPAs are termed a 'popular organisation' (*minjian zuzhi* 民间组织) by the Chinese government they are in fact institutionally connected to the Party-state apparatus. Indeed, OPAs were first established in the 1980s as an official 'unit' connected to village committees.[73] They gained momentum in the 1990s, and now there are estimated to be over 490,000 OPAs across China. Their number alone ought to make them a target of scholarly interest[74] and with state funds being made available for establishing grassroots OPAs, their importance is set to grow. Although their function is contested, newspaper reports and existing studies suggest their activities go beyond the social realm, with OPAs taking on politicized roles locally, including contributing towards policy implementation, propaganda dissemination, and dispute meditation.

This section will look at the existing literature on OPAs in order to show clues to their role in social governance, mediation and stability preservation. Although the existing academic literature on OPAs is sparse, one can point to three distinct analytical tracts that are useful for examining the existing research. This section will start by looking at bottom-up approaches to OPAs, then at contentious approaches, and finally at top-down

[73] Hansen, M. (2007) 'Organising the Old: Senior Authority and the Political Significance of a Rural Chinese 'Non-Governmental Organisation'', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol 42, No.5, pp.1057–1078, p.1063.
[74] They almost equal the number of registered NGOs, which is said to be at 460,000. China Daily (2012) 'Number of NGOs in China grows to nearly 500,000', *China Daily*. [Accessed online on 15/08/16 at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-03/20/content_14875389.htm]

approaches. To my knowledge, I have reviewed all existing academic research on OPAs in English and Chinese in the discussion below.

1.4.1'Bottom Up' Approaches

The first model, pursued primarily in the Chinese language scholarship,[75] provides a bottom-up account of OPAs. This approach sees the growth of OPAs as a societal response to the dislocation of rural communities in the reform-era. He Xuefeng,[76] academic director of Huazhong University's Rural Governance Research Centre, paints a picture of despairing elderly confronted with a rapidly changing environment in which communes have collapsed, the market economy has undermined social norms, and older people have an increasingly difficult time manoeuvring a more contract-based society. A wider literature[77] reveals that it is the rural elderly that have felt the negative effects of reform most keenly, having to work longer, and raise grandchildren while adult children work elsewhere. He Xuefeng[78] and other Chinese scholars such as Dong Haining and Deng Yanghua[79] see the growth of OPAs as a response to these new more difficult conditions of life and an integral part of rural reconstruction efforts. Citing examples of

[75] He, X. (2007) 'New Rural Reconstruction (NRR) and the Chinese Path', *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 39, No. 4, pp.26-38; Dong, H. (2003) '现代农村社区福利的产生和促进: 对浙江宁波 L 村老年协会个案的考察' ['Generating and facilitating community welfare in contemporary rural China: A case study of the Society of Senior Citizens in L village, Ningbo, Zhejiang'], 社会 [*Society*] Vol. 11, pp.9-12; Deng, Y. (2008) '农村银色力量何以可能?一以浙江老年协会为例', ['To What Extent is Grey Power Possible? A Case Study of Older People's Associations in Zhejiang Province'], 社会学研究 [*Sociological Research*]; He, X. (2005) '老年人协会建设纪事' ['A Chronicle of the Formation of Older People's Associations'], [Accessed online on 09/11/2011 at: http://www.snzg.cn/article/show.php?itemid-4471/page-1.html].

[76] He, X. (2007) 'NRR and the Chinese Path'.

[77] Murphy, R (2006) *Domestic Migrant Remittances in China: Channels, Distribution and Livelihoods*, IOM Migration Research Series, (Geneva: United Nations Press); Pang, L. (2004) Working Until You Drop: The Elderly of Rural China, *China Journal*, Vo. 52, pp.73-96.

[78] He, X. (2007) 'NRR and the Chinese Path'.

[79] Dong, H. (2003) 'Generating and facilitating community welfare'; Deng, Y. (2008) 'To What Extent is Grey Power Possible'.

OPAs in villages in Hubei and Zhejiang, He Xuefeng's[80] longitudinal study showed how OPAs were established as non-politicized societal spaces to be used by older people for social gatherings, cultural classes, and community traditions.[81] These activities, he argued, generated the trust and social capital required to bring communities together[82] to find collective solutions to community problems.[83] The approach that these scholars have taken suggests that OPAs have, over time, become a strong societal force in rural areas filling a void in social welfare provision, where the local state has, for either lack of will or lack of resources, retreated.[84]

1.4.2 Contentious Approaches

If OPAs have become strong societal actors locally (be that in service provision or elsewhere) one wonders whether these activities can ever burgeon into challenging the state and its policies. The most recent scholarship on OPAs suggests that in some instances this may be the case. In three journal articles assessing the actions of one OPA in Zhejiang, Deng Yanghua and Kevin O'Brien[85] demonstrate how the OPA constituted

[80] He, X. (2007) 'NRR and the Chinese Path'.

[81] Chinese scholars have also noted their role in preserving local histories, holding events to commemorate ancestors, and hosting temple fairs. For more on this, see: Mu (2006), Wang (2009) and Yang (2009) cited in: Deng, Y. O'Brien, K. (2014) 'The Society of Senior Citizens'.

[82] He Xuefeng argues that in the past everyone in a village knew each other and people feared moral judgement from their neighbours. Nowadays that is no longer the case, so the 'free rider' issue blocks collective solutions to problems, as people take advantage of collective projects without contributing to them. He, X. (2007) 'NRR and the Chinese Path', pp.152-157.

[83] OPA activities burgeoned into social welfare provisioning, distributing food and social care, visiting sick and disabled residents, and subsidizing funeral costs. He, X. (2007) 'NRR and the Chinese Path'; Similar activities were described by: Dong, H. (2003) 'Generating and facilitating community welfare''; Deng, Y. (2008) 'To What Extent is Grey Power Possible'.

[84] He Xuefeng is a renowned scholar *and* a social activist and his studies of OPAs involved a mix of both capacities. One therefore questions whether the OPAs in his study would have developed this way without outside involvement.

[85] Deng, Y. O'Brien, K. (2013) 'Relational Repression in China'; O'Brien, K. Deng, Y. (2015) 'Repression Backfires'; Deng, Y. O'Brien, K. (2014) 'The Society of Senior Citizens'.

an effective 'mobilizing structure'[86] for collective action against a number of state-backed polluting factories.[87] In addition, they showed how state efforts to repress their protest activities led the OPA to escalate its protest tactics.[88] Although no other detailed studies of 'contentious OPAs' appear to exist, Deng and O'Brien and another article on OPAs by Hurst *et al.*[89] refer to online reports of OPAs organizing petitions, lawsuits, and other forms of collective action against cadre corruption, environmental degradation, and pension arrears. As such, this contentious approach to OPAs suggests that, in some localities, they have become a force capable of rallying resources against (parts of) the state and (some aspects) of state policy. Although, Deng and O'Brien do not address the OPAs' formation explicitly, based on their funding arrangements[90] it is clear that these OPAs are (or at least were) connected to the Party-state apparatus. This leads one to wonder how a state-established organization has moved so far beyond the control of governmental actors and whether OPA establishment may become a double-edged sword for the local state. Yet, it is also important to keep in mind that, with articles focusing only on one OPA in Zhejiang and a few online reports elsewhere, this model of OPAs may not reflect the typical activities of OPAs across China.

[86] The OPA that Deng and O'Brien describe had an effective 'mobilizing structure' owing to 'strong finances, organizational autonomy, [and] effective leadership.' Deng, Y. O'Brien, K. (2014) 'The Society of Senior Citizens'.

[87] Elderly activism in China has received some limited attention, see: Hurst, W. O'Brien, K. (2002) 'China's Contentious Pensioners', *The China Quarterly* No. 170, pp.345-360; Michelson, E (2006) 'Connected Contention: Social Resources and Petitioning the State in Rural China', Working Paper. [Accessed online on 7/10/13 at: http://www.indiana.edu/~emsoc/Publications/Michelson_Petitioners.pdf.]

[88] O'Brien, K. Deng, Y. (2015) 'Repression Backfires'.

[89] Deng, Y. O'Brien, K. (2014) The Society of Senior Citizens', p.2; Hurst W. *et al.* (2014) 'Reassessing Collective Petitioning in Rural China: Civic Engagement, Extra-State Violence, and Regional Variation', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 46, No. 4, pp.459-482.

[90] This OPA was funded by collective land owned by the village, an arrangement I saw replicated at state-established OPAs in Yunnan and Sichuan.

1.4.3 'Top-down' Approaches

Mette Halskov Hansen[91] offers a competing analysis of OPA activities with a clear 'top-down' emphasis. Her study of OPAs in Zhejiang and Fujian demonstrated that, rather than ceding ground to OPAs, the state has been successful at overseeing their activities to bolster its legitimacy. In doing so, she provided the first clues to OPA involvement in stability maintenance and governing conflict at the local level. Indeed, Hansen[92] argued that the state's establishment of OPAs is an attempt to institutionalize the authority of older people into an organization intimately related to the local state. The traditional prestige of the elderly men who head OPAs makes them complementary partners for younger officials suffering from a lack of public respect during a time of rapid social change in rural areas.[93] Hansen gives examples of OPAs helping village committees to implement contentious state policies, such as birth control and mandatory cremation, to demonstrate their critical value to the state. Likewise, in a large-*n* survey, Hurst *et al.*[94] also note local government reliance upon OPAs to 'persuade the masses' in disputes over state policy. Indeed, using statistical evidence, they argue that, OPAs have become so effective at placating local communities that their presence reduces the probability of popular protest. Although Hurst *et al.*[95] frame the OPAs' role as one of liaison in disputes, attributing slightly more agency to them than Hansen's approach,[96] their emphasis remains primarily on describing a state-directed process.

[91] Hansen, M. (2007) 'Organising the Old'.
[92] *Ibid.* p.1062
[93] *Ibid*. p.1063
[94] Hurst W. *et al.* (2014) 'Reassessing Collective Petitioning'.
[95] *Ibid.*
[96] Hansen, M. (2007) 'Organising the Old'.

Yet, a significant shortcoming of both articles is that neither explore *how* or *why* the state uses OPAs to implement contentious policy and mediate disputes in any great depth. In the Hurst *et al.,* paper this is because they discuss a wide array of organizations - the 'mafia', lineage halls, churches - and, as such, although they briefly make an argument about OPAs, they dedicate very little discussion to them. Hansen on the other hand does spend the whole article discussing OPAs, yet she dedicates little space to the *process* of conflict mediation and policy dissemination, in which the OPA is involved. Both papers lack analysis of *how* the state seeks the help of the OPA, *how* the OPA goes about persuading the masses to comply with contentious policy, and *how* they prevent disputes spiralling out of control. Most importantly, and perhaps the reason why these papers focus on 'top-down' interactions, neither article looks at how the OPA committee members *respond* to the obligations the state channels through them nor how their actions might affect others in the local community. Without looking at these other modes of interaction in-depth, scholars passivize the agency of OPA actors and fail to acknowledge their ability to interpret and renegotiate the situations in which they find themselves. My Masters research on OPAs in Yunnan and Sichuan sought to provide a more dynamic account of OPAs' role in stability maintenance by showing how OPA mediation of disputes allowed them leverage to negotiate with the state over the outcome of disputes.[97] Yet, a Masters thesis did not provide enough space for an in-depth study of this phenomenon and further research for this D.Phil thesis has been necessary to examine the complex dynamics between actors.

[97] Robins, V. (2012) 'Older People's Associations and the Local State: The Politics of Organising the Old in Contemporary Rural China', University of Oxford, Unpublished Masters' Thesis.

1.4.4. Section Summary

This section has reviewed the existing literature on OPAs in English and Chinese. It has pointed to three themes within the existing research that can be framed as 'bottom-up approaches', 'contentious approaches', and 'top-down approaches'. Bottom up approaches largely see the growth of OPAs as a societal response to the dislocation of rural communities in the reform-era; contentious approaches suggest that, on some occasions, OPAs have become vocal challengers of state policy or state officials. Top-down approaches have suggested that OPAs can be useful allies of the state in policy implementation and conflict mediation. Yet, this section has shown that these top-down approaches have often not adequately explored *how* or *why* the state uses OPAs to implement contentious policy and mediate disputes in any great depth. This thesis seeks to address this gap in the literature.

1.5 Research Questions

Central Question: What role do OPAs play in 'social governance' and 'stability maintenance' in rural China?

Sub-Questions:

a) How and why do local officials seek the support of OPA committees to implement contentious policy and maintain stability, particularly in cases of land conflict?

b) How do OPAs understand and respond to the kinds of obligations that the state seeks to channel through it?

c) Does this provide OPAs with opportunities to reinterpret or negotiate with the local state over policy implementation and

outcomes? And does negotiation provide a channel through which villagers can redress their grievances locally?

e) Finally, might an overreliance on OPAs for maintaining stability actually weaken the state's control?

1.6 Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

This study utilizes 'State-*in*-Society' as an overarching framework through which to understand the aforementioned research questions. A brief summary of the theoretical approach is included below; a much longer theoretical discussion is included in Chapter Two.

1.6.1 State vs. Society

Since opening-up, a debate has raged as to whether to characterize the proliferation of associations in China as a burgeoning 'civil society' or as 'state-corporatism'. On the one hand, scholars, writing particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, who utilized the 'civil society' concept pointed to a liberal, pluralizing space for social organizations to fill service provision gaps or even challenge state policy. Initially, at least, these scholars asked whether associational groups might challenge the CCP's political monopoly.[98] Yet, those writing after the suppression of the Tiananmen Square student movement, demonstrated the weakness of Chinese 'civil society' and were cautious of using the term given its emphasis on autonomy from the state. Instead, a new wave of scholars used 'state-

[98] Zhang, X. Baum, R. (2008) 'Civil Society and the Anatomy of a Rural NGO', in, *Associations and the Chinese State: Contested Spaces,* ed. Unger, J. (London: M.E. Sharpe) pp.200-215, p.200.

corporatism' as a conceptual approach pointing, as evidence, to the creation of numerous 'government-organized NGOs' (GONGOs) and a range of control mechanisms to constrict associational life. Yet, both these theories are premised on the idea of 'state' and 'society' as binaries pit against each other in a zero-sum game. Although some scholars of Chinese politics and society have successfully shifted their focus away from the 'state-society dichotomy' towards the 'intermediary sphere' *between* state and society,[99] many others have become bogged down in the *degree* of autonomy social organizations have from the state.[100] Indeed, those scholars who have focused on these two approaches have often neglected to adequately demonstrate the complex patterns of co-existence, mutual dependency, and embeddedness that exist between social organizations and the Chinese state.[101] Given the limitations of these terms, this study avoids couching its discussion of OPAs in this context.

1.6.2 State-in-Society

A deeper understanding of Chinese politics requires moving beyond the 'state-society dichotomy' by disaggregating the crude categories of 'state' and 'society'.[102] Writing in the context of North Africa, Joel Migdal's[103] 'State-*in*-Society' approach is one of the most influential attempts at this. In his critique of the 'statist school',[104] Migdal

[99] Such as, Duara's 'cultural nexus', Huang's 'third realm' or Rankin's 'managerial public sphere' cited in: Thornton, P. (2007) *Disciplining the State: Virtue, Violence, and State-Making in Modern China,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) pp.8-9

[100] Perry, E. (1994) 'Trends in the Study of Chinese Politics: State-Society Relations', *The China Quarterly*, No. 139, pp.704-713.

[101] Bislev, A. Thøgersen, S. (2012) *Organising Rural China – Rural China Organising,* (Abingdon: Routledge).

[102] Perry, E. (1994) 'Trends in the Study of Chinese Politics'.

[103] Migdal, J. (1988) *Strong Societies and Weak States*.

[104] The 'statist school' views the state as the primary actor in dictating social, political and economic developments within its borders. For more on the 'statist school', see: Evans, P. Rueschemeyer, D. Skocpol, T. (1985) *Bringing the State Back In,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

maintained that the state should be examined as a product of its social setting. While research on policy making at the political centre may usefully delineate spheres of state and society, at the grassroots periphery these distinctions are less clear-cut and fraught with cleavages. As such, state behaviour should be seen as being shaped by interactions with individuals at the grassroots. To illustrate, Migdal showed how alliances with social forces at the grassroots, and with local 'strongmen'[105] in particular, have been key to furthering state reach. Yet, such alliances are risky because they bolster the authority of powerful societal agencies that could use their status to challenge the authority of local officials and pursue interests at the expense of the centre and its policy goals.[106]

While Migdal's approach was developed to characterize 'weak states' it can still be useful in a 'strong state' context, like China, where weaknesses in state oversight and capacity still exist at the rural grassroots level.[107] Indeed, Vivienne Shue's study of state-society relations under Mao, *The Reach of the State,* demonstrated that states that look strong at the centre may be frailer at the grassroots. In the reform-era, however, the state has extended its penetration of the local level by binding more closely the interests of local officials to those of the centre. In this context, one would expect the primary locus of bargaining to have shifted from centre-periphery interactions (described by Migdal and Shue), towards interactions *between* cleavages at the grassroots. As such, the key problem of State-*in*-Society for use in a strong state context is the implicit zero-sum relationship between centre and periphery that runs throughout his analysis. A revision of Migdal's original approach is therefore necessary. While alliances between the local state

[105] Migdal gives examples of landlords, caciques, local businessmen, and traditional chiefs.
[106] Migdal (1988) *Strong Societies and Weak States*, p.265
[107] Shue, V. (1988) *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press); Shue, V. (2012) 'Modern/Rural China: State Institutions and Village Values', in, *Organizing Rural China – Rural China Organizin*g, eds, Bislev, A. Thøgersen s. (Abingdon: Routledge).

and local societal forces may indeed create space for negotiation that shapes state policy and behaviour, yet this does not *necessarily* have to produce a zero-sum outcome for the centre. Rather, 'mutual empowerment' whereby 'interactions (or linkages) between state segments and social segments can and do have the effect of creating more power for *both* sides'[108] is also a possible outcome. Such a theoretical approach can help us explain the aforementioned paradoxical duality of how a strong, resilient authoritarian state can co-exist with robust societal forces.

Hypothesis: Using this theoretical discussion as a springboard, this study has hypothesized that local states utilize 'strongmen' embedded within OPAs to extend local state capacity and penetration of the grassroots. Specifically, in the context of rising societal conflict, local state officials use OPA allies – who represent figures of high esteem and local authority – to maintain stability and resolve disputes. Yet, OPA actors are also embedded within, and allied to, their local communities. Thus, these alliances provide leverage with which OPA actors negotiate with the local state over the implementation of state policy and the outcome of local disputes in exchange for their support. As such, OPA-state negotiations provide a channel through which the state can increase its penetration of the grassroots and maintain stability and societal forces can influence and negotiate with the state at the same time.

1.7 Note on Terminology

[108] Kohli, A. Shue, V. (1994) 'State Power and Social Forces: On Political Contention and Accommodation in the Third World', in, *State Power and Social Forces,* eds, Migdal, J. Kohli, A. Shue, V. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p.323.

1.7.1 'Social Control', 'Social Order', and 'Social Order Maintenance'

The term 'social control'[109] refers to the mechanisms and patterns of pressure through which society maintains order and cohesion.[110] That is to say, 'social control' is the process of maintaining social conformity to established norms and rules.[111] 'Social control' and 'social order maintenance' are used interchangeably in this thesis. 'Social order' is the *outcome* of 'social control'. However, given the close overlap in meaning and vernacular usage of these terms, I have often used them interchangeably within this dissertation.

1.7.2 'Stability Maintenance' and 'Social Stability'

The terms 'stability maintenance' (which refers to the process) and 'social stability' (which refers to the outcome) are closely linked to 'social control' and 'social order' in that, in general usage, they refer to the preservation of social order. However, in the Chinese context these terms have a more specific meaning. Although I have not been able to find an official definition for these terms in either policy documents or academic sources,[112] based on my interpretation of their use in Chinese government sources and in academic articles on China, I would argue that this leads us to the following definition. 'Stability maintenance' (*weichi wending* 维持稳定 or *weiwen* 维稳 in short) and 'social stability' (*shehui wending* 社会稳定) are usually used to refer to: (1) the preservation of

[109] For more on 'social control' in the subfield of sociology, see: Durkheim, E. (1947). *The Division of Labour in Society*. Tr. Simpson, G. (New York: Free Press); Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* (New York: Pantheon); Pound, R. (1996). *Social Control Through Law,* (New Brunswick: Transaction); Cohen, S. (1985) *Visions of Social Control: Crime, Punishment, and Classification,* (Cambridge: Polity).

[110] Carmichael, J. (2012) 'Social Control', *Oxford Bibliographies*. [Accessed online on 22/04/2017 at: http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0048.xml?rskey=znQuMR&result=3&q=social+control#firstMatch]

[111] *Ibid.*

[112] They are terms that are regularly used but rarely explicitly defined.

law and order as defined and regulated by the CCP; (2) the reduction and/or containment of social conflict, disputes, and protests in Chinese society; and (3) the mitigation of threats to CCP rule. This does not necessarily mean a society entirely without disputes, but rather that disputes are contained, localised, and unable to spiral out of control. As such, although not exactly interchangeable, 'maintaining stability' often boils down to maintaining Communist Party hegemony and durability.

1.7.3 'Social Management', 'Social Governance'

Finally, the terms 'social management' (*shehui guanli* 社会管理) and 'social governance' (*shehui zhili* 社会治理) are used in this thesis to refer to the specific stability maintenance policies used by the Chinese Government. These policies have been defined and explained more comprehensively earlier in this introduction.

1.8 Dissertation Outline

This thesis has deliberately sought to include an extended review of the existing literature, theoretical framework, historical background, and research methods in **Chapters One to Three (pp. 12 - 142)**. A long review of the existing literature has been necessary in this thesis because it is highly interdisciplinary in nature drawing on historical, political, sociological, anthropological, and socio-legal studies. As such, it has been necessary to use the three initial chapters to fully equip the reader with an understanding of the background and context in order to understand the choice of theoretical approach and the empirical findings of this dissertation.

Chapter One, (the Introduction) has reviewed the literature on conflict and grievance; stability maintenance and social governance; as well as all the existing literature on older people's associations in China. In doing so, it has sought to demonstrate gaps in the existing literature and has put forward research questions to address these gaps.

Following this introductory chapter, **Chapter Two** reviews the literature on state-society relations in contemporary China. It begins by reviewing the literature on 'civil society' and 'state-corporatism', but argues that neither approach is nuanced enough to capture the role of associations in rural life. Next it looks at the more recent literature on NGO-state relations, which has sought to move beyond the state-society dichotomy, such as 'embedded activism' and 'consultative authoritarianism'. However, it argues that, while highly useful for some NGOs and certainly more illuminating than civil society and state-corporatism, these approaches do not sufficiently differentiate between two types of NGOs - societal NGOs and GONGOs. The former is concerned with societal activism in a constrained system, while the latter is arguably a form of state-building. Given that OPAs fall into the latter category, Chapter Two then puts forward a theoretical approach – State-*in*-Society – that recognises the state-building dynamic involved in using social groups to penetrate society. Yet, unlike state-corporatism, the State-*in*-Society approach does not underestimate societal capacity to reinterpret and redefine such organizations locally. This chapter argues that this approach is useful for two reasons. First, this theoretical model can show how states use alliances with local authority figures to pursue their governing agenda, and second, it emphasises the state's need to negotiate with such figures when seeking their allegiance, thereby allowing them to influence state policy. Finally, given that the State-*in*-Society approach focuses on alliances with local *authority* figures, this chapter provides a definition of 'authority' and a historical overview of

traditional authority (i.e. kinship, patriarchy and the seniority of elders) and social control in China.

Chapter Three sets out the research design and details the process of conducting fieldwork, selecting fieldsites, as well as the methods and types of data collection. This chapter first addresses the research design and outlines a qualitative – 'one-case, multi-fieldsite' approach to looking at grassroots OPAs in counties across three provinces - Yunnan, Fujian, and Shaanxi. It then addresses the sources of data collection including participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and policy/documentary analysis. The limitations of this research project are discussed throughout this chapter.

This thesis has generated new knowledge for the next four empirical chapters (**Chapters Four to Seven, pp.143-301**). The first of these four – **Chapter Four** – delivers new empirical evidence on OPAs from a macro-perspective, while the latter three are focused on the empirical data generated from OPAs at the rural grassroots. More specifically, Chapter Four outlines the establishment of OPAs as well as the regulatory structures that surround them. It first discusses the establishment of OPAs, looking particularly at the contours of variation in the different typologies and functions of OPAs that exist at the grassroots. It then looks at the state's motivation behind the establishment of OPAs. Finally, the chapter explores the supervisory structures surrounding OPAs and the regulatory environment in which they operate. In doing so, this chapter aims to demonstrate the ways in which OPAs are institutionally connected to party-state structures thereby allowing policy directives and goals from the central level to permeate to the grassroots. Yet, it also shows how these structures are not used to restrict and

constrain OPAs. Rather, the state has sought to encourage the proliferation of OPAs at the grassroots.

Chapter Five explores what types of individuals are appointed or elected to sit on OPA committees and assesses how these people can be useful allies of the state. More specifically, it looks at the common characteristics of those individuals appointed to sit on OPA committees as well as how these characteristics are key to generating authority in rural villages. In doing so, it has demonstrated how traditional Confucian norms such as old age, male gender, influence in the kinship network, high educational and employment status, and good moral character continue to hold currency in the context of rural China. Furthermore, this chapter has shown how embedding local authority figures into the OPA, makes these individuals and the traditional authority that they possess legible and accessible to the state for its aims. In exploring these issues, this chapter aims also to make a wider point about state-making and modernisation in China. The conventional view of the modern Chinese state, and the modern state more generally, is often seen as seeking to supplant traditional authority and social control with rational, legalistic, and bureaucratic mechanisms. Yet, this chapter shows that the post-Mao Party-state has actually played a key role in *mobilising* and *enmeshing* traditional forms of authority into organisational structures, like the OPA, in order to utilise it to aid state capacity and social control.

Chapter Six explores the relationship between OPAs and the local state through the prism of land conflict and infrastructure development. It argues that alliances with OPAs enable the state to harness qualities possessed by OPA members such as trustworthiness and biographical availability in order to aid the governance and resolution of land disputes.

More specifically, it argues that such alliances allow the state to delegate the mediation of land disputes to OPA committees who have more time, than local officials, to repeatedly engage with disputants to find satisfactory solutions to conflicts. In addition, such alliances also enable the state to gather information on villagers and village affairs so as to tailor their dispute negotiating strategies to suit the personalities of individual disputants. Such alliances therefore serve to aid state capacity and enhance state penetration of society at the micro-level.

While Chapter Six focused on how state-OPA alliances benefit the state, **Chapter Seven** looks at the relationships from the opposite perspective. That is to say, it focuses on how the OPA committee can use their position to negotiate with the local state, as well as how the OPA can also be of benefit to societal actors. In doing so, this chapter argues that OPAs are not uncritical in their cooperation with state officials. Rather, they are very much tied to local interests and can maintain local allegiances even at the same time as engaging in cooperation. As such, local officials cannot simply impose their will on passive OPA actors at the grassroots. Instead, any reliance on OPAs for dispute mediation and policy implementation provides OPAs with political opportunities and leverage with which to negotiate with the state over both the process and outcome of such disputes in return for their support. In doing so, OPAs can then use their status to negotiate over state policy, deflect certain state aims, circumvent the authority of certain state institutions, or transmit societal grievances to the local state.

The **Conclusion** will recap the central empirical and theoretical arguments of this thesis and will point to future research needed in this field. It will also look more broadly at

lessons learned from this thesis on broader issues of: state-society relations; authoritarian resilience; and state modernisation.

1.9 Conclusion

This introductory chapter has reviewed all the existing academic literature on OPAs in both English and Chinese language scholarship. I have suggested that OPA activities appear to go beyond a purely social role in rural communities with many OPAs taking on increasingly politicized duties including contributing towards policy implementation and dispute meditation. As such, this chapter put forward my research questions and has asked what role OPAs play in 'social governance' and 'stability maintenance' in rural China. Although a limited number of studies have shown how OPAs can be politically useful for the state, none have situated their studies so explicitly in the context of social governance discourses. Furthermore, existing studies that do address OPAs' role in mediating conflict only provide 'top-down' accounts of these processes in which the state is considered the primary political actor. This study seeks to understand how OPAs respond to the different kinds of authority and obligations that the state channels through them, and asks whether such interactions provide OPAs with an opportunity to negotiate with local officials over the outcomes of state policy.

This study is relevant for understanding the 'micro-foundations' of authoritarian resilience at China's rural grassroots. Although most studies of authoritarian resilience in

China have focused on macro-level political institutions,[113] more recently scholars have begun look at the foundations of authoritarian resilience at the grassroots. Yet, these studies have almost exclusively focused on urban areas.[114] In addition, studies on conflict and social discontent have primarily focused on how conflicts are resolved by higher levels of government. Far fewer focus on conflict mediation *within* the village and, when they have, they have tended to give excessive attention to the role of grassroots officials at the expense of informal actors. By seeking to understand how the Party-state uses OPAs to maintain stability at the *rural* grassroots, this study seeks to rectify this imbalance and contribute to our understanding of how 'social governance' plays out at the local-level. These questions are relevant for addressing broader questions about state-society relations in contemporary China, in particular whether it is possible for the Party-state to continue to mobilize the social energy of local communities without weakening its own grip on power.

Finally, although this study does not explicitly situate itself within the field of demography or gerontology, I hope this study can provide a small counter-weight to a wide literature that largely[115] portrays China's elderly as vulnerable victims[116] or passive

[113] Nathan, A. (2003) 'Authoritarian Resilience'; Shambaugh, D. (2008) *China's Communist Party*; Chen, X. (2011) *Social protest and contentious authoritarianism in china.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

[114] Heberer, T. Göbel, C. (2011) *The Politics of Community Building in Urban China* (London: Taylor & Francis Group); Read, B. (2012) *Roots of the State*; Lee, C.K. Zhang, Y. (2013) 'The Power of Instability'.

[115] There are some limited exceptions, see: Jacka, T. (2014) 'Left-behind and Vulnerable? Conceptualising Development and Older Women's Agency in Rural China', *Asian Studies Review,* Vol. 38, No. 2, pp.186-204.

[116] 'The vulnerable group discourse reproduces a stereotype of left-behind older people as abandoned, dependent, passive and weak; unable to look after themselves, let alone contribute to development. Like all stereotypes, there is a grain of truth here – some elderly, especially those who have been incapacitated by illness or extreme old age, do fit this picture, but as a general description of the rural elderly, it is', as Tamara Jacka writes, 'empirically inaccurate and misleading'. *Ibid.*

receptors of economic and social change.[117] In both Western and Chinese scholarship on conflict and collective action, despite diverse attention to social cleavages, the elderly are almost invisible, seen as engaging only in passive forms of political participation,[118] and rarely portrayed as strong, influential, or contentious political actors. Given that such invisibility serves to passivize the agency of the elderly and negate their role as political actors, I hope this study might encourage other scholars to challenge these assumptions in future research.

[117] For examples, see: Connelly, R. Maurer-Fazio, M (2015) 'Left Behind, At Risk, Vulnerable Elders in Rural China', *The Institute for the Study of Labor*, Discussion Paper No. 9213; Cai, F. Giles, J. O'Keefe, P. Wang, D. (2012) *The Elderly and Old Age Support in Rural China* (Washington, DC: World Bank); England, R. (2005) *Ageing China*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies); Powell, J. Cook, I. (2007) *New Perspectives on Ageing* (New York: Nova Science Publishers); He, G. *et al.* (2015) 'Depression in left-behind elderly in rural China: prevalence and associated factors', *Geriatrics and Gerontology International*, Vol. 16, No. 5; Woo, J, Kwok, T. Sze, F. Yuan, H. (2002) 'Ageing in China: Health and Social Consequences and Responses' *International Journal of Epidemiology,* Vol. 31, No. 4, pp.772-775; Li, X. Xiao, Z. Xiao, S. (2009) 'Suicide among the elderly in mainland China' *Psychogeriatrics,* Vol. 9, No. 2, pp.62-66.

[118] Melo, D. Stockemer, D. (2012) 'Age and Political participation in Germany, France and the UK: A Comparative Analysis', *Comparative European Politics,* Vol. 12, No. 1, pp.33-53.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to provide an overview of the literature on state-society relations in China. Its primary aim is to understand the gaps in the existing conceptual literature and to assess whether 'statist' theories sufficiently capture the nature and role of social organisations, and specifically older people's associations, in contemporary rural China.

States are political organizations concerned with managing, exercising, and pursuing governing power.[119] Exactly *how* states pursue governing power has shifted over time and space, but the most distinguishable characteristic of the *modern* state lies in its ability to organize and render 'legible' the complex natural and social ecologies under its

[119] Shue, V. (2012) 'Modern/Rural China', p.224

jurisdiction. [120] As Foucault [121] has argued, through techniques of coordination, organisation and rearrangement, the modern state strives to make the lives of those it governs visible in their entirety. At the same time, states use a repertoire of organising routines to condition their subjects to identify and situate themselves within the state's framework of legibility.[122] This ability to project 'organisation' onto impenetrable aspects of social life is arguably the signature aspect of 'modern' governance.[123]

While 'organisation' can be said to form the basis of governance across democratic and authoritarian contexts, it is in the latter setting where such techniques are considered most penetrating. In the Chinese context, the familiar 'strong state, weak society' axiom has been used time and again by scholars seeking to describe modern China's developmental experience in relation to other societies.[124] As Vivienne Shue argues, 'that Chinese state builders and practitioners past and present have defined their roles and responsibilities much more expansively and penetratingly than state authorities in other parts of the world, is something few would dispute'.[125]

[120] Mitchell, T. (1991) *Colonising Egypt,* (Berkeley: The University of California Press); Scott, J. (1998) *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed,* (London: Yale University Press).
[121] Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Cited in: Shue, V. (2012) 'Modern/Rural China', p.224
[122] *Ibid.*
[123] *Ibid.*
[124] *Ibid;* Perry, E. (1994) 'Trends in the Study of Chinese Politics'.
[125] Shue, V. (2012) 'Modern/Rural China', p.223. For a comparison of early modern state building in China and Europe, see: Wong, R. (1997) *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limit of the European Experience,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

This desire to penetrate society and extend state capacity[126] has led contemporary state builders[127] to develop institutional channels for the incorporation of particular groups and their interests. Such channels have been documented at every level of China's political system, from the political centre down to the grassroots periphery, the level with which this study is concerned. Indeed, political scientist Benjamin Read[128] argues that large swathes of organizations labelled as 'social organizations' by the Chinese government have not developed spontaneously, but rather were actively shaped and cultivated by the state. These can be defined as groups that engage citizen participation at the ultra-local level while remaining institutionally connected to Party-state structures enabling them to act as the state's 'nerve tips' in the effort to make the lives of societal actors visible, legible, and controllable.

Although academic studies on this kind of grassroots organisation have focused primarily on the urban grassroots,[129] it is clear that such organizations also exist in rural areas.[130] As an organisation established by and institutionally connected to Party-state structures while engaging societal participation for state aims, older people associations (OPAs) represent one such group. Yet, selecting an apt theoretical framework with which to study this social organization, and others like it, remains problematic. Studies of how states

[126] State 'capacity' is defined as the ability to administer its territory effectively. For more on this see, Skocpol, T. (1985) 'Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research', in, *Bringing the State Back In*, eds, Evans, P. Rueschemeyer, D. Skocpol, T. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Zysman, J. (1983) *Governments, Markets, and Growth: Financial Systems and Politics of Industrial Change*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

[127] State-building means the establishment, re-establishment, and strengthening of a public structure in a given territory capable of delivering public goods. As such, it can be seen as the *process* by which 'state capacity' is built. Fukuyama, F. (2004) *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press) p.ix

[128] Read, B. (2000) 'Revitalizing the States Urban "Nerve Tips"', *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 163, pp.806-820; Read, B. (2009) 'Introduction', p.1

[129] For examples, see: Read, B. (2012) *Roots of the State*; Heberer, T. Göbel, C. (2011) *The Politics of Community Building*; Lee, C. Zhang Y. (2013) 'The Power of Instability'.

[130] Bislev, A. Thøgersen, S. (2012) *Organising Rural China*.

mobilize and arrange society in ways that enforce their power have traditionally been dominated by approaches in the statist tradition.[131] These approaches have assumed that strong state capacity mitigates societal strength or agency. Yet, scholars of rural China have repeatedly noted that rural society has shown 'remarkable resilience...in the face of repeated assaults upon its foundations by officialised power'.[132] Thus, whether statist theories really capture the nature of such organisations, needs to be discussed and debated.

2.1.1 Chapter Overview and Argument

State-Society Relations in China

This chapter will review the literature on social organisations in contemporary China in order to assess different theoretical approaches to the study of state-society relations, and to OPAs more specifically. This chapter will begin by discussing how the conceptual approaches to social organisations in China have shifted and changed in the period since opening-up and reform. In doing so, it will review the literature on 'civil society' and on 'state-corporatism', the two dominant approaches to the study of associations in China. It will, however, argue that, because of their view of state and society as separate and often conflictual entities, neither of these approaches are nuanced enough to capture the role of associations in rural life.

Next, the chapter will look at the more recent body of literature on NGO-state relations in China, which seeks to move theoretical debates beyond the state-society dichotomy, such as 'embedded activism' and 'consultative authoritarianism'. Yet, it will suggest that

[131] For an account of the Statist school see: Evans, P. Rueschemeyer, D. Skocpol, T. (1985) *Bringing the State Back In.*

[132] Shue, V. (2012) 'Modern/Rural China', p.223

there is an analytical difference between NGOs, filled with activists or staffers, that are seeking to pursue their goals and deliver services in a constrained system, and a state-organised and institutionally connected group, created to embed a particular cohort and pursue the state's governing agenda. The former is concerned primarily with societal activism, while the latter is arguably a form of state-building.

Theoretical Framework

This thesis has sought to use a theoretical framework that recognises the state-building dynamic involved in using social groups to penetrate society. Yet, at the same time, it has sought not to underestimate the capacity of societal elements to reinterpret and redefine such organizations locally and to reshape the obligations channelled through them. As such, this study argues that Joel Migdal's State-*in*-Society approach is an appropriate framework for doing this. The State-*in*-Society approach is useful for two reasons. First, its approach to how states penetrate society and extend state capacity focuses on building alliances with local authority figures (or 'strongmen') at the grassroots. This fits closely with how the Chinese state embeds village 'elders', who possess authority locally, into OPAs in order to help it pursue its governing agenda. Second, this approach is useful because of its emphasis on negotiation with these authority figures when seeking their allegiance and in the outcomes of state policy. This thesis argues that this dynamic is also in evidence when looking at the behaviour of grassroots OPAs. As such, the State-*in*-Society approach, more than the State vs. Society approach, sees state and society as disaggregated entities, comprised of individuals that interact and are shaped by one another's actions.

Finally, given that Joel Migdal's State-*in*-Society approach focuses on the state's alliances with societal elements that have authority in the communities in which they operate, this chapter will also provide a definition of 'authority' and a historical overview of authority and social control in China. It will define 'authority' as 'legitimate power' and will argue that, despite one hundred years of state modernisation in China under Republicanism and Communism, traditional forms of authority, such as kinship, patriarchy and the seniority of elders, continue to remain rooted in rural society today.

2.2 State-Society Relations in China: A Genealogy of Ideas

This section will review the different conceptual approaches to social organisation in China in turn. It will start by looking at the civil society concept. In doing so, it will show that since opening-up, scholars have utilised three different definitions of civil society to capture the rise of associational life in China. First, they used liberal/pluralist definitions of civil society which conceived of associational groups as both antagonistic toward the state and democratising in the short to medium term; then scholars moved on to sociological definitions of civil society which saw NGOs as operating within an autonomous sphere from the state but not in opposition to it; and finally, they used the concept of 'state-led' civil society to account for the dominant role of the government in establishing, cultivating, and directing associational groups.

2.1.1 The 'Civil Society' Concept

Defining civil society

When considering the role of associational life in politics, 'civil society' has become the dominant paradigm in discussions about citizen associations in academic and policy contexts.[133] Political sociologist Larry Diamond defines 'civil society' as 'the realm of organised social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules'.[134] Indeed, a long theoretical tradition makes necessary the relationship between associational *autonomy* and citizen participation in political processes with features of voluntarism, self-constitution, and independence from government appearing across the majority of definitions.[135] More politicized definitions also necessitate a level of opposition and antagonism towards the state, although this is not universally required.[136] The combination of such properties is almost ubiquitously thought to contribute to democratic outcomes for the political system,[137] including increased political participation and better governmental accountability, to name two.[138] There are several reasons for this, but one of the more common assumptions is that the solidary networks that develop within associations serve to undergird the commitment of group members to civic norms and bolster 'social capital'. This in turn drives them to more insistently

[133] Read, B. (2009) 'Introduction'.
[134] Diamond, L. (1999) *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation,* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press) p.221
[135] Bratton, M. (1989) 'Beyond the State: Civil Society and Associational Life in Africa', World Politics, Vol. 41, No. 3, pp.407-430, p.417
[136] *Ibid.* p.417
[137] Alexis de Tocqueville is credited with first noting the relationship between 'vibrant associational life' and democracy. Tocqueville cited in: *Ibid.* p.417; Frolic, M. (1997) 'State-Led Civil Society', in, *Civil Society in China*, eds. Brook, T. Frolic, M. (London: M.E. Sharpe) pp.46-67, p.49.
[138] Diamond, L. (1999) *Developing Democracy.*

demand responsiveness to such norms from the state.[139] Others go further to argue that civil society is a democratising force because it acts as a 'parallel polis' and a buffer *against* state power.[140] That is to say, in this post-Tocquevillian view, civil society provides the ultimate guarantee that the state will be unable to arrogate to itself more power than an active citizenry is willing to grant.[141] The fundamentals of this theory have appeared under different names including: 'civil society',[142] 'social capital',[143] 'pluralism',[144] 'mass society',[145] and 'civic culture'.[146] Furthermore, the relationship between civil society, political action, and democratisation has been examined at virtually all levels of the political system from the national level right down to the grassroots – the level with which this study is concerned.[147] Indeed, Manuel Castells' study of grassroots

[139] Putnam, R. (1993) *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

[140] Similarly, much of the theoretical literature on social mobilization has highlighted the importance of horizontal social ties and solidary networks as 'mobilizing structures' for collective action. A 'mobilizing structure' refers to the organizational basis for popular contention. For more on this and social movement theory more broadly, see: Tarrow, S. (1998) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Della Porter, D. Diani, M. (1999) *Social Movements: An Introduction,* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing); McCarthy, J. Zald, M. (1977) 'Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory', *The American Journal of Sociology,* Col. 82, No. 6, pp.1212-1241.

[141] Bratton, M. (1989) 'Beyond the State'.

[142] For examples, see: Habermas, J. (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* tr. Burger, T. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press); Calhoun, C. (1993) 'Civil Society and the Public Sphere', *Public Culture,* Vol. 5, No. 2, pp.267-280.

[143] For examples, see: Putnam, R. (1993) *Making Democracy Work*; Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community,* (New York: Simon and Schuster).

[144] For examples, see: Lipset, S. Trow, M. Coleman, J. (1956) *Union Democracy: The Internal Politics of the International Typographical Union,* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press).

[145] For examples, see: Arendt, H. (1959) *The Human Condition,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Horkheimer, M. (1974) *Eclipse of Reason,* (London: Continuum).

[146] For examples, see: Almond, G. Verba, S. (1963) *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations,* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co).

[147] It should be noted, however, that, although the majority of scholarly work links civil society with greater democratisation, there are some exceptions. Simone Chambers and Jeffrey Kopstein, for example, argued that building 'trust and solidarity, [that is,] developing an 'I' into a 'we', does not strengthen democracy when the trust, solidarity, and the 'we' are such that they do not go beyond the group in question'. Using examples of gangs and the Ku Klux Klan they show how networks built on 'hatred, degradation and denigration of fellow citizens' can ostracise and isolate members from society rather than building active citizenship. Likewise, Sheri Berman similarly showed how vibrant associational life served to fracture and polarize German society in the 1930s facilitating Hitler's rise to power. Chambers, S. Kopstein, J. (2001)

neighbourhood groups in cross-cultural contexts, demonstrated that, even at the ultra-local level, such groups can be a fertile source of protest movements capable of transforming the political status quo – but *only* if they maintain their independence from the state.[148]

'Civil Society' in the Chinese Context

Economic reform and modernisation in China under Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s created new opportunities for citizen participation and, with it, the burgeoning of an associational sphere.[149] The breakdown of the command economy prompted the withdrawal of the state from many areas of economic and social life, leaving space for the rise of new non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in its place. In the economic realm, industry associations and chambers of commerce began to play a role in sectoral coordination and regulatory development.[150] In the realm of welfare provision, the state created numerous government-organised NGOs (GONGOs) to deal with a range of social problems and interest groups.[151] At the same time, international and local NGOs sought to fulfil a

'Bad Civil Society', *Political Theory,* Vol. 29, No. 6, pp.837-865; Berman, S. (1997) 'Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic', *World Politics,* Vol. 49, No. 3, pp.401-429.

[148] Read, B. (2009) 'Introduction'.

[149] For studies of Chinese 'civil society' see: White, G. *et al.* (1996) *In Search of Civil Society*; and a symposium on the origins and implications of Chinese civil society in *Modern China*, Vol. 19, No.2.

[150] Nevitt, C. (1996) 'Private Business Associations in China: Evidence of Civil Society or Local State Power?' *The China Journal,* Vol. 36, pp.25-43; Unger, J. (1996) 'Bridges: Private Business, the Chinese Government and the Rise of New Associations,' *The China Quarterly,* Vol. 147, pp.795-819; Foster, K. (2002) 'Embedded within State Agencies: Business Associations in Yantai,' *The China Journal,* Vol. 47, pp.41-65.

[151] Examples of GONGOs include: the Chinese Women's Development Foundation; the China Youth Development Foundation, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, the Chinese Society for Sustainable Development, and the China Environment Protection Fund. Wu, F. (2003) 'Environmental GONGO Autonomy: Unintended Consequences of State Strategies in China', *The Good Society,* Vol. 12, No.1, pp.35-45.

welfare function on issues such as poverty alleviation,[152] disaster relief,[153] education,[154] and old age care.[155] In the environmental realm, NGOs and citizen activists have played a prominent role in awareness raising, promoting regulatory change, and providing resistance on issues of pollution and environmental degradation.[156] Simultaneously, a host of grassroots and unregistered social organisations, have sprung up around controversial or 'marginalised interests',[157] such as, HIV/AIDS, gay rights, poor labour conditions, and drug addiction, to name a few.[158] By 2016 there were said to be roughly 675,000 registered NGOs in China, with estimates on the number of unregistered social organizations reaching as high as 3 million.[159] Regardless of how one characterises them,

[152] Wang, M. (2011) *Emerging Civil Society in China, 1978-2008,* (Leiden: Social Science Academic Press); Lu, Y. (2009) *Non-governmental Organisations in China: The Rise of Dependent Autonomy*, (Abingdon: Routledge).

[153] Teets, J. (2009) 'Post-earthquake Relief and Reconstruction Efforts: The Emergence of Civil Society in China,' *The China Quarterly,* Vol. 198, pp.330-347.

[154] Lu, Y. (2009) *NGOs in China.*

[155] Liu, C. (2015) 'Community Mobilization and Policy Advocacy in Urban China', in, *Urban Mobilizations and New Media in Contemporary China,* eds, Dong, L. Kriesi, H. Kubler, D. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate); Jing, Y. Liu, C (2010) 'Understanding China's Administrative Adaption: The Role of Weak Organisations', *Issues and Studies,* Vol. 46, No 2, pp.1-32.

[156] Yang, G. (2005) 'Environmental NGOs and Institutional Dynamics in China', *The China Quarterly,* Vol. 181, pp.46-66; Ho, P. (2001) 'Greening without Conflict? Environmentalism, NGOs, and Civil Society in China', *Development and Change,* Vol. 32, pp.893-921; Ho, P. Edmonds, R. (2008) *China's Embedded Activism: Opportunities and Constraints of a Social Movement,* (Abingdon: Routledge); Lora-Wainwright, A. (2017) *Resigned Activism: Living with Pollution in Rural China,* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

[157] Howell, J. (2004) *Governance in China,* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield); Spires, A. (2011) 'Contingent Symbiosis and Civil Society in an Authoritarian State: Understanding the Survival of China's Grassroots NGOs', *American Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 117, No. 1, pp.1-45.

[158] Hildebrandt, T. (2013) *Social Organizations and the Authoritarian State*; Hildebrandt, T. Chua, L. (forthcoming) 'Negotiating In/visibility: The Political Economy of Lesbian Activism and Rights Advocacy', *Development and Change;* Zoccatelli, G. (2015) 'Globalizing Empowerment: An Ethnography of AIDS, Heroin and Civil Society in Contemporary China', Unpublished PhD Dissertation, SOAS; Mitchell, T. Sevastopulo, D. (2014) 'China Labour Activism: Crossing the Line', *The Financial Times,* [Accessed online on 21/04/2017 at: https://www.ft.com/content/bb0f1c3a-c953-11e3-99cc-00144feabdc0]

[159] Hsu, C. Chen, F. Horsley, J. Stern, R. (2016) 'The State of NGOs in China', *The Brookings Institution* [Accessed online on 01/05/2017 at: https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2016/12/15/the-state-of-ngos-in-china-today/]

NGOs and social organisations are certainly 'an important instrument through which Chinese people participate in public affairs and promote their wellbeing.'[160]

Antagonistic Models of Civil Society

Yet, how the rise of this associational sphere should be conceptualised in academic discourses has shifted considerably in the last 40 years since China began opening-up. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, inspired by the strength of civil opposition movements against authoritarian states in East and Central Europe, and by a 'Habermasian Revolution' in the study of state-society relations in those contexts,[161] China studies scholars began to ask whether the proliferation of associational groups in China heralded the rise of a 'civil society' that might one day challenge the political monopoly of the Chinese Communist Party-state.[162] At the same time, the 'Beijing Spring' in 1979 and the 1989 Democracy Movement protests propelled some to believe that fundamental political and democratic reform was on its way. In this context, academics such as Laurence Sullivan,[163] Clemens Ostergaard,[164] and Jonathan Unger,[165] amongst others,[166] began to draw on liberal, pluralist models of 'civil society',[167] conceived in the democratic West, in order to characterise China's so called 'associational revolution'. These models built

[160] Yuen, S. (2017) Partners of Authoritarians: The Politics of Community NGOs in China' Unpublished D.Phil Dissertation, University of Oxford, p.4

[161] Movements included the Catholic Church in Poland, the former Democratic Party in Hungary, and political and environmental activists in East Germany. For more on civil society in Eastern Europe see: Rau, Z. (1991) *The Re-emergence of Civil Society in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union,* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press).

[162] Zhang, X. Baum, R. (2008) 'the Anatomy of a Rural NGO', p.200

[163] Sullivan, L. (1990) 'The Emergence of Civil Society in China, Spring 1989', in, *The Chinese People's Movement: Perspectives on Spring 1989,* ed, Saich, T. (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe), pp.126-144, p.136.

[164] Ostergaard, C. (1989) 'Citizens, Groups and a Nascent Civil Society in China: Towards an Understanding of the 1989 Student Demonstrations, *China Information,* Vol. 4, pp.28-41.

[165] Unger, J. (1991) 'Introduction', in, *The Pro-Democracy Protests in China: Reports from the Provinces,* ed, Unger, J. (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe) pp.1-7.

[166] Gold, T. (1990) 'The Resurgence of Civil Society in China', *Journal of Democracy,* Vol. 1, pp.18-31.

[167] Perry, E. (1994) 'Trends in the Study of Chinese Politics'.

on conceptions of civil society as a realm of organized social life that is independent of, and, antagonistic towards, the state.

For these scholars, the presence of protest mobilization alongside the development of social networks outside of the Party-state's control[168] was interpreted as part of 'the fundamental conflict between an emerging civil society and a state with totalitarian intentions'.[169] Ostergaard, for example, wrote in 1989 of the 'sudden, massive spread of civil society' and warned of a 'nationwide autonomous organization of the discontented' with 'new and dangerous' prospects for the CCP.[170] Some later studies even pointed to the burgeoning associational sphere, amongst other things, as indicative of the impending collapse of CCP rule.[171] As such, while not all studies predicted the immediate fall of the Party-state, many scholars writing in this period in the 1980s and 1990s did conceptualize associational life as both antagonistic towards state structures and democratizing over the short to medium term.[172]

Sociological Models of Civil Society

Yet, the suppression and de-legitimisation of popular movements like the 1989 Tiananmen Square student movement and the Falun Gong sect of the late 1990s,

[168] Goldman, M. (1991) 'Hu Yaobang's Intellectual Network and the Theory Conference of 1979', *The China Quarterly,* Vol. 126, pp.219-242; Nathan, A. (1990) *China's Crisis: Dilemma of Reform and Prospects for Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press); Bonnin, M. Chevrier, Y. (1991) 'The Intellectual and the State: Social Dynamics of Intellectual Autonomy during the Post-Mao Era', *The China Quarterly,* Vol. 127, pp.569-593; Strand, D. (1990) 'Protest and the Public Sphere in China', *Problems of Communism,* Vol. 39, No. 3, pp.1-19.

[169] McCormick, B. Su, S. Xiao, X. cited in: Yuen, S. (2017) 'Partners of Authoritarians'.

[170] Ostergaard, C. (1989) 'Citizens, Groups and a Nascent Civil Society'.

[171] Chang, G. (2002) *The Coming Collapse of China* (London: Random House).

[172] Whyte, M. (1992) 'Urban China: A Civil Society in the Making?' in, *State and Society in China: The Consequences of Reform,* ed, Rosenbaum, A. (Boulder: Westview Press), pp.77-101.

demonstrated the relative weakness of Chinese 'civil society'.[173] The idea that associational life might one-day result in democratic reform seemed increasingly unlikely. Indeed, some of the scholars who had initially characterised the associational sphere as a 'civil society' in the post-Tocquevillian sense, were accused of 'embellishing' or misusing the term.[174] In its place, China scholars turned toward sociological definitions of 'civil society' that emphasise autonomy from the state but not opposition to it.[175] These definitions drew loosely on the Hegelian notion of civil society as an intermediate sphere between the state and family that enjoys some autonomy from the state, and is formed voluntarily of its own accord.[176] Such definitions sought to account for the presence of a burgeoning associational life in a context in which open confrontation with the state was prohibited. That is to say, these studies suggested that associations need not always be in open conflict with the state for an active civil society to be in play.[177] Gordon White, for example, argued that the rapid socio-economic changes in China in the 1980s had created the space for a fledgling civil society to emerge. While not entirely independent and certainly not oppositional, he argued that the social organisations in his study did 'exercise a limited sphere of autonomy'[178] that satisfied this less political definition of

[173] In this context, a number of scholars re-evaluated the early 1989 protests and found them to have been weaker than the early scholarship initially claimed. Walder, A. Gong, X. (1993) 'Workers in The Tiananmen Protests: The Politics of the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation,' *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs,* Vol. 29, pp.1-29; Wright, T. (2001) *The Perils of Protest: State Repression and Student Activism in China and Taiwan,* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press).

[174] Chamberlain, H. (1993) 'On the Search for Civil Society in China', *Modern China,* Vol. 19, No. 2 pp.199-215.

[175] Dillon, N. (2011) 'Governing Civil Society: Adapting Revolutionary Methods to Serve Post-Communist Goals', in, *Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China*, eds, Heilmann, S. Perry, E. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Centre) p.139; White, G. (1993) 'Prospects for Civil Society in China: A Case Study of Xiaoshan City', *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs,* Vol. 29, pp.63-87.

[176] For Hegel, civil associations are a product of a capitalist economy and modern state. 'Civil Society' he argued, is formed to enable the expression and protection of private interests. Cited in Bratton (1989) 'Beyond the State', p.416.

[177] Frolic, M. (1997) 'State-Led Civil Society'.

[178] White, G. (1993) 'Prospects for Civil Society', pp.85-86

civil society. Likewise, Deborah Davis' edited collection found autonomous associational ties in urban intellectual and artistic communities, as well as in daily labour and leisure activities.[179] These accounts did not suggest that civil society would be the cataclysmic force for political change that earlier scholars had predicted. Nevertheless, they did imply that societal autonomy would, with time and patience, gradually produce a more plural society.[180]

'State-led' Civil Society

But even these less antagonistic approaches to 'civil society' provoked controversy in the Chinese context after numerous studies provided evidence of stringent regulatory constraints placed upon associations by the government, often with negative effects for associational autonomy.[181] In addition, far from being self-constituted, the state seemed to have a hand in creating and developing many of China's new NGOs.[182] Since most Chinese associations could not be labelled as autonomous in any meaningful sense, use of the 'civil society' concept became seen as somewhat problematic. With this in mind, and in order to account for the prominent role of the Party-state, some tried to amend the concept of civil society for use in the Chinese context. Michael Frolic, for example, developed the idea of 'state-led' civil society, in which associational life is 'created from the top-down'.[183] This kind of 'civil society' does not challenge the state's hegemony,

[179] Davis, D. (1995) *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China: The Potential for Autonomy and Community in Post-Mao China*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
[180] Ma, Q. (2006) *Non-governmental Organisations in Contemporary China: Paving the Way to Civil Society?* (London: Routledge).
[181] Jiang, R. Ortolano, L. (2008) 'Corporatist Control of Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations: A State Perspective', in, *China's Embedded Activism: Opportunities and Constraints of a Social Movement,* eds, Ho, P. Edmonds, E. (Abingdon: Routledge), pp.44-68.
[182] Dillon, N. (2011) 'Governing Civil Society', p.139.
[183] Frolic (1997) 'State-Led Civil Society'; Frolic, M. (1996) 'The Emergence of Civil Society in China', *East Asian Policy Papers,* Vol. 14, pp.9-12.

nor engage in active conflict with the state over policy issues. Rather, it helps the state cope with rapid change and difficult areas of governance by facilitating societal mobilisation in place of the state.[184]

Yet, if Frolic's 'state-led' civil society is not autonomous, self-constituted, antagonistic nor democratising, one wonders how it can be conceptualised as 'civil society' by any of the usual definitions. Although Frolic admitted that ''state-led' civil society is a form of corporatism',[185] one might ask why not simply *use* corporatism, rather than amending the civil society concept so far beyond its original form. Indeed, scholars that seek to bend non-conforming associations into the 'civil society' framework, have been criticised for engaging in 'conceptual stretching'.[186] In doing so, the concept is either redefined almost beyond recognition or crucial aspects of associational life that are at odds with its basic premise are neglected or ignored. As Chamberlain argued, 'if we cannot find Western-style civil society in China, why persist in modifying it so that we can find it? The more we do so, the more amorphous the concept becomes – and the more problematic as well.'[187]

Section Summary

In sum, this section has shown that scholars of China have shifted their definitions of civil society, from liberal/pluralist, to sociological, to state-led definitions, in order to match

[184] Frolic argued that 'state-led civil society' possesses some limited autonomy but this autonomous space is tightly regulated. Confusingly, he also argued that these types of associations function as both 'part of [the state]' and 'intermediaries between state and society'. Frolic, M. (1996) 'The Emergence of Civil Society', p.10; Frolic (1997) 'State-Led Civil Society'.
[185] Frolic (1997) State-Led Civil Society'; Frolic, M. (1996) 'The Emergence of Civil Society', p.10.
[186] Read, B. (2009) 'Introduction'.
[187] Chamberlain, H. (1998) 'Civil Society with Chinese Characteristics?' *The China Journal,* Vol. 39, pp.69-81, p.81; Chamberlain, H. (1993) 'On the Search for Civil Society'.

their observation of a restrictive associational environment in which the state is a key player. Yet, as definitions have moved away from their original form, their use has become increasingly problematic. Given that we know that older people's associations are both state-established and highly intertwined with state structures (see Chapter Four), and, in an effort to avoid both 'conceptual stretching' and the democratic 'baggage' that comes with the 'civil society' concept, I believe it is safer to avoid couching debates on OPAs in such terms. Instead, we will turn now, as scholars of China did, to approaches – such as 'state-corporatism' – that give more weight and primacy to the state's role in associational activity.

2.2.2 The 'State-Corporatist' Approach

This section will first provide a definition of state-corporatism and then look at its application to the study of associational life in China. In doing so, this section will show how scholars that attribute state-corporatism to the Chinese context, often point to regulatory control measures that restrict NGO operation as evidence. In addition, these scholars point to the creation of government-organised NGOs (GONGOs) and the accommodation and direction of 'useful' NGOs that help serve the state's interests. Finally, however, it will show that some scholars have pointed out that there can be discrepancies between organisations that appear state-corporatist at the national level, but are not so at the grassroots.

Defining State-Corporatism

At the opposite end of the 'state-society' spectrum to 'civil society', state-corporatism has been an important theoretical approach used for understanding associational groups

in semi-authoritarian contexts. Philippe C. Schmitter,[188] arguably the most influential academic writer on the subject, defined 'state-corporatism' as a system in which the state grants social groups deliberate representational monopolies in particular sectors in exchange for their positive response to central state controls. Specifically, Schmitter argued that, in a corporatist system, the state requires its own sanction as a condition for associational formation and operation, it controls leadership selection and interest articulation, and only allows 'a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally different[iated]' social groups to exist.[189] While not as totalitarian in nature as 'mass organizations', which are said to act as 'transmission belts' for authoritarian ideology,[190] 'state-corporatism', as a theoretical approach, has its roots in the 'organic statist' tradition and therefore necessitates some element of centralized control.[191]

'State-Corporatism' in the Chinese Context

As the 'civil society' concept became seen as increasingly problematic in the post-Tiananmen period, scholars of China turned to alternative approaches that give primacy to the state's role in associational life. The most popular of these has been state-corporatism, which scholars of China have used as a way to capture the dominance of the Party-state, while acknowledging the pluralizing socio-economic changes induced by

[188] Schmitter delineated two sub-types of corporatism: 'state-corporatism' and 'societal-corporatism'. 'State-corporatism' was used to describe interest group arrangements in Fascist Italy in the 1930s. 'Societal-corporatism' has been used to describe institutionalised bargaining between the state and sectoral groups. Schmitter, P. (1974) 'Still the Century of Corporatism?' *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 1, pp.85-13.
[189] *Ibid.*
[190] Kasza, G. (1995) *The Conscription Society: Administered Mass Organizations,* (New Haven: Yale University Press); Linz, J. Stepan, A. (1996) *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-communist Europe,* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press).
[191] Read, B. (2009) 'Introduction', p.5

market reforms.[192] Using state-corporatism or variations thereof, such as 'state-socialist corporatism',[193] 'agency corporatism',[194] or 'local-state corporatism',[195] scholars of China have shown that, by either instituting control measures on NGOs or by cultivating social organizations that serve its own ends, the Party-state has created an environment in which associations are at least highly constrained, if not actually directed by the state to serve its own legitimacy.

Regulatory Control Measures

Advocates of the state-corporatist model have often pointed to the Party-state's development of a complex set of regulations that, on the one hand, protects and directs top-down GONGOs or useful NGOs, while simultaneously limiting the establishment and function of international or grassroots NGOs. Kang and Han,[196] for example, demonstrated how the state has created a differentiated strategy of 'graduated controls' in order to allow the Party-state to manage associations differently according to either their ability to challenge the state or the value of the public goods that they provide.[197] In particular, the 'dual management system', which functioned between 1990 and 2010,[198] is said to have created a system of regular monitoring by both a professional sponsoring agency and the civil affairs authorities, in order to ensure NGOs and GONGOs are limited

[192] Zhang, X. Baum, R. (2008) 'the Anatomy of a Rural NGO', p.201
[193] Pearson, M. (1997) *China's New Business Elite: The Political Consequences of Economic Reform*, (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press).
[194] Jiang, R. Ortolano, L. (2008) 'Corporatist Control of Environmental NGOs'.
[195] Oi, J. (1992) 'Fiscal Reform and the Economic Foundations of Local State Corporatism', *World Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 1, pp.99-126; Oi, J. (1995) 'The Role of the Local State in China's Transitional Economy', *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 144, pp.1132-1149; Hsu, J. Hasmath, R. (2013) *The Chinese Corporatist State: Adaption, Survival and Resistance*, (Abingdon: Routledge).
[196] Kang, X. Han, H. (2008) 'Graduated Controls: The State-Society Relationship in Contemporary China,' *Modern China*, Vol. 34, No. 1, pp.36-55.
[197] Yuen, S (2017) 'Partners of Authoritarians'.
[198] *Ibid.*

to a prescribed framework of activity.[199] Failure to stay within this framework meant that civil affairs bureaus could replace leaders, confiscate assets, collect fines, or even revoke the NGO's legal status.[200] As Jiang and Ortolano noted, in combination with structural constraints,[201] this system has allowed the state to control and direct the activities of the NGO sector.[202] While dual management has now been replaced by direct supervision from civil affairs bureaux, many argue that penalties, crackdowns, and an ambiguous legislative environment still ensures that NGOs are limited to state-permitted activities under the new system. Indeed, scholars have documented that, since Xi Jinping came to power, the state has brought in more obstacles to restrict the operations of those social organisations that it perceives to pose a threat to its rule – such as international NGOs[203] and domestic rights NGOs.[204]

GONGOs and 'useful' NGOs

Yet, at the same time we know that, in keeping with state-corporatism, the Party-state has played a vital role in establishing or cultivating GONGOs and NGOs that it believes will

[199] Jiang, R. Ortolano, L. (2008) 'Corporatist Control of Environmental NGOs', p.47

[200] Moreover, the state has used 'clean-up-and-consolidation' campaigns to enforce regulations and crack down on NGO activity, reducing the number of local NGOs from 184,000 to 127,000 in the 2001 campaign. *Ibid.* p.46

[201] Such as the lack of government funding, unfavourable tax regulations on donations, and limits on membership and membership fees. Ho, P. (2008) 'Self-imposed Censorship and De-Politicized Politics in China: Green Activism or Colour Revolution?', in, *China's Embedded Activism: Opportunities and Constraints of a Social Movement,* eds, Ho, P. Edmonds, E. (Abingdon: Routledge), pp.20-43, p.33

[202] Mary Gallagher also points to four key mechanisms that allow the Chinese state to control and direct the NGO sector: strict legal and administrative guidelines; financial and political dependence on the state; double-posting of personnel in NGOs and the bureaucracy; as well as directing their ideology and interest representation. Gallagher, M. (2004) 'The Limits of Civil Society in a Late Leninist State', in, *Civil Society and Political Change in Asia: Expanding and Contracting Democratic Space,* ed, Alagappa, M. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), pp.419-454. For more on NGO constraints, see: Jiang, R. Ortolano, L. (2008) 'Corporatist Control of Environmental NGOs'; Ho, P. (2008) 'Self-imposed censorship', p.33

[203] In 2016, for example, the Chinese state instituted a new law restricting the operation of international NGOs. For more on this see: Hsu, C. Teets, J. (2016) 'Is China's New Overseas NGO Management Law Sounding the Death Knell for Civil Society? Maybe Not,' *The Asia Pacific Journal,* Vol. 14, No. 4.

[204] Hsu, C. *et al.* (2016) 'The State of NGOs in China'.

serve its interests. Many of these organisations, structurally at least, appear to conform to Schmitter's definition of state corporatism as being hierarchically ordered, with a monopoly in their area of focus, and controls on formation, leadership selection, and interest articulation.[205] Jennifer Hsu argues that the Chinese state has been particularly supportive of those organisations that seek to address social problems or fill service provision gaps where the state has, for lack of will or resources, retreated.[206] As such, whether state-corporatism allows the state to strengthen its grip over society, or whether it is a means by which the state loosens its grip has been widely debated.[207] Scholars like Unger and Chan,[208] for example, argued that GONGOs are often shouldered with traditional responsibilities of the state. The All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), for example, delivers much of the social service provision available to migrant workers in place of the state.[209] In return for addressing these social problems, Wu Fenshi argues that GONGOs often receive state support, funding, and privileged access to the policy process.[210] Likewise, domestic NGOs that provide a useful function are supported or tolerated by the state, so long as their activities stay within a particular framework of activity. More recently, Jennifer Hsu and Reza Hasmath have demonstrated that similar dynamics also occur between NGOs and local states. That is to say, local states, like central ones, can determine which local NGOs flourish and develop, by employing either

[205] Schmitter, P. (1974) 'Still the Century of Corporatism?', pp.93-94

[206] For examples see: Hsu, J. (2009) 'A State Creation? Civil Society and Migrant Organisations', in, *China in an Era of Transition: Understanding Contemporary State and Society Actors,* (New York: Palgrave), pp.127-143; Ma, J. (2012) 'The Rise of Social Accountability in China', *The Australian Journal of Public Administration,* Vol. 17, No. 2, pp.111-121; Teets, J. (2014) *Civil Society under Authoritarianism*.

[207] Hsu, J. Hasmath, R. (2013) *The Chinese Corporatist State,* p.4

[208] Unger, J. Chan, A. (1995) 'China, Corporatism, and the East Asian Model', *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs,* Vol. 33, pp.29-53

[209] Hsu, J. Hasmath, R. (2013) *The Chinese Corporatist State,* p.4

[210] Wu, F. (2003) 'Environmental GONGO Autonomy'; Wu, F. (2002) 'New Partners or Old Brothers? GONGOs in Transitional Environmental Advocacy in China', *China Environment Series,* Vol. 5, pp.45-58; Wu, F. Chan, K. (2012) 'Graduated Control and Beyond: The Evolving Government-NGO Relations', *China Perspectives,* No. 3, pp.9-17

'overt sanctioning' or 'tacit sanctioning' depending on whether the NGO's mission is useful to the aims of the local state.[211]

Regardless of whether the relationship is characterised by control or coordination of social affairs, those who ascribe state-corporatism to Chinese social life tend to agree on its legitimizing effect. Relying less on coercion and propaganda to control society and maintain party hegemony as it did under Mao,[212] scholars such as Bruce Dickson argue that the Party-state has created or revived a web of economic and social organisations to act as 'input institutions'[213] or 'bridging agents'[214] between state and society. The aim is that these organisations will ameliorate societal tensions and avert political dangers posed by a decline in governability and control. Thus, he and others conclude that, contrary to the traditional view of NGOs as a democratising force, state-corporatist social organisations serve to enhance authoritarian resilience rather than weakening it.

National vs Local State-Corporatism

Yet, state-corporatism has often been criticised for overemphasising macro-level state control at the expense of dynamics at the micro-level. As such, using state-corporatism to explore the behaviour of social organisations at the grassroots has often proved challenging. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that while corporatist *structures* may dominate some NGOs, these structures are often more manoeuvrable at the grassroots

[211] 'Overt Sanctioning' is defined as: 'a strategy of coercion and propaganda' and other 'overt measures to manage social organizations'. 'Tacit sanctioning' is defined as a situation in which: '(1) the state creates and maintains the relationship; (2) select organizations and groups are granted the privilege to mediate interests on behalf of their constituents to the state; and (3) these organizations and groups must adhere to the rules and regulations established by the state.' Hsu, J. Hasmath, R. (2014) 'The Local Corporatist State and NGO Relations in China', *Journal of Contemporary China,* Vol. 23, No. 87, pp.516-534

[212] Dickson, B. (2000) 'Co-optation and Corporatism', p.538

[213] Nathan, A. (2004) 'Authoritarian Resilience'.

[214] Dickson, B. (2000) 'Co-optation and Corporatism'.

than the organizational structure suggests. Indeed, scholars, particularly in Chinese political economy, have noted discrepancies between organisations that appear corporatist at the national level and their local equivalents. In studies of the Self-Employed Labourers' Association (SELA), for example, Nevitt [215] and Unger [216] demonstrated that, despite corporatist structures, the organisation had little presence at the grassroots or had been co-opted by local officials for localised goals. Others have similarly shown how corporatist organisations can wriggle free of state oversight at the grassroots to pursue divergent priorities.[217] When this happens, the ideal-type corporatist state is prevented from operating, since the local level is using these organizations to pursue local goals at the expense of those planned nationally.

Some scholars such as Jean Oi, and Jennifer Hsu and Reza Hasmath,[218] have developed variants of corporatism that do not necessitate *centralized* planning, such as 'local state-corporatism'. However, at least *some* element of hierarchical control is definitionally required and thus, I would argue that this variant is primarily useful in mid-level studies (i.e. the province or county), rather than those at the micro-level (i.e. the village), such as this one. Control of an individual organisation and its members by grassroots officials without much direction from above, is not necessarily best characterised by 'state-corporatism'. Without hierarchical direction (as stipulated in Schmitter's definition) the concept is arguably stretched too far from its original conception.

[215] Nevitt, C. (1996) 'Private Business Associations'.
[216] Unger, J. (1996) 'Bridges: Private Business'.
[217] Oi, J. (1992) 'Fiscal Reform'; Hsu, J. Hasmath, R. (2013) *The Chinese Corporatist State.*
[218] Hsu, J. Hasmath, R. (2013) *The Chinese Corporatist State,* p.5; Hsu, J. Hasmath, R. (2014) 'The Local Corporatist State'.

Section Summary

This section has defined state-corporatism and reviewed its application to the study of associational life in China. In doing so, it has shown how NGOs and social organisations are often directed or restricted by a complex set of regulatory control measures. In addition, the creation of government-organised NGOs (GONGOs) and the cultivation of 'useful' NGOs has helped the state manage social problems and arguably enhanced regime legitimacy and resilience. Yet, state-corporatism, as a theoretical approach, often overemphasises the macro-level at the expense of the micro-level. As such, it can often overlook the fact that social organisations and NGOs that may that look corporatist at the national level, are often more complicated at the grassroots.

Finally, in keeping with this view, this study argues that when looking at OPAs at the macro-level the institutional *structures* that surround them conforms closely to the definition of state-corporatism (see Chapter Four). Yet, these structures only represent the first part of the story. Rather, the behaviour of OPAs at the *grassroots* is more nuanced than the state-corporatist model can account for. As such, other conceptual frameworks beyond state-corporatism will be needed to characterise the behaviour of village-level OPAs and how they interact with the state.

2.2.3 Beyond the State-Society Dichotomy

This section looks at how civil society and state-corporatism have led us towards presenting state-society relations as dichotomous entities, or what is known as 'state vs. society', 'the state-society paradigm' or the 'state-society dichotomy'. This section will show that, more recently, scholars have sought to move beyond this approach, towards characterising Chinese state-society relations as co-dependent, embedded and non-zero-

sum.[219] In doing so, I will review approaches, such as, 'embedded activism' and 'consultative authoritarianism', and address the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches.

Civil Society and State-Corporatism as Conceptual Binaries

The civil society versus state-corporatism debate has produced a wide array of scholarly material that has shaped our understanding of the opportunities and constraints on associational life in contemporary China. Yet, these concepts have been criticised for being premised on a 'state-society' dichotomy that pits state-centric corporatism on the one hand, against society-centric civil society on the other. That is to say, the 'civil society' concept tends to over-emphasise societal mobilization and underemphasise the state's role in associational life.[220] 'State-corporatism', in contrast, tends to focus on one mode of interaction - that of top-down state control – while neglecting innovative tactics employed by associations to ensure their survival and impact on public policy.[221] Giving primacy to one or other side of the state-society relationship serves to mask the fluidity of power relations within political processes and denotes passivity on the part of societal actors embroiled in state-corporatist structures.

[219] Thøgersen S. Bislev A. (2012) 'Introduction: Organizing Rural China - Rural China Organizing', in, *Organizing Rural China - Rural China Organizing*, eds, Bislev A. Thøgersen S. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books) pp.1-12

[220] Yuen, S. (2017) 'Partners of Authoritarians'.

[221] For articles on how innovative tactics are used by associations to ensure survival and impact on public policy, see: Sheih, S. (2009) 'Beyond Corporatism and Civil Society: Three Modes of State-NGO Interaction in China', in, *State and Society Responses to Social Welfare Needs in China*, eds, Schwartz, J. Sheih, S. (Abingdon: Routledge); Hsu, C. (2010) 'Beyond Civil Society: An Organizational Perspective on State–NGO Relations in the People's Republic of China', *Journal of Civil Society,* Vol. 6, No. 3, pp.259-277; Hildebrandt, T. (2011) 'The Political Economy of Social Organization Registration in China', *The China Quarterly,* No. 208, pp.970-989

In response to these criticisms, some scholars, such as Mary Gallagher, have argued that 'civil society' and 'state-corporatism' as conceptual models are neither opposite to each other nor mutually exclusive, but instead differ in what they seek to explain.[222] Others have argued that these concepts exist on a continuum that ranges from societal autonomy at one end to state control at the other, rather than being divided by a clean conceptual break.[223] Nevertheless, even with these caveats, use of these concepts does tend to lead us towards analysis of the macro-political environment and towards presenting state-society relations as dichotomous. One reason that this dichotomy exists, Ben Read argues, is that, in an effort to establish discrete and bounded theoretical concepts, scholars have created binary distinctions between those groups that fall within the parameters of civil society and those that fall outside it. In doing so, scholars have neglected actual, existing organizations that do not fit tidily into these frameworks but instead either straddle the state-society divide or produce mutually reinforcing outcomes. [224] Although several China historians writing in the 1990s, such as Philip Huang[225] and Mary Rankin[226], amongst others,[227] sought to shift the debate away from these binary categories by turning their attention to an 'intermediary sphere' *between* state and society, these attempts made little effort to either disaggregate the two spheres or blur the boundaries between them. A deeper understanding of Chinese politics requires moving beyond the 'state-society dichotomy' by disaggregating or blurring the crude and unwieldy categories of 'state' and

[222] Gallagher, M. (2004) 'The Limits of Civil Society', p.421 cited in: Yuen, S. (2017) 'Partners of Authoritarians'.
[223] Ding, Y. (2001) *Chinese Democracy after Tiananmen* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press) p.72 cited in: Yuen, S. (2017) 'Partners of Authoritarians'.
[224] Read, B. (2009) 'Introduction', p.20
[225] Huang, P. (1993) '"Public Sphere"/ "Civil Society" in China? The Third Realm between State and Society', *Modern China,* Vol. 19, No. 2, pp.216-240
[226] Rankin, M. (1993) 'Some Observations on a Chinese Public Sphere', *Modern China,* Vol. 19, No. 2, pp.158-182
[227] Duara, P. (1988) *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942,* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press); Thornton, P. (2007) *Disciplining the State.*

'society'. With this in mind, scholars writing more recently have focused their attention on the tactics and methods through which such organisations interact with the state and how they seek incremental policy change at the micro-level.[228]

Patterns of Co-dependency

Recent scholarly work has moved beyond the state-society dichotomy and away from examining the effect of NGOs on macro-political transformation. Instead, more emphasis has been placed on micro-level analysis of the internal dynamics of Chinese social organisations, their relationships with state agencies, and how they affect sector and policy change at the local level. This shift towards the local level is important because, as Jennifer Hsu argues, Chinese NGOs are more likely to operate at the local level without the ability to scale-up to provincial or national level.[229]

In these studies, the democratisation question is largely absent, with scholars often taking the semi-authoritarian context and involvement of the state as a given rather than a point of debate. What has been more important in these studies has been the specific ways in which societal and state elements manoeuvre and shape one another while facilitating policy change. In other words, as Peter Ho noted, *whether* 'NGOs succeed in bringing about political change … [has been] of less importance … than *how* they attempt to do this'. [230] In addressing this question, scholars have utilised different theoretical approaches and reached different conclusions on methods and tactics. Yet, what unifies

[228] Perry, E. (1994) 'Trends in the Study of Chinese Politics'.

[229] Hsu, J. (2014) 'Chinese Non-Governmental Organisations and Civil Society: A Review of the Literature', *Geography Compass,* Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 98-110, p.102

[230] Ho, P. (2008) 'Introduction: Embedded Activism and Political Change in a Semi-Authoritarian Context', in, *China's Embedded Activism: Opportunities and Constraints of a Social Movement,* eds, Ho, P. Edmonds, R. (Abingdon: Routledge) pp.1-19, p.5

practically all recent research on how local level organizations relate to the Chinese state is, as Thøgersen and Bislev argue, the observation of complex patterns of 'co-existence, mutual dependency and embeddedness'.[231]

In the environmental sector, an arena where NGOs have arguably been most successful at impacting state policy,[232] Peter Ho contends that China's semi-authoritarian context creates a symbiotic environment in which activism is 'embedded' and the dividing line between NGO, state, and party is blurred.[233] In this context, he argues that the state sets the terms of engagement, while NGOs attempt to influence policy-making by leveraging linkages with state officials and by skirting the boundaries of acceptable activism.[234] Paradoxically, Ho argues that a semi-authoritarian context is both restrictive of, and conducive to, collective action, with NGOs that work within the state's rules of engagement facing little threat of state repression. Likewise, Timothy Hildebrandt also highlights symbiosis in the state-NGO relationship. Using a 'political opportunity structure' approach, Hildebrandt, like Ho, argues that Chinese social organisations are confined to a 'game' that they 'have no choice but to play'.[235] As such, in seeking to ensure their own survival and advance their interests, NGOs must adapt to the changing interests of the state and work in its service to address social problems. In doing so, NGOs serve to enhance the resilience of the authoritarian Party-state by helping it to govern

[231] Thøgersen, S. Bislev, A. (2012) 'Introduction', p.2
[232] Hsu, J. (2014) 'Chinese NGOs and Civil Society', p.103; Ho, P. (2008) 'Introduction', p.2
[233] Ho, P. (2008) 'Introduction', p.2
[234] For example, Peter Ho has shown how environmental NGOs skirt the boundaries of acceptable activism by employing strategies of 'self-censorship' and 'issue de-politicization'. Ho, P. (2001) 'Greening without Conflict?', Ho, P. (2008) 'Self-imposed Censorship'.
[235] As Hildebrandt notes, 'for Chinese social organisations … exit and voice are not viable options'. This is because most 'NGOs are designed to solve growing social problems, [and] exiting would be an early admission of defeat and would do nothing to help the cause. Voicing concerns about the problems of the 'game' would resemble an oppositional orientation, increasing the likelihood that they would face a strong negative state response'. Hildebrandt, T. (2013) *Social Organizations and the Authoritarian State,* p.26

effectively. For Hildebrandt, the NGO-state relationship is therefore a 'co-dependent' one in which the state needs NGOs to govern, and NGOs need the state to provide opportunities to allow them to exist.[236]

Using a different theoretical model but arriving at similar conclusions, Carolyn Hsu argues that, rather than seeking to assert their autonomy from the state, NGOs are more interested in building alliances and developing close relationships with state officials in order to more effectively pursue their interests.[237] Through the use of an institutional interdependence approach, she highlights how such alliances are mutually beneficial for state agencies and NGOs, because they help both parties 'secure necessary resources and gain legitimacy'.[238] Building on this observation of state-NGO alliances, Gallagher goes further to highlight both how NGOs form alliances with state officials and also to how 'the process of interaction … defines, bounds, or transforms the two sides'.[239]

Consultative Authoritarianism

In a similar vein, but placing more emphasis on the local state's role in building partnerships with NGOs, Jessica Teets, argues that, as a result of decentralizing welfare responsibilities and the inclusion of public service provision in the cadre evaluation system, local state officials seek to collaborate with NGOs to deliver social services. Through a process of 'policy learning', Teets argues that state officials learn the benefits and disadvantages of working with NGOs, and are able to shape collaborations

[236] *Ibid.*
[237] Hsu, C. (2010) 'Beyond Civil Society'.
[238] *Ibid.* p.259
[239] Gallagher, M. (2005) 'The Limits of Civil Society,' p.422

accordingly.[240] For Teets, such collaborations are shifting the state-society relationship away from corporatism towards 'consultative authoritarianism' which 'promotes the simultaneous expansion of fairly autonomous [social organisations] and the development of more sophisticated and indirect tools of state control over [them]'.[241] The duality of both autonomy and control, that is fundamental to the 'consultative authoritarian' model, has also been observed by Jing Yijia in his analysis of state-NGO service delivery collaborations. Jing argues that local states provide NGO partners with sufficient autonomy so that they can flexibly address the social needs of the groups they provide for.[242] Yet, at the same time, by using administrative and market mechanisms – such as a competitive procurement processes – local states favour NGOs that are 'politically inactive and professionally capable' and, in doing so, point the NGO sector in the direction of their choosing.[243]

Yet, despite these elements of control, Teets does not envisage NGOs as passive recipients of the consultative authoritarianism model but instead sees them as architects of it.[244] This is because, as Teets argues, these collaborative arrangements provide partnered NGOs with relative autonomy, create more pluralistic participation in the policy process, and often facilitate better public service provision.[245] Crucially, this model

[240] Teets, J. (2013) 'Let Many Civil Societies Bloom: The Rise of Consultative Authoritarianism in China', *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 213, pp. 19-38, p.36

[241] *Ibid.*

[242] Jing, Y. (2015) 'Between Control and Empowerment: Governmental Strategies towards the Development of the Non-profit Sector in China', *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 39, No. 4 pp.589-608 cited in: Yuen, S. (2017) 'Partners of Authoritarians'.

[243] *Ibid.*

[244] Teets, J. (2014) *Civil Society Under Authoritarianism,* p.145

[245] Not everyone is as optimistic as Teets. Judith Howell, for example, observes the same processes but concludes that NGOs have little agency. She argues that through incentives, such as relaxed registration, and through control mechanisms, such as competitive subcontracting, local states are able to 'stymie [an NGOs] radical edge by emphasizing services to the exclusion of rights' and directing their activities to assist in the implementation of government policy. Howell, J. (2015) 'Shall We Dance? Welfarist

differs from civil society in that increased pluralisation is not said to lead to democratisation or genuine autonomy; rather NGOs become partners of the state and a buttress to authoritarian rule.[246] As such, one could argue that Teets' observation of societal 'consultation' under 'authoritarianism' can be seen in a similar light to Lily Tsai's *Accountability without Democracy*,[247] whereby societal actors pose no threat to the authoritarian macro-political environment, but can create more plural politics at the grassroots.

2.2.4 Problems and Gaps

There are a number of problems with these approaches as well as both theoretical and empirical gaps in the existing literature. First, in an effort to provide an overarching framework – such as consultative authoritarianism, civil society, and state-corporatism – that can explain a majority of NGO-state relationships, scholars often overlook considerable variation in state-NGO relationships and in the methods and reasons for NGO survival and operation. While 'consultative authoritarianism' is arguably a highly useful way of understanding macro-level state-society relations and the *outcomes* of state-NGO relationships across China, it is too broad to account for all NGO variation at the grassroots. That is to say, the mix of autonomy and control or consultation in an authoritarian political climate may indeed be present in most NGO-state relationships.

Incorporation and the Politics of State–Labour NGO Relations', *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 223, pp.702-723 cited in: Yuen, S. (2017) 'Partners of Authoritarians'.

[246] Teets, J. (2014) *Civil Society Under Authoritarianism.*

[247] Lily Tsai argued that when village-level solidary groups both *embed* local officials and *encompass* the majority of the local population, they provide strong social incentives for local officials to fulfil civic norms and provide public services to their communities. Local officials who act in the interests of the community, by providing public goods, earn moral standing from other members of the group and suffer social sanctions for not doing so. As a result, Tsai found that solidary networks had the capacity to change official behaviour and improve governance, making them powerful institutions of informal accountability at China's rural grassroots. Tsai, L. (2007) *Accountability Without Democracy: How Solidary Groups Provide Public Goods in Rural China*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p.356

Yet, it is too broad to answer more specific questions about how and why states seek to mobilize certain segments of the population and how certain mobilized citizens respond to mobilizing attempts. A more specific framework is therefore needed for this thesis given the nature of its research questions. That is not to say that overarching frameworks like 'consultative authoritarianism' are not relevant or useful for OPAs *per se*, rather this thesis differs in what it seeks to explain and thus requires a different framework.

Second, most of the recent scholarship that seeks to move beyond the state-society dichotomy by assessing NGOs in terms of mutual dependency and embeddedness, does not clearly differentiate between two quite different types of NGOs – societal NGOs and GONGOs. Societal NGOs are filled with activists, such as LGBT activists in Hildebrandt's study, or staffers, such as the members of staff at Greenpeace in Teets', who are each seeking to pursue their goals and deliver services albeit in a constrained system. These studies are concerned with how societal activists pursue their interests in an authoritarian system that both requires their help to govern and provide services, while simultaneously seeking to limit those activities that do not serve its interests.

Local level GONGOs, by contrast, are state-organised and institutionally connected groups, that are often created with the aim of embedding or co-opting a specific societal cohort – such as women, youth, or the elderly – to make them legible to the state and to condition their members to see themselves within the states framework of legibility.[248] The mobilization of these groups by the state, however, may *also* lead to symbiosis. This is because those that are embedded in such organisations can reinterpret the state's efforts to mobilize them and redefine the obligations that the state seeks to channel through them.

[248] For example, the Women's Federation; China Youth League; and Old People's Associations.

As such, the *outcome* of both types of NGO may be a kind of 'consultative authoritarianism' or 'embedded activism', but the *process* of getting there is quite different. The former is concerned primarily with societal activism in a constrained system, while the latter is a form of state-building where societal actors have the potential to wriggle free. I would argue that they should therefore be characterised by different theoretical approaches.

As such, a theoretical framework for assessing OPAs should take state-building as its starting point. This is because OPAs are, for the most part, *not* groups of elderly seeking to campaign on and address specific issues such as old age policy. Rather, as we shall explore more in Chapter Five, they are 'elders' who have been grouped together by the state because they possess specific characteristics that the state requires and therefore seeks to harness for its own aims, many of which have nothing to do with old age policy and more to do with mediating disputes and resolving conflict.

Finally, while, as we have discussed above, much of the existing literature on social organisations focuses on how such organisations play a legitimizing role for the state, most of these studies centre their analysis on service provision NGOs. That is to say, these NGOs are portrayed as strengthening authoritarian resilience by filling resource and service provision gaps where the state has retreated. Yet, there have been very few studies of how social organisations and social actors play a more direct role in stability maintenance through dispute mediation. As we discussed in the introductory chapter, this is a surprising omission because the state's 'social governance' agenda has sought to bring societal actors into the mediation process and create a more consultative approach to managing societal discontent. While scholars of conflict mediation, such as Ben Read and

Neil Diamant, have sought to move the mediation debate away from formal institutions such as the court system, they have still focused on state officials and state institutions like Residents Committees. As such, despite our knowing that informal and societal actors play a key role in dispute mediation and resolution (see Chapter One: Introduction), very little of the literature on social organisations and socials actors in China addresses this.

2.2.5 Section Summary

This section has shown that civil society and state-corporatism have framed state-society relations as dichotomous and overly focused on the macro-political environment. As a consequence, more recent scholarship has sought to move beyond the state-society paradigm towards looking at ways in which societal and state elements manoeuvre one another and seek policy change at the local level. Through varying frameworks, scholars have demonstrated complex patterns of mutual dependency in which the state needs NGOs to govern and NGOs need the state to extend opportunities to allow them to exit. Yet, in creating broad theories to address the state-society relations question some of these frameworks inevitably become too broad to explain all the dynamics of social organisations. Furthermore, these frameworks often do not clearly distinguish between societal NGOs and GONGOs despite there being a clear analytical difference between these two types. One is filled with activists or staffers, that are seeking to pursue their goals and deliver services in a constrained system. While the other is a state-organised group, created to embed a specific societal cohort and which may or may not end up reinterpreting the states' efforts to mobilize them. The former is concerned primarily with societal activism, while the latter is a form of state-building. As such, while the *outcomes*

may both lead to ‘consultative authoritarianism’ the *process* of how you get there is different and therefore requires a different framework.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This section defines and outlines the theoretical framework used in this study. In particular, it focuses on what this approach tells us about how states penetrate society, and what results from such efforts. It then looks at how variants of this framework have previously been used in the Chinese context.

2.3.1 Defining the State-in-Society Approach

This study uses Joel Migdal’s ‘State-*in*-Society’ as an approach to understanding OPAs in contemporary China. This model has been selected for two reasons: first, for its approach to how states penetrate society and extend state capacity to the local level, and second, for its view of the outcomes of these efforts. The first is concerned with state capacity, social control, and the legitimation of authority (which taken together can mean, state-building), while the second is concerned with bargaining and negotiation between state and societal elements over the outcomes of state policy. A discussion of the theory is needed first before we discuss its application.

Extending state capacity

At least since Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol[249] brought the state back into academic analysis in the 1980s, the modern state has been viewed as the primary architect of political and social order. That is to say, the state, as the central political organization within a given territory, is often seen as possessing the legitimate authority to set and enforce the binding rules within its borders.[250] In this approach, the state is seen as separate from society and often portrayed as a coherent, unified, and autonomous entity.[251] Joel Migdal's[252] 'State-*in*-Society' approach presents one of the most influential challenges to this view. Migdal questioned the idea of the state as the primary political actor with the ability to dominate society. Yet, unlike Marxists and structuralists, who claim that state behaviour is nothing more than a reflection of social patterns of power, he did not reject the idea of the state altogether.[253] Rather, Migdal argued that the state should be seen as a part of society, and should be examined as a product of its social setting.

More specifically, Migdal viewed society not as a monolithic entity but as a 'melange of social organisations'[254] such as families, clans, clubs, and villages. The state is just one organisation amongst this multitude of communities.[255] Each of these social

[249] The 'statist school' views the state as the primary actor in dictating social, political and economic developments within its borders. Corporatism is understood to be one approach within the 'statist school'. For more on the statist school see: Evans, P. *et al.* (1985) *Bringing the State Back In.*

[250] Lambach, D. (2004) 'State in Society: Joel Migdal and the Limits of State Authority, Paper presented at 'Political Concepts Beyond the Nation State: Cosmopolitanism, territoriality, democracy', Danish Political Theory Network Conference, University of Copenhagen, Department of Political Science Copenhagen. [Accessed online on 30/05/2017 at: https://www.uni-due.de/imperia/md/content/politik/debiel/lambach_copenhagen_2004.pdf] p.4

[251] Mitchell, T. (1991) 'The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics', *The American Political Science Review,* Vol. 85, No. 1, pp.77-96

[252] Migdal, J. (1988) *Strong Societies and Weak States.*

[253] Lambach, D. (2004) 'State in Society', p.4

[254] Migdal (1988) *Strong Societies and Weak States,* p.28

[255] Lambach, D. (2004) 'State in Society'.

organisations, Migdal argued, have their own rules and norms that make claims on, and compete for authority over, their members' behaviour. Each organisation also offers incentives (i.e. security, prosperity, status, meaning/values[256]) or sanctions (i.e. violence, ostracism) to make members adhere to these rules.[257] Yet, since each person is a member of multiple social organisations at once,[258] the rules and norms of one organisation often compete with the rules and norms of another.[259] That is to say, members face competing claims of authority over their behaviour to which they must decide whether or not to submit.[260] When an individual submits to an organisation's rules, they invest that organisation with 'social control' over their behaviour.[261] For Migdal, the amount of 'authority' or 'social control' that an organisation has over its members depends both on the number of people that follow its rules and on their motivations for doing so.[262] That is to say, an organisation has more authority when people do not simply abide by the rules (compliance), but do so because they believe them to be right (legitimation).[263]

In the State-*in*-Society approach, the state is just one social organisation within society, but it aspires to be (and often is) the dominant authority within its territory with the legitimacy to regulate all social relations.[264] As such, for Migdal, a 'strong state', depends primarily on 'the successful subordination of people's own inclinations of social behaviour or behaviour sought by other social organizations in favour of the behaviour

[256] By meaning, I mean adherence to the traditions, customs, and symbols that give communities meaning.
[257] *Ibid.* p.4
[258] For example, nation, village, lineage, and social club.
[259] For example, compliance with state anti-corruption or anti-nepotism laws may conflict directly with customary rules in families and lineages that compel one to put the interests of the family before state legislation.
[260] These are difficult choices because people face the possibility of competing sanctions from one or other group.
[261] *Ibid.* p.5
[262] *Ibid.*
[263] *Ibid.;* Migdal (1988) *Strong Societies and Weak States*, pp.32-33
[264] *Ibid.* p.20

prescribed by state rulers.'[265] Yet, in certain 'weblike' societies,[266] getting people to submit to the state's authority over other social organisations is a challenge. This is because local organisations are perceived as possessing the legitimate authority and social control to regulate social relations within their local communities.[267]In order to extend state capacity to the local level and supplant local forms of authority and social control, Migdal argued that states have to mobilize and channel society into organisational frameworks that serve their aims and promote state authority.[268] Some states have been more successful at this than others. Indeed, Migdal argues that in parts of the Third World, state leaders have often faced impenetrable barriers to state predominance. As such, rather than seeking to *supplant* local authority and social control altogether, these states have instead sought to build alliances with the leaders of these local organisations at the grassroots to use them to further state capacity. These leaders – termed 'strongmen' by Migdal – refer to holders of authority within local social organizations and include figures such as 'chiefs, landlords, rich peasants, or clan leaders' depending on the structure of local society.

Negotiated Outcomes

Yet, although these 'strongmen' help states increase their capacity, these alliances are also risky because they bolster the authority of powerful societal agencies that could use

[265] *Ibid.*

[266] According to Migdal, Societies are weblike in that they host a mélange of fairly autonomous social organizations. *Ibid.* p.37

[267] Lambach, D. (2004) 'State in Society', p.5

[268] For example, he noted that 'the growth of the very first modern states in Europe included building a triad of essential tentacles – a standing army, a vastly improved tax-collecting mechanism, and an expanded set of judicial courts.' Through the judicial system, in particular, European states sought to establish 'state law in place of fragmented customary or feudal law', in order to 'induce people to behave as state leaders wanted them to behave ... [rather than] according to dictates of local lords'. Migdal, J. (1988) *Strong Societies and Weak States*, p.22

their status to challenge the authority of the state. Thus, in what he labels the 'triangle of accommodation', an overreliance on 'strongmen' may result in the disaggregation of state interests, with the interests of local officials being to negotiate or collude with strongmen at the expense of the political centre and its policy goals.[269] The argument continues that the implementation of state policy and the behaviour of state officials are shaped by real life interactions with individuals they build alliances with at the grassroots.

2.3.2 State-in-Society in a 'Strong State' Context

While Migdal's theory has been used to describe 'weak states', where the state ultimately loses its bid to enforce its authority over all other social organisations, he allowed that this model is not *only* relevant in a weak state context. Indeed, Migdal argued that, the relationship between state and society is rarely characterized by domination of one over the other. Rather, both entities influence each other in their competition for authority and social control, even where one side of the equation is weaker or stronger than the other. In fact, he does not rule out these types of dynamics in societies where the state is usually considered to be 'strong'. As he says, 'all states [even strong ones] have had limited capabilities at *some time*, or with *some groups* or on *some issues*.'[270]

So this approach can still be useful for a strong state context like China, where weaknesses in state oversight and capacity still exist at the rural grassroots level. As Vivienne Shue argued,[271] although state builders have arguably been more penetrating in China than in many other parts of the world, extending state capacity right down to the rural grassroots

[269] *Ibid.* p.265
[270] *Ibid.* p. xiv [my emphasis]
[271] Shue, V. (2012) 'Modern/Rural China', p.223

has been a continuous challenge. [272] Rural society, in particular she argues, has demonstrated 'an obdurate recalcitrance' [273] in the face of repeated interventions to change its foundations by state officials. Indeed, in her seminal work *The Reach of the State*[274] in which she advanced the thesis that the Maoist state was strong at the centre but frail at the rural grassroots, she showed how 'honeycomb-like' structures of local solidarities tied local officials to local interests.[275] Accordingly, the central state could not impose its will on the rural grassroots, but had to bargain with local officials who could 'deflect or reduce certain central demands made against them'.[276] Although Shue did not explicitly use the term State-*in*-Society, her approach, similarly disaggregates state interests and focuses on how state policy is shaped by interactive processes at the grassroots.

In the reform-era, however, far from retreating, the post-Dengist state has extended its penetration of the local level by binding more closely the interests of local officials to those of the centre.[277] In this context, one would expect the primary locus of bargaining to have shifted from centre-periphery interactions, towards interactions between cleavages at the grassroots. Where Migdal and Shue both describe local officials

[272] Shue, V. (1988) *The Reach of the State*.
[273] Shue, V. (2012) 'Modern/Rural China', p.223
[274] Shue, V. (1988) *The Reach of the State*.
[275] Shue's honeycomb-like structures can be likened to Migdal's 'weblike' societies of autonomous local organisations. Subsequent scholars have sometimes referred to 'honeycomb and web' to refer to the same phenomenon. *Ibid.*
[276] Shue's study was highly influential because it disaggregated the Mao-era state, at a time when it was considered centralized and monolithic. Yet, her research did little to disaggregate the varied interests of societal actors at the periphery, which may or may not have been homogenized. In addition, although she conceded that the interests of local officials and local society were not always the same, her primary focus was on highlighting the more homogenized solidarities that existed at the local level periphery that were distinct from those of the centre.
[277] This argument – that the state has bound the interests of centre and periphery more closely – can be seen in various policy arenas. In the context of stability, the aforementioned discussion of localising stability maintenance, the implementation of the cadre evaluation system, and use of veto-power all serve to bind the interests of local officials with the agendas of the central state.

colluding with societal actors at the *expense* of the centre, this is less likely in the contemporary context. That is to say, although Migdal's approach to strongmen is useful for this research because it helps one avoid overplaying the state's role as a political actor, there are problems with his approach. The key problem for use in this context is the implicit zero-sum relationship between centre and periphery (if not state and society) that runs throughout his analysis. A revision is therefore necessary for 'strong state' contexts. That is to say, in contemporary China, given the intertwined interests of centre and periphery officials, alliances between the local state and local societal forces may indeed create space for negotiation that shapes state policy and behaviour, yet this does not *necessarily* have to produce a zero-sum outcome for the centre. Rather, Shue's concept of 'mutual empowerment' whereby 'interactions (or linkages) between state segments and social segments can and do have the effect of creating more power for *both* sides'[278] is also a possible outcome. That is to say, power relations are not *inevitably* zero-sum.[279] Although mutually reinforcing interactions may not produce *equal* power relations between actors most likely favouring one side over the other,[280] positive-sum, mutually reinforcing relationships can develop.[281] Such a theoretical approach can help us explain the paradoxical duality of how a strong, resilient authoritarian state can co-exist with robust and authoritative societal forces.

[278] Kohli, A. Shue, V. (1994) 'State Power and Social Forces', p.323

[279] In the Weberian tradition, power has readily been defined in terms of mutually exclusive objectives. The implication is that a finite amount of power exists; a positive gain in the desires of one actor is necessarily the loss to the desires of another. Wang, X. (1999) 'Mutual Empowerment of State and Society: Its Nature, Conditions, Mechanisms, and Limits', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 2, p.232

[280] As Kohli and Shue note, the obstacles to achieving mutually reinforcing outcomes are substantial. This is because '[t]he phenomenon of mutual empowerment…depends on the viability of institutions that can link state power with social forces'. With viable institutions in place to link state power and 'social demand', mutual empowerment may materialize; but in the absence of such institutions opportunities for mutual empowerment will be missed. Kohli, A. Shue, V. (1994) 'State Power and Social Forces', p.320

[281] Shue, V. (2011) 'The Political Economy of Compassion: China's 'Charity Supermarket Saga', *Journal of Contemporary China,* Vol. 20, pp.751-772, p.752

2.3.3 Section Summary

To conclude, this section had laid out the theoretical approach used in this thesis and demonstrated how it can be used in a 'strong state' context. It has shown that, Migdal's State-*in*-Society approach argues that the state and social organisations continuously compete for authority and social control over the lives of their members. While the state seeks to be the dominant authority within a given territory, getting people to submit to the state's authority is a challenge because, in some societies, local organisations are perceived as possessing the legitimate authority to regulate social relations within their local communities.[282] In many parts of the Third World, in order to extend state capacity, the state builds alliances with local authority figures, or 'strongmen'. However, this is risky because these alliances can bolster the authority of powerful societal agencies that could use their status to challenge state authority and weaken the political centre. Yet, this section has argued that in strong state contexts, the locus of bargaining is more likely to occur at the grassroots and less likely to produce a zero-sum relationship between centre and periphery. Rather, these alliances may also produce 'mutual empowerment' for both state and societal actors.

2.4 Defining authority

Since Migdal's approaches rests so heavily in understanding authority a definition is necessary here. Sociologists and political scientists have often defined authority as being

[282] Lambach, D. (2004) 'State in Society', p.5

inextricably linked to 'power' and 'legitimacy'.[283] Robert Dahl for example defined authority as 'legitimate power'[284], for Hannah Arendt it is 'power based on consent'[285] and for Robert MacIver authority is 'the power to command obedience'.[286] If authority is linked to power and legitimacy, it is also necessary to understand these terms.

2.4.1 Authority as 'Power' and 'Legitimacy'

While the concept of 'power' has been variously defined, it broadly refers to 'the capacity of an individual or group …, to modify the conduct of other individuals or groups in the manner in which [they] desire'.[287] Yet, the ability to elicit compliance from others can be generated through different means. It can be coercive, that is, where compliance is elicited through threats or the use of force, or it can be legitimate, where compliance is based on a sense of rightfulness. More specifically, the term legitimacy is used to refer to situations in which people are influenced not by force or coercion, but because they believe that 'the decisions made and rules enacted by that person or institution are in some way 'right' … and ought to be followed'.[288] As such, authority as a form of 'legitimate power' rests on a voluntarist response to the imposition of will, obedience, and assent to commands.

In the context of social control, having legitimacy means that communities believe that the individuals or institutions charged with enforcing laws and making decisions that influence their lives are appropriate and 'deserve' to rule. Indeed, the idea that 'a decision

[283] Philip Robins also links 'authority, [and] its components legitimacy and power', with a definition of state sovereignty. For more on this see: Robins, P. (1988) 'The Consolidation of Hashemite Power in Jordan: 1921-1946', PhD Dissertation, University of Exeter, pp.21-33
[284] Dahl, R. (1957) 'The Concept of Power', *Behavioural Science,* Vol. 2, No. 3, pp.201-215
[285] Arendt, H. (2006 [1954]) *Between Past and Future,* (New York: Penguin) pp.91-141
[286] MacIver, R. (1945) *Society: A Textbook of Sociology,* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart).
[287] Tawney, R. (1931) *Equality,* (London: Allen & Unwin) pp.175-176
[288] Tyler, T. *et. al* (2007) *Legitimacy and Criminal Justice: International Perspectives,* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation) pp.10-11

or rule is valid and should be obeyed by virtue of *who* made the decision or *how* it was made' [289] is central to the concepts of authority and legitimacy. Thus, while authority and power overlap in many respects, where they differ is via the presence of legitimacy and the absence of coercion. Yet, as Gramsci's[290] work on 'hegemony'[291] has taught us, authority is a more effective tool for social control than (coercive) power. This is because coercion and force require a large expenditure of resources to obtain modest amounts of influence over others. They also generate costs (such as resentment) in the process. Authority, in contrast, is more effective because when decisions are thought to be legitimate they are largely 'deferred to voluntarily… people become self-regulatory in the sense that their behaviour is shaped by their values'.[292] Such deference is a superior mechanism for establishing and maintaining social order.

2.4.2 Different Types of Authority

What types of institutions or individuals are viewed as having authority differs markedly from context to context. Max Weber[293] distinguishes three sources of authority (or 'legitimate rule') that exist in different settings. The first – '*legal-rational authority*' – is, he argues, where legitimacy is derived from rule creation and interpretation, or what we term 'the rule of law'. Political sociologists have argued that 'legal-rational authority' and the institutions that embody it, such as the court system, constitutions, and contracts, are

[289] *Ibid.* p.11 [My emphasis]
[290] Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, (New York: International Publishers).
[291] The theory of hegemony 'is one with which few would disagree: that man is not ruled by force alone, but also by ideas.' That is to say, political leadership is also 'based on the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class'. Bates, T. (1975) 'Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony', *Journal of the History of Ideas,* Vol. 36, No. 2, pp.351-366, p.351
[292] Tyler, T. *et. al* (2007) *Legitimacy and Criminal Justice,* pp.11-12
[293] Weber, M. (1968 [1925]) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (New York: Bedminster Press); Weber, M. (1958) 'The three types of legitimate rule', tr. Gerth, H. *Berkeley Publications in Society and Institutions,* Vol. 4, No. 1, pp.1-11

a key characteristic of the modern state[294] and form the basis of social order maintenance in the majority of 'modern' Western societies.[295] In contrast, Weber described '*charismatic authority'* as deriving legitimacy not from principles, but from the 'exemplary character of an individual person, and the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him'.[296] For this reason, this form of authority has often provided the foundation for revolutions,[297] religions, and cults.

Most usefully for the case of OPAs in rural China, Weber outlines a third source of authority – *'traditional authority'* – based on deference to traditions and rituals. This is the type of much of the local authority referred to by Migdal. Such authority takes the form of unwritten social norms, rather than codified laws and is based on the strong societal bonds and obligations of a 'communal society'.[298] In such systems, the family, kin, and local community (as opposed to the legal system and the state) form the basis of social control mechanisms.[299] Arguably the most endemic form of traditional authority is patriarchalism, that is, the dominance of the father, husband, and male elder, over members of the household and kinship network.[300] Obedience is based on the culturally embedded belief that it is one's duty, sanctioned by tradition and feelings of filial piety, to respect the authority of these people. These authority figures may emerge naturally (on the basis of age) or be selected based on their adherence to traditional principles. As long

[294] 'Legal-rational authority' is arguably a product of the post-industrial 'mass society' and the anonymity of *Gesellschaft.* For more on 'mass society' see: Mills, C. (1956), *The Power Elite*, (New York: Oxford University Press). For more on *Gesellschaft* see: Toennies, F. (1963 [1887]) *Community and Society*, Tr. Loomis, C. (New York: Harper & Row).
[295] Hobsbawm, E. (2007) *Globalisation, Democracy and Terrorism,* (London: Little, Brown) p.93
[296] Weber, M. (1968 [1925]) *Economy and Society*, p.215
[297] For example, Mao Zedong, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez, and Adolf Hitler.
[298] This is also known as *Gemeinschaft.* Toennies, F. (1963 [1887]) *Community and Society.*
[299] *Ibid.*
[300] Gerth, H. Mills, C. (1958) *From Max Weber Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press) p.296

as the method is recognized by the group, the patriarch's decision-making authority over others will usually be accepted.[301]

2.5 Traditional Authority and Social Control in China

While these Weberian ideal-types can overlap and co-exist with one another, broadly we expect them to be more or less prevalent according to the level of state modernisation. That is to say, traditional authority often forms the basis of social control mechanisms in pre-modern peasant societies, while legal-rational authority tends to play an increasingly important role in maintaining social order as states develop and modernize. Given this premise, one might expect a century of Republican and Communist rule, and the modernisation and bureaucratisation of the state that came with it, to have imposed a 'legal-rational' order upon society. In other words, in 21st Century China, one might expect the flat 'high modern' state and 'legal-rational' institutions, like the bureaucracy and legal system, to penetrate all areas of society and provide the basis for controlling the individual. At the same time, although one might expect the remnants of traditional forms of authority and social control mechanisms – like kinship, seniority and patriarchy – to exist to some extent, one would not expect them to have a clear place in the governance methods of the modern Chinese state.

Yet, this section will show that many of the traditions and norms that we initially thought had been eradicated under Communism are still, in fact, present in contemporary Chinese society. Moreover, far from trying to eradicate such norms and values, the state appears

[301] *Ibid.*

to be mobilising them to aid state capacity and governance. To demonstrate this, this section will outline the evolving nature of traditional authority and social control in historical and philosophical perspective.

2.5.1 Ritual and Social Control in Confucianism

Rural China has often been described as a traditional Confucian[302] society in which rituals[303] and customs, rather than laws, predominate.[304] In his seminal work, *Xiangtu Zhongguo* [*From the Soil*], China's foremost sociologist, Fei Xiaotong, argued that, at least in the Imperial and Republican eras, the nexus of social control was based not on a top-down system of rules and laws ('legal-rational authority'), but on a network of ritualised, hierarchical, dyadic relationships ('traditional authority'). That is to say, social order depended primarily on obedience to traditional and customary social obligations of each interpersonal relationship, rather than to a set of legal principles. Specifically, Fei described Chinese society as consisting of 'ranked categories of social relationships'[305]

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[302] The literature on Confucianism is vast. For useful summaries see: Madsen, R. (1984) *Morality and Power in a Chinese Village*, (London: The University of California Press); Munro, D. (1969) *The Concept of Man in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press); Tu, W. (1993) 'Confucianism', in, *Our Religions*, ed, Sharma, A. (New York: Harper-Collins).

[303] Ritual in the general sense of the term can be defined as publicly recognised, culturally specific behavioural norms. For more on ritual, see: Bell, C. (1992) *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press); Geertz, C. (1981) *Negara: The Theatre State in 19th Century Bali*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press); Turner, V. (1967) *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press). Ritual (礼 *li*) in Confucian philosophy is more specific. It can mean 'custom', 'etiquette', 'morals' or 'rules of correct behaviour' and refers to a range of activities from ancestor worship, to dinner etiquette, to interpersonal relationships. Classical Confucians viewed cultivation of ritual as a way to maintain social harmony and proper governance. For more on ritual and governance in imperial China, see: Wechsler, H. (1985) *Offerings of Jade and Silk: Ritual and Symbol in the Legitimation of the T'ang Dynasty*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press); McMullen, D. (1987) 'Bureaucrats and Cosmology: The Ritual Code of Tang China,' in, *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, ed. Cannadine, D. Price, S. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

[304] Fei Xiaotong argues that rural society 'is a society without law' if laws are defined as regulations maintained by the state. Yet, the absence of law does not affect social order because rural society is ruled by ritual, that is, publicly recognised behavioural norms. Fei X. (1992 [1947]) *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*, Tr. Hamilton, G. Wang, Z. (London: University of California Press).

[305] For more on this, see: Fei's concept '*chaxugeju*'. Fei's (1992 [1947]) *From the Soil*, pp.60-70

in which pre-defined hierarchies of fathers over sons, rulers over subjects, husbands over wives, and elders over the young, determined social behaviour to a large extent. Going further, Fei argued that Chinese society could be characterised as being 'ruled by elders' (*zhanglao tongzhi* 长老统治) who governed and mediated disputes through their knowledge of the *li* (ritual).[306] In keeping with this view, Confucian ethics necessarily links deference to social hierarchy,[307] and the performance of one's societal 'role', to the establishment and preservation of social order both within one's family and in wider society. In this context, authority and obedience are derived from one's position in society, and, specifically, from the ritualised behaviour that each category of social relationship requires.[308] As such, essential Confucian norms, like patriarchalism and family hierarchy, rest not upon the *personal* power of the father or elders, but upon the *legitimacy* of their dominant 'role' in the family system.[309] Indeed, scholars such as Fei Xiaotong have argued that for centuries in pre-modern, Imperial China, the Confucian concept of the 'roles' and the obligation to fulfil them permeated every sphere of Chinese society,[310] in the same way that individuation, law, and rational state institutions permeate every sphere of 'modern' Western societies today.[311]

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[306] Some have argued that the word 'ritual' is an unsatisfactory way to translate *li.* This is because *li* is seen as a far more all-encompassing system of understanding both hierarchy and mutual obligation than just ritualised habit. Mitter, R. (2005) *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p.112

[307] Social hierarchy is ingrained in Confucian ethics via the 'three bonds', 'five relationships' and concept of 'filial piety'. The three bonds refer to the hierarchies of ruler over minister, father over son, and husband over wife. The five relationships extend the three bonds to include 'precedence between old and young' and 'faithfulness between friends'. Filial piety is a doctrine of submission and obedience to one's father, parents, elders and superordinates.

[308] Hamilton, G. Wang, Z. (1992) 'Introduction: Fei Xiaotong and the Beginnings of a Chinese Sociology', in, *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*, Tr. Hamilton, G. Wang, Z. (London: University of California Press) p.22

[309] Hamilton, G. (1990) 'Patriarchy, Patrimonialism, and Filial Piety: A Comparison of China and Western Europe', *The British Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. pp.77-104, p.94

[310] Neo-Confucian scholars stressed these roles not only as a behavioural ideal, but an 'eternal principal of the cosmos from which there is no escape between heaven and earth' *Ibid.*

[311] *Ibid.*

2.5.2 Patrilinealism and Senior Authority in Imperial China

Historians of Imperial China have shown how this Confucian outlook, and the customary authority of superordinate individuals imbued within it, have long been a feature of social order maintenance in China. Indeed, some historians have argued that the foundation of late imperial rule was based on 'a common logic of legitimate authority'[312] of two institutions – a cohesive patrilineal society[313] on the one hand and a long lived imperial state on the other.[314] In this context, the governance and stability of grassroots communities was achieved, at least in part, through the patriarchs' control of the family and the elders' (*zhangbei* 长辈 / *zuzhang* 族长) and gentry's[315] (士绅 *shishen*) control of the village and kinship network.[316] Such individuals exerted enormous influence over their families, lineage group, and village community, representing the legitimate authority for upholding norms of behaviour and social order. In what was termed family law (*jiafa* 家法), customary rules governed behaviour in families and villages, with it falling on the family patriarch or community elders to act as interpreter, executer, and judge for resolving community conflicts and punishing those who acted outside of what was socially and morally acceptable. This informal process for mediating and resolving conflict, which had been practised for thousands of years due to its adherence to Confucian virtues of compromise and non-litigiousness,[317] was built on the institutional structures of a close-knit family, clan, and village network.[318] More formally, the

[312] *Ibid.* p.77
[313] More specifically, the pervasiveness of the family system and seniority of male elders.
[314] *Ibid.* p.77; Lubman, S. (1967) 'Mao and Mediation: Politics and Dispute Resolution in Communist China', *California Law Review,* Vol. 55, No. 5, pp.1284-1359
[315] For more on the role of China's gentry in imperial and republican society, see: Fei, X. (1980 [1953]) *China's Gentry: Essays in Rural-Urban Relations,* ed. Redfield, M. (London: The University of Chicago Press).
[316] Fei X. (1992 [1947]) *From the Soil,* p.114-119
[317] Lubman, S. (1967) 'Mao and Mediation'.
[318] *Ibid.*

hierarchical role of elders and patriarchs in villages was further legitimised under Ming and Qing rule through the *Li-Jia* (里甲) and *Bao-Jia* (保甲) systems which embedded 'virtuous elders'[319] into the official system of local governance and often gave official titles such as 'village headman'.[320] Even the written legal codes of the day, and particularly those in the Qing dynasty,[321] strengthened the authority of the father and elders by allowing them, *de facto*, right to prosecute their children and carry out punishment for unfilial behaviour.[322] Indeed, if measured by codified law, 'the moral and legal obligations of children to their fathers [and elders]… grew better defined and more stringent as China approached the modern era.'[323]

2.5.3 Destruction of Traditional Values in the 20th Century

In the 20th Century, however, Chinese society saw immense changes that have had a profound effect on the structure of Chinese politics and society. During the Republican period, the topic of how Chinese society should be organised became subject to intense debate and social engineering experiments.[324] In seeking to build a modern Chinese nation-state, reformers viewed existing social organisations – such as families, clans, and native places – as obstacles to modernisation and called for the radical restructuring of

[319] Schurmann, F. (1970) *Ideology and Organisation in Communist China,* (London: California University Press) p.428

[320] According to the writings of Huang Liuhong a district magistrate in the early Qing dynasty 'village headmen [in the *lijia* system] are chosen from among those who are older and virtuous, direct in behaviour and able to persuade others' cited in: *Ibid.* These characteristics are exactly those that are found within OPAs today.

[321] Hamilton argues that concepts of filial piety and senior authority were not as deeply ingrained into the governing system in the Tang and Song dynasties as they were in the Qing dynasty. Hamilton G (1990) 'Patriarchy, Patrimonialism, and Filial Piety'.

[322] Parents could also prosecute their children before a magistrate and most magistrates would accede to parental requests for punishment even when the parent asked for the child's death. Fathers would also go unpunished during this period if they killed their son for being unfilial. *Ibid.* pp.86-87

[323] *Ibid.*

[324] Thogersen, S. Bislev, A. (2012) 'Introduction', p.3

society.[325] Indeed, when Sun Yatsen lamented that China was a 'plate of loose sand' (*yi pan san sha* 一盘散沙) 'he did not mean that there were *no* social organisations, but that they were the *wrong kind*'.[326] Consequently, rural social experiments in the 1930s sought to breakdown traditional clan loyalties,[327] while at the same time, Guomindang propaganda and policy sought to target and transform religious and folk practices.[328]

A similar attitude towards traditional social organisations and practises continued under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the Mao-era. During the Civil War and after 1949, the CCP sought to extend its authority across the nation. As an alternate locus of authority, with interests' independent of the CCP, village 'elders' were a group that needed supressing to enable the Party to consolidate power. According to Franz Schurmann,[329] during the civil war and land reform periods, the Communists sought a 'fundamental transformation in the authority relationship in the village.' The CCP began recruiting 'strong, young peasants', who were seen as more malleable than their 'elders', into the Party and gave them formal responsibility for village work and battle teams. Yet, the elders remained influential and so in order to 'drive their organisation [- the CCP -] deep into the fabric of the village,' young Party cadres were encouraged to struggle against, and seize leadership from, the village elders particularly during the land reform movement. As a consequence, in addition to the more obvious discourse of 'class conflict' during this period, tension between 'old' and 'young' became an inherent part of the struggles of the 1950s.

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[325] Fizgerald, J. (1998) *Awakening China Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press) cited in *Ibid.*

[326] *Ibid.*

[327] Thogersen, S. (2002) cited in Thogersen, S. Bislev, A. (2012) 'Introduction', p.3

[328] Nedostup, R. (2009) *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

[329] Schurmann, F. (1970) *Ideology and Organisation in Communist China,* pp.428-429

At the same time, the CCP sought to establish authority over powerful clan and kinship networks by eradicating the natural village as a political unit and establishing the administrative village (an amalgamation of several natural villages) as the basic level of the state.[330] Since natural villages mapped onto established kinship and lineage structures, in the early years of the revolution these had often become a mobilising structure for peasant uprisings.[331] By establishing political structures at the higher administrative village level, this arguably prevented new political positions mapping directly onto, and being subverted by, old authority networks.

The struggle against rural 'elders' and traditional authority and culture continued more broadly during the Mao-era, but reached a climax during the Cultural Revolution. The campaign to 'smash the four olds' (*po si jiu,* 破四旧) – old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas – was a direct attack on traditional culture. In rural areas, this campaign sought to disrupt traditional social organisations and social networks that had cemented local power bases. Kinship ties, lineages, religious customs, and traditional Confucian norms – such as filial piety and deference to social hierarchy – all became targets of the young Red Guards. Indeed, some historians have suggested that, for a period of ten years at least, religious and folk practices vanished almost without a trace.[332]

[330] *Ibid.* p.414
[331] *Ibid.*
[332] Chau, A. (2003) 'Popular Religion in Shaanbei, North-Central China.', *The Journal of Chinese Religions,* Vol. 31, pp.39-79, p.42

2.5.4 Reform-era Resurgence of Traditional Culture

Yet, despite efforts to eradicate traditional authority in the Mao-era and despite the immense changes that have occurred since opening-up under Deng Xiaoping, studies of rural China conducted from the 1980s onwards have testified to a continued, and, in some respects, strengthened importance of filial piety, social hierarchy, kinship, ancestors, religious practices, and lineage ties in everyday life and culture.[333] That is to say, despite a century of modernisation and change, many of the traditions and norms that we initially thought had been eradicated under Communism appear, in fact, to still be present in contemporary Chinese society today.[334] In keeping with this, Adam Chau's recent scholarship has documented the resurgence and revitalisation of popular religion across rural China.[335] Arguing that religious life was only really interrupted for a decade during the Cultural Revolution, Chau claims that a religious revival began as early as 1978 with timid religiosity and small-scale temple festivals. Government sponsored renovations of religious sites in the 1980s and 1990s demonstrated a new religious tolerance and provided the impetus for a boom in rebuilding village temples, a revival in outward displays of religious worship, and the restoration of monks, shamans, mediums, and other religious figures to community life. In more recent years, he argues, the state has not just

[333] For examples, see: Hansen, M. (2007) 'Organizing the Old'; Yan, Y. (2003) *The Flow of Gifts: Reciprocity and Social Networks in a Chinese Village*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press); Jun, J. (1996) *The Temple of Memories: History, Power and Morality in a Chinese Village*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press); Cohen, M. (2005) *Kinship, Contract, Community, and State: Anthropological Perspectives on China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

[334] Some have argued that although Confucianism, and traditional culture more generally, undoubtedly came under assault and buckled under the impact of modernity in China, the extent of its demise has been exaggerated. For a discussion of the evolution and decline of Confucianism in the first half of the 20th Century see, Mitter, R. (2005) *A Bitter Revolution,* p.110-137

[335] Chau, A. (2006) *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press); Chau, A. (2011) *Religion in Contemporary China: Revitalization and Innovation* (Abingdon: Routledge); Chau, A. (2005) 'The Politics of Legitimation and the Revival of Popular Religion in Shaanbei, North-Central China', *Modern China,* Vol. 31, No. 2, pp.236-78; Chau, A. (2003) 'Popular Religion in Shaanbei'.

been tolerant of popular religion but has actively supported it by recognising village temples as cultural heritage sites, legitimizing them through official titles (i.e. *zongjiao huodong changsuo* 宗教活动场所), and using them for public welfare aims.[336] Other scholars, such as Lily Tsai and Tao Yu, have shown how the revival of popular religion generally, and temple associations more specifically, have been used by the local state for a variety of state aims from funding and supplying public goods[337] to negotiating with protestors to maintain social stability.[338]

Similarly, since opening-up, lineage and kinship based organisations have re-established their influence in many rural communities particularly in Southern China. These often link small villages to a network of overseas migrants throughout South East Asia and beyond for reunions and business dealings.[339] While the revival has not reproduced such dominant organisations in North China, scholars such as Jing Jun[340] and Myron Cohen[341] have demonstrated in different ways how ancestors and lineage affiliation continue to constitute an organising principle for many people in rural Northern communities as well.[342] Traditional funeral practices and Tomb Sweeping to honour the ancestors, which

[336] Chau, A. (2003) 'Popular Religion in Shaanbei', p.42
[337] Tsai, L. (2007) *Accountability without Democracy.*
[338] Tao, Y. (2015) 'Unlikely Friends of the Authoritarian and Atheist Ruler: Religious Groups and Collective Contention in Rural China', *Politics & Religion,* Vol. 8, No. 1, pp.86-110
[339] Tan, C. (2006) *Southern Fujian: Reproduction of Traditions in Post-Mao China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press).
[340] Jun, J. (1996) *The Temple of Memories.*
[341] Cohen, M. (2005) *Kinship, Contract, Community, and State.*
[342] Hansen, M. (2007) 'Organising the Old'.

were supressed throughout the Cultural Revolution,[343] have also seen a revival,[344] with professional mourning and funeral performance now a flourishing industry[345] and the Tomb Sweeping Festival having been recognised as public holiday in 2008.

Concerning relationships between the generations, although some scholarship has found senior authority to be waning in the reform-era urban China, many contemporary studies of rural China have pointed towards a continued high degree of authority attributed to the oldest people, and oldest men more specifically.[346] Indeed, Charlotte Ikels argues that, despite some early rhetoric against the traditional family system, norms of filial piety and specifically care of the old remained surprisingly intact under Communism. The CCP, she argues, even initiated periodic campaigns on respecting and supporting one's parents in old age under Mao.[347] Likewise, after opening-up in the 1980s, scholars such as Jack and Sulamith Heins Potter found respect and care for the old had not waned. On the

[343] During the Cultural Revolution, in an attempt to modernise China and supress traditional culture, tomb-flattening policies were widespread and orderly public cemeteries replaced scattered gravesites. Rates of cremations (which were not the custom) increased dramatically reaching 90% in some areas. Traditional mourning rites such as burning paper money, figures and objects and performances of filial grief by professional mourners (which date back thousands of years) were also outlawed as 'feudal superstition'. For more on changes to funeral practices in the 20th Century see, Davis, D. (1991) *Long Lives: Chinese Elderly and the Communist Revolution,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press) chapter 5; Han, D. (2008) *The Unknown Cultural Revolution: Life and Change in a Chinese Village* (New York: Monthly Review Press).

[344] Ikels, C. (1996) *The Return of the God of Wealth: The Transition to a Market Economy in Urban China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

[345] NPR (2013) 'Belly Dancing for the Dead: A Day with China's Top Mourner', *National Public Radio (NPR)* [Accessed online on 20/04/2017 at: http://www.npr.org/2013/06/26/195565696/belly-dancing-for-the-dead-a-day-with-chinas-top-mourner.] There are some caveats to this and the state, particularly in urban areas, does still restrict some funeral rituals, encourages cremation, and discourages extravagant and prolonged funeral ceremonies. Ikels, C. (2004) *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press); The Guardian (2013) 'Chinese leaders ban lavish funerals', *The Guardian* [Accessed online on 20/04/2017 at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/20 /chinese-communist-party-ban-lavish-funerals]

[346] Hansen, M. (2007) 'Organising the Old'.

[347] Ikels, C. (2004) 'Serving the Ancestors, Serving the State: Filial Piety and Death Ritual in Contemporary Guangzhou', in, *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia,* ed, Ikels, C. (Stanford: Stanford University Press) pp.88-105, p.88

contrary, such norms were routinely practiced and largely taken for granted in the villages they studied.[348] In addition, subsequent studies have shown that the oldest male continues to hold a superordinate position of authority within families in rural China,[349] and there has been a resurgence in gender inequality in the post-Mao family dynamic. This patriarchal bias is also enshrined in the contemporary legislation, with the regulation of property, divorce, and other financial matters often skewed against women in both rural and urban areas.[350]

Finally, in terms of the role of the family, village, and native place (*laojia* 老家), these institutions may not have waned under Mao as much as was originally believed. Indeed, the CCP's system of organising families and households into teams and brigades, and restricting their movement through the *hukou* system, arguably served to solidify local relationships prompting households to 'thicken ties within hamlets and villages while dissolving ties to the outside', making peasant communities 'even more self-absorbed than before'. [351] Indeed, when William Parish and Martin Whyte conducted their ground-breaking study of rural China in the late 1970s, they argued that the village and the family, perhaps more than ever, were the units that framed people's lives.[352] Since then, rapid urbanisation and large-scale out-migration, have impelled more people to leave their home communities, with clear negative implications for the bonds of family, village, and native place. Yet, academic studies have found that the family – albeit more interspersed

[348] Potter, S. Potter, J. (1990) *China's Peasants: The Anthropology of a Revolution,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) cited in Hansen, M. (2007) 'Organising the Old'.
[349] Baker, H. (1979) *Chinese Family and Kinship*. (London: Macmillan Press).
[350] For more on this, see: Hong Fincher, L. (2014) *Leftover Women: The Resurgence in Gender Inequality in China*, (London: Zed Books Ltd).
[351] Shue, V. (1988) *The Reach of the State*, pp.134-135
[352] Parish, W. Whyte, M. (1978) *Village and Family in Contemporary China*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press) cited in Thøgersen, S. Bislev, A. (2012) 'Introduction', pp.4-5

– continues to be an important organisation in the lives of Chinese people.[353] Indeed, the spring festival migration of people back to their villages and home towns – the largest simultaneous migration of human beings[354] – and the continued importance of 'paying calls' (*bainian* 拜年) at this time, demonstrates, perhaps more than anything else, that family, village, and native place continue to be a significant organising principles in China today.

2.5.5 Section Summary

To conclude, this section has provided a brief overview of the evolution of traditional authority in rural China. In doing so, it has demonstrated that despite widespread campaigns to eradicate traditional norms and practices in the Mao-era, many of these traditions quickly reappeared (albeit in sometimes altered forms) after opening-up and reform. Moreover, far from trying to eradicate such norms and values, the contemporary Chinese Party-state has been either tolerant or encouraging of this resurgence, often using traditions to channel state aims. This is surprising because one would have expected 70 years of communism and the development of a 'modern state' in China to have pushed out traditional forms of authority. Rather, as I will argue in Chapter Five, the state has created structures to make this traditional authority 'legible' to the state to use as a governance method and control mechanism in the contemporary-era.

[353] Xu, A. DeFrain, J. Liu, W. (2016) *The Chinese Family Today*, (Abingdon: Routledge).

[354] Wang, Y. (2017) 'World's Largest Human Migration Begins: Chinese New Year 2017', *Forbes.* [Accessed online on 01/06/2017 at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/ywang/2017/01/26/worlds-largest-human-migration-begins-chinese-new-year-2017/#7993e420999a]; Embury-Dennis, T. (2017) 'Chinese New Year 2017: Largest migration of human beings in the world underway', *The Independent.* [Accessed online on 01/06/2017 at: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/chinese-new-year-2017-fire-rooster-largest-migration-a7546326.html]

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has assessed the theoretical approaches to social organisation in contemporary china. To summarize, as Elizabeth Perry has noted, even the most cursory review of the state-society relations scholarship attests to the popularity of the state-society paradigm.[355] As a result, in the reform-era, much scholarship on the burgeoning array of social organizations, has implicitly or explicitly engaged in an analytical tug of war between a unitary 'state' and an undifferentiated 'society'.[356] Those scholars who attest to the continued dominance of the Party-state have tended to draw from approaches in the statist tradition, using state-corporatism as an analytical prism through which to understand the proliferation of social organizations. For these scholars, associational groups, and particularly those, like OPAs, that are institutionally connected to the Party-state, are seen as tools with which the state manages society and pursues its policy objectives. These scholars, at least implicitly, succumb to a 'strong state, weak society' account of state-society relations. On the other side of the state-society spectrum, those scholars who have tended towards a more optimistic view of the Chinese state's trajectory of reform and society's role within that reform process, have sought to establish that civil society is burgeoning in today's China. Scholars writing in the post 2000s have been less forthcoming in their predictions of democratization than many of those writing in the 1980s and 1990s. Therefore, scholarship moved away from politicized definitions of civil society to more sociological definitions that emphasise autonomy (or degree of autonomy) from the state but not opposition to it.

[355] Perry, E. (1994) 'Trends in the Study of Chinese Politics', p.705
[356] *Ibid.*

Yet, this chapter has argued that by assessing state and society as separate and unitary entitles, we run the risk of neglecting those associations that straddle the state-society divide, and of obscuring cleavages within these two spheres. As such, the state-society dichotomy may serve to ignore some of the most interesting aspects of the Chinese reform experience.[357] This chapter has argued that Joel Migdal's[358] State-*in*-Society approach is a more nuanced framework through which to understand state-society relations at the rural grassroots. This is because his approach views state and society as disaggregated entities often fraught with cleavages, conflicted allegiances and overlapping identities. To understand the state's use of OPAs for stability maintenance and other governance purposes one must look at the specific interactions between officials and OPA actors to understand the dynamics of such relationships. In particular, his discussion of local strongmen appears to be particularly analogous to this case, providing useful questions such as whether increased state penetration of society through local authority figures actually increases state strength, or whether it leads to official concessions.

Finally, this chapter has defined authority as 'legitimate power' and has provided an historical overview of traditional authority in China. It has argued that despite a century of rapid change and modernisation in the Republican and Communist eras, traditional authority and values continue to hold currency in contemporary rural China. Moreover, far from trying to eradicate such norms and values, the contemporary Chinese Party-state has tolerated and, in some cases, even encouraged the resurgence of such norms. Furthermore, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, in mobilizing traditional authority

[357] *Ibid.*

[358] Migdal, J. (1988) *Strong Societies and Weak States.*

and the building of alliances with local authority figures, the state can mobilize such forces to utilise for state aims.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research design and data collection methods used in this thesis. It puts forward a qualitative methodology and collection of 'thick data' for addressing my research topic on the role of OPAs in stability maintenance. In doing so, it argues that the qualitative approach is the best, and perhaps only, way of addressing my research questions which focus on complex issues of *how* OPAs mediate conflict, *how* officials seek their support, and *how* OPAs respond or reinterpret efforts to mobilize them for state aims. This is because the answers to these types of questions are difficult to standardize and quantify, particularly if one seeks to understand the phenomenon in depth, rather than focusing on breadth or representativeness across China. This study has employed a 'one-case, multi-fieldsite' approach to look at grassroots OPAs across three provinces – Yunnan, Fujian and Shaanxi. In addition, it has sought to use three qualitative data collection techniques – semi-structured interviewing, participant observation, and documentary analysis – to gather evidence for this thesis. Over the course of this D.Phil, I spent over 23 months in China doing fieldwork and conducted 176 structured interviews, 115 semi-structured interviews, and 21 focus groups with academics, policy makers,

NGO staff, local officials, OPA committee members, and villagers. The research and data collection methods used for this thesis will be discussed at length in this chapter.

3.1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter begins by addressing the research design used in this thesis. It then discusses the rationale behind my fieldsite selection and how I established myself at each location. After that, this chapter looks at the sources of data collection used in this thesis – participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and policy/documentary analysis. In the section on participant observation, it addresses trust building, positionality and reflexivity, data documentation strategies, as well as the problems of using this approach. In the section on semi-structured interviewing, it addresses the methods used to conduct both field interviews and elite interviews. In the section on policy/documentary analysis, this chapter discusses the different types of documents used, such as newspaper articles, government policy papers, and documents written by or for OPAs. Limitations of this research project are discussed throughout.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 A Qualitative Approach

This thesis investigates the role of older people's associations (OPAs) in social governance, maintaining stability and resolving conflict. While a number of China studies scholars have looked at how grievances are resolved at the grassroots level and by which actors, most of these have taken a large-n statistical approach.[359] While these studies have

[359] Hurst, W. *et al.* (2014) 'Reassessing Collective Petitioning'; Michelson, E. (2008) 'Justice from Above or Below?'

helped provide a broad picture of 'justice from below',[360] because of their research methodologies, they have been unable to provide a vivid account of exactly *how* conflicts are resolved and *why* they are resolved in the way that they are. Those studies that do take a more qualitative approach tend to focus on institutions of the state like village committees[361] or higher-level state institutions[362] like the courts[363] and petitioning[364] in grievance resolution and neglect *within* village mediation and the role of informal actors. This study seeks to rectify this imbalance by using a qualitative case study approach to explore the complex and highly personal dynamics of how OPAs resolve disputes, how and why the state seeks their support in such conflicts, and how OPA actors respond to their role as community mediators. These are questions that are not only much better suited to a qualitative methodology, but arguably could not be sufficiently addressed by using a quantitative approach alone. The strength of qualitative research is that it provides complex textual description of how people experience a given research issue. Sensitive subjects and complex relationships can be more flexibly explored through qualitative research which, through in-depth interviewing and the use of open questions, allow participants to respond at length using their own words. This research has sought to collect data on how conflict and contentious policy are negotiated and mediated by OPAs at the local level. Research of this kind not only necessitates an understanding of the local community and relationship between actors, but also requires sensitivity and trust

[360] Michelson (2008) 'Justice from Above or Below?'
[361] Read, B. Michelson, E. (2008) 'Mediating the Mediation Debate'.
[362] O'Brien, K. Li, L. (2006) *Rightful Resistance*.
[363] Diamant, N. Lubman, S. O'Brien, K. (2005), 'Law and Society in the People's Republic of China', in, *Engaging the Law in China: State, Society, and Possibilities for Justice,* eds, Diamant, N. Lubman, S. O'Brien, K. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University press), pp.3-30; Gallagher, M. (2005) 'Use the Law as Your Weapon! Institutional Change and Legal Mobilization in China', in, *Engaging the Law in China: State, Society, and Possibilities for Justice,* eds, Diamant, N. Lubman, S. O'Brien, K. (Stanford: Stanford University press), pp.54-83
[364] Chen, X. (2012) *Social Protest and Contentious Authoritarianism*.

between researcher and participant which can only be built up over multiple in-depth conversations.

Although I entered the field with broad research questions and a hypothesis, I believed this would be insufficient for developing a fixed research design due to the complex and unpredictable nature of social interaction.[365] Indeed, a qualitative case study approach has been deliberately chosen over a variable-oriented approach,[366] to facilitate research flexibility in the field. Instead, I explored a broad range of topics and remained open to new knowledge in order to 'ground' the research in empirical data. In doing so, I let research questions, hypothesis, and conclusions develop with the help of informants and my embeddedness in the research setting. Finally, this research has sought to be 'interdisciplinary' by drawing on literature from politics, sociology, anthropology, and socio-legal studies.

3.2.2. Case Study Method and Fieldsite Selection

This study has employed the qualitative 'one-case, multi-fieldsite'[367] approach to look at OPAs across three provinces – Fujian, Yunnan, and Shaanxi – in rural China. The case study method involves drawing conclusions about macro-level phenomena on the basis

[365] *Ibid.*

[366] The variable-oriented approach begins with the identification of key variables and the collection of data centering on those variables. The reason for not using this approach is because a more flexible and adjustable approach is often warranted in contemporary rural China. Kan, K. (2014) 'Land, Distributive Politics and Rural Governance in Reform China', University of Oxford, Unpublished D.Phil Dissertation, p.84

[367] The 'one case, multi fieldsite' approach has been hugely influential in studies of Chinese politics. Kevin O'Brien and Li Lianjiang used this method to develop the concept of 'Rightful Resistance' in one of the most persuasive analyses of Chinese politics. O'Brien, K. Li, L. (2006) *Rightful Resistance*. See also, Heimer, M. (2006) 'Field Sites, Research Design and Types of Findings', in, *Doing Fieldwork in China*, eds, Heimer, M. Thøgersen, S. (Copenhagen: NIAS) p.65

of micro-level analysis.[368] The case study under observation here is the grassroots OPA. Some political scientists have argued that case studies are 'unscientific' and lack generalizability because they only focus on one specific case at one specific period of time.[369] To limit such criticism, while still maintaining depth, this study has looked at OPAs across a number of fieldsites. Although increasing the number of fieldsites does not increase my ability to generalize about OPAs across China in a statistical sense, it does increase the probability that my findings occur in other locations.[370] Nevertheless, generating a rich and nuanced understanding of the phenomena has taken precedence over eliciting data that is generalizable.

The remainder of this section addresses how and why different fieldsites were selected for this thesis and the advantages and limitations of my selection methods. In doing so, it first outlines the ''guerrilla' style selection method', where one's existing networks are utilized to locate fieldsites. It then outlines C. Wright Mills' 'most different' approach to fieldsite selection which seeks to generate fieldsites that are different in the respects the researcher is not examining. Finally, this section then gives a brief description of each of fieldsite location.

'Guerrilla' Style Selection

When I started my fieldwork, the atmosphere for foreign journalists and researchers in China was becoming more constricted. Under Xi Jinping, foreign journalists were having

[368] Gerring, J. (2007) *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
[369] Campbell, D. Stanley, J. (1963) *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research.* (Chicago, IL: Rand-McNally).
[370] Heimer, M (2006) 'Field Sites, Research Design', p.65

their press visas removed or were facing other intimidating tactics,[371] a new draft law was set to further restrict the activities of foreign NGOs,[372] and the government was seeking to limit the 'spread of western values' in the education system.[373] This came amid increased censorship generally and a rise in arrests of lawyers and activists across the country.[374] Indeed, according to some commentators, these last few years have been the most constricted period for social science researchers and journalists in China in two decades.[375] At the same time, Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign had made many local officials edgy and I was concerned that, as a Caucasian foreigner who cannot blend in, local officials might be unwilling to have me on their doorsteps.

Given this context, selecting locations where I had reliable contacts who could vouch for me was of the utmost importance when choosing fieldsites. Even without this political climate, turning up to a village without an introduction would have been unlikely to yield positive results in terms of data collection or would have taken much longer to integrate into, given the insider-outsider dynamics of Chinese psychology.[376] This would have

[371] The Guardian (2016) 'The Guardian View on Foreign Press in China: expelling the Messenger', *The Guardian.* [Accessed online on 14/03/16 at: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/01/the-guardian-view-on-the-foreign-press-in-china-expelling-themessenger]

[372] Economist (2015) 'Uncivil Society', *The Economist.* Accessed online on 14/03/16 at: [http://www.economist.com/news/china/21661819-new-draft-law-spooks-foreign-not-profit-groups-working-china-uncivil-society]

[373] Reuters (2015) 'China classrooms must 'keep out' western values', *Reuters.* [Accessed online on 14/03/16 at: http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-values-idUSKBN0L304620150130]

[374] Buckley, C. (2016) 'Charges Against Chinese Rights Lawyers Draw Foreign Criticism', *New York Times,* [Accessed online on 14/03/16 at: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/19/world/asia/china-lawyers-arrest-reaction.html?_r=0]

[375] Home Office (2016) 'Country Information and Guidance. China: Journalists', *Home Office Report*. [Accessed online on 12/04/16 at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/507384/ cig_china_journalists_v_1_0_final.pdf]

[376] Chinese society is relationship-oriented and built on personal connections. It is a behavioural norm for Chinese people to make distinctions between insider and outsider relationships. These norms present a problem for researchers who find it difficult to move from 'out-group' to 'in-group' in short periods in the field. This context strengthens the case for ethnographic research as trust can be built up over a long period of time in the field. For more on this, see: Thomas, D. Liao, Y. (2010) 'Inter-cultural interactions: the

been less of a problem for an anthropologist planning to spend a full year or 18 months in one single village. However, given that I planned to spend a few months at each fieldsite, I believed it was vitally important to 'hit the ground running' with good introductions and sympathetic 'gatekeepers' from the start.

To do this, and while in Beijing improving my Mandarin at IUP[377] at Tsinghua University in 2014, I devoted much time and effort to networking with Chinese academics and students in the hope that someone would be able to help provide a village introduction. This sort of selection process is not uncommon in the study of Chinese politics and society. Indeed, the sociologist Thomas Gold [378] termed the approach 'guerrilla interviewing' in 1989 and Dorothy Solinger reiterated the continued relevance of the 'guerrilla' style selection process in the more recent book *Doing Fieldwork in China*.[379] Consequently, fieldsites in Fujian, Yunnan, and Shaanxi were selected, primarily because I had successfully cultivated connections in these locations (see section titled 'fieldsite descriptions' for more on this).

'Most Different' Approach

Having said that, of the limited choices I had available, I sought to choose locations that would conform with C. Wright Mills'[380] 'most different' approach to case selection.[381] I

Chinese context', in, *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Psychology,* ed, Harris Bond, M. (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

[377] The Berkeley-run Inter-University Programme for Chinese Language Studies based at Tsinghua University.

[378] Gold, T. (1989) 'Guerrilla Interviewing Among the *Getihu*', in, *Unofficial China,* eds, Link, P. Madsen, R. Pickowicz, P. (Boulder: Westview Press).

[379] Solinger, D. (2006) 'Interviewing Chinese People: From High Level Officials to the Unemployed', in, *Doing Fieldwork in China,* eds, Heimer, M. Thøgersen, S. (Abingdon: NIAS).

[380] Mills, C. (1959) *The Sociological Imagination,* (New York: Oxford University Press).

[381] Gerring also includes the 'most different' approach in his list of nine different methods of case selection which include: 'typical', 'diverse', 'extreme', 'deviant', 'influential', 'crucial', 'pathway' and 'most

selected counties in three different regions across China in order to demonstrate that this phenomenon is not isolated to a single village or region. Fujian, Yunnan, and Shaanxi provide perspectives from the South East, South West and Northern regions of China. Broadly speaking, under Deng Xiaoping, the South East opened up earlier and developed faster than other regions, having been a manufacturing hub in the 1980s and 1990s. As such, the region in which Fujian is found is comparatively wealthy (see table 3.1.), and better developed. This region is also well known for its strong lineage traditions, conservative attitudes, and emphasis on traditional, religious, and folk culture. The South West is typically characterised as a poor region which was late to China's development process. Yunnan's key industries include tobacco, agriculture, mining, and tourism, with many rural villages relying on agriculture as their primary industry.[382] Yunnan is known for having relatively strong lineage traditions (although not as strong as Fujian). It is also known for its numerous ethnic minority populations. However, the county selected within Yunnan is majority Han and there is no ethnic minority dimension to this study. Shaanxi, in the North, is a comparatively poor province, particularly in its rural areas, with a greater reliance on agricultural that the South East or North. North China generally is known to have weaker lineage traditions than South China. It is important to have this variation because published studies have, thus far, primarily focused on OPAs in in Hubei,[383] and Zhejiang,[384] and, to a lesser extent, Fujian.[385] OPA dynamics in other regions therefore remain underexplored. In addition, selecting fieldsites from a variety of provinces can

similar' approaches. For more on case selection methods, see: Gerring, J. (2007) *Case Study Research*, pp.86-150.

[382] Interview with County Government Official, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2014).

[383] He, X. (2007) 'NRR and the Chinese Path'.

[384] Deng, Y. O'Brien K. (2014) 'The Society of Senior Citizens'; O'Brien, K. Deng, Y. (2015) 'Repression Backfires'.

[385] Hansen, M. (2007) 'Organising the Old'.

help us understand whether a phenomenon is isolated to a particular region and whether it is different in different locations.

Table 3.1. Comparison of Key Provincial Statistics

	Fujian	**Yunnan**	**Shaanxi**
GDP (¥)	2,405,576	1,281,459	1,768,994
Provincial Ranking by GDP (out of 31)	11	23	16
Per capita GDP (¥)	57856.00	25083.00	42692.00
Annual Per Capita Net Income of Rural Households (¥)	11184.20	6141.3	6502.60
Urbanisation Rate (%)	60.8	40.5	51.3
Rural Population (10000 persons)	1,454	2,747	1,791
Population life expectancy (years)	75.8	69.5	74.7
Natural Growth Rate (population growth) (%)	7.5	6.2	3.87
Old Dependency Ratio (%)	10.1	12.1	14.3

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2014.[386]

Limitations of Fieldsite Selection

Nevertheless, it is important to note that this research does not pretend to be representative of China as a whole, nor representative of these provinces or regions. Rather, by selecting more than one location it aims to show than my findings are not just limited to one county and therefore cannot be dismissed as a local anomaly. Another limitation of this study's fieldsite choices, is that, for various reasons I did not spend equal amounts of time in each province or in each village. As such, because of the length of time I stayed in each area, where I resided, and where I built closer relationships, I naturally became more familiar with some villages (and villagers) than others. There are therefore some villages and

[386] National Bureau of Statistics of China. 'Annual by Province: 2014'. [Accessed online on 28/04/16 at: http://data.stats.gov.cn/english/easyquery.htm?cn=E0103]

regions where I generated richer data. Specifically, I spent the longest time at fieldsites in Fujian and already had strong relationships at my fieldsite in Yunnan. As a result, I generated richer data in these regions than in Shaanxi. In Shaanxi, because I was carrying out a separate research project in tandem to my own, I was unable to use the same research design and, as a result, I only spent a few days in each village. Given that this was my last fieldsite, I used OPAs in Shaanxi as a way of understanding whether what I had observed in other provinces was also occurring in this region. However, I was not able to watch any disputes unfolding nor delve into as much detail with interviewees as in other areas. I have tried to make these fieldsite limitations or biases clear throughout this thesis.

3.2.3 Fieldsite Descriptions

For this D.Phil thesis, I spent just under two months in total at Zhuanping County[387] in Yunnan over three visits in 2012 and 2014. In addition, I spent two months at Wuwei County and just under five months at Foshan County both in Fujian in 2015. I revisited Foshan for a week in 2016. In addition, just under three months were spent in villages in four counties in Shaanxi in 2015.

Table 3.2. Fieldsite Locations

See Appendix 1 for a full list of villages visited by the author.

Yunnan	**Fujian**		**Shaanxi**
Zhuanping County *Located in central Yunnan*	**Foshan County** *Located inland in central Fujian*	**Wuwei County** *Located on the coast in south west Fujian*	**4 Counties in Shaanxi** *Located throughout Shaanxi*

*all location names under the province are pseudonyms.

[387] All location names below the Province are pseudonyms.

Yunnan Province

I have a longstanding connection to one region of Yunnan Province having lived there on three occasions, for two, three, and seven months, between 2006 and 2009.[388] Building on friendships made during this time, I visited Zhuanping County within this region for my Masters research on OPAs in 2012. Zhuanping county in Yunnan is largely agricultural, specializing in fruit production. Many of the younger villagers in this region have moved to the cities to work while older villagers (over 40) had stayed in the village to till the land. However, despite this being an agricultural county most farmers were not poor subsistence farmers. Rather, they mainly grew commercially viable crops and therefore had more than enough to support their regular expenditure.[389]

In 2012 during my Masters fieldwork, I spent just under one month living in the Zhuanping County seat and collecting data on OPAs in three villages in two townships. Having already established trust with individuals in this region made the 'snowballing' process quicker and easier. The data collected in 2012 formed the basis of my research design and some of the data from that research project has also been included in the empirical chapters of this thesis. Because I had already spent a lot of time establishing trust in the area, I did not include another prolonged stay in this location.[390] Instead, in order to follow up with interviewees that I had met in 2012, I revisited villages and

[388] Teaching English between Sept 2006 and March 2007; teaching and visiting friends in July and August 2008; working on a research project and interning for a local NGO in between June and August 2009.
[389] While their income was more than enough to support their daily expenditure, they would, for instance, run into difficulties paying for serious medical conditions if they arose.
[390] I also decided not to return to this area for a prolonged period in 2015 because my primary gatekeeper was pregnant and then nursing her newborn and I did not want to be a burden on her during that time.

conducted follow up interviews on two occasions in 2014 to fill gaps in my data and understanding of the local issues.

Fujian Province

I visited two counties – Wuwei and Foshan – in 2015. In Wuwei county in Fujian, a vice-mayor, whom I had been introduced to via the Tsinghua alumni network, helped establish me in the region. The town I stayed in was a wealthy manufacturing hub. The villages within this township had very little agricultural land, their land having previously been rented or sold to factories or used for village urbanization projects (i.e. building roads, parks and other facilities). The limited remaining agricultural land was not usually toiled by locals but rented out to poor migrants from north China who lived in make-shift homes and were largely excluded from village life. Most native villagers of working age made a living in the town or county seat, working in shops or factories, as drivers, or running their own small business ventures. Younger villagers had either moved away completely or lived at their work place during the week and returned to the village at weekends.

In Foshan County, I was introduced by a friend and an academic at Xiamen University to a family in a village several hours away to whom he was related. Although the region is generally well developed, this county was the least developed of the region. Most people over the age of 40 (which represented most people who remained in the villages) relied on agriculture – particularly growing aubergines and rearing pigs – for their primary income. The regional government had sought to develop the area for tourism and because of this, and because of the presence of a local reservoir, no factories were allowed to open, reducing local work opportunities. Nevertheless, some younger villagers who had not

migrated to the bigger cities found work nearby operating diggers, driving trucks, selling insurance, or running small businesses.

Shaanxi Province

By chance, the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, Help Age International, and the World Health Organization were running a study on the role of older people's associations in villages in Asia and needed a researcher to collect data in Shaanxi in summer 2015. I took on the position on the understanding that I would be able to conduct my own research alongside collecting data for their study. During this time, I conducted 200 short interviews with OPA members and 16 focus groups with OPA committees across 16 villages in four counties in Shaanxi. Although the research design did not allow me to spend a long time in each village (two days each) the study helped improve my general understanding of OPAs across China and opened more doors to government officials in the Shaanxi Provincial Committees on Ageing and China's National Committee on Ageing than I would otherwise have had access to and gave me a better understanding of the policy and regulatory environment surrounding OPAs. In addition, as previously mentioned, spending two days in each village allowed me to gain a very general picture of what OPAs were doing in villages, but did not allow me to build up a strong understanding of local relationships nor did it allow me to gain rich textural description in interviews. As a result, most of the very detailed case studies in this thesis come from the data collected on OPAs in Fujian and Yunnan.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this research comes from methodological triangulation of three qualitative research techniques - intensive interviewing, participant observation, and policy/documentary analysis. These techniques have been used in conjunction with one another to gather a range of data and ensure its reliability. I discuss each of these data collection methods below.

3.3.1. Data Collection Timeframe

I spent one month in 2012, three weeks in 2014 and over nine months in 2015 and one week in 2016 at my fieldsites collecting data. Just under two months were spent at fieldsites in Yunnan, a little under seven months were spent at fieldsites in Fujian, and just under three months were spent at multiple fieldsite locations in Shaanxi. In addition, I spent 12 months improving my Mandarin in Beijing between January 2014 and January 2015. I used this time in Beijing to conduct interviews with policy makers, NGOs and academics. In total, I spent over 23 months in China collecting data for this D.Phil thesis.

3.3.2. Participant Observation

Long-term, Immersive Fieldwork

Participant observation – the primary data collection tool of ethnographers – has been used to gain a detailed understanding of 'life from the perspective of the participants'.[391] The aim of participant observation is to provide a detailed, in-depth description and interpretation of everyday life and culture, something which is often referred to as 'thick

[391] Burnham, P. *et al*. (2008) *Research Methods in Politics, 2nd Edition*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan) p.90

description.' [392] Participant observation usually involves long-term immersion in a community for an extended period of time, as well as taking part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events in the local community.[393] It also involves using everyday conversations in the local language as an interview technique and involves recording conversations, emotions, body language, and other relevant contextual information in a field journal so as to record both the explicit and tacit aspects of people's lives.[394]

There are many benefits of long-term fieldwork. First, this method enables one to build trust with local people, which, in turn, facilitates more frank and open discussions with them about their lives and experiences. Living at each fieldsite for a number of months allowed me to build trust with local officials, OPA members, and villagers in their environment and allowed me to verify interview data through observation. In Fujian and Yunnan, I lived with members of older people's associations in their homes and shadowed their activities. By building up close relationships of trust with these individuals, I was able to observe OPA meetings, interactions with officials and villagers, as well as OPA engagement in dispute mediation.

In addition, long-term fieldwork allows one to observe events and relationships over time. This both reduces the likelihood that people will behave differently or stage their behaviour for the researcher, as they might in a one-off visit. It also means that a researcher can observe a phenomenon as it unfolds thereby revealing its various

[392] This term is usually attributed to anthropologist Clifford Geertz. He defined 'thick description' as not only composed of facts but also of commentary and interpretation. The aim is to extract the 'meaning structures' behind culture and actions. Geertz, C. (1973) 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. (New York: Basic Books), pp.3-30

[393] DeWalt, K. DeWalt, B. Wayland, C. (2002) *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield).

[394] *Ibid.*

dimensions rather than a static view of the issue. In Fujian, in particular, by living in villages for many months I was able to see how village conflicts unfolded and I was able to observe the OPA's role negotiating them. This then enabled me to verify whether my observation of current dispute mediation matched up with accounts of past dispute mediation that was recounted to me in interviews. Indeed, using long-term fieldwork for this research is particularly important because much of the literature on mediation in China has used archival material and official state records. More recently, however, scholars, like Neil Diamant[395] and Ben Read and Ethan Michelson,[396] have cautioned against this approach because of problems of state bias in official sources. Instead they recommend 'assessing the actual behaviour [of those actors involved] through direct observation of disputes [as they unfold].'[397] Long-term fieldwork is therefore the only way to achieve this effectively.

Given time constraints, I was not able to practice this method at every fieldsite. I used participant observation in Wuwei and Foshan in Fujian where I spent the most time and was able to watch disputes as they unfolded. In Yunnan, this method was used to a lesser degree because my time was divided over a number of visits rather than one prolonged period. As such, I was not able to see disputes unfold and instead relied on accounts of past disputes from local interviewees. However, I had already built up a high degree of trust with some key gatekeepers, including some OPA members and local officials, having visited the area repeatedly in 2006, 2008, 2009, 2012 and 2014. Revising the fieldsite in 2014 also appeared to cement my commitment to the area in people minds and they were more open and willing to go into depth than in interviews in 2012. As such, I

[395] Diamant, N. (2000) 'Conflict and conflict resolution'.
[396] Read, B. Michelson, E. (2008) 'Mediating the Mediation Debate'.
[397] *Ibid.*

think the trust element of participant observation was achieved despite not being able to conduct a prolonged stay in this location. In Shaanxi, I was not able to use participant observation because of the limited two-day visit to each fieldsite. As previously noted, the data I generated in this region was not as rich as in the Fujian and Yunnan. The data collected here served to confirm information I had gathered elsewhere, but would have been insufficient on its own and or without my prior understanding of OPAs from Fujian and Yunnan. The difference in material generated further confirmed to me the efficacy of long-term participant observation for gaining insights into local knowledge and practices.

Building Trust and Community Integration

My research strategies varied because my method of introduction differed in each location. In Wuwei in Fujian, where I had been introduced via the vice-mayor, local officials were particularly concerned about my safety and insisted that I stay in a government dormitory and eat in the government canteen.[398] Although I believed this arrangement to be an obstacle at first, eating in the canteen provided me with opportunities to build rapport with town and village officials.[399] Within a short space of time, I had made connections with a number of village officials who were willing to introduce me to OPAs in their villages. Had I been placed in a village directly, I would not have met so many officials so quickly. I chose four villages to focus on and rotated between them. After a few weeks of rotating, I successfully persuaded a charismatic couple in their 50s – Aunty Xu and Uncle Li[400] – to let me stay with them. As well as being active in their own village, Aunty Xu had friends at the OPA in one neighbouring

[398] It is likely that they both wanted to keep an eye on me and ensure no problems occurred that might reflect badly on them to their superior, the vice-mayor.
[399] The village officials from the nearby villages also often ate lunch in the township government canteen.
[400] All names in this thesis are pseudonyms.

village, and had attended dance classes in another, thus enabling her to provide introductions across three of the four villages I was looking at. Building relations with charismatic local 'gatekeepers' was an effective strategy that I employed throughout my research. After I moved into the village, I maintained my dormitory in the town government staying there at least once a week to appease the town leaders[401] and because it provided me with easy access to officials in the canteen who I accosted intermittently when I needed to plug gaps in my knowledge.

My entry into villages in Zhuanping in Yunnan and Foshan in Fujian were via informal connections with whom I had already established a great deal of trust. This in many ways made my initial integration much easier. In Fujian, in the village I stayed in the longest, I was introduced via a friend and academic to a couple in their late 60s who I refer to as Aunty Ye and Uncle Bo in this thesis. Although I initially thought this couple would just provide a home and introductions in the village, by fortuitous coincidence Uncle Bo turned out to be the head of the village OPA and highly respected locally. He spent a great deal of time at the beginning of my stay showing me around the village, introducing me to locals, and explaining village history, which made my integration process quicker and easier. In the opposite approach to the one described above, I spent the first few weeks getting to know this one village and then, with help from Uncle Bo, began visiting the three surrounding villages. Although I rotated around these villages and collected interesting data at each, I undoubtedly got to know the village I was living in much better and formed much closer relationships with people in that village.

[401] By this point, the town leaders appeared relaxed by my presence and did not seem to mind that I was not living in the town dormitories.

Positionality and Reflexivity

Researchers particularly in the field of anthropology have documented how gender, age, occupation, and cultural background can impact upon the negotiation of fieldwork relations, facilitating research or establishing boundaries depending on the situational context.[402] A main obstacle to my research was linked to my identity as a foreign researcher. Since I was the first foreign researcher to have spent time at my fieldsites, some of my host families were nervous about what to expect from me. One family believed, as a European, I would expect high standards, modern living facilities and fine dining. I invested much energy in trying to dispel this view in order to ensure my host families and other locals felt relaxed in my presence. I did this by dressing modestly, eating whatever I was offered, and helping locals with daily chores such as preparing food and picking vegetables.[403] In particular, my willingness to eat rice porridge (*zhou* 粥) at mealtimes turned out to be a particularly good way of establishing myself as a 'modest and plain living' (*hen pusu* 很朴素) person. Behaving in this way was vital for demystifying my presence and establishing relationships of trust and support in the village. In addition, in order to try to establish stronger bonds with local people I tried to make myself useful by helping local children with their English studies. Helping productively in the communities I was living in enabled me to establish a positive local reputation and build trust with residents which made them more willing to help me with

[402] Galam, R. (2015) 'Gender, Reflexivity, and Positionality in Male Research in One's Own Community with Filipino Seafarers' Wives', *Qualitative Social Research,* Vol. 16, No. 3. [Accessed online on 28/04/16 at: http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/viewFile/2330/3848]; Bourke, B. (2014) 'Positionality: Reflecting on the Research Process', *The Qualitative Report,* Volume 19, pp.1-9. [Accessed online on 28/04/16 at: http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR19/bourke18.pdf]

[403] Prior to starting fieldwork, I read the research method chapters of number of PhD dissertations on rural China to understand the best way to integrate quickly. The strategies I used were recommended in those dissertations. Anna Lora Wainwright's D.Phil thesis was particularly helpful in this respect. Lora-Wainwright, A. (2006) 'Perceptions of Health, Illness, and Healing in a Sichuan Village, China', University of Oxford, Unpublished D.Phil Dissertation. The amended published version of this thesis is: Lora-Wainwright, A. (2013) *Fighting for Breath.*

my research in return. Throughout my fieldwork I embraced invitations to dinners, birthdays, and family celebrations as opportunities for research, to build trust, and expand my network.[404]

There were times, however, when my identity as a foreigner was useful for my research. In particular, my identity as a foreigner seemed to override my identity as a female. This was useful in Fujianese villages, where, because locals tended to be more conservative and women did the bulk of agricultural work, older men tended to keep the company of other older men. As such, in shadowing OPA committees (which were almost exclusively old and male) there were many situations in which I was the only young person and the only female person. As a foreigner, I did not fit strictly into these socio-cultural hierarchies which likely made locals more accepting of my presence in these situations.

As an academic researcher, it is possible that I could have been viewed as representing an elite social institution bringing issues of power and social hierarchy into the research setting. However, as a short-statured, female, student, in her 20s, locals did not appear to find my identity or appearance particularly intimidating. On the contrary, most people felt *they* were helping *me* with my studies and wanted to make sure I was well looked after far from home. Furthermore, because many of my informants were so much older than me (at least the age of my parents or grandparents) they often related to me as their junior, telling me about, and likening me to, their own grandchildren and providing me with plentiful life advice. I sometimes worried that, in the context of rural China which is ostensibly male, patriarchal, and hierarchical, my young, female identity would be taken

[404] Lora-Wainwright, A. (2006) 'Perceptions of Health'.

less seriously. However, on the whole[405] I think it was a useful identity to have for conducting this research. Indeed, on more than one occasion in Fujian, locals commented that had I been a tall, foreign male they might have been more nervous about inviting me into their homes for tea. In addition, I think it was a useful identity for gathering sensitive information because people did not view me as a threat, did not question my research intentions, and appeared to quickly become comfortable in my presence.

Finally, I sought to remain objective throughout my fieldwork and to verify and check what I had been told through methodological triangulation. However, this research recognizes that no researcher can be entirely objective and one's experiences will always influence the way one views and approaches a research topic. In particular, a lot of people showed me great kindness and generosity over the course of my fieldwork, and this will undoubtedly have had an effect on how I viewed those people. The process of building relationships of trust in the field is also necessarily a process of friendship-making which comes with (potentially negative, in the positivist sense) implications for researcher detachment and bias. Nevertheless, as many ethnographers have documented,[406] there are enormous benefits of building up close relationships at one's fieldsites particularly for generating rich data and for generating data on sensitive subjects such as this.

[405] There were obviously also some downsides to my young, female identity. In Fujian, which seemed to be particularly conservative, I was expected to take the advice of my male hosts and to ask their permission to do things (i.e. go to the nearby town or visit the local school), which grated after a while. I sometimes accidently offended an OPA committee member by not being overtly deferential enough or making cultural *faux pas* (such as not holding my tea cup in the most deferential way or not sitting in the most deferential position). Luckily, they did not hesitate to tell me when I was doing something wrong. In addition, in all locations, I put up with incessant comments about when I would get married or have children, and with villagers and officials trying to set me up on blind dates with their relatives. In addition, after one villager – an alcoholic with social problems – tried to pull me into his home, I felt nervous about visiting that part of the village and about walking between houses after dark. These things might have been less of a problem for an older or male academic.

[406] Owton, H. Allen-Collinson, J. (2014) 'Close but not too close: friendship as method(ology) in ethnographic research encounters', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography,* Vol. 43, No. 3, pp.283-305

Data documentation strategies

During *informal* conversations with residents I rarely took notes in their presence because this seemed to stilt the flow of conversation. Indeed, many researchers have argued against producing pen and notebook because it impedes communication.[407] Instead, I would jot down key points at the first available opportunity and take fuller notes on my findings after lunch (when everyone was napping) or in the evening. One problem with this approach is that not everything will be remembered when writing up a conversation after the fact. Nevertheless, I believed this to be preferable to being met with stilted conversation or embarrassed silences. The only exception to this was when I did not understand what was being said. On those occasions, I would ask the person I was talking with to help me write it down. Finally, in order to try to make these notes more systematic and to make the data analysis process easier, I clustered my field notes according to research themes and I also sought to verify my observations or informal conversations in subsequent semi-structured interviews.

3.3.3 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews serve as a main data source for this dissertation. Interviews can be divided into two categories 'field interviews' and 'elite interviews'. These are discussed in turn.

Field interviews

In addition to informal conversations with villagers, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with officials at the village, township, and (where possible) county levels, with

[407] Lora-Wainwright, A. (2006) 'Perceptions of Health', p.xviii

OPA participants, OPA committee members and villagers. Using 'gatekeepers' as a start point, the 'snowballing' method was used to source relevant people for interview. Although generating a sample of informants from one network may be viewed as unrepresentative,[408] this method is commonly used by China scholars of all levels of experience due to the restrictive nature of the political system.[409] It is also one of the best ways of establishing a network of trust quickly. In addition, in order to ensure that my interviewees went beyond those suggested to me by my gatekeepers, I expanded my network through attendance at village-wide social gatherings (i.e. weddings and festivals), participation in village drum and dance teams (*yaogu dui* 腰鼓队 / *guangchangwu* 广场舞*)*, as well as 'hanging out' in the village social spaces (tea shops; fix-it shop; village park). These activities enabled me to grow my own network of informants. One limitation of this research, however, is its sampling bias and this is evident in my own research because I did not always have access to exactly the same types of interviewees at every fieldsite. In Wuwei where I initially stayed in the government dormitories, I had much better access to county and township government officials than I did in other locations. I also had access to provincial officials in Shaanxi provincial government but not in Yunnan or Fujian. Nevertheless, at the village level I did try to interview the same types of people at each fieldsite.

[408] King, G. Keohane, R. Verba, S. (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

[409] Thøgersen, S. (2006) 'Approaching the Field through Written Sources', in, *Doing Fieldwork in China*, eds, Heimer, M. Thøgersen, S. (Copenhagen: NIAS) p.195

Figure 3.1. Village *Yaogu* Drum Team

Village 'yaogu' drum team in Fujian in May 2015.

Source: Author's own photographs

To provide structure and consistency to my fieldsite research, I used a 'topic guide'[410] (which included both themes and specific questions) which I applied to all the interviews. Yet, naturally during the course of these conversations new themes arose that required

[410] Arthur, S, Nazroo, S. (2003) 'Designing Fieldwork Strategies and Materials', in, *Qualitative Research Practice*, eds, Ritchie J. Lewis, J. (London: Sage) p.110

diverting from the original topic guide for follow up. Open-ended questioning was used and interviewees were encouraged to describe their experiences in full. Although data from open-ended questioning is more difficult to analyse than closed questioning, the wide distribution of responses generated has provided a deeper account of the issues examined than survey data would have done.[411] Living in villages for several months or returning to fieldsites several times meant I was able to conduct follow up interviews or informal conversations to fill any gaps missed in initial interview. Political biases were noted when interviewing officials and care was taken to separate rhetoric from reality.

Prior to fieldwork, I had planned to conduct interviews on a one-to-one basis, but in practice this was not always possible. On some occasions, several people would turn up to be interviewed at once; on others, the interview would start as a one-to-one but would inevitably expand as friends and neighbours dropped by. Interviewing in groups allowed me to hear multiple perspectives at one time and created the feel of a more typical social situation.[412] There were some drawbacks, however. A main concern was that certain individuals would be more outspoken and appear to represent the opinions of the whole group when they did not. This seemed to be more of a problem in interviews (or focus groups) of four people or more, of which I conducted only a few. In these limited cases, I actively encouraged all those present to speak; yet, as in any social situation, there were some individuals who were quieter than others. In situations where neighbours had dropped in on an interview, I had to take my cues from the interviewee and the person who had dropped by (i.e. are they a relative or the village party secretary) as to whether to continue or whether to exclude some more sensitive questions.

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[411] Burnham, P. *et al.* (2008) *Research Methods in Politics,* (Basingstoke: Macmillan) p.125

[412] Bedford, T. Burgess, J. (2001) 'The Focus Group Experience', in, *Qualitative Methodologies for Geographers: Issues and Debates,* eds, Limb, M. Dwyer, C. (London: Arnold), pp.121-134.

Most people in the villages I stayed in spoke Mandarin (or at least an intelligible form of Mandarin) in addition to their native dialect, and so Mandarin was used to conduct the majority of interviews. In a limited number of cases in Fujian where the interviewee was not fluent in Mandarin or had a particularly strong accent that I could not decipher, I asked friends in the city or local high school students (who I hoped would be less susceptible to bias than adults) for help with interpreting. I did not ask to record interviews with every interviewee, but I did successfully receive permission to record interviews with a minority of people that I knew particularly well. Where interviews were recorded, I transcribed the interviews and translated them as soon as possible after the interview. I took extensive handwritten notes regardless of whether I was recording the interview or not. Interview notes were then clustered according to research themes to aid data analysis.[413]

When writing up, my informants' identities have been protected through the omission of identifying information or the use of pseudonyms. Informants were notified of these measures when obtaining interview consent.

Elite Interviews

Aside from field interviews, I also conducted elite interviews to gain a broad understanding of OPAs across China. These were carried out with academics, relevant NGO workers, provincial-level officials and policy makers from China's National Committee on Ageing. Contacts for such interviews were secured in two ways, by self-introduction through email, or by referral through an established contact. Working with Help Age International opened doors to policy makers that I would not otherwise have

[413] Bryman, A. Burgess, B. (1994) *Analyzing Qualitative Data,* (London: Routledge).

had access to. Most interviews were conducted while I was based in Beijing in 2014 or when I was back in Beijing at intervals in 2015.

3.3.4 Policy/Documentary Analysis

Policy and documentary materials have been consulted as a data source for this thesis. These documents can be divided into three categories: 1. newspaper articles; 2. government policy papers and reports; 3. documents produced for or by OPAs.

Newspaper articles

Newspaper articles have been accessed online in English and Chinese from newspapers such as *China Daily*, *Xinhua,* etc. The national media outlets in China remain subject to state control and as such are often reflective of state agendas. This is particularly true under Xi Jinping.[414] Pro-state biases have been taken into account when reading Chinese newspaper articles.

Government Policy Papers and Reports

Government policy papers and reports have been utilized for this study as a way to understand the direction of policy towards OPAs, and as a way to understand the state's agenda behind their establishment. This study has also looked at primary texts produced by central, provincial, county, township and village governments.

Most of the national-level policy documents used in this study are those published by China's National Working Committee on Ageing (CNWCA) and its office (OCNWCA),

[414] Phillips, T. (2016) 'Love the party, protect the party': How Xi Jinping is brining China's media to heel' *The Guardian.* [Accessed online on 13/03/2016 at: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/28/absolute-loyalty-how-xi-jinping-is-bringing-chinas-media-to-heel]

the government body charged with designing and implementing ageing policy. CNWCA and ONWCA are jointly referred to as 'CNCA' throughout this thesis.[415] Joint policy papers between CNCA and the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) have also been used, including their 2012 and 2015 policy papers on *Strengthening the Construction of Grassroots OPAs* which set the agenda for OPA policy in the 12th five-year plan period. These national level policy documents are open access and available on CNCA or MCA websites.

Branches of CNCA and MCA at the provincial, county, and town levels of administration also produce policy papers. These regional and local level documents are usually focused on the interpretation of national policy on OPAs or how national level policy on OPAs is being implemented locally. Some of these reports were accessible online on local government websites, others were collected from local governments while in the field. For example, in Fujian, one township government provided me with access to research papers on the future direction of OPA policy locally. At village level, I accessed village committee transcripts related to OPAs such as funding applications to build an OPA centre or implement a 'happiness yard' (*xingfu yuanzi* 幸福院子) at the OPA. Stig Thøgersen[416] suggests that officials are flexible with internal documents of the lowest classification. I found this to be the case at my fieldsites. Party-state biases have been taken into account when looking at all sources and care has been taken to distinguish between policy and practice.

415 I have used this abbreviation because the English acronym used for CNWCA and ONWCA on their websites and documents is CNCA.

416 Thøgersen, S. (2006) 'Approaching the Field', p.189

OPA Documents

Finally, I sought to gain access to documents produced both for OPAs (usually by town-level officials) and by OPAs at each fieldsite. At most locations OPAs had been provided with 'working principles', 'duties', 'tasks' and an 'OPA constitution'. Although OPA-guidelines differed to some extent across OPAs, the central tenets were remarkably similar. Given that my fieldsites span provincial boundaries, this similarity suggests that these directives had come down or been modelled on those from the central state. Indeed, more recently CNCA has made available a template for the OPA constitution which, in terms of content, matches closely with those found at the grassroots.

Documents written by OPAs themselves were indicative of the types of activities an OPA was engaging in. These documents ranged considerably in scope from those focused on social aspects of the OPA like activity reports and registers of attendance, to those focused on financial aspects like accounting records and funding applications, as well as health and educational information like flyers advertising free health checks and educational speeches. A considerable number of documents written by OPAs were more politicised in nature related to propaganda work of the OPA. For example, I collected flyers and posters written by OPAs aimed at 'changing prevailing habits and customs' (*yifeng yisu* 移风易俗) such as advocating cremation over burials for funerals, advocating a reduction in funeral food consumption and costs, as well as publicizing rules governing official conduct like the 'Eight Rules' (*baxiang guiding* 八项规定). The latter two are reflective of current CCP campaigns.[417] In addition, most OPAs (and all those I visited in Shaanxi)

[417] This is reflective of Xi Jinping's campaign against food waste and extravagance, targeted particularly at private banquets held at weddings, funerals, birthdays and other occasions where it is custom to provide an abundance of food to show hospitality to one's guests. Zhou, Z. (2015) 'Reducing Food Waste

kept records on disputes that the OPA committee had helped to mediate. In some cases, I was permitted to photograph these records for later use. Finally, a minority of OPAs held training to improve the 'quality' (*suzhi* 素质) of the OPA committee and I was able to collect documents pertaining to this training.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the research design and data collection methods used in this thesis. It has put forward a qualitative approach and use of 'thick data' as the best way of addressing my research questions. It has employed a 'one-case, multi-fieldsite' approach to look at grassroots OPAs in villages across three provinces – Yunnan, Fujian and Shaanxi – and has discussed how fieldsites were selected. Yet, at the same time, it has consciously sought to put depth above breadth or representativeness in this thesis. In doing so, it has used three qualitative data collection techniques – semi-structured interviewing, participant observation, and documentary analysis – to gather evidence for this research. It has discussed the benefits and limitations of these techniques throughout.

to Boost China's Long-term Food Security', *China Policy Institute Blog.* [Accessed online on 01/03/2016 at: https://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/chinapolicyinstitute/ 2015/05/19/reducing-food-waste-to-boost-chinas-long-term-food-security]

Chapter Four: OPA Establishment, Regulation, and Structure

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will seek to define OPAs and their role in contemporary Chinese society by describing their establishment, regulation, and structure. In doing so, this will be the first study to situate OPAs in the context of national policy making, and the first to provide a comprehensive analysis of OPA strength and operation in contemporary rural China. Using new and original empirical data, this chapter argues that OPAs do not constitute 'civil society' in the typical sense of the term, in that they are state-established organisations that function as a unit connected to, and embedded within, state structures. Instead, it will show how a 'state-corporatist' hierarchical supervisory structure allows policy directives to permeate down from China's National Working Committee on Ageing (CNCA) in the central government, right down to OPAs at the grassroots level.

Yet, despite close formal links with the state and a structure that looks state-corporatist in nature, I will argue that, unlike international or non-state-affiliated NGOs, the government is not seeking to use regulatory and supervisory structures to constrict and

smother the establishment and function of OPAs. Rather, the state has been actively seeking to increase and strengthen OPAs across all parts of China. Although some scholars have argued that close proximity to the state increases state control and restricts the activities of social organisations, in this case, state embeddedness has meant that many of the usual regulatory hurdles have been relaxed giving OPAs more operational freedom. Thus, while the supervisory structures that surround OPAs provide a conduit for state policy and state agendas to filter down to the grassroots, other aspects of OPA development at the local level are only loosely controlled.

4.1.1 Chapter Overview

The chapter will first discuss the establishment of OPAs, looking particularly at the contours of variation in the different typologies and functions of OPAs that exist at the grassroots. The four typologies outlined are my own categorisation, and this chapter provides the first delineation of OPAs from one another according to their organisational structure and associational membership. In doing so, this chapter makes an important contribution to our understanding of how OPAs fit into Chinese political and social structures, and will assist future research by offering a framework for measuring change and growth of the OPAs over time. After outlining these typologies, this Chapter will then look at the state's motivation behind the establishment of OPAs, and then it will explore the supervisory structures surrounding OPAs and the regulatory environment in which they operate. The majority of data utilised in this chapter has been generated through original field research in Fujian, Yunnan, and Shaanxi or via documentary analysis of government policy documents and legislation (see Chapter Three, Research Methods, for more on the types of documentation used).

4.2 Establishment and Typologies

This section addresses the establishment of OPAs and the different types of OPAs at the grassroots. It begins by discussing the establishment of OPAs and their rate of development. It then puts forward four typologies of OPAs that exist in China: (1) 'committee-style OPAs' that have a committee but no functioning membership; (2) 'associational-style OPAs' that look like typical social organisations with both an organising committee and participating members; (3) 'shell OPAs' that exist in name only; and (4) 'externally-driven OPAs' which are OPAs that have received investment, direction, or support from outside actors (such as NGOs or social reformers). Finally, this section will address the composition of OPAs by looking at its organising committee.

4.2.1 OPA Establishment

The first OPAs were established in the 1980s as an official 'unit' connected to village committees.[418] They were initially established as part of efforts to build bureaucratic structures to deal with China's ageing population. China's National Working Committee on Ageing (*Quanguo laoling gongzuo weiyuanhui* 全国老龄工作委员会) and other sub-national committees on ageing were established thereafter. As these bureaucratic structures expanded and became more institutionalised, the numbers of OPAs in villages gradually increased as well. By 2010 there were 400,000 OPAs in existence at the rural

[418] Hansen, M. (2007) 'Organising the Old', p.1063; Article Six of the model OPA Constitution published by China's National Working Committee on Ageing says that OPAs 'fall under the remit of the village (or neighbourhood) committee and party branch'. CNCA (2014) 村(居)老年协会章程(示范文本) [Village (neighbourhood) OPA Constitution (template document)], 全国老龄办 [CNCA].

and urban grassroots,[419] nearly as many as all other registered NGOs combined. Since then, OPAs have received greater attention from CNCA and other government agencies and there has been a push towards increasing the numbers of villages with a functioning OPA. Specifically, the 12th Five Year Plan (2012-17) highlighted ageing as a key policy priority and outlined grassroots OPAs as one method of dealing with problems associated with it.[420] As a consequence, in 2012 the government made 90% OPA coverage in urban areas and 85% OPA coverage in rural villages their official target.[421] In the intervening years, in order to facilitate a more rapid establishment rate, the government has provided subsidies, support, and even state-owned communal land to OPAs in villages to help them build OPA centres and run activities and services.[422] In May 2015, a Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA)-CNCA joint policy paper advised that the MCA fund for starting up (*fuhua* 孵化) social organisations should be 'mainly targeted at establishing and strengthening OPAs'.[423] As a result of this increased focus on OPA development, the number of OPAs in rural and urban areas has now reached over 492,000,[424] a national coverage rate of 74% .

[419] Int. with Former Asia Program Director, Help Age International (2011)

[420] Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, (2011) *China's 12th Five Year Plan (2011-2015), (english translation by British Chamber of Commerce).* [Accessed online 07/12/15 at: http://www.britishchamber .cn/content/chinas-twelfth-five-year-plan-2011-2015-full-english-version]

[421] CNCA, (2012) 关于加强基层老年协会建设的意见 [*China's National Committee on Ageing Opinion on Strengthening Grassroots OPAs*], (Beijing: CNCA Publicity Department). [Accessed online on 05/11/15 at: http://www.hzsllw.com/Zcfg/ Detail/682.html]

[422] Int. with OPA Head, TP Village, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2012); CNCA, (2012); CNCA, (2015) 全国老龄办、民政部关于进一步加强城乡社区老年协会建设的通知 [*China's National Committee on Ageing and Ministry of Civil Affairs Notice on Strengthening the Construction of Grassroots OPAs*], (Beijing: CNCA Publicity Department). [Accessed online 03/06/2015 at: http://www.cncaprc.gov.cn/contents/3/77782.html];

[423] CNCA (2015) 'CNCA and MCA Notice'; CNCA, (2015b) 全国基层老年协会建设推进会在遵义召开 [*Nation to Promote Construction of Grassroots OPAs*], (Beijing: CNCA Publicity Department). [Accessed online 10/07/15 at: http://www.cncaprc.gov.cn/contents/2/78500.html]

[424] CNCA (2015) 'CNCA and MCA Notice'.

4.3.1 OPA Typologies

With an uneven establishment process over a period of 35 years, it is not surprising that OPAs have not followed a rigid pattern of formation at the grassroots. Rather, they have taken different shapes and evolved in different ways in different places. When looking at rural OPAs in villages, we can broadly delineate four main typologies of OPAs in operation today: committee-style OPAs; associational-style OPAs; shell OPAs; and externally driven OPAs.

Committee-style OPA

The most common type of OPA in rural China is what I call a 'committee-style' OPA. This type of OPA is comprised of a small committee of between five to fifteen people who are responsible for running the OPA.[425] These committee members tend to be men, over the age of fifty-five who are relatively well educated, well trusted, and held in high esteem locally, such as retired teachers (for more on this, see Chapter Five). Apart from one annual gathering at *Chongyang* Festival for the elderly,[426] the 'membership'[427] are largely inactive, making the committee the *de facto* OPA. Without a membership to hold activities for, most of the OPA's time is spent helping village and township officials with governance, conflict mediation, and other tasks related to village public affairs. For this type of OPA, the term 'older people's association' feels like a misnomer, with their role and function more akin to an advisory committee than an association of members. The

[425] For more on the characteristics of people chosen to sit on OPA committee, see chapter five.

[426] The one annual event organised by the committee is the celebration for Old People's Festival (also known as Double Ninth Festival or *Chongyang Jie* 重阳节).

[427] The eligible membership of older people's associations are women over the age of 55 and men over the age of 60. According to state policy, membership is automatic upon turning 55 or 60. However, in many villages where only the committee is active, many people will not be aware that they have become members of the OPA.

function and composition of the OPA committee is largely the same across all of the different types of OPA (with the exception of shell OPAs) and, as such, the OPA committees' role (as opposed to the membership) is the primarily focus of this thesis.

At some of my fieldsites, the OPA committee had been provided with an office or activity centre within which they could hold meetings, organise activities, and store documents or other equipment. These offices tend to be in, or nearby, the village committee offices. However, often these locations are multifunctional spaces used for other village social activities and organisations like a 'village hall'.[428] Those OPAs without an office or an activity centre, instead hold informal and impromptu gatherings at the village committee, in each other's homes, or in village social spaces (e.g. village tea shop or public square). Because this type of OPA lacks a participating membership and because their offices tend to be located in multifunctional spaces, their presence is not always immediately obvious to outsiders who, without prior knowledge of the OPA and/or without living in the village long-term, would not necessarily see the significance (or repetition) of clustered conversations between older people. Likewise, because of the lack of membership, surveys on 'social organisations' may not pick up the presence of this committee-style social group. The difficulty of immediately observing an OPA's presence within a village is likely to be a key reason why OPAs have been neglected by scholars studying grassroots governance and society. Given the lack of survey data on OPAs, it is not possible to make claims about the number or proportion of committee-style OPAs across

[428] Many of these spaces are referred to generally as *huodong zhongxin* (活动中心) or *huodong changsuo* (活动场所).

China. However, based on the OPAs I visited, it is my sense that this is the most common type of OPA.[429]

Associational-Style OPA

The second type of OPA that I observed, and what I call an 'associational-style OPA', comprises both an organising committee and a participating membership and, as such, is active more broadly in the village than the 'committee-style OPA'. The committee of this type of OPA functions in largely the same way as the 'committee-style OPA', acting as the organisation's focal point and carrying out tasks – including conflict mediation – for the village committee. The main difference between this type of OPA and the committee-style type is that this also acts as a social and cultural hub for older people in villages and often has an OPA centre with mahjong rooms, a library, and other facilities.[430] In addition to their role in governance and mediation, the committee members are also responsible for organising social and cultural events for OPA members and other villagers.

In locations with a functioning 'associational-style OPA', it is common for the local government to use the OPA as a vehicle for implementing other ageing related policies. For example, OPA centres often contain some basic social care facilities – such as rest beds –as part of the 'happiness yard' policy (x*ingfu yuanzi* 幸福院子) that aims to bring old-age support to rural communities. More occasionally, the government will run subsidised communal dining for older villages at OPA centres as part of efforts to ensure the elderly are cared for in their home communities rather than having to move into care

[429] Having said that, the number of associational-style OPAs appears to be growing with additional funding and emphasis from the state.

[430] These OPA centres are usually paid for by either a mix of local, central or provincial government funding, overseas Chinese and/or local donations.

homes outside their village (these centres are therefore sometimes referred to as 'homecare service stations' *jujia yanglao fuwu zhan* 居家养老服务站). Although these are separate state policies, OPAs have been a useful organisational structure and resource through which the state has sought to implement these other aims. In addition, given that these policies are organised and run by the OPA committee[431] and given that they are usually funded by a mix of local government funding and local donations,[432] OPAs provide an inexpensive way of addressing the needs of an ageing population. Indeed, this kind of overlap is being actively encouraged by the state with CNCA and MCA recently announcing that OPAs should 'be involved in the management of ageing related services and facilities' [433] in their communities. Although the organising committee of an 'associational style-OPA' functions in a similar way as a 'committee-style OPA', because this type of OPA has a membership and additional role as a social hub, they are often a more observable presence in villages than committee-style OPAs.

Shell OPAs

Since the government set the target of achieving one OPA in every village or neighbourhood across 85-90% of the country, local officials have had to report the numbers of OPAs in their localities. In order to meet this target quickly, some village officials have recorded the presence of an OPA with the local government, provided committee titles to local individuals, and put up signs to suggest the presence of an OPA, without a functional OPA actually being in existence. In some villages I visited, village

[431] For example, in one village with communal dining facilities that I visited, the OPA organised a rota of volunteers to man the kitchen, took charge of buying all the produce and cooking utensils, and organised helpers to get the 'oldest old' from their homes to the dining hall on time.

[432] In Fujian, and in some wealthier villages in Shaanxi, in particular, the OPA committee had been very successful at raising donations for the subsidised dining hall from overseas Chinese (*huaqiao* 华侨) or successful migrants who consider the village to be their place of origin (*laojia* 老家).

[433] CNCA (2015) 'CNCA and MCA Notice'.

officials had even gone to the lengths of decorating a room with information about an OPA (e.g. an OPA constitution and a list of OPA duties) to show to officials at higher levels of government. However, in reality, in these cases, the OPA does not function and is best described as a 'shell OPA'. It has been possible for officials to arrange this semblance of implementation because, until recently, OPAs were not included in the cadre evaluation system, and did not carry the possibility of a performance reward (*jiangli* 奖励), which meant that they were not routinely checked in detail by township officials. Although no changes have been made to the performance reward system, in May 2015 a new MCA and CNCA policy required the inclusion of OPAs on the cadre performance criteria (as part of the cadre evaluation system) for officials within local level civil affairs bureaus and local level committees on ageing.[434] Although performance criteria will vary according to the local context, indicators that the author has seen (which are reportedly based on templates from the central level) cover a range of functions that go beyond just the establishment and recording of the OPA. As a consequence of this new policy, officials and other stakeholders who are engaged with OPAs, believe that these 'shell OPAs' will have to become more active in the next few years.[435]

Externally-driven OPAs

OPAs are one of a limited number of rural grassroots social organisations that have received widespread government support.[436] As such, they have become an uncontentious

[434] For example, county committees on ageing.

[435] Int. with Staffer, Help Age International (2015); Int. with CNCA Government Official, Oxford (2015); Int. with Provincial Committee on Ageing Official, Shaanxi (2015); Int. with Academic, Tsinghua University, Beijing (2014).

[436] Other rural grassroots 'social organisations' that have received government attention are peasant's committees and rural cooperatives. However, these organisations are focused on specific work based functions. The OPA on the other hand is a social and cultural organisation. It is therefore easier for projects to be organised within them.

route through which external actors like social activists, academics, and NGOs seek to influence or mobilize village society for social, cultural, and welfare ends. In the last ten years, OPAs have become a target for external actors seeking to enliven what they often perceive as 'left-behind' village communities. For example, Jing Jun, a sociologist and public health specialist at Tsinghua University, has piloted the use of OPAs as centres of 'mutual support' for the elderly as a means of tackling mental health issues, such as depression and social isolation.[437] Although his research is thus far limited to one county, his pilot study is being watched closely by CNCA officials as a possible way to combat a spike in elderly suicide in across the country.[438] Likewise, academic and social activist He Xuefeng has used OPAs in villages in Hubei Province to try to tackle village social issues with collective solutions.[439] In addition, international NGOs, like Help Age International, have been allowed to set up microfinance, health, and homecare initiates in villages using OPAs as a mobilizing structure. At a time when mobilizing civil society is especially controversial under Xi Jinping, setting up new social organisations or rejuvenating more overtly traditional organisations like temples and lineage associations, is arguably too contentious an approach.[440] Working through existing government-sponsored OPAs is a less controversial way of pursuing these projects. Nevertheless, these 'externally-driven OPAs' represent only a fraction of the total OPAs across China. Help Age International, for example, has worked with just 62 OPAs across three provinces, just 0.01% of the total.[441] Likewise, the aforementioned scholarly projects are

[437] China Daily, (2014) 'Suicide among China's rural elderly grows amid urbanization', *China Daily USA*, [Accessed online on 01/02/2017 at: http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/201410/02/content_18693171.htm]

[438] Int. with CNCA Government Official, Oxford (2015); Int. with Academic, Tsinghua University, Beijing (2014)

[439] He, X. (2007) 'NRR and the Chinese Path'.

[440] Int. with Staffer, Help Age International (2015).

[441] This is based on the assumption that there are estimated to be approximately 490,000 OPAs in total across China. China Daily (2012).

limited to a single county each. As such, they are not representative of most Chinese OPAs. Yet, despite their limited number, given that these 'externally-driven OPAs' tend to require support from CNCA and provincial governments, they do have disproportionate influence on the development of other OPAs because they are treated like pilot studies which can influence national-level policy. In addition, because of the government involvement in these projects, these OPAs are usually required to fulfil at least the basic elements of a 'committee-style OPA' in addition to their more specialist agendas put forward by the external actor.

Figure 4.2. OPA Committees[442]

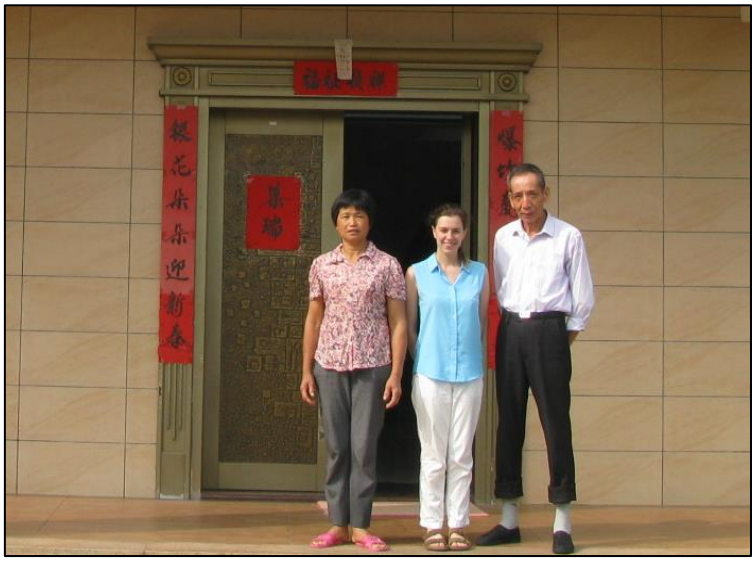
1) *OPA head (far left), and deputy-head (far right), with the author (third from the left), the village party secretary (second from the left), and local government officials outside an OPA in Shaanxi in August 2015.*

[442] The first three group photos were taken while working with the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing and Help Age International, hence the inclusion of local officials in the photos. I have included the fourth photo from a village in Fujian, because the OPA head featured in the photo has sadly passed away since I conducted my fieldwork. No other photos of people have been included to protect the identities of my interviewees.

2) *The author (centre) with the OPA head (second right), OPA deputy-head (far right), OPA committee (all others), and two local government officials (first and second from the left) in Shaanxi in August 2015.*

3) *The author (centre) with the OPA committee, some OPA members, and a township government official (second from the left) in Sichuan in March 2012.*

4) OPA head (right) and his wife (left) with the author (centre) in Fujian in June 2015.



Source: Author's own photographs

4.3.2 Committee and Decision-Making Structures

Appointment process

Despite observing these four different forms of OPA, many of their functions and, in particular, the function and composition of the committee, remains remarkably consistent across all four types. At most fieldsites, an almost exclusively male committee of five to fifteen people were responsible for the OPA and its activities. The committee usually consists of an OPA head, an OPA deputy-head, and representatives from each of the different parts of the village.[443] The desire to maintain party-state leadership is evident in the selection processes of the OPA committee. In villages where there is a 'committee-style OPA', nominations for the OPA head and OPA deputy head – the two most

[443] This can mean a representative of each village 'team or small group' (*dui* 队 or *xiaozu* 小组) or each natural village (*ziran cun* 自然村) depending on how that village is structured.

important positions – are usually made by the village officials and approved by the township government. According to government policy, the OPA head and deputy head should be reappointed every three years,[444] but, in practice, these positions are usually held for life. In villages where there is an 'associational-style OPA', the OPA head and deputy-head are elected by the membership every three years, although in many cases the same people are often continuously elected.[445] In these cases, the village committee still retains some influence by either short-listing candidates to be voted on by members or by approving the final result.[446] Only in a small number of cases, in Fujian, did I come across OPA elections that were not influenced in some way by the village committee and/or the township government. Nevertheless, even in these cases, the elections were not necessarily 'fair' since many of the elderly members were illiterate and thus had to rely on someone else to cast their ballot for them.[447] In both committee and associational style OPAs, the other committee members were usually appointed by the OPA head, OPA deputy head, and the village committee to reflect and represent the different 'small groups' in the village.[448]

Committee Links to the Local State

Although the OPA is not technically part of the village committee, it was often treated as such at my fieldsites. Interestingly, OPA committee positions largely[449] mirror the

[444] CNCA, (2014) 全国老龄办关于印发《村(居)老年协会章程(示范文本)》的通知 [CNCA issued notice: Village (neighbourhood) OPA Constitution (Model Text)], 全国老龄办 [CNCA]; CNCA, (2015)

[445] In JY village, for example, the OPA head, who was in his late 70s, had been elected to either the OPA head or the OPA deputy head position consistently for the last 20 years.

[446] Int. with Village Official Two, HF Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015); Int. with OPA Head, TP Village, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2012); Reiterated by numerous others.

[447] Old People's School Head, LS Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015).

[448] For example. no. 2 small group, OPA head, *laonian xiehui dier zuzhang* 老年协会第二组长

[449] Where they differ is in the lack of specialised roles such as the 'social affairs' position and the grassroots Women's Federation representative. In only one OPA, had an OPA women's representative been appointed.

positions within the village committee, which is comprised of a party-secretary, village head, and representatives from each of the village small groups. OPA committee members were encouraged to participate in village committee meetings and the OPA committee members were sometimes referred to as 'cadres' (*ganbu* 干部) by villagers. Likewise, in the villages I visited, the village committees had delegated some of their responsibilities to the OPA committee. These tasks ranged from mundane jobs like dropping flyers about the date of the next free health check, to more important tasks like organising and distributing monthly social security payments and agricultural subsidies.[450] In addition, in many villages in Fujian, when the village committee went on its annual excursion or to visit development projects in other villages, the OPA committee were invited to go too. Furthermore, in terms of pre-retirement positions, the OPA committee tends to be comprised of people with state-linked pre-retirement positions. Indeed, retired teachers and retired village officials – be that the former party secretary, village head, or village small-group head – were the most common pre-retirement positions for OPA committee members at my fieldsites. This finding corresponds with a study at Nankai University that found most OPA committees to comprise one or more Party-state officials and/or retired Party-state officials.[451]

Nevertheless, it should be noted that although the state is clearly involved in the committee selection process and although some committee members are retired officials, this does not *necessarily* mean that these people would not have been chosen anyway by

[450] Two villages in Shaanxi had delegated this entirely to the OPA.

[451] Huan, Q. Yuan, X. (2006) '构件和谐社会过程中的基层老年群众组织作用研究' ['Research on the role of grassroots mass organizations of senior citizens in building a harmonious society'], 人口学刊 (*Population Journal*) No. 157; Thøgersen, S. Ni, A. (2010) 'He is He and I am I: Individual and Collective among China's Elderly', in, *iChina: The rise of the individual in Modern Chinese Society*, ed, Hansen, M. (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies) p.85

their local communities. As we will discuss further in Chapter Five, those individuals who have held village cadre positions and have been successful at them tend to be well respected locally, as do individuals with high levels of education such as retired village school teachers. Furthermore, not *all* retired officials become OPA committee members with those that were not successful or not respected being excluded. For example, in one village in Fujian, the person who held the position of OPA deputy-head was regarded by villagers as having been the most successful party-secretary the village had ever had; he was a good organiser, had personal integrity, and had high prestige. Another retired party-secretary in the same village, by contrast, was described by villagers as 'ineffectual' (*meiyou nengli* 没有能力) and, given that he lacked popular respect, he was not asked to sit on the OPA's committee upon retirement. Additionally, although many of the OPAs I visited had one or two former party-state officials on their committees, the committees did usually also contain peasant farmers as well. As such, selection of some retired cadres to sit on the committee appeared to be more about their personal standing in local society, rather than about their links to the state.

4.3.3 Section Summary

To conclude, this section has addressed the establishment of OPAs and has observed and put forward a typology of four different types of OPAs that exist at the grassroots. 'Committee-style OPAs' are comprised of an organising committee which works closely with village officials on governance and dispute mediation, but has no participating membership. 'Associational-style OPAs' are social organisations with both an organising committee and participating members. As such, in addition to the committee's work on village governance, they also organise activities for their membership. In doing so, they have proved an inexpensive way of implementing other state policies related to ageing

and social care. ‘Shell OPAs’, exist in name only; and ‘externally-driven OPAs’ are OPAs that have received investment, direction, or support from outside actors. Finally, this section looked at the composition and function of OPA committees. It has shown that the local state has been closely involved in appointing OPA committee members, with retired officials and retired teachers the most common pre-retirement occupations. Finally, it has shown how the OPA committee are often treated as part of the village committee – sharing their work load and participating in meetings. Nevertheless, state involvement does not mean that such people would not have been elected anyway given their high standing in local communities.

Figure 4.3. Selection of OPA Centres

(1) *Purpose built OPA Centre (below left) in village in Fujian March 2015: equipped with Mah-jong room, library, ‘old people’s school’ lecture theatre (below right), OPA committee office, rest-bedroom, and music room.*

(2) *Former village school converted into an OPA Centre (below left) in village in Shaanxi in August 2015: equppied with games room, storage room, OPA committee meeting room (below right), library, office rooms.*

(3) *Converted village schools in two different villages in Shaanxi (left and right) in August 2016. One room of each former school provided to the OPA committee for meetings and storing equipment.*

(4) *Multifunctional OPA and village recreation centre (below left) in Yunnan in March 2012: equipped with library (below right), games room, storage room, meeting room, and basketball court.*

Source: Author's own photographs

4.4 Motivation behind OPA establishment

This section will look at the state's motivation behind the establishment of OPAs and the recent push towards increasing their coverage. It will do so by looking at government policy on OPAs, including the new performance criteria for assessing and strengthening OPAs. This section will begin by putting the establishment of OPAs into the context of a rising ageing population in China. It will then argue that three key aims underpin the state's establishment of OPAs: (1) addressing inexpensively the problems of an ageing population and rising social care needs; (2) targeting the elderly for propaganda and political education work; (3) bringing the elderly into village governance and stability maintenance efforts. These will be discussed in turn below.

4.4.1 China's Ageing Society

While three key aims emerge from the analysis of these documents, they should all be understood in the context of China's rapidly ageing population. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Chinese government put forward the 'later, longer, fewer' policy, which encouraged people to marry later, have fewer children and wait for longer gaps between each child.[452] This policy, and the one-child policy which followed, limited most[453] families to only one child, and has led to a 'boom generation' (because of longer life expectancies) being followed by a much smaller next generation. While China's elderly population[454] grew from 7.5% to 10.1% in the 50 years between 1950 and 2000, it is

[452] BBC (2012) 'Ageing China: Changes and Challenges), *BBC.* [Accessed online on 08/05/2017 at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-19630110]

[453] The Chinese government allowed rural families to have two children if their first-born was a girl in order to allow families to have more children to help in the fields and to prevent the gendercide of females. In addition, ethnic minorities in China were exempted from the policy because of their already limited populations. More recently, parents who are only children themselves have been able to have two children.

[454] By 'elderly population' I am referring to those over the age of 65.

estimated to grow to 31.1% by 2050.[455] The unprecedented rate of ageing presents a profound challenge to a Chinese state that arguably lacks the institutional and welfare capacity to deal with a highly dependent population cohort. These demographic changes have been complicated by the systematic decline of socialist welfare structures that were responsible for delivering pension and medical services to retirees. In addition, rural to urban migration and the '4:2:1' problem[456] has weakened the feasibility of China's traditional cross-generational housing model given the relocation issues involved and the number of family members in need of care.[457]

Despite the growing demand for elderly support services, China has been slow to respond to these challenges. The social care system remains underdeveloped. While in both the 12th (2012-17) and the 13th Five Year Plans (2016-20), the state has sought to open up the old-age service market and provide market-based solutions to ageing services and social care problems,[458] the challenge of dealing with the poorest elderly in rural areas remains unsolved. Indeed, in 2012, government funding only covered 1.6% of the very poorest seniors in need of care, with a further 3.4 million care home beds needed by the end of 2017.[459] Yet, old age care homes are still relatively uncommon in rural areas and the current healthcare infrastructure is unable to provide optimal care for the rural elderly.[460] Although the government is targeting this area for investment, community care and local

[455] Liu, C. (2015) 'Community Mobilization and Policy Advocacy'.
[456] Namely, there are now four grandparents and two parents for every one working Chinese.
[457] Nelson, C. (2012) 'Care in China: Challenges and Opportunities', *China Business Review.* [Accessed online on: 01/05/2017 at: https://www.chinabusinessreview.com/senior-care-in-china-challenges-and-opportunities/
[458] KPMG (2016) 'The 13th Five Year Plan – China's Transformation and Integration with the World Economy', *KPMG.* [Accessed online on 01/06/2017 at: https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/ cn/pdf/en/2016/ 10/13fyp-opportunities-analysis-for-chinese-and-foreign-businesses.pdf]
[459] Nelson, C. (2012) 'Care in China'.
[460] Kung, P. (2015) 'How can China care for its elderly', *World Economic Forum.* Accessed online on 19/08/17 at: https://www.weforum.org/ agenda/2015/09/how-can-china-care-for-its-ageing-population/]

societal mobilization has been seen as one way to deal with this challenge of providing for the poor, rural elderly.

4.4.2 Rural Community Care

With this in mind, one of the key aims of establishing Older People's Associations in rural villages has been to tackle the community social care crisis inexpensively through societal mobilization.[461] Indeed, the performance indicators, being brought in to assess the quality and strength of an OPA, for example, prescribe that OPAs should 'provide services to older people and organise older people's mutual support activities, such as, providing housekeeping, homecare,[462] nursing, advice, and counselling services.'[463] Likewise, recent government documents indicate that OPAs should be involved in running 'nursing homes, day care centres, community service centres, community facilities, older people's activity centres, and older people schools'.[464] In addition, they suggest that OPAs should 'organise the young elderly to help and assist the oldest old, those living alone, and those who are incapacitated'[465] something which was being carried out at most OPAs I visited in Shaanxi and some in Fujian. Likewise, under the

[461] In a study of Chinese state-building, Patricia Thornton argues that the state has weighed increases in its size and scope against the costs required to support those increases. The result has been a minimalist state that is reliant on the intermittent mobilization of societal forces to realize state aims. Thornton, P. (2007) *Disciplining the State.*

[462] In January 2008, the China National Committee on Ageing, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Minister of Civil Affairs (MCA), issued the policy paper - 'Views of Promoting Home Care Services' - and called for the promotion of a comprehensive home care service as a way to deal with China's ageing problems. 'Home care' was defined as the provision of 'life-care, housekeeping services, rehabilitation care, and spiritual comfort' for older people by 'government and social forces in their [home] community'. Home care services also include 'day care, dining rooms, canteens or centralized meal delivery' Tian (2010) cited in: Zhou, J. Walker, A. (2015) 'The Need for Community Care Among Older People in China', *Ageing and Society*, Vol. 36, No. 6, pp.1312-1332.

[463] SPCA (2012) 陕西省规范化基层老年协会等级评审评分参考表陕西省老龄办 [Shaanxi Provincial Committee on Ageing Standardisation of Grassroots OPA Performance Review Scoring Criteria], *Shaanxi Provincial Committee on Ageing* 陕西省老龄办, No. 47; CNCA, (2014) 'CNCA Issued Notice'.

[464] CNCA (2015b)

[465] SPCA (2012) 'OPA Performance Review Scoring Criteria'; CNCA, (2014) 'CNCA Issued Notice'.

'Scope of Business' section of the model OPA constitution issued by CNCA, OPAs are obliged to 'assist village committees with work on ageing', 'organise and provide services for the aged' through 'government procurement processes', and 'facilitate mutual support amongst the elderly'. [466] This is also evidenced by the implementation of the aforementioned 'homecare service stations' and the 'happiness yard' policy via OPAs.

At the same time, in these and other documents, OPAs are seen as a way of implementing the CCP's 'active and healthy ageing agenda' (*jiji jiankang de laoling linian* 积极健康的老龄理念) and the 'happy ageing' project which both seek to enhance the health and social life of the elderly.[467] The performance criteria, for example, suggests that OPAs should 'promote the concept of active and healthy ageing [by] organising activities for the elderly that promote a healthy mind and body, as well as organising cultural and sports activities to promote a rich, energetic, cultured lifestyle for the elderly.'[468] The model constitution similarly prescribes that OPAs should 'organise … beneficial health, cultural, and recreational activities'. These types of activities were noticeable at many of the 'associational-style OPAs' that I visited. As such, tackling problems of societal ageing is clearly one key aim of establishing and promoting OPAs across China.

[466] CNCA, (2014) 全国老龄办关于印发《村(居)老年协会章程(示范文本)》的通知 [CNCA issued notice: Village (neighbourhood) OPA Constitution (Model Text)], 全国老龄办 [CNCA];
[467]Town Committee on Ageing (2014) 积极健康的老龄理念 [Concept of Active and Healthy Ageing], *Town Committee on Ageing, Wuwei, Fujian.*
[468] SPCA (2012) 'OPA Performance Review Scoring Criteria'; CNCA, (2014) 'CNCA Issued Notice'.

4.4.3 Elderly Ideological and Propaganda Work

Linked to this, an ageing society brings an increasingly large cohort of people who are not easily managed through their school or a workplace, and with potential grievances against the state. Contentious action over pension arrears, lack of old-age support services, and other related issues have been growing in recent years with the potential to cause instability.[469] In addition to this, with lower levels of literacy, the rural elderly have always been a group that is more difficult to reach through traditional or digital propaganda channels. As such, the second key aim of the state when setting up OPAs appears to be the desire to target the elderly for propaganda and political education. The first point under 'Scope of Business' in the template constitution, for example, states that OPAs should 'conduct ideological and propaganda work' and 'educate and guide the elderly to practice socialist core values'. Likewise, performance indicators encourage OPAs to 'carry out 'political thought work' (sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo 思想政治工作) on the elderly'[470] and hold 'regular study classes for the elderly on the Party's current direction, guiding principles, policies, and national level laws and regulations.'[471]

All of the 'associational-style OPAs' I visited were practicing this to some extent, and some 'committee style OPAs' had also organised an educational element to their annual *Chongyang* Festival celebrations. Those OPAs with an OPA centre often had small libraries with books and newspaper cuttings on laws that pertain to elderly. More strikingly, many of the associational OPAs in Shaanxi and Fujian organised monthly or

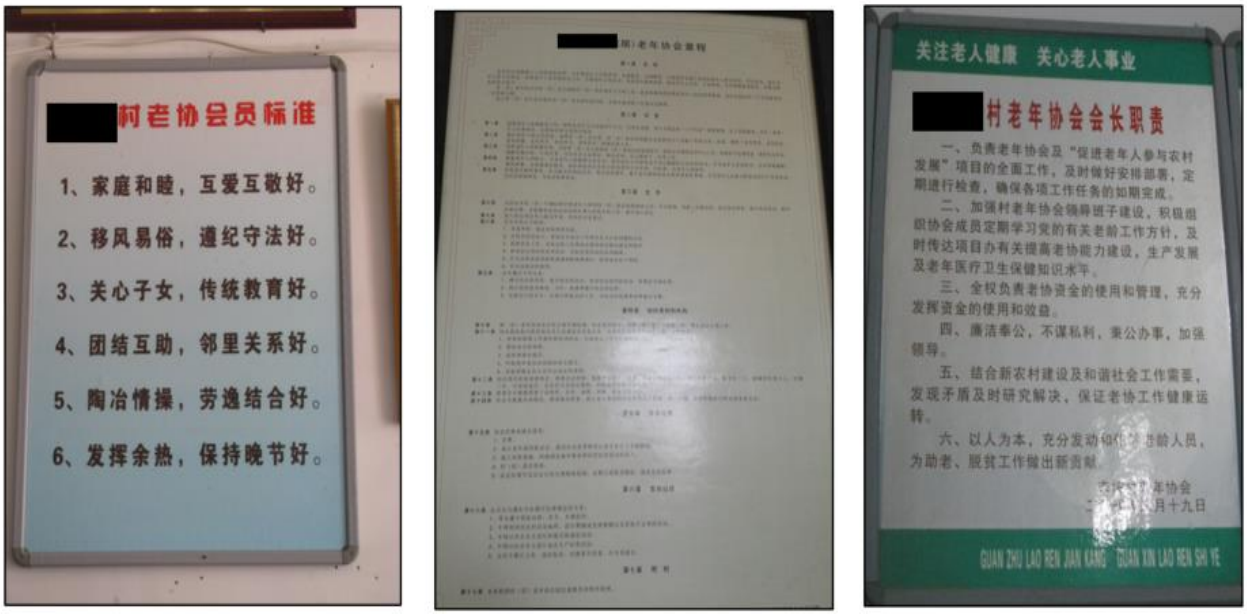
[469] Liu, C. (2015) 'Community Mobilization and Policy Advocacy'; Hurst, W. O'Brien, K. (2002) 'China's Contentious Pensioners'.
[470] SPCA (2012) 'OPA Performance Review Scoring Criteria';
[471] SPCA (2012) 'OPA Performance Review Scoring Criteria'; CNCA, (2014) 'CNCA Issued Notice'.

quarterly lectures as part of the 'old people's school' (*laonian xuexiao* 老年学校) programme run by OPAs. In Wuwei County in Fujian, for example, OPA committees attend monthly lectures by the township or county committee on ageing and are expected to deliver these lectures to the older people in their own villages. Lectures ranged in terms of their politicisation from less political classes on health, exercise, and laws that relate to the elderly, to more political lectures on China's current disputes in the South China Sea, the history of the Sino-Japanese war, and how to resist 'feudalistic superstitious beliefs' and 'change old habits and customs' (*yifeng yisu* 移风易俗) in their communities.[472] Although not all OPAs I visited had an old people's school, national level documents and interviews suggested that funding and support are increasing for these types of activities. As such, political and ideological education for the elderly also looks to be a key aim of establishing OPAs.

Figure 4.4. OPA Ideological and Propaganda Work

(1) *Most OPAs had signs on the wall of their OPA centre outlining the responsibilities and activities of the OPA committee and its members. These signs reflected the political and ideological nature of the OPAs work. The following signs include (1) OPA membership criteria (Shaanxi), (2) an OPA constitution (Fujian), and (3) the responsibilities of an OPA head (Shaanxi).*

[472] Int. with Town Committee on Ageing Official, Wuwei, Fujian (2015); Int. with Old People's School Head, LS Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015); SPCA (2012) 'OPA Performance Review Scoring Criteria'.



(2) *OPA Awards System. OPA honours list (below left) for the following awards: 'moral model'* (*daode mofang* 道德模仿)*, 'harmonious family'* (*hexie jiating* 和谐家庭)*,* 'filial son and daughter' (*xiaoxun hao ernü* 校训好儿女), and 'most entrepreneurial' (*zhifu nengshou* 致富能手). Criteria for assessing a 'good family' (middle) and 'respect the old' model family (below right).

Source: Authors photographs

4.4.4 Village Governance and Stability Maintenance

Finally, my conclusion, from both the empirical observation of OPAs in action at the grassroots twinned with my examination of policy documents, directives and political

statements from the centre downwards, is that an important state aim is actively and purposefully to bring older people into village governance and use OPAs for the maintenance of the state's stability. Performance appraisal indicators, for example, state that that OPAs should 'mobilize older people to play a positive role in community building' including helping to 'resolve neighbourhood disputes and family conflicts and safeguarding public security.'[473] Likewise, both the performance indicators and the recent CNCA and MCA notice on strengthening OPAs, explicitly state that OPAs should play a role in social governance (*shehui zhili* 社会治理) and social governance innovation (*chuangxin shehui zhili* 创新社会治理) which, as discussed in previous chapters, involves bringing non-state actors into dispute mediation and promoting a consultative approach to stability maintenance. Indeed, in a 2015 speech on OPA development by then CNCA director, Wang Jianjun, he argued that OPAs play a 'significant role in promoting social harmony'[474] and this role should be enhanced and strengthened in the coming years. Likewise, interviews with national level officials also suggested that 'resolving intractable disputes'[475] is a central part of the function that OPAs are expected to perform.[476] OPAs at all my fieldsites, irrespective of the type of OPA it was (bar shell OPAs), reported performing a dispute mediation function in their communities both for public disputes, usually over land, and private disputes within families. It is this function that is the key focus of this thesis.

[473] SPCA (2012) 'OPA Performance Review Scoring Criteria'.
[474] CNCA (2015b)
[475] Int. with CNCA Government Official, Oxford, (2015).
[476] *Ibid.*

Table 4.3. OPA Function

** Not all OPAs were undertaking these activities. However, this table gives an overview of activities that were both outlined in national level documents and being carried out at more than one OPA at my fieldsites.*

Ageing Work	Political and Ideological Work	Governance and Mediation Work
Organise 'young old' to provide support and care to the 'oldest old' and those who live alone.	Political, moral, and educational lectures delivered via the 'old people's school' programme, or at key festival events.	Mediation and resolution of public conflicts (*tiaojie jiufen* 调解纠纷). i.e. land, water, and boundary conflicts. Negotiation of compulsory purchase order compensation.
Administer and organise old age support services and other ageing policies such as 'homecare service stations', 'old-age dining halls', and the 'happiness yard' policy.	Administer the awards system for 'filial son', 'filial daughter-in-law', 'good mother-in-law', and 'most harmonious family', and family 'most respectful to the older generation' (to create harmonious community relations and enhance filial piety).	Mediation and resolution of private conflicts. i.e. relations between mother and daughter in law; divorces; domestic violence; feuds between neighbours; inheritance; and, other intra-familial matters.
Organise cultural and recreational activities for the elderly, including the annual *Chongyang* (重阳) Festival celebrations.	Pass on cultural heritage and cultural traditions to future generations.	Help the village committee carry out its work (*peihe cunweihui zuo gongzuo* 配合村委会做工作). i.e. volunteering, writing announcements, publicising government policies (*zuo xuanchuan* 做宣传), and providing informal guidance to the village committee.
Organise fundraising initiatives to provide old age services, social care, and activities for the elderly.	Provide training to OPA committee members so that they can be a 'moral model' and 'backbone' (*gugan* 骨干) of the community.	Honour individuals or groups who play their part in resolving disputes and building harmonious community relations.

Source: Author's tabular analysis

4.4.5 Section Summary

This section has outlined the argument for the state's motivation behind the establishment of OPAs. It has put their establishment into the context of a rising ageing population in China and it has argued that there are three primary aims that underpin the state's policy

of establishing and strengthening OPAs. First, OPAs are seen as a way of addressing some of the problems of an ageing population, including rising social care needs, inexpensively through societal mobilisation. Second, OPAs help the state target an ever-growing population cohort for propaganda and political education work. Finally, the establishment of OPAs also appears to be about bringing the elderly into village governance and stability maintenance efforts under the social governance initiative.

4.5 Supervisory Structures and Their Limitations

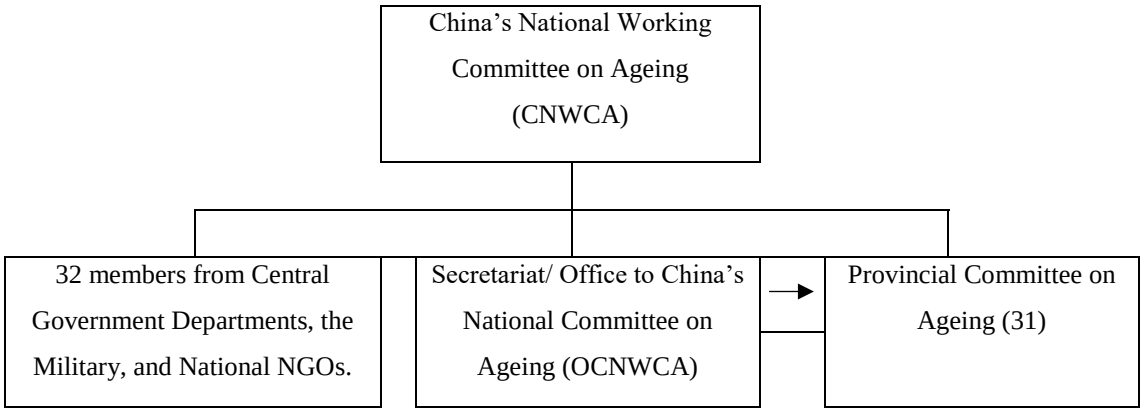
4.5.1 Supervisory Structures

Although OPAs are officially classified as 'popular organisations' (*minjian zuzhi* 民间组织) by the Chinese state, they are clearly connected to state structures through a variety of institutional mechanisms.[477] In keeping with theories of state-corporatism which describe such organisations as being 'hierarchically ordered',[478] the activities of grassroots OPAs are overseen by higher levels of government in a hierarchical supervisory structure that extends from the grassroots OPA all the way up to China's National Working Committee on Ageing (CNWCA *Quanguo laoling gongzuo weiyuanhui* 全国老龄工作委员会) an intra-governmental advisory body under the State Council responsible for coordinating ageing policy across 32 central government ministries and bureaux.[479] Reporting to CNWCA,[480] the Office of China's National

[477] The literature on Chinese state-society relations has shown many of these 'popular organisations' are closely related to, or part of, the Party-state apparatus.
[478] Schmitter, P. (1974) 'Still the Century of Corporatism?'
[479] Established in 1999, CNWCA is chaired by the Vice-Premier Liu Yandong.
[480] CNCA is also affiliated to the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA *Minzhengbu* 民政部)

Working Committee on Ageing (OCNWCA *Quanguo laoling gongzuo weiyuanhui bangongshi* 全国老龄工作委员会办公室) is the main government agency responsible for supervising the implementation of ageing policy by local governments as well as developing research and strategy on ageing. With CNWCA only meeting intermittently, it is OCNWCA that represents the highest active central agency along the supervisory structure that connect OPAs to the state and its policies.

Figure 4.5. Central Level Bureaucratic Structures on Ageing



Source: CNCA

China's National Committee on Ageing (CNCA) was established in 1982 with support from the UN.[481] It was replaced by CNWCA and OCNWCA in 1999.[482] In the intervening years since their establishment, provinces, municipalities, and counties have all been required to establish committees on ageing (variously referred to as *laoling weiyuanhui*

[481] Poston, D. Yaukey, D. (1992) *Population of Modern China* (New York: Springer Science) p.473

[482] For ease, I have continued to use CNCA throughout this thesis to refer to both the working committee (CNWCA) and its office (ONWCA). Chinese government websites also still use the CNCA acronym to refer to these more recent bodies.

老龄委 (员会) or *laoling bangongshi* 老龄办 (公室)) at every level of administration.[483] Although these committees are not technically government bureaux, they function as such with directors reporting to mayors and vice-mayors, and with responsibility for supervising the administrative level below them.[484] County Working Committees on Ageing (CWCAs) form the lowest formal level of this supervisory structure and are tasked with implementing grassroots ageing policy as well as supervising formal and informal structures for the elderly at the county level and below. In addition to supervising OPAs, they are responsible for other local old age bodies like the older people's sports association, older people's universities, and professional associations for the elderly.[485]

[483] Int. with Former Asia Program Director, Help Age International (2011); Int. with Staffer, Help Age International (2015); Int. with Academic, Huaxi Institute of Public Health, Sichuan (2012); Int. with Vice-Director, Bureaux of the Retired Cadres, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2012)

[484] Ministry of Civil Affairs directors also provide some oversight (or head-up both departments) despite technically being on the same bureaucratic level.

[485] Int. with Town Government Official Three, Wuwei, Fujian (2015); Int. with Town Committee on Ageing Official, Wuwei, Fujian (2015); Int. with Vice-Director, Bureaux of Retired Cadres, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2012); Int. with Head of the Older People's Sports Association, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2012)

Table 4.4. Chronology of Institution Establishment

Time of Establishment	Name of Body	Nature
1982-1995	CNCA (China's National Committee on Ageing)	Coordination Mechanism supervised by the Ministry of Labour and Personnel (MLP).
1995 – present	CAA (Chinese Ageing Association)	Vice-ministry-level public service unit that initially succeeded the CNCA
1999 - present	CNWCA (China's National Working Committee on Ageing)	Non-standing consulting and coordinating committee headed by a vice-premier with a vice-ministry-level office (OCNWCA) directed by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA).

Source: Liu, C.[486]

Although CWCAs are the last formal level of administration, informal structures exist below the county level. At the town or township level, committees on ageing, or town OPAs, as they are sometimes called, are quasi-governmental and are usually staffed with retired town-level government officials who take up the roles on a voluntary basis (usually for status[487] or *guanxi* purposes or the desire to maintain a public policy role post-retirement). Nevertheless, despite being seen as non-governmental, they retain close links to and supervision from the state. They often share offices or dining facilities with the town government, meet regularly with officials from the town civil affairs bureau or the social affairs office (*shehui shiwuban* 社会事务办), and hold monthly meetings with CWCAs and other relevant county-level departments. Although these positions are voluntary, in some areas, town committees on ageing receive some limited payment from the local government in the form of subsidised telephone bills, subsidised meals (in the

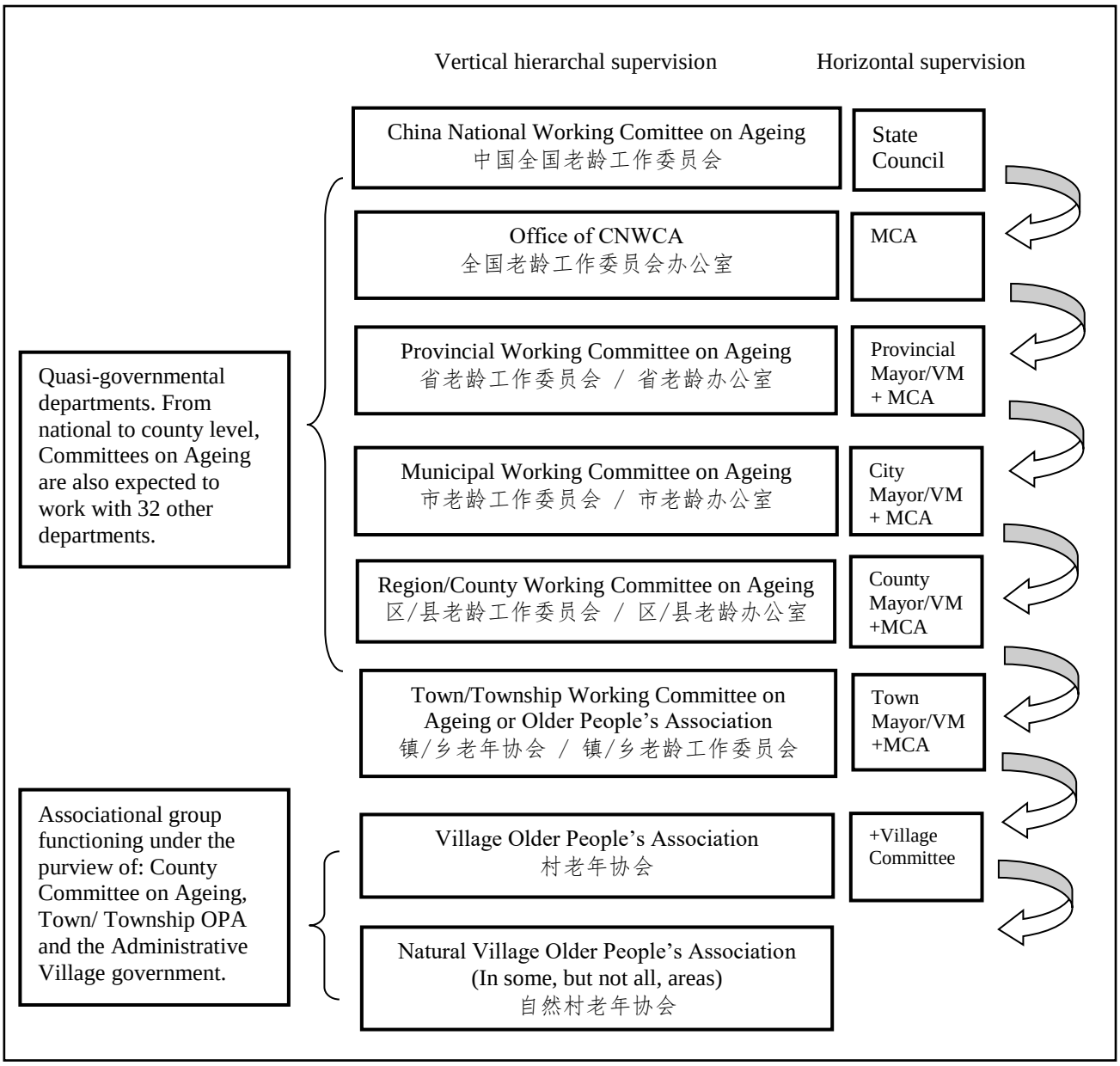
[486] Liu, C. (2015) 'Community Mobilization and Policy Advocacy'.
[487] These positions arguably provide retired officials with something to do, status, and helps manage their transition out of positions of power.

local government canteen), and an annual 'hardship fee' (*xinku fei* 辛苦费) for their efforts.[488] This again highlights how closely intertwined they are with the local state.

On the final rung of the supervisory ladder, town committees on ageing are responsible for overseeing village OPAs and directing their work (although CCAs do maintain some oversight when resources permit). Town-level supervision and management of OPAs involves the organisation of monthly meetings and lectures for village-level OPA heads on topics ranging from public policy, to history, to foreign policy as well as health awareness which the OPA heads are then expected to pass on to their communities. In areas of geographical remoteness or where resources are scare, this oversight is more *ad hoc* with town committees on ageing and officials from the social affairs office acting as an advisory committee for OPAs when problems arise.

[488] Int. with OPA Head, YS Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015); Int. with CNCA Departmental Director, Oxford (2015); Int. with County Committee on Ageing Official, Shaanxi (2015).

Figure 4.6. OPA Hierarchical Supervisory Structure



Source: Author's own tabular analysis

Theoretically, at least, the hierarchical supervisory structure described here – stretching from CNWCA and OCNWCA at the central level right down to OPAs in villages – should allow policy directives decided at the central and provincial levels to permeate right down to the grassroots. Because of this hierarchical structure, OPAs arguably become another

conduit, alongside the village committee, for the implementation of policy and dissemination of information to the grassroots. As scholars have noted in reference to other Chinese social organisations,[489] at least bureaucratically, OPAs appear to be organic parts of the governing body connected by a variety of administrative and supervisory mechanisms to the Party-state.

4.5.2 Supervisory Limitations

Having said that, a number of bureaucratic constraints impinge upon the effectiveness of this administrative structure. Because CNWCA and OCNWCA are relatively new government bodies and not officially recognised as a bureau or ministry, they have been seen, until recently, as less important, institutionally weak bodies with limited funding and capacity.[490] As the tackling of China's demographic changes and ageing population have moved higher up the priority ladder, the importance and resource capacity of these bodies has grown as well.[491] In particular they have received an increase in resources since the 12th Five Year Plan (2012-17) highlighted ageing as a key issue of national importance. Nevertheless, these changes are taking time to filter down to each level of administration which has meant patchy coverage and oversight of OPA activities in some areas.[492]

[489] Unger, J. Chan, A. eds. (2008) *Associations and the Chinese State* (London: M.E. Sharpe); Unger, J. Chan, A. (1995) 'China, Corporatism, and the East Asian Model'; Hsu, J. Y. Hasmath, R. (2013) *The Chinese Corporatist State.*

[490] Int. with Academic, Huaxi Institute of Public Health, Sichuan (2012); Liu, C. (2015) 'Community Mobilization and Policy Advocacy'.

[491] Int. with CNCA Government Official, Oxford (2015)

[492] Int. with Academic, Huaxi Institute of Public Health, Sichuan (2012)

In a study of an OPA in Zhejiang, Deng Yanghua[493] has argued that patchy hierarchical supervision leads to a situation where OPA management is left to the prerogative of village committees resulting in selective or reduced management of OPAs. She argues that, in her case in Zhejiang Province, this resulted in greater autonomy for the OPA from the state and increased diversity of their activities. While this may have been the case at Deng's[494] fieldsite, this situation does not always lead to powerful OPAs and I would argue it has equally led to weak, ineffectual OPAs as well. Although my research also found patchy management of OPAs, I did not find that this necessarily resulted in increased OPA activity. Rather, a lack of emphasis on OPAs by higher authorities and weak links to the village committee appeared on many occasions to reduce OPA access to state funding, resources, encouragement and legitimacy. Thus, as resource mobilization theory predicts,[495] weakening its organisational capacity and resulting in inactive or shell organisations. Having said that, with the management and strengthening of OPAs becoming a criterion in the cadre evaluation system earlier in 2015 their supervision and management is likely to become more comprehensive.[496]

4.6 Regulatory Environment

Although an increasingly comprehensive system of supervision surrounds ageing policy generally and OPAs in particular, this does not necessarily mean that these systems are in place to restrict OPA development and activities. While some scholars have argued

[493] Deng, Y. (2008) 'Is Grey Power Possible?'
[494] *Ibid.*
[495] McCarthy, J. Zald, M. (1977) 'Resource Mobilization and Social Movements'.
[496] CNCA (2015) 'CNCA and MCA Notice'.

that state-established NGOs like GONGOS (government-organised) and PONGOs (party-organised)[497] are highly constricted in their activities and development, this does not seem to be the case for OPAs. Advocates of a state-corporatist approach to social organisation in China have often pointed to the Party-state's development of a complex set of NGO regulations used to control and frustrate the establishment and function of NGOs at all administrative levels.[498] The registration process, in particular, has proven to be a serious bottleneck for NGO establishment, encompassing a variety of control measures that are consistent with a state-corporatist system. In being closely intertwined with bureaucratic structures and in being actively promoted by the state, however, OPAs are not subject to all the stringent regulatory constraints that more independent social organisations must endure.

Unlike most NGOs, OPAs are not required to register as a legal entity with their local MCA bureaux and 'just need to record their existence on file with town or street level authorities'.[499] Indeed, only 12% of OPAs are formally registered with the MCA nationally, with the highest rate of registration being by urban OPAs in wealthy areas.[500] None of the OPAs I visited in Yunnan Province were registered with MCA and none planned to do so. The situation was more mixed in Shaanxi, and Fujian with organisations with external funding sources (usually INGOs or wealthy overseas Chinese) having registered and those operating with less funding not needing to register formally. The vast majority of OPAs I visited fell into the latter category. Furthermore, OPAs are also not

[497] Thornton, P. (2013) 'The Advance of the Party: Transformation or Takeover of Urban Grassroots Society?', *The China Quarterly,* Vol. 213, pp.1-18.
[498] Jiang, R. Ortolano, L. (2008) 'Corporatist Control of Environmental NGOs', p. 45; Frolic, M. (1997) 'State-Led Civil Society', p.46
[499] CNCA (2015) 'CNCA and MCA Notice'; Int. with CNCA Government Official, Oxford (2015)
[500] Deng, Y. (2008) 'Is Grey Power Possible?'

required to have a minimum level of funding at registration, a measure that often frustrates the establishment of smaller NGOs. On the contrary, in a policy announcement on OPAs in May 2015, authorities were told to 'simplify [registration] procedures to [ensure] smooth registration of OPAs'.[501] Interviews with officials from CNCA confirmed that 'the government is trying to encourage the establishment of more OPAs and have made their registration [or recording] process simpler to ensure there are no barriers to establishment'.[502] This was reiterated by provincial level interviews and publications.

The lack of a formal registration process mean that the usual regulatory hurdles used to restrict NGO establishment and operation do not apply in the case of OPAs. For example, there is no required annual check on OPA activities and, as a result, no impending threat of forced organisational dissolution that most organisations face. For other social organisations, annual checks and the threat of dissolution constricts NGO activity and forces them to stay within a prescribed operational framework. Failure to comply with such measures can lead MCA to replace leaders, confiscate income and assets, collect fines and even revoke the NGO's legal status.[503] Similarly, while formal registration processes usually constrict NGOs to a limited membership, there are no membership restrictions for OPAs. Although many OPAs have inactive memberships (see OPA typologies), those OPAs that do have a functioning membership usually comprise all those over the age of 60 in the local community. Membership size therefore ranges according to the local population. At my fieldsites, membership tended to be between 150-300 members. However, in some villages with large populations and a high rate of ageing, membership went up as high as 850. This is interesting because the government

[501] CNCA (2015) 'CNCA and MCA Notice'.
[502] Int. with CNCA Government Official, Oxford (2015)
[503] Jiang, R. Ortolano, L, (2008) 'Corporatist Control of Environmental NGOs'.

tends to be nervous about mobilizations of more than 50 people,[504] and yet they have relaxed membership restrictions for OPAs. Thus, the regulatory environment seems less constricting for OPAs than many other NGOs. Indeed, relaxed registration described here has also been documented by Judith Howell who argued registration is relaxed for those groups the state wants to encourage and enforced for those it does not.[505]

One way in which OPAs do appear to be restricted is in terms of geographic scope with OPAs limited to representing one village (or natural village). In theory, a 'representational monopoly'[506] in a limited geographic area – a central tenet of state-corporatism – limits society-led older people's groups from forming of their own accord around their own interests and precludes cross-geographical cooperation. Proponents of state-corporatism have argued that constraints on geographic scope require NGOs to operate within a given boundary, limiting them to localised activities in an attempt to circumvent widespread campaigns.[507] Having said that, while cross-national OPA cooperation is unlikely to occur, in practice at the grassroots I found numerous examples of OPAs in villages next to each other cooperating to organise festivals, fundraising, and other activities. At a policy level, the desire to find inexpensive solutions to service provision problems has led CNCA and MCA to relax this restriction in some cases, encouraging OPAs within a particular region to 'collaborate with one another to provide services' to their local communities.[508]

[504] Heimer, M (nee Edin) (2003) 'State Capacity and Local Agent Control in China: CCP Management from a Township Perspective', *China Quarterly*, No. 173, pp.35-53

[505] Judith Howell observed that through incentives, such as relaxed registration, and through control mechanisms, local states are able to cultivate those NGOs it supports while restrict those it does not. Howell, J. (2015) 'Shall We Dance?'

[506] Schmitter, P. (1974) 'Still the Century of Corporatism?', pp.93-94

[507] Heimer, M (nee Edin) (2003) 'State Capacity and Local Agent Control'.

[508] CNCA (2015) 'CNCA and MCA Notice'.

4.7 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has sought to define OPAs by looking at their establishment, regulation and structure. In doing so, this chapter has shown that there are four main types of OPA in China today – committee-style OPAs, associational-style OPAs, shell OPAs, and externally-driven OPAs. Although they differ in terms of their membership and some activities, their committee's composition and function remains similar across typologies (with the exception of shell OPAs). Specifically, although OPAs do engage citizen participation and expression at the grassroots, they are in fact a group conceived of, established by, and institutionally connected to the Party-state apparatus.

Indeed, at least structurally, the supervisory mechanisms that surround OPAs appear to encompass many of the central tenets of state-corporatism. That is to say, OPAs are vertically organized in a hierarchical supervisory structure that extends to every level of administration from the village all the way up to CNCA at the central level. This structure allows policy directives to permeate down from central and provincial levels to the grassroots. For example, the new scoring criteria for OPAs manipulates the local state into putting increased emphasis on OPA supervision and direction as well as stressing particular activities such as: stability maintenance; political propaganda; and service provision for the rural elderly. Again, in keeping with ideal-type state-corporatist arrangements, the state also has a hand in leadership selection, with committee appointments usually having to receive village or township government approval before they can hold office. Given that these corporatist structures surround OPAs, it is difficult to claim that they are autonomous from the state in any meaningful sense thereby reducing the usefulness of the civil society concept in this case.

Yet, while corporatist *structures* may dominate, OPAs do not appear to be highly restricted or constrained by the state. Rather, governmental support for OPAs has led to fewer regulatory hurdles and greater operational freedom than many other social organizations face. Unlike many associational groups in China, OPAs are not required to register their activities with the local bureau of civil affairs nor do they need to find a governmental sponsor under 'dual management system'.[509] Unusually, there are no membership constraints on OPAs with OPAs in large villages comprising (at least theoretically) several hundred members. In addition, there are no minimum financial requirements for the formation of OPAs, a measure that often frustrates the establishment of small 'NGOs'. Finally, although OPAs have a representational monopoly on older people's activities in each village, they are allowed to join up with other local OPAs to provide services if they wish.

As such, it may be true that under Xi Jinping the state is seeking to smother and restrict the operations of 'civil society' organisations like international NGOs or certain domestic NGOs that operate in parallel to the state. Yet, OPAs are not self-constituted civil society organisations. Rather, the desire to penetrate society has led Chinese state-builders to develop institutional and organizational channels connected to Party-state structures, like OPAs, to incorporate particular groups, perform specific state aims, and to act as the state's 'nerve tips' in the effort to make the lives of societal actors more visible, legible, and controllable. It is *this* type of organization that is being allowed to develop, even at the same time as the space for some self-constituted 'civil society' groups is becoming increasingly constricted.

[509] Deng, Y. (2008) 'Is Grey Power Possible?'

Yet, as subsequent chapters of this thesis will demonstrate, this is not the end of the story. When the state pursues efforts to organize society in ways they believe will promote their goals, these efforts naturally involve the activities of those actors they are seeking to organize. Those societal forces then have the capacity to reinterpret and redefine such organizations locally.[510] In the case of OPAs, I would question whether the state-fostered nature of an organization really prevents those that comprise it from exercising their agency when interpreting state initiatives. Is there really no process of negotiation or ability to influence those officials who seek their support? Answering such questions – as the following chapters will do – requires moving beyond a 'top-down' analysis of structures that surround OPAs, towards micro-level analysis of their behaviour at the grassroots.

[510] Thøgersen, S. Bislev, A. (2012) 'Introduction'.

Chapter Five: OPAs and Embedding Traditional Authority in Rural China

5.1 Introduction

Now that we have explored the structures surrounding the establishment and regulation of OPAs, it is important to delve into the composition of OPA committees in greater depth. This chapter will look at what types of individuals are appointed or elected to sit on OPA committees and assess how these people can be useful allies of the state. More specifically, it will explore the common characteristics of OPA committee members found across my fieldsites – such as high educational status, kinship influence, old age, and virtuous personality types – and will demonstrate how these characteristics can generate authority and trust. As such, this chapter will argue that OPA committees are comprised of local authority figures who are perceived as having the legitimacy to regulate social relations within their local communities. In doing so, it will argue that although OPAs in their current organisational form (as discussed in Chapter Four) are new, the characteristics that the state seeks to embed within them are rooted in the much

longer historical and philosophical tradition of local authority networks that we discussed in Chapter Two.

In exploring these empirical questions, this chapter aims to make a wider point about state-making and state modernisation in China. The conventional wisdom in studies of state-making is that, as states modernise they use their power to impose a rational order on society.[511] At least in theory, the rational authority[512] of the flat 'high modern'[513] state comes to the fore, and everything that is traditional or accidental is either abandoned or rendered obsolete.[514] That is to say, bureaucratic and legal state structures should penetrate all areas of public life and supplant traditional forms of authority, obligation, and social control dominated by the family and kinship networks. In practice, modernisation processes are more complicated and nuanced than this picture suggests; tradition features in even the most 'modern' of states with entrenched legal and bureaucratic systems. Nevertheless, the conventional view is that the implantation of legal / rational structures over traditional ones is at least a key *aim* of the modern state, even if it is not always achieved in full.

Yet, this chapter will argue that despite the breath-taking depth of change to Chinese society, traditional values, authority, and social control mechanisms have not been

[511] Scott, J. (1999) *Seeing like a State*.
[512] See section on Weberian ideal-types in chapter two.
[513] High modernism refers to the shaping of state and society according to rational design. This means building a society based on 'linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and an increasing control over nature.' *Ibid.* p.89
[514] *Ibid* p.4

eradicated. Traditional Confucian norms – such as senior authority,[515] filial piety, patriarchy, high educational status, and virtuousness – continue to hold currency in the context of the rural village. Furthermore, despite the urgency of modernisation discourses that dominate academic and policy debates on 'rural problems' in China, and contrary to expectations, the state is not always seeking to quash or supplant these traditional forms of authority. Rather, in keeping with Migdal's State-*in*-Society approach, the post-Mao Party-state has actually played a key role in *mobilising* and enmeshing traditional forms of authority into organisational structures, like the OPA, in order to utilise them to aid state control. As such, by building alliances with local authority figures and embedding them into OPA committees, the state is able to institutionalise and harness the traditional authority that they possess to aid state capacity and mend gaps in the grassroots state's fragile authority. This chapter has been written using original fieldwork data generated across Shaanxi, Yunnan, and Fujian, with the key characteristics of OPA committee members highlighted in this chapter drawn from empirical observation in all three fieldsites.

5.2 Embedding Traditional Authority within OPAs

The following section describes how traditional values continue to hold currency in the context of contemporary rural China. Furthermore, it will argue that despite the modernisation discourses discussed above, the Chinese state is not seeking to eradicate

[515] Senior authority refers to both the authority of elders (akin to the concept '长老统治' *zhanglao tongzhi*) and 'relational' seniority, that is, the authority of the older over the younger within the same generation (i.e. older brother over younger brother). However, it is the former that is most relevant for this thesis.

or supplant traditional authority. Rather, they have found a way, via the OPA, to incorporate and mobilize traditional authority – like kinship, seniority, and patriarchy – to aid social control mechanisms and to enable OPAs to 'set roots in rural society' so that OPAs can become an 'engrained part' of rural life.[516] This section addresses different types of traditional authority in turn, and demonstrates how these characteristics are embedded within the OPA to be used for governance purposes. The section is split into the following parts: 'influence in the kinship network'; 'patriarchy and the seniority of elders'; 'gender'; 'education and employment status'; and 'moral character'.

5.2.1 Influence within the Kinship Network

The first aspect of traditional authority embedded within the OPA that we will look at concerns kinship relations. More specifically, it concerns the appointment of individuals who are influential within their kinship network on to OPA committees. Kinship relations have often been described as the most significant of all social relationships in Chinese society. [517] Indeed, Chinese society is sometimes described as being like concentric circles, with an individual in the centre and the rings emanating outward representing their social influence.[518] The thickest circles (or most influential relationships) near the centre are said to represent kinship relations to whom one feels strong loyalty and obligation.[519] Within the kinship network there are differentiations in the intensity of one's obligations depending on the closeness of the relationships involved.[520] Obligations

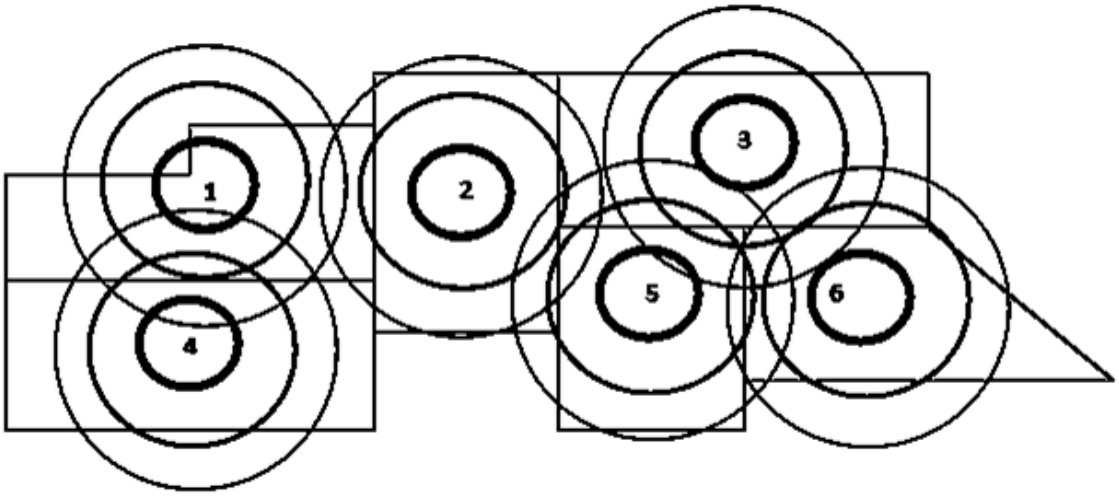
[516] Ma, H. Xu, Y. (2012) 'Reorganising Rural China from the Bottom: A Discussion of Recent Experiments with Rural Reconstruction', in, *Organising Rural China*, eds, Bislev, A. Thogersen, S. (Plymouth: Lexington Books).
[517] Fei X. (1977) 'Chinese social structure and its values' in *Changing China: Readings in the History of China from the Opium War to the Present*, ed Gentzler, M. (New York: Praeger) p.211
[518] *Ibid.*
[519] *Ibid.* p.212
[520] Madsen, R. (1984) *Morality and Power in a Chinese Village*, p.55

to ‘close family’ members, for example, are stronger than to distant kin. Yet, the people whom one considers as ‘close family’ can be highly elastic.[521] Richard Madsen argues that, in traditional Chinese ethics, the size of the social sphere toward which one owes loyalty and expects cooperation depends on the authority and influence of the person at the centre.[522] As such, the close kinship ties of an influential person can extend throughout an entire village and can include anyone who is related to them in any way.[523] By contrast, close kinship ties of an uninfluential person can shrink to a small group of one’s nuclear family and immediate neighbours.[524]

[521] *Ibid.*
[522] *Ibid.* p.56
[523] Fei, X. (1977) ‘Chinese social structure’, p.212 cited in: *Ibid.* p.55
[524] In the extreme, ‘it can be like Su Qin (an impoverished itinerant scholar of the Warring States period) returning home a failure: ‘His wife did not consider him her husband and his elder brother’s wife did not consider him her brother-in-law.’ *Ibid.*

Figure 5.7. Example Village: Concentric Spheres of Influence

The six 'small groups' of a village are represented by the six numbers in this diagram. Since each village 'small group' usually maps on to one extended family, they are analogous to a close kinship network. The emboldened circles in the centre represent strongest bonds of influence, obligation and loyalty within the kinship network. By selecting an influential representative of each small group to sit on the OPA, the state ensures that the OPA committee's influence extends throughout the whole village, as is represented in the diagram below.



Source: Author's own tabular impression

This understanding of kinship is relevant to OPAs because OPA committees are usually comprised of influential representatives from each local family. That is to say, alongside the OPA head and deputy, OPA committees contain a representative from each village 'small group' (*xiaozu* 小组 or *dui* 队). Since each small group tends to be comprised of one extended family,[525] the representatives of these groups are usually one of the respected 'elders' from within each local family (or surname group).[526] By embedding such individuals into the OPA, the state can ensure that the organisation commands the deference of the local community. This is because each representative will have close kinship ties, and with it, influence and obligation, toward the people in their small group. Electing or appointing a representative from each group ensures that the OPA's authority

[525] Although these small groups are a remnant of the old production team system (*shengchandui* 生产队), they also map on to the composition of local families.

[526] In this way, they are similar to the old-style family head (*jiazhang* 家长).

and influence extends through each family and, by inference, across the whole village. Furthermore, the selection of a highly influential figure to represent each family ensures the bonds of loyalty and obligation are stronger with more people than if a less influential individual were appointed.

By cementing such individuals into a state-linked organisation like the OPA, these local superordinates, to whom a large proportion of the local population defer, become legible and accessible to the local state to use for stability maintenance purposes. Indeed, at my fieldsites, when implementing contentious policy or seeking to resolve conflict, local officials often discussed these issues with the OPA first and then, once the OPA had been persuaded, they would ask them to help convince villagers of the state's view. That is to say, if the local state can gain the support of the OPA, it then becomes easier to gain the acceptance of the other villagers because of the support of these local authority figures. The deputy mayor of a town in Wuwei in Fujian illustrated this point most explicitly, as he put it:

> 'In China, older people are extremely influential. They hold everything together. They hold the family together and they help build strong networks [*guanxi* 关系] between relations. … Old people are the centre of the family network. … And because of this they can influence government policy. If the government wants to implement a [development] project in a village they will have a hard time doing so without the approval of the older villagers', and, particularly, the men of the OPA. … If we have the support of the OPA, we know we will be able to gain the support of the other villagers because [the villagers] will listen to them. … This is especially true when the project requires use of local land. These land projects always require OPA support and approval before they go ahead.'[527]

By emphasising the link between being at the centre of the family network and possessing influence amongst family and fellow villagers, he demonstrates the relationship between

[527] Int. with Town Deputy Mayor, Wuwei, Fujian (2015)

superordinate kinship status and authority over others within the network. More specifically, he articulates a state strategy to utilise OPA influence within their kinship network in order to implement contentious development projects. Although selecting an influential individual from each part of the village, and different family groupings, was practiced across all three provinces, it seems particularly important in Fujian where lineage ties are known to remain particularly strong and influence social relations to a high degree. Indeed, in some villages in Wuwei with a number of different lineage groups, lineage groups members elected their representative to sit on the OPA committee and some scholars have argued that in some areas of Fujian lineage groups have been rejuvenated within the structures of the OPA.

Thought Work and the Kinship Network

I found that this strategy of using kinship ties to resolve disputes was reiterated and expanded upon by officials elsewhere who explicitly linked it with grassroots 'thought work'. When discussing a land dispute in one village, it was explained by a local village official[528] that 'thought work' (sixiang gongzuo 思想工作), which refers to the process of reforming someone's thinking on a particular issue,[529] is often required in order to persuade villagers to agree to contentious development projects going ahead.[530] When asked to elaborate on what 'thought work' entails, the answer reiterated the link between authority, superordinate status, and kinship ties. Thought work, he said, 'is built on

[528] Int. with Village Official Three, LH Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015). Also reiterated by other village officials elsewhere.

[529] 'Thought work' can also be referred to as 'ideological remoulding', 'ideological reform', or 'thought reform' (*sixiang gaizao* 思想改造). This terminology was originally used as part of a CCP campaign to reform the thinking of Chinese citizens into accepting Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. Techniques employed at that time included "struggle sessions", propaganda, criticism and self-criticism. However, this phrase is now used in everyday vernacular to mean changing someone's mind on a particular issue.

[530] Int. with Village Official Three, LH Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)

interpersonal relationships (*renji guanxi* 人际关系).'[531] What that means is that 'in order to persuade you to do something you do not want to do, I have to find someone you respect and look up to, or someone with whom you have close relations, to try to convince you.'[532] That person, he noted, 'will usually be a close older relative or a former teacher whom you respect and trust. [This is because] most villagers will listen to [and accept] the views of these people.'[533] This suggests that local officials need to find someone who has the authority to intervene and whose views will be deferred to voluntarily by the person they are trying to convince. As such, this analysis of what 'thought work' entails and who is best placed to carry it out, connects closely to the concept of authority, and specifically, the idea that a decision is valid and acceptable to a particular group by nature of *who* makes that decision.

This strategy of using kinship ties to conduct 'thought work' can be linked more broadly to the protest demobilisation method, 'relational repression',[534] in which social ties are used as a 'soft' repression tactic. That is to say, during protest episodes, rural officials are said to seek out those with personal ties to protesters, like close relatives, in order to help persuade them to stand down or take a less contentious course. Specifically, Deng Yanghua and Kevin O'Brien, the scholars who documented this method, argued that when the social bonds between protestor and de-mobilizer (or thought worker) are particularly strong, this tactic is largely successful. Thus, while their study focuses on conflict at a more advanced stage, the strategy of using close personal relationships to

[531] *Ibid.*
[532] *Ibid.*
[533] *Ibid.*
[534] Deng, Y. O'Brien, K. (2013) 'Relational Repression'.

influence others while governing conflict, appears to be similar to the use of kinship ties described here.

By using kinship networks in this way, officials – particularly those at the township level – implicitly recognise the fragility of their own authority and the more detached relationship they have to village life. That is to say, in identifying and utilising those people whose views have more weight in the community than their own, these officials recognise that they are distant from local society and thus their duties can be circumscribed in relation to it.[535] Indeed, some officials recognised this quite explicitly. In Fujian, township officials reported that when dealing with disputes they 'take an OPA committee member who is particularly respected [and] trusted'[536] along with them and 'on most occasions, [leave it to] the older villager [to] listen to the grievances of the respective parties, say a few words [about the conflict to the disputants], and make the decision [on how to resolve it].[537] Likewise, in Yunnan it was reported that 'although an official often comes along [when negotiating disputes], it is the OPA committee member with the closest relationship to the disputant who does the negotiating'.[538] These examples mirror almost exactly Fei Xiaotong's observation of rural dispute mediation in the imperial and republican periods. Indeed, he noted that at meetings to arbitrate on local disputes, the 'government representative (*baozhang* 保长) almost never spoke',[539] leaving, instead, the responsibility of conflict resolution to the 'village elders'. This, he argued, was because the government representative had 'no social status in the

[535] Fei, X. (1992) *From the Soil*, p.104
[536] Int. with Town Government Official One, Foshan, Fujian (2015).
[537] *Ibid.*
[538] Int. with Village Head, TP Village, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2014).
[539] As I describe in more detail in subsequent chapters, this local official would regularly take one of the OPA committee members with him and, in a similar vein to that described by here, they would stay silent, deferring to the OPA member in the mediation and resolution of those local disputes.

village…he was just a petty bureaucrat',[540] and, as such, lacked both kinship ties and a superordinate 'role' in relation to local people.[541] Interestingly, although immense changes have taken place in Chinese society since the period being described, the recognition of traditional authority and, more specifically, the idea that the closer one is to the core of the kinship network the more one can legitimately arbitrate the conduct of people in that network, appears to remain an ever present structure in the contemporary Chinese context.

Figure 5.8. Personal Biographies: Mr Ye

Mr Ye, No. 2 Group OPA Committee Member, YS Village Fujian

Mr Ye was a farmer and retired village committee official in his mid-60s. He was a native resident of YS village and a member of the Ye family clan, the village's largest lineage group. Despite humble origins, he had received an education up to junior middle school at which point his education was interrupted by the Cultural Revolution. At that time, he became a red guard (*hongweibing* 红卫兵) and was famous throughout the village for having been one of the fiercest in the area, leading public denouncements of other villagers and traditional customs, as well as participating in the destruction of local historic and religious sites. From his time as a red guard onwards, he was well known for being one of the best orators in the village as well as being frank and forthright in his views. After opening-up, Mr Ye built up a relatively successful pig rearing business and boasted of having the one of the largest pig farms in the township. He had held one of the village committee positions in the 1990s and early 2000s and had been well regarded in the role as being a good leader and organiser as well as being fair and transparent. He was relatively well off with income from farming and remittances from two sons in good white-collar jobs in Xiamen city. Ironically, given his former red guard status, he had served as a member of the temple and lineage hall committee since his early 50s and had completed a three-year rotation as the Ye lineage hall head. Although Mr Ye did not enjoy talking about his former red guard status, this was always one of the first things other villagers brought up about him. In addition, almost without exception, every villager who spoke to me about Mr Ye said that he was on the OPA committee because he was frank, unafraid to speak his mind, and good at persuading others. As an example of his frankness and oratory, several people recounted a story about Mr Ye and his nephew who had been YS village party secretary for the past 8 years and had engaged in some corrupt practices. Mr Ye, they said, confronted his nephew in front of a large group of villagers at the village tea shop and

[540] Fei, X. (1992) *From the Soil*, p.104
[541] *Ibid.*

gave a long speech denouncing his behaviour publicly and telling him he had brought shame on their family and village. Because of his relationship to Mr Ye, the party secretary had to sit and listen to the speech and was unable leave or talk back to Mr Ye in response. He was well respected in the village and held in high regard even by people in other teams. He had been appointed as OPA representative of Number Two Small Group when he turned 60.

Source: Author's Interviews

5.2.2 Patriarchy and Seniority of Elders

Customary Norms

The second aspect of traditional authority that we will examine concerns patriarchalism and the seniority of elders. Unsurprisingly, given the OPA's name and remit, OPA committees are comprised entirely of 'old people' (*laonian ren* 老年人), and almost exclusively older men, aged over fifty-five. These characteristics, like kinship relations, appeared to be important for cementing the OPA's status as a dispute mediator in village communities. Throughout my fieldwork, interviews with villagers and rural officials suggested that norms of senior authority, patriarchy, and filial piety continue to hold strong currency in a village setting. For example, when discussing why OPA committee members are listened to by villagers, respect for the authority of elders, both as a traditional virtue and because of their educational function, came up repeatedly. As one villager told me:

> 'In Chinese rural areas, there is still a culture of respecting the old. This is a kind of virtue or moral excellence (*meide* 美德). For this reason, there are many things [- like local development projects -] that cannot be done without the help of the older residents and especially the OPA. The older men who sit on the OPA committee enjoy high prestige

> and universal respect (*degao wangzhong* 德高望重).[542] People here still respect the elderly. This is because when someone is old they have more experience than you do and for this reason they are worthy of respect. Young people[543] here usually heed the advice of their elders.'[544]

This excerpt indicates that the OPA is able to resolve local conflicts because their views are readily deferred to by younger villagers. The implication is that the young village officials need the support of their more authoritative elders to commence contentious development projects. While the statement - 'young people here usually heed the advice of their elders' - is unlikely to hold true for every 'young person' in every conflict situation, the interviewee felt it accurate enough to make the generalization. In doing so, the quote touches on the two cornerstones of 'senior authority'. The first part of the quote, that respect for the old is a virtue, reflects the normative belief in submission to one's societal 'role'. That is, that elders are to be respected and listened to because ritual and custom dictate it. The second part of the quote, that elders are worthy of respect because of their acquired experience, reflects the 'educational function' imbued within senior authority. That is, that elders possess greater life experience which makes them worth listening to.

Although not all interviewees expressed this view with as much clarity, the idea that the OPA committee should be respected because of their age and experience was a dominant theme that ran throughout my interviews. The regular trope that the OPA can mediate disputes because 'they are convincing [to the young people]',[545] because 'the elderly are

[542] This expression is primarily used to describe an old person. It can also be translated as 'an old person of noble character and high prestige' or 'an old person who commands high prestige and universal respect'.
[543] By young people this interviewee meant people under the age of 55 or 60 who are not yet considered old.
[544] Int. with Villager Two, JY Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)
[545] Int. with Party Secretary, JG Village, Zhuanping, Yunnan, (2012)

respected',[546] and, more obliquely, that 'old people are convincing because they are old'[547] are all trying, unconsciously, to pinpoint a ritualised, respect for the authority of elders. Others were more explicit about the customary norms encapsulated within these views. Indeed, when asked why the OPA is involved with resolving village conflicts, one OPA head replied directly that, 'this is a traditional custom. In the past, when the village had a conflict, it was always older people who presided over justice. Now we have the OPA, so the OPA has responsibility for mediating disputes.' [548] Similarly, when discussing an OPA's role in dispute mediation, one village official claimed that the OPA committee will 'make a decision on how a dispute should be settled. Then, regardless of the outcome, it is an unwritten rule that the view [of the OPA] will be final and accepted by both parties.'[549] This view that respecting the OPA's judgement was an unwritten rule, was repeated to me by villagers and officials across a number of villages. The discussion of 'traditional customs' and 'unwritten rules' in these quotes is suggestive of traditional social norms that are uncodified, but accepted as prevalent and appropriate norms of behaviour.

Elders' Experience

For others, the experience possessed by the elderly was identified as the primary reason why villagers acquiesce to the OPA's view on contentious village matters. Indeed, two expressions came up repeatedly. First, that 'an older person has eaten more salt than a younger person has eaten rice' (*wo chi de yan bi ni chi de mi hai duo* 我吃的盐比你吃

[546] Int. with Vice-Director, Older People's University, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2012)
[547] Int. with OPA Head, TP Village, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2012)
[548] Int. with OPA Head, JY Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)
[549] Int. with Village Official One, LH Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)

的米还多)[550] and second that 'an older person has crossed more bridges than a younger person has walked roads' (*wo guo de qiao bi ni zou de lu hai duo* 我过的桥比你走的路还多). These hyperbolic expressions suggest that, because the person is old, they have acquired more experience, even of the things that one does relatively infrequently (like eating salt and crossing bridges), than a young person has of the things that one does every day (like eating rice and walking on roads). The use of these expressions in this context indicates that, at least in the eyes of rural villagers, simply via the passing of time and accumulation of years, people develop knowledge and experience that gives them the authority to weigh in, and be listened to, on contentious matters.

Figure 5.9. Personal Biographies: Mr Xue

Mr Xue, Head of SSY Village OPA, Shaanxi OPA

Mr Xue had not been educated as a child but after gaining a position as team leader in the village government in his late 30s he started to teach himself how to read and enlisted the help of the then village school teacher to help him practice. For this endeavour, he was well respected in the village with several people commenting that this demonstrated his hardworking nature and his natural intelligence. After obtaining a reasonable level of literacy he was elected as village head and was the village's longest running head, serving for seventeen years in the role. After retirement he was appointed head of the OPA. I was told by the other OPA committee members that he had been chosen for this position because of his strong organisations skills, leadership experience, as well as his willingness to serve the community. Having been a village official in the past he was also familiar with people across the whole village, and their respective personalities, as well as with many of the issues facing the village and its development. Mr Xue was clearly highly charismatic with a high social standing in the village. Everywhere I went with him in the village, residents waved at him, came out of their homes to greet him, and stopped their bikes to chat. Mr Xue's personal charisma, credibility, and experience had, it was claimed, made the OPA more influential in the village with most villagers preferring to go directly to Mr Xue and to the wider OPA committee to help them with issues ranging from welfare payments,

[550] I have translated 'I' (*wo* 我) and 'you' (*ni* 你) as 'older person' and 'younger person' in these two expressions because they are almost exclusively used by an older person when talking to a younger person and because they were used in this context in my interviews.

to complaints, to land rights issues, to problems at home. In addition, because of his experience of village governance he retained much influence over village affairs with the village committee utilising him as an advisor for their daily tasks.

Source: Author's Interviews

Elders vis-à-vis Officials

Finally, senior authority embedded within the OPA should also be viewed in contrast to the role and status of officials on the village committee. Small villages are societies without strangers, based entirely on familiarity.[551] Although out-migration has seen a new generation of children and young people grow up and work outside their home villages, most people that permanently reside in villages today are still of a generation that have lived in the same place all their lives. This level of societal familiarity arguably serves to enhance the authority of elders. This is because, as Fei Xiaotong argued, 'every child grows up in everyone else's eyes'.[552] If you have observed someone as a child, it is more difficult to then view them as a superordinate figure in adulthood.[553] Indeed, the concept of paternalistic power is based on 'generational succession' whereby older people represent authority until they die, at which time the younger generation become the elders. Possession of seniority and authority is therefore a just matter of time and precedence.[554]

However, since village officials tend to be in their thirties or forties, there are often multiple generations of villagers who are older than them. This is important for

[551] Fei, X. (1992) *From the Soil*, p.41
[552] *Ibid.*
[553] Age arguably matters less for creating authority in 'mass society' environments where adults are encountered as adults, without recourse to knowledge of their childhood state.
[554] *Ibid.*

understanding the OPA's strength as dispute mediators vis-à-vis the younger village officials' relative weakness. Having related to the village officials as children and subordinates, it is more difficult for older villagers to then defer to them in adulthood. In one village where a dispute had erupted over a proposal to use local land to build a public square, the village officials told me they were unable to resolve the dispute themselves because the affected villagers would either 'curse them' (*ma tamen* 骂他们), 'ignore them' (*bu li tamen* 不理他们), or shut their doors on them. Villagers specifically highlighted the village officials' youth when discussing their ineffectiveness in resolving this conflict. The officials were described as 'too young, inexperienced, [and] lacking the ability to solve these problems' as well as 'too young to be the village head. No one listens to him'. In keeping with this theme, several older villagers nicknamed the village officials 'the kids' (*xiao haizi* 小孩子) using their youth as a way to deride them behind their backs. This was in direct contrast to how the OPA committee mediators were viewed and treated. When OPA members went to talk with disputants, they said that 'because of [their] age and high standing … [villagers] did not dare shut the door on [them].'[555] Likewise, villagers reported that because of 'the age of the OPA committee [they] had no choice but to listen and show them respect'.[556] This difference between the respect and deference shown towards the older OPA committee members and the lack of respect shown to the younger village officials is demonstrative of those who are deemed to possess authority locally and those who lack it.

Figure 5.10. Personal Biographies: Uncle Bo

[555] Int. with OPA Head, LH Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)
[556] Int. with Villager Five, LH Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)

Uncle Bo, Head of LH Village OPA

Uncle Bo, a tall, charismatic man in his late 60s with kind eyes and a sharp tongue headed LH village's OPA. Uncle Bo had been sent down to LH village during the Cultural Revolution from a then well-developed city, two hours away. He came from a relatively well-off, middle-class family who ran a teahouse business. He had been an excellent student in his youth, graduating with high grades from senior high school and plans to attend university. The Cultural Revolution, however, disrupted his education and he was sent down to LH village to work on the land. Upon arrival, despite being taller than most locals, he struggled with farm work and failed to achieve the same work points as other villagers. Yet, he was adept at building relationships and after making some shrewd alliances, and because local officials saw value in his education, he was transferred to work as a teacher in the village school. When the Cultural Revolution ended, having married a local woman and built a positive reputation as one of the best teachers in the school, he decided to remain in the village. He was informally considered part of one local family who had acted as his landlord and become his adopted parents (*gandie* 干爹) after the death of his own father and mother. During de-collectivisation, it was agreed that he too should be allocated a plot of land, demonstrating his integration into the community. Having worked at the village school, first as a Chinese teacher and then as the head teacher, for 35 years, Uncle Bo had built up close familiarity with almost every family in the village. Indeed, nearly everyone under the age of 55 professed to having been his student. The general view was that, having been the head teacher for so many years, he had become an 'expert in education' *(jiaoyujia* 教育家*)*, an 'expert in management' *(guanlijia* 管理家) and an 'expert at manoeuvring social affairs' (*shehui huodongjia* 社会活动家). In addition, he was well respected, and had a good reputation for being trustworthy, of good morals, and willing to go out of his way help others. He was often asked to write family trees, register gifts at weddings, lead the organisation of village events, and provide names for the children in his extended family. He was well off in retirement with a sizable state pension and two educated children with good jobs (a teacher and an SOE regional manager) in the city. After stepping down from his position in the village school, he was appointed to the OPA initially as deputy head and then, when the position became available, as head.

Source: Author's Interviews

5.2.2 Gender

Another key characteristic of the OPA committee that links closely to norms of traditional authority is their gender composition, which I found was almost exclusively male. Indeed, none of the OPA committees in Fujian and Yunnan that I visited contained a single female representative. Likewise, all OPA heads and OPA deputy heads – the two most important

positions on the OPA committee – were, across all three provinces and without exception, male. Only in Shaanxi, in five locations did the OPA committees contain a female representative. Yet, in these small number villages where a woman had been appointed to the OPA committee her role was exclusively focused on women's social and cultural activities, such as music and dance activities like organising 'square' dancing and 'Yang'ge' dancing. Women in these locations did not report in interviews with me of having been involved in mediating local disputes with this role being left to their male counterparts. While it appeared that women were often influential behind the scenes and in the home or family, they did not have the same level of prominence in the public sphere and in the public affairs of the village as older men did. Certainly, while the gender-neutral expression 'prestigious older person' '*you weiwang de laoren* 有威望的老人' came up time and again to describe members of OPA committees, I never heard the expression used about a woman in a village, even in those locations in Shaanxi where the committee had a female representative. Although attitudes to women are changing in China, this suggests that rural China has remained ostensibly patriarchal particularly with regard to village governance, public affairs, and who has the authority to intervene in such matters.

5.2.3 Education and Employment Status

Yet, while old age and gender are clearly a factor in creating superordinate status for the OPA, old age *alone* does not necessarily give one authority. As Tu Weiming notes, 'the unexamined assertion that 'Confucians respect the old' loses its persuasion in the light of the [negative] Confucian view of unmannerly old people.'[557] Indeed, in Fei Xiaotong's famous work *China's Gentry* he demonstrated how, in the imperial era, it was not just

[557] Tu, W (1993) 'Confucianism', p.191

any older man that could participate in the public affairs of the village. Rather, it was those who had passed the state examinations and gained a position in the imperial state apparatus and their family members, who had the authority to influence local affairs.[558] The rural gentry during this period were usually 'retired bureaucrats, the relatives of bureaucrats, or even educated landlords'.[559] According to Fei, in most cases, 'they did not have actual political power, nor were they necessarily directly connected to politics.' Yet, they were educated, usually retired,[560] and enjoyed high 'social prestige' (*shehui* 社会声望). As such, 'they were the people with power and influence [in the village setting]'.[561]

In keeping with this, old age is clearly not the only criterion for being selected to sit on the OPA committee. In most villages I visited, the elderly population comprised about 12-15% of the registered population[562] which usually amounted to between 150 and 250 people. However, OPA committees only comprise 5 to15 people, leaving plenty of elderly villagers who had not been selected to perform this function. There are clearly other factors beyond old age which affect selection for this role. High educational and employment status prior to retirement appeared to be a consistent factor for appointment to the OPA committee across my fieldsites, suggesting that these characteristics continue to play a role in engendering authority today. Yet, it is important to note that high

[558] Harrison, H. (2005) *The Man Awakened from Dreams: One Man's Life in a North China Village 1857-1942*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press).
[559] Fei, X. (1953) *China's Gentry: Essays on Rural-Urban Relations,* (Chicago: Chicago University Press).
[560] In *China's Gentry* Fei argues that 'retirement is an ideal of the Chinese people'. He says that when a bureaucrat retires, they no longer have to strategize about how to increase their position in the state hierarchy. A bureaucrat can simply return home and will be surrounded by grateful relatives who enjoyed protection while he was in office. At this time of his life, he just needs to enjoy his social prestige (*shehui shengwang* 社会声望), a rich (*shenghuo fuzu* 生活富足), and an easy-going and contented life (*xinkuan tipan* 心宽体胖). Fei, X. (1953) *China's Gentry*.
[561] *Ibid.*
[562] Older people over the age of 60 usually made up 12-15% of the registered population (i.e. people with their *hukou* in the village). However, they tend to make up a higher percentage of the actual resident population due to out-migration by the younger generations.

educational and employment status do not translate completely unchanged into the contemporary era. Whereas in the imperial period passing imperial state exams gave one high status in one's village, nowadays it is successful retired government officials and retired teachers that tend to be respected locally, as well as villagers who moved away and became successful or wealthy in their careers. In keeping with this, retired teachers and retired village officials were the most common pre-retirement positions of OPA committee members, with the most important position – OPA head – dominated overwhelmingly by retired teachers.

The embedding of retired teachers into the OPA appears, again, to be about embedding traditional authority figures into a state-linked organisation. Much existing literature has demonstrated the high status that teachers hold both symbolically and socially in traditional culture, with teachers regarded as both learned scholars and moral figures in Chinese ethics.[563] According to Madsen, after relations to one's kin and elders, relations with one's teachers were amongst the most morally significant of all relationships in traditional Chinese ethics.[564] Indeed, respect for teachers was traditionally so strong that it had been considered part of filial piety, and parallel to the utmost deference given to parents by their children.[565] As one Confucian maxim says, 'one should respect one's teacher as if he were one's father even if the teacher-student relationship exists for only a single day'.[566] Contemporary survey data tells us that this deep-rooted cultural belief in the high standing of teachers and scholars persists today. China consistently tops world

[563] Fwu, B. Wang, H. (2002) 'The Social Status of Teachers in Taiwan', Comparative Education, Vol. 38, No. 2, pp.211-224.
[564] Madsen, R. (1984) *Morality and Power in a Chinese Village.*
[565] *Ibid.*
[566] *Ibid;* Fwu and Wang (2002) 'The Social Status of Teachers', p.217. Likewise, in imperial times, society was structured according to four categories of people: scholars, peasants, artisans, and merchants, with scholars afforded the highest prestige.

rankings for respect toward the teaching profession. A 2013 survey of public attitudes on the professional status, trust, pay, and desirability of teaching as a career in 21 countries, placed China highest in terms of the social status of teachers, with respect for teachers considerably higher than the next highest countries.[567] For example, 75% of all respondents in China believed that students respect their teachers, compared to an average of just 27% across the other countries surveyed.[568]

Respect and deference towards the teaching profession appeared to be a key reason behind the selection of retired teachers to head OPA committees, and for the high status afforded to OPAs in their village communities. Many of the officials I interviewed who had been involved in appointing OPA committees, attributed their selections to the pre-retirement positions of the people chosen. Indeed, when discussing the appointment of one OPA head with the township official who had appointed him, the official directly attributed his selection to the head's former position as the village primary school teacher. As he put it:

> '[The OPA head] was a teacher here for over 40 years. He is well educated and knows more about the society outside [the village]. He is a pioneer in teaching in this area. He has more advanced thinking. People trust and admire him, and he has many former students here who respect him. This is why he is a good candidate for the position of OPA head.'[569]

This quote indicates that there is a link between his former role as a village teacher, his respected status in the village community, and his appointment to the OPA. By selecting a retired teacher who is widely respected, trusted, and listened to, to become the OPA head, the state is able to utilize these personal attributes to enhance the authority of the

[567] Coughlan, S. 'Teachers in China given highest level of public respect', *BBC,* [Acessed online on 03/03/2017 at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-24381946]
[568] *Ibid.*
[569] Int. with Head of Township Bureau of Civil Affairs, Shaanxi (2015)

OPA. That is to say, if the OPA head and other committee members are well respected, then the OPA as an organisation is likely to be respected as well. This view was expressed repeatedly with interviewees often stating simply that retired teachers can do this job well because they have the 'respect of the people'[570] or 'respect of the villagers'[571] (*shoudao renmin de zunzhong* 受到人民的尊重 or *shoudao cunmin de zunzhong* 受到村民的尊重*).* Furthermore, interviewees often made the connection between deference towards retired teachers on the OPA committee and an OPA committees' ability to resolve conflicts locally. As one OPA head noted:

> 'The government often asks us to help resolve land disputes [that arise from local development projects]. [In such instances,] the OPA committee must go to talk with [the disputants] and make them see sense. … [Of the OPA committee], I am particularly effective at conducting 'thought work' because I am a retired teacher. I was a teacher in this village for more than 35 years. Most of the people here were my students when they were in primary school so they have known me their whole lives and, overall, they have great respect for me and my views. … Because I was a teacher here, the people in this community, and especially my former students, listen to my views (*ting wo de hua* 听我的话).[572] [Because of my former position], I also have many years of experience talking and giving speeches in front of large groups and I have a way with words (*wo hen hui shuo hua* 我很会说话). I am not easily tongue tied and I know how to think on my feet and respond quickly in these situations [when dealing with disputants]."[573]

The excerpt (and figure 5.10) both demonstrate that having held a superordinate role as teacher to most of the villagers, and having developed leadership skills in the process, the OPA head can command the respect and deference of the majority in the community. In a similar vein to the discussion of 'thought work' and kinship ties, retired teachers'

[570] Int. with OPA Head, HF Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015)
[571] Int. with Villager Three, JG Village, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2014)
[572] This expression '*ting wo de hua* 听我的话' can be literally translated as 'listen to me'. However, it usually has stronger connotations of 'heeding the advice of an elder or superior' and/or 'being obedient'.
[573] Int. with OPA Head, LH Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)

personal relationships with villagers who had been their students gives them superordinate status in the village. This status then gives their views more authority and weight, ensuring their opinions are widely listened to as a result. The appointment of retired teachers and use of them to conduct 'thought work', is arguably an even more effective strategy than using kinship ties. This is because the influence of a family or 'small group' 'elder' only extends throughout their particular family and small group. The influence of a retired teacher, by contrast, extends throughout all different parts of the village and different family and lineage groups to all those people who have been taught by them. This may explain why retired teachers were commonly appointed to the more important position of OPA head or OPA deputy head, whereas the OPA small group heads were just responsible for their own kinship and neighbourhood groups.

Reciprocity

Finally, there is also a reciprocity element to the authority possessed by these retired teachers. I am using 'reciprocity' here to refer to the non-market exchange of goods or labour. When the exchange is immediate, it does not create a social relationship, but when the exchange is delayed or unrepaid it can establish both a hierarchical relationship and a debt or obligation for return.[574] A wide literature has shown us the importance of reciprocity and gift giving in rural Chinese society.[575] Indeed, as Vivienne Shue argues, 'in village society, the value of *bao* (or reciprocity, 报), is generally held up as a fundamental principle expected to inform virtually all interpersonal relations'.[576] This is important to note when discussing the embedding of retired teachers into the OPA

[574] For more on reciprocity and kinship or reciprocity and social hierarchy, see Sahlins, M. (1972) *Stone Age Economics*, (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton) pp.196-210
[575] For more on reciprocity and gift giving in rural China, see: Yan, Y. (1996) *The Flow of Gifts*.
[576] Shue, V. (2012) 'Modern/Rural China', p.226

because, in addition to the indebtedness felt by villagers to these people for having provided them with an education, villagers often owe these people debts from everyday life. This is because, with a high level of education relative to the local village population, teachers and retired teachers are often called upon to provide help and advice to others in the community on a range of everyday matters. As one villager in Fujian said,

> 'the OPA head is a retired teacher and so he is knowledgeable about many things. If anyone here [in the village] has a problem or needs help with something, they will often go to him. You ask him to do something for you, he will always be willing to help. He is a really upstanding person'.[577]

More specifically, villagers I interviewed reported asking retired teachers for help with a wide range of tasks: from writing family trees and wedding invitations because of their skilful ability to write characters and knowledge of family titles; to collecting, recording, and counting money at village ceremonies and choosing baby names because of their high literacy and numeracy level; to putting on extra classes for struggling school children. In addition, when I was living in the home of one retired teacher and OPA head, I observed that villagers with low literacy would often drop by to ask for his help with reading and completing formal documentation on land registration issues, inheritance, and health insurance and hospital invoices, amongst others.

These acts all arguably solidify the hierarchical social relationship and create an unspoken obligation for reciprocity. This can be useful for resolving conflicts because this debt makes it harder for villagers to say no to them in negotiations.[578] One OPA head put it most succinctly,

[577] Int. with Villager Five, LH Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015).
[578] For more on reciprocity and kinship or reciprocity and social hierarchy, see Sahlins, M. (1972). *Stone Age Economics.*

> 'I am almost always involved in negotiations [over development projects that require use of local land] because I am a retired teacher and I know everyone in this village. They respect and trust me and so I am often successful at convincing them. In addition, as a retired teacher people often come to ask my help and advice on things and I usually try my best to help them. When I go to ask them to do something, it is then difficult for them to refuse.'[579]

As such, by embedding such people into the OPA and asking them to help resolve land conflicts and implement contentious development projects the state can access and utilise this reciprocal relationship for its own benefit.

Table 5.5. Composition of the OPA Committee

Committee Composition / Common Selection Criteria	**Description**
Old age	OPA committee members must be aged over 55
High educational status	Retired teacher was the most common pre-retirement position for OPA heads. Retired cadres and literate peasants usually comprise the rest of the committee.
Male gender	OPA committees are almost exclusively male. In the very rare cases when a female was appointed she only had responsibility for 'women's issues'.
Influential within the kinship network / neighbourhood	The most respected or influential male elder in each village small 'group' would be selected to represent that part of the village (neighbourhood) or family network in the OPA.
High trustworthiness and local respect	OPA committee members were most commonly described as possessing high respect (受到人民的尊重), prestige (*weiwang* 威望) and popular trust (*weixin* 威信). *'Wei* 威*'* - which means strength or power - also indicates a degree of formidability.
Good moral character and virtuousness	The OPA committee were often described as possessing good moral character (*pinzhi hao* 品质好 / *daode hao* 道德好), being 'selfless' 'altruistic', 'impartial, just and fair' (*dagongwusi* 大公无私).
Lucid, bold, and unafraid to speak their mind	OPA committee members were often described as lucid or good with words (*ta hui shuo hua* 他会说话), unafraid to speak up (*gan jiang* 敢讲) and reason with others (*jiang daoli* 讲道理). Those with good moral character, but who were shy, well behaved, or naive (*tai laoshi* 太老实) were not deemed suitable.
Leadership skills and ability to command attention and obedience	OPA committee members were also seen as possessing good leadership skills and the ability to command villagers' attention and obedience (*cunmin ting tamen de hua* 村民听他们的话; *tamen shuo jiu suan le* 他们说就算了).
Public service oriented and willing to volunteer	The OPA committee also tended to be enthusiastic (*rexin* 热心) about public service and OPA participation as well as willing to help the village committee with the public affairs of the village.

[579] Int. with OPA Head, JY Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)

Relatively well-off	OPA heads and deputy heads were usually reasonably well off – usually with a pension from a pre-retirement position – so as to prevent corruption and ensure they were not too preoccupied with maintaining their livelihoods to participate.

Source: Author's own tabular analysis

5.2.4 Moral Character, Respect, and Trust

A fourth and final aspect of embedding authority into the OPA comes from the personal attributes of those selected to sit on the committee. Regardless of their education and pre-retirement position, what OPA committee members were recognised as possessing was good moral character and the respect and trust of their local community. These attributes also link to traditional authority because of the importance of virtue in Chinese traditional ethics and in the structure of rural social life. As Vivienne Shue argues, 'the filaments that define and give coherence to rural village life can best be understood as ethical ones' in which 'the proper handling of … person to person encounters' must be observed.[580] More specifically she argues that villages are bound together through basic relational-ethical principles:

> 'the value of *bao* (报 reciprocity) is generally held up as the fundamental principle expected to inform all interpersonal relationships. … [Likewise] the value of *renqing* (人情 humanity) is generally cherished and understood as … empathy, decency, mutual recognition, and regard that civilised human beings are expected to demonstrate in their dealings with one another. … *Mianzi* (面子'face' or dignity) … refers to norms of courtesy, consideration, and respect in social intercourse that serve to reaffirm relationships to the larger community. [While] the value of *ganqing* (感情 human emotion or sentiment) refers to that special 'natural' affection, generally elicited only over time and through relations of greater familiarity, that should be honoured in the conduct of affairs involving intimates.'[581]

[580] Shue, V. (2012) 'Modern/Rural China', p.226
[581] *Ibid.* pp.226-227

It is on these basic principles and values that codes of conduct and rituals of everyday rural life are based. Observing these basic values and displaying 'moral character' arguably generate authority and trust in the context of rural China because small villages are characterised by familiarity. These are societies without strangers in which interpersonal trust and respect are based on *specific* knowledge of one another's character and personality built up over time, rather than on abstract principles. In these types of communities, authority, trust, and respect are not reliant on the importance of legal contracts but, rather, on the dependability of people.[582] That is, knowledge and experience of interacting with one another on a day-to-day basis.

By appointing and embedding individuals who are perceived in their community as being of good moral standing, observers of village values, and who are trusted and respected, the state is able to embed the most authoritative members of a community and utilise these characteristics for state aims. Indeed, in answer to the question 'what personal qualities or characteristics enable someone to sit on the OPA committee and do the job well?' the three most common responses were that committee members should possess 'popular respect' (*weiwang* 威望), 'popular trust' (*weixin* 威信), and 'moral excellence' (*meide* 美德). Particularly the first two attributes – 'popular respect' and 'popular trust' – are not just about possession of virtue in and of itself, but also about community *perception* and *deference to* such virtues. Interestingly, these three characteristics were repeated by interviewees at all levels of the political system, from villagers, to township officials, to representatives in China's National Committee on Ageing, indicating that these characteristics are part of the national level discourse on OPAs. Other expressions that came up repeatedly also indicate that OPA committees are appointed for their

[582] Fei, X. (1992) *From the Soil*, p.43

personal virtues and moral values. For example, OPA committee members were often described as being 'selfless, fair, and impartial' (*dagong wusi* 大公无私), 'upright and upstanding' (*ganzheng bu'e* 刚正不阿), 'virtuous' (*daode hao* 道德好), of 'good moral character' (*pinde hao* 品德好), and, simply, 'good people' (*zuo ren hen hao* 做人很好).[583]

These characteristics were not only repeatedly described in relation to the OPA, but they were also attributed as a reason behind why the OPA has authority in dispute mediation processes. Interviewees directly linked these personal attributes to villagers' willingness to defer to the view of the OPA committee. For example, according to one township government official, the OPA committee 'can do this job [of negotiating conflicts] well, and young people listen to their views, because they are respected, trusted, fair and impartial (*dagong wusi* 大公无私)'.[584] Indeed, interviewees suggested these attributes are important when resolving disputes because, in order to be willing to listen and accept the OPAs' decision on a particular conflict, the disputants must perceive the OPA committee as being unbiased in their judgements.

To understand why embedding these attributes would be of use to the state when governing conflict, it is again necessary to view the OPA in contrast to perceptions of local state officials. As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, in the context of rapid change and endemic local corruption, rural cadres are often perceived as

[583] Only in one instance did I come across an OPA committee member who was not described positively by villagers. Having blackmailed a local official to get a position on the committee, he did not conform to the usual OPA committee characteristics. However, despite his title he was largely excluded from the OPA's activities because the other committee members did not want to be associated with him and because, without the respect of the community, he was not useful to the local officials.

[584] Int. with Town Government Official Three, Wuwei, Fujian (2015).

untrustworthy, easily bought off, and willing to use their position for personal gain. Furthermore, most township officials are remote from rural life, thereby reducing villagers' ability to verify their trustworthiness from everyday experience. These perceptions and biases, therefore, reduce the ability of local state officials to negotiate and resolve disputes. By using the OPA as the primary conduit for mediating disputes, the local state can ensure that the task of maintaining stability is managed effectively while plugging gaps in its fragile authority. Indeed, in keeping with this view, some interviewees suggested that a key purpose of the OPA is to fill a gap in moral governance that has developed alongside Communist rule. This is achieved, one OPA deputy head argued, through the selection of people with good moral character to sit on the OPA and act as a guiding force for the villagers and village committee. As he put it,

> "The OPA committee members are selected based on several criteria. They must have the ability and willingness to get involved alongside the village committee. They must be hardworking (*renzhen* 认真) and enthusiastic (*rexin* 热心) and, most importantly, they must have good virtues and moral character (*pinde hao, daode hao* 品德好，道德好). [*Why is it important for them to possess these qualities*?] In the past, the elders (*zhangbei* 长辈) were highly influential in Chinese villages, especially those elders who were well educated and had high social status … These elders were very powerful and often governed relations in villages … [either] formally or informally through their knowledge of traditional morality and ethics (*li* 礼). … However, when the Communist Party took control of the country, and especially during the Cultural Revolution, the power and influence [of the elders and lineages] was ceded to the Communist Party. … As a result, what has been weakened during this time has been moral and ethical governance. So, when we select the OPA committee, we choose qualities that our communities are in need of like moral character. These people then become a guide to the village committee and to villagers when disputes arise."[585]

This quote suggests an awareness of the historical role of that these virtuous 'elders' played in Chinese villages in the past, as well as an understanding of how their decline

[585] Int. with OPA Deputy Head, LH Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015).

during the early years of the Communist Party has affected village society. It also suggests that the state has recognised the historical significance and usefulness that these people played in village relations and social stability. The creation of the OPA is therefore arguably a state-controlled method of reviving this group of elders while simultaneously controlling the expression of their authority via the structures of the OPA.

Lucidity and Leadership

Although appointing those with good moral character and the respect and trust of their local community appeared to be one of the most consistent aspects of OPA committee appointments, there were caveats to this rule. That is, alongside a good moral character OPA committee members had to be willing and able to speak out about their opinions, and able to lead others. Villagers often spoke admiringly of OPA committee members who had a quick tongue, were lucid, and not afraid to express themselves (*ta hui shuo hua* 他会说话; *zhege ren hen hui jiang hua* 这个人很会讲话).[586] Likewise, one official told me that to be able to sit on the OPA committee 'you must be bold and dare to speak out (*ganshuo, ganjiang* 敢说，敢讲).'[587] Going further, he said that:

> 'there are people in this village with good moral character (*pinzhi hao* 品质好), but who are too simpleminded, well behaved, and shy (*tai laoshi* 太老实). If someone is not brave enough to speak up or stand up to others then, despite a good moral character, they would not be well suited to the OPA.'[588]

Others similarly reiterated that alongside 'being respected, and being selfless and impartial, OPA committee members must also be able speak up and mobilize others into

[586] Int. with Villager Four, YS Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015); Int. with Villager Three, JG Village, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2014); Int. with Party Secretary, LP Village, Shaanxi, (2015).
[587] Int. with Village Official Two, YH Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015).
[588] *Ibid.*

action (*neng jiao de dong ren* 能叫的动人)'.[589] Indeed, the importance of being good orators and leaders with the ability to mobilise others not only appeared useful for negotiating conflict but also for the ideological and propaganda work carried out by the OPA. In one village in Fujian where the OPA held monthly lectures on topics ranging from health to Chinese history, the OPA committee member who had been selected to give the speeches had been chosen specifically because of his oratory skills. Indeed, in recent speeches on the Sino-Japanese war, villagers I interviewed claimed that his speech had 'moved everyone' in the room, with many of the residents in tears at his description of life at that time.[590] Likewise, in another village in Shaanxi, at a recent lecture organised by the OPA head on how to bring up one's grandchildren, he had also left many in tears at the challenges they face with parents working elsewhere. The OPA head claimed that he had designed the emotive speech to encourage the older residents to do better at supporting and educating the next generation.[591] Similarly, in villages across Shaanxi and some in Yunnan, annual awards ceremonies to reward the 'most filial son', 'most filial daughter-in-law', and 'best mother and daughter-in-law relations', were, according to local villagers, conducted with much fanfare and with speeches designed to praise and promote the winners and their behaviour as moral models for villagers that year.[592] As such, we can see throughout this section that the personalities, conduct, and oratory of OPA committee members are also key to their appointment, their ability to resolving conflicts, deliver speeches, and act as useful allies for the local state.

[589] Int. with OPA Deputy Head, JY Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015).
[590] Int. with Old People's School Head, LS Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015).
[591] Int. with OPA Head, ZZD Village, Shaanxi (2015).
[592] Int. with Villager / OPA Member Seven, LP Village, Shaanxi, (2015).

5.2.5 High Levels of Wealth

Finally, one additional characteristic that affected the selection of OPA committees in Fujian, but appeared to be less important in other regions was socio-economic status or levels of wealth. In Fujian, OPA committees - and OPA heads and deputy heads in particular - were usually relatively well off. In part, this appeared to be because the pensions of retired teachers and officials in wealthy Fujian are much higher than those of the same occupations in Yunnan and Shaanxi. As such, the retired teachers and cadres in Fujian tended to be wealthier relative to their fellow villagers, than retired teachers in the other provinces are in relation their fellow villagers. However, unlike in Yunnan and Shaanxi where level of wealth was not raised at all by interviewees as a requirement for membership of the OPA committee, this was actively raised in most villages in Fujian and all villages in Wuwei. This seems to suggest that level of wealth as a condition of OPA committee membership was more than just something linked to their pre-retirement position. Indeed, out of all of China's provinces, Fujian alongside southern Zhejiang (particularly Wenzhou), and parts of Guangdong are known for ostentatious displays of wealth,[593] with social status often tied to one's socio-economic status.[594] Unlike in other locations, one's authority and ability to be involved in village public affairs in villages in Fujian, whilst also tied to the conditions previously discussed, seemed to be linked to economic capital and material wealth.[595]

[593] For example, high dowry fees and opulent weddings are common place in much of Fujian. Likewise, there is a growing architectural trend in rural China for big houses, with villagers often competing over the number of stories even when many of these are not used. Sun, L. Hu, M. (2013) 'The Price of Chinese Marriage', *China Daily*, [Accessed online on: 31/10/17 at: 'http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/m/ fujian/2014-07/13/content_17766950.htm]; Moore, M. (2013) 'China's brides go for gold as their dowries get bigger and bigger', *The Telegraph*, [Accessed online on: 31/10/2017 at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/ 9780786/Chinas-brides-go-for-gold-as-their-dowries-get-bigger-and-bigger.html]; Shenzhen Daily, (2013) Fujian tycoon marries off daughter with ¥1b dowry', *Shenzhen Daily*, [Accessed online on: 31/10/17 at: http://www.szdaily.com/ content/2013-01/02/content_7560933.htm].

[594] Tan, C. (2006) *Southern Fujian*.

[595] *Ibid*.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the common characteristics of those individuals appointed to sit on OPA committees as well as how these characteristics are key to generating authority in rural villages. In doing so, it has demonstrated how old age, male gender, influence in the kinship network, high educational and employment status, high socio-economic status (in Fujian), and good moral character can all engender authority in the context of rural China. Indeed, while these have been broken up and analysed individually for the purposes of clarity in this chapter, it is actually the *combination* of these qualities together (and, perhaps other locally specific qualities as well) that gives the OPA committee their respected status. Just as old age alone does not give one authority, neither would a retired teacher with a bad moral character be likely to generate villagers' respect. In addition, this chapter has sought to show that the traditional authority imbued within these people, despite taking differing contemporary forms, is rooted in a long historical and philosophical Confucian tradition. Indeed, when one looks at those representatives of the *lijia* system of governance in the Qing dynasty, it is said that village headmen were 'chosen from among those who are older and virtuous, direct in behaviour and able to persuade others'.[596] These characteristics overlap closely with the selection criteria for modern day OPA committees. As such, they demonstrate that despite much modernisation and change in rural China many of the characteristics that engendered authority in Chinese villages in the past remain intact today.

[596] Quote by Huang Liuhong a district magistrate in the early Qing dynasty cited in: Schurmann, F. (1970) *Ideology and Organisation in Communist China*, p.428

Additionally, this chapter has shown how embedding these local authority figures into a state-linked organisation, such as the OPA, makes these individuals and the traditional authority that they possess accessible to the state for its aims. This is interesting because a key aim of the modern state has often been to supplant traditional authority and values with legal, rational and bureaucratic ones. Indeed, in China, as Vivienne Shue argues, modernisation *discourses* by the Party-state have tended to fall back on its own 'linear-modernist teleology'[597] when describing rural life and 'rural problems', often labelling traditional rural rituals and customary norms as a thing of the 'past', 'backward', 'obstacles to progress', and 'a constant menace to modernity'. Given the urgency imbued in some of the Party-state's modernisation discourses one might be surprised to see the state utilising and mobilising traditional authority networks as a tool of governance. That is to say, while it is perhaps not surprising that traditional authority has continued to persist in rural communities *per se*, it *is* surprising that the Chinese state is playing a key role in *mobilising* and enmeshing traditional authority into state-linked organisational structures, like the OPA, in order to utilise it to aid state control.

There is an implicit recognition of the limits of state power in this admission. That is to say, there is a recognition that the state cannot simply impose its will on the grassroots nor simply supplant or eradicate traditional norms from community life. Rather, when implanting state institutions into rural society this requires a process of 'mutual colonisation' whereby 'institutions set roots in rural society [in order to] become an engrained part of how rural society works'.[598] As we shall discuss further in subsequent chapters, it is by building alliances with local authority figures and embedding them into

[597] Shue, V. (2012) 'Modern/Rural China', p.226
[598] Ma, H. Xu, Y. (2012) 'Reorganising Rural China from the Bottom'.

OPA committees that the state is able to institutionalise and harness the traditional authority that they possess to aid state capacity and mend gaps in its own fragile authority at the grassroots in the pursuit of state aims.

Chapter Six: OPA - Local State Cooperation and Extending State Reach

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 Chapter Argument

This chapter looks at the relationship between OPAs and the local state in the implementation of contentious state policy and mediation of disputes. It uses land conflict and infrastructure development as cases through which to trace the cooperation and negotiation between local state officials and OPA committee members at the rural grassroots. This chapter can contribute empirically to our understanding of what role OPAs play in 'social governance' and stability maintenance. It can also aid our understanding of how and why local state officials use informal actors, such as OPA committee members, for conflict governance and controversial policy implementation.

Using Joel Migdal's concept[599] - 'State-*in*-Society' - as a theoretical approach, this

[599] Migdal, J. (1988) *Strong Societies and Weak States.*

chapter argues that the local state builds alliances with social forces, or 'strongmen', like the OPA in order to increase their penetration of local societies and further state reach. In doing so, this study argues that the state uses the OPA to harness two characteristics that are useful for facilitating state penetration of the grassroots: (1) trust and authority of the OPA committee and (2) the 'biographical availability' of the OPA vis-à-vis the biographical unavailability of local officials.

This chapter will argue that while the *central* state and its policies may command authority, the local state is not trusted to implement or accurately represent policies of the centre. As such, the local state lacks both trustworthiness and authority, particularly during moments of conflict and controversy. The perceived (un)trustworthiness and lack of authority of local officials may not have been a problem in the past when the local state used coercion and force to command obedience. Yet, coercive tactics have become riskier in recent years, meaning local officials need to rely more heavily on persuasion or deference to induce cooperation from local people. In this context, the authority, trustworthiness, and believability of local officials become more important because, as we discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Five, coercive power is not as effective a tool of social control as authority. Only when people believe that decisions or decision makers are legitimate, do they defer to them naturally out of a sense of rightfulness. This chapter argues that OPA-local state alliances allow the state to harness the 'authority' and 'trustworthiness' of the OPA committee to enhance both the state's believability and societal deference in the process of governing.

The second mechanism by which the state extends its reach is via harnessing

'biographical availability'. [600] 'Biographical availability' refers to the 'absence of personal constraints [on] movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities'.[601] That is to say, when individuals have ties of obligation such as families or inflexible full-time occupations, they have less time and energy available for political participation.[602] While this term is often used for political action, it can also apply to participation in social organisations or semi-formal governance, such as, the village committee. This chapter will argue that, due to weak bureaucratic structures at the village level and the multiple occupations of village officials, the grassroots state lacks the capacity to govern villages effectively. Thus, despite village officials being imbued with the responsibilities of governing locally, given their other occupational responsibilities, they lack the time to fulfil them. Building alliances with biographically available older men on the OPA committee serves to remedy this weakness and to aid local state capacity.

6.1.2 Chapter Outline

The chapter will first address the dual pressure faced by officials to engage in infrastructure development and maintain stability at the same time. It will then look at how and why the OPA has been used as an ally by officials to aid their governance of conflict. In doing so, it will look at the following reasons for building such alliances: (1) harnessing trust and authority, (2) drawing on local knowledge, (3) using the OPA as an avoidance strategy, and (4) using the OPA as a time-saving device. This chapter draws

[600] McAdam, D. (1986) 'Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer', *American Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 92, No. 1, pp.64-90, p.70

[601] *Ibid.*

[602] While this theory has usually been used in studies of collective action, it can also be applied to other situations such as participation in social organisations or semi-formal governance (i.e. participation on parish councils in the UK; and village committees in China).

on fieldwork in rural Yunnan, Fujian, and Shaanxi provinces between March 2012 and October 2016. Data was collected using intensive interviewing and participant observation while living in villages and shadowing OPA committee members (for more on this, see Chapter Three, on Research Methods).

6.2 Village infrastructure development: a decision-making dichotomy

This section looks at the tension between the pressure on officials to implement infrastructure projects and the pressure to ensure that land disputes, which inevitably result from such projects, do not spiral out of control or threaten social stability. This section will first look at infrastructure development in the rural realm and the incentives for officials to emphasize construction projects; it will then look at resultant land conflicts; and finally, at the risks to officials who pursue coercive or forceful strategies to remove peasants from their land.

6.2.1 Land, Infrastructure, and Development

The process of development necessarily requires changing land use. China's development process has been no exception with infrastructure development and urban renewal projects, like roads, rail networks, electricity and telecommunications having been a consistent priority for the Chinese government in the reform era.[603] Although, in the early years of reform, fiscal decentralization negatively biased against infrastructure

[603] Chen, Y. Matzinger, S. Woetzel, J. (2013) 'Chinese Infrastructure: The Big Picture', *McKinsey Quarterly.* [Accessed online on 10/05/16 at: http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/winning-in-emerging-markets/chinese-infrastructure-the-big-picture]; Sahoo, P. Dash, R. Nataraj, G. (2010) 'Infrastructure Development and Economic Growth in China', *IDE Discussion Paper,* No. 261. [Accessed online on 10/05/16 at: http://www.ide.go.jp/English/ Publish/Download/Dp/pdf/261.pdf]

development in rural, poor, marginalized areas,[604] more recently the state has been active in redistributing funds to these regions to intensify rural infrastructure development and growth. Indeed, between 2001 and 2004, investment in rural roads grew by a massive 51% annually.[605] In 2006, the Hu Jintao government unveiled a major new policy initiative aimed at rebalancing investment and modernising a countryside which had fallen behind in China's development process.[606] The policy to construct a 'new socialist countryside' (*jianshe shehui zhuyi xin nongcun* 建设社会主义新农村) reallocated funding to rural areas for a broad set of policy aims from increased agricultural subsidies to free school textbooks, all arguably with the aim of creating a more affluent peasant population, reducing inequality and curbing the growing unrest in rural areas. Although the policy had a range of agendas, at the rural grassroots it has been infrastructure development that has received the most attention and uptake from rural cadres.[607] Under this policy, every village has received (or is set to receive) at least some level of state investment in paving or building roads and public squares in villages, as well as larger scale infrastructure projects like reservoirs and irrigation systems to serve whole townships. More recently, an additional national level policy encouraging urbanization and the construction of a 'beautiful countryside' (*meili xiangcun* 美丽乡村) has provided villages with further state funding for paving

[604] Yao, Y. (2009) *The Impact of Fiscal Decentralisation on Growth, Inequality, and Local Governance in Rural China.* Cornell University, Unpublished PhD Dissertation; Shen, C. Jin J. Zou H. (2006) 'Fiscal Decentralisation in China: History, Impact, Challenges and Next Steps', *World Bank Report.* [Accessed online on 07/06/16 at: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPUBSERV/Resources/47725011649 26394169/Zou.Chen.Jing.China.Fiscaldecentralization.28nov2006.processed.pdf]

[605] Chen, Y. *et al.* (2013) 'Chinese Infrastructure'.

[606] Watts, J. (2006) 'China vows to create a 'new socialist countryside' for millions for farmers', *The Guardian*. [Accessed online on 07/06/16 at: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/feb/22/ china.jonathanwatts

[607] Looney, K. (2015) 'China's Campaign to Build a New Socialist Countryside: Village Modernization, Peasant Councils, and the Ganzhou Model of Rural Development', *The China Quarterly,* Vol. 224, pp.909-932.

and landscaping public spaces, standardizing village housing, planting flowerbeds, and building public parks and other communal spaces in villages.[608]

As Graeme Smith[609] argues, there are numerous incentives for officials to prioritize these construction projects. Such projects represent political opportunities for cadres at both the town and village level because their superiors – who have control over their career prospects and bonuses under the 'one-level down' management system[610] – can see tangible evidence of them getting things done. As such, these projects are often referred to as 'political points projects' (*zhengji xiangmu* 政绩项目) carrying weight in the cadre performance assessments.[611] On the other hand, because policies like the construction of a 'new socialist countryside' and a 'beautiful countryside' come with regional quotas and targets, non-implementation (or a low implementation rate) is politically embarrassing for local officials because it gives an impression of incompetence to superiors who, under pressure from their own supervisors, further pile on the pressure to implement. In addition, because many infrastructure projects are supported by investment from higher levels of government, they bring in additional revenue from which officials or their *guanxi* networks can benefit (i.e. friends and relatives who own local construction companies).[612] Finally, as Lam[613] argues these projects also provide visible evidence of cadre

[608] Wang, W. (2014) 美丽乡村建设：现状与对策 ['Constructing a Beautiful Countryside: Current Situation & Countermeasures'], 华中师范大学学报 [*Huazhong Normal University Journal*.] [Accessed online on 06/06/16 at: http://www.cqvip.com/qk/81671x/201401/48863975.html]

[609] Smith, G. (2013) 'Measurement, promotions and patterns of behaviour in Chinese local government', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol 40, No 6, pp.1027-1050.

[610] Lee, C.K. Zhang, Y. (2017) 'Governing the Counter-movement'.

[611] Smith, G. (2013) 'Measurement, Promotions and Patterns'.

[612] Goodman, D. (2007) 'Narratives of Change: Culture and Local Economic Development', in, *The Chinese economy in the 21st century*, eds, Krug, B. Hendrischke, H. (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing), pp.180-184.

[613] Lam, T. (2000) 'The local state under reform: a study of a county in Hainan Province, China' Australian National University, PhD Dissertation. pp.179-180 cited in: Smith, G. (2013) 'Measurement, Promotions and Patterns'.

achievements to local people and can be packaged as attempts to do something of benefit to the local community, thereby potentially eliciting the respect, deference, and support of the local community. Consequently, there is often considerable pressure on rural cadres to instigate and complete these infrastructure projects locally.

6.2.2 Changing Land Use and Land Conflict

At the same time, however, all these rural construction projects require land – a commodity not always in ready supply in contemporary rural China. Since opening-up, land conflict has been one of the most combustible sources of discontent in rural areas. Academic researchers have documented numerous examples of land seizures and compulsory evictions often in exchange for minimal compensation.[614] Between 1985 and 1988, an average of 208,000 hectares of cultivated land were lost per year to rural and urban construction.[615] The first six years of the 1990s saw the further disappearance of 4.85 million hectares of cultivated land, most noticeably in East and Central China[616] and, since 2000 the amount of land classified as urban has more than doubled.[617] While small scale construction affects individuals' farmland, large-scale projects have led to the resettlement of households or even whole villages, altering the course of peasant lives and livelihoods in the process.[618] The development of rural land has therefore often been conflict-ridden and violent as peasants are forcefully dispossessed of their farmland and

[614] Hsing, Y. (2006) 'Brokering Power and Property in China's Townships', *Pacific Review*, Vol. 1, No. 19, pp.103-124; Ho, P. (2001) 'Who Owns China's Land? Policies, Property Rights and Deliberate Institutional Ambiguity, *The China Quarterly,* No. 166, pp.394-421

[615] Kan, K. (2014) 'Land, Distributive Politics'.

[616] *Ibid.*

[617] Lang, F. (2015) 'The Great Sprawl of China', *The Economist*. [Accessed online on 02/08/16 at: http://www.economist.com/news/china/21640396-how-fix-chinese-cities-great-sprawl-china]

[618] Croll, E. (1999) 'Involuntary Resettlement in Rural China: The Local View', *The China Quarterly*, No. 158, pp.468-483.

uprooted from rural communities.[619] With local government budgets under strain from unfunded mandates,[620] selling rural land is the fastest method by which officials can raise money for essential public policy areas. What makes land disputes even more combustible is that, with little regulation and the ability to use their positions of power to make money, some local officials have used the rural construction boom to line their own pockets often illegally and at the expense of peasant farmers.[621] Understandably, land expropriation has become one of the most explosive sources of social unrest in rural areas.[622]

Nevertheless, it should be noted that - contrary to their portrayal in most media and academic articles[623] - not all rural land conflicts fit into the tidy narrative of state versus society. While whole-village resettlements may unify an entire village against the local state, many smaller *within* village infrastructure projects are less clear cut involving a variety of stakeholders with competing interests. Indeed, local projects, built under the 'beautiful countryside' or 'new socialist countryside' policies, such as small roads and public squares, can divide villages across a variety of cleavages, with projects supported by some residents but met with resistance by others who will lose land if the projects go ahead.

[619] Kan, K. (2014) 'Land, Distributive Politics'.
[620] Fan, Y. (2015) 'The Centre Decides and the Local Pays: Mandates and Politics in Local Government Financial Management in China', *Local Government Studies,* Vol. 14, No. 4, pp.516-533
[621] So, A. (2009) 'Peasant conflict and the local predatory state in the Chinese countryside', *The Journal of Peasant Studies,* Vol. 34, No. 3-4, pp.560–581.
[622] This activity has been made more pervasive by ambiguous and incomplete legislation on collective and individual land rights. Ho, S. Lin, G. (2005) 'The State, Land System and Land Development Processes in Contemporary China', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers,* Vol. 2, No. 95, pp.411-436.
[623] O'Brien, K. Li, L. (2006) *Rightful Resistance*; Guo, X. (2001) 'Land Expropriation and Rural Land Conflicts in China', *The China Quarterly,* No. 166; Pomfret, J. (2013) 'Chinese Farmers Revolt Against Government Land Grab as China Mulls New Laws', *Huffington Post* [Accessed online on 03/08/16 at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com /2013/03/07/chinese-farmersrevolt _n_2826703.html]

Whether such conflicts divide state and society or intra-societal actors, it is ultimately the grassroots officials who have responsibility for ensuring projects continue without land conflicts spiralling out of control. In the past, when officials were met with resistance to land redevelopment, given the pressures and incentives to carry out such projects and the limited checks on their behaviour, forced evictions and other coercive[624] or violent strategies became widespread methods for ensuring project go-ahead.[625] While these methods are still in use, they have become far riskier for local officials in recent years. First, in an acknowledgement that excesses in land expropriation have affected social stability, the 2011 Expropriation Regulation has established new procedures that place an emphasis on due process in expropriation and explicitly prohibit forced evictions. This regulation has, for the first time, made coercive state strategies unlawful.[626] Second, as a number of scholars and journalists have documented,[627] the advent and popularisation of the internet, and micro-blogging in particular, has increased the threat that such behaviour will be exposed and publicized, attracting negative media attention and subsequent punishment by superiors as per cases like the 'Siege of Wukan' in 2011. Third, Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign has made officials at the grassroots nervous about stepping out of line lest they attract unwanted attention and scrutiny or make enemies that

[624] Such as, threats, cutting off the supply of water, heating, gas or power or blocking road access. Gardener, V. (2012) 'A step forward for property owners in China, but risks remain', *BLP Expert Legal Insights*. [Accessed online on 12/06/16 at: http://www.blplaw.com/expert-legal-insights/articles/a-step-forward-for-property-owners-in-china-but-risks-remain]

[625] Hornby, L. (2015) 'China Migration: Dying for Land', *Financial Times.* [Accessed online on 07/06/16 at: http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/33ae0866-3098-11e5-91ac-a5e17d9b4cff.html#axzz4AuNuYc5V]

[626] The government can no longer forcibly remove owners from their premises. Instead, they have to apply to the court and seek a court enforcement order. The 2012 Enforcement Regulation sets out further specific criteria that the courts must take into account when deciding whether or not to issue such an order. Gardener, V. (2012)

[627] Yang, G. (2009) *The Power of the Internet in China*, (New York: Colombia University Press); Thornton, P. (2010) 'The New Cybersects: Popular Religion, Repression, and Resistance,' in, *Chinese Society*, eds, Perry, E. Selden, M. (Abingdon: Routledge); Gu, Y. (2012) 'Bringing Down 'Watch Brother': China's Online Corruption-Busters Tread a Fine Line', *Time Magazine.* [Accessed online on 07/06/16 at: http://world.time.com/ 2012/10/10/bringing-down-watch-brother-chinas-online-corruption-busters-tread-a-fine-line/]

could expose their past misdemeanours. Finally, and most importantly, the cadre evaluation system has provided a mechanism for punishing officials that fail to prevent social unrest occurring in their localities. Under the 'one veto rule' (*yi piao foujue* 一票否决), failure to prevent social disturbances[628] deprives officials of their bonuses and promotion opportunities, removes their government unit's eligibility for organisational honours, and negates all other accomplishments, however successful, achieved by the unit throughout the course of the year, in the annual performance evaluation.[629] This policy provides an incentive not to use force to make peasants relinquish their land lest they resort to protesting in response.

6.2.3 Section Summary

To conclude, what is clear from the aforementioned discussion is that officials, particularly at the lowest ranks of state hierarchy, face a cascade of bureaucratic pressure to ensure infrastructure projects go ahead while maintaining stability at the same time. Balancing the differing interests involved and ensuring all local parties are satisfied with the process so as to prevent unrest is a difficult balancing act for local officials. In an era in which force is an increasingly risky strategy for implementing contentious policies, local officials must seek innovative ways to ensure projects go ahead, while preventing popular disputes spilling over into violence or demonstrations. Given this context, the question of how officials actually go about getting things done while minimising

[628] Failure to prevent or implement key policy areas like failure to prevent industrial accidents or over-quota births also hold 'veto-power'. Lee, C.K. Zhang, Y. (2017) 'Governing the Countermovement'.

[629] 'Priority targets' which attract 'veto-power' vary according to location. However, studies suggest 'birth control' and 'public unrest' are nationally enforced. Heimer gives the example of one county in Zhejiang, where the three situations that held veto power were: embezzlement of more than ¥200,000; violence (resulting in death); and demonstrations (of 50+ people). Heimer, M (née Edin) (2003) 'State Capacity and local Agent Control', p.40; Whiting, S. (2004) 'The Cadre Evaluation System at the Grassroots: The Paradox of Party Rule', in, *Holding China Together,* eds, Naughton, B. Yang, D. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) pp.106-107

discontent is an important one. Indeed, Kevin O'Brien recently noted that, thus far, 'too little of the literature on rural governance addresses 'how officials actually get things done.''[630] This is the main focus of this Chapter henceforth, thereby providing new evidence and analysis to shed light on this important aspect of governance in rural China.

6.3 Harnessing Authority and Trust

This research has found that local cadres repeatedly sought out OPA committee members to act as allies in their bid to ensure that local infrastructure projects went ahead successfully while maintaining stable and harmonious community relations. This section addresses one of the ways in which the OPA is a useful instrument for furthering state penetration of the grassroots. It focusses on how and why the local state seeks to harness authority, respect, and trust embedded within the OPA, beginning by assessing what we mean by trust and why trust is important in the context of land dispute resolution. It then looks at two case studies of land disputes that were resolved by OPAs – the first regards a contentious public square and the second a new main road – to understand how trust and authority where key to their resolution. Finally, it points out that it is not just village officials who seek to harness trust and respect from OPAs, but township officials at higher state levels as well. As such, alliances between the local state and OPA committee appears to be an official tactic (rather than an ad hoc measure) utilised to ensure that disputes are resolved before they escalate.

[630] Yeh, E. O'Brien, K. (2015) *Rural Politics in Contemporary China,* (London: Routledge) p.6

6.3.1 Defining Trust

At my fieldsites, local officials sought to build alliances with OPA committee members during instances of land conflict in order to harness useful characteristics – such as authority, trustworthiness, and respect – that they themselves were lacking. A brief definition of trust is necessary here. Trust[631] has been most commonly defined as 'a particular level of the subjective probability with which an agent assesses that another agent…will perform a particular action, both before [s/he] can monitor such action … and in a context in which it affects his [or her] own action.'[632] That is to say, trust is a response to our ignorance or uncertainty with respect to the unknowable future actions of others[633] and a way of coping with 'the limits of our foresight'.[634] Trust does not concern all future actions in general, but all future actions which affect our present decision making.[635] Therefore, as Diego Gambetta argues:

> 'when we say we trust someone or that someone is trustworthy, we implicitly mean that the probability that [they] will perform an action that is beneficial or at least not detrimental to us is high enough for us to consider engaging in some form of cooperation with [them]. Correspondingly, when we say that someone is untrustworthy, we imply that that probability is low enough for us to refrain from doing so.'[636]

[631] For more on political trust and social capital see, Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone;* Putnam, R. (2002) *Democracies in Flux,* (New York: Oxford University Press); Gambetta, D. (1988a) *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, (Oxford: Blackwell); Fukuyama, F. (1995) *Trust: Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, (New York: Simon & Schuster); Cook, K. (2001) *Trust in Society* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation).
[632] Gambetta, D (1988b) 'Can We Trust Trust?', in, *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, (Oxford: Blackwell) p.217
[633] *Ibid.* p.218
[634] Shklar, J. (1984) *Ordinary Vices* (Harvard: The Belknap Press) p.151
[635] Gambetta, D (1988b) 'Can We Trust Trust?', p.218
[636] *Ibid.* p.217

A wide literature has shown that grassroots officials in China tend to be young, inexperienced, and lacking in popular respect and trust[637] affecting their credibility and, arguably, hindering their ability to build cooperative relationships with local people. Although trust is useful for governing generally, it is particularly important when managing controversial policies - such as the expropriation of peasant land for infrastructure. This is because the stakes are high (i.e. there may be a loss to livelihoods) and there is an element of uncertainty involved. That is to say, villagers have to decide whether to give up their land *before* knowing whether the project is worth giving up land for; *before* knowing whether the ascribed benefits will indeed materialise; and, usually, *before* compensation is provided.[638] As scholars have noted, trust is especially relevant when there is 'the possibility of *exit*, betrayal and defection'[639] from the cooperative relationship. As the following discussion will show, the men who comprise OPA committees are perceived as trustworthy and authoritative and therefore make useful partners for officials suffering from a lack of public respect, trust, and confidence in their leadership[640] and who, as a result, struggle to engage the cooperation of villagers.

6.3.2 The Case of LH Village Public Square

To illustrate this point, I investigated an example from LH village in Fujian where the

[637] Hansen, M. (2007) 'Organising the Old'; Li, L. (2004) ''Political trust in rural China,'' *Modern China*, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp.228–58; Tsai, L. (2007) 'Solidary Groups, Informal Accountability, and Local Public Goods Provision in Rural China,' *American Political Science Review*, Vol.101, No.2, pp.355-372

[638] Compensation procedures differ in different locations and according to local officials. However, at my fieldsites, village officials reported that they are being advised to provide compensation after building work has started because of negative past experiences of providing compensation before a project has started. They reported that, in the past, some villagers had taken the compensation and then quibbled over what had been agreed or had changed their minds or had sought to provide different land than that which had initially been agreed. The result, in one village, was a road that was meant to run straight through the village ended up being wiggly so as to avoid animal huts, trees, or other land that peasants thought most valuable. However, there could also be other less benign reasons that officials want to provide compensation on project completion, and this uncertainty is likely to feed into the perceive untrustworthiness of officials.

[639] Gambetta, D (1988b) 'Can We Trust Trust?', p.218

[640] Hansen, M. (2007) 'Organising the Old'.

OPA committee's perceived trustworthiness was harnessed by officials to resolve a local land conflict. During my time living in LH village, the whole region was in the process of constructing a 'beautiful countryside'. Every village in the area was set to receive state investment to re-design their communal spaces.[641] In LH village, a public square was planned to be the centrepiece. According to the designs, there were only a few suitable locations for the public square, the largest and most central of which overlapped with the site of a cattle pen used by several households. The land ownership of the cattle pen was highly ambiguous. The land had been appropriated by the state from a local land owner[642] for collectivisation in the 1950s and then used – along with the landowner's house – as the township government offices. In the late 1990s, the township government relocated to a bigger site several miles away leaving the house and land to fall into dereliction. In the intervening years, a number of nearby households – in small team number two (*di er zu* 第二组) – used the land for rearing animals and had joined together to build a cattle pen on the site. Given that the land had not been officially allocated for use by these villagers, local officials working on the village re-design were determined that the land should be used for collective purposes. Nevertheless, they did concede that some compensation should be provided, given that the villagers had been using the land for many years and had invested in building the cattle pen.

Yet, the affected villagers, in small team number two, had nowhere else to keep their cows and believed the compensation to be too low; they resisted the project's development and sought to prevent it from going ahead in its preferred location. It is

[641] There were different levels of investment available to villages and LH village had been allocated the highest level of funding for a comprehensive redesign of the village's communal spaces.
[642] The land had belonged to a landowner who had been executed when the CCP came to power. His immediate family fled the area.

worth noting, however, that there was not a clear state-society divide in this conflict. The majority of villagers were in favour of the re-design; it was just the households who used the cattle pen who were opposed to the plans.

With most of the village and the township government backing the project, the village officials were under pressure to begin the development. For several weeks the village head and party secretary worked to persuade the affected villagers of the value of the re-design. But, as the weeks went by, the dissenting villagers' position became more entrenched. A key obstacle to resolving the deadlock was that the affected villagers did not trust the officials to be telling them the truth about the benefits of the project nor about the levels of compensation available. They were therefore unwilling to listen to the village officials or cooperate with them. Indeed, the issue of trust was highlighted in my conversations with the village head who specifically complained that:

> There is compensation for this land, but they still will not budge. Every day we sit and talk with them for hours, but they will never believe what we tell them. They do not trust us nor anything we say. It is hard to convince villagers to do anything. Peasants are the least educated, most narrow-minded of all society. Every day officials from higher levels of government call me to see if I have resolved the problem but every day I have to report that we have not yet changed their minds … In the past, the village officials solved these problems easily. We could just knock a hut, a wall or a pen down. We did not need their agreement. Back then we could just tell them it had to be done, give them some compensation, and get on with it. Now we have to convince them. We cannot force people to give up their land because there is more emphasis now on following the law. Instead, we have to negotiate and persuade people to agree to these projects themselves.[643]

Here we can see that the low levels of trust between the villagers and the village officials negatively affected the state's persuasiveness and believability in the negotiations. In

[643] Int. with Village Head, LH-Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)

addition, we can also see how this lack of trust affected the villagers' willingness to cooperate with officials and their agendas. As the official here explains, the lack of trust in local officials was not a problem in the past when they were able to use force and coercion to resolve the problem. However, now that coercive approaches are frowned upon centrally and riskier to adopt locally, and since there is now more emphasis on 'due process' in land expropriation, officials need to rely much more on their ability to be persuasive and believable in negotiations with disputants. Being persuasive and believable, particularly over issues that can adversely affect livelihoods, is more difficult without strong and productive relationships of trust.

The lack of trust felt towards the village officials not only appeared to influence their believability and persuasiveness, but also appeared to have a negative effect on their authority and levels of respect locally. During this dispute, villagers both for[644] and against the redesign were openly disrespectful towards the village officials. Almost every day, I observed gatherings of villagers cursing the village head and party secretary, discussing their 'incompetence' and 'inexperience' claiming that they were 'too young' to hold positions of authority and bemoaning that 'no one listens to them' as a result.[645] The villagers whose land had been affected muttered[646] about past corrupt practices

[644] Many of the villagers who were in favour of the public square were critical of both the affected villagers for resisting the redesign and the village officials for their inability to make it happen quickly. They simultaneously cursed the village officials for being incompetent, and many stopped speaking to the villagers in small team number two who, in their minds, were holding the project up.

[645] For more on the attributes that engender authority in rural China see Chapter Five. For more on theories surrounding 'authority of elders' and 'patrilineages' in rural China see Chapters 6 and 11 in Fei, X. (1992) *From the Soil*.

[646] To me and to each other in my presence.

undertaken by the party secretary[647] as evidence of his untrustworthiness and, as I observed, took to shutting their front doors in the village officials' faces.

At the same time, many of the villagers who supported the project also showed the party secretary and village head disrespect because of their inability to get the project off the ground. Several villagers (over the age of 50) nicknamed them the 'the kids' (*xiao haizi* 小孩子) and whispered it at them behind their backs. It was clear that the village officials were not well respected and that this was affecting their ability to get people to listen to their views. A wider literature reveals that this is a typical perception of grassroots officials. Indeed, O'Brien and Li,[648] and other scholars,[649] have shown that village officials are perceived as the least trusted level of the state, often described as 'the enemy',[650] and framed as subverts of a benevolent central state's policy prescriptions. While, as Stern[651] argues, in practice, this view of the parochial and predatory local state as subverting the central state's good intentions is over simplistic, places too much blame on local officials, and underemphasizes structural conditions (often created at the centre) that incentivise such behaviour at the grassroots. Nevertheless, whether fair or not, this

[647] Although many villagers alluded to or spoke openly about this, I intentionally did not seek to gather evidence on cadre corruption given the possible ethical implications involved. It is mentioned here to show the villagers *perceptions* which may or may not have been grounded in reality.

[648] O'Brien, K. Li, L. (1995) cited in: O'Brien, K. (2015) 'Rightful Resistance Revisited', in, *Rural Politics in Contemporary China,* eds, Yeh, E. O'Brien, K. (London: Routledge) p.138

[649] For examples see: Bernstein, T. Lü, X. (2000) 'Taxation without Representation'; Pei, M. (2006) *China's Trapped Transition: The Limits of Developmental Autocracy,* (Cambridge, M.A: Harvard University Press).

[650] 'The centre is our benefactor, the province is our relative, the county is a good person, the township is an evil person, and the village is our enemy' is a saying often heard in rural areas that demonstrates a centre – periphery dichotomy in the perception of state officials. O'Brien, K. (2015) 'Rightful Resistance Revisited'.

[651] Stern, R. (2013) *Environmental Litigation in China: A Study in Political Ambivalence,* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

prevailing *perception* of village officials as untrustworthy clearly influences how villagers interact and engage with them.

In order to overcome these personal shortcomings, the village officials both in this case and at my other fieldsites in similar disputes, sought to make use of the OPA committee's trusted and respected status in the village to help them resolve the dispute. They did this in different ways in different locations, and again in different ways as conflicts unfolded. However, the most common methods were to (1) repeatedly drop in on the OPA committee members to discuss a dispute and seek advice on how to deal with it, (2) to take some of the OPA committee with them to meet with disputants', as well as (3) delegating responsibility for resolving the conflict to the OPA entirely.

In this particular case, over the course of several weeks the village officials kept the OPA committee members updated on the land dispute and sought their advice throughout. However, once it was clear that the village officials were not making any progress, they asked the OPA to take over the responsibility of 'conducting thought-work on the intractable villagers'.[652] Having discussed the plans with officials, each other, and other members of the village community, the OPA committee were convinced that the redesign would not only make the village a nicer place to live, but it would also be a good opportunity for an otherwise poor village to develop. They believed that a project that would 'serve the whole village should not be scuppered by the self-interest of a few'.[653] In describing how things progressed, the trustworthiness, authority, and respect possessed by the OPA committee appeared to be central to their ability to resolve the conflict. As

[652] Int. with Village Official Three, LH Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)
[653] Int. with OPA Head, LH Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)

the OPA head described:

> Initially the village head and party secretary spoke with them, but after the first few weeks the villagers would just shut the door in their faces and refuse to listen. When members of the OPA went to talk to them, because of our age and high standing in this village they did not dare shut the door on us. They said, "since you have come here to talk with us we will listen and hear you out". … We [on the OPA committee] know everyone in this village and they respect and trust us. I am a retired teacher and well educated so villagers often come to ask for my help[654] and I usually try my best to help them. The other [OPA committee members] are also highly respected. Because we have a good reputation for being helpful and trustworthy it is usually easier for villagers to accept our opinion [than the opinion of the village officials] and easier for them to back down without losing face… [In the end], the villagers accepted the compensation and we found a number of places around the village for most[655] of the cows to be kept.[656]

What is emphasized here is that the high standing, respect, and trustworthiness of the OPA committee affected the villagers' willingness to listen to their arguments about the redesign and made the OPA committee's opinion appear more credible and believable to them than that of the village officials. Furthermore, the fact that these qualities make it easier for the villagers to change their minds and back down without it causing them a loss of 'face' suggests that in some cases villagers may be won around by the official arguments, but are unable to change their position because of a loss of face and damage to their reputation. Hearing the arguments from people of who are older and held in high esteem, i.e. from people they are customarily expected to defer to, appears to make backing down easier for those involved.

[654] For example, writing family trees; writing wedding invitations; chronicling 'red packet' (*hongbao* 红包) information at family ceremonies; putting on extra-classes for children after school.
[655] Some of the cows had to be sold.
[656] Int. with OPA Head, LH Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015). This sentiment was also expressed in interviews with the affected villagers.

6.3.3 The Case of JG Village Road

The issue of the land dispute described above was by no means an isolated case of OPA dispute resolution, nor was it isolated to one region in my fieldwork. Indeed, officials' use of OPAs to negotiate and resolve land disputes that were too intractable for the village committee to resolve themselves were provided as examples in 28 of the 30 villages I visited for this research. Furthermore, in all bar one location, possession of 'popular trust' and 'respect' were cited by interviewees as reasons why OPA committees are successful at negotiating and resolving contentious land disputes. This does not, therefore, appear to be a phenomenon limited to one region. The case of JG village in Yunnan is another example. JG village had planned to build a road connecting seven of its twelve natural-villages,[657] providing faster access by road to the county seat and on to the provincial capital. The purpose was largely to make it easier to transport agricultural produce, in particular oranges and lemons, in bulk out of the village and onto the public highways where they could go on to serve fruit markets across China. The main road, however, was set to run through arable land potentially depleting some farmers' crop yields. While a number of farmers supported the road believing it would help them transport more fruit more quickly, others were unwilling to give up their land or at least wanted to negotiate higher compensation.

As in LH village, the village officials initially set about trying to persuade them of the road's benefits. Despite having succeeded in winning some of the farmers around to the idea, the village officials remained under pressure from the town government to resolve the remaining conflicts in order to begin the project quickly. Bowing to this pressure, the

[657] Some villages are divided by natural village rather than by 'teams' or 'small groups'. Some villages have both natural villages *and* 'teams' and 'small groups'.

village committee brought in diggers unannounced one morning to start clearing the area despite having not reached an agreement with all affected parties. What had been a relatively peaceful negotiation descended into acrimony when the outraged villagers blocked their path and refused to budge. Although the village officials claimed to have been intending to clear the land belonging only to those people who had already agreed, most villagers believed they should have waited until consensus had been reached. After that, because of the diggers debacle, which exacerbated the already general lack of trust in the village officials, more farmers were now against the road on principle and the project came to standstill.[658]

To try to resolve the dispute, the party secretary called a meeting with the OPA to ask for their support. Although the OPA committee were not happy at the village officials' handling of the situation, they believed that the road would be good for the village and begrudgingly agreed to help.[659] The task of persuading each of the affected families was divided up between the OPA committee, with each OPA committee member responsible for persuading the families living within his own natural-village. [660] This was because, as we discussed in Chapter Five, the OPA representatives of each area had closer ties to the families living there and would, therefore, be more persuasive to them. Over several weeks the OPA committee members made repeated visits to the affected families to conduct 'thought-work' and persuade them to change their minds. Exerting emotional

[658] Int. with Party Secretary, JG Village, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2014); Int. with OPA Deputy Head, JG Village, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2014); Int. with Villager Three, JG Village, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2014).
[659] They helped despite believing that the officials were 'taking liberties' (*kun gutou* 啃骨头) by bringing them in at such a late stage. *Kun gutou* is used in Yunnanese local dialect to mean feeling 'used' by someone or 'taking liberties' or 'taking advantage'.
[660] For example, no.2 natural village OPA head was responsible for the affected families in no.2 natural village. In this village, because of its size, each natural village had a representative rather than each 'team' or 'small group', as in some other locations.

pressure on the villagers, they discussed how the road would 'benefit the *entire community*' and made it clear that the affected farmers were 'standing in the way of progress for the *whole village* and its *future generations*' (*xia yidai* 下一代) if they continued to block the project.

The villagers I interviewed about this incident said that the OPA committee were largely believed to be 'impartial judges' who were trusted in the community. In addition, because of their high standing, they were also difficult people to say no to. As such, in the end it was 'out of respect for the OPA leaders, [that the villagers[661]] relented and the road was built.'[662] This example also demonstrates how the authority of the OPA committee can be useful for negotiating with and placating villagers so as to ensure that infrastructure projects go ahead without causing unrest. The party secretary in this village also told me that the village officials had learnt from their experience of this project, and had sought to engage the OPA at an earlier stage in later development projects. When a potentially contentious irrigation project was planned for the village a few years later the OPA were consulted and brought in to help from the outset.[663]

6.3.4 Township Official's Mediation Tactics

The desire to harness trust and respect possessed by the OPA was not limited just to village officials. Township officials also stressed a desire to harness or use the trust embedded within OPA committees for state aims. Indeed, when interviewing township

[661] Only one farmer would not budge and the route of the road was changed to go around his land.
[662] Int. with OPA Committee Member One, JG Village, Zhuanping, Yunnan, (2012) and reiterated in a subsequent interview in 2014.
[663] In what is akin to Teet's experience of 'policy learning'. Teets, J. (2014) *Civil Society under Authoritarianism.*

officials who had specific responsibility for social stability and resolving conflict locally, they often pointed to partnering with OPA committees as one of their tactics. As one township official told me:

> When we go to sort out disputes, we never go alone. If you go alone there is no record of what you have said. Instead we go in pairs from the government and we take with us an older villager from the OPA committee who is particularly respected, trusted, and who enjoys much local prestige. The reason we do this is [firstly] that there will be a record of our meeting that villagers can trust, and [secondly] because villagers are more likely to listen to the views and opinions of this respected older person than they are to us …. On most occasions, we let the older villager listen to the grievances of the respective parties, say a few words [about the conflict to the disputants], and make a decision. Because this person is neutral, trustworthy, [and held in high esteem], most of the time the villagers agree to their view. In more complex cases, we have to go several times, and if the dispute still cannot be solved only then do we start pursuing the legal avenue. It is only in conflicts between two different villages where this approach does not work. This is because in those cases, there is no trusted, impartial actor who can mediate [since the elders are assumed to be biased towards their own village]. In those cases, we have to go directly to resolving the problem through the courts.[664]

Likewise, in Shaanxi, a town government official made a similar point in saying that,

> 'villagers are more likely to listen to the government if we bring a member of the OPA committee with us [when resolving a dispute]. They are better known to the villagers than we are and villagers are therefore more likely to trust them and listen to their views. It is a tradition here to listen to the views of these types of people, so most villagers will accept a decision made by a member of the OPA'[665]

In these cases, we can see that bringing the OPA along to aid dispute mediation is a clear tactic of the local state. The township officials here point to the trust and authority of the OPA committee members as the reason for their usefulness to the local state. This point – that authority, respectability, and trustworthiness are key to successfully negotiating

[664] Int. with Town Government Official One, Foshan, Fujian (2015).
[665] Int. with Township Government Official, Shaanxi, (2015).

with disputants – was reiterated in interviews with OPA committee members, villagers, and government officials across all three provinces and across different levels of the state hierarchy from village and township officials to central state officials within China's National Committee on Ageing (CNCA). As we discussed in more length in Chapter Five, the terms *weiwang* (威望) which can be translated as prestige, respectability, or high social standing and *weixin* (威信) which can be translated as the possession of popular trust, credibility or having credit with the people, came up time and again in discussions about the OPA committees' ability and success in resolving conflict at the grassroots. It therefore appeared to be the view of the state (at varying levels) that the possession of these characteristics creates the conditions upon which villagers trust the OPA to not act in a detrimental way towards them and are therefore willing to consider believing their views and engaging them in cooperation.[666] Indeed, CNCA officials at the national level also stressed that 'older people who possess these characteristics have a special ability to negotiate and solve intractable disputes that others are unable to resolve'.[667] Building alliances with those who possess such qualities, like the OPA committee, allows the state to harness such characteristics to fulfil the state's aim of the consensual resolution of disputes and the maintenance of stability. As such, alliances between OPA and local state officials serve to enhance state capacity by enhancing the state's believability at a time when being credible and persuasive (as opposed to forceful and coercive) are more important than ever before.

6.3.5 Section Summary

To conclude, this section has sought to demonstrate how local officials – both in the

[666] Gambetta, D. (1988b) 'Can We Trust Trust?', p.217-218
[667] Int. with CNCA Government Official, Oxford (2015).

village and township – seek to harness the trust and respect possessed by OPA committees to aid dispute resolution. In doing so, it has shown how disputants are often more willing to listen and defer to OPA members – whom they trust and hold in high regard – than they are to local officials. These qualities are particularly useful to the local state now that force and coercion is not condoned by the centre and have become riskier ways of implementing infrastructure projects. Local officials instead need to rely more on being persuasive and getting locals to agree to these projects themselves.

6.4 Harnessing Local Knowledge

This section looks at how OPA committees' knowledge of local people and local affairs are useful to the local state during land disputes. The first part of this section addresses knowledge of local people and how this can help the local state tailor negotiating strategies to the individual personalities of the disputants. The second part of this section looks at knowledge of local affairs – such as land usage and boundaries – and demonstrates how recourse to this information can help the state negotiate land conflicts (either between themselves and villager(s) or between two or more village households) more quickly.

6.4.1 Expanding the 'Emotion Control' Network

A key aspect of why the OPA committee members were repeatedly brought in to act as cooperative allies of the state in conflicts over infrastructure was linked to 'emotion control', a tactic used by the state for dealing with protestors and disputants. In an article

on urban conflict governance, sociologists Ching Kwan Lee and Zhang Yonghong[668] argue that specific social skills are key for stability preservation. Local officials responsible for stability maintenance and conflict mediation in urban areas, they argue, 'display remarkably astute sensitivity to people's psychology, character, and social dynamics' and stress the importance of 'emotion control' in their relationships with aggrieved citizens in the context of protest and conflict. Specifically, Lee and Zhang[669] showed how local officials observed that when dealing with protesters or those resisting a contentious state policy (i.e. infrastructure and land conflict), even if different protestors' grievances and interests are the same, mediation and resolution will require 'different language and methods' because of the different personalities of the people involved. This again can be linked back to trust because the use of different approaches is designed to find ways to best elicit trust in, or deferral to, officials (either to trust that they will provide compensation, or trust that they will enforce penalties for non-cooperation) in order get disputants to cooperate with the state. Those involved with mediation therefore need to be flexible enough to improvise and adapt their mediation approaches and tactics to fit the character and personalities of the actors involved in the dispute.

However, in *rural* townships, officials responsible for stability maintenance and dispute mediation usually neither live nor work in the villages they are responsible for. In addition, because much of their daily work takes place in the township government offices and because they usually have large numbers of villages under their jurisdiction, township officials visit villages too infrequently to get to know all residents. Likewise, township

[668] Lee, C.K. Zhang Y. (2013) 'The Power of Instability'.
[669] *Ibid.*

leaders rotate to other jurisdictions every three to four years[670] reducing their ability to get to know the people living in areas they are responsible for. These officials therefore tend to be outsiders who are *not* intimately familiar with villagers' personalities and characteristics, nor with the social dynamics of local communities. Nevertheless, rural township officials interviewed for this thesis reported that sensitivity to individual psychologies and personalities remained an important tactic for the local state in dealing with disputes and resolving conflicts 'harmoniously'. Central to employing this tactic in rural areas was cooperation or consultation with older people held in high esteem (*you weiwang de laoren* 有威望的老人) in villages, specifically retired teachers, many of whom sit on the OPA committee. As one department head, responsible for township stability maintenance, put it:

> [When mediating local disputes], it is useful for us to take one of the older people [from the OPA] with us because they are usually familiar with the majority of villagers. Typically, at least one of the men on the OPA committee is a retired [village] teacher. Not only do retired teachers command a lot of respect, trust, and prestige, but they are also familiar with each villager and their respective personalities because of acting as their teacher in the past. When we go to mediate these conflicts, it is important for us to understand the personalities of the people we are dealing with so we know how to approach the issue with them. We need to know what tactic or approach will be most persuasive to that person … [and] which approach will be most likely to resolve the conflict. Retired teachers are well suited to helping us with this task.[671]

Similarly, a village official in Yunnan also highlighted this tactic when he claimed that,

> 'Because of their old age and long-term residence in this village, the OPA committee members are very familiar with people here. They know most villagers' characters and

[670] Kennedy, J. (2007) 'The implementation of village elections and tax-for-free reform', in, *Grassroots Political Reform in Contemporary China*, eds, Perry, E. Goldman, M. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); Yang, Z. (2003) *Local Government and Politics in China: Challenges from Below*, (Abingdon: Routledge) p.119

[671] Int. with Township Government Official One, Foshan, Fujian, (2015).

> their families, and they know how they interact with others in the village. They have seen them grow up from children to adults and know all about their lives. We [the village officials] are younger, and some of us have lived in the county seat for several years. Although we know everyone in this village, we are not always as familiar with their character or current situation. When we have a problem with one villager or we need to persuade them to do something, we will always consult the OPA head first. Sometimes it is easier to let the OPA head talk with them directly because they know how to discuss the issue in a way that that person will listen to.'[672]

By engaging members of the OPA as cooperative allies here, the local state is able to extend its reach and penetration of the grassroots. This is because, by consulting or cooperating with such actors in the process of mediating conflict, the state is able to compensate for its own lack of local knowledge by acquiring access to, and use of, the institutional memory and local knowledge capacity of the OPA committee members they consult with. The tactic of focusing on retired teachers in particular, because of their close familiarity with a majority of villagers', further serves to expand the network of people about whom the state has access to information, thereby expanding its understanding of the local population and their personalities. Access to this knowledge increases the state's ability to adapt mediation approaches to fit the character of the actors involved, with the aim of improving the outcome of mediation for the state - be that the production of a certain outcome or a swift resolution of the conflict.[673]

[672] Int. with Party Secretary, JG Village, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2014).

[673] It is interesting to note that Lee and Zhang state that officials in urban areas adapt to local peoples' individual personalities. However, they do not provide any insight into how they acquire this knowledge. For example, do the urban grassroots officials usually live in the communities they govern? Do they stay in their positions longer? Do they govern smaller communities where they are better able to get to know the local population? It is quite possible that, as in rural areas, the urban officials also utilize local gatekeepers to provide them with a window into the local community they govern. Lee, C. Zhang, Y. (2013) 'The Power of Instability'; Lee, C. Zhang, Y. (2017) 'Governing the Counter-movement'.

6.4.2 Knowledge of Local Affairs

Other aspects of OPA members' local knowledge were also harnessed by township officials as a way to extend the state's governing capacity. Specifically, township officials stressed how knowledge and memory of local history and affairs of a village can help make negotiating land conflicts easier and quicker. Again, access to this kind of local knowledge was made available through cooperation with OPA committee members. According to a township official responsible for mediating village land and water conflicts in the township:

> Older people on the OPA committee tend to be knowledgeable about local history and affairs in villages. They often have a greater sense of where the original boundaries of the land used to lie, which land belongs to which family … and how land use has changed overtime … Because they are more familiar with the local history [than we are], there is no need for us to endlessly go back and forward to check what we are being told [against government records]. … Often disputants bend the truth when putting forward their case to us. [However,] it is more difficult for them to do this with the older villager present … Having someone there who is able to quickly tell us the facts makes the mediation process quicker and easier.[674]

Again, the local state appears to be compensating for its lack of local knowledge by tapping into the memories and knowledge acquired by older villagers who have spent their entire lives in these communities. This is particularly important in cases of land conflict because the system of rural land ownership is notoriously complex. While village land records provide some account of boundaries, often these are open to dispute as residents acquire land that is left unused by the state (as shown in the case of LH's cattle pen – see paragraph 6.3.2), their relatives, or neighbours; and as land is periodically, formally and informally, reallocated because of marriages, changes in *hukou* status, and deaths. The difference between official land allocation and how land is actually divided

[674] Int. with Township Government Official Two, Foshan, Fujian (2015)

up and used informally between families and friends is increasingly complicated in practice. This is because out-migration means that some people no longer need to use their land allocation, but the inability to change their *hukou* status means the land is still officially theirs even if it is being lent or rented out to someone else. By bringing OPA members into the process of mediating land conflict, township officials are able to access this intimate local knowledge of actual land ownership and use. This helps them distinguish between fact and exaggeration in the claims of disputants making the process of governing conflict easier for officials and aiding the state's endeavour to resolve disputes quickly without escalation.

6.4.3 Organizing the Grassroots

After studying these examples, one might ask why the OPA - as an *organization* - is specifically needed, when what the state really needs is access to the individual knowledge and experience from specific people like retired teachers. Why have an OPA at all if officials can just find out who is held in high esteem or knowledgeable about local affairs and ask them for help? Township officials I interviewed emphasized that the organizational structures of the OPA were specifically important for rendering such individuals 'legible' and 'visible' to the local state. As one official put it, the 'OPA helps us to locate and connect to these people [of high local esteem] more easily. And because they have accepted a position on the OPA committee, it is their duty to help us.' Likewise, an official from Shaanxi Provincial Committee on Ageing argued that 'OPAs help officials connect directly with the some of the most respected local villagers.'[675] Going further, he argued that,

[675] Int. with Shaanxi Provincial Committee on Ageing Official, Shaanxi (2015).

> '[the creation of OPAs] is particularly important now that the village officials are increasingly living and working outside of their villages. … [OPAs] therefore help the government to connect with people who know what is going on in the village quickly and easily, ensures that there are people [remaining in the village] who feel like it is their responsibility to help us with official business [when the village officials are not around].'[676]

As such these interviewees make clear that the organisational structures of the OPA are there both to ensure that such individuals are easily visible to state officials who may not be familiar with local residents, and to ensure that the OPA committee members have a sense of duty to help the state with its goals. This formalisation resonates with Foucauldian arguments about state organisation; as he argued,[677] through techniques of organization and rearrangement, the modern state strives to make the lives of those it governs visible.[678] At the same time, states use organizing routines to condition their subjects to identify and situate themselves within the state's framework of legibility.[679] For township officials who do not live in the villages and who rotate frequently between positions, the organizational structures of the OPA enable them to locate those with useful personal characteristics and local knowledge quickly and easily providing the state with a window into village communities. At the same time, the organizational structures of the OPA, such as its committee positions and titles, condition the OPA committee members to identify and situate themselves within the state's framework of legibility and subscribe to the duties of the organization to which they belong. Indeed, this appears to be why it is not enough for local officials to just seek out local individuals of high esteem on an ad

[676] *Ibid.*
[677] Foucault, M. (1977) cited in: Shue, V. (2012) 'Modern/Rural China'.
[678] James Scott has argued that the state's ability to organize and render 'legible' the complex natural and social ecologies under its jurisdiction as the distinguishable characteristic of modern governance. Scott, J. (1998) *Seeing like a State.*
[679] *Ibid.*

hoc basis and why they need to institutionalize such individuals within the structures of the OPA.

6.4.4 Section Summary

This section has argued that rural officials were clearly using members of the OPA to access trust and local knowledge – be that knowledge of population characteristics or knowledge of local history and affairs – to enhance their capacity to govern disputes. Although it would also have been possible for village officials to provide township cadres with a window into village communities, their relative youthfulness and shorter memories appears to make them less useful allies of the state for this task than the older OPA members. In addition, the fact that village officials increasingly live and work outside of their home villages means that higher levels of the state need to find other actors in villages, like the OPA committee, through which they can access such knowledge. In addition, rather than consulting individuals with local knowledge on an ad hoc basis, the process of organizing and institutionalizing them within the organizational structures of the OPA committee is important for rendering them legible and visible to the local state and for imbuing the villagers with a sense of responsibility towards the state and its goals.

6.5 The OPA as an Avoidance Strategy

While the above discussion shows how the OPA was used by township officials to *harness* certain qualities (trust, respect, and knowledge) to aid their own governing capacity during land conflict, there were also numerous instances of the state using the OPA as an avoidance tactic during land disputes.

Village officials stressed how contentious policies like infrastructure development and the loss of peasant land could cause serious problems to their leadership and relationships with villagers with long-term repercussions lasting beyond the dispute's conclusion. Indeed, village officials in a number of different areas cited the need to shield themselves and their positions as one reason for asking OPA members to intervene in land disputes. One village official summed up this feeling with a story about widening a road in YH village:

> A few years ago, the township government decided to widen one of the roads running through this village. They asked us village officials to get everything ready for the road widening to commence. Because the project would just involve thin strips of land at the front of people's houses there was no compensation available for residents. Most people agreed to give up a strip of land for the road widening, but some people did not. The other village officials and I initially tried to persuade these people to come around, but when we did not succeed, we did not to try again because we were afraid of offending them (*pa dezui tamen* 怕得罪他们). We thought offending them may have a negative effect on us later on … What I mean is, that after this particular dispute has been resolved we still need to continue be the village head and the party secretary. We need to maintain their support otherwise these people may be hostile to us and our work in the future. So, we asked the OPA to discuss the dispute with them instead. Because the OPA committee thought the road expansion would benefit the village they agreed to help. The OPA are respected and trusted in our village, and because the residents trusted the OPA to be telling them the truth [about the road's benefits], they agreed to give up the land.[680]

In this example, the fact that the OPA committee members are trusted and therefore better placed to persuade the villagers to give up their land is a key reason for the OPAs involvement, it is not the only reason. Rather, the ability for the OPA to provide cover to the village officials allowing them to avoid confrontation during the implementation of a contentious policy is also of primary concern from the local state's perspective. Likewise, in Shaanxi, OPA committee members in a number of villages reported that one reason

[680] Int. with Village Official Two, YH Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015)

the village officials often asked them to negotiate and resolve disputes locally was because they were scared of the repercussions from residents and particularly from residents making their work more difficult in the future.[681] As one interviewee said, 'if [the officials] develop a poor relationship with some of the villagers, these people can become obstinate when faced with other official requests in the future.'[682] Village officials – as these examples describes – are acutely aware of their need to continue to act in the capacity of the state beyond this particular dispute's resolution. As such, by bringing in the OPA to act as a mediator, the OPA committee effectively shields village officials from some of the negative repercussions of the state's own decision-making and ensures its governing capacity (expressed via grassroots cadres) is not weakened every time a contentious policy decision is made.

6.6. The OPA as a time-saving device

In addition to needing to protect their position in the eyes of the local community, village officials have other reasons for using the OPA as an avoidance tactic during infrastructure development and conflict, which is linked to their status in the government hierarchy. Although functionally the village committee and its cadres are part of formal administrative structures, they are in fact denied this status.[683] That is to say, the township government is considered the last *official* rung of the state ladder, while the village committee is considered an informal part of village 'self-government'.[684] Therefore,

[681] FG with OPA Committees in ZZD Village, YWY Village, NS Village and TQ Village, Shaanxi (2015).
[682] FG with OPA Committee in YWY village, Shaanxi (2015).
[683] An, C. (2014) *The Transformation of Governance in Rural China: Market, Finance, and Political Authority*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) pp.16-17
[684] *Ibid.*

while village officials are required to perform the duties of government officials, they are denied the privileges associated with this role. Specifically, they are not technically termed 'civil servants' nor are they on the regular state payroll and benefits system. Indeed, village officials' wages are usually very low[685] and it is expected that village officials will have second jobs or other supplementary income to sustain themselves.

A new literature has shown how it is increasingly local entrepreneurs with jobs and enterprises outside of the village who are elected to village committee roles (rather than local farmers).[686] Although village officials can increase their salaries through corrupt practices or through the rewards system (*jiangli* 奖励), rewards only tend to be given to the village cadres with the best regional performance in a given policy area (i.e. 'model village for birth control'). Since these rewards are only provided to a minority of village cadres they cannot be seen as a way for village officials to top up their incomes more generally. Consequently, village officials, who are usually of working age (or necessarily of working age in the case of the party secretary), have to balance the work required of them by the state hierarchy (within the village) with their other work and business endeavours (usually outside the village) which can sustain them financially. As such, they can be considered 'biographically unavailable' given their other occupational commitments. Although this balance is taken into consideration to some extent in that village officials are usually only expected to work half days on state business between Monday and Friday, it still remains a difficult balancing act particularly when running more time-burdensome projects.

[685] *Ibid.*

[686] Dickson, B. (2015) 'Economics as the Central Task: Do Entrepreneurs Matter?', in, *China's Leadership in the 21st Century,* eds, Finkelstein, D. Kivlehan, M. (Abingdon: Routledge).

Indeed, during the initial negotiations around LH village's contentious cattle pen (see paragraph 6.3.2) the party secretary and village head – who both had day jobs and other business interests in the county seat (and, in the case of the party secretary, also lived outside the village) – expressed the difficulties of having to repeatedly meet with disputants for several hours before work every day to try to resolve the conflict. The village head noted that 'we would resolve the conflict in the morning and by the time I returned from work at the end of the day, the villagers would have colluded with each other and changed their minds'.[687] In addition, they complained of not only having to deal with the disputants, but also having to hold regular meetings with developers and township officials before or after work who were putting pressure on them to start the project. Rightly or wrongly, in describing their role in such conflicts, village officials across the breadth of my fieldsites lamented their job as being 'the hardest and least well-paid of all government officials'.[688]

In YS village, when a large-scale regeneration project began under the policy to 'construct a new socialist countryside' in 2008, based on their past experiences of infrastructure-related land conflicts, the village committee asked the OPA to set up and man a 'control centre' to deal with any issues arising over the course of the regeneration. Manned daily by four OPA committee members, the control centre was there to 'answer any questions [villagers had] about the project … solve problems that arose during the project, and record any opinions or difficulties villagers were having and relay the most serious or intractable problems to the village officials'.[689] When asked why such a control centre

[687] Int. with Village Head, LH Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)
[688] Int. with Village Official One, YH Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015); reiterated by interviewees in Shaanxi and Yunnan.
[689] Int. with OPA Deputy Head, YS Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)

was necessary, the village officials' lack of time vis-à-vis the retired OPA committees 'biographical availability' or time-abundance, was central to the thinking behind this set up. As the OPA head of YS village explained:

> This is a large village with a population of over 4000 people spread over a wide geographic area. In the past, when villagers had problems they would come to the village centre to look for the village officials in the village committee office, but it was very difficult to get hold of the village officials because they all have other jobs outside the village. When they are doing work for the village, their time is often taken up with meetings in the town government [several miles away]. As a result, they are only occasionally in the village committee offices. That was frustrating for villagers especially those who had travelled further to meet with them. When the redevelopment project began in 2008 it was clear that it would involve a lot of disruption and land issues because of the amount of new building work involved. So, to pre-empt problems arising [over villagers not being able to meet with the village officials], the village committee asked us [in the OPA] to set up a control centre where villagers could go to discuss or report any problems or disputes. We did not have any formal powers, but we were able to answer questions and help resolve any difficulties or conflicts that arose. When serious problems occurred, we were able to record the issue, relay it to the village officials and help resolve it … We [on the OPA committee] are all retired so we had more time to spend manning the control centre and helping resolve problems than the village officials.[690]

In this example, the village officials are seeking to save themselves time by having the OPA man the control centre and pre-emptively prevent any resentment towards themselves for not being available to help villagers. By having the OPA act in this capacity the village officials effectively had their work obligations filtered; since the OPA was available to answer questions and resolve minor issues as they happened, the village officials only needed to concern themselves with the most complex or intractable issues relayed to them by the OPA. Most of the OPA committee members in YS village were retired teachers or retired grassroots officials they were all literate and experienced at

[690] Int. with OPA Head, YS Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)

digesting policy documents.[691] Thus, they had both the ability and the time to field questions and resolve problems related to the regeneration as they arose. At the same time, the village officials were protected and shielded from criticisms of being lazy, incompetent, or not doing their jobs properly because the OPA was providing this service to villagers instead.

According to village officials in YS village, after seeing how helpful the OPA could be for implementing such policies, the village committee used some of its regeneration funding to build a permanent office for the OPA next door to the village committee office. The town government also began reimbursing the OPA committee member's telephone bills to cement and semi-formalise their role. Although not all villages I visited had reinforced the OPA's role in acting on behalf of the state as formally and explicitly as YS village, the vast majority of OPAs did have an office for their activities either within the village committee building or nearby. There were also repeated examples across my fieldsites of village officials delegating the resolution of protracted local land conflicts (as well as other village committee work and obligations) to OPA committee members because 'they require time and persistence'[692] which the village officials themselves were lacking.

Pessimistic analysts of China's state-society relations would no doubt view the building of the office and reimbursement of phone bills as evidence of OPA co-option by the local state, with the OPA's loyalty bought through gift-giving. That is to say, they would view the state-OPA relationship as one characterised by co-optation, or at least symbiosis, in

[691] For more on the characteristics and qualities of those individuals selected to serve on OPA committees, see Chapter Five.
[692] Int. with Village Official Two, HF Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015)

which the OPA committee members help the state with its objective to govern conflict and maintain stability in return for material or symbolic capital. Indeed, it is likely that there is more than an element of reality in this analysis. Specifically, the process of appointing individuals to the OPA committee and giving out committee titles undoubtedly bolsters the social and symbolic capital of those individuals involved in the OPA by increasing their perceived importance in the village setting. Bestowing an office upon the OPA committee goes one step further by providing a very public display of symbolic capital[693] – that is prestige or honour – upon the committee members in return for their support.[694]

Additionally, the benefits to the OPA committee also sometimes appeared to go beyond symbolism and into material gains. For example, most village committees in the villages I visited in wealthy Fujian went on at least one annual subsidized 'away week'. This either involved visiting another province for tourism purposes or visiting branches of their lineage association in the Philippines or Taiwan to build *guanxi* or to tout for donations and inward investment. On these visits, the OPA committee or at least the OPA head and deputy head were usually invited to go on these subsidised trips with them. At other poorer locations in Yunnan, there were no such visits, but the OPA head and deputy were included in dinners between village officials and township officials. Finally, some OPA committee members had benefited more personally from their close relations with the village and township officials. As one OPA deputy head told me:

[693] For more on symbolic capital see: Bourdieu, P. (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production*: *Essays on Art and Literature*, (Cambridge: Polity Press) p.7; Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p.179; Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction* (London: Routledge) p.291

[694] These are likely to be factors that OPA committee members consider (either consciously or subconsciously) when taking-up their positions and when carrying out the 'duties' they entail.

> ‘My relationship with the township and village government officials is very good. I know them very well because of my position in the OPA and my former job as a teacher. When I rebuilt my house, because I have a good relationship with them, they did not mind that I asked for it to be taller than the local planning regulations allow. My house in now the tallest in the village.[695]

As such, there are clearly some symbolic and even material benefits to be gained for the individuals who sit on the OPA and from a close symbiotic, OPA-state relationship.

Yet, viewing the state-OPA relationship *purely* from this perspective overlooks other elements in the relationship. While building an office for the OPA may have been a form of gift-giving in return for the OPA’s help with governance, it was also a formalised space in which villagers could to ask questions about construction projects and seek help with their grievances from people with both the knowledge of local policy and the time to help them. Likewise, if an OPA committee member uses their phone to update and communicate with residents to keep them better informed, then reimbursement is surely not an unreasonable request. In addition, when OPA committee members were invited on visits to overseas lineage associations they did so as representatives of the local community and because they tended to be more successful at eliciting donations than the village officials. These donations were then often used for community projects like restoring village temples, redecorating village community centres, or buying equipment for village social clubs.[696] To view this state-society relationship with only a zero-sum lens misses important aspects of the relationship (for more on this, see Chapter Seven: Negotiation, Cooperation, and Positive-Sum Interactions). Rather, the control centre and

[695] Int. with OPA Deputy Head, YS Village, Foshan, Fujian, (2015).
[696] Int. with OPA Head, YS Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015); Int. with Town Government Official Two, Wuwei, Fujian (2015).

subsequent OPA office building appear to me to be '*mutually* empowering'[697] spaces in which: officials can maintain stability without dedicating more time away from their occupations; villagers can pursue 'justice from below'[698] from individuals they trust and who have time to help them; and, the OPA committee members obtain elevated and bolstered social and symbolic capital in their communities in return for their efforts.

6.6.1 Section summary

This section has aimed to shed light on the relationship between OPAs and the local state at the grassroots and specifically how cooperation and consultation with OPA committees helps to further state reach and penetration of the grassroots during episodes of infrastructure development and land conflict. It has shown how the local state has sought to use the OPA as an avoidance mechanism to deflect criticism and save themselves time. It has also shown how local officials seek to harness certain qualities, characteristics and knowledge, institutionalized within the OPA, to support the implementation of contentious state policy.

6.7 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has looked at the relationship between OPAs and the local state through the prism of land conflict and infrastructure development. It has argued that local officials at the grassroots have sought to build alliances with OPA committees in order to harness useful characteristics – such as authority, trust, and respect – that they themselves

[697] For more on mutual empowerment see: Wang, X. (1999) 'Mutual Empowerment of State and Society' p.232; Migdal, J. Kohli, A. Shue, V. (1994) *State Power and Social Forces,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
[698] Michelson, E. (2008) 'Justice from Above or Below'.

were lacking. In doing so they were able to increase their penetration of local societies and further state reach. Specifically, this chapter has argued that – with force and coercion becoming riskier methods of implementing policy and gaining villagers cooperation – local officials have had to rely more on persuasion. Given that peasants usually need to agree to give up their land for an infrastructure project *before* knowing how the development will affect them and their village, and *before* they receive compensation, trust is often a necessary condition for dealing with this uncertainty[699] and gaining peasant cooperation. As such, this chapter has argued that OPA-local state alliances allow the local state to harness the authority and 'trustworthiness' of OPA committee members to aid the state's believability in the process of governing. This has been achieved by delegating the mediation of land disputes to OPA committees and by using OPA committees to gather information on villagers and village affairs so as to tailor their negotiating strategies to suit the personalities of individual disputants.

In addition, this chapter has argued that due to weak bureaucratic structures it is usually necessary for village officials to engage in full time employment outside their villages to support themselves financially. Thus, despite being imbued with the responsibilities of governing locally they lack the time to fulfil them. This is a problem because land disputes are often protracted and involve investment of time, patience and persistence if they are to simultaneously maintain stable, harmonious community relations, and these are qualities that village officials either lack or are unable to provide. The 'biographical availability' of the retired older men who sit on the OPA committee make them useful partners because, unlike local officials, they have the time to repeatedly engage with local disputants to find satisfactory and harmonious solutions to local conflicts.

[699] Gambetta, D. (1988b) 'Can We Trust Trust?'.

Although I have argued in this chapter that harnessing authority, trust and 'biographical availability' successfully facilitate state reach, we shall see in the next chapter that this is not a one-sided process and alliances with OPAs can actually provide opportunities in the other direction to negotiate with the state over the outcomes of state policy.

Chapter Seven: Negotiation, Cooperation, and Positive-Sum Interactions

7.1 Introduction

This thesis has, thus far, focused primarily on how the Chinese state penetrates society and extends state capacity to the local level by building alliances with local authority figures embedded within OPAs. As such, given that the focus has been on how OPAs are of use to the state, one might be forgiven for thinking at this point that these processes are entirely state driven and for state benefit. Yet, focusing exclusively on top-down interactions neglects other elements of the state-society relationship and passivizes the agency of the OPA committee members. This chapter will focus on how the OPA committee can use their position to negotiate with the local state, as well as how the OPA can also be of benefit to societal actors in villages. In doing so, this chapter argues that OPA committees are not uncritical in their cooperation with local state officials. Rather, they are very much tied to local interests and can maintain local allegiances even at the same time as cooperating with state officials. In looking at this flip side to the relationship,

I found that local officials cannot simply impose their will on passive OPA actors at the grassroots. Instead, any reliance on OPAs for dispute mediation and policy implementation provides them with political opportunities and leverage to negotiate with the state over both the process and outcome of such disputes in return for their support. In utilising these opportunities, OPAs can sometimes act as a channel through which village communities transmit their opinions to the local state or redress their grievances.

In addition, by building alliances with OPAs and cementing their role in negotiating local land conflicts, the state legitimizes their role as a mediator in other non-state-linked conflicts. As a result, OPAs have become a focal point for intra-societal (or intra-familial) dispute mediation, such as divorces or inheritance disputes, which would otherwise be solved by the court system. This does not necessarily weaken the state. On the contrary, the resolution of local societal disputes is likely to be in the state's interests. Nevertheless, the promotion of informal OPA dispute mediation may weaken or prevent certain state institutions, such as the court system, from extending their authority to rural communities and to all issues with potential legal recourse. In terms of state-building, this can mean that alliances with OPAs both extend state reach while simultaneously limiting the penetration of certain 'modern' state institutions. That is to say, in keeping with my theoretical approach, although alliances with social forces – such as OPAs – at the grassroots may be key to furthering state reach and achieving state aims at the rural grassroots, they also bolster the authority of powerful societal agencies with allegiances rooted in their local communities. These authority figures can then use their status to negotiate over state policy, deflect certain state aims, or circumvent the authority of certain state institutions, such as the legal system.

7.1.1 Chapter Outline

To provide evidence for this argument, this chapter will look at two case studies in turn. First, it will continue with the case of infrastructure development to look at how the processes we discussed in the previous chapter provide opportunities to negotiate with the state, deflect certain state demands, and/or feedback community grievances to local state officials. Second, it will look at the role of OPAs in intra-societal (or intra-familial) conflict to show how the creation of OPAs serves to make local authority figures legible and legitimizes their role as dispute mediators in their communities. As such, OPAs provide a focal point for redressing community grievances which would otherwise be resolved by state institutions like the court system. The data for this chapter has been generated from original fieldwork in Yunnan, Shaanxi, and Fujian, and provides new information about how village interactions are structured and utilised.

7.2 Infrastructure and OPA-State Negotiation

This section will look at three ways in which OPAs can use their position as leverage to negotiate or deflect state demands placed upon them. It will first look at how OPAs can manipulate knowledge of the state and its regulations to their own advantage, that is, how OPAs 'play the rules'. It will then look at how OPAs can change policy or policy implementation by feeding back local community grievances to the state. Finally, it will look at how OPAs withhold or withdraw support in order to negotiate with the state over the outcomes of disputes.

7.2.1 Playing the Rules

As discussed in the previous chapter, local state officials often sought to involve OPA committees in infrastructure projects and land dispute negotiations that inevitably arose from such projects. Although involving OPA committees in these disputes helped the state resolve those conflicts, it also gave the OPA committee members knowledge of state policy, implementation processes, and government personnel that could be useful to them for other purposes. Indeed, across my fieldsites, OPA committees used their knowledge and experience of being incorporated into governance processes as a way to negotiate with the state and *deflect* or *reduce* certain state demands. Specifically, OPA understanding of the local state and local policy often appeared to help them manipulate state regulations to their own, or their local communities', advantage.

YS Village Tree Plating Initiative

In YS village (the location of the aforementioned 'control centre', see paragraph 6.6), for example, the OPA committee were able to use their understanding of local policy, gained through running the control centre for a previous infrastructure project, to leverage a better compensation deal for residents affected by plans to build a reservoir on their land. In the run-up to the decision to build the reservoir, because of their regular meetings with village and township officials, the OPA committee had been kept abreast of the ongoing discussions concerning the reservoir's potential location. Although there had been a number of alternative possible villages in contention to site the reservoir, the OPA committee were well aware that the topography of YS village made it a prime location for such a project. Based on conversations they had had with township officials, the OPA believed that YS village was indeed the most likely location for the reservoir. The OPA committee members began contingency planning with one another about how they should

present the project to local residents, how they should reduce the possibility of conflict over the development, and, importantly, how they could get the best deal for villagers who would have to sacrifice some of their land. Based on their knowledge and experience of mediating past land conflicts and manning the control centre, they understood that the rate of compensation was often a main stumbling block when mediating compulsory purchase orders involving the state. They also knew that land with trees[700] growing on it would receive a higher rate of compensation than other types of agricultural land. Armed with this knowledge, they planned that, if the reservoir went ahead in YS village, they would organise a mass tree planting effort on the land so as to increase the rate of compensation for the affected villagers.

Once a decision had been made at township level, the OPA were made aware informally and unofficially by one of their contacts in the township government that YS village had been selected. With contingency plans in place, they immediately organized a meeting to discuss 'the potential effects of the reservoir, whose land would be affected and what disputes might arise'[701] during the building process. After explaining their plan to those villagers whose land was to be affected, the OPA committee set about organizing a village-wide mass tree planting campaign to help affected villagers increase their compensation claim. In order to make their actions seem less antagonistic to the local state,[702] they framed the tree planting as part of the state's wider efforts to 'protect the environment and raise environmental awareness.'[703] They used some of the OPA's own

[700] Each additional tree added an additional level of compensation.
[701] Int. with OPA Head, YS Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)
[702] This tactic to use the language of the law, state policy, or state campaigns in order to make protest or subversion more palatable and less antagonistic to the state (or particular levels of the state) has been described elsewhere. See O'Brien, K. Li, L. (2006) *Rightful Resistance.*
[703] Int. with OPA Head, YS Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)

funds to buy saplings in bulk from a nearby tree farm and also encouraged villagers to buy a few saplings each per family. On the day of tree planting, villagers were encouraged to plant a few trees on their own land and the rest (that the OPA had purchased) on the intended location of the reservoir.

A few weeks later, when township government officials came to break the news to residents and discuss compensation, they found they had to increase the compensation rate for each tree that had to be cut down.[704] The OPA committee – who had been asked to accompany the township officials on their visits to break the news to villagers – suspected that township officials were aware of what they had done. However, they said they were not challenged over the tree planting, because they had 'built up a good reputation for helping local officials with dispute mediation in the community'[705] and because 'the villagers did not contest the [revised] amount provided by the government'.[706]

By incorporating the OPA committee into governance practices, the local state provided access to knowledge (of the reservoir plans and location), contacts in the township government (who let them know about the decision prior to the official announcement) and experience of state processes (land compensation rates and mediation methods) that allowed the OPA to manipulate the system to get a better outcome for the affected villagers. Although the OPA accepted that the reservoir would ultimately have to be built, they did not do so passively nor unquestioningly. Instead, their response demonstrated a pragmatic allegiance to their local community and a desire to produce a mutually

[704] The compensation value was higher than the original price of the saplings.
[705] Int. with OPA Head, YS Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)
[706] Int. with OPA Deputy Head, YS Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)

beneficial outcome by 'increasing the compensation the villagers received *and* reducing the likelihood of a dispute over the amount'.[707] Moreover, because of the interdependent relationship between the local state and OPA (and, most likely, because their actions did not threaten the reservoir itself), local officials did not contest their actions.

Nevertheless, some might question whether an approach that seeks simply to raise compensation, rather than to challenge – through litigation or resistance – the reservoir itself, is really an approach that demonstrates a favourable outcome for society (since the state's main goal was never threatened). Yet, I would argue that their decision was a tactical one that reflects a pragmatic understanding of the state, its policies, and the changing nature of rural land use. First, the committee noted that, according to the law, 'the government has the right to requisition land for public infrastructure projects'[708] and therefore 'legal action would be unlikely to succeed'.[709] This was particularly the case since the reservoir was supported by the regional government. Second, since younger villagers were increasingly opting to work outside the village and remaining families were choosing to farm smaller plots of land, the OPA calculated that – 'with compensation available it would be better to accept the reservoir and try to get the best financial settlement for the villagers'[710] for land they increasingly did not use. Finally, if they did take the local state to court or resist the reservoir development this would create a 'bad relationship between [the] village and higher levels of government which could

[707] Int. with OPA Head, YS Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015) my emphasis
[708] *Ibid.*
[709] As Andrea Pia showed, legal remedies do not necessarily help locals to peacefully solve land conflicts because the law itself allows for land expropriation for use in the 'public interest'. Pia, A. (2015) 'Disavowing the Law and Engaging Politics in Rural China', *Anthropology News*. [Accessed online on 17/06/16 at: https://politicalandlegal anthro.org/2015/03/30/disavowing-the-law-and-engaging-politics-in-rural-china-2/]
[710] Int. with OPA Head, YS Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)

jeopardize how future policies are implemented and future investment in the village'.[711] Indeed, Zweig has argued more widely that the threat of relationship deterioration or retaliation often means that villagers seek local compromises to conflicts with the state rather that risking taking them to court. In his study, villagers are reported as saying that 'no matter whether you win or lose [a court case], you lose. You still have to live here and the township government won't forgive you'.[712] Although the OPA sought a mutually beneficial outcome that did not threaten the state's reservoir project, their decision still demonstrates an active choice made with allegiance to their local community in mind.

HF Village Temple Funding

In another case, in HF village in Fujian, a new dual carriageway being built by the regional government was set to run along the edge of the village into the path of the one of the village's three temples, which lay on the outskirts of the village. Several villagers also had been asked to give up strips of land along the sides of their houses and most had been willing to do so given that the land was not valuable and the compensation was adequate. The much bigger problem in the eyes of local residents was not the requisitioning of individual land, but rather that the temple would have to be demolished. Despite the compensation being higher for a building than for land, villagers did not feel that the compensation was sufficient for this kind of religious building and many of the residents were also superstitious about demolishing a temple, fearing that it could bring bad luck or negative repercussions to the village and its residents.

Local officials asked the OPA committee to help persuade villagers that demolishing the

[711] Int. with OPA Deputy Head, YS Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)
[712] Zweig cf. Michelson, E. (2008) 'Justice from Above or Below',

temple would not bring them bad luck, but the OPA committee refused to help unless they were given sufficient compensation to build a much larger, more elaborate temple with resources to pay a shaman to help them decide a new location for it. They told local officials that if these resources were not provided, they would not intervene if villagers sought to actively resist the temple's demolition (e.g. through road blockages or sit-ins). The OPA head told me that although 'the township government initially claimed that they did not have the resources and could not increase the compensation',[713] he knew from his regular dealings with them that there were pots of money available that could potentially be used for such purposes. Furthermore, the OPA head and his deputy joked that the township leaders were so desperate not to look incompetent in front of their superiors in the county and regional government, that they knew these officials would be easily cajoled so long as the OPA ensured the road project moved forward without any long-term problems.

The OPA committee and the temple association committee (which had significant membership overlap in this particular village) went to see the head of the township government and proposed that he use a pot of money that was designated for social affairs to build a new temple for them. Although CCP rules stipulated that the money should not be used for religious activities, the township head made an exception because the money would be used via the OPA which was a social organisation (and, more importantly the OPA said they would ensure that building would go ahead without encountering any problems from residents). With the funding in place, the OPA committee and the temple committee arranged a well-respected religious shaman to perform a ritual in front of the villagers to show them which of the possible locations put forward for a new temple was

[713] Int. with OPA Head, HF Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015).

preferred by the temple gods. Through the performance of this ritual the shaman claimed that the temple gods preferred one of the new locations which was more centrally located in the village to the old location on the village's outskirts. The ritual was therefore used to demonstrate to the local villagers that the temple gods would be satisfied with a new location and would not deliver bad luck to the village. Performing such a ritual by someone with the authority to make such a decision, the OPA committee said, meant that everyone accepted the demolition of the old temple and rebuilding of the new one in a new location.[714]

In the end, with the money from the township government and some additional donations from wealthy villagers, a new temple twice the size and much more ornately decorated was built in the village and no one protested the building of the dual carriageway. In this case, the OPA used their knowledge of the township government's resources (the pot of money for social affairs) and priorities (wanting to look good in front of their superiors) and used this as leverage to get the outcome they wanted. Likewise, by working through the OPA who had an understanding of what kind of ritual performance would make the demolition of the temple acceptable the local villagers, the local state was able to push forward with the dual carriageway without opposition. Had the state simply suggested a new location, they would most likely have been met with resistance given that they have no authority to make decisions related to religious or folk customs.

Section Summary

As we can see from this case and the case of YS village's tree planting initiative and HF village's temple funding, the OPA are not passive in their dealings with the local state

[714] FG with OPA Committee, HF Village, Fujian (2015).

and not simply uncritical conduits for the implementation of state policy. While the OPA may be willing to help the state negotiate such conflicts, they remain embedded within, and products of, their local communities and are therefore not fully allied to the state's aims and objectives. Indeed, the view that the OPAs have agency and pursue their own aims was reinforced by discussions with villagers who had been affected by the reservoir in YS village. Residents in YS village (and, indeed, at some other fieldsites) often referred to the OPA committee as the '*lao youtiao* 老油条'[715] which can be translated as the 'wily old fox' and refers to people who are experienced, worldly-wise, as well as shrewd, crafty and clever in their dealings with others. This analogy, which was always used positively in a joking manner, indicated that these men are often very good at manipulating their relationships with both state and societal actors and are not simply passive tools of state policy making.

7.2.2 Channelling Grievances

Another way in which OPAs were able to use their position to impact upon state policy was by acting as an intermediary between villagers and local officials. Indeed, just as the OPA institutionalizes and makes legible traditional authority figures to state officials, it also renders these people legible and accessible to the wider community as well. That is to say, by utilizing the OPA as a conflict mediator the state has bolstered and legitimized their role in this regard, leading villagers to seek out the OPA committee to help resolve their own problems that involve the state. Just as the respected and trusted status of the OPA committee makes them figures that villagers will listen to on behalf of the state, the

[715] The analogy of the '*lao youtiao'* (老油条) comes from the cooking method of the famous breakfast snack '*youtiao*'. The *'youtiao'* is dipped and rolled in a pot of oil over and over continuously. By describing someone as a *lao youtiao* you emphasise that the person - like the *youtiao* – is steeped in layer after layer of experience, making them worldly-wise operators as a result.

respected status of the OPA committee can also be harnessed by villagers to ensure their views are listened to by local officials. As such, the OPA appeared to be able to act as a channel through which villagers can feedback grievances to the local state, in turn, affect or shift policy implementation.

At my fieldsites, villagers actively sought out OPA committee members to help with land or infrastructure related conflict (be it between state and society or intra-societal actors). In the aforementioned case of YS village where an OPA-manned control centre had been set up to manage a construction project in the village, just as the 'control centre' was a useful tool for the largely absent local state, it was also a useful resource for villagers. Since many of the village officials worked outside of the village making it difficult for villagers to access them, the OPA control centre provided a channel through which villagers could express grievances and feedback ideas to the local state about the regeneration and its implementation. In the words of the OPA deputy-head, at that time 'the OPA worked as a bridge between the villagers and the village committee and a bridge for public opinion.'[716]

Specifically, feedback and objections raised by villagers at the control centre were used by the OPA to negotiate a number of changes to the regeneration designs that made them more acceptable to locals including more use of unused, derelict, or communal land and less use of high value[717] agricultural land. The OPA also acted as a channel through which villagers could monitor the quality of construction during the project. There were two occasions where villagers 'spotted cracks, holes and uneven areas in new roads that were

[716] Int. with OPA Head, YS Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)

[717] By high value I mean either conveniently positioned land or particularly fertile land with good soil or water quality for certain commercial crops.

causing erosion from water run off'.[718] In such instances the villagers took their complaints about the road's poor quality to the OPA who then called a meeting with village and township officials and persuaded them to require the construction company to rebuild those sections of the road to a higher standard that the villagers were satisfied with. In interviews, villagers attributed their ability to affect change to the OPA. As one of the villagers said, 'when we complain to the village officials, they never listen to us. But when the OPA committee tells them to do something, out of respect for them they have to act.'[719] That is to say, because of the OPA's respected status (and likely because of the village officials' reliance on the OPA committee for support in other areas), the village officials give more credence to their views and were more likely to act on their advice than when villagers made such requests.

In other locations in Yunnan and Shaanxi, there were similar examples of villagers using the OPA as a conduit for feeding back grievances over land and infrastructure. In SSY village in Shaanxi, a large crack and pothole in a road prevented villagers from being able to move their harvest from the fields to the main road for transporting to market. Although the villagers had asked the village officials to fix the pothole in the months leading up to harvest, the village officials had not acted on their requests. Once harvest came around, they needed the officials to act quickly otherwise the corn would rot in the fields leaving them without income or corn stores. Exasperated by the officials' inaction and believing that the elders on the OPA committee were the only people the village officials would listen to, the villagers then took their complaint to the OPA committee and asked them for help. The villagers I interviewed claimed that within a few days the OPA head had

[718] Int. with OPA Head, YS Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)
[719] Int. with Villager Four, YS Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)

met with the village officials and forced them into action. The OPA head had also offered to call the construction company and to be onsite to manage the construction so as to relieve the time pressures that the village officials were under from their other jobs. The OPA head of SSY village told me that he had made the officials prioritise the road by convincing them that ignoring the problem would have serious negative repercussions for themselves and the villagers if the harvest were to rot in the fields and those villagers were to be left with a reduced income as a result.[720]

A very similar scenario happened in TP village in Yunnan over a leaky water pipe. The village officials had been asked repeatedly to fix a leaking water pipe which was seeping out on to the road and under several nearby properties. Residents were particularly concerned about the effects of the water on their newly built property foundations. Yet, despite their repeated complaints, the village officials – who mostly lived outside of the village – did not come down to view the damage nor arrange for someone to come to fix the pipe until after the OPA committee intervened and asked them to do it.[721]

The OPA is unlikely to be the only mechanism for feeding back these types of grievances to the local state, likewise the local state may not always act on the immediate request of the OPA in every location. Nevertheless, there were a significant number of examples across all three provinces of the OPA acting as a bridge for feeding back public opinion to the local state, as well numerous examples of villagers saying that both village and township officials listen more to the OPA than to other villagers. Indeed, in my interviews

[720] Int. with Village Head, SSY Village, Shaanxi (2015); Int. with OPA Head, SSY Village, Shaanxi (2015); Int. with Villager / OPA Member Three, SSY Village (2015).
[721] Int. with OPA Head, TP Village, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2012); Int. with Villager Two, TP-Village, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2014); Int. with Village Head, TP-Village, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2014)

with officials in the Shaanxi provincial government, this ability to act as a bridge or channel to connect and feedback the views of local residents to both village and township officials appeared to be part of the official thinking behind the push to expand the numbers of OPAs in the province. In the words of the vice-director of the provincial committee on ageing, 'OPAs should enable us to better connect villagers to the government' in order to help the government to 'understand villagers' views and any issues they are having'.[722] He claimed that government officials at the township level and higher are usually detached from village affairs and, as such, the government had been looking at better ways in which to link villagers to the government, the OPA being one such method.[723] While village officials can also provide this link, as previously discussed, younger village officials increasingly choose to reside outside of their home villages and have more calls on their time than the older OPA committee members. The use of the OPA as a mechanism through which to feedback grievances to the local state is of positive benefit to both state and societal actors and therefore arguably represents a positive sum accountability mechanism for both state and society. Indeed, in acting in this capacity, the OPA can help the state better understand problems in villages and ameliorate them early to prevent tension and unrest. Likewise, such processes help societal actors to make themselves heard, input their views into the system and place a check on the power of local officials.

7.2.3 Withholding and withdrawing support

I also observed that OPA committee members also appeared to use their position to exert leverage over the state or reassert their agency through withholding support or threatening

[722] Int. with Provincial Committee on Ageing Official, Shaanxi (2015)
[723] *Ibid.*

to withhold support. Specifically, where the OPA committee believed the state's requests for support and mediation either not be in the interests of the village or to threaten their own trusted and respected status, they tended to withdraw or withhold their support for the state. This gives further evidence to the argument that OPAs are not just passive tools of the state and as such they cannot be manipulated to help the state under any circumstances.

In LH village, for example, a local man who had made his fortune in Beijing had donated money to the village to build a stage.[724] The township and village officials were handling the project and seeking to ensure it went ahead smoothly – it would, after all, count towards their performance assessments and demonstrate to their superiors their ability to attract donations to the village. Although the village already had a stage, there was a general consensus amongst the villagers that, in a large village with numerous social clubs,[725] two stages would be better than one. However, to make room for the stage some of the land of four families located close to the village centre (containing a pig pen and wood storage huts) would have to be requisitioned. As the village and township officials got on with discussing construction plans with the donor and the local construction company, they delegated the task of convincing the four families to give up their land to the OPA committee.

[724] It is common for developed villages to build a stage for performances of local opera, square dancing or drumming. Such acts, which are common in much of Fujian, are public displays of wealth and success that give symbolic capital – that is accumulated prestige, celebrity or honour – to the donor and their family. Bourdieu, P. (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production*, p.7; Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice* p.179; Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction*, p.291. For more on symbolic capital in Fujian Province see: Tan, C. (2006) *Southern Fujian*; Tan, C. (2004) *Chinese Overseas*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press).

[725] The village had a square dance team, two types of drum teams, a temple association, an ancestral association, as well as spontaneous karaoke in the evening throughout the summer months.

Based on an understanding of the personalities of those involved, the OPA head and deputy head decided to 'take a slow approach, regularly visiting the villagers, and [dropping into conversation] the benefits of the project for the villager, to try to make them see sense for themselves.'[726] After a few weeks of these conversations, two of the four families had become supportive and had given consent for their land to be used. Given that the land involved was not of high value and some compensation was provided, the OPA committee felt sure that, given time and persistence, the remaining two families would also be won around. Yet, both the officials and the donor wanted the project to move quickly and tried to force the OPA to take a more aggressive approach. The OPA committee, however, felt that such an approach would negatively affect villager relations and would impact upon their trusted status in the community. Not willing to jeopardize their status in the community they withdrew their support for the project in protest. As the OPA head of LH village explained:

> The village head called around to ask me when they should book the bulldozers; they wanted to start as quickly as possible. I told him we could not provide a date because we did not know how long it would take for the remaining families to agree. Our view was that if we tried to force them this would spark an outcry in the village and may result in an argument between villagers or create festering resentment. I told him that individual family opposition to the project is something the OPA can resolve, but a village-wide argument cannot be easily managed. I told him to be patient and wait a few more weeks. But after several days he returned to my house to tell me they had booked the bulldozers; they wanted to force us to move faster … But I felt that moving faster and trying to force the villagers to agree would cause an argument and would negatively affect villager relations. I thought people would not trust me in the future if I was involved in this. So, I called a meeting with the other OPA committee members and we decided to stop assisting them … In the end, as you can see, the stage is very small and in an odd position. This is because they did not manage to persuade the families without our help and they blocked the bulldozers from accessing their land … The village officials are easily frustrated and

[726] Int. with OPA Committee Member Two, LH Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)

want to do things fast. But often the more successful approach is the slow approach.[727]

In this case, the OPA head believed the government officials and donors' actions would negatively affect both their reputation in the village and would lead to resentment which would be bad for the village over the long-term. As a result, they withdrew their support for the project and would not act as a mediator for the state. Without the OPA's help, the government was not granted permission to use the land by any of the four families, and, in the end, they were resigned to building a much smaller stage in a less suitable location further from the centre. As we can see, the OPA committee are not unquestioningly allied to the local state. Indeed, when faced with a situation that might threaten both their local reputation and harmony within the village, the OPA removed their support so as not to be tarnished by the local state's actions.

A similar situation occurred in YH village where the local state wanted to build a road in front of the village temple. Although the land in front of the temple had not been allocated to villagers and was technically there to be used for collective projects, the head of the temple association did not want the land to be used for a road and had planned instead to build a small patio and seating area in front of the temple for residents to congregate. Since people in the village placed great emphasis on folk religions,[728] the village officials believed they could not move forward without the temple association head's support. To overcome this obstacle, they went to the head of the OPA – who had supported the road's construction in principle – and asked him to overthrow the head of the temple association so that the project could go ahead. The village officials calculated that most villagers

[727] Int. with OPA Head, LH Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015)
[728] For more on folk religions in contemporary China, see: Chau, A. (2006) *Miraculous Response*; Chau, A. (2011) *Religion in Contemporary China*.

would not mind if they replaced the temple head who was widely seen as a poor temple head because of his weak organisational skills. Indeed, he had only been chosen through a shamanistic ritual[729] (rather than because of his personal authority and standing in the village). They thought that no one would object if the OPA head were to replace him because the OPA head was seen as a competent organiser with high authority and social standing in the village. But the OPA head flew into a rage at the village officials' suggestion, told them they had to respect local customs, and sent them on their way. He later told me that, although the temple head was not necessarily temperamentally suited to his position, he had been chosen through the proper ritual processes and should therefore be supported in his role. He said that even if he was personally supportive of the road building project in principle, it was not an important enough project to justify acting in such a way towards a fellow villager. Indeed, he argued that overthrowing the temple head would be an immensely 'rude and disrespectful' act[730] that would not only cause his fellow villagers to 'lose respect for [him], but 'they would hate [him]'.[731] In the days afterwards, the OPA head and the other OPA committee members came together to lament the village officials' lack of cultural awareness and their disrespect towards the temple head. They agreed to support the temple head in his decision not to allow the road to run in front of the temple and the village officials had to find a different route for the road to take instead.

Again, in this case the OPA head was unwilling to act in a way that would threaten his

[729] The head of the temple association was chosen every five years through a shamanistic ritual whereby spirits would be called to move inside male villagers over the age of 50 and make them dance and beat themselves with canes. Then a visiting shaman brought in from outside the village (to be impartial) would select the villager in which the most spirits had accumulated to become the temple head.
[730] Int. with OPA Head, YH Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015)
[731] *Ibid.*

reputation in the local community. This is not entirely surprising given that the qualities that make the OPA committee authoritative (and therefore useful to the state) are linked to respect and trustworthiness, it seems unlikely that the OPA committee would be willing to risk this reputation just to fall in line with state aims. Indeed, this sentiment – that the OPA acts in the interests of the village and does not simply follow orders – was reiterated by interviews with villagers. When I asked villagers why the OPA helps negotiate over use of land for infrastructure development, the most common response across my fieldsites was that they were doing this 'for the good of the village'[732] (*wei cunzi hao* 为村子好). When I followed up by asking how they thought the OPA committee would react if the government asked them to help on a project that would not benefit the village, most villagers believed the OPA would withdraw their support. A villager in YH village put it in clear terms:

> 'The OPA will only solve these problems for the government if they believe that the project will help the village. They assess the project and make a judgement. They would not help the government with the things they thought would be bad for the village because otherwise they would lose the respect and trust of the people who live here and villagers would blame them.'[733]

Similar sentiment that the OPA will not just unquestioningly support the government was expressed by villagers in JY village. As one villager eloquently put it:

> 'Of course, the OPA committee do not always take the side of the government in disputes. We are all people of the same village (*women dou shi cunli de ren* 我们都是村里的人), and we all have the same common ancestor (*dou shi tongzu de ren* 都是同宗的人). It is impossible for them to stab [the other villagers] in the back (*bu keneng dong li dong qiang* 不可能动刀动枪) by always taking the side of the government. If the OPA committee takes one step towards a preferential outcome to one side in the hope that it will benefit

[732] Int. with Villager Five, YH Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015)
[733] Int. with Villager Five, YH Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015)

> them in the future, or if they use their connections to make a judgement, this will be bad for the reputation of the OPA committee and relations in the whole village in the long run. The role of the OPA committee is to make a reasoned and impartial judgement. Their opinions must not lack etiquette *'li'* (礼). All contradictions, including disputes with the government, require a middleman (*zhongjian ren* 中间人) to resolve them. These people are peacemakers (*heshilao* 和事佬)[734] and a peacemaker's role is to extricate everyone from an awkward position (*heshilao de zuoyong jiushi gei taijie xia taijie xia* 和事老的作用就是给台阶下台阶下).[735]

Similarly, when officials talked about seeking support from the OPA they usually qualified it with a statement about the OPA committee's positive view of the project. For example, 'Because the OPA committee thought the road expansion *would benefit the village,* they agreed to help', and '[the OPA head] was *in support of the project* believing it to be *a good opportunity for an otherwise poor village to develop',* as well as 'the OPA believed the regeneration was *in the interests of the village*, so they were willing to help us negotiate with the disputants.' These qualifications seem to indicate that were the OPA to feel differently about the project or regeneration they would have withheld their support. Thus, while the OPA may be willing to help the local state with stability maintenance and policy implementation where they feel it to be in the interests of the village, this does not mean they unquestioningly support state policy in all circumstances. When such actors put forward plans that negatively affect their trusted and respected status locally, OPAs appeared largely to put their own social status and the interests of intra-village relations above their willingness to help the local state.

[734] Interestingly the characters for peacemaker include a character for older person perhaps demonstrating how deeply ingrained mediation by the elderly is in rural China.

[735] Int. with Villager Two, JY Village, Foshan, Fujian (2015). This expression (*gei taijie xia taijie xia* 台阶下台阶下) literally means when two people are standing on a high platform and must find a graceful way to take a step down. It refers to a situation where two people are stuck in a situation and neither want to back down out of embarrassment and in case of causing loss of face, and have to find a way to do so. And a similar English expression would be to 'give somebody an out'.

7.3 Preferences for Village Level Mediation over the Court System

This chapter has thus far focused on the societal side of the state-society relationship and how OPAs negotiate with the state, deflect state aims, or seek to transmit societal views to the local state. However, another important aspect of understanding the state-society relationship is whether local people feel that utilising the OPA as conflict mediators is of preference to them than going through state structures and the legal system. When seeking to understand how the emergence of OPAs as dispute mediators in villages benefits societal actors, it is necessary to examine how villagers view *within*-village dispute mediators vis-à-vis formalised legal structures and processes. This is the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

7.3.1 Basis in existing socio-legal theory

Existing studies of village-level dispute mediation both in rural China and other traditional rural communities seem to suggest that villagers tend to prefer and be more satisfied with local level dispute mediation. Indeed, to go back to Ethan Michelson's large-*n* study on the prevalence and satisfaction of dispute resolution 'from below', he puts forward a number of theoretical propositions as to why local mediation may be both more prevalent and popular at the rural grassroots. Drawing on the existing ethnographic literature on 'customary law' in other country contexts,[736] he suggests that when conflicts

[736] For studies of why people choose and how they experience state law versus customary law, see: Africa: Gluckman, M. (1955) *The Judicial Process Among the Bartose of Northern Rhodesia* (Manchester: The University Press); Gulliver, P. (1969) 'Dispute settlement without courts: the Ndendeuli of southern Tanzania', in, *Law in Culture and Society*, ed, Nader, L. (Chicago: Aldine), pp. 24–68; Comaroff, J. Roberts, S. (1981) *Rules and Processes: The Cultural Logic of Dispute in an African Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). United States: Llewellyn, K. Adamson Hoebel, E. (1941) *The Cheyenne Way:*

erupt in rural contexts where people are 'deeply embedded in dense networks of durable social relationships, local solutions are normally preferable to outside' solutions.[737] This is because villages are characterised by multiplex relationships that are diffuse, affective, and span multiple domains (i.e. neighbours, who are also cousins, who work together, and whose children play together and attend the same school).[738] As such, more so than their urban counterparts, there are significant social costs and social disincentives to escalating village disputes through petitioning or formal legal action because there is a greater risk to damaging multiplex relationships.[739] Indeed, socio-legal studies have shown that, in general, the more multiplex the relationship, the less likely formal legal action will occur in the event of a dispute.[740] Related to this, rural villagers tend to pursue local resolutions over litigation because the former tends to prioritise both a resolution of the conflict *and* the preservation of the disputants' relationship. That is to say, the legal system uses a formal set of fixed principles as the basis for resolving a dispute, whereas 'village dispute processes [are usually designed to] effectively preserve ongoing, multiplex, affectional relationships.'[741] The outcomes are therefore 'more flexible and [the negotiation] is part of everyone's daily, routinized behaviour'[742] (which litigation is

Conflict and Case Law in Primitive Jurisprudence (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press). Mexico: Nader, L. (1965) 'Choices in legal procedure: Shia Moslem and Mexican Zapotec', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 67, No. 2, pp. 394–99; Collier, J. (1973) *Law and Social Change in Zinacantan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press); Parnell, P. (1978) 'Village or state? Competitive legal systems in a Mexican judicial district', in *The Disputing Process – Law in Ten Societies*, eds, Nader, L. Todd, H. (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 315– 50; Parnell, P. (1988) *Escalating Disputes: Social Participation and Change in the Oaxacan Highlands* (Tuscon, AZ: The University of Arizona Press) cited in: Michelson, E. (2008) 'Justice from Above or Below', p.60

[737] *Ibid.*

[738] *Ibid.*

[739] Gluckman, M. (1955) *The Judicial Process* cited in: *Ibid.* p.61

[740] Felstiner, W. (1975) 'Avoidance as dispute processing: an elaboration', *Law & Society Review*, Vol. 9, No. 4, pp.695-706 cited in: *Ibid.*

[741] Starr, J. (1978) 'Turkish village disputing behavior,' in, *The Disputing Process*, Nader and Todd, p.138 cited in: *ibid.*

[742] *Ibid* p.56

not).[743] To further support this, prioritising affectional relationship has been cited by officials in China's central government as being part of China's traditional legal norms and practices. Indeed, Hao Chiyong, former Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Justice of the Central Government specifically praised 'China's unique, non-litigious conflict-resolution methods' as being 'rooted in the grassroots, operated through a wide range of personal networks, convenient and speedy' as well as designed to 'protect the affection of the parties involved'.[744]

An extension of this argument, but one not mentioned by Michelson, is that in a locally mediated dispute it is not just the disputants whose relationships are characterised as multiplex, but the mediators as well. That is to say, the mediators are also related to the disputants and their relatives by a complex web of personal relationships. Thus, mediators from within a village are also likely to suffer social costs or sanctions if they unfairly side in one person's favour or take a bribe from one of the disputants. As such, they may be seen as more trustworthy than judges, lawyers, and higher-level authorities whose relationship to disputants will be simplex, professional, and transactional. This is because a judge (or other mediator) will suffer fewer (if any) sanctions for making an unfair or biased ruling or for taking a bribe from one of the disputing parties than a local mediator

[743] This view of modern vs. traditional methods of justice and dispute resolution have been depicted elsewhere. Zhang Yimou's film *The Story of Qiu Ju* (*Qiu Ju da Guan Si* 秋菊打官司) for example demonstrates the limitations of modern legal approaches in villages that are underscored by traditional and multiplex local relationships. In the film, Qiu Ju takes the local village head to court to seek compensation for him kicking her husband in the groin. The case is referred up multiple layers of China's legal bureaucracy a process that takes several months to complete. In the meantime, however, the village head helps her deliver her baby during a difficult labour and he makes amends for his past actions. After the delivery, however, Qiu Ju discovers that the higher court has ruled that the village head should not just pay compensation to her but should serve a jail time. Qiu Ju in the end is left feeling uneasy about the sentence and the legal case against the village head because it feels disproportionate, particularly given his help with her labour. This story underscores the same issue that the legal system is not always flexible enough to deal appropriately with close affectional relationships.

[744] Zhang, S. (2016) *Confucianism in Contemporary Chinese Politics: An Actionable Account of Authoritarian Political Culture* (New York: Lexington Books) p.115

would. As such, higher level mediators are more easily bought off by one or other side of the disputing parties, than a mediator from within a village. Indeed, a separate literature on law and judicial process in China has documented that corruption is rife in the court system[745] and trust in legal structures remains relatively low, particularly in rural China.[746] This may therefore be another reason why villagers tend to prefer or get greater satisfaction from having disputes resolved by local mediators than they do from higher authorities.

7.3.2 Cases from Rural China

Although Michelson hypothesised that the multiplex relationships of disputants may be the reasons for the prevalence and satisfaction of 'justice from below' found in his survey, his quantitative research design meant that he lacked rich qualitative stories from the field to back them up. The theories he put forward were therefore fleshed out with information from other non-Chinese contexts. He therefore put forward these theories as questions and issues for future research in China rather than something his study could provide evidence on categorically. My research has been able to fill some of this knowledge gap by providing just such case studies, adding evidence to the research questions he left unanswered.

Although the reasons for pursuit of 'justice from below' discussed above can be applied to both conflicts between state and society, and intra-societal actors, it was in conversations about the latter (intra-societal conflict) that this reasoning came through most clearly. Intra-societal disputes were a large proportion of those negotiated and

[745] Gong, T. (2004) 'Dependent Judiciary and Unaccountable Judges: Judicial Corruption in Contemporary China', *China Review,* Vol. 4, No. 2, pp.33-54; Wang, Y. (2013) 'Court Funding and Judicial Corruption in China', *The China Journal,* No. 69, pp.43-63.

[746]

mediated by the OPAs at my fieldsites. Indeed, infrastructure development and land conflict aside, the most common disputes that OPAs dealt with often did not involve the state directly. Rather, they concerned family feuds over inheritance, extra-marital affairs, divorces, domestic violence, poor relations between mothers and daughters-in-law, disputes with unfilial sons, and feuds of various kind between neighbours. In half of the villages that I visited in Fujian and most in Shaanxi, local dispute mediation had been formally and explicitly delegated to OPA committees by village officials and their responsibility in this regard was widely known about by villagers.[747] In villages in Yunnan and the other half of fieldsites in Fujian, OPAs were also involved in mediating these types of intra-societal disputes but responsibility for them had not been delegated so formally to OPAs. Rather, they were delegated more organically and spontaneously as disputes arose.

In a number of villages in Fujian where OPAs had been in operation for over 25 years, the OPA committees claimed to have mediated[748] literally thousands of land and family conflicts since the OPA's initial establishment. They argued this was because the OPA committee had more time to spend on these issues than the village committee, and that they were more familiar with the local villagers than the village officials,[749] and they were better skilled at negotiating disputes because everyone, including the local officials, respected them (*dajia dou hen zunjing tamen* 大家都很尊敬他们).[750] Indeed, in these

[747] OPAs in Shaanxi also documented the disputes they had conducted each year.
[748] To be clear, the current OPA committee members reported that the 'OPA committee' had mediated thousands of conflicts. However, given that the composition of the OPA committee had changed over the 20-year period (due to ageing, deaths, and retirement), they themselves had not been involved in all the disputes.
[749] Many of the village officials lived in the town or county seat to be closer to better schools for their children.
[750] Int. with Villager Two, HF Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015); Int. with Village Official Two, YH Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015); Int. with Village Head, SSY Village, Shaanxi (2015).

locations, many of the villagers I spoke to said that after trying to resolve a dispute between themselves, their next recourse would naturally be to approach the OPA to resolve it.[751] At all fieldsites including in Yunnan and Shaanxi, locals claimed that the vast majority of disputes were resolved within the village, with very few going to court and those only when all other mediations attempts had been exhausted.

Although villagers were more reluctant to talk in detail about intra-societal conflict given that these tended to be more personal and sensitive in nature than those involving land and the state, some OPA committees did recount detailed examples of family disputes that they had resolved. Many of the examples they described appeared to support the theoretical propositions outlined above that a) local mediation is more flexible than the court system and seeks solutions that both preserve local relationships and ensures both parties are satisfied; and b) that local mediators can help protect disputants from the uneven biases of the state mediators. A number of cases and their theoretical implications are discussed below.

Case Study A: The Bigamous Young Man

The first case involves a bigamous young man in HF village in Fujian. A young man in his early 20s from HF village had reached marrying age and was on the lookout for a wife. As is still common in much of the Chinese countryside, he was introduced to a woman from a nearby county via matchmaking (*xiangqin* 相亲).[752] Their families were of similar socio-economic status and they were recommended to each other by close connections, so the conditions for marriage seemed right. The young man and woman –

[751] Int. Villager Five, HF Village, Wuwei, Fujian, (2015).
[752] Int. Villager Six, HF Village, Wuwei, Fujian, (2015).

Zhang Wei (m) and Wang Fang (f)[753] – swapped phone numbers (or, more accurately, scanned wechat barcodes), and after a few months of regular 'wechatting'[754] they decided to marry. Once married, however, things started to go downhill. They didn't get on well in person, they argued almost constantly, and 'did not have a happy marriage'[755] (*jiehun ganqing bu hao* 结婚感情不好). After several months living together in HF village, they separated, and Wang Fang moved back home to live with her family. After a while, Zhang Wei wanted to get a divorce, but Wang Fang refused to agree to one until he returned the money that her family had paid upon their engagement. Her family had provided 400,000rmb in dowry fees, and contributed 300,000rmb towards the purchase of a house, as is custom in this region. However, because the house was in her husband's name and the dowry fees were classified as a gift, they were not protected under China's divorce law, which significantly favours men in divorce proceedings.[756]Weighing up the chances of success as unfavourable, Wang Fang and her family wanted the money returned before starting divorce proceedings in order to have any chance of getting the money back.

More than a year later Zhang Wei met another woman at his work place and remarried. When his first wife, Wang Fang, found out, she came back to the village with her family and demanded compensation. Not only had he married without getting a divorce, but he was refusing to give back the money for the house and the dowry fees.[757] When the OPA committee heard about this they 'came forward to harmonize the situation' (*laorenhui chumian xietiao* 老人会出面协调).[758] They explained to Zhang Wei that bigamy is a

[753] All names used throughout this thesis are pseudonyms.
[754] WeChat is an instant messaging mobile app that is hugely popular in China.
[755] Int. with OPA Head, HF Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015).
[756] Hong Fincher, L. (2014) *Leftover Women.*
[757] In this county, the wife's family give the husband's family money upon an engagement.
[758] FG with OPA Committee, HF Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015).

crime punishable by jail and that is what could happen if Wang Fang reported him to the police. The OPA committee knew him and his family well and wanted to prevent what they believed to be a disproportionate sentence befalling a young, naïve man. However, in order to prevent it, they needed Zhang Wei to work with them to resolve the dispute in a mutually acceptable way that recognized Wang Fang's claim to the dowry money given the shortness of their marriage.[759]

Neither party wanted to go to court for a number of reasons. First, under the law, Zhang Wei could have been sent to jail for bigamy and Wang Fang could have lost her claim to the dowry money altogether, an outcome that neither of them wanted. Furthermore, neither Wang Fang nor her family wanted to escalate the dispute and see Zhang Wei jailed, after all they had close family friends in common and they believed that imprisonment would be disproportionate. They just wanted the money to be returned. In addition, there were high financial costs of going to court and neither party could be sure that the issue would be resolved fairly in a mutually acceptable way. Both families trusted the OPA committee to resolve the issue fairly and agreed for them to lead the negotiation. After a long negotiation process between some of the OPA committee, Zhang Wei, Wang Fang, and their two families, they agreed on an amount of compensation (which was slightly less than the dowry sum) that they were both satisfied with. The OPA drew up a repayment schedule for Zhang Wei to pay back Wang Fang's money over a number of months and at a fixed rate of interest.[760] The OPA committee also organized for Zhang Wei to apologize to both Wang Fang and her family for his actions. In return, she agreed to divorce him and not report his bigamy to the police. This settlement was acceptable to

[759] *Ibid.*
[760] *Ibid.*

both parties and their families. It solved the problem without resorting to formal litigation and prevented the more extreme outcome of a jail sentence for Zhang Wei.

This case shows us that, in the eyes of rural villagers, the modern legal system is often too inflexible to deal with problems in a way that truly resolves the issue. Going to court in this case would most likely have resulted in an outcome that satisfied neither party. Likewise, the law itself is was not seen as fair or flexible given that the divorce law would have favoured one side (the man) over the other and would not have accounted for the shortness of their marriage. Likewise, the law on bigamy, given that Zhang Wei and Wang Fang had not been together for a year, would in their eyes have produced a disproportionately harsh sentence. We cannot know what would have had happened in this case if they had gone to court and whether in practice the judges would have taken some of these things into account. Nevertheless, it was certainly the *perception* of both Zhang Wei and Wang Fang's families that the OPA committee were fairer, more flexible, and more trustworthy mediators than the courts would have been.

Case Study B: The Car Accident

The second case involves a serious car accident and the paralysis of a local resident. A newly tarmacked main road through HF village had resulted in motorists driving too fast and parking dangerously. One night, a villager called Li Xiuying was walking down the dimly lit village road in the dark and was hit by a speeding car. She was left paralyzed from the waist down. The driver of the car was a local man, Zhang Qiang, who came from another family in the same village. A dispute broke out between the two families over who was at fault and how much Zhang Qiang should pay toward the costs of her immediate medical treatment. In addition, Li Xiuying and her family also wanted

compensation for the accident and help with all her future medical expenses. After trying and failing to resolve the dispute themselves, both families agreed to allow the OPA committee to get involved. This dispute is interesting because a judgement through the formal court system might be seen, to objective observers, as more appropriate in a case like this. Yet, Li Xiuying and her family did not want to take Zhang Qiang to court despite having a good legal case. Their reasons for not wanting to go to court were two-fold. First, they did not want to escalate the dispute and create further hostility between the two families by taking Zhang Qiang to court. They also did not want him to go to jail, but were seeking instead an adequate sum of compensation. Second, even though they had a good case, they did not trust the legal system to be fair. That is to say, they did not know whether Zhang Qiang's family would have a connection to the appointed judge that could influence the outcome or whether he would try to buy a favourable decision from the judge. Lawyers and judges, everyone seemed to agree, can be easily bought. The OPA committee members by contrast were all well known to the two families and were seen as fair and trustworthy. At the same time, both parties thought the other would accept and abide by a judgement made by the OPA.[761]

The OPA committee also believed that resolving the dispute themselves would be preferable both for the sake of the disputants and the 'harmony' of the village.[762] In their view, 'the law…does not always produce outcomes that are both fair and acceptable to both sides'.[763] While producing a fair and just outcome for the aggrieved party is important, producing a mutually acceptable outcome is equally so.[764] This is because, to

[761] Int. with Villager Six, HF Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015).
[762] Int. with OPA Deputy Head, HF Village, Wuwei, Fujian, (2015); Int. with HF Village OPA Head, Wuwei, Fujian (2015).
[763] Int. with OPA Deputy Head, HF Village, Wuwei, Fujian, (2015);
[764] *Ibid.*

paraphrase HF village OPA head, disputes should be settled in a fair way but also in a way takes into account that 'the two families need to continue to live [in close proximity] with each other in the future.'[765] As such, the OPA committee's view on this links closely to the multiplex relationship theory discussed above, that 'village dispute processes [are usually designed to] effectively preserve ongoing, multiplex, affectional relationships.'[766] This, the OPA committee argued, is not just for the sake of the disputing parties but also for the sake of the rest of the villagers. Disputes that are not resolved in this way, they argued, can result in 'tension and unease in small villages such as this'.[767] Thus, the process of taking another family to court or resolving it inflexibly can cause irreparable divisions that are damaging for both the disputants and the long-term harmony of the village.[768] At the end of this particular conflict, the OPA committee said they negotiated for the family of the driver, Zhang Qiang, to pay Li Xiuying's medical costs incurred up to the point of their decision, which represented the largest portion of the expected total medical costs. They also negotiated a sum of compensation that both parties found acceptable which could be used to cover some of her future medical expenses.

This case demonstrates that OPA committee members, with whom the disputants have familiar, multiplex, relationships, are seen as more trustworthy and less easily bought, than official legal mediators and provide outcomes that are more flexible than the rigid principles of the legal system. Despite Li Xiuying having a case that could have been resolved in her interests through the court system, her family did not trust the uneven biases of potentially corruptible judges. Furthermore, it was perceived that the OPA, more

[765] Int. with OPA Head, HF Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015).
[766] Starr, J. (1978) 'Turkish Village Disputing Behavior,' in, *The Disputing Process*, eds, Nader and Todd, p.138 cited in Michelson, E. (2008) 'Justice from Above or Below', p.61
[767] Int. with OPA Head, HF Village, Wuwei, Fujian (2015).
[768] *Ibid.*

than the court system, would flexibly take into account the dual goal of gaining justice for the aggrieved party, *and* producing an outcome that is mutually acceptable and preserves the long-term, multiplex relationships between villagers.

Case Study C: Intra-Familial Disharmony

Similar examples of OPAs resolving these types of neighbourly or intra-familial conflicts were found across all my fieldsites. While in many locations, the OPA committee responded to these types of disputes when they arose as per the examples above, in villages in Shaanxi and in one village in Yunnan, OPA committees had developed a number of other mechanisms in order to resolve intra-familial disputes and to preemptively promote harmonious relations between family members. Specifically, issues such as poor relations between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law (*po-xi guanxi* 婆媳关系), domestic violence, divorce, and other spousal conflicts, disputes between siblings (usually over inheritance or parental caregiving), as well as unfilial and neglectful adult children were highlighted as issues that OPA committees in these locations were actively seeking to address.

While the OPA committee members in these locations argued that these were all serious issues that could affect the harmony of a village, they were not the types of issues that villagers would be willing or able to involve the courts over and therefore it was more important for OPAs to monitor and resolve them.[769] Several reasons were cited as to why villagers would not utilize the court system to address these types of intra-familial disputes. First, relationship breakdowns such as these were not perceived to be criminal

[769] FG with OPA Committee, GX Village, Shaanxi (2015); Int. with Villager / OPA Member, GX Village, Shaanxi (2015); Int. with OPA Head, BZM Village, Yunnan (2012).

issues, and in many cases – such as poor relations between mother and daughter in law – the legal system was indeed not of much help to them. Second, even in those cases where they were covered under the law – such as domestic violence, divorce, and unfilial children – the close relationships involved appeared to be a deterrent to going to court. As one OPA committee member argued, 'many people here would think it was strange to take your mother-in-law or your son to court. If you did you may be considered a trouble maker. People think these problems should be solved within the family'.[770] While a villager said that 'if you take your family member to court then your relationship with them will get worse not better! These things cannot be solved by the law.'[771] Linked to this, OPA committees suggested that, because of the sensitive familial nature of these disputes, villagers were too embarrassed to discuss these types of conflicts in a public forum and would consider it shameful and a loss of face to admit to such problems in their own family. As a result, most suggested these issues were better resolved through informal and local mediation methods if they could not be resolved by the parties directly involved.[772]

To try to combat these issues OPA committees in Shaanxi each appointed someone to have responsibility for these types of intra-familial conflicts. This committee member's role was to work with families when such conflicts arose and to monitor how the relationships progressed after the initial conflict had been resolved. They were also tasked with keeping detailed records of the disputes and keeping a note of what had been agreed in each case. These records were then referred to if one side contested the agreement at a

[770] FG with OPA Committee, GX Village, Shaanxi (2015).
[771] Int. with OPA Member / Villager, TQ Village, Shaanxi (2015).
[772] FG with OPA Committee, SBH Village, Shaanxi (2015); FG with OPA Committee, LP Village, Shaanxi (2015); FG with OPA Committee, GX Village, Shaanxi (2015).

later point. In addition to regular monitoring after a dispute's resolution, these OPAs had also sought ways to preempt such intra-familial conflict from arising in the first place. In a number of villages, with help from the township government, they had delivered educational talks on common areas of contention in families such as inter-generational tensions and conflicts about money and inheritance, as well as effective methods of dispute resolution that they could employ to resolve them. Several elderly villagers in one village whose children lived far from home, for example, claimed to have had improved relations with them after hearing more about the pressures their adult children face in the city and why they might not visit as often as they would like. Whilst in another village in which they had received lectures on how to de-escalate disputes, residents reported feeling better equipped to find ways of compromising when arguing with their adult children. As one man said,

> [The OPA head] gave several talks on resolving domestic conflict and getting on with your children. He talked about the need to compromise [and gave us practical examples of how to do so]. For example, in a situation where you might like to eat rice and your child might want to eat noodles. In the past, older people here would have insisted on rice just because [we] are older ... and [our children] should respect [our] wishes. But we were told, [by the OPA head] that [because society is changing] there is no harm in compromising with your children and one day having rice and the next day having noodles. These simple examples were used to show us how to get on with our children better. In the past I have been too short tempered with my children when I thought they were not respecting me. Now I have tried to change my relationship with them for the better and be more understanding of the pressures of their lives in the city'.[773]

In several locations, the township government had distributed conflict resolution videos

[773] Int. with Villager/OPA Member Four, CG Village, Shaanxi (2015).

to OPAs, which included short case studies performed by actors of common village conflicts and how to deal with them, and the OPA hosted meetings to play the videos and talk through the scenes with residents.[774]

In addition, in all villages I visited in Shaanxi and in one village in Yunnan, the OPA had put in place an awards system for promoting positive intra-familial relations. Awards were given out annually at *Chong'an Jie* Festival and were designed to address intra-familial disputes. Specifically, awards were given for being a 'harmonious family', 'good mother-in-law', 'good daughter-in-law', 'good son', 'good wife', and (in some cases) 'good husband'. In some villages, the OPA committee had also created a 'most improved' category whereby family members could be awarded a commendation for having bettered their relationship over the course of the year. Villagers could nominate different people for these awards and the OPA committee would analyses the behavior of the nominated candidates and select a winner and several runners up. Winners of these awards reported to have received a certificate and a gift from the OPA committee – such as several month's supply of cooking oil, corn, blankets, or other staple foods. In addition, their pictures were put up on notice boards in the village squares or in the village committee offices to display their achievements. Sons and daughters-in-law who lived outside the village who won the awards were invited back to receive it in front of other villagers at the festival. At the award ceremony the OPA head would outline the achievements of the winners and present them as a 'moral model' for the community for that year.

[774] FG with OPA Committee, CG Village, Shaanxi, (2015); FG with OPA Committee, ZZD Village, Shaanxi, (2015).

This use of symbolic capital, that is bestowing honors and prestige on individuals in a very public forum is clearly intended to be an incentive or method of moulding or inducing 'harmonious' behaviours within families. Interviews with residents in Shaanxi are full of references to the benefits of these awards on intra-familial relations. Nevertheless, although most villagers in Shaanxi who I interviewed spoke positively about this award system and suggested it had had a positive effect on family relationships, this research does not pretend to be able to *measure* the extent to which these awards shape people's behaviour in practice. Rather, what is interesting is that such disputes had been identified as an area of concern, and preemptive mechanisms have been put in place by OPAs and the local state in an attempt to improve intra-familial relationships and resolve such conflicts locally within villages.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that OPA committee members are not passive receptors of state policy and they remain embedded within, and allied to, their local communities even while cooperating with the local state. State reliance on OPA committees in order to 'get things done' provides OPAs with leverage with which to negotiate with the local state over the implementation of state policy and the outcome of local conflicts. This chapter has shown that they can do this by utilizing their knowledge of state policy, withholding their support for the state during moments of conflict, and by becoming a focal point for villagers to report problems and grievances to the local state. In doing so, OPAs can provide a 'positive-sum', mutually empowering channel through which village communities can negotiate with the state, redress societal grievances, and deflect state demands even at the same time as facilitating state reach.

In addition, this chapter has looked at the ways in which OPAs have become a focal point for resolving intra-societal conflicts, such as divorces, intra-family feuds, and inheritance disputes in villages, which might otherwise be resolved by the court system. These local dispute mediation methods allow villagers to circumvent state law and find more flexible outcomes to local problems that take into account *both* the desire for justice and the desire to preserve the multiplex relations of communal societies. While this may weaken some parts of the state bureaucracy such as the legal system from cementing their authority in rural China, legitimizing such local dispute mediation practices is ultimately in both state and societal interests. This is because local mediation is preferred by villagers over the court system for producing flexible outcomes that are routinized and rooted in local norms; whist at the same time ensuring that tensions and conflicts are minimized in order to facilitate harmonious community relations and stability maintenance which is of key importance for the state.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This conclusion is split into three parts. The first section addresses the ***originality*** of this thesis, where it has delivered new empirical knowledge, and what gaps in the literature it has sought to address. In this section, I argue that this thesis makes an original contribution in five areas: the development of OPAs as an institution; the role of informal actors in dispute mediation 'from below'; the issue of the micro-foundations of authoritarian resilience; the role of the elderly as political actors; and the application of the State-*in*-Society concept to a strong state context.

The second section explores in more detail ***the main argument and key findings*** of this thesis and how they run through each of the chapters of this thesis.

After that, I discuss ***the implications for Chinese politics and future academic research***. The section is divided into three key areas that relate to: ageing and older people's

associations; modernisation and the Chinese state; and social governance and authoritarian resilience.

8.2 Areas of Originality

8.2.1 The OPA as an Institution

This thesis contributes original research in several different ways. To my knowledge, this is the first and only full-length study of older people's associations in China, despite being an immensely important institution for negotiating disputes in rural China. Although some studies of OPAs do exist,[775] they are mainly limited to single journal articles, case studies of one location, and tend to address OPAs as a means by which to explore other phenomenon. For example, Deng and O'Brien use a case study of an OPA in Zhejiang to explore environmental activism and protest tactics.[776] Likewise, Hurst *et al.* only touch on OPAs briefly in a study that also looks at the role of the 'the mafia', lineage halls, and churches in collective petitioning. While Hansen's study does focus on OPAs, she only explores some of their activities at the grassroots and does not put them in the context of national policy. This is therefore the first study to look directly at OPAs as an institution, to provide an account of their vertical and horizontal establishment and origins, to put them in the context of national-level policy making, and to describe in detail their various

[775] Hansen, M. (2007) 'Organising the Old': He, X. (2007) 'NRR and the Chinese Path'; Dong, H. (2003) 'Generating community welfare'; Deng, Y. (2008) 'To What Extent is Grey Power Possible?'; He, X. (2005) 'A Chronicle of the Formation of OPAs'; Deng, Y. O'Brien, K. (2014) 'The Society of Senior Citizens'; Deng, Y. O'Brien, K. (2013) 'Relational Repression in China'; O'Brien, K. Deng, Y. (2015) 'Repression Backfires'; Hurst W. *et al.* (2014) 'Reassessing Collective Petitioning'; Robins, V. (2012) 'Older People's Associations and the Local State'.

[776] Deng, Y. O'Brien, K. (2013) 'Relational Repression'; O'Brien, K. Deng, Y. (2015) 'Repression Backfires'; Deng, Y. O'Brien, K. (2014) 'The Society of Senior Citizens'.

activities at the grassroots. In doing so, this thesis has provided a significant contribution to our understanding of OPAs at a time when they are becoming increasingly important.

8.2.2 The Micro-foundations of Authoritarian Resilience

The second area of originality and where this thesis has contributed new knowledge has been in addressing the 'micro-foundations' gap in the authoritarian resilience literature. As outlined in the introduction, the main puzzle of explaining the Chinese state since the 2000s has been around its capacity to maintain stability and perpetuate regime control despite a wide array of conflicts and mobilization episodes that have taken place since the collapse of state socialism. The Chinese studies literature depicts an 'adaptive' and 'resilient' authoritarian state on the one hand and an assertive society on the other, while failing to adequately explain how this paradoxical duality persists.[777] Most studies of authoritarian resilience in the Chinese context have focused on macro-level reasons for regime durability, such as the co-optation of elites, control of the media, and an increasingly professionalised bureaucracy. These studies take social stability and the resolution of social conflict as a given rather than a subject of enquiry.[778] As such, the authoritarian resilience literature has left under examined[779] the question of how the state responds to conflict episodes as they arise at the grassroots, and exactly how state-society *interactions* during moments of conflict shape stability maintenance and ultimately contribute to regime durability. While some recent studies have begun to look at the micro-foundations of authoritarian resilience at the grassroots, these studies have been

[777] Lee, C.K. Zhang, Y. (2017) 'Governing the Counter-movement'.
[778] *Ibid.*
[779] There have been some attempts at this, see: Heberer, T. Göbel, C. (2011) *The Politics of Community Building*; Read, B. (2012) *Roots of the State*; Lee, C.K. Zhang, Y. (2013) 'The Power of Instability'; Lee, C.K. Zhang, Y. (2017) 'Governing the Counter-movement'.

limited in number and have almost exclusively focused on urban areas.[780] By looking at conflicts and disputes as they unfold at the rural grassroots and by exploring how the state and social forces interact as they seek to negotiate and resolve them, this study has sought to contribute to our understanding of the 'micro-foundations of authoritarian resilience' and takes steps towards redressing this significant gap in the literature (see key findings for more on this).

8.2.3 Stability Maintenance and Social Governance

In a similar vein, this dissertation has also contributed new knowledge on *how* stability maintenance and social governance are carried out at the rural grassroots. As previously discussed in the introductory chapter, the advent of the 'social governance' agenda has suggested a state desire to diversify stability maintenance efforts and provide more of a role for social organisations in maintaining stability, resolving disputes, and negotiating unrest. Yet, despite this, academic studies of conflict and grievance in China have tended to focus on how disputants seek resolution of conflicts 'from above' by state institutions (i.e. petitioning/the courts) rather than 'from below' by actors within the village. This is surprising given that large-*n* studies[781] have shown that the bulk of dispute mediation is resolved locally by local actors. Those studies that do focus on *within*-village resolution mechanisms, tend to focus on the role of officials and grassroots state institutions, such as village committees, and neglect unofficial or informal ones. There has been both a dearth of literature on the role of informal actors and social organisations in resolving disputes at the rural grassroots, as well as a dearth of research on the resolution of conflicts 'from below' by village actors more generally.

[780] Heberer, T. Göbel, C. (2011) *The Politics of Community Building*; Read, B. (2012) *Roots of the State*; Lee, C.K. Zhang, Y. (2013) 'The Power of Instability'.
[781] Michelson, E. (2008) 'Justice from Above or Below',

This thesis has sought to redress this imbalance by focusing on the role of grassroots OPAs in mediating village conflict. In doing so, this thesis has developed our understanding of within-village mediation process, as well as demonstrating how and why local state officials use informal actors like OPAs to govern disputes. In addition, while Hansen's article on OPAs[782] referred briefly to their dispute mediating capacity, she presented OPAs purely as a tool of the state and with limited agency. This study has gone further to show the other side of the story. That is to say, it has shown how OPAs respond to the obligations the state channels through them, how such interactions provide opportunities to negotiate state policy, circumvent state authority, or transmit grievances to local officials. In doing so, this thesis has provided a contribution to the literature on stability maintenance, social governance, and rural dispute mediation processes.

8.2.4 Demography and Gerontology

This study does not explicitly situate itself within the field of demography or gerontology. Nevertheless, given that it has focused closely on the role of the elderly in Chinese rural society, it is worth mentioning the contribution this thesis makes has in this area. I would argue that this study is original in presenting a contemporary view of the elderly (and older men in particular) as influential political actors. Most studies of ageing in China portray this social cohort as vulnerable victims or passive receptors of economic and social change. Indeed, China's elderly are often described as 'left behind', 'abandoned', 'dependent', 'passive' and 'weak'. While it is true that some elderly people, particularly those who have been incapacitated by extreme old age or illness do fit this picture, it is wildly inaccurate to stereotype the whole of this age cohort in this way. Despite the

[782] Hansen, M. (2007) 'Organising the Old'.

invisibility of the elderly in the literature on contentious politics in China, this study has shown that the elderly, like many other social cohorts, can also be strong, influential, or contentious political actors with clear political agency, their own social capital, and an important role to play in shaping grassroots politics.

8.2.5 Theoretical Originality

Finally, although the primary contribution of this thesis is empirical rather than theoretical, I would argue that there is also an original theoretical dimension to this research. Given Midgal's initial use of the State-*in*-Society approach to describe state fragility, it is often associated with 'weak state' contexts or democratic societies where the state faces pressure from strong societal interest groups. Yet, Migdal did not preclude use of this approach in strong state contexts. In fact, he specifically argued that 'all states have had limited capabilities at *some time*, or with *some groups* or on *some issues*'[783] and that, even in strong, authoritarian states, the state-society relationship is rarely characterized by complete domination of one side over the other. Nevertheless, despite these caveats, the application of this concept by academic scholars has, for the most part, been limited to weak or democratic settings. By applying this concept in a strong, semi-authoritarian context such as China, this thesis contributes to rectifying this imbalance and demonstrates how this theoretical approach can be applicable in a strong state setting.

In addition, because Migdal focused on weak states, the outcomes he explored portray centre-periphery relations as zero-sum. In the Chinese context, however, where the state is relatively strong and the interests of central and local officials are closely bound together, zero-sum outcomes for the centre are much less likely. Rather, this thesis argues

[783] *Ibid.* p.xiv [my emphasis]

that negotiation between state and society at the grassroots does not *necessarily* have to lead to a loss of power for the political centre. Rather, it can produce a variety of outcomes along a continuum, from bolstering some state institutions and their aims (i.e. enhanced stability maintenance) at the expense of others (i.e. the authority of the legal system in villages), to increasing 'mutually empowering' outcomes for both state and society. Indeed, this thesis has shown that mutual empowerment is possible with the state benefiting by enhancing its ability to resolve disputes quickly and in ways that often suit their broad interests, while societal actors can also benefit by influencing policy implementation and feeding back grievances to the local state. As such, a key theoretical contribution of this thesis has been in demonstrating the other possible outcomes that arise from the State-*in*-Society approach (other than state fragility), including the 'mutual empowerment' of both state and societal actors.

8.3 Main Argument and Key Findings

This section explores the key findings from each chapter and demonstrates how the main argument of this thesis flows through them. It also highlights how these finding have contributed towards the five areas of originality discussed above. In doing so, this section will first address the structure and function of OPAs. It will then look at how and why OPAs enable the state to extend its reach and penetration of the grassroots. Finally, it will assess how cooperation between OPAs and the local state leads to negotiation, cooperation, and accommodation of societal interests. Migdal's State-*in*-Society approach, which is the key theoretical framework of this thesis, is woven throughout the

discussion. The amendment of the State-in-Society approach and inclusion of 'mutual empowerment' is discussed at the end.

8.3.1 Structure and Function of OPAs

This thesis has put forward new knowledge in four empirical chapters (Chapters Four-Seven). In Chapter Four – ***'Defining OPAs: Establishment, Regulation, and Structure'*** – I outlined and categorized four distinct types of OPAs and to analyse the supervisory and regulatory structures that surround them. To my knowledge, this is the first and only study to provide a comprehensive overview of national state policy on OPAs and their establishment. In doing so, this chapter argued that despite some differences in the activities and membership of OPAs, the function of OPA committees, and the regulatory environment that surrounds them, remains similar across typologies.[784] OPAs are established by the state and are institutionally connected to it through a hierarchical bureaucratic structure that allows policy directives[785] to filter from the central level to the grassroots. As such, at least when looked at from this regulatory perspective, OPAs appear state-corporatist in nature and reflect a desire to build institutional structures that extend state reach to the rural grassroots. Yet, these structures do not appear to be used to constrain the operation of OPAs, as they have done with many domestic and international NGOs. On the contrary, government support for OPAs has led to fewer regulatory obstacles and greater operational freedom than many other social organizations. This is because, in the eyes of the state, OPAs do not represent a 'civil society'[786] organization in the same way that self-constituted groups do. Rather, they are a product of Chinese

[784] That is, with the exception of shell OPAs.

[785] Policy directives on stability maintenance, political propaganda, and service provision for the rural elderly in particular.

[786] Given that the state does not view them as a threatening civil society organisation they have not been subject to the increasing constraints faced by domestic and international NGOs under Xi Jinping.

state-building, that is, the desire to create institutional channels to incorporate particular groups, perform specific state aims, ameliorate societal problems, and act as the state's 'nerve tips'[787] in an effort to make the lives of societal actors visible, legible, and controllable.

8.3.2 OPAs, State-Building, and Stability Maintenance

With this in mind, Chapter Five – ***OPAs and Traditional Authority in Rural China*** – sought to address the underlying reasons behind why OPAs enable the state to extend its reach and why OPAs are able to effectively negotiate grassroots conflict. I focussed on the composition of OPA committees and the common characteristics of those appointed to sit on them. Again, apart from a few short references to OPA committees being 'old' and 'male' in Mette Hansen's article,[788] no other studies of OPAs have, to my knowledge, addressed this issue.[789] In doing so, this chapter demonstrated that OPAs tend to be comprised of older men over the age of fifty-five, who are well educated relative to other villagers, who previously held high status positions as cadres or teachers, who are influential within their kinship networks, and who are generally perceived as possessing both good moral character, a frankness of speech and leadership qualities. These characteristics link closely to the traditional authority of kinship, patriarchy, an educated/gentry class, and the moral standards and 'particularistic ties' of a society characterized by familiarity. Indeed, as the discussion of traditional authority in Chapter Two – ***Literature Review and Theoretical Framework*** – showed, such characteristics are

[787] Read, B. (2000) 'Revitalizing the States Urban "Nerve Tips"'.
[788] Hansen, M. (2008) 'Organising the Old'.
[789] In Deng and O'Brien, and in Hurst *et al.*, the composition of OPAs and the role of the OPA committee are not addressed.

– albeit in slightly altered forms[790] – those that have generated authority and regulated social control in rural villages throughout much of China's imperial history. As such, OPAs are able to mediate grassroots conflict because they are perceived as possessing the legitimate authority to regulate social relations within their local communities.[791] Embedding these individuals within OPAs therefore enables the state to harness their authority for its own ends.

This is a key point that links closely to my theoretical argument. As I laid out in Chapter Two – ***Literature Review and Theoretical Framework*** – the State-in-Society approach argues that states and social organisations compete for authority and social control over the lives of their members. While states seek to be the dominant authority within their territory, getting people to submit to their authority is a challenge because local organisations are often perceived as being the legitimate arbiters of local social relations.[792]Therefore, state-building has often involved building institutional 'tentacles' to reach into local communities and channel society into frameworks that serve state aims and promote state authority. In the modernisation of Europe, as we know from wider historical research,[793] state-building rested heavily on establishing the legal/rational authority of the judicial system and bureaucracy. In doing so, European states sought to enable state law to supplant 'fragmented customary or feudal law [and] induce people to behave as state leaders wanted them to behave ... [rather than] according to dictates of local lords'.[794]

[790] For example, while passing the imperial state exams gave one status and authority in village in the imperial era, being a successful local teacher appears to give one authority and status today.
[791] Lambach, D. (2004) 'State in Society', p.5
[792] *Ibid.*
[793] Tilly, C. (1993) *Coercion, Capital and European States, A.D. 990-1990,* (London: Wiley-Blackwell)
[794] Migdal, J. (1988) *Strong Societies and Weak States*, p.22

Yet, in many other parts of the world, state leaders have faced impenetrable barriers to state predominance, with local values, customs, and norms proving difficult to displace.[795] Rather than *supplanting* local authority and social control altogether, some states have sought instead to build alliances with the leaders of these local organisations and to use them to further state agendas. This, I have argued, best explains the embedding of local authority figures into OPAs, as well as use of OPAs to enhance the state's stability maintenance efforts. Indeed, in pursuing this state-building strategy, the state arguably demonstrates a recognition of the limits of its own power. This is because, in doing so, it recognises that it cannot just impose its will on the grassroots directly, nor simply supplant or eradicate the traditional norms of community life all together. Rather, it suggests that when building institutions in rural society, in order to become truly effective, these 'institutions [must] set roots in rural society and become an ingrained part of how rural society works'.[796] That the state is pursuing this strategy is interesting, and in some ways paradoxical, because modern states have often sought to implant legal, rational, and bureaucratic structures in place of traditional ones, and the Chinese state's own modernisation discourses have often portrayed rural rituals as 'obstacles to progress' that should be eradicated. Thus, while it is perhaps not surprising that traditional authority and values have continued to persist in rural communities *per se*, it *is* surprising that the Chinese state is mobilising traditional authority networks in order to use them to aid state control and rural governance.

[795] *Ibid.*

[796] Ma, H. Xu, Y. (2012) 'Reorganising Rural China from the Bottom'.

Following this discussion of *why* OPAs are able to extend state reach and negotiate rural conflict, Chapter Six – ***OPA-Local State Cooperation and Grassroots Penetration*** – focused more specifically on *how* they perform this function at the grassroots. This chapter has delivered new knowledge on: the role of social organizations in 'social governance' and 'stability maintenance'; the resolution of conflict 'from below' within the village; as well as the strategies used by OPAs and local officials to implement contentious policy, negotiate disputes, and generally 'get things done' at the grassroots level. Using case studies of land conflict and infrastructure development as examples, this chapter traced the role of OPA's in negotiating disputes and maintaining stability as well as how they cooperate with local officials in fulfilling these tasks. In doing so, this chapter argued that since force and coercion have become riskier methods of implementing contentious policy, the state needs to rely more heavily on persuading rural people to comply with, or defer to, state policy of their own volition. In keeping with the State-*in*-Society approach, this chapter argued that local officials have sought to build alliances with OPA committees in order to harness their authority and trustworthiness, to enhance the state's persuasiveness when governing conflict. More specifically, it suggested that by delegating the mediation of land disputes to OPA committees or by using them to gather information on villagers, the state is able to tailor its negotiating strategies to adapt to specific local situations and the specific personalities of individual disputants. In doing so, this has allowed local government officials, who are usually outsiders with circumscribed knowledge of village affairs, to tap into local networks to resolve disputes more quickly or in a way that suits their interests.

8.3.3 OPA - State Negotiation

While Chapters Five and Six primarily focused on top-down interactions and on how OPAs benefit the state and aid state penetration of the grassroots, Chapter Seven – ***Negotiation, Cooperation and Positive-Sum Interactions*** - focused on the flip side of the state-society relationship. That is to say, it focused on how OPA committees use their position to negotiate with the local state, change local policy, and benefit local societal actors. In doing so, this chapter argued that OPA committees are not uncritical in their cooperation with local state officials. Rather, they are very much tied to local interests and can maintain local allegiances even at the same time as cooperating with the state. Indeed, local officials cannot simply impose their will on OPA actors at the grassroots. Rather, cooperation between the local state and OPAs provides them with political opportunities and leverage to negotiate with the state over the process and outcome of such disputes. In doing so, OPAs can circumvent state authority, negotiate state policy, deflect state aims, and sometimes act as a channel through which village communities can transmit their opinions to the local state or redress their grievances. In addition, this chapter looked at the ways in which OPAs have become a focal point for resolving intra-societal conflicts, such as divorces, intra-family feuds, and inheritance disputes in villages, which might otherwise be resolved by the court system. These local dispute mediation methods allow villagers to circumvent state law and find more flexible outcomes to local problems that take into account *both* the desire for justice and the desire to preserve the multiplex relations of communal societies. This chapter argued that while OPAs may help the state with its stability maintenance agenda and may extend state penetration of the grassroots in this regard (as described in previous chapters), it may simultaneously weaken other parts of the state bureaucracy, such as the legal system, from extending its authority to rural communities. Therefore, despite state discourses implying

a modernist agenda, the accommodation and legitimization of OPAs can serve to further entrench traditional authority, customary law, and local social control mechanisms in place of state law and 'modern' bureaucratic institutions.

The analysis provided in Chapter Seven links closely to the second part of my theoretical argument. That is to say, as the State-*in*-Society approach argues, building alliances with local authority figures can be risky for states, because doing so bolsters powerful societal agencies that can use their status to challenge or circumvent state authority, negotiate state policy, and deflect state aims. The result, in the states that Migdal studied in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), was a disaggregation of state interests with the interests of local officials being to collude with strongmen at the *expense* of the political centre and its policy goals. In these contexts, he argued, that such alliances ultimately led to state fragility and the fragmentation of social control.[797] Yet, while Migdal used the theory to describe 'weak states', where the state ultimately loses its bid to enforce its authority, he allowed that this model is not only relevant in a weak state context. Indeed, he argued that 'all states [even strong ones] have had limited capabilities at *some time*, or with *some groups* or on *some issues*.'[798] Thus, the state-society relationship is rarely characterized by complete domination of one side, with both able to influence each other even when one side is weaker or stronger. As such, as I argued in Chapter Seven, even in cases when the state is ultimately successful in implementing policy, cooperation with OPAs provides opportunities to negotiate state policy, deflect state aims, circumvent state law, and transmit village grievances to local state officials. Furthermore, I have found that local

[797] Migdal, J. (1988) *Strong Societies and Weak States*, p.265
[798] *Ibid.* p.xiv [my emphasis]

state officials often choose to accommodate and negotiate rather than resort to coercion, force, and domination to elicit compliance.

Yet, in contrast to Migdal's approach, I have argued that negotiation and accommodation at the grassroots does not *necessarily* have to lead to a loss of power for the political centre. While it may lead to a diminishing of some aspects of state power in some cases, such as undermining the efforts of the court system to extend their authority to rural villages, in the majority of cases these negotiations have the effect of creating more power for *both* sides, or what some have called 'mutual empowerment'.[799] This is because they allow the state to implement contentious policy, resolve disputes quickly without threat of them spiralling out of control, and often in ways that suit their broad interests. This is at the same time as allowing societal actors to negotiate with the state, feedback grievances to local officials, and influence policy implementation at the local level.

8.4 Implications for Chinese Politics and Future Academic Research

The main arguments and the empirical evidence generated through this research have implications for wider discussions on Chinese politics and society and for the direction of future academic research. I will first discuss ageing and OPAs, then modernisation and the Chinese state, and finally, social governance and authoritarian resilience.

[799] Kohli, A. Shue, V. (1994) 'State Power and Social Forces', p.323

8.4.1 Ageing and Older People's Associations

This study has focused on Older People's Associations as a case through which to explore social governance and grassroots stability maintenance agendas. In doing so, it has also put forward new knowledge on the history, establishment, regulation, structure, and motivation behind OPAs more generally. This new knowledge gives rise to further research questions about OPAs. In terms of their historical development, one wonders how and why OPAs have developed differently in different places and what this can tell us about policy implementation processes more generally. In addition, where OPAs are more developed and better functioning, one wonders whether this is because of 'policy learning' by local officials, because of the personal political agendas of local government leaders, or because of other local factors. With regard to motivation behind OPA establishment, numerous interesting questions and research topics arise. This thesis put forward evidence to suggest that there are at least three primary motivators behind the establishment of OPAs – village governance and stability maintenance; elderly ideological and propaganda education; and ageing and community care. This thesis has focused on the former, that is, the embedding of traditional authority figures into OPAs in order to help the state mediate conflict and maintain stability in rural villages. Yet, the latter two, which have not been addressed in this thesis, are also worthy of future scholarly attention.

Specifically, on the role of OPAs in ageing and social welfare, government policy suggests that, in order to tackle the ageing problem inexpensively, OPAs are being encouraged to provide community social care and social and cultural activities[800] for the

[800] OPAs should 'promote the concept of active and healthy ageing [by] organising activities for the elderly that promote a healthy mind and body, as well as organising cultural and sports activities to promote a rich, energetic, cultured lifestyle for the elderly.' CNCA (2015b)

rural elderly. At least in some areas, this is already happening with OPAs engaged in providing 'homecare'[801] for the infirm and the 'oldest old', organising communal dining halls, and establishing social and cultural hubs to reduce loneliness. Yet, with the exception of Jing Jun's forthcoming study on the role of OPAs in reducing suicide and other mental health issues amongst the rural elderly and an Oxford Institute of Population Ageing report on the impact of OPAs on managing ageing in Shaanxi, there has been precious little research on the role of OPAs in this area. Further issues to be explored by researchers in the field of demography, gerontology, social policy, as well as other social science disciplines, include: the effectiveness of OPA-led service delivery and 'homecare' initiatives vis-à-vis formal government services; the extent to which OPAs can effectively provide a substitute to family or institutionalised care mechanisms; how OPAs fit into the overall picture of ageing and social care policymaking across China; and what the impact is of OPA-led social, cultural, and health initiatives on the mental and physical wellbeing of the elderly. These are just some of the questions that relate to OPAs and ageing policy that could be explored by researchers in the future.[802]

The other key motivation behind OPA establishment that is not addressed in this dissertation, is the provision of ideological and propaganda education for the elderly by OPAs. As I documented in Chapter Four, OPAs have been involved in running older people's schools and delivering lectures on both political and non-political[803] issues,

[801] Providing housekeeping, homecare, nursing, advice, and counselling services, doing their shopping and picking up medical prescriptions, taking them to the doctors, and helping them to pay their electricity bills at the local state grid.

[802] Zhou, J. Walker, A. (2015) 'The Need for Community Care'.

[803] Examples on non-political classes and lectures include, health education talks on diabetes, stroke prevention, nutrition and healthy diets, exercises to manage arthritis.

including issues around contemporary nationalism, such as the Sino-Japanese war,[804] the century of humiliation, and disputes in the South China Sea. At the same time, there has been an increase in older people's universities (*laonian daxue* 老年大学) in urban areas delivering a mix of social activities, health information, and ideological education classes.[805] This is interesting because much of the literature on ideological education in China has focused on delivery of the Patriotic Education Campaign and nationalist historical narratives to China's youth in primary, secondary, and, to a lesser extent, tertiary education.[806] The creation of a system of ideological education for the elderly raises questions, such as, how the Chinese state seeks to construct national identity after formal schooling and throughout the life-course; how the content of ideological education differs for different age cohorts; and how different generations respond to ideological education in different ways (i.e. is there an 'angry youth' equivalent for the elderly). In addition, some scholars in the field of communication studies have argued that China's older rural population are less easily targeted by traditional propaganda methods (TV/Newspapers) given their higher illiteracy levels and continued propensity to use local dialects. Future research might therefore investigate whether older people's schools provide a more effective method of transmitting state ideologies to older rural communities via the 'personal influence'[807] of local OPA leaders. The role of OPAs in

[804] For a history of the Sino-Japanese War, see: Mitter, R. (2013) *China's War with Japan, 1937-1945: The Struggle for Survival,* (London: Allen Lane).

[805] Int. with Vice- Director, Old People's University, Zhuanping, Yunnan (2012)

[806] Wang, Z. (2008) 'National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 52, pp.783-806

[807] For example, communications theorists, Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, argued that mass communications involve a multistep process (or 'two step flow') of information to the general public by both the mass media and local opinion leaders. As such, they argued that political campaigns cannot be communicated by mass media alone but also through interpersonal communication by influential local individuals. Katz, E. Lazarsfeld, P. (1955) *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*, (London: Routledge).

delivering ideological education and propaganda is therefore an important area that could be explored in future research.

8.4.2 Modernisation and the Chinese State

A second key finding and implication of this thesis surrounds the issue of modernisation. The prevailing view in studies of state-building has often been that as states modernise they seek to establish the dominant authority of the rational, legal, and bureaucratic structures of the modern state onto social and political life. Supplanting or eradicating traditional values and displacing local, customary forms of authority and social control, even if they are not achieved altogether, are at least perceived to be key *objectives* of the modern bureaucratic state. Indeed, many accounts of the modern Chinese state in both the Republican and Communist-eras suggest that it has been no exception. From Sun Yatsen's view of the Chinese countryside as a 'plate of loose sand' crying out to be organised, to campaigns against rural beliefs and ritual practices in the Nanjing decade,[808] to the linear-modernist teleology imbued within the Chinese state's view of the countryside and its habits as 'backward', 'obstacles to progress' today.[809] Indeed, the most recent state debates on rural China are often filled with a panicky sense that, without new and modern designs, China's rural areas might be 'falling apart'; [810] its traditions, rituals, and 'superstitions' portrayed as a threat to modernity, civilisation, and dragging rural communities in directions far removed from modern state aspirations.[811]

[808] Nedostup, R. (2009) *Superstitious Regimes.*
[809] Shue, V. (2012) 'Modern/Rural China', p.226
[810] *Ibid.*
[811] *Ibid.*

Yet, what this thesis has sought to show, is that despite these assertions, the Chinese state is, in practice, more adaptable and accommodating of local and alternative modes of authority and culture than such discourses would suggest. Indeed, by creating institutions, like the OPA, that set roots in rural society and embed traditional authority figures within them, the Chinese state arguably recognises the limits of its power, choosing to adapt, accommodate, and appropriate local social control mechanisms and use them as allies, rather than seeking to eradicate or supplant them altogether. Furthermore, by actively building up an institution, like the OPA, with the aim of utilising and mobilising traditional authority and social control for its own ends, this thesis has demonstrated that it is not that the Chinese state has simply failed in its efforts to supplant traditional authority, but rather that it has not always *sought* to do so. That is to say, this is not merely a problem of inadequate 'reach of the state', but rather the state has accepted the usefulness of accommodation and appropriation of such norms for the resilience and adaptability of the Party-state and has built structures around doing so. Given state discourses on 'rural customs', it is perhaps surprising that the Chinese state is so actively engaged in sustaining and mobilising such systems to use them to aid state control and rural governance. Nevertheless, one could argue that it is precisely the Chinese Party-state's ability to recognise its own weaknesses and adapt to or utilise them (rather than to rigidly insist on a particular *modus operandi*), that has underpinned the success, resilience, and long-term durability of Chinese Communist Party rule.

Nevertheless, so as not to essentialize rural society, it is important to note that China's rural dwellers are not fixed edifices of traditional culture with unchanged habits and practices, nor do they eschew all the benefits that modern life and a modern bureaucracy

has to offer them.[812] Rather, it is likely that there is a constant process of renegotiation and reinterpretation of traditional and modern norms between state and society. On the one hand, rural society is well studied in seeking to preserve locally embedded customs while simultaneously seeking to make use of modern state and societal structures for their own ends. While on the other hand, the state continues to adapt its priorities and institutions around locally preferred and traditionally embedded systems of social exchange, pragmatically acquiescing to those more impenetrable aspects of traditional culture, while utilising and mobilising those aspects that can help to cement its power and enhance its resilience.[813]

The accommodation and, in some case acquiescence, to traditional peasant norms and the renegotiation and reinterpretation of them between state and society, suggests than even in ostensibly strong states, the state-society relationship is rarely characterized by complete domination of one side over the other. Rather, in practice both are able to influence each other, even when one side is weaker or stronger. Furthermore, on-the-ground state performance in China, as elsewhere, has shown itself to be non-uniform, strong on some lines, weak on others, and constantly oscillating between the two spheres.[814]

Looking to the future, the real questions around modernisation will not be so much about state capacity and accommodation, but rather of how long rural villagers will continue to ascribe to and seek accommodation of traditional values. That is to say, while norms of family hierarchy, patriarchalism, kinship, and the authority of elders continue to hold

[812] *Ibid.*
[813] *Ibid.*
[814] Shue, V. (2012) 'Modern/Rural China', p.223

currency (albeit in sometimes altered forms) in today's rural China, how these cultural norms and values are being changed by out-migration, urbanisation, global visions of modernity, and the decline of the 'native place' (*laojia* 老家) are the key issues for scholars going forward. Likewise, if such traditional social control mechanisms start to break down further, what types of control mechanisms will spring up in their place? Will this be filled by an ever-modernising bureaucratic state or will societal forces fill the void in different ways? Given the persuasive power of market economy and globalisation, the deck appears to be stacked more heavily against traditional village values going forward. Nevertheless, one hesitates to make a wager on the outcome given long persistence of such values throughout Chinese history, and the state's continued willingness to accommodate them.

8.4.2 'Social Governance' and Authoritarian Resilience

A third key implication for our understanding of wider Chinese politics and society concerns 'social governance' and authoritarian durability. Indeed, a key aim of this thesis was to understand both the 'micro-foundations' of authoritarian resilience that is, how state-society *interactions* during moments of conflict shape stability maintenance, as well as how the Chinese state's 'social governance' agenda plays out at the grassroots. As a reminder, social governance places more emphasis on reaching consensus through 'negotiation and dialogue' and pushes state officials to 'guide more and control less' by allowing social organisations to take on more responsibility for stability maintenance and social control. As such, the *process* and *interactions* of governing social discontent should involve more 'consultation' and 'negotiation' between the state, informal actors, and disputants at the grassroots.

This thesis has demonstrated that the creation of OPAs has helped to facilitate negotiation between state and society during moments of conflict at the grassroots. Indeed, this thesis has shown that despite being a state-established social organisation, OPA committees are not uncritical in their cooperation with local state officials and are often tied to local interests. Use of OPAs as conflict negotiators by the state provides them with political opportunities to circumvent state authority, negotiate state policy, deflect state aims, and act as a channel through which village communities can transmit their opinions to the local state, seek accountability, or redress their grievances. Yet, as I have shown, negotiation and accommodation at the grassroots does not *necessarily* have to lead to a loss of power for the state. While it may lead to a diminishing of some aspects of state power, such as undermining the efforts of the court system to extend their authority to rural villages, in the majority of cases these negotiations have the effect of creating more power for *both* sides.[815] This is because such interactions allow the state to find innovative ways to implement contentious policy and resolve disputes quickly in ways that suit their broad interests, whilst simultaneously allowing social actors space to negotiate, feedback grievances, and influence policy implementation.

I would contend that this is important for our understanding of the Chinese state more broadly because it is arguably one of the fundamental components of how authoritarian resilience works. Indeed, this combination of the duality of micro-level accommodation and negotiation, alongside macro-level political control is arguably the crux of what underpins the Party-state's ability to maintain its resilience in the context of rapid flux and change. Indeed, given that the social governance agenda, with its emphasis on increased consultation and negotiation, was spawned and advanced at the political centre,

[815] Kohli, A. Shue, V. (1994) 'State Power and Social Forces', p.323

this suggests that the Chinese state is well aware that diversifying the management of social discontent (to include social and informal actors) and increasing consultation is something that serves Party-state resilience rather than weakening it. That is to say, even in the context of an increasingly constricted political space under Xi Jinping, there is a recognition that ensuring tensions are released in controlled ways rather than allowed to build up is beneficial for the durability of the state. As such, this thesis has made steps towards demonstrating how the Chinese state can maintain overall control whilst allowing and managing conflicts that erupt at the grassroots. In doing so it has proffered an answer to the question of how a strong, resilient authoritarian state simultaneously co-exists with robust and authoritative societal forces.

For some scholars of China this analysis will add further ammunition to the view of the Chinese Party-state as the 'perfect dictatorship'[816] whereby channels are created for society to put forward grievances and 'let off steam' in a state-controlled environment that does not ultimately pose any challenge to macro-level Party-state hegemony. For these scholars, this demonstrates that the state is seeking governance reforms aimed at pre-empting public demands for political reform, thereby pushing democratic transition even further beyond reach. Nevertheless, I would suggest that regardless of whether the macro-political environment is affected and regardless of whether political change is ever on the cards, if social governance creates spaces for negotiation and some limited accountability at the grassroots then this is surely positive for the lives of contemporary rural Chinese villagers.[817]

[816] Ringen, S. (2016) *The Perfect Dictatorship: China in the 21st Century,* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press).

[817] The analysis levelled here is more in the vein of Lily Tsai's *Accountability Without Democracy*, than Ringen's *The Perfect Dictatorship*.

Looking forward, future academic research in this area should look at what other social organisations are involved in facilitating social governance and how they are involved in processes of managing social discontent. If social governance aims to see the diversification of conflict resolution it would interesting to understand the interplay between officials, the police, and social organisations in other urban and rural conflicts. At the same time, while this thesis has focused upstream of the collective action process on disputes as they unfold, it would be interesting to understand the extent to which social organisations play a role in governing discontent downstream of the collective action process conflicts have evolved into larger scale protests.

Finally, looking to the future, scholars should continue to monitor the direction of social governance, particularly in the context of Xi Jinping's increasingly draconian turn. Specifically, whether government thinking shifts on the benefits of consultation and negotiation when managing discontent will be interesting to observe given the direction of travel under his leadership. Nevertheless, even if political space does shrink further under President Xi, it is important for academic researchers to pay close attention to those spaces in which people do engage in creative rebellion, small-scale resistance, and negotiation in an effort to uphold their own values and seek greater accountability. For as we have seen time and again, China's supposedly 'strong' state often elects to acquiesce and to settle for an accommodation, while China's supposedly 'weak' rural society often successful at utilising its own weakness for societal gain.

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See appendices two and three for details for interviews and focus groups.

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Appendix 1: List of Villages

Interviews were conducted within 30 villages across four provinces for this research.

Village	Fieldwork Period
Zhuanping County, Yunnan	
TP Village	2012 and 2014
JG Village	2012 and 2014
BZM Village	2012
Foshan County, Fujian	
LH Village	2015
YS Village	2015
JY Village	2015
MT Village	2015
Wuwei County, Fujian	
HF Village	2015
YH Village	2015
LS Village	2015
KR Village	2015
Shaanxi Province (in five counties)	
SSY Village	2015
ZZD Village	2015
SS Village	2015
LP Village	2015
NS Village	2015
GX Village	2015
SBH Village	2015
XS Village	2015
YWY Village	2015
SQ Village	2015
NBY Village	2015
DLS Village	2015
CG Village	2015
TQ Village	2015
Sichuan Province (in two counties)	
SL Village	2015
GR Village	2015
O Village	2012
P Village	2012
Q Village	2012

Appendix 2: List of Focus Groups

21 focus groups were conducted for this research primarily with OPA committee members.

Village / Location	Focus Group Composition	Year
Yunnan		
BZM Village	Villagers / OPA Members (who are not on OPA committee)	2012
Fujian		
HF Village, Wuwei	OPA Committee	2015
KR Village, Wuwei	OPA Committee	2015
LS Village, Wuwei	OPA Committee	2015
Town in Wuwei	Town Committee on Ageing	2015
Sichuan		
FH Village	OPA Committee	2012
SL Village and GR Village	Two OPA Committees from two neighbouring villages	2015
Shaanxi		
SSY Village	OPA Committee	2015
ZZD Village	OPA Committee	2015
SS Village	OPA Committee	2015
LP Village	OPA Committee	2015
NS Village	OPA Committee	2015
GX Village	OPA Committee	2015
SBH Village	OPA Committee	2015
XS Village	OPA Committee	2015
YWY Village	OPA Committee	2015
SQ Village	OPA Committee	2015
NBY Village	OPA Committee	2015
DLS Village	OPA Committee	2015
CG Village	OPA Committee	2015
TQ Village	OPA Committee	2015

Appendix 3: List of Structured and Semi-Structured Interviews

N.B. The list of people below only includes those with whom the author conducted longer, more formal semi-structured interviews. The author also engaged in informal unstructured conversations with many other individuals at my fieldsites which were noted down in field journals and have underpinned the case studies discussed in this thesis.

Semi-Structured:

114 semi-structured interviews of varying length and one email exchange.

Position	Organization	Location	Year
NGO/ Academic/ National Government			
Former Asia Programme Director	Help Age International	Oxford / Bangkok (email exchange)	2011
Country Director	Help Age International	Shaanxi	2015
Staffer	Help Age International	Shaanxi	2015
Academic	Tsinghua University	Beijing	2014
Government Official	CNCA	Oxford	2015
Departmental Director	CNCA	Oxford	2015
Academic	Huaxi Institute of Public Health	Sichuan	2012
Academic	Xiamen University	Fujian	2015
Academic	Tianjin Nankai University	Tianjin	2014
Zhuanping County, Yunnan			
Vice-Director	Bureau of Retired Cadres, County Party Branch	Zhuanping County	2012
County Government Official	County Government	Zhuanping County	2014
Head	Older People's Sports Association, County-Level	Zhuanping County	2012
JG Village			
Party Secretary	Village Party Branch	JG Village	2012, 2014
Assistant Party Secretary	Village Party Branch	JG Village	2012
OPA Head	OPA Committee	JG Village	2012, 2014
OPA Deputy Head	OPA Committee	JG Village	2014
OPA Committee Member One	OPA Committee	JG Village	2012, 2014
OPA Committee Member Two	OPA Committee	JG Village	2012, 2014
Villager One (and OPA Member)	OPA / Village	JG Village	2012

Villager Two (and OPA Member)	OPA / Village	JG Village	2012
Villager Three (and OPA Member)	OPA / Village	JG Village	2012, 2014
Villager Four	Village	JG Village	2014
TP Village			
TP Village Head	Village Government	TP Village	2014
OPA Head	OPA Committee	TP Village	2012, 2014
Village Head	Village Government	TP Village	2012, 2014
Villager One (OPA Member)	OPA / Village	TP Village	2012
Villager Two (OPA Member)	OPA / Village	TP Village	2012
BZM Village			
OPA Head	OPA Committee	BZM Village	2012
Village Team Head	Village Government	BZM Village	2012
OPA Committee Member	OPA Committee	BZM Village	2012
1 focus group with four villagers / OPA Members			

Wuwei County, Fujian			
Town Committee on Ageing Official	Town Committee on Ageing	Wuwei County	2015
Town Deputy Mayor	Town Government	Wuwei County	2015
Town Government Official One	Town Government	Wuwei County	2015
Town Government Official Two	Town Government	Wuwei County	2015
Town Government Official Three	Town Government	Wuwei County	2015
Town Government Official Four	Town Government	Wuwei County	2015
HF Village			
Village Official One	Village Government	HF Village	2015
Village Official Two	Village Government	HF Village	2015
OPA Head	OPA Committee	HF Village	2015
OPA Deputy Head	OPA Committee	HF Village	2015
Villager One (OPA Member)	OPA / Village	HF Village	2015
Villager Two	Village	HF Village	2015
Villager Three (OPA Member)	OPA / Village	HF Village	2015
Villager Four (OPA Member)	OPA / Village	HF Village	2015
Villager Five	Village	HF Village	2015
Villager Six	Village	HF Village	2015
LS Village			
Head of Old People's School	OPA Committee	LS Village	2015

OPA Deputy Head	OPA Committee	LS Village	2015
Villager One	Village	LS Village	2015
Villager Two	Village	LS Village	2015
YH Village			
Village Official One	Village Government	YH Village	2015
Village Official Two	Village Government	YH Village	2015
OPA Head	OPA Committee	YH Village	2015
OPA Committee Member	OPA Committee	YH Village	2015
Villager One (OPA Member)	Village / OPA	YH Village	2015
Villager Two (OPA Member)	Village / OPA	YH Village	2015
Villager Three	Village	YH Village	2015
Villager Four	Village	YH Village	2015
Villager Five	Village	YH Village	2015

Foshan County, Fujian			
Town Government Official One	Town Government	Foshan County	2015
Town Government Official Two	Town Government	Foshan County	2015
YS Village			
OPA Head	OPA Committee	YS Village	2015
OPA Deputy Head	OPA Committee	YS Village	2015
OPA Committee Member One	OPA Committee	YS Village	2015
Village Head	Village Government	YS Village	2015
Village Official One	Village Government	YS Village	2015
Villager One (OPA Member)	Village / OPA	YS Village	2015
Villager Two (OPA Member)	Village / OPA	YS Village	2015
Villager Three	Village	YS Village	2015
Villager Four	Village	YS Village	2015
LH Village			
OPA Head	OPA Committee	LH Village	2015
Village Head	Village Government	LH Village	2015
OPA Committee Member One	OPA Committee	LH Village	2015
OPA Committee Member Two	OPA Committee	LH Village	2015
OPA Deputy Head	OPA Committee	LH Village	2015
Party Secretary	Village Party Branch	LH Village	2015
Village Official One	Village Government	LH Village	2015
Village Official Two	Village Government	LH Village	2015
Village Official Three	Village Government	LH Village	2015
Villager One	Village	LH Village	2015
Villager Two	Village	LH Village	2015

Villager Three	Village	LH Village	2015
Villager Four	Village	LH Village	2015
Villager Five	Village	LH Village	2015
JY Village			
OPA Head	OPA Committee	JY Village	2015
OPA Deputy Head	OPA Committee	JY Village	2015
Villager One	Village	JY Village	2015
Villager Two	Village	JY Village	2015
Village Official One	Village Government	JY Village	2015

Shaanxi			
Provincial Government Official	Shaanxi Provincial Committee on Ageing	Shaanxi	2015
County Government Official	County Committee on Ageing	Shaanxi	2015
Head of Township Bureau of Civil Affairs	Township Government	Shaanxi	2015
Party Secretary	Village Party Branch	LP Village	2015
Party Secretary	Village Party Branch	ZZD Village	2015
Village Head	Village Government	SSY Village	2015
Village OPA Head	OPA Committee	SSY Village	2015
176 Interviews with Villagers/OPA Members across Shaanxi (see structured interviews)			
14 focus groups with OPA Committees			
Sichuan			
Government Official	County Government	Sichuan	2012
Retired Vice-Chairman	People's Political Consultative Committee, County Government	Sichuan	2012
Head of Township Bureau of Civil Affairs	Township Government	Sichuan	2012
Head of Finance	Township Government	Sichuan	2012
Head of OPAs	Township Government	Sichuan	2012
O Village			
OPA Head	OPA Committee	O-Village	2012
Village Head	Village Government	O-Village	2012
Villager (OPA Member)	OPA / Village	O-Village	2012
Villager (OPA Member)	OPA / Village	O-Village	2012
P Village			
OPA Head	OPA Committee	P Village	2012
OPA Deputy Head	OPA Committee	P Village	2012
OPA Committee Member	OPA Committee	P Village	2012
OPA Committee Member	OPA Committee	P Village	2012
Villager (OPA Member)	OPA / Village	P Village	2012
Villager (OPA Member)	OPA / Village	P Village	2012
Villager (OPA Member)	OPA / Village	P Village	2012
Villager (OPA Member)	OPA / Village	P Village	2012

Q Village			
OPA Head	OPA Committee	Q Village	2012
OPA Committee Member	OPA Committee	Q Village	2012
Villager (OPA Member)	OPA / Village	Q Village	2012

Structured Interviews:

176 short, structured interviews lasting approximately half an hour each.

Number of Interviewees	Interviewee Type	Village	Year
12	OPA Member / Villager	SSY Village	2015
14	OPA Member / Villager	ZZD Village	2015
15	OPA Member / Villager	SS Village	2015
10	OPA Member / Villager	LP Village	2015
11	OPA Member / Villager	NS Village	2015
13	OPA Member / Villager	GX Village	2015
10	OPA Member / Villager	SBH Village	2015
12	OPA Member / Villager	XS Village	2015
15	OPA Member / Villager	YWY Village	2015
13	OPA Member / Villager	SQ Village	2015
13	OPA Member / Villager	NBY Village	2015
13	OPA Member / Villager	DLS Village	2015
14	OPA Member / Villager	CG Village	2015
11	OPA Member / Villager	TQ Village	2015