

Are you informed?: State information management and autonomy in local China

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ARE YOU INFORMED?: STATE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND AUTONOMY IN LOCAL CHINA

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**ARE YOU INFORMED?:
STATE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND
AUTONOMY IN LOCAL CHINA**

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How does an authoritarian state like China effectively gather information from society? Among today's multiple informational channels built by local states, what is the power dynamics between? And ultimately what is the rationale of China's state information management, if there is one? To answer these questions, I have conducted a months-long field work in S Province since 2014.

From the state's perspectives, this thesis argues: first, China's Xinfang mechanism is a state-dominated information gathering tool, rather than a mechanism for conflict resolution; and the previous research paradigm may lead to neglecting a larger group of societal actors I conceptualize as "information seekers." Secondly, with more than one informatics apparatuses in the game today, central and local leaders may introduce peer competition between these informatics apparatuses, and award the best-informed one with more apparatus autonomy.

The internal structure of the Chinese state is far from a Weberian bureaucracy, but more of a collection of multiple relatively separate power fields. This understanding leads to my final argument that apparatus autonomy cannot be equated with officials' individual autonomy. On the contrary, front-tier officials in an autonomy-enhanced apparatus shall be faced with heavier burden and trusted with less individual autonomy to themselves, which may make more responsive and yet less innovative governance.

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TERMS, ABBREVIATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

Chinese Communist Party	Zhongguo Gongchan Dang	CCP
Committee of Local Chronicles	Difangzhi Bangongshi	CLC
General Office	Bangong Ting	GO
Government Administration Council	Zheng Wu Yuan (history)	GAC
Government Open Day	Zhengfu Kaifang Ri	GOD
Government-Organized Organization	Renmin Tuanti	GOO
Office of Electronic Government	Dianzi Zhengwu Bangongshi	OEG
Office of Governmental Affairs Disclosure	Zhengwu Gongkai Bangongshi	OGAD
Office of Letters and Calls	Xinfang Bumen/Xitong	OLC
Office of Letters and Visits	Xinfang Bumen (history)	OLV
Open Government Data	Zhengfu Xinxi Gongkai	OGD
Petition	Xinfang	
Petitioner	Xinfang Qunzhong	
Pilot Section/Agency	Qiantou Danwei	PS
State Bureau for Letters and Calls	Guojia Xinfang Ju	SBLC
State Council	Guo Wu Yuan	SC

Street Office

Jiedao Banshi Chu

SO

Undergraduate Government Internship Initiative

Daxuesheng Zhengfu Jianxi UGII

INTRODUCTION

Permanent agencies, with fixed jurisdiction, are not the historical rule but rather the exception. This is even true of large political structures such as those of the ancient Orient...In all these cases, the ruler executes the most important measures through personal trustees, table-companions, or court-servants. Their commissions and powers are not precisely delimited, and are temporarily called into being for each case.

Max Weber, Essays in Sociology (1946)

States need information to govern, especially authoritarian states, due to the absent of a formal electoral process where citizens in democracies can express opinions and participate in public affairs. To learn citizens' needs and thus earn support their support for policies, an authoritarian state needs a mechanism to fill the vacuum of the election for information gathering from society, with which the state is able to locate and handle civil conflicts before those issues grow and begin to rattle the regime. And a usual choice for the authoritarian state is to build a citizens' complaint system.

To build and maintain such a system may be increasingly costly, however. The 2017 annual departmental budget for the State Bureau for Letters and Calls (国家信访局), China's national apparatus for its citizens' complaint system, reaches RMB 140.6

million yuan, 12.95 million yuan higher than that for the previous year, increasing by 10.14% (State Bureau for Letters and Calls, 2017). Fiscal support for the office has not only expanded on the state level, but on the locality level as well. For instance, the OLC of Shenzhen Municipality (Office of Letters and Calls of Shenzhen Municipality, 2017) released their budget for this year of RMB 47.47 million yuan, 3.56 million yuan higher than that for 2016, increasing by 8%.

High as the cost for Xinfang is, both central and local states in China have also developed various informatics apparatuses for more information gathering in recent years, as scholarly work shows severe erosion of political trust caused by the Xinfang mechanism (Dimitrov, 2015; Hu, 2007; Yu, 2004). So what went wrong with the Xinfang mechanism, and how do today's new information channels work? Does the emergence of these newly informatics practices by the Chinese state indicate a future abolishment of the Xinfang mechanism? Where are these informativ apparatuses placed or they place themselves, compared to the OLCs? And ultimately what is the rationale of China's state information management, if there exists one?

In order to answer these questions and foster an understanding of today's state information management in China, this thesis first employs the method of historical analysis. In overviewing the political development of China's information management, the thesis provides an initial effort in English literature to answer how and why societal petitioning was gradually translated into state-dominated action and whether or not informational engagement impacted state autonomy. In analyzing the Xinfang historical evolution, not only its related institutional setup and according bureaucracy building, I also present three values orientations embedded in China's Xinfang mechanism: mass

mobilization, conflict resolution and information gathering, which comprehensively shaped the face of today's Xinfang.

Before delving into what is going on with current state information management, the thesis gives a review on existing studies on the internal structure of the Chinese government. In the authoritarian context of "proxy accountability," the thesis develops an understanding that the Chinese state consists of multiple "power fields," within which internal actors have exclusively autonomy and capacity that cannot be exercised as effectively outside the power field. In this regard, I also propose a concept of "front-tier officials," who are considered the lowest-level official in one's power field, the coolie in the office. As the coolie, the front-tier official burdens multiple tasks, including drafting the detailed policy documents.

The thesis then moves on to field work conducted in S Province since 2014 through 2017 that counted approximately 20 weeks altogether, including my participatory observation inside the provincial government, multiple governmental files¹, recorded and unrecorded interviews with governmental officials of various levels and undergraduate government interns selected on basis of randomness. With such first-hand empirical evidence, the thesis develops three main arguments as below:

First and foremost, while previous studies mostly see the Xinfang mechanism as a system of conflict resolution rather than one for information management (Ying, 2001; O'Brien, 1996; Hu, 2007; Fang, 2009), I find that there exist an increasing number of

¹ All documents referenced in this thesis are collected from 2014 through 2017 on my participatory observation in the provincial general office, some of which are confidential and not accessible publicly, and thus will be neither named nor cited.

Here I clarify that all governmental documents referenced and quoted in this thesis are accessible publicly online whose links are given in the list of references.

information seekers among petitioners from the background databases of both Governor's Mailbox and the Provincial Bureau for Letters and Calls' online complaint system, as well as citizen participants in government-organized activities. Information seekers, unlike petitioners conventionally studied who request immediate intervention to solve their problems from the state, come to consult about certain policy or some ambiguous policy field, and/or merely seek to "feel/sense" what it is like with the government, rather than to ask immediate intervention from the state to have their problems resolved. Such informational needs of today's Chinese public may be in need of higher attention from policy makers and scholars.

Second, the leadership, whether at central or any local level, have sought to establish various informatics apparatuses, and charged them with jointly or separately building information channels and thus providing an information stream for policy making reference. In doing so, central and local states have intrigued competition between these informatics apparatuses, and the apparatuses hereby develop two strategies to draw more societal actors to their offices and guarantee their informational supplies to above. These apparatuses either make and deliver a promise to those "solution seekers" that a proper solution will be guaranteed as long as solution seekers come and petition to them, or satisfy "information seekers" by creating chances for them to "feel" the government, or do both.

Such competition eventually results in a champion among all the informatics offices in the arena. Therefore this office, as the best informed player perceived by the leadership, is assigned with stronger autonomy in decision making, being appointed as the "pilot agency (牵头部门)" to launch a new package of reformist policies for example,

and thus more bargaining chips against its superior counterpart and/or horizontally parallel offices. Thus I argue that more information exchange with society leads to increased state apparatus autonomy.

Last but not least, apparatus autonomy cannot be equated with individual official autonomy. While an office is assigned with increased autonomy, the very officials' individual autonomy may fall down to a lesser degree, and they are grounded from proposing policy initiatives or attempting to adjust policy implement to realities. As the authoritarian trend within the central state has been significantly strengthened since 2012, local leadership is more likely to follow in the central state's steps and adopt a similar mode of centralizing power to themselves from lower-level localities and agencies. In this fashion, I argue that enhanced state autonomy may contribute to a more responsive system of governance, and yet not necessarily to an innovative one.

This thesis centers on the relations between state apparatuses, especially the informatics apparatuses in the authoritarian context. Previous studies have interpreted China's model of governance as "proxy accountability (Dimitrov, 2013; Zhou L. , 2002; Zhe & Chen, 2011; Zhou & Lian, 2011; Cao, 2014; Congressional Executive Commission on China, 2009)," and create a three-actor game model showing how the central government maintains the balance between the local government and citizens. The limit of these researches is that they takes each level of government as a unitary actor rather than a collection of individual offices, and thus neglect these specialized offices' potential intensions to carry out or virtually hinder the will and policy of the local leadership. Out of this concern, this thesis stresses the horizontal relations between these

specialized offices, especially the relations between informatics apparatuses and those between informatics apparatuses and non-informatics ones.

With an emphasis on the horizontal relations between parallel offices, the thesis views each level of the Chinese government as more a collection of individual parallel offices, rather than a unitary actor. Each individual office, or a group of a few several offices may constitute a power field, whose officials enjoy autonomy exclusively within the field. In this fashion, the Chinese state can be seen as a collection of various power fields, rather than a one unitary power triangle. Additionally to distinguish from “grass-roots officials,” the thesis proposes a concept of the “front-tier official” who is the lowest-level official in one’s power field, and burdens most initial work in the office, including drafting policy documents, proposing innovative initiatives, and directly contacting front-tier officials from other fields to moderate the relations between offices. A front-tier official may be placed at a higher level than a grass-roots one is, and yet her/his autonomy in the office may be lesser.

This thesis thereby also attempts to complement existing scholarly work that studies the relations between the authoritarian states and society. With an informatics apparatus as the pilot agency, the apparatus is likely to strengthen or at least sustain its previously successful information exchange activities, in order to maintain its informational advantage and favorable position. In this fashion, it may form a more responsive information-driven mode of local governance in China.

Previous scholarly work on Xinfang mostly sees it, as well as similar government practices, as a mechanism for conflict resolution and stability maintenance. Differently, this thesis argues that the primary role of these communication channels remains an

information collector, and finds in unique field work that an increasing number of citizen participants and petitioners intend to attain information from their communication and interaction with the government, rather than seek for state intervention to help solve their problems. Thus I introduce a concept of the “information seeker” to describe these societal actors. Based on the informational needs of today’s society, I also extract a new strategic options for the informatics apparatus from existing practices, and propose a model of “informational competition” within the authoritarian state.

This thesis renders a pioneering attempt to reveal the ultimate rationale of China’s state information management. Through institutional arrangements including stationing the informatics apparatuses close to the leadership, and stir up competition between informatics apparatuses, central and local leadership guarantee a steady informational stream, and then assign more autonomy to the better informed apparatus by naming it as the “pilot agency” who lead related offices and draft a certain policy or a package of policies. If this informatics apparatus fail to maintain best informed in the following informational competition, the leadership still enjoy the flexibility to change in favor of the next champion in informational competition, which largely results from the fact that power assignment between departments is under legally prescribed.

Therefore, this thesis also finds itself closely related to existing literature on state autonomy and capacity, and their correlation with governmental transparency and information exchange with society. Having examined the departments of transportation and departments of environmental protection in the United States, Neshkova (2014) argues that as individual apparatus’ autonomy increases, the apparatus tends to attach greater attention to its public participation. Similarly, Fan and Zhao (2017) attribute

strengthened apparatus capacity and its improved quality of open government data to higher pressure from superior government.

Furthering their studies, the thesis argues that enhanced information exchange lead to increased apparatus autonomy, with the moderating efforts by local leadership, and in reciprocating the favor to one another, it may create a virtuous cycle. An informatics apparatus' information exchange with society may earn favor from their local government's leadership and stronger apparatus autonomy, which can be translated into more political resources to bargain with parallel offices and lower-level localities. In addition, historical findings also support this argument: state-society information exchange has helped consolidate the regime as a source of legitimacy.

The findings of this thesis also correlate to studies on identity politics. When interviewing government officials from informatics apparatuses, I find they share information with certain informatics offices, despite their informational competition, and their answer is that they identify these offices as "one of us." It arises a question whether or not and why governmental officials identify themselves with other co-workers in the same sub-groups, which is to be answered by follow-up research.

In the pages to come, I first overview the historical evolution of China's state information management since 1949, especially on Xinfang bureaucracy building and related ideological development. This section combines historical notes by a central OLV senior cadre and multiple local chronicles from Wuhan, Xi'an, Tianjin, Hangzhou, Beijing and Shanghai, and offers an overall historical panorama of the Xinfang mechanism. Historical work on Xinfang has been done before, and yet most attention

goes to pre-modern China and its political convention, instead of China under the communist rule (Minzner, 2006; Fang, 2009).

In the following section, after a brief introduction of S Province, I utilize field work done there, and elaborate how the provincial leadership have established and initiated new informatics apparatuses and their information gathering activities. Over the last 4 years, though there occurred a shift in leadership, informatics apparatus continuously has been increased in autonomy, and trusted as the pilot agency implementing and supervising a major provincial reform in the following years. Other municipal self-initiated information projects shall be later introduced and interpreted as well.

In the concluding section, I draw the implications that information exchange with society increases state apparatus autonomy through “informational competition,” and that central and local leadership both take advantage of institutional flexibility to sustain strong control over informatics apparatuses. Besides, this section furthers itself to the future trend of S Province’ informational model under Xi Jinping’s central leadership, and in developing a critique on the limitations of the thesis, it also aims at raising questions and discussion for follow-up research.

1.0 POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA'S STATE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

In China, petition has another name, Xinfang, the literal abbreviation for letters (laixin, 来信) and visits (laifang, 来访)². Since Xinfang mainly constitutes information exchange between state and society in China, this section reviews the historical evolution of Xinfang as the state information strategy.

Xinfang is assumed to be a mechanism of conflict resolution, or a tool for mass mobilization in most existing scholarly work. The very primary purpose of Xinfang as a mutual information channel between the state and society is somehow neglected in existing literature, and it leads to two consequences: 1) as the pursuit of information gathering is overlooked, those informatics action by the state and those societal actors who particularly seek for information “disappear” in the narratives; and 2) when studying today's information management by the Chinese state such as Mayor's Mailbox and other local practices, since the Xinfang mechanism is not regarded as an information channel, it is less likely to form an institutional evolution on China's state information management.

There have emerged some academic attempts to view Xinfang as an information gathering system (Dimitrov, 2013; Feng, 2012). However, such seminal work has not connected Xinfang immediately to today's informatics strategies and form a lineage.

² To be noted, the official English translation for Xinfang was changed into letters and calls, since communication technology considerably advanced and phone calls grew to be a form of petitioning usually used over time.

This research adopts “letters and calls” in general and for the period of time from 2000 through the present in particular, and uses “letters and visits” especially for the period of time before 2000.

Consider this vacuum in scholarly work, this section adopts a historical perspective on China's state information management since 1949. Equipped with the perspective of historical evolution, I argue that little fixation with a certain model or process is shown in China's state information management, as related informatics principles, institutions and bureaucracy building has all been evolving in the last seven decades. Nonetheless, behind the evolving, the Chinese state has an ultimate rationale and a certain series of organizational arrangements for information management, which seemingly appears of involution.

To be clarified, the official English translation³ for the national-level Xinfang office used to be the State Bureau for Letters and Visits, and later changed into the State Bureau for Letters and Calls. In order to distinguish the present from history, I refer to Xinfang offices from pre-1949 through 1999 as the Offices for Letters and Visits (OLVs), and those one since 2000 as the Offices for Letters and Calls (OLCs).

1.1 THE MASS LINE AS THE IDEOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF XINFANG

The Mass Line thought, a core concept of the CCP's guiding communist ideology originally elaborated by Mao, is widely argued as the ideological origins of the Xinfang mechanism (Dimitrov, 2013; Chen X. , 2012; Feng, 2012) that the Party should insightfully guide the masses toward the communist utopia, and to do so, the Party need

³ Due to the complex nature of this political phenomenon, Xinfang has more than one English translation either in scholarly literature or in governmental documents (He H. , 2012). Beside the above two terms "letters-and-visits" and "letters-and-calls," in this thesis I also use "petition/petitioner" to describe the action of complaining through the official process and the citizens who take the action; and "Xinfang" to refer to this Chinese political phenomenon in general.

to gain popular support for their political agendas. One should first turn to Mao himself and the thought of the Mass Line:

In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily “from the masses, to the masses.” This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study form them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action. Then once again concentrate ideas from the masses and once again take them to the masses so that the ideas are persevered in and carried through. And so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time...The concept of a correct relationship between the leading group and the masses in an organization or in a struggle, the concept that correct ideas on the part of the leadership can only be “from the masses, to the masses”, and the concept that the general call must be combined with particular guidance when the leadership's ideas are being put into practice--these concepts must be propagated everywhere during the present rectification movement in order to correct the mistaken viewpoints among our cadres on these questions (Mao, 1943).

The Mass Line requires the CCP leaders should proactively communicate with the masses, and stay responsive to public opinions. As interpreted, the Mass Line provides an “implicit social contract”, under which the state delivers certain public goods and services, and in return citizens pledge allegiance to the regime, and the Xinfang system is the channel and means to fulfill the terms of the contract. In this regard, Xinfang is a core

institution essential to the Chinese communist regime, which is not only derived out of the communist ideology, but a path the Chinese state shall inevitably take.

Scholarly work also aims to interpret how the Mass Line ideology is related to applicable policy making and governance, and Feng contributes most. As Feng (2016; 2012) argues, the Mass Line presents a dialectical relationship between the Party and the masses, and to stabilize the relationship and guarantee Party-masses mutual understanding, an information channel is needed. The Party, on the one hand, as the representative of the masses, is required to serve the interest of the masses and closely follow public opinions. Under such circumstances, the Xinfang mechanism shall be used to resolve conflicts among the masses and/or between the Party and the masses.

On the other hand, among the masses are only few progressive societal actors in early stages of social evolution, and the Party views itself as a pioneer among the masses in the cause of evolution. When the Party exceeds the understanding of society, and the Party and the masses are partially in opposition to one another, the Party should seize every possible chance to insightfully guide the masses toward the communist utopia. The Party shall convince the masses of the progressive needs, and thus make the masses comply with the new political agendas, rather than indulge society in backwater.

Therefore in the cases where the Party go far ahead of the current course of social evolution exceeding the majority of the masses, the communist state shall utilize citizens' complaints, especially those who reflect the emerging progressive public opinions to launch new socio-political movements and then mobilize the public into these campaigns, eliminating the backwardness and transforming the masses, which is what I conceptualize as "mass mobilization" by Xinfang.

Similarly, Dimitrov (2013) views the Xinfang mechanism as a communist “social contract” that as long as citizens come and make complaints to the government, the communist government shall help solve petitioners’ conflicts. Behind such an ambitious promise of public services, lies a patriarchal logics of a total government to society. He also notes that potential political risks and administrative costs of neglecting information from society are too much for the communist state to afford.

Chen (2012) puts Xinfang and mass line politics in a larger frame of the political opportunity structure, which means that petitions provide external impetus to further political reforms in front of the state and then is translated to state policies. And such inherent tensions contribute to maintaining a vibrant regime and innovative governance. Yang and Zhao (2015) similarly attribute China’s economic success to this system of governance open to societal policy initiatives.

In the following pages of this section, I overview the historical development of Xinfang both on the ideological and institutional aspects, in question of how the communist state take Xinfang from a societal initiative into its governance system. Furthermore, I attempt to render an explanation of Xinfang as a “necessary evil” that is destined to undergo today’s low political trust and yet cannot be abolished.

1.2 PRELIMINARY XINFANG INSTITUTION BUILDING, 1949-1952

In pre-1949 years, the communist rule had already exercised a preliminary Xinfang system. In 1931, the CCP-governed Gaoxing District in Soviet Jiangxi Province

(江西省兴国县高兴区苏维埃政府) installed a “Complaint Box (控告箱)”, and on the box wrote, “Any Soviet citizen has rights to complain in front of the Complaint Bureau.” Mao personally visited two coal miners in Anyuan Coal Mine who wrote to him, and thus started a political convention that party leaders should receive petitioners in person (Diao, 1996, pp. 20-21).

That being said, it took quite long for the Xinfang mechanism to come into being since 1949. On the one hand, Mao and the central leadership was aware of an issue they called “bureaucratism (官僚主义),” by which they refer to conspiracy among bureaucrats who turned unresponsive to the masses. Out of such concern, an information channel between the central state and society was badly needed. As a matter of fact, upon the founding of the PRC in 1949, the Party was faced with a time of popular uncertainty; floods of letters and visitors came to Beijing, consulting about new policies, wondering what changes this new regime would impose, and complaining about daily inconveniences and/or officials’ misconduct. In this year, the General Office of the CCP Central Committee (中共中央办公厅) received 4,457 letters and 4 visits. In the next year (1950), this number sextupled to 26,219 letters plus 260 visits, and then in 1951 increased to 346,865 letters. The Government Administration Council (predecessor of the State Council, 政务院), which was announced the assembly in October 1949, received 62 letters in total this year, 987 letters in 1950, and 1,047 letters plus 270 visits in 1951.

And yet on the other hand, the central leadership including Mao himself also feared that the establishment of such an informatics bureaucratic system would enlarge the scale of bureaucracy too much and thus exacerbate “bureaucratism” breeding inside. This extreme caution was originated from their ideological perspectives, and shared by

those early communist leaders. Compared with an incapable government, they were more afraid of witnessing a somewhat privileged bureaucracy come into being, and the revolutionary government grow into a cluster of bureaucratic interests and privileges, as the KMT government did in the late 1940s. Such thought was even fixed more firmly by the corruption case of Zhang Zishan and Liu Qingshan⁴ (1997, p. 468; Yang J. , 2014; Xi, 1991, pp. 148-153).

In fear of bureaucracy growing too large, letters-and-visits work naturally fell on those central leaders and their secretaries, and hence made letter-and-visits work defined as a part of secretarial work ever since, which directly answered to the leaders and was supposed to provide them with information from society. Letters-and-visits work turned out such a heavy burden: Mao had to read citizens' letters mailed to the Party committee every day, while Premier Zhou Enlai was drowned in letters to the GAC.

Then the team of Mao's secretaries became a *de facto* OLV led by the chief secretary, Tian Jiaying. Tian drafted a preliminary letter-and-visits process: the secretaries decided which letters contained information worthy of being read by Mao, and then forwarded them to Mao; they also generated a seasonal report to Mao every three months, describing what issues were most often mentioned by the petitioning letters.

The GAC realized one office of a larger staff size could do more than three separate offices, as the Party's letter-and-visits work was centralized to Mao's secretaries. There were three offices inside the GAC receiving letters from society by 1950, which

⁴ Zhang and Liu, who both served the Party for nearly two decades, were appointed Tianjin Party Secretary and Administrative Supervisor in 1949, and gradually grew corrupted. Xi (1991, p. 155) particularly mentioned a tiny detail that Mao stayed awake the night before leaving for Beijing on March 23 1949 to demonstrate this common anxiety among the Party leaders.

were the Secretary Office, the General Office and the Premier Office. In December 1950, the GAC fused the General Office and the Secretary Office, and then gradually allocated all the letters-and-visits work from the Premier Office to a newly-expanded Secretary Office, which created the organizational condition to establish the Xinfang mechanism within the Central State.

Suffering from heavy pressure and short-handed bureaucracy on letters-and-visits work, existing staff found themselves hardly capable of responding to all the letters and visits, and even inevitably made errors in haste sometimes. In March 1951, in response of letter-and-visits staff's internal complaints and suggestions, the GAC set up a new division called the Group for Citizens' Letters (群众信件组) affiliated with the Secretary Office, and nearly one year later, appointed a county-level (县处级) cadre to direct this office.

And there are three takeaways for this personnel arrangement: 1) this group remained leaderless for nearly one year, connoting that central leaders still wanted to manage letter-and-visits work with secretaries to avoid bureaucratism issues by not setting up an independent office with its own director; 2) lack of a formal policy document, as well as the relatively low administrative level, indicated that the central leadership's political commitment in citizens' complaints was still limited, although they were aware of the needs of building a specialized office; and 3) this quasi-OLV division was placed next to the central leadership by design, which was a strong and yet flexible signal to both governmental offices and the public that such a letter-and-visits office could make an informational avenue to the top leadership.

Such concerns from letter-and-visits secretaries also reached Mao and the Party committee. On May 16 1951, Mao wrote a comment entitled *Letters from People Must Be Paid Attention*, in response to a report on people's letters by the Secretary Office of the Central Committee (中共中央办公厅秘书室). As Mao writes in this comment (CCP Central Literature Press, 1997, pp. 265-269):

(We) Must pay huge attention to communication with people, properly respond to people's letters, and meet the needs of the masses (reflected from the letters). It should be seen a way for the Party and government to enhance communication with people, and do not adopt an attitude of bureaucratism. If letters are too many to respond to, we should charge an office or a staff particularly with the letters; if letters are not that many, do not establish such an office.

Following Mao's instruction, the GAC issued *Decision in regard of Handling People's Letters and Visits (the Decision*, 政务院关于处理人民来信和接见人民工作的决定), later marked as the origin of the ILC system (CCP Central Literature Press, 1997, pp. 322-324). According to *the Decision*, it required:

Governments of Prefectural/Municipal level and above should charge a certain section with arranging a staff responsible for responding to citizens' letters, and establish a reception office for citizens' visits; leaders should regularly examine and instruct this work (CCP Central Literature Press, 1997, p. 322).

Although *the Decision* required a specialized staff should be responsible for letters and visits, it did not accordingly approve of an independently budgeted staffing allocation, and did not allow local governments to recruit new employees particularly for this duty, but demanded localities to allocate one or some of existing employees to receiving visitors and letters. In that regard, although the central state had theoretically attached great political significance to letters-and-visits work, and yet in practice still refuse to distribute adequate administrative resources and promote the OLV bureaucracy building accordingly. One explanation could be that underdeveloped China, meanwhile also in the Korean War, had too limited administrative resources and little revenue to fiscally support a specialized office system.

The Decision pressurized the local governments to pay more attention to letters-and-visits work. Higher political commitment was made on the local level. Besides local leaders' secretaries, they built up a larger task force. And most localities spontaneously had a standing committee member personally in charge of letters-and-visits work in the 1950s. To be noted, that the Xinfang channels must be installed closely to and answer to central and local leadership has been repeatedly restated on various occasions as "existing successful experiences and legacies." For instance, Premier Zhou Enlai first instructed in 1951 and emphasized in November 1957, "there should be one leading cadre personally in charge of the work of letters and visits (Diao, 2014, p. 2)."

As the OLVs later became the one and only window for the state to collect information from society until 2000, central leaders also learnt through practice, and gradually realized how important this information channel could be. As Xi Zhongxun, former Vice Premier and a co-founder of the Xinfang mechanism later puts it, Xinfang

serves as “a window”, “ears” and “a bridge” between the government and citizens, and offers “invaluable information regarding society that cannot be bought with money (Diao, 1996, p. 1).”

1.3 EXPLORATION ON XINFANG AS A MASS MOBILIZATION WEAPON, 1951-1952

Through historical overview and analysis, I intend to render an answer on which is the major driver of Xinfang, the state or society. Previous literature mostly views Xinfang as an initiative made by society, and argues that the state establishes an according system only in response of such a societal movement, in order to avoid grievances uncontrollably growing, or even evolving into collective actions on the streets. These society-centered scholars diverge on the initial motives of petitioners. Yu view that in absent of formal political participation platforms such as elections, citizens choose to petition as a substitute means of political participation and a powerful tool against grass-roots public agents, and failed petitions may result in serious consequences including intense social unrests and lower political trust (Yu, 2004; Hu, 2007).

Similarly, underdeveloped judicial institutions and low political trust in it also results in popular preference for the Xinfang mechanism, and thus Xinfang passively becomes a complement channel to formal legal systems (Michelson, 2007; Ying, 2004; Zhang T. , 2009; Minzner, 2006). In addition, it is argued by historians that petitioning is deeply rooted in China’s political convention since imperial ages (Fang, 2009; Fang,

2009; Minzner, 2006), and further implied that petitioning is a natural right for Chinese citizens.

Although local cadres are targeted by petitioners, other analysts argue that petitioners only intend to defend their interest that was earlier hurt by grass-roots cadres who also violate higher authorities' policy (O'Brien & Li, 1995; O'Brien, 1996; Ying, 2001). Petitioners are more of self-interest defenders than political participants, and hence they master relevant policy knowledge to enable themselves to explain the policies to their favor. Certain universal changes, such as "the national focus on economic growth," have exposed local cadres open to many new complaints and citizen pressure (O'Brien & Li, 1995, p. 761). In answer to the political participation theory, it is illustrated that by politicizing petitions, petitioners enjoy a better chance of having their problems settled, and therefore "political participation" is more a means than an end (Dong, 2010). In addition, field work has also shown that both politicizing and de-politicizing their issues are alternative strategies for petitioners: as the petition unfolds, the way of petitioners organizing themselves has changed as well; a few proactively petitioning citizens may invest more to band other citizens of similar appeals together, and thus become what is called "grass-roots activists/petitioning elites/leading petitioners (Ying, 2007; Ying, 2001)."

Furthering the interest defender theory, Ying and his supporters argue that petitioners usually choose to continue petitioning action when their moral code and consensus are breached (Ying, 2007; Ying, 2009; Wu C. , 2010). Ying affirms defending self-interest as the initial motives of petitions, and demonstrates with case studies of rural petitions that as the grass-roots administration inertially suppresses leading petitioners,

petitioners feel their moral consensus breached and dignity hurt, thereby triggering massive negative emotions and reproducing petitions, even while provided a better financial offer.

Petitioners may as well pressure local cadres into providing extra benefit (Rao, Ye, & Tan, 2011; Tian, 2010; Xiao, 2014; Tian, 2012). Due to the pressurized political system in China, grass-roots officials who are accountable to superior authorities take all means necessary to settle petitioners, no matter the cost; under such circumstances, by (threatening with) repeated petitions, petitioners can make a profit from local governments, and there has even emerged professional petitioners who make a living by not only petitioning for themselves but representing others before local governments.

These fruitful studies constitute our fundamental understanding of petitions and petitioners: petitioners, originally driven by economic interest including but not limited to land usage, residential relocation, water resources and etc.(both administrative and civil disputes), may adopt, alter and abandon a variety of strategies to expand the influence of their petition and achieve the goal of defending interest according to the situation as they perceive, and as the petition unfolds, petitioners also possibly turn to pursuing goals beyond their former expectation, such as a higher degree of political participation or extra profit from grass-roots agents.

Nonetheless, society-centered approach must be called into question, because it is less able to explain why Xinfang has but shown high consistency, despite the regional and other social differences, both in the major topics and in the trend of the case amount. Take the period of 1980-1990 for example, Tianjin, Wuhan, Xi'an and Hangzhou Municipal OLVs had similar changes in major petitioning themes, and the curves of the

case amount were alike⁵ (Wuhan Office of Local Chronicles, 2006, pp. 454-455; Xi'an Committee of Local Chorography, 2000, pp. 565-567; Hangzhou Committee of Local Chorography, 2003; Tianjin Editorial Committee of Choronicles, 1997, pp. 187-189).

As shown in the chart below, the four cities were faced with similar trajectories in number of petitions during the time period of 1980-1990:

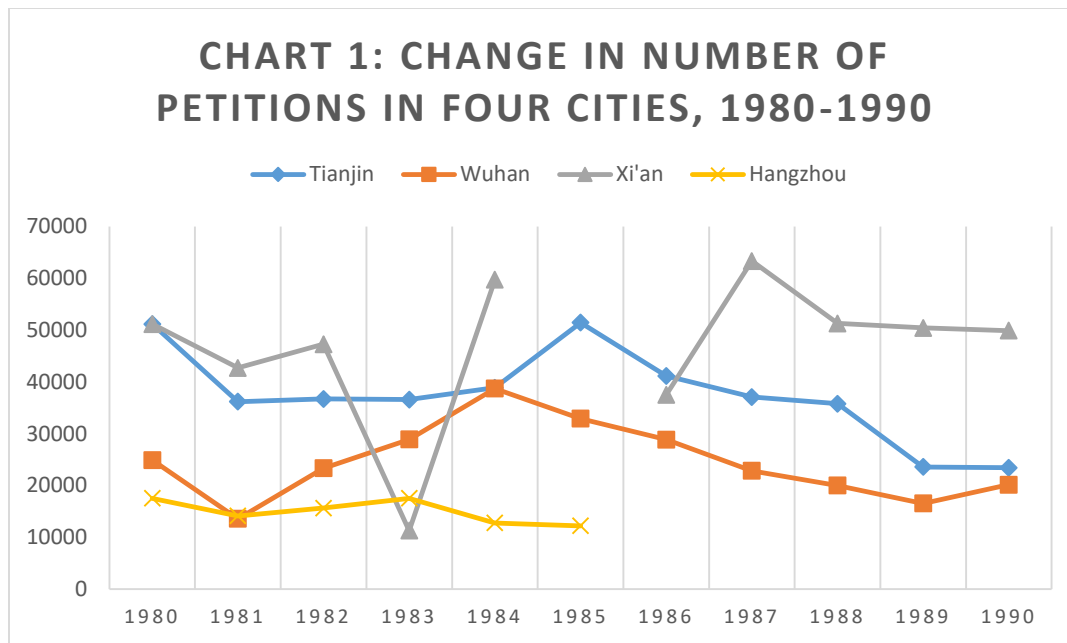


Figure 1. Change in Number of Petitions in Four Cities, 1980-1990

In regard of the distribution of various appeals, the major concern of petitions around the year of 1980 was to rehabilitate those who were wrongly persecuted during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and the case amount was higher; in 1981-1983, the amount of cases decreased, and more letters suggesting on economic reforms came in via the OLVs; between 1984 and 1987, most letters reported on malpractice and corruption of grass-roots officials. But for state intervention, such high consistency between regions

⁵ Data on Hangzhou after 1985 and Xi'an in 1985 is not found in disclosed documents.

would hardly be explained, especially consider China as a strong state. Therefore in analyzing existing literature, I choose state-centered approach over society-centered, and sees the state as a dominant force in shaping the Xinfang system.

Indeed in history as mentioned, the state passively received letters and visits by societal actors in 1949, and as Yang and Zhao argue (2015), the state later introduced and translated such unintended social initiatives into state targeted policies, and gradually took over. In the case of the Xinfang mechanism, the Chinese state began to explore what to do with Xinfang since *the Decision* was issued, and sat behind the steering wheel. As their Three-anti and Five-anti Campaigns (1951-1952) unfolded, the state found out the function of Xinfang as a powerful tool of mass mobilization, and exploited it to fully promote their ongoing and incoming socio-political campaigns. Such a value orientation for mass mobilization is originated from and deeply rooted in the Mass Line ideology as discussed above.

The Three-anti and Five-Anti campaigns were to enhance internal discipline on Party cadres, and to eliminate capitalism, corruption and bureaucratism. During these two campaigns, the OLVs proved to be a convenient tool as well as an information channel for the state to widely monitor grass-roots agents, locate corrupt officials and further set good examples in its nationwide propaganda. Therefore, central and local states discovered the value of Xinfang beyond merely a tool for information gathering, and then attached the OLVs to stronger decision-making and implementary autonomy in mobilizing societal actors into political movements launched from above to below.

In 1952, the Three-anti campaign approached to a low period. However in May, a typical example of Zhang Shunyou appeared, and then the state quickly responded. An

ordinary worker, Zhang Shunyou from Shanxi Province spotted a counter-revolutionary suspect and then reported to local police. However, he was thwarted by local bureaucrats to better participate in the social campaigns:

To accuse this anti-revolutionist Song Yude, I reported to 27 offices across Suiyuan, Chahar and Shanxi in 5 months. It not only kept me from working and producing, but cost me all the savings including my clothes, blanket and smoking pipe...When the anti-revolutionist was arrested, I asked Yanggao County Police Station to cover my expenses. They told me they couldn't resolve this and I had to return to Guisui City. And Guisui Municipal Police introduced me to the Court, and Comrade Li from the Court said, this was too long ago, and it was a non-local case, so they wouldn't resolve this...Now I have no choice but to turn to the North China Bureau⁶ (North China People Press, 1953).

Suffering much from growing bureaucratism, Zhang Shunyou was repeatedly pushed away by various local offices. At last, he decided to attempt one more time, and this time he chose the North China Bureau, a temporary regional authority, superior to provincial governments and inferior to the central government.

The Zhang Shunyou Incident drew attention from regional and even central leaders. Shortly after he reported, an editorial entitled “*(We) Must Eliminate Bureaucratism* (必须肃清官僚主义)” by *People's Daily* on May 30, 1952 sharply

⁶ The CCP North China Bureau (the NCB, 中共中央华北局) was the regional leading agency in the area of North China, whose level was between the Center and the Province. In May 1948, the Bureau of Shanxi, Chahar and Hebei and the Bureau of Shanxi, Hebei, Shandong and Henan were incorporated into one, the North China Bureau whose first First Secretary were Liu Shaoqi and Bo Yibo. In April 1954, the North China Bureau was abolished. Between November 1960 and 1966, the Bureau was revived.

criticized Shanxi Provincial Government as “astonishingly neglecting organizational discipline and policy regulations.” *Shanxi Daily* not only reprinted the editorial by *People’s Daily*, but praised Zhang Shunyou as a model citizen who “hates anti-revolutionists so much” and “we all should learn from,” someone fearless to difficulty and retaliation.

The NCB held a special session to discuss this incident, and Liu Lantao, a Deputy Secretary⁷ attended and spoke on the meeting, which apparently showed the NCB’s increased political commitment to this complaint incident. According to Liu’s speech, he emphasized the political importance of responding to citizens’ letters and visits:

Immature or incorrect as they might be, opinions from people should be welcomed by us...and we never turn our back to their voices, and should thank all those who help us see and correct our mistakes...Some comrades may say, I’m so busy at work and how am I supposed to receive an ordinary citizen? This is wrong! Receiving citizens or their representatives and helping them with their problems is always our unalienable duty...People must be answered, and their cases be resolved (North China People Press, 1953).

In the whole Zhang Shunyou Incident, there are three features from previous Xinfang coverage by state media to be identified: 1) previous state media coverage on Xinfang was mostly central leaders’ personal instructions, public speeches and governmental documents; and this time, state media emphasized on an individual case of

⁷ Liu was the Third Secretary at the time, seconded only to Bo Yibo (First Secretary) and Nie Rongzhen (Second Secretary).

a typical petitioning, and clearly managed to foster a social atmosphere of sympathizing and admiring Zhang's petitioning.

2) Unlike before, the state had already launched political campaigns, and been seeking to strengthen the undertaking of the Three-anti and Five-anti campaigns since January 1952, as multiple documents were issued and particularly aimed at expanding the two campaigns (CCP Central Literature Press, 1997, pp. 9-10, 53-54). Therefore, the state expected to have a petitioner who went through phenomenal difficulty in petitioning, instead of passively waiting and receiving petitions. Otherwise Zhang would be treated as an ordinary petitioner, who might still have his problem resolved and would not be interviewed by *People's Daily* and *Shanxi Daily*.

3) To launch a massive political movement takes a targeted enemy with a recognizable face, besides establishing and rewarding a model for the public to follow. Only when the targeted enemy has a "clear face" can the public recognize similar enemies who walk among us, and the "clear face" can be either exemplary action, attitudes or other identifiable performances. As Mao and his communist theorists defined, these communist ideology-driven socio-political campaigns were in nature mobilizing the masses against one part of or whole bureaucracy, and in this particular case, the exemplary enemy acknowledged by the central state was all the 27 offices, about which Zhang complaint. In the editorial by *People's Daily*, these offices' unresponsiveness toward Zhang Shunyou was portrayed as typical performances of bureaucratism.

To guarantee Xinfang fully function for mass mobilization, a necessary precondition is citizen participation. Only with sufficient information from society, can the state select a particularly typical one among all the petitioned cases. And only among

a relatively large amount of petitioners with similar appeals/complaints can a representative example then emerge and be spotted by the state. Concretely. But for Zhang Shunyou constantly petitioning to various offices, it would have produced neither such an exemplary model of a highly participating citizen or that of indifferent offices contaminated with bureaucratism.

In this sense, the state decided to collect more citizens' complaints by encouraging people to petition through the Xinfang channels. In mid-1952, Peng Zhen, Mayor of Beijing wrote an article entitled *A Letter to Beijing Residents in Acknowledgement of Reporting on Misconduct by Governmental Officials* (关于感谢市民检举政府工作人员中的非法行为致各界人民的函) on *People's Daily*, making a consistently encouraging gesture. In this letter, he expressed gratitude for citizens who reported specific issues of officialdom, those who "helped us, cared for the country and took the civic responsibility", and encouraged citizens to write to the government, "whether reporting on individual officials or criticizing governmental work, whenever or wherever (Feng, 2012, p. 33)."

Local governments also organized special task forces, and charged them with stationing in various neighborhoods and collecting complaints from residents nearby. In February 1952, Tianjin Municipality and Mayor Huang Jing organized a "Mayor's Mission (市长代表访问团)" to respond to letters received regarding the Three-anti and Five-anti campaigns. And this Mayor's Mission had talked to 6,586 citizens and directly settled 3,421 problems (Tianjin Editorial Committee of Chronicles, 1997, pp. 206-207).

1.4 MASS MOBILIZATION THROUGH XINFANG COMING INTO SHAPE, 1953-1957

By 1953, the Chinese state, along with its state media, had developed a set of strategies for mass mobilization through Xinfang, and grown very familiar with this package of mass politics strategies. Concretely, mass mobilization through Xinfang follows a skeletal multi-procedure process given below:

1) The state requests certain information from society, and petitioners respond with information regarding state targeted movements, such as reporting on malpractice by local officials;

2) With information acquired, the state is enabled to locate targets whom the incoming campaign is against, such as corrupt officials who seek for privileges or state workers who waste materials at work;

3) State media finds and makes good examples of these campaign targets, propagandizes the plans of the socio-political campaign, and in the meantime, media encourages more citizens to participate by reporting on similar campaign targets;

4) Since mass sentiments against the campaign enemy has been highly heated and widespread, the state manages to mobilize the masses and gain popular support;

5) Through these massively supported campaigns, the communist state realizes its transformation of society and enhances state penetration. As can be seen, Xinfang is an indispensable link in this process toward the communist utopia as the informational avenue to public opinions for the state.

The state transplanted its experience from Zhang Shunyou to the next petitioning case, and tested this new strategy of mass mobilization. Only 2 months later after the Zhang Shunyou Incident, Tianjin Municipality inspected its letters-and-visits work of 37 municipal bureaus in August 1952, and apparently they found what they were looking for. Followed this inspection was a critical article on *Tianjin Daily* entitled *Public Health Agency Should Not Neglect People's Letters* (公共卫生局不该漠视人民来信) published on November 13, which set up an enemy with a clear face and a name, pointing out that Tianjin Public Health Agency delayed responding to people's letters.

Thereby the Agency was compelled to improve their work on letters and visits, and in January 1953, the municipal leadership praised the Agency's efforts in correcting previous wrongs in *Anti-bureaucratism Campaign Report* (反官僚主义运动总结). Assisted by information from society conveyed by these letters, Tianjin Municipality managed to better supervise the Municipal Court, the Southwest District (南开区) Government and the Education Bureau in 1953 (Tianjin Editorial Committee of *Chronicles*, 1997, pp. 320-322).

The central state also kept up with local states. On January 19 1953, an editorial by *People's Daily* straightforward encouraged citizens to petition through the Xinfang channel:

We must combat bureaucratism. And we hope the whole body of the masses will fully utilize the method of writing letters of petitioning, a most convenient, freest, economical and immediate way, to promptly complain about and report on

phenomena of bureaucratism, no matter where or in what form (Diao, 1996, p. 49).

On March 25, the front-page headline of *People's Daily* covered another “Zhang Shunyou-style” story that Wang Zhenhai, former Ding County (定县) Party Secretary, was removed from office. In the editorial entitled *A Serious Lesson from Wang Zhenhai's Crime* (王振海犯罪事件给我们的教训), it profiles in details an “extremely self-centered individualist” who “indulged himself in personal interests and privileges by abusing power” and eventually “totally betrayed the Party and people (North China People Press, 1953).”

By making use of information via the Xinfang mechanism and publicly setting up typical targets via propaganda, the state proved the graveness of certain socio-political problems, and naturally the necessity to launch related campaigns. In this manner, the state began to escalate mass mobilization to a higher extent, propelling its communist campaigns into a more influential movement transforming society according to the Party state's ideology. That is, the state had therefore shifted from a receiver and passive utilizer of information from society to an active seeker for information, especially information that could contribute to its campaigns.

In order not to have information channels blocked, the state also put efforts into reducing unnecessary information by showing their informational preferences. On December 25 1951, the Party Central Committee issued *Instruction on Avoiding Encouraging Citizens to Write Letters of Salutes or Mail Gifts* (中共中央关于制止动员群众向中央写致敬信、发贺电和送礼的指示), in which the Party heavily criticized

local governments for letting citizens write letters of salutes and stated such letters were “more than a waste and but a political mistake (CCP Central Literature Press, 1997, pp. 547-548).”

As state autonomy increased as a whole in campaigns, it is strongly implied that the OLVs were also growing beyond informatics apparatuses as they were at the beginning. In order to secure a steady informational flow and fuel the campaigns, the OLVs were trusted with more autonomy by central and local leadership to guarantee the rate of petitioning settlement, and thus were enabled to draw a larger amount of petitioning. Mass mobilization and the OLVs increased autonomy later enhanced one another in the next decade, making a continuously vicious cycle.

Shifting its value orientation to mass mobilization, Xinfang institutional building took a firm step ahead. Through May 28 to 31 1957, the First National Xinfang Conference was held in Beijing, and both Yang Shangkun and Xi Zhongxun attended. The Conference discussed the drafts of *Instructions by the State Council on Enhancing the Work of Letters and Visits* (国务院关于加强处理人民来信和接待人民来访工作的指示) and the *CCP Provisional Regulation on Handling People's Letters and Visits* (中国共产党各级党委机关处理人民来信、接待群众来访工作的暂行办法).

The First Conference confirmed that to enhance letters-and-visits work necessarily requires a specialized office with independent staffing allocation. Unlike previous instructions and documents such as *the Decision*, the Conference allowed central and local OLVs to have a separate budget and determine its own staffing size. Moreover, the administrative level of the OLVs was accordingly elevated. For example,

Tianjin Municipality established the Reception Office for People (人民接待室), affiliated with the municipal general office, with a county/division-level director and 20 employees in total in June 1952, which was escalated from sub-division level.

By 1960, the OLVs were established nationwide within the governments, Party organizations, courts, military committees, People's Congresses, state-owned enterprises, government-organized organizations, and other components of the public sector.

Hangzhou Municipality charged the Office of Citizen Representatives Liaison (人民代表联络处) with the duty of responding to and receiving letters and visits in 1955. Xi'an Municipality established the Division for Letters and Visits with 4 officials in 1957 (Tianjin Editorial Committee of Chronicles, 1997, p. 60; Xi'an Committee of Local Chorography, 2000, p. 563; Hangzhou Committee of Local Chorography, 2003).

1.5 OLV AUTONOMY INCREASED AND MASS MOBILIZATION OVERWHELMING, 1957-1976

As state leaders realized letters-and-visits work could promote their campaigns, the state had ceased to welcome all kinds of petitioning, but became a more selective collector who required only certain information from society, especially information that would help most to escalate socio-political campaigns. While citizens were indeed highly mobilized into public movements, letters-and-visits work transformed into a powerful weapon for power struggles against political adversaries, especially so during the Cultural Revolution.

The central government first showed constraints on the rapidly growing OLVs, and ambiguously presented hesitation towards a Xinfang mechanism aimed at mass mobilization. As Xi Zhongxun spoke on the First Conference, “it is not enough yet with a specialized staff; it must be combined with a team spirit that everyone does it together (大家动手的精神); only when everyone responsibly engaged will the problems be easily resolved (Diao, 1996, pp. 111, 113).” Later Premier Zhou also endorsed the “everyone-does-together” slogan on a different occasion. This “everyone-does-together” slogan was in fact an attempt to prevent the specialized agency from totally transforming into a mechanism for mass mobilization, and thus stabilize letter-and-visits work.

However Xi and Zhou failed to hinder mass mobilization through Xinfang, since a national unitary OLV system was absent at the time, the lower-level OLV did not necessarily receive direct instructions and orders from the higher-level OLVs, and enjoyed much autonomy. It could be also reflected by the staffing allocation of the OLVs. While Hunan provincial OLV only had one cadre, Shanghai had the largest provincial OLV of 15 cadres, and other provincial OLVs were all of different sizes. Whether to increase or decrease the size of local OLVs, the exact name of local OLVs and qualification for Xinfang cadres were all determined by local governments themselves (Diao, 1996, pp. 82-84).

With widely established and separate local OLVs, mass mobilization through Xinfang had its organizational condition to further develop. Following the First Conference, *People's Daily* published an editorial entitled *In the Light of the Rectification Movement, Enhance Handling the Work of Letters and Visits* (结合整风运动, 加强处理人民来信来访工作) on June 3 1957. As it advocated, localities were

supposed to make use of letters and visits “to push the Rectification Movement forward inside state apparatuses.” Although this editorial still placed information gathering in the center of Xinfang⁸, it apparently emphasized more on mass mobilization. This editorial also suggested that local leaders should bring policy deficiencies reflected from letters and visits to their policy making and regular meetings.

On November 9, the State Council issued *Instructions by the State Council on Enhancing the Work of Letters and Visits*, which was discussed and polished on the First Conference:

All specific demands and appeals made by people, if just and possible, should be immediately fulfilled with effective means; if unjust or unsolvable at the present, should be patiently explained...In general, whether just or unjust demands, we should pay equally attention and proceed responsibly, and must not underestimate them...Superior offices...if within the sphere of competence and capacity, should not forward petitioning case files to inferior offices (Diao, 1996, pp. 358-360).

The Instructions and the earlier editorial could be seen as a declaration that called on citizens to participate in letters-and-visits work, and urged governmental officials to act more responsively; what distinguished *the Instructions* and the editorial from previous documents to encourage letters and visits, Mayor Peng Zhen’s public letter for example,

⁸ This editorial cited Xi Zhongxun’s speech on how letters-and-visits work could help the government gather information about society or policy implement from citizens. As Xi spoke on the Conference, “citizens bought the postage stamps (to send us letters), bought the train tickets (to visit us), and if we didn’t take them seriously but are willing to make a detour (to gather information), that’d be stupidest bureaucratism (Diao, 1996, p. 111).”

was their informational preferences made quite clear by the state this time, voicing an explicit request especially for letters regarding the Rectification Movement, which also demanded the OLVs adopt a selective attitudes toward all petitioning cases.

Thereby as the Rectification Movement shifted onto the Anti-rightist Movement, letters-and-visits work also “automatically” switched to serving the new campaign. Many who wrote letters of complaint answering the call to participate in the Rectification Movement were targeted and quickly classified as “class enemies (阶级敌人),” and retaliated by local agents. Tens of thousands of letters were detained by county leaders in several provinces.

A worse case stood out: an anonymous letter was forwarded from above to a county in Henan, which complaint about food shortage. The local Party secretary charged the police with finding whoever wrote this “trouble-making” letter, and found out it was a female bank clerk who eventually was treated as a “hostile element.” Such antagonism even expanded against the OLVs and their individual officials during this period of time. More than a few local cadres publicly expressed distrust against the OLVs, doubted Xinfang cadres were “infected by rightist feelings” because they most often contacted rightists in work, and even some of OLV officials were classified as “rightists” and denounced in the Anti-rightist and other following political campaigns (Diao, 1996, pp. 121-122).

That being said, the OLV apparatus autonomy, especially implementary autonomy, was highly increased, as mass mobilization overwhelmed the Xinfang mechanism. In order to secure a steadily rich informational stream, the OLVs constantly reached more implementary powers to directly solve petitioners’ problems, with the tacit

permission by central and local leadership. The central leadership later required that the OLVs should work on basis of a principle “handling more, assigning less (多办少交)”, demanding that the OLVs should assign less letters to parallel specialized offices responsible for related affairs, but immediately handle as many appeals as possible on their own.

Take Tianjin in 1964 for example. On April 20, Mayor Hu Zhaozheng received a letter from two grass-roots staff, complaining that recently Tianjin Watch Factory ceased producing stopwatches and advising on resuming production; on May 21, Mayor Hu received a letter from residents who reported that a Party member in their neighborhood bullied others; on June 21, a firm based in Luoyang, Henan Province, wrote to complain about poor quality of bicycles produced by Tianjin’s factory.

Instead of assigning these three letters to the Municipal Bureau of Light Industry who was in charge of bicycle and watch production, or Hebei District whose jurisdiction covered the neighborhood, Mayor Hu and his General Office⁹ directly contacted the Watch Factory, the Street Office and the Bicycle Factory in regard of the three problem, and help resolved them. In one of Hu’s instructions, it was particularly emphasized that the letters should “not be forwarded to lower-level authorities” but be handled by himself (Tianjin Editorial Committee of Chronicles, 1997, pp. 235-237).

In September 1963, the Party Central Committee and the State Council jointly issued *the Circular on Reinforcing the Work of People’s Letters and Visits (the Circular, 关于加强人民来信来访工作的通知)*. *The Circular* officially required that the province

⁹ At the time, Tianjin’s OLV was installed inside the Municipal General Office.

and the municipality should directly handle rather than assign petitioning letters to lower-level offices, and the county should only handle letters immediately and not assign them elsewhere at all. Yang Shangkun spoke of a similar principle on the First Conference¹⁰.

Since the Cultural Revolution left local governments of all levels in ruins, Premier Zhou had little choice but to encourage the OLVs “to carry the cases right down to the grass-roots level (一杆子到底),” which empowered the OLVs with the power to independently implement decisions on certain petitioning cases¹¹. A series of Zhou Enlai’s instructions and arrangements during the Cultural Revolution also contributed to a regularized classification of letters (Diao, 1996, pp. 217-221). This procedural legacy remained beneficial in rebuilding the Xinfang mechanism after the Cultural Revolution.

As seen above, OLV apparatus autonomy and mass mobilization through Xinfang increase one another. The more the state was leaning toward mass mobilization, the stronger in autonomy the OLVs grew. The stronger OLVs more radically promoted social movements and mass mobilization, and hence made a vicious cycle. In addition, the state not only promised to meet the legit demands to draw petitioners to the OLVs, but invested much to reducing the inconvenience for those petitioners. Such investment grew to an extent ridiculously high.

¹⁰ On the Conference, this idea was rough both literally and in thought. Yang in fact intended to simply stress the officials’ responsibility to people’s letters:

“Local governments can invent specific working methods in practice...the matter of the utmost importance is not to shirk (不要推). There are so many departments in the provincial Party committee and the provincial government, and no matter to whom the citizens write letters, we must not shirk...if we can handle a letter and the needs in the letter are legit, handle it immediately (Diao, 1996, p. 109).”

¹¹ On the other hand, in the disorder caused by the Cultural Revolution, Zhou was concerned that local governments were incapable of fulfilling tasks assigned by the central state, and thus he more firmly encouraged the central governmental officials “to take the directive right down to the grass-roots” as well.

In 1965, Zhou Enlai proposed constructing a joint reception building to meet and receive those petitioners who visited the central government. Considering most petitioners came by train, the State Council chose a site next to Beijing South Railway Station for this reception building. Earlier, Beijing Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs was under orders to build a facility to provide temporary lodging for petitioners (Diao, 2014, pp. 40-43; Diao, 1996, pp. 208-210). These arrangements largely cut down the costs for visiting Beijing, and thus resulted in a drastic rise of encouraged skip-level petitioning (越级上访).

By 1962, petitioners in Tianjin mostly wrote to Beijing about their problems, and few chose to visit the central government. And yet, petitioning visitors from Tianjin to Beijing had swiftly increased to 608 since 1963. Between January and October 1964, only the State Council received 907 petitioning visitors from Tianjin, 60% of whom did not even attempt to bring their issues to any authority based in Tianjin before coming to Beijing (Tianjin Editorial Committee of Chronicles, 1997, p. 183).

Mass mobilization through Xinfang to launch and strengthen socio-political campaigns did go further and eventually lost control. Based on citizens' complaints, revolutionary groups detected the "class enemies" who had ill intentions against the "people's regime"¹², as well as any new trends of class struggles in society. It inevitably led to absurd consequences: only in one county, 898 cadres and citizens were persecuted as enemies during the Cultural Revolution, and even 80% of villagers in one single

¹² "People (人民)" is a political concept created and used by the CCP, and refers to the patriots and advocates for the CCP rule.

village were all identified “problematic” (Tianjin Editorial Committee of Chronicles, 1997, pp. 77, 260).

Ironically, when the goal of mass mobilization finally dominated the Xinfang channels, letters-and-visits work was *de facto* suspended. The masses, no longer contained by or content with any state channels or officially organized movements, instead chose informal platforms that were more emotionally extreme and public, such as the notorious big-character poster (大字报). These posters not only was verbally vicious and fierce, but able to immediately stir up massive sentiments, because they were publicly displayed instantly, and possibly led to the persecution of their targets, mostly their personally unfavored individuals. Even some big-character posters were rumored and made up to denounce the targets, it was usually impossible to undo the damage to victims’ reputation. Here I list two typical posters in part ¹³:

Secretary Guo Seeks Privileges: This February, when Secretary Guo went to relocate veterans in Fujian, he did not take comrades from the payroll section or political department to aid him in the task. Instead, he took a steward and a medical staff in his company, merely for his own comfort...It [Guo’s conduct] had a negative effect. Seeking privileges is in essence a reflection of bourgeois thought.

Policy and tactics are the life of the Party: [Interrogating] Li; The Supreme Instruction: Never forget the class struggle. 5. As a committee member

¹³ The source is “Red & Black Revolution: Dazibao and Woodcuts from 1960s China” the exhibition by Harvard’s Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies.

of the Rebel team, why did you consult your own files when you were supposed to investigate black-list information?! – The metalworking group of the workshop

1.6 INCORPORATING THE OLVS INTO ONE NATIONAL UNITARY SYSTEM, 1978-1982

In previous scholarly work, it is commonly believed that the Cultural Revolution suspended Xinfang development; as is usually mentioned as an example, *the Circular* had yet to be fully carried out (Feng, 2012). Most historians merely leave the Cultural Revolution period out of their analysis (Fang, 2009; Wu C. , 2009). Damaging as it was indeed, the Cultural Revolution also left Xinfang building with its unique political legacy, by incorporating previously separate OLVs into one unitary system.

Revolutionary committees had emerged in localities, replacing previous local Party committees and governments since 1967. In January 1967, pro-Cultural Revolution factions were mobilized and organized to overthrow Shanghai Municipal Government and Party Committee, and Mao named the newly-built pro-Cultural Revolution authority as “Shanghai Revolutionary Committee.” Thereby revolutionary committees quickly took place of former local governments across China.

As a result, local governments and Party organizations were both merged into revolutionary committees, including the previous OLVs that separately belonged to the government and Party organization. In November 1967, Tianjin Municipal Revolutionary Committee was founded, and established the Reception Division; the Division was allocated with a staff size of 110 employees, while the previous municipal OLV was

permitted to only have a staff of 20 employees (Tianjin Editorial Committee of Chronicles, 1997, p. 60). Similar practices were conducted nationwide. In December 1967, Hangzhou established the OLV affiliated with the revolutionary committee, and its administrative level was escalated to the municipal/departmental level. More cadres were added onto the work of letters and visits across the municipality. In May 1968, Xi'an Revolutionary Committee established a Reception Station for Citizens with 25 cadres (Hangzhou Committee of Local Chorography, 2003; Xi'an Committee of Local Chorography, 2000).

With mobilized masses, extreme emotions and violence, revolutionary committees advocated an assertive organizational principle: everything belongs to the Cultural Revolution and revolutionary committees. Admittedly, such a totalitarian slogan led to a hierarchy where a superior office had absolute control over its inferior. Therefore the OLVs started to form a similar system where a lower-level OLV took orders and instructions from and answer to a higher-level OLV.

These OLVs inside the revolutionary committees, entering post-Cultural Revolution years, were re-merged into local governments through the reshuffle of local authorities. And in this way, the Xinfang system moved forward toward the incorporation, as a legacy by the Cultural Revolution. According to local chronicles across Shaanxi, revolutionary committees also contributed to unifying previously various names into the one name of Xinfang offices that is still used today, Xinfang Bangongshi aka the OLV in English (Shaanxi Provincial Office for Local Chronicles, 2018).

After the Cultural Revolution, the missions of top priority regarding letters-and-visits work were to rebuild the OLVs, to revive the normalized working process before

the Revolution, and to help victims by the Cultural Revolution overturn all those false convictions upon them. In September 1978, the Second National Xinfang Conference was held in Beijing, which set the goal of letters-and-visits work at redressing unjust and mishandled cases caused by the Revolution. The Second Conference launched the Xinfang apparatuses rebuilding, in which the state attempted to incorporate the OLVs into one unitary hierarchal system. As mentioned above, the OLVs before the Revolution were atomized and separate from each other. The incorporation had connected these fragmented OLVs together under one frame by the early 1980s.

In February 1982, The Third National Xinfang Conference was held, and issued *Provisional Regulations on the Work of Letters and Visits in the Party Organizations and Government (the Provisional Regulations, 党政机关信访工作暂行条例)*, which stipulated that specifically which governmental sections must establish an OLV “for the convenience of the masses and related policy work.” It was also clearly regulated that a local OLV was underneath a dual leadership, directed both by the local leadership, as well as instructed by the superior OLV (Diao, 1996, pp. 398-402). To illustrate it concretely, a municipal OLV for example, should answer to Mayor, Municipal Party Secretary and the municipal leading body, and in the meantime, the provincial OLV was also empowered to supervise and instruct the work of the municipal OLV.

To be noted, in the late 1970s, the OLVs in many localities were first restored as they were in pre-Cultural Revolution years, separately belonging to the Party committee and the local government, while there were joint OLVs in a few regions directly inherited from the OLV of the revolutionary committee. In July 1980, the Central Joint OLV was revoked and divided into the OLV underneath the CCP Central Committee, the OLV of

the State Council and the third one affiliated with the National People's Congress, and there was not a joint central OLV until February 2000. Even though, *the Provisional Regulations* in 1982 suggested the provincial governments and Party committees establish joint OLVs (Diao, 1996, p. 399).

1.7 NORMALIZING XINFANG TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS AND RETURN TO INFORMATICS APPARATUSES, 1983-1999

To set letter-and-visits work back on the course of pre-Revolution years, mass mobilization through Xinfang must be ended. And it started from reducing OLVs apparatus autonomy. To be specific, the state restored the OLVs as a mechanism for information gathering and processing for the state.

Before the Cultural Revolution, the First Conference and *the Circular* proposed a procedural principle of “managing through specialized departments (归口办理)” that required the OLVs should classify received letters by the affairs involved, and then assign letters to related parallel specialized departments, rather than addressing these problems directly by the OLVs. This principle limited the power of the OLVs to only the duty of receiving, classifying and assigning letters to other departments, and yet was interrupted by the Cultural Revolution before it was *de facto* put in practice.

I do not intend to imply that the OLVs should not be largely empowered with implementary and decision making autonomy. In fact, strictly delimited in the post-Revolution years, the OLVs had also been heavily criticized for being nothing more than

ornaments, because all they did was to forward petitioning cases to other offices and localities. A nickname for the OLVs reflected such criticism: “another Post Office.”

Still through state media, the state sounded a clear signal to society that mass mobilization through Xinfang was no more. An editorial entitled *Resolve the Petitioning Problem on the Ground* (切实解决上访问题) on September 17, 1979 was released, in which petitioners were habitually by *People's Daily* portrayed as ordinary citizens who deserved compassion and sympathy, while OLV officials involved were described as cold-blooded bureaucrats who turned unresponsive and indifferent to these citizens' complaints. This editorial successfully encouraged petitioners to take further action, and eventually caused days overloaded petitioning in Beijing.

Under such circumstances was another editorial *Properly Treat the Petitioning Problem* released (正确对待上访问题). This editorial stated that the Xinfang mechanism should be aimed at “upholding tranquility and unity,” rather than mass mobilization for socio-political campaigns. And for the very first time since 1949, the state sounded a serious warning to petitioners with this article that “those who deliberately caused trouble would be strictly dealt with.” In the editorial, it also required scrutinizing every single petitioner and “those petitioners who unreasonably intend to make trouble should be strictly handled according to what they have done.” This was the first attempt by the state to intimidate potential petitioners into stepping down, and resulted in a significant decrease of petitioning in Beijing, which was also approved by Deng Xiaoping in person (Editorial Office of People's Daily, 2004).

Therefore, letters-and-visits work was faced with a sharp turn-around. While Xinfang was previously utilized for mass mobilization, the OLVs since the 1980s had

been more committed to conflict resolution among the masses and/or between the masses and the governments. To help citizens with their complaints and problems was then always claimed to be a major goal of the Xinfang mechanism. Utterly different from before, Xinfang dominated by conflict resolution would perceive petitioning as more a concentrated expression of social unrests, and Xinfang should be devoted to inviting such unrests into governmental channels. That is, the ultimate goal of Xinfang was aimed at eliminating petitioning, reaching an ideal condition where no one had anything to complain about before the government. As *People's Daily*¹⁴ describes it, letter-and-visits work should be “an annihilating battle against petitioning (Feng, 2012, p. 38).”

This sharp turn of Xinfang in its dominant pursuit could be seen in the attitudes of the state towards skip-level petitioning as well. During 1949-1966, the Chinese central state favorably received petitioners and petitioning letters from outside Beijing, and for a long time, the state had covered a part of or whole petitioners' expenses in transportation, accommodation and food during visiting Beijing. As mentioned before, Beijing Municipality even built a building in order to provide temporary accommodation for non-native petitioners. However on the Third Xinfang Conference, a consensus was reached that grass-roots and the county-level OLVs should be largely reinforced, to stop most petitioning at the county and below immediately where conflicts were brewed, which should be regarded a guiding principle to “decrease skip-level petitioning letters and visits...and resolving problems on the grass-roots frontline (Diao, 1996, pp. 267-268).”

¹⁴ In the original context, petitioning at the time was mainly about wrong convictions during the Cultural Revolution, and by “annihilating” petitioning, the state would undo the damages done by the Cultural Revolution.

Entering the 1990s, the central state issued *the Xinfang Regulations* (信访条例), in which the state emphasizes Xinfang should serve the good of citizens, and no retaliation against petitioners by governmental officials shall be tolerated, which also intends to blur the previous distinctions between “the people” and “class enemies” by collectively referring to them as “petitioners”:

to report the situations and to propose advice, suggestions, queries, or complaints, in forms of letters, emails, fax, telephone and visits etc., by citizens, legal persons or other organizations, to levels of governmental sections, including the county level and above...petitioners refer to citizens, legal persons and other organizations who reflect on realities, and/or propose advice, suggestions or appeals...no organization or individual is allowed to suppress, retaliate or persecute petitioners (State Council, 1995).

Later entering the 21th century, *the Regulations for Letters and Calls* (国务院信访条例) issued by the State Bureau of Letters and Calls clearly discourages skip-level petitioning, further disassembling mass mobilization through Xinfang (State Bureau for Letters and Calls, 2005):

Article 16. A complaint maker may bring the complained matter to the state apparatus at the corresponding level or the one at superior level empowered to address related affairs. If the complained matter is already being proceeded or in progress of addressing, and the complaint maker brings the complained matter to the apparatus superior to the one that is proceeding the matter or in progress of addressing, the superior apparatus shall not hear the matter.

Along with the demand of conflict resolution, the Xinfang mechanism also turned back heavily to its primary goal, information gathering and processing for policy making. Since the 1980s, with a unitary OLV system already built, the Xinfang channels as the only informational avenue between society and the state had been devoted to information support to other state apparatuses, which were mainly in two forms, one by experience exchange between localities and the other by building Xinfang informational networks.

During the 1980s and 1990s, there were a number of cross-regional experience exchange on the work of letters and visits (Diao, 1996, pp. 285-300). Some experience-exchanging forums were hosted by the central state, and only in 1983, the central OLVs organized multiple forums in Beijing, Wuhan and Jinan, etc. In the meantime, there were self-organized forums between neighboring provinces; in his notes, Diao mentions there also existed regular meetings between the five provinces in North China, meetings between the three provinces in Manchuria, meetings between the five in southeast China, and even larger cross-regional meetings that were also frequently held during this period.

On the other hand, the OLVs put their hands to building Xinfang informational networks within their jurisdiction as well. In March 1983, the CCP Central General Office and the State Council General Office issued a joint circular, requiring that the OLVs should serve the leadership as an information channel, especially for information regarding economic building and reform issues, which led local OLVs to engaging in state information networks building (Diao, 1996, pp. 308-315). In April 1984, Tianjin Municipality required the districts and prefectures should build information channels within their jurisdiction; in May 1988, the municipal OLV regularized the process of Xinfang information including compiling, approving, transferring and feedback. Until

then was the network of Xinfang information constituted, and Xinfang information is required to be reported to the municipal leadership every month (Tianjin Editorial Committee of Chronicles, 1997, pp. 302-312).

In March 1986, the Party Central Committee and the State Council jointly issued *Circular on Enhancing the Work of Letters and Visits* (关于加强信访工作的通知), which required the OLVs should provide information for leaders, especially that in regard of economic construction and reforms (Diao, 1996, p. 308). Local governments also built their own Xinfang informational networks. Only in the 1980s, Tianjin Municipal OLV founded four periodicals¹⁵ to share information gathered from society, of which two were widely circulated with all offices, one only for the municipal leadership, and one only issued to the letter-and-visits offices in Tianjin (Tianjin Editorial Committee of Chronicles, 1997, pp. 302-306, 310-312).

In this fashion, information regarding citizens' complaints is relatively accessible and traceable, "and hence the thesis chooses to study information collected by the state via citizens' complaints channels, including Xinfang, state media interviews, Mayor's Mailbox and etc. Nonetheless, the content of some "citizens' complaints" may not be necessarily complaints, but consulting about some policy related to the petitioners' life. Broadly defined, "information" may include information conveyed by informal personal networks, such as career advice from a governmental official, and the attitudes and preferences of the leadership towards one or several certain policies.

¹⁵ There were six periodicals, and two were later fused into one weekly periodical entitled *Reflections from the Masses* (群众反映).

1.8 INVITING SOCIETAL ACTORS INTO XINFANG AGAIN, 2000- PRESENT

In January 1999, the Chinese state launched the project of “government online (政府上网工程),” followed by the emergence of new communication channels built nationwide. According to circulated documents on E-Government building¹⁶, governmental websites are now required to convey more of the function of government-citizen communication, and it is a major item for the annual evaluation on government performance. For example, in *the Circular on Major Tasks in 2003*, the State Council urged sub-national governments and ministries to “accelerate E-Government building (the State Council, 2003).”

How much does the Internet impact the work of letters and calls? I would illustrate with a fact. The State Bureau for Letters and Calls, reluctant to skip-level petitioning as prescribed above in *the Regulations*, even makes an exception for online skip-level petitioning, and allows petitioners to make complaints directly to the State Bureau, no matter which formal procedure the petitioning case file specifically reaches at the time.

With online social media, more governmental sections have registered Governmental Weibo¹⁷ accounts. A hashtag called “Transparency (政务公开)” created

¹⁶ On the website of the State Council, search with “E-Government” results in 78 decrees issued by the State Council since 2000, averagely 5.2 documents each year.

¹⁷ Sina Weibo is a Chinese microblogging (weibo) website, a Chinese equivalent of twitter. Launched by Sina Corporation on 14 August 2009, it is one of the most popular social media sites in China.

by the account of Yibin County Government has over 66 million page views. And on January 23, the 2018 Annual Summit for Governmental Weibos is held in Beijing.

Mayors' Mailbox has been another active channel for mutual communication between the state and society, and existing studies show strong evidence on the mailbox' responsiveness and effectiveness (Distelhorst & Hou, 2016; Hartford, 2005). Mayor's Mailbox in Tongchuan Municipality has established an information network that can respond to citizens' emails in 24 hours, including receiving the email, consulting about related policies on specialized departments, forming a feasible resolution, and finally responding to the email writer.

With the informational avenue broadened online for the central state, in perspectives of local governments, turning indifferently blind to petitioning is no long an option, and there are two major means to settle conflicts (Zhang & Zhang, 2009; Ying, 2001; Chen X. , 2012): 1) coercing petitioners or leading activists until they give up petitioning; 2) negotiating with petitioners and eventually reaching an agreement that entirely or in part meet petitioners' appeals. If the local government chooses to suppress the petitioners, the petitioners admittedly may end up with a damaged motive for further action.

However, more cases support otherwise (Dong, 2010; Wu C. , 2010; Ying, 2007): feeling their moral consensus breached, petitioners decide to carry their appeals up to higher governments, or take more extreme action, such as collective petitioning or even disruptive petitioning. The local governments who take the second means in practice were also faced with difficulty. Petitioners who distrust the local government refuse to neither accept terms made by the government in the negotiation, nor negotiate. And on

the other side, the local government may be fiscally incapable of meeting terms made by petitioners.

More and more cases have burdened the OLCs with heavier fiscal and political pressure on conflict resolution. In 2004, a new concept of “Harmonious Society” was put forward by the Hu-Wen leadership. In light of this concept, the former strategy of coercion is despised. It does not mean local cadres completely abandon it as an optional strategy, and yet if they choose to force petitioners to quit petitioning, Xinfang cadres will find themselves faced with severer punishment than before. Empirical studies deliver rich resources of case studies (Liu, 2017; Minzner, 2006; Michelson, 2007; Tian, 2012; Zhang & Zhang, 2009; Zhang & Lee, 2012), and present a wide array of petitioners and petitioning strategies to Xinfang officials’ habitual tactics, including buying off with “stability maintenance funds (维稳经费)”, working in coalition with local labor unions and other related forces against petitioners (legal institutions, other governmental agencies and etc.), building community workshops (社区工作站) and other counter-measures. And above all, whether local or central, individual leaders’ political commitment into Xinfang plays a vital role, which can determine the officialdom’s temporal attitudes toward petitioners.

And at the same time, the OLCs are charged with a mission of higher political importance to settle unrest among petitioners and help uphold social tranquility. And as has been explained in the preceding part, a third-party actor is badly needed between local authorities and petitioners, due to the distrusting sentiments on the two sides. As analysts detect, some local states seek for and turn to societal actors who have grown stronger. Social engagement thus can be introduced into conflict resolution as

intermediate agencies. Through such social intermediate mechanism in Shanghai, contentious behaviors are transformed into a gentler form, and better contribute to regime stability (Liu, 2017).

Such experiences can also be found in rural China. Zhang and Zhang (2009, pp. 126-131) find that in petitioning and negotiating, a highly respected neutral third-party actor, usually an elder from the village, the village secretary and the village chief who is respected by both the local authority and common residents, is always necessary between the government and the petitioner(s), which can provide an alternative possibility for stable communication.

As the Xinfang mechanism has been normalized, the OLCs are also formalized to become independent from the General Office. Organizationally derived from the General Office, the OLC used to enjoy a special position where was closer seated to the leadership than other parallel offices, which virtually increased its autonomy because it was perceived as informed of leaders' policy preferences. However, today's OLCs, independent from the General Offices and the administrative level promoted, have been suffered from weakened connections with central and local leadership and a low popular trust, and therefore the OLCs' informational advantage about leaders' political preferences and popular attitudes are no longer. In this regard, the Xinfang system turns out more of a conflict manager introducing social engagement aimed at settling the petitions, whether in practice or in scholarly work (Dimitrov, 2013; Feng, 2016; Rao, Ye, & Tan, 2011; Tian, 2012). Today's Xinfang mechanism has shown a combination of social mobilization for more engagement and conflict resolution.

Besides, the role of the General Office deserves further investigation. Conventionally the General Office is thought to serve as a secretary department for the leadership, presenting summarized reports from various departments to the leaders. However according to the historical research, I find that Xinfang as an initially experimental office that first was placed inside the General Office. Is the General Office regularly a test field for new experimental practices in China? How are state apparatuses in China internally structured and organized? What makes the relations between those apparatuses? Out of such concerns, the thesis introduces a new sphere of literature into the arena.

2.0 INTERNAL STRUCTURE WITHIN THE CHINESE STATE: PROXY ACCOUNTABILITY

2.1 AN ELEVATOR INSIDE THE CHINESE STATE

On the 1988 CCTV Spring Festival Gala, Jiang Kun and Tang Jiezhong performed a cross talk (相声), a traditional form of Chinese stand-up comedy, entitled “Adventure in An Elevator (电梯奇遇).” In this Kafkaesque story, Jiang Kun plays his fictional self¹⁸, a resident who goes and complains about poor water supply and heating systems in his neighborhood to the District Government located in a building named “Efficiency Tower.” This newly-built Efficiency Tower however has two ancient elevators in disrepair installed inside. As expected, a malfunction occurs, and traps Jiang inside.

Then, directors of the four different offices show up, and claim that they have long questioned the quality of the elevators and yet chosen not to report on it. Instead of seeking to get Jiang out, they improve his stay in the elevator in their various ways limited within their own jurisdiction. The first is the Director of the Logistics Office who is in charge of the cafeteria. On the basis of his jurisdiction, he makes an offer for everyday food supply, and reads his annual report to Jiang. Then, the Director of the Publicity Office attempts to take over, because Jiang as an actor should belong to his

¹⁸ One of the commonly used modes in cross talk is that the major performer (逗哏), which is Jiang in this case, tells a fictional story where the fictional role he plays goes by the same name, while the minor performer (捧哏), which is Tang in the case, stays outside of this story, and makes comments from time to time bringing out the gist and implications.

sphere of competence. Third, the Director of the Personnel Office says that he can have Jiang Kun temporarily on loan to the District Government from Jiang's troupe. And finally, the Director of the General Office quickly summons all the cadres to an emergency meeting.

After the meeting, the Logistics Director has a fixed catering budget for Jiang, and comes back to Jiang with lunch. The Publicity Director, in order to mark this extraordinary day, decides to award Jiang with some title of honor, such as Pacesetter of Tree-planting or Pioneer of De-ratization, and eventually settles on the title of Lone Hero. The Personnel Director decides that Jiang should be treated as a township-level cadre temporarily during his stay in the elevator. As more and more gawkers cluster before the Efficiency Tower, the General Office Director decides to start selling them tickets for admission to visit this cross-talk actor trapped in the elevator.

Each Director strictly limits himself to his fixed sphere of competence, even when faced with a crisis like someone being trapped in the elevator. As they remain within the confines of their competence, they reach these decisions listed above on the meeting, and carry them out in the name of the four offices collectively. Therefore how is power *de facto* divided between these four offices, and where do they attain these powers? In answering this question, this part reviews literature debating over how the Chinese state mobilizes itself from within and its internal power dynamics.

With the four offices horizontally parallel at the same administrative level, there are two roles missing in the story, the District leadership and the superior offices. The General Office serves as the District leaders' secretaries, and being closer to the district leadership makes the General Office a coordinator of the other three, which enables the

General Office Director to summon a meeting. The other missing role is the superior offices, namely the four offices of the municipal level. Each office in the story is under the dual instructions from both its superior office and the district leadership, as shown in the chart below. In this sense, there are two dimensions for the Chinese state internal structure: first, horizontal relations between counterparts at the same administrative level; and second, vertical relations between national, sub-national states and grass-roots authorities below.

Chart 2: A Tetragonal Hierarchical Structure of the Chinese Government

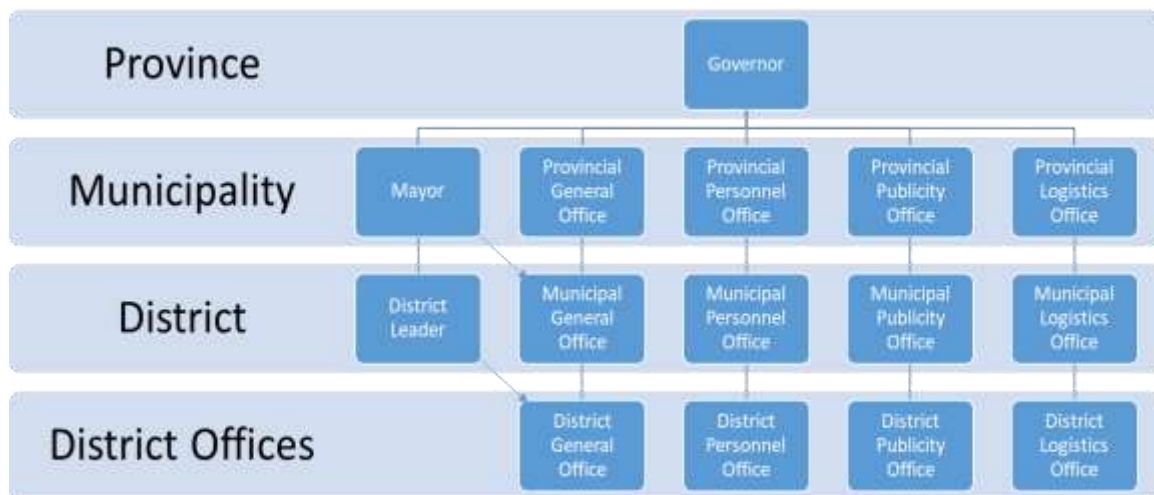


Figure 2. Tetragonal Hierarchical Structure of the Chinese Government

2.2 A PRESSURIZED AND ISOMORPHICALLY STRUCTURED SYSTEM

The consensus reached in the academia is that the Chinese state is politically centralized, as well as relatively de-centralized fiscally and administratively. According to Qian and Weingast (1997), local governments in China resist against “encroachment by the central government” and thereby shape *de facto* fiscal federalism that helps “align the interests of public officials with citizens... (and) maintain the positive and negative incentives necessary for thriving markets.” With field work in Xinmi County, Henan Province, Rong and his team bring about a concept of “the pressurized system” that later becomes widely used, which refers to the phenomenon where the local government, in order to fulfill the annual quotas assigned from above, allots these quotas to offices and localities below, and thereby divert the political pressure from above to below (Rong, Cui, & etc., 1998). Similarly, on the central-local governmental relations, Landry (2008) also holds the point of view that the Party realizes effective control over officials through its meritocratic career system with a strong hold of personnel powers, as empowered officials are annually assessed with performance indicators. Zhou Li'an (2002) further studies how local officials are mobilized with promotion incentives to fulfill the annual quotas, and he later conceptualizes it as a “political tournament” between provincial leaders.

Besides, inspired by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), Zhu and Zhang (2005) also notice that unlike the United States and other western democracies, there is no distinguishing line between politicians and bureaucrats in the professional career of Chinese officials, and since different levels of governments show high consistency in

departmental setup, and the resource of power for inferior offices is empowerment by superior offices, it is highly possible that the jurisdiction of inferior offices overlaps with that of superior offices, and superior offices may easily go *ultra vires* and encroach on inferior affairs. They conceptualize such phenomena as “structural isomorphism.”

2.3 DEBATES ON PROXY ACCOUNTABILITY

Scholarly work thus debates over how power is assigned to individual apparatuses in the Chinese state. Compared with private-sector management, Zhou (2014) describes power assignment by the Chinese state as “administrative sub-contracting,” meaning that based on the principal-agent model, the inferior office as the agent is empowered to make minor specific decisions and implement them to fulfill the major goal assigned by the superior office as the principal, while the superior office remains control over personnel power, veto power, the power to intervene and other formal powers.

As a sub-contracting mechanism, it is result-oriented, which means if the agent manages to deliver the major goal, the principal will award the agent, ignore, if any, procedural violations, and even formally or informally justify certain violations. Otherwise the agent will be criticized or even removed from office, and thus it shapes a pressurized system different from a de-centralized structure. As a matter of fact, such a process of sub-contracting does not necessarily take place, but automatically comes into being based on some unspoken norm. In the case of our elevator story, the four District offices are automatically empowered to address this elevator accident based on such a sub-contracting norm, unless either the District leadership or the municipal offices

decides to intervene directly, whether formally or informally. In addition, the District Personnel Director and their collective meeting, as a sub-contractor, are therefore enabled to assure Jiang's treatment as a township-level cadre (or make and implement any other decisions), and yet, if they fail to minimize the negative influence of this incident or eventually have it resolved, the District Leader and superior offices will intervene, and any procedurally irregular decision will be re-evaluated as well.

Similarly, Cao (2014; 2011) divides the power of the Chinese state into one "power governing state officials" and the other "one governing citizens outside the state." As the central state firmly holds onto the power governing state officials, civil affairs and other specific tasks are left by the central state to the discretion of the sub-national states and apparatuses below, more directly faced with individual citizens and society as a whole, in order to spread risks and maintain a better image of the central state. Selective interventions by the central state "create a system of proxy accountability, in which the central government acts as the proxy of the masses vis-à-vis local officials (Dimitrov, Vertical Accountability in Communist Regimes: The Role of Citizen Complaints in Bulgaria and China, 2013, p. 278)." In the story of Jiang's elevator, many political slogans by the central state are mentioned repeatedly by Jiang and the District officials, and as Cao would interpret, these slogans are merely "the symbolic existence of the central state." And Jiang can only rely on "petty local despotism (Shue, 1990)" to get himself out. In fact, none of these District officials bothers to ask Jiang for his own opinion.

By emphasizing the control by the central state, Zhou Xueguang (2011) finds that "administrative subcontracting," due to its informal nature, can be withdrawn by the

central state or superior offices any moment when they see necessary. Take Mao for example. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao compelled provincial leaders to run his political campaign by removing them from office or threatening to do so.

Zhou X. (2014) furthers his argument by analyzing the two concerns of the principal, promoting efficiency and reducing risks. Whether to continue or abolish such a sub-contracting hinges upon the superior office; when the inferior deviates from the will of the superior, the superior intervenes to avoid losing control over inferior counterparts. A question arises then, how does the superior and inferior offices balance the informal “sub-contracting” and the formal Weberian bureaucracy?

Zhou X. and Lian (2011) answer with individual offices’ bargaining with superior offices during the phase of decision making. In their bargaining model, the inferior office has three options to negotiate, which are formally bargaining via documents, informally bargaining through personal networks such as alumni and co-workership, and to sub-exit the negotiation if the superior office aims at pressurizing the inferior into simply obeying. That is, assigned to implement no matter what, the inferior office can maintain its information advantage to the superior, which guarantees its negotiation space even after it sub-exits from decision making into the next phase, implementation. However, the “sub-exit” strategy of the inferior office has not been fully discussed.

While these scholars have yet to delve into the relations between individual offices, Zhang (2014) notices the organizational foundation of “administrative sub-contracting.” Given the isomorphic institutional building by Zhu and Zhang Z., she starts with a strange phenomenon where a head of a local office is promoted to a higher-level government, his power is but weakened. Then she argues that rather than a unitary

system, the Chinese state consists of multiple fields; when an official is promoted, she/he in fact is a beginner in the new field, and results in her/his lesser influence. Therefore, the superior office must negotiate with the inferior one to get the major policy goals achieved, and in such negotiating, the superior one must yield much power to the inferior one. One way to yield powers is, as Zhang lists, to issue a series of interrelated policies, and to establish a provisional “leading entity (领导小组)” to sub-contract and fulfill a certain task.

2.4 THE PROJECT SYSTEM: THE LOGIC OF A LEADING ENTITY

Such a “leading entity” may consist of staff members (including directors or other leading members) from various parallel offices that concerns this task or project, which shapes a more grass-roots governance mode conceptualized by scholarly work as “the Project System (Zhe & Chen, 2011; Qu, 2012; Zhou F. , 2012).” In this mode, the central state as a whole, individual central state apparatuses or a collection of certain central apparatuses initiate a bidding process for a project, that of poverty alleviation of a certain village for example, and then the local government who tenders for the project will receive a fund earmarked for this project. The central state will regularly inspect the progress of the project, seeing the project (being) done as well as enhancing its control over local governments.

Suppose the District Government in our story were not fiscally capable of handling the elevator incident, the District would but turn to municipal offices for fiscal support, and thus result in the establishment of a project. Yet in doing so, the District’s

autonomy in decision making is taken by the municipality, and it would take even longer for the decisions mentioned in the story to come out. Another possible risk is that the municipality may make decisions unfeasible for the District to carry out, and thus cost more time and other administrative resources, which is an unintended consequence for the superior office as well. That is, even the District leadership is absent in the story, while the four District offices only possess a very limited power, decision making still naturally falls on the shoulder of the District leadership, rather than municipal offices.

In conclusion, existing literature discusses the proxy accountability including administrative sub-contracting, the project system and etc. It is mostly discussed that the central state vertically empowers and oversees local states in what ways, while how local states, especially those leading entities or project sub-contractors, fulfill the projects is under studied. Still, put it in the context of Jiang's story for a vivid understanding. How the four District offices are held accountable by their superior is most debated, and yet it remains less understood that among each of the four offices, what determinants forms the power allocation and project assignments. And this is what this section attempts to examine.

2.5 FRONT-TIER AND GRASS-ROOTS OFFICIALS

As the above literature review uncovers, while the vertical aspects of the proxy accountability have been fully discussed by previous studies, much on the horizontal relations is yet to be discussed and explained. As Zhang Jing uses an example that a

promoted official instead find himself with less power, I would rather start with an exemplary phenomenon as well:

A saying goes, “the emperor is as far away as the high Heaven beyond reach (天高皇帝远).” Grass-roots officials, despite pressurized by their superior authority as Rong argues, may enjoy a higher degree of autonomy than officials whose level are higher, as a result of their huge distance from the central state. Provincial officials on the county/division level would prefer being appointed as a head of a county to being promoted and staying inside the provincial office. Such contradictions indicate that “grass-roots officials” as a scholarly concept comes short of interpreting similar reality situations where lower-level officials *de facto* exercise more autonomously than higher-level ones.

In the light of Zhang Jing’s “multi-field organizational structure,” I view the Chinese state as a collection of various power fields. Each power field consists of one independent office, or a group of offices who have overlapping spheres of competence, and/or projects to collaborate on together. For example, superior and inferior offices from the same vertical system may make such a power field where an official above a certain level has somewhat autonomy to engage decision making, and once the official exits the field, her/his autonomy turns nearly ineffective. By “nearly” I mean still, she/he is able to mobilize political resources to some degree with her/his administrative rank and informal interpersonal networks, and yet it would not be the same when she/he exercises power within the field.

Within such a power field, there are one or a few officials who are at the relatively lowest level (or have the relatively shortest length of services). With little

authority over other colleagues, these officials burden most preliminary tiresome work in the field, whom I conceptualize as “front-tier officials.” Those preliminary tiresome work includes and is not limited to: drafting initial policy documents, proposing innovative policy initiatives with a political risk of rebukes from above, immediately contact petitioners, and coordinating cooperation with front-tier officials from other power fields.

There are two major distinguishing features between the concept of “grass-roots officials” and that of “front-tier officials.” First, the “grass-roots officials” concept depends on one’s absolute administrative level within the officialdom, which is an absolute measure; on the contrary, the concept of “front-tier officials” is more relative, and depends on one’s relative position within a power field. For example, within a power field of a municipal OLC, the front-tier official may on the township level; and when this official is assigned to inspect the district OLCs beneath the municipality, she/he attains a high degree of autonomy vis-à-vis those district official who are front-tier officials to him.

Second, the two concepts aim to present different relations. The concept of “grass-roots officials” is designed to describe the closer relations between lower-level officials and ordinary citizens than those between higher-level officials and citizens. As the Internet and communication technology advances, such distances may be enormously reduced. Consider this reality situation, the concept of “front-tier officials” is mapped to the relationship between officials who work together, and indicates the power dynamics among them. In that fashion, the next section depicts what happened with S Province’ current informatics apparatuses, and represents a map of their informational competition.

3.0 EMERGING INFORMATION CHANNELS IN S PROVINCE

3.1 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO S PROVINCE¹⁹

S Province lies in mid-north China. It covers an area of over 205,000 km² with a population of about 38 million. Under the jurisdiction of the province, there is a sub-provincial-level city as the capital of the province, along with nine prefecture-level municipalities. Nearly all the people are ethnic Han Chinese, with pockets of Hui population in a few regions. The predominant religions there are Chinese folk religions, Taoist traditions and Chinese Buddhism. According to surveys, 7.58% of the population believes and is involved in ancestor veneration, while 1.57% of the population identifies as Christian. 90.85% of the population may be either irreligious or involved in worship of nature deities, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, folk religious sects, and small minorities of Muslims.

The overall economy of this province lies at the mid-level among provincial localities in China. Nominal GDP for 2011 was \$196.7 billion, and GDP per capita was \$3,179, ranking 17th nationwide. Nominal GDP in the year of 2016 was approximately 290 billion US dollars. Home to several leading universities and research institutes in China, the province also plays a major role in the burgeoning aircraft and aerospace industries, producing more than 50% of the R&D and manufacturing equipment for the country's domestic commercial air industry.

¹⁹ This general introduction of S Province is excerpted from its provincial government's official website.

3.2 XINFANG IN S PROVINCE TODAY

Before delving into the undertaking experimental information strategies by S Province, I shall demonstrate the face of today's Xinfang channels. A story best serves such a purpose as always: last year, a female street official received a petitioning resident who requested a higher social security payment, which was beyond the power of the street office. With rage and disappointment, the resident refused to reason, and hysterically swallowed the goldfish from a small fishbowl on the official's desk. As my interviewee surmises, this mad petitioner might obey an androcentric code of not hitting women. As former interns with the provincial OLC and other servicing offices who receive citizens reflected in private, male officials are more likely to be yelled at and/or even physically attacked by hysterical petitioners than female ones. In addition, provincial departments have not assigned undergraduate interns to such servicing offices since 2015 in order for their protection²⁰.

Admittedly, Xinfang has exhausted mutual trust between the state and society, especially that between the local administration and petitioning citizens (Dimitrov, 2015; Chen X. , 2012; Hu, 2007; Zhang & Zhang, 2009). Of course central and local states have been encouraging Xinfang officials to keep up providing information, as well as seeking new information channels for a constant petitioning informational stream. Officially stated, citizens' complaints is still seen as the barometer to understand and assess society and popular attitudes, and information voluntarily delivered to doorstep; and thus the

²⁰ I have considered the possibility that the government possibly aims to avoid its image being undermined by petitioners in front of the interns, which has proven wrong because interns are still assigned to respond to online complaints, equally negative as the complaints may be.

state encourages Xinfang cadres to work harder and maintain an open mind to all petitioning appeals (Li, 2016; Wu D. , 2003).

At the same time, local governments have already taken actions to build new avenues for information gathering in place of traditional Xinfang channels. Shanghai Bureau of Letters and Calls established its own online Mailbox, as well as Mayor's Mailbox and other similar online servicing channels jointly with the State Bureau, and has run a new phone call hotline since August 2012 (Shanghai Bureau for Letters and Calls, 2016).

So has S Province. The Provincial Bureau for Letters and Calls has also run its own online complaint platform, which received approximately 200 online petitioning message per week. Such volatile situations as the goldfish swallower story, however, are not unusual. And even when petitioning goes on peacefully, petitioners are mostly inclined to distrust whatever explanations local officials provide, unless their needs are entirely met. He and Feng (2016) attribute that the state and societal actors cannot reach an agreement to the differentiating and mismatched discourses they use, from the evidence observed from the OLCs inside the Courts.

Another fact may as well contribute to such a consequence: history of mass mobilization through Xinfang. People do remember. As elaborated above, the Xinfang mechanism used to welcome all kinds of petitioning, and meet their needs as much as possible for better mass mobilization. Such a "social contract" has already been deeply carved in petitioners' mindsets. When petitioners get to the OLCs and learn that not all problems can receive state intervention to their favor, it easily results in an unbalanced psychology, and thus triggers further extreme action.

On the other hand, letter-and-visits work and its promise to help resolve conflicts, so deeply impressed, make the OLCs the first (and perhaps only) state apparatuses petitioners turn to. During my field study, the online system maintained by the Provincial Bureau for Letters and Calls received approximately 150 effective petitioning cases even in the week just before the Chinese New Year's Eve, which should be a period to receive a relatively less amount of complaints, while their reception hall were also crowded with desperate petitioners, mostly peasants, every single day. Compared to other citizens' complaints system, the Xinfang mechanism may be most popular.

And here is the complicated situation today's Xinfang channels are faced with. The OLCs, along with other local governmental offices, are not too much trusted by ordinary citizens, if they are not distrusted. Once citizens in trouble choose to petition, these petitioners intuitively turn to the OLCs in high hopes of getting trouble resolved. If the petitioning does not go as expected, the petitioners will lower their political trust in the OLC they have been to, and soon turn to a higher-level OLC and keep petitioning.

In this manner, the Xinfang system may be filled with repetitive petitioning information, and the OLCs are less capable of forming a valuable and steady informational stream as they did before. In fact, the Provincial Bureau for Letters and Calls did publicly issue a monthly periodical on Xinfang information gathered from society, and yet ceased to publish in 2004.

Vibrant as the Xinfang online channels may appear, they do not receive political investment from the provincial leadership as much as they did in the 1980s. The Provincial Bureau for Letters and Calls used to be an OLC affiliated with the Provincial General Office. Since 2008, the Bureau has been promoted to be an independent

apparatus out of the General Office, also equally as a department/municipal-level (市厅级) department. Separated from the General Office, the Bureau lacks a steady communication avenue with the provincial leadership. The ceased periodical used to be the only communication tool between the Bureau and the provincial leadership, and now connotes that the provincial leadership publicly has little immediate contact with the Bureau.

Of all petitioning cases displayed on the website background of the Bureau's online platform, none went to neither the provincial leadership, nor the general office (according to the data and materials I have come by), but directly to lower localities and other provincial departments, according to a clear division of labor regulated by formal documents. It would be unrealistic and even absurd to reckon that there is no regular reporting by the Bureau to the leadership. Personally speaking, there must exist one, which is only not disclosed to come by. And yet, the absent of such a publicly accessible report on Xinfang petitioning cases still implies that the provincial leadership are to some degree reluctant or hesitant about showing their political commitment for the conventional Xinfang mechanism in front of society.

Still, people also remember that Xinfang was used as a weapon for socio-political movements, and the facts that local governments searched for and repressed (potential) petitioners, especially in the 1990s and 2000s. The commonly perceived "caprice" observed in history also undermines the OLCs and the Xinfang mechanism today. In this sense, it can be said that Xinfang is not as trusted.

Due to low trust caused by history, the conventional OLC has already lost its informational competition vis-à-vis other informatics apparatuses. Perhaps a best option

ahead for the OLC is to weigh more on its function of conflict resolution, supported by a degree of social engagement, as Shanghai Bureau and the districts have been doing with the “Bai Wanqing Volunteers Initiative (Liu, 2017).” After all, most surveyed petitioners show low trust in the Xinfang mechanism and the OLC cadres, and they take petitioning as a compulsory choice, because their limited knowledge of governmental processes makes any other option impossible (Zhang & Zhang, 2009, p. 118).

Counterintuitive as it sounds, Xinfang indicates regime trust when it comes to conflict resolution (Dimitrov, 2015). Citizens who are faced with conflicts and lack political knowledge are still inclined to go to the OLC rather than a Court, which can be told by the higher amount of their online complaints and that of petitioners in the OLC than other newly-built complaint platforms. It would not be wise for local leaders to express too much support in the Xinfang mechanism against the mainstream social sense, and even more unwise for them to decide to abolish the Xinfang mechanism, not to mention that one more informatics apparatus can intensify peer pressure between the informatics apparatuses.

3.3 WEIBO AND THE OFFICE OF E-GOVERNMENT CAME ON STAGE

In response to the central state’s call on establishing an electric government, S Province established the Office of E-government affiliated with the General Office, and the E-government Office was placed on the sub-department level. Such a close distance to the provincial leadership, as well as a particularly high administrative level, indicated intensive political commitment by S Province into building an E-government.

However, the online office system designed and developed by the E-government Office turned out to be quite outdated and hard to put into practice. Therefore it is barely used by the provincial officials. During my internships inside the provincial general office and daily working memos collected from undergraduate interns from other provincial departments (2014-2017), methods mostly used to transfer files are still fax, humanly delivery and QQ.²¹

The E-government Office is also responsible for maintaining the official website of the provincial government. During my first-time internship (summer 2014), the front page of this website could display the number of real-time online users. And the number was never reported to exceed 1,000 in internally circulated documents. Until a recent website revision, the number of online users is now removed from the front page.

The E-government Office created an authorized Weibo account, which is now (March 2018) followed by over 1,100,000 Weibo netizens. This account has posted more than 22,000 posts, covering a wide range of news regarding politics, cultural activities, economy and technology in the province. However, very little government-citizen interaction has been made on Weibo, since the account in view of online censorship especially heavy on Weibo and other reasons, decides to turn off the comments under most of its posts. Even under those with the comments open, there were few comments left, if not none. Of all the hot posts automatically placed on the account's front page, only one post had over 20 comments underneath.

²¹ Tencent QQ, commonly known as QQ, is an instant messaging software service developed by the Chinese company Tencent Holdings Limited. QQ also offers services including online file transfer, social games, music, shopping, microblogging, movies, and group and voice chat software. The link to its official website is given below: www.qq.com.

Apparently the E-government Office has failed to either create a steady informational flow for the provincial leadership with its Weibo-based strategy, or build up a more efficient information sharing system within the provincial government. No effort to market the provincial government's website also resulted in an unpopular official website, and consequentially, the provincial leadership turned to a new informatics apparatus and decided to test another set of informational strategies.

3.4 INFORMATION SEEKERS AND TWO STRATEGIC OPTIONS FOR INFORMATICS APPARATUSES

Suppose there were a body of ordinary citizens, it would be hard to picture that most or the majority of them have conflicts with the grass-roots administration; in that sense, they may possibly choose to launch violent resistance or even seek to overthrow the regime. Not to mention most citizens, as a matter of fact, a large proportion of petitioning cases are merely to consult about a certain policy, to make a policy proposal, and to express interest in some public affair, according to the disclosed Xinfang data (Diao, 1996; Tianjin Editorial Committee of Chronicles, 1997; Shaanxi Provincial Office for Local Chronicles, 2018; Zhang & Zhang, 2009). That is, many petitioners do not face any conflict for the state to step in, and they take the Xinfang mechanism more as a means for political communication with the state.

Conventional studies on Xinfang and China's state-society communication focus on those "solution seekers" who are confronted with interest disputes against other citizens or local officials, and petition in hope of state intervention resolving the dispute

in favor of themselves. The Chinese state has also built the Xinfang mechanism on the basis of such an assumption that most petitioners need the state to step in their conflicts. Therefore whether aimed at mass mobilization for socio-political campaigns, or setting up the online complaint platform, the OLCs are targeted at solution seekers.

An informatics apparatus, in order to bring in petitions enough to provide information for the leadership, thereby has two strategic options: 1) the apparatus should guarantee a high rating of petitioning settlement, and even a good rating of petitioner satisfaction; to deliver such an outcome, the apparatus needs much administrative resources. Consider the citizens' complaints system has exercised the principle of "managing through specialized departments" since post-Revolution years, it is now nearly impossible to make such a total apparatus that can autonomously address a variety of civil conflicts.

Thereby the other option seems more reasonable to take: 2) the apparatus can also focus on political communication needs of those "informational seekers," and through information-oriented channels and activities, feed them with knowledge regarding the government. As these activities edge up to mutual communication channels between the state and societal actors, the apparatus can extract information useful to improve governance, and finally create an informational stream up to the leadership.

As seen above, the Provincial Bureau for Letters and Calls and its online platform adopt the first approach, and with abundance of complaints steadily incoming, the Bureau is able to provide the provincial leadership with mass information for policy making. And yet, due to historical reasons, the Bureau cannot convince the provincial leadership to support their cause with more political commitment.

The E-government Office is likely to have noticed such high risks of lower popular trust and less political support from above, if they focus on solution seekers as the Bureau have. And thus the E-government does not target at solution seekers, and attempts to build government-citizen online communication channels outside of formal organization. Lacking in a well-organized strategy and a strong director, the E-government Office fails to satisfy those information seekers by establishing appealing and effective communication channels.

Less than three years after the E-government Office' establishment, S Province installed the Office of Governmental Affairs Disclosure, also affiliated with the General Office and placed on the sub-department level. But unlike the E-government Office, the provincial leadership decided to initiate and build up communication channels in a joint effort with the Disclosure Office, which was targeted at information seekers.

As I take information seekers into account, it has to be emphasized that information seekers may not only appear as policy consultants about some certain policy or seek for a positive response from the state on some certain issue as they did before. Information for which they seek today can be very ambiguous and not immediately goal-oriented at all. Most interviewed former interns expressed such appeals while being asked why they chose to participate in the Undergraduate Government Internship²²:

²² The records of the interviews with these former undergraduate interns are provided in the Appendix. I also found that interns of the last three terms (spring 2017, summer 2017 and spring 2018) shared similar ideas, although I had not formally interviewed them by January 2017.

With my career planning made, I just wanted to be a state official. And here came the chance that I could feel how it is like to work in the government in advance.

I had a schoolmate who interned after me. He majors in law, and happened to be assigned to the Justice Department. Afterwards he became quite determined to be a governmental official. And now he works for the legal system in Inner Mongolia.

Before I interned, I felt poverty alleviation was all about giving money to the poor, and during my internship in the Office of Poverty Alleviation, I was shocked.

My friend said I'd not be qualified for the internship, and I just wanted to challenge that. Especially that the whole application was difficult made me determined to join it.

Targeted at information seekers, the provincial leadership proposed two initiatives, including the weekly Governmental Open Day in 2011, and the Undergraduate Government Internship Initiative in 2012. The provincial leadership, as the mode of administrative sub-contracting depicts, charged the Disclosure Office with generating a feasible policy arrangement in details, along with the Provincial Bureau of Office Administration (机关事务管理局) who are responsible for the logistics work for all the governmental offices.

In light of the Project Model, the Disclosure Office and the Logistics Bureau, with other state actors who later joined in, virtually made a leading body (领导小组) onto

these two projects. Since it was the Disclosure Office who were requested by the provincial leadership to generate a detailed draft of the two policy documents, it was clear that the Disclosure Office played the role as the pilot agency in this leading body, while the Logistics Bureau was a supporting actor to help implement them. Then how did the Disclosure Office complete their tasks, and what followed in the next years?

3.5 THE DISCLOSURE OFFICE IN ACTION: INVITING CITIZENS INTO THE GOVERNMENT

The Disclosure Office was established slightly after the E-government Office, with an independently budgeted staffing size of 7 official, including one director (sub-municipal/departmental level), 4 deputy directors (county/division level), and two officials (township level). Due to the short-handed pressure, the Office also later requested for one extra IT official on loan from the Provincial Internet Security Assessment Center, a subordinate unit underneath the Disclosure Office.

Now the Disclosure Office has two original activities for government-citizen communication: the Open Day and the Undergraduate Government Internship. The Open Day, first held in October 2011, has been regularly held on a weekly basis. On each Open Day, approximately 30-50 voluntary participants who previously signed up are invited to the Government Compound. Besides sightseeing historical site within the compound, participants also visit two or three provincial departments who shift seasonally in turn, and have the chance to consult about their interested policy face to face. Irregularly and

yet about once a month in practice, participant may also have a chance to meet one of the Governors.

The Undergraduate Government Internship, by the Disclosure Office jointly with the Educational Department and the Provincial communist youth league, meritocratically selects voluntary undergraduate students, normally in their sophomore or junior year, each summer vacation and winter break. And these students, assigned to more than forty provincial departments, take the internship for a month. Each term of the summer internship may include 150-240 interns, as each winter internship includes at least 100 interns. Unlike Foshan City, the Internship is not on a contract basis (Lau, 2014). The internship initiative has been conducted since 2012, and today it is also open to international applicants, and taking feedback in account, it allows interns to work for more than one month with the consent of both the department and the intern. Since the making of the Open Day is in general similar to that of the Internship Initiative, I only elaborate on the Open Day in the following paragraphs.

In 2011, the incumbent Provincial Governor first initiated a proposal of the Governmental Open Day on a close-door weekly meeting²³. And the incumbent Executive Vice Governor²⁴ seconded this proposal. After they agreed on the Open Day

²³ The weekly meeting of the provincial leadership takes place on every Monday morning, with Governor, Executive Vice Governor, and other Vice Governors. Their Chief Secretary and Deputy Chief Secretaries (who are secretaries to Vice Governors) usually attend the meeting as well, unless there is some special occasion.

Besides, officials from provincial departments and other subordinate offices may as well be summoned to the meeting, if the meeting is about to make decisions related to those offices and their work.

²⁴ Executive Vice Governor is the Vice Governor who have a slightly higher position than other Vice Governors, and can temporarily acting as Governor when there is a position vacuum.

proposal, the provincial leaders decided to sub-contract this project to the Disclosure Office.

The Disclosure Office took the job, and had an internal meeting. This smaller meeting then came up with a skeletal idea on the Open Days. For example, the Disclosure Office needed to answer which provincial offices are involved in this activity. In fact, they found many more state actors to be invited into this project, and a leading body of only two offices (the Disclosure Office itself and the Logistics Bureau) could not carry it out.

First and foremost, state media must be invited to the party. The Disclosure Office would enlist the help of state media to sell the Open Day, and therefore draw citizens to participate. And much in favor of the Office, they had long developed pre-existing connections with state and private media to disclose governmental affairs and release news, such as the provincial branch of Xinhua News, the provincial daily newspaper, the provincial TV network, and some most influential private press. In fact, the Disclosure Office and the Xinfang branch later co-founded the WeChat²⁵ account for the provincial government, and provided a text message news service on the daily basis.

Second, the Disclosure Office had an online registration channel where ordinary citizens would sign up for the Open Days to be built and embedded in the existing provincial government's website, which was in the charge of the E-government Office as introduced earlier. Meanwhile, the Disclosure Office was aware that many offline citizens needed a registration channel on the ground, and thus needed to turn to local

²⁵ WeChat is a Chinese multi-purpose messaging and social media app developed by Tencent. It was first released in 2011, and by 2018 it was one of the world's largest standalone mobile apps with over 1 billion monthly active users.

authorities, especially grass-roots offices like street offices and village committees for help.

Third, once the Office had pooled voluntary participants, they still needed to go through the background information regarding these participants, in order to guarantee safety and avoid unnecessary turbulences on the office grounds. To do so, the Disclosure Office would seek help from the Public Security system (the Police system) who had access to the national criminal record database.

Fourth, since participants in the Open Day would visit provincial departments, the Office felt compelled to collect opinions from the provincial departments, and forecast that the departments might be somewhat reluctant or even non-cooperative. As Zhou X. (2011) argues, the departments cannot exit the decision-making process, or refuse to implement decisions from above; and yet, the departments can implement the decisions they dislike in a passive manner. Therefore, the Disclosure Office found it essential to collect opinions.

Last but not least, it would also take full support from the Logistics Bureau, along with the armed guards on the office grounds. Due to the nature of the logistics work, the Logistics Bureau was staffed by officials averagely aged higher than other offices, and thus might retard the pace of the project. The Disclosure Office could only have them comply through elementary bargaining.

One township-level official was assigned with the task to coordinate the Office's relations with these above state apparatuses, collect their opinions and finally generate a detailed policy draft that would clearly divide the whole Open Day project into marginalized assignments to the above apparatuses. According to unrecorded

conversations we had, he revealed that although the Office collectively came up several rough ideas, it was him alone who proposed most arrangements for the Open Day (and put them all together) in writing the draft document. In addition, he also consulted several friends of his level from other departments, and discussed a proportion of arrangements and related rhetoric, such as phrases he felt uncertain about.

In face of the question what if the departments express overt reluctance toward the Open Day, he answered:

A most often used sentence is, “what can I do about it? This is a policy made by those from above. I have nothing to do with this. I’m merely someone to pass this on to you.” We cannot argue with them by justifying the necessity of the policy. That’d only make more trouble. Just say, “I’m just like you, like soldiers; we exercise orders from bosses. So don’t make this difficult for me.”

Then I threw a follow-up question: what if the other office still does not shake off such passive attitudes? He answered with sharp urgency in his tone:

So what? They still have got to carry it out! Then we just tell them, “This is a policy initiated and endorsed by the Governor himself; if you have a problem against it, try talking to him.” And we are a provincial apparatus. We cannot just stop. Make sure our attitudes are evident and clear to them.

It can be seen here that the official, playing the role of a front-tier official, is inclined to deploy an informal bargaining strategy first against the other office who may disagree on the Open Day policy. By making himself and the bargaining opponent

empathize with one another, he attempts to form a mutual understanding with the opponent, and eventually makes the opponent to step down.

However, he can also play a card of toughness, if the opponent insists on its own standpoint and refuses to empathize. With the task to collect opinions from other departments on the Open Day project falling on him, individual autonomy is transferred to this front-tier official as well, from the provincial leadership through the director of the Disclosure Office at the same time. And such autonomy renders more bargaining chips for him against the other office.

The effect of similar autonomy can be huge over local leaders and officials. Once we organized a meeting, and contacted all the municipal general offices, summoning at least one of their chief secretaries approximately one week prior to the meeting. But there was a municipality who did not answer the phone until three days in advance of the meeting. An intern in the Office randomly picked a deputy chief secretary of this municipality, and then dialed the secretary's private cellphone number²⁶.

On hearing the reason why the intern called, the deputy secretary immediately responded that this was too small a meeting and did not deserve him going on an inter-city trip particularly in such a limited time. The intern simply responded, "The provincial Party secretary is coming too. If he makes time for this meeting, maybe you should too." Finally in a nervous tone, this deputy secretary said he would book train tickets right after the phone call.

²⁶ Each provincial office possesses a telephone directory, in which contains all offices' land-line phone numbers and major local cadres' private cellphone numbers across the province.

Yet this bargaining strategy may not work all the time. The Governor who initiated the Open Day and later was promoted to Provincial Party Secretary remained the very source of such autonomy of the Office on the project, and yet, he was transferred to Beijing in 2012. With the most important political investor gone, the Disclosure Office underwent a period of time of uncertainty until early 2017. During the time, the Logistics Bureau apparent made the project more difficult for the Office.

In preparation for the launching meeting of the 2017 winter internship for example, the Bureau required a document issued by the Disclosure Office particularly to them, given the fact that they had already received one circular regarding the meeting issued to all departments involved. Besides, instead of one document that covered everything, the Bureau demanded separate extra paperwork for each supporting service they offer, including one document to apply for the Bureau's catering services, one for the Bureau's electronic screens and one for their tour guide services for incoming interns.

Whether enjoying autonomy or suffering from unnecessary difficulty, the Disclosure Office has managed to satisfy groups of information seekers, and thus provides the provincial leadership with a steady informational flow. Besides one-month informal interaction with undergraduate interns, the Disclosure Office generates a report on participants' feedback and complaints for the provincial leadership after each Open Day. If the report contains certain policy deficiencies reflected by the participants, the provincial leadership will also respond with their instructions to improve according policy implement, or it will even trigger the making of a revised policy.

The provincial leadership were perfectly content with the work by the Disclosure Office. It became so self-evident when the inaugural director of the Office was promoted

to Provincial Deputy Chief Secretary. With “one of us” in the Governors’ weekly meeting, the Disclosure Office was apparently favored by the provincial leadership.

3.6 RETURN OF THE E-GOVERNMENT OFFICE: GOVERNOR’S MAILBOX

As the inaugural director of their rival office was promoted, the E-government Office was faced with huge pressure to make a competitively informational stream for the provincial leadership. Even worse, before the E-government Office proposed a new information channel, their Weibo account was handed over to the Disclosure Office as well. Suffering from the lack of self-owned information channels, the E-government was propelled to regain its informational input into the state.

In May 2016, the E-government Office launched online an experimental channel named the “Governor’s Mailbox,” inspired by the Mayor’s Mailbox policy originated from a municipality below. For the first month, this website column of the “Governor’s Mailbox” received 414 petitioning complaints, among which included 377 valid complaints. Although the number was smaller than the Xinfang online platform, it had managed to get itself on the track towards a popular information channel for one just in the beginning stage.

However at the time of my field work (December 2016-February 2017), the monthly number of received complaints via the Governor’s Mailbox did not increase but decrease to stable level. How did it come?

Compared to its successful predecessor, the Mayor's Mailbox, the Governor's Mailbox had three severe shortcomings that made it under responsive and thus less popular: 1) behind the Mayor's Mailbox stands a specialized office staffed with experienced and relatively young cadres who have knowledge regarding a variety of policy fields; the E-government Office only had a division-level cadre in his fifties responding to all the complaints. Also needed elsewhere, the cadre admitted to me that he was not even able to browse the complaints every day, not to mention responding to them. In the first month, of all the 377 complaints received, only 6 complaints were responded to, and with no follow-up investigation, it remained unknown whether those online petitioners were content or not.

2) The municipality has decreed that online complaints should be responded to in 1 day, addressed in 3 days, and settled in 5 days; to the contrary, the Governor's Mailbox was lacking in such an institutional setup. Even worse, 3) lacking in institutional setup and according supervision, the Governor's Mailbox may end up with more harm done to online petitioners:

When I browsed the online complaints that were selected and publicly displayed by that cadre, I noticed a complaint made by some peasant. That complaint reported on the conspiracy between village cadres and local strongmen, and contained the peasant's personal information including his name and ID number. And yet, when I confronted the cadre with this complaint, he refused to admit it was a wrongdoing, and instead he defended himself saying a complaint with detailed personal information could be addressed faster than one without.

To be noted again, the provincial government's official website undertook an overall comprehensive revision in late 2017, along with the column of the "Governor's Mailbox," the current situation of which my field work does not cover.

Anyhow at the time of mid-2017, the E-government Office' attempt to win informational competition against the Disclosure Office had proven failed. At the same time, the Disclosure Office, perceived by the leadership as the best informed apparatus, has been empowered with more autonomy that even lifts the Office higher than parallel offices.

3.7 A SUB-CONTRACTOR TO ANOTHER: THE DISCLOSURE OFFICE AUTONOMY FURTHER CONSOLIDATED

Since late 2016, S Province has undertaken a large-scale project aimed at online government-citizen communication and public services, which is its Internet Governmental Services Platform building, including a wider range of documents to be disclosed and a more responsive incorporated information channel to be launched. This project is designed to eventually incorporate S Province' most existing information channels into one unitary management system. Such a large and complicated project involves multiple departments. As these departments constitute a leading entity focused on the project, the Disclosure Office is named by the provincial leadership as the pilot agency within the leading entity. If it stopped here, it would only be another story of the Disclosure Office as the pilot agency, indeed of a much larger scale, and yet only another similar story.

The Internet Platform project involves too many complicated tasks, including the building of a website, as well as the renovation of an actual governmental services hall. Apparently the Disclosure Office is unable to promote and supervise the progress of all those minor projects with its staff of less than 10. In this regard, the Disclosure Office submitted its detailed plans to the provincial leadership, and suggest some other apparatuses should be leading certain minor project. For instance, the Disclosure Office recommends that the Provincial Development & Reform Commission should design the renovation of the governmental services hall, and the Logistics Bureau supervise the construction progress.

As introduced in previous pages, usually a superior office sub-contracts to an inferior one. And yet in our case, the Disclosure Office, as a sub-contractor to the provincial leadership, sub-contracts its minor projects to other offices of the same or even higher administrative level. Accompanied with the fact that the Disclosure Office and the Xinhua branch took over the Weibo account from the E-government Office, that the Internet Platform is devoted to incorporating S Province' information channels can also make a gradual process of the Disclosure Office consolidating its informational advantage and hence apparatus autonomy in this competition.

It cannot be certain whether the provincial leadership have learnt from the lesson of the Xinfang mechanism or not. The Disclosure Office, instead of being promoted and independent from the General Office as a parallel department, has remained inside the General Office, and maintained closely connected to the leadership. But one thing is certain that apparatus autonomy the office holds now is not formally prescribed, which means if the Disclosure Office does not stay up to the champion of informational

competition in the future, the provincial leadership are still able to empower the next winning office with stronger autonomy by naming it the pilot agency of another policy package with most political investment received.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND LIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH

As the Disclosure Office consolidates its autonomy and intends to win future informational competition, this thesis approaches to a period. In this thesis, I attempt to develop a horizontal perspective to examine the inter-office relations inside the Chinese state, within a “proxy accountability” framework. More generally speaking, in an authoritarian context, not only informatics apparatuses, but other state apparatuses who share similar sphere of competence, are faced with such peer pressure.

The champion apparatus under peer pressure presents a better internal organization and stronger capacity, and therefore earns favor of the state leadership. In return, the leadership empower the champion apparatus with more autonomy both in decision making and implementary processes. In stirring up such peer competition, the state can propel its apparatuses towards more innovative (and responsive in our case) governance.

Arguing that more information exchange leads to increased apparatus autonomy, I propose a concept of “front-tier officials” who are not necessarily at an absolutely low administrative level, but at a relatively low level within their power field, and that of “power fields.” With the concept of “front-tier officials,” the thesis sheds a light to the interpersonal mode within an office, and may also contribute to the organizational theory.

Through field work, I find the Disclosure Office and the E-government Office share information gathered and/or initiated formal or informal cooperation, despite their informational competition. In face of my doubts, they usually responded that the other

office were identified as “the same team (自己人)” as well. The concept and theory of “power fields” may much contribute to answering how officials from different apparatuses identify cooperators and competitors.

Moreover, the thesis also renders a historical overview of Xinfang development, which makes a pioneering effort to link the Xinfang mechanism to today’s state information channels, and reveals the ultimate rationale of China’s evolving information management to be encouraging informational competition between the informatics apparatuses.

That being said, this thesis has its limitation for various reasons, which can be fixed by further research. First, much is yet to be revealed in historical work. For example, the State Council had installed more than one Xinfang office within for a period of time, and did those Xinfang offices have similar peer pressure and informational competition as well? Insufficient field work inside the Xinfang mechanism also limits the thesis to further touching today’s Xinfang offices’ bargaining with other offices.

Bargaining depends not only on apparatus autonomy, but officials’ individual autonomy, especially front-tier officials’ autonomy. According to my recorded interview with an experienced Xinfang cadre, such bargaining not only exists, but exists both in decision making and implementary processes; sometimes it depends on the individual(s) more than the apparatuses.

Between apparatus autonomy and officials’ individual autonomy may lie the most serious flaw, which is that in respect of its theoretical framework, this thesis fails to clearly distinguish and examine the correlations between officials’ individual autonomy,

apparatus autonomy and state autonomy as a whole. How can we accurately identify and measure autonomy of the three aspects of state actors? What consequences will there be, if either apparatus autonomy or individual autonomy alters? How does it influence on state autonomy as a whole, when the relative strength of apparatus autonomy and individual autonomy changes? And how are these changes translated into state-society relations in China? These question, I hope, can be discussed in follow-up research.

There is one thing we can know for sure, if it helps: apparatus autonomy cannot be equated with individual autonomy. Informal norms like the discretion hinder state officials, and even rattle their regime trust more than ordinary citizens, because they are much more exposed to and familiar with such norms. As a matter of fact, more than one front-tier official, whether grass-roots or department level, informational work or something else, expressed their confusion on where their individual jurisdiction ends during my field work. Take governmental transparency for example. Although the State Council encourages “most to be disclosed,” it still confuses many officials today which documents can be disclosed or not, which is still within the discretion of the few. And the discretion may vary from individual to individual, from time to time, as uncertain as Xinfang has been in history. Such concerns may be perfectly projected on other affairs as well.

Another subject that deserves further investigation is societal actors engaging in state-organized information channels. Short of a pre-survey on citizen participants in the Open Days, it is hardly likely to tell whether those participants are *de facto* solution seekers who turn to as many information channels as possible to increase the success odds, or information seekers as I conceptualize. In addition, distinguishing information

seekers from solution seekers can also be tricky. Take one who proposes some certain policy via Xinfang channels for example. She/he appears as a civic participant with no intention for state intervention, and yet, the policy proposal can be very much in favor of her/him.

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APPENDIX

I. INTERVIEW RECORDS, EDITED AND TRANSLATED

Every single interviewee was fully informed of whether the interview would be recorded or not, and aware that information conveyed in the following conversation would be used in research work on condition of anonymity.

In the following records, the author goes by “X.”

Gamma, Street Official²⁷; Lambda, Township Officials; Psi, Township Party Committee Official. They were former undergrad interns with Alpha City, the capital of S Province.

This recorded part followed a story: last year, one of Gamma’s female colleagues received a resident who wanted a higher social security payment, the budget of which the street office is not empowered to raise. Turned down and irritated, the resident refused to reason with the female official, and then in a rage swallowed the goldfish from her small fishbowl. As Gamma surmises, this mad petitioner might have a commonly accepted androcentric code of not hitting women.

G: 还有一次，有个人在楼下等着领导，拿着小刀片，他说他有艾滋嘛，就说你办不办，不办我割了我然后就割你。这好多（这种的）。还有乙肝的，一来就凑可近跟你说话，“我乙肝，你看这事情办不办”，你见他就觉着……

G: ...there is another one. The petitioner waited outside for our director, with penknife in hand. He claimed to be infected with AIDS. He only asked whether his request would be fulfilled or not; if not, he would cut himself and (with the same knife) then cut you. Merely one among many. Also those infected with HBV, while complaining, they just came real close to you, “I have HBV, and you tell me whether my conflict will be handled.” Once you see one of those guys... (You feel intimidated.)

.....

²⁷ The conversation took place in the afternoon on February 12, 2017, the recorded part of which was 39’ 35”.

G: 我们政府也有个女孩，本来是要每天提前半个小时给办公室打扫卫生，现在提到八点，她说，“不行，领导你给我分个宿舍吧”。她本来就要六点半起，她家住得远。

G: A co-working girl is also responsible for cleaning the office half an hour in advance of the clock-in time every morning. Then the clock-in time is brought earlier to 8am. She said, “no way (can I do so this early), unless boss you assign me an apartment nearby. She lives so far away that she has to get up at 6:30am.

P: 打扫办公室还轮不上咱；有的不愿意（让下属来做），喜欢自己打扫。

P: You cannot clean the office even you wish. Some directors aren't willing (to have the office cleaned by subordinate officials), but clean themselves.

L: 有的不愿意别人进来，给领导打扫办公室你要有办公室钥匙呢。我那天就发现了……他（指领导）后备箱拉满了（礼物），他给谁送我都知道。

L: For privacy. To clean the office, you have to possess the key. The other day I found out...he (the director) had the truck of his car full (of gifts), so I knew to whom he gave gifts.

G: 过年前省政府门前全是（送礼的）人。

G: There are tons of people (who come and give gifts) in front of the provincial government.

X: 你们会给经常去上访的人送吗？

X: Do you give gifts to those habitual petitioners?

G: 不会，那样会增加……就比如快到，北京要开会了，或者我们（省）快开会了，就会去他家附近……盯着，他去哪儿你就跟着他。我们信访办做这个。或者我们在哪儿开会来着……各个街办都会去那附近，盯自己的人如果去上访，如果是北京的话，有可能跟着人防止他去北京，有可能直接去北京防去那儿。像这种情况，都是提前打好关系，防止上访；过年过节，以慰问的形式，发个东西给个钱啊。

G: No, that would...but on occasion of some conference in Beijing or Alpha City, some officials go to those petitioners and follow wherever they go (in case the petitioners make a scene at the conference). Our OLC does this. Or each street office will send someone near the site of the conference, in case of petitioners from their jurisdiction come. As for Beijing, maybe someone follows the petitioner, or maybe goes to Beijing. For such cases (of habitual petitioners), they just keep friendly in advance to prevent (skip-level petitioning); like on each festival, in form of conveying care and sympathy, the office gives some gifts or cash to potential petitioners.

X: 一个街道会有多少这种人啊？

X: How many of such petitioners would be in the jurisdiction of one street office?

G: 不一定，我们主要有一个，那一个特别厉害，去过好几次北京，年年（都要）访那个人。还有一个，是我在的时候发生的，她老公的什么事办不下来，她就老来老来闹，但那个事情我们也解决不了，是区上不解决，好像退伍军人的医保之类。

她有一次跑去分管领导那里，然后刚开始还很平静，后来说着说着，“我要跳楼”，一脚踏上办公桌，旁边是窗子。然后把她拉下去了。

G: That depends. We only have one, but he is active. Has been to Beijing many times, so that (we need to) visit him every single year. Another one I encountered, her husband had some unsolved trouble, and she came and disturbed very frequently. It was about veterans' medical insurance or something, beyond our competence already; it was the District Government that didn't help. Once she came to a deputy chief of ours. At the beginning, she was all calm, and gradually got emotional. Shouting "I'm jumping off," and one foot is on the desk. The desk is right next to the window. Then we dragged her down.

.....

L: 你们现在都负责啥？

L: So what are you two working on recently?

G: 政协，统战，妇联。

G: Stuff regarding political consultative work, the united front and local women's federation.

P: 非公党建。那你们是不是事儿不多？

P: Mine is Party building in the private sector. So you (G) are not too busy, aren't you?

G: 事儿不多，但是领导事儿多，你明白？妇联本来没啥，但领导特别爱抓，因为他今年新抓这个，就要把这个抓起来。

G: Not too busy, if not for my boss, you know? Women's federation work isn't much in the first place, but since he is in charge of it very recently, he wants to increase related work and thus improve his performance.

.....

L: 喝鱼那件事已经很经典了。

L: The fish-swallowing story is pretty typical.

G: 他当时没咽下去，还咽了一下；办公室那个女孩恶心得一个礼拜都没吃下饭。

G: The ridiculous detail was that he was choked a bit with the goldfish and then gulped very hard. The girl found it so disgusting that she barely ate for the next week.

.....

P: 你们现在加班吗？

P: Do you usually work extra hours?

G: 电视刚播那阵儿，天天加班，坐在那儿等，就看播的是不是我们。

G: Not recently. But when the TV program on citizens' complaints just released, we were working extra hours every day to wait and see if they complaint about us.

X: 被播过吗？

X: Have you been ever?

G: 有过，我们是卫生，镜头都没有带到我们那边……但区长他们都过来了。

G: Only once, about street cleaning. It was on the border of our jurisdiction, and the scenes broadcasted weren't within our jurisdiction at all. But the District Leader showed up in our office (to oversee us).

.....

X: 也会有接电话投诉的吧？

X: How about petitioning via phone calls?

G: 接电话责任划分不那么明确，比如民政，就是（街道办的）社会事务科。然后一个人负责什么事务，比如低保、保障房、文体、残联，但不会按投诉方式来分。我是写东西的，负责过一段时间优抚、双拥。还去残联口做过两个礼拜。但民政的很多工作不是正式工来做的，是招社工。我们科室有二十个人，但不到十个是正式工。有的岗位不好干，以防有事；他们工资特别低。社区工作其实不好干，太杂了，挺危险的。

G: We don't have staff specially receive petitioning phone calls. Take the civil affairs office for example, each official has a clearly divided sphere of competence, such as social security, housing policy, cultural affairs, and work regarding the disabled persons' federation (DPF). I'm responsible for document writing, and I used to work on preferential care for martyrs' and veterans' families. And I did work with our DPF staff for two weeks. But much of our work is not assigned to regular officials, but social workers or temporary employees. We have 20 people in the office, and less than ten are regular officials. Those temporary are responsible for some difficult work, and in case such work gets the office in trouble; and they are very poorly paid. Community work is actually too complicated to handle, even dangerous.

X: 而且指不定会碰上什么人、什么事。被电视点炮以后，你们会干嘛呀？

X: And you never know whom you encounter or what accident happens next. What would you do if complained by the TV program?

G: 比如说环境卫生，事不过夜，马上就办，就去现场，找保洁工，或者自己去。我们清理街道还要穿特别的衣服，写着口号。

G: The principle given from above is "not to leave the issue for tomorrow, but handle it overnight." For example, street cleaning, we ought to go to the site right away, and find street cleaners to clean the street, or we clean it by ourselves. When cleaning streets, we are asked to wear special shirts with a slogan and the name of our office on it.

X: 你们最主要的信访内容是什么？

X: So what mainly makes the petitioning your office receives?

G: 啥都有，你能想到的都有，“小区路灯坏了”，但这种一般是先找社区。低保最多，因为不缺东西、生活条件好的群众是不用找社区的，你找过吗？除非有什么证明要开。一般是低保，要么是残联，残疾人们申请一些器械。

G: All kinds of complaints, you name it, “streetlights in my neighborhood broke” and all. But they usually first turn to the neighborhood committee instead of us. We mostly receive complaints for social security, because economically capable residents need nothing from us. Do you? No, unless you need some paperwork from us. Usually those who want social security money. Or disabled residents, they need special grants for assistive equipment, like wheelchairs.

Lambda, Township Official²⁸; Psi, Township Party Committee Official. They were former undergrad interns with Alpha City, the capital of S Province.

L: 我们一个局长评了先进个人，还要来找我呢。

L: A bureau commissioner from our town wanted to earn a title of “Worker of the Year,” and he might turn to me.

X: 评这个有什么用？

X: Does this title matter so much?

P: 这个能涨工资呢。评了优秀也可以。

P: Possessing one of these may rise your salary. So can “Excellent Worker.”

L: 优秀不行，优秀只能抵工龄，一个半年。

L: No, not with the “Excellent.” It can only be used to “trade in” your length of services, each for half a year.

.....

L: 金融办是办公室下设的副科级事业单位.....

L: Office of finances is a public unit underneath the general office.

P: 不，它是政府序列的。

P: Not a public unit, it is a governmental office.

X: 是一个办公室的内设科室，可能自己有下属的企事业单位。

X: It should be part of the general office. It may have its own public-owned firms or units.

.....

P: 他是有进选调生？

²⁸ The conversation took place in the morning on February 12, 2017, and was recorded separately into two files, one 64' 13" and the other 12' 37".

P: Is he not one of the selected graduates²⁹?

L: 他进了。

L: He is.

P: 那咋可以（晋升）那么快呢？

P: How could he be promoted so fast?

L: 就跟你一批的，15（年）的。政策都是人定的，想咋解释咋解释。

L: He was the same year like us. After all institutions are made by men, and can be interpreted anyhow.

.....

X: 这一期电视节目我看了，废料堆积，发霉发臭，直播的时候有记者现场问路人，“臭不臭”，老太太说臭，问那个局长，他说不臭。

X: I watched the latest TV inquiry with officials. It was about an enormous junkyard where all the wastes were left moldy and stinking. When the programme was going live, an on-site journalist just randomly asked pedestrians, “Do you smell the stink?” and an old lady said yes. Then the host asked the bureau chief who claimed to have been there, and he said he didn’t smell anything.

L: 那怎么办？

L: Then what?

P: 整改啊！

P: Rectify of course!

.....

L: 有好多事不是我们能决定的，像有一个八十五岁的公安局局长，专业上访三十年，退休了，就说他的问题很复杂，我们县解决不了。我也想签字解决了，但是搞不定。

L: A lot is not up to us. Say, we have an 85-year-old retired police commissioner who has petitioned for 30 years. He got a very complicated problem, historical reason, beyond our county’s power. I want to sign his paperwork (and get it over with), but I cannot.

P: 村支书选举可容易出事儿了，给乡镇打电话，基本上很难去解决了。

P: Village elections are a mess. The failed candidates would come petition. And the county may only make phone calls to the township, but hardly really intervene the result.

L: 这样的地方人物当选，有好有坏，看上面怎么指导。顺其自然，但是要加强监管。

²⁹ Selected graduates (选调生) is a personnel institution to select recent graduates on the meritocratic basis and assign them to grass-roots authorities, with a promise for a better chance of future promotion.

L: A local strongman being elected can be either good or bad. It only depends on how the superior authority moderates villages. Let the positions go to the strongmen, but accordingly legal supervision must be enhanced.

.....

P: 暗访是很难的，谁不认识谁啊，来了就认识，大家就会互通消息，有人来了。

P: Superior leaders coming for uninformed inspections is hard today. Everybody knows everybody. Once you come, people know it. And counties may warn each other, "here comes someone."

Nu, Township Party Committee Official³⁰, supporting the TV programme in the inquiry of municipal officials.

N: 这个电视节目需要全市民众参与，像我们这种偏一点的郊县就需要有人帮忙组织观众参与，然后通过政审就可以参与直播了。

N: The programme takes participation through the city. But for citizens from remote suburban districts or counties like ours, it needs local offices to help organize voluntary participants. And once the participants pass the background check, they are going to the live programme.

X: 其他区县呢？

X: How about other counties, the same?

N: 这个我就知道了，我们只是从问政办那儿知道这个月的节目主题和人数限额，按时把观众带过去。

N: This I don't know. All I do is to know the monthly theme and the quota of the audience from the Office for TV Inquiries, and take them there by time.

X: 那问政办是政府口还是党口呢？

X: So does this office for TV inquiries belong to the Party committee or the municipal government?

N: 那我也不知道。因为每次也没有下发什么文件，就是打个电话给我们通知。

N: I don't know this either. Because there is no document for this. They just informed us each time on the phone.

.....

N: 每一期的方法都不大一样，有一期是通过县的人大或政协、村委会、医务工作者中组织，但不能是干部，只能是普通民众。

N: Each time different themes need different groups of participants. One time I find people through the county's assembly of representatives, political consultative

³⁰ The conversation took place in the afternoon on February 5, 2017, and was recorded separately into two files, one 22' 49" and the other 9' 34".

conference, village committees and hospital employees. But no cadre, they must be ordinary citizens.

Theta, Former Intern in the Provincial Transportation Department³¹, 2014.

X: 那你分到哪个处了？

X: Which division were you assigned to?

T: 我在办公室。

T: The general office

X: 老师跟你现在还有联系吗？

X: Is your mentor still in touch with you?

T: 联系呀。我们办公室是主任坐在我对面，然后两个秘书，一个是公文这边，一个是政务公开的。我跟的是网上政务公开的那位。前一阵子我还去拜访过他们，因为马上就快过年了，就是他们都要报材料，我就去跟他们聊了聊，就走了。我们主任还升了，更忙了。

T: Yes. The chief of the office sat across the desk to me. Two secretaries, one on the documents, the other working on the disclosure. My mentor was the disclosure guy. Not long ago, I just visited them in the office, for Chinese New Year is coming soon. They all had paperwork to do, so I didn't stay long, just chatted. The chief was promoted, busier.

X: 你在办公室，那你有（自己的）桌子吗？

X: Do you have a desk all to yourself?

T: 有的。

T: Yes.

X: 应该每个人也都分到老师了吧？

X: Every intern got her/his mentor?

T: 是，四个人都有老师。

T: All four got our own mentors.

X: 单说你，你都做哪些工作了？

X: What did you do by yourself alone?

T: 我的话，主要就是在办公室帮忙整理了一个大事记，每年交通厅都会做一个交通方面大事件的汇编，是每年有个交通报，要从那里面选出来，然后汇总、编辑；再一个就是，当时不夏天吗，我那个老师他休假，休年假，一周，他的工作我来做，网站，政务发布，他的位子来电话、下面传（真）个资料也都到我这儿，然后我再做成像简报差不多，再传进政府内网，给主任审核，再给我们厅长。

³¹ The conversation took place in the afternoon on December 16, 2016, and was recorded for 101' 58".

T: I helped generate a handbook on this year's major events. Every year the transportation department made a compilation on related major events, selected from regular transportation newsletters, and compile and edit them. Moreover, my mentor went on leave with one week off. Thus I took over all his duties, website, disclosure, answering phone calls and receiving materials via fax. I made a newspaper like that, and uploaded it onto our internal system for my office chief's reading, and the department chief there.

X: 交通厅还用政府开发的那个公务系统?

X: Your department used the internal online system?

T: 用着呢啊, 一个内网, 一个外网。每天要给厅长检验, 做好以后还要走内网, 给政府传一份。

T: Yes, one for the internal web, one for the Internet. Each time I completed an article, I need to submit to the head of the department and the provincial leadership through the internal system.

X: 所以你干了一个月陕西交通厅的公众号?

X: So you were running the department's WeChat account for one month?

T: 也不是, 只有一周。我做过这一类工作, 大一的时候帮人做过公众平台, 也有别的社会活动, 所以有这方面经验。就是有的时候在内容上拿捏不准, 再请教人家。

T: Not really, for one week. I had similar experience in my freshman year, and other student society things. But sometimes I felt uncertain about the content, and had to turn to other officials.

X: 一般你的内容是怎么定出来的? 应该有个工作流程吧。

X: How was your content generated and confirmed? There must be some sort of a process.

T: 像内容, 就是一般从下面发上来……就是(交通厅内的)各个处室, 还有就是市级的。还有交建集团、公路处, 他们把自己的重要工作写成一个总结汇报, 发上来, 内容已经编辑好了, 上来以后需要你审核, 你看内容, 分大小事儿, 是否对外公开, 有些重大的事儿直接就可以发表。省长去调研, 直接就可以发。还有一些小事儿, 处室里举办的小活动就不对外公开了。有些事不大不小, 拿不准就去问主任发不发。后台就是排版啊、错别字啊, 这些检查一遍, 审核差不多就可以公布了。措辞基本上是, 都是他们写好的。

T: The content was mostly submitted from the below, including the department's divisions, the municipal transportation bureaus, the transportation state-owned enterprises and related offices. They generated a report on what they've done, and submitted it. These are already written and edited, but you still need to classify them, whether to disclose or not. Important stuff can be uploaded and disclosed right away, such as stories of a governor inspecting transportation affairs. Minor things, like the office holding an internal activity, are usually not disclosed. Things between, neither too big nor too small,

I would ask before address them. On the background website, I can edit, and correct typos in going through it. Then it's good to go. The language and rhetoric is not something I need to worry about, because it was written before coming to my hand.

X: 每周一的例会你们（见习生）可以参加吗？

X: The weekly meeting on Monday, could you interns participate?

T: 可以参加。

T: We could.

X: 聊聊你们的调研吧。

X: You had a business trip?

T: ……那天早上，主任就说，去调研，新汽车站新建的，也是归厅里管，还有某隧道的修复工作，也要厅里去视察检验。主任就问我不就那儿的人嘛，你跟着一起去，我说我能去吗，他说车能坐得下。中巴嘛。

T: On the morning, the chief said, we are going to inspect a project on the field, a newly-built inter-city but terminal that belongs to the department, and a project on a tunnel restoration. The chief asked whether I was from that area, and said I could come along. I wasn't sure, and he said it was fine. There was room for me on the van.

X: 所以厅里的安排很丰富，你们还每个人都能出个差？

X: So every intern got a field work chance?

T: 拍哥在机关后勤处，刚好是夏天，给“送清凉”活动，就是开西瓜，绿豆汤，哥们儿美院的，让给（公交司机）送清凉去了。

T: Pai was in the logistics office. It was summer, and the office offered watermelon and green bean soup for bus drivers. And Par was there distributing watermelon.

X: 参加见习前后，对省里交通状况的印象有没有改变？

X: Through the internship, what did you learn about the province' transportation?

T: 变化挺大的，我家是农村的，在村里修个路什么的，以前是土路，修水泥路，有个二级收费站，路政特别严厉，感觉修路很难，出行最好也就是石子路，实习前两年（2012年）我们那儿才通水泥路，后来你真的到了交通厅，整理大事记，看到交通网，才知道变化特别大。我以前去学校上学的话，是走山里，那时候绕着山要一天半，现在就是高速。

有时候在办公室，就是中午午休的时候，闲聊我们就会说，我就以为路政，路桥费肯定挺赚钱的，盈利额很大，他就说盈利是有一些，但很多是入不敷出的，通行的车辆特别少，以前以为说路网修了就能哗哗进钱，但后来才知道通车量特别少，是赔钱的。

T: There were big changes. I'm from rural areas. In the village, the road used to be dirt road with a second-level toll station. Things were difficult, and it was hard to build new roads. At best there was a cobbled road. We didn't have cement roads until 2012. When I

took the internship and contacted the materials, I learnt great changes. I went to college around the mountains for one and half a day. Now there is a highway.

Sometimes we chatted in office during lunch break. I thought toll stations were very profiting. My mentor told me most stations were losing money, on the contrary. Many roads were built for a convenient highway network, but traffic flow was not large enough to profit.

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T: 重的卡车过得多，路面压损特别严重，二级路归市里管，好像特别不好。我们去调研的时候，就发现路上一会儿限速四十一会儿限速七十，就有领导在车上说，市上制订的标准也太不合格了，四十到七十差别这么大，车子咋跑得起来，限速什么的制订很不合理，调研下去到市里开领导会的时候，也都提出来了。

T: Heavy trucks were many and caused severe road damage. The second-level highways were in the charge of the municipality, and the road condition was particularly bad. When we were there inspecting, we found the speed limit was somewhere 40 and somewhere 70. Our chief said on the site, this was ridiculous, how could cars possibly run with such inconsistent speed limit? And we mentioned this to the municipality.

X: 给了个文件？

X: Gave them a document?

T: 就当场提出来的，就是调研完了以后，回来之后都是跟市里领导座谈，他们汇报和我们看到的，都交流。

T: No, face to face. After the on-site inspection, we had a meeting with the municipal leaders. They report their work, and we what we found during the inspection. We talk about all these.

Kappa, Former Intern in the Provincial Office for Poverty Alleviation³², 2014.

X: 在扶贫办分到哪个处啊？

X: Which division?

K: 监测中心。工作主要是一些数据的上报，比如今年扶贫的状态，多少多少人处于贫困线之下啊，每个县有多少多少资金投入啊，数据的汇总吧。

K: The monitoring center. Mainly responsible for data work. Like this year's poverty status, how many people below the poverty standard, how much investment each county has made so far. All the big data.

X: 你当时主要做什么工作呢？

X: What did you do?

³² The conversation took place in the afternoon on December 16, 2016, and was recorded for 67' 01".

K: 我记得当时，第一个比较重要的工作就是建档立卡，其实我对这个建档立卡（不太熟悉），因为他们也没有对我很详细地介绍过，要在一些贫困线以下……因为当时提出一个（口号）“精准扶贫”，会在低保线以下的都会被认定是贫困户一类的，就要建档立卡，对这些贫困人口进行一个跟踪，看他们是不是真的生活贫困，建立一个（更贴近真实的）标准，里面会介绍什么什么情况，比如说是哪种贫困，还会划分（贫困）等级之类的，建立档案后就会给你（即贫困户）发那个卡……

我主要负责的只是一个建档立卡手册的校对。当时有这么一个建档立卡的手册，给每个县每个区发这样一个小册子，小册子上就会有一个指导、指南，就等于是建档立卡指南吧。我是校对那个东西。

K: As I recall, the work of top priority was to establish a system of individual files. In fact I wasn't familiar with this, and they didn't introduce to me in details. Back then, there was a slogan called "accurate poverty alleviation." All households identified as impoverished families must be established a file that tracks their economic state. And with information conveyed by these files, we can initiate a standard (more realistic). The file covers a wide range of information, types of poverty, level of poverty, and etc.

There was a handbook guiding for this new work, from the province to each county and district. I was editing this handbook.

……

K: 那一周时间他们就给我一个省上扶贫的政策性信息，让我了解了解省上扶贫的状态，我们省的确是有很多很多贫困地区，大学生可能在学校里面，对省情可能不是很了解，这些都算是一个内部的资料汇总吧，他们就说希望大学生能够去一些比较艰苦的地方考村官什么的，说大学生不应该来省政府来见习，应该去基层来见习更好。

K: There was one week they were not around and left me some policy information to study. We do have a vast impoverished area in the province. College students may stay on campus and kind of ignorant to this reality. So they gave me this compilation of the provincial information. They also said they hoped college students would be village cadres in some remote and difficult areas; instead of the provincial government, grass-roots authorities might be a better option.

……

X: 所以你还有得到什么新的感受吗？

X: So what's new in all this?

K: 第一周还是挺兴奋的，感觉能到政府里见习（很不平常）……慢慢就会觉得，其实他们的工作也蛮正常的。领导讲话的稿子很少有自己写的吧，就是底下人写，其实凝聚了很多很多人的心血，包括我们科室要给他提供——一篇演讲稿都要分为几个部分，比如不一样的工作方面——有一次我记得清华大学还是北大的一个代表团，来我们调研，我们陪他们去见面，他们就说想了解情况，我们的副主任还是某位领导，就做了一个简短的介绍，我们扶贫办分为监测中心、城市，他那篇报告就

是每个处室的工作都有涉及到，应该是很多人提供了数据，凝结了很多人的心血，他才能去写完。

K: The first week was all exciting. I felt so unusual to work inside the government. But gradually you feel it is nothing different. Speeches by senior officials are rarely written themselves, right? Officials below write for them. These speeches condensed efforts by many, for example data provided by our monitoring center. Once I remembered a delegation from Peking University or Tsinghua. They wanted to learn what's going on in the province, and a senior cadre held a debriefing session. That brief introduction contained all aspects of our work involved many areas. Many divisions provided data and information for it, and made this introduction possible.

X: 你当时做扶贫，你校对过那个手册，有没有得到什么比较特殊的扶贫方面的数据、知识或者了解啊？

X: What did you learn about poverty alleviation?

K: 当时去之前就觉着，扶贫就是给钱，让他们去干嘛干嘛；但是去扶贫办以后，就知道不止是给钱，比如产业扶贫——去给这个村子或者这个镇，依据实际特点来设计产业。比如这里土地很好，就推荐他们种植比较适宜的农作物来带动（经济），或者这个地方就是不好，土也不好，水也不好，什么也不好，那就整体搬迁，重新安置到别的地方。还有发展企业工业，很多很多方法。当时看完觉着很震撼，他们把扶贫人群划分得很精确，每种人都有特定的方法来帮助，而不是说给你钱然后你自己想招儿吧，而是不仅给钱，还要给办法。但是时间太久了，能想到的事情就这么多了。

K: Before the internship, I thought poverty alleviation was to give money. But it was beyond money giving. The government assessed the situation of this village or this township, and made an industrial plan based on its local characters. For example, they had great quality soil here, and then we should recommend economic farming. Or this location was just no good, then re-locate the villagers elsewhere. Many other approaches, I was shocked first time reading it. More than money, but ways to keep making money. That's what I can still remember now.

X: 见习前后，对政府部门的印象也有变化吗？

X: Did your impression about the government change?

K: 首先就是觉着他们都很亲切。以前都会觉着政府里的人就很高高在上，因为我们科室两个都是男老师，工作上说普通话，闲下来就会说方言，就觉着很亲切。加班的时候也会聊聊天；他们就会加班，让我正常下班。

之前觉着政府里越高等级的人，工作越轻松。因为我觉着基层的人就会累死累活地做，上面的人就一层层收集别人的成果，会觉着他们很轻松。但去了以后就会发现他们非常非常忙，想起一件事：他们有一次要底下的一个数据，给市上的扶贫办打电话，一层一层去问，我当时就奇怪，我们不是省上吗？就等着他们报啊，他们不报就追究他们责任，他们就说不是这样，如果想追责是很简单，但是想要把事情办好，只能去要，人家不给，就得一直要，因为你只有要到这个数据，才能进行下一

步的工作，之后我们还要给国家报。有时候市上的人不一定那么急，所以国家一直强调追责什么的制度。（追责其实也很困难，）除非产生了什么重大的影响。

K: Before, I felt official were up there looking down on us. But they felt nice and intimate. We could chat in local dialect while available. They worked extra hours and let me go back at normal clock.

Before, I thought higher cadres were less burdened: grass-roots officials implement policies, and higher officials only gathered these results, easy and relaxing. But now I don't think this way. Once we asked a local office for some relevant data. We gave a phone call to the municipality and below. I was confused: we are the provincial office, are we not? We can wait for subordinates reporting, and otherwise we hold them accountable. But no, hold them accountable is one thing, and getting the job done is another. We have to keep asking, otherwise we cannot continue on the job. Sometimes the municipality were not in a hurry. Holding them accountable is not easy, unless grave consequences were made.

X: 我们当时办会也是这样，也要一个一个去打电话确认。

X: Indeed. We had to make a lot of phone calls to confirm one by one when organizing meetings.

K: 我还有一个工作是发信，有个报告就是县上、市上扶贫办都要给，信封有一两百个，都是固定的，打印在 A4 纸上，裁成小条，贴在信封上。当时觉着特别不能理解，已经无纸化时代了，怎么还要这样？

K: Another assignment was to mail letters. A report must be distributed to each municipality and county. There were one or two hundred envelops. I had to glue the address note on the face of those envelops one by one. I cannot understand this. Why this today, in a digital era?

.....

K: 有的，有一个小细节，像政发、政函、政字的区别，他给我解释过，发就是规章制度，函就是平级之间，没有隶属关系的往来（文件），有可能用函，还有.....记不清了。他们都很厉害的，有一个领导找我聊天，问我习不习惯之类的，通过那次聊天，我知道他不光在省政府里领导工作，还在哪个学校还是老师，教授什么，说这种情况很普遍，一般会去做客座什么的，但他是实实在在要授课的，教数学的，他就说这种情况很普遍，可他们要有知识沉淀的。

K: A tiny detail. My mentor taught me about the difference between various documents. 发 means a publicly formal regulation; 函 means communication documents between parallel offices; and...sorry I kind of forgot.

A senior cadre talked to me once, asking whether I was used to working there. And I learned he was also working at some university teaching advanced mathematics as an adjunct professor. He said it was common, because it required experience.

.....

X: 当时你见习补贴够花吗？

X: Did your internship stipend suffice?

K: 够的，我住在学校。外地大学的就要租房，很麻烦。

我当时去（见习）也主要是好奇吧，我们学校报名的人非常非常多，各种主席什么的，我就是报名试试，我们所有人都是大三的，只有我是大二的，不知道为什么老师挑中了我。宣传部本来有个全国（大学生）的会让我去的，后来说为啥没去，我说自己去省政府见习。可能大二学生跟大三学生去见习的心态也不一样，大三学生那个时候可能已经决定去考研或者考公务员了，接下来就是大四了，所以目的性很强，去了认识认识领导什么的，我们有个同学，（我们之后）下一届去的，学的法学，刚好分到司法厅，就很明确要考公务员，现在在内蒙古的司法系统里工作。去了司法厅之后，目的很明确，就想要去这里工作，但我大二过去，就是去玩，去见见世面，抱着很平常的心态去了，目的很单纯。

K: Yes, I lived on campus. But those whose university is not here, they needed to find apartments. It was trouble.

When I applied for the internship, it was mainly out of curiosity. There were many applicants from my school, student leaders in particular. I was the only sophomore guy among all these junior students, and had no idea how I was selected. There was another national meeting for college students that summer. But I gave up that chance for our internship here.

Maybe psychology of sophomore and junior students were different. Junior students were starting thinking about their career plans, about to graduate after all. They are more goal-oriented. I have a friend, intern for the next term, law major, assigned to the justice department. He was fixed to working in the legal system. Now he is working in the legal system in Inner Mongolia. He was super clear during the internship. But I was doing it for fun, to broaden my horizon. Nothing else.

.....

K: 我就觉着这种活动，不管是一天还是我们一个月时间，去学到什么东西也不太现实，最主要的目的还是打破政府的传统观念，觉着政府里面就是喝喝茶看看报，某个政策的出台会凝聚很多心血。有的政策需要很多很多的调查。

建档立卡，我们老师就说不是你在办公室想着说有多少贫困户，你要去多少地市看过以后，才知道贫困也有很多很多种，不是“贫困”两个字就能概括的，在城里就没见过那些山沟。

所以一个是改变对政府的观念吧，我有同学进机关，有的向我抱怨，以为去政府工作很安稳，国家的政策要打响扶贫攻坚战，2020年要脱贫，他们就每天都要加班，市上、省上经常要材料，加班就很平常。扶贫这里提到很高的层次，说压力很大。

另一个是了解省情。像我在扶贫办的时候，因为我去之前，大学里没人教这些，想不到有地方这么落后这么穷，我确实没了解过。等我去了扶贫办，像西山这种地方很贫穷，连车都不通，一周有一辆车接他们下来买东西存着，收入全靠务农，在山

头上包很多地，没有进城打工的收入。今天很难想象，但在扶贫办里就能了解这些情况。

走之前每个人不是要写见习心得吗，我的老师就建议我写，希望大学生更多地了解省里，我们属于经济中等偏下的省份，扶贫攻坚任务又很艰巨，希望大学生留在贫困地区，能够用智慧去改良农村。大学生村官一方面是缓解就业压力，也应该是向农村引入高水平人才。

K: Personally, whether one open day or one internship month, these activities cannot make participants really learn anything. It'd be unrealistic. The major goal should be to shatter the traditional opinions toward the government that believed officials had nothing to do but tea and newspaper. A policy making requires much investigation.

The impoverished family files cannot be made in office. You have to go there and see with your own eyes. Poverty is not merely "poverty," which cannot be seen in the city.

I have schoolmates now working in the government. They complaint to me. They thought officials' deskwork could be relaxing and stable. But the state is claiming an anti-poverty war and aimed to eliminate poverty by 2020. They had to work extra hours every day for superior inspections. Poverty alleviation is attached to huge political significance, and thus huge pressure.

In addition, to learn where we live. Before the internship, no one taught us in class how poor some places remain. I never knew. During the internship, places like Xishan, there was even no road. Only one car picked them up and drove them to the township for shopping. All incomes are made by farming on the hills, no secure salaries. Hard to imagine, but everyday things in the poverty office.

By the end of the internship, each and every one of us was supposed to write something. Mentor suggested I write that college students should learn more about our province, an economically medium poor province faced with a serious challenge of poverty alleviation. They hope more of us to serve the rural areas, improve the realities with wisdom. Undergraduate village cadres can relieve the pressure of the job market, and introduce more talents to rural China.

Sigma, Former Intern in the Provincial Commission for Public Health³³, 2014.

S: 当时报这个活动，是我一个朋友告诉我的，我们学校没有公开这件事……

S: The internship thing, I was told by a friend. Our school didn't publicly accept applications...

X: 这是违规的啊。

X: Isn't that violating our policy document?

S: 他们没公开这件事，我就自己在网上找到了，截图，去团委，说我要报名这个，他就问，你从哪儿知道这个事儿的，我就把手机拿出来跟他们看。

³³ The conversation took place in the afternoon on December 17, 2016, and was recorded for 104' 17".

他们就说，这不是谁想去就能去的，我就说这要走什么程序，他们问，你是哪个系的，我就说了，他们让系里辅导员出证明，我就找辅导员出了，拿来了，他们又说要填申请表，我说申请表在哪儿，他们说要下载，我就问在哪儿下载。然后我就填了拿来。他们又说要去学校各个部门盖章，我就说都需要哪些部门，我记得盖章有宣传部的，机要处的……

反正我就盖齐了，让我把表交给一个学生会的秘书长，我怕他们糊弄我，我就一直给那个秘书长打电话，烦得他不行。后来叫我们去的时候，有很多学生领袖，学生会主席，后来有人传我是什么领导的亲戚。

我们学校，真的没有发布这个消息。后来几年我也一直没在我们学校的网站上公开看到过这个消息。

S: Well no, they didn't publicly inform students. I found it online myself, took a screen shot, and went to the school's youth league office, "I'm applying for this." They were shocked, asking "how do you ever know about this?" I showed them my cellphone.

Then they said, it was not something anyone could just walz in. I asked what procedure it would take. They asked which department I was from, and said it took permission by my department assistant. I got it done, and brought it to them. They said it took an application form. I asked where the form was. They said it could only be downloaded somewhere. I asked for the link. Then filled and brought to them. They then said it took seals by various offices in the school, and I asked which ones. I remembered the publicity office, the communication office...

Anyway I got them all. They told me to submit the form to a secretary of the Students' Union. I was afraid they would ignore my application, and thus made phone calls to the secretary every single day to bug him. At last, other interns were all student leaders, president of the Students' Union and everything except me. And there were rumors that I was related to some school principal.

Our college did never publicly inform students of the news. In the next few years, I had never saw similar circulars on our school website.

Upsilon, Former Intern in S Provincial Science & Tech Department³⁴, 2014

U: 首先是，我当时已经做好职业规划，就是想考公务员，然后就有这么个机会，能提前感受一下政府部门的工作……应该说是了解一下吧，我觉着如果能考上，对我成长、工作是有好处的，主要是有这样一个想法。

U: First, I had done my career planning back then, which was to be a state official. And here came the chance, allowing me to know how it feels like to work for the government in advance. I felt if recruited, it would do me well, to grow, to work. Primarily so.

X: 那么你们当时学校是公开选拔的吗？

X: Was there an open selection for this?

³⁴ The conversation took place in the afternoon on December 18, 2016, and was recorded for 29' 2".

U: 是公开的，是在学校的官网上发布的，然后就是大家先报名，提交一份报名表（和简历），然后老师面试，最后确定名额。

U: It was open, and posted on the school's website. We applied, submitted application forms and resumes; then interviews by administrative staff; and finally have interns selected.

.....

U: 这个怎么讲……因为我们是人事处，所以一些企业，像中煤科工之类的国企，之前一无所知，都不知道人家是干啥的，但通过人事处的业务往来，他们经常开会什么的，包括后来调研什么的，就业这块，这些国企的薪资福利这一块（我都有所了解）。

去了中煤科工，这是我印象最深刻的，还去了两个我记不清楚了。去中煤科工，参观了车间，当时印象非常深刻，一尘不染来形容都不夸张，工人各司其职，就跟中央电视台里看到的那样，这一点儿都不夸张，真的是这样。然后见了他们的人事处处长，给我们简单讲了一下业务这一块，原理、技术这些，包括我们感兴趣的，以后……他们的招聘条件，印象好像研究生才可以，薪资待遇福利还都不错。

U: How to put it...because we personnel office were also responsible for some enterprises, like CCTEG (China Coal Technology Engineering Group) and other state-owned companies. I didn't know it a bit back there, not even what these companies do. But through the business transaction, they had many meetings, and some field studies afterwards over the employment issues and the companies' salaries and welfare. So I learned much.

CCTEG, the most impressive field trip. There were two else, but I don't remember much. In CCTEG, we visited their workshops. I was so impressed. The workshop was so clean. I'm not exaggerating, not even a grain of dust. Really. We met their personnel chief. He briefly introduced their business, and technology they use, and what we were interest, their employment condition. As I recall, it must be graduate students, but the salaries and other welfare are high. Great offer.

.....

U: 第一个是，我开始一心想考公务员，在科技厅的老师说公务员这块，大学生如果一出来非常有抱负，想发挥自己所学，可能在这个位置上不如在外企、私企更淋漓尽致，大富大贵也无法达到，但总体来说，比私企、外企，虽然有时候加班，但还是轻松一些的。再者是，老人这种，可能观念是找对象（比较稳定）。

U: First, I just wanted to be an official. But they said, to be an official might not be as good as that in companies for a fresh graduate to accomplish ambitions and fully make the best of knowledge. Generally, it's a bit easier than company employees after all, though extra hours sometimes. What's more, elder in the house may think official job is steady, and good to find me a spouse.

X: 高速是怎么进去的？

X: How did you enter the expressway group?

U: 一样，还是（笔试）考试，然后面试，都非常正规。

U: The same. Tests, interviews, all very serious formal process.

X: 竞争激烈吗？

X: Competitive?

U: 是，我也很用心准备了，也比较爱学，感兴趣这块的东西。

U: Yes. And I prepared hard, and I love learning this kind of stuff, interested.

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-科技厅这块，后来从事的工作接触也比较少，我们（高速集团）是属于交通厅的。科技厅这里，说心里话，业务来往比较少，回头看也觉着（只）是个待人接物的启蒙。

U: The sci-tech department, I don't contact them in business. Our group is a subordinate beneath the transport department. Honestly, less business contact means less. The internship there is merely manners 101 to me.

Beta, Director of the OLC affiliated with a Provincial Party Department³⁵, who had over 20-year experience in receiving citizens' complaints.

B: 就是 1995、1996 年那几年有非常高的两费拖欠，老干部的钱没有收归财政上来，是由国企各自负担的。那问题就只能是一个解决一个，没法子从根本上解决。在哪个企业，就由哪个企业来负责，要是老人本身没什么病，企业又有盈利，就没什么问题，要是老人有病，企业又不咋地，说破产又没破产，这种企业的老干部就比较困难了。看病医疗费报（销）不了。

这种报销不了严重到什么程度？甚至老人去世四五年、五六年，甚至以上，这个费用报销还没解决。这是，常事儿。

B: Since 1995 and 1996, there was a high wave of unpaid retirement pay. Because it didn't belong to the fiscal budgets, but to the independent budgets of the enterprises. So it could only be solved one by one if they came and petitioned. After all it could not be fundamentally solved. Enterprises took responsibility of retired employees on their own. If the elder isn't severely ill, and the enterprise is profiting, then it'll be no problem; if the elder is badly ill, and the enterprise runs poorly, say nearly bankrupt, it will be big trouble for the retired. It was highly possible that their medical expenses were not reimbursed.

To what extent did the situation decline? Some senior cadres might have passed 4-6 years and even longer ago, and the reimbursement was still unpaid. This used to be usual.

X: 是到 08 年有所改善？

X: Until 2008?

³⁵ The conversation took place in the afternoon on January 5, 2017, and was recorded for 93' 40".

B: 08年省上下发了一个文件，把全省离休干部全部收归同级财政，就有保障了，财政肯定有保障了。基本上当年拖欠都是企业，事业单位也有，机关其实也有，比如年初财政紧张，但是基本能做到上半年清下半年，下半年清上半年，很少会拖过一年，也有，但少。还是企业。

企业的拖欠很多，每天的信访量很大，每天接待……我那时候就在楼门口那儿，最多的时候，同时就有三五拨儿，但接待的就我一个。那就只有排队。

B: Yes. The province released a policy document in 2008, which charged the related budgets to parallel level governmental fiscal budgets, and thus had it guaranteed. State revenue is much more reliable. In the past, such cases happened mostly to enterprises, as well as governmental apparatuses and other public organizations, which was but way less.

Even when such things happened to governmental apparatuses, say budget got tight at the beginning of the fiscal year, the apparatus could basically solve it within one year. Only few would extend the unpaid retirement grants to over one year. Still, most frequent and serious issues were with enterprises.

The petitioning flow back then was huge. My office, you know, was right by the entrance of the building. At the peak, there were three or five groups of petitioners at the same time. But I was the only letters-and-visits official. They would have to wait.

X: 一天最多接待过多少人？

X: What was the peak number for one day?

B: 那只能按拨儿来算，按事件来讲，一天最多，十几个是很正常的，但上二十件就不多了，每一年的接待量是要上万人次的。他们过来一说，把信件一转（给相关部门或地方）。信件每天要有二三十件。很多是外地的，但本地也有，交通不方便。

而且会有心理压力，省委不是说来就来的，他们会比较庄严一些，告状本身也是，而且会担心企业领导会不会收拾他。

B: You cannot count it by the number of people, but by the number of cases. Then a dozen groups of visitors one day. Rarely would it exceed 20 for one day. The annual number was over ten thousand. Petitioning visitors came, and then I forwarded their case files (to localities or related departments). Letters per day might reach 20-30, among which were mostly from other cities. Due to the inconvenient public transportation years ago, there were also letters from the city.

In addition, petitioning visitors might have psychological pressure (and then choose to write to petition). After all it is the provincial Party committee, not some place you can just walz in and walz out. Petitioners may treat us more seriously. Petitioning itself was also be risky, and petitioners might be concerned whether their bosses would retaliate for their complaints.

X: 我们似乎有一年突然门禁就严格起来了。

X: Speaking of which, it seemed as I recall that one year our access control was drastically enhanced, all of sudden.

.....

B: 具体的事呢，有一件年三十儿的事，我印象很深。那天是 98 年大年三十，我要值班，早上起来，雪就下得很大，积雪有半尺，路上都很泥泞的。我本来以为，日记里也这么写的，以为下这么大的雪，又是大年三十，应该没人来（上访）。

我就到单位来（上班），八点半就来了一位老太太，我一看，就把她让进来。她进门就让我很感动，非常朴素非常有礼貌，她恐怕鞋有泥水，就一直在门口跺跺脚。进来以后，我有个破沙发和一个椅子，她没坐沙发，找了一把椅子，也只是半坐着一——所以说省委的确还是一个庄严的地方——她反映的，是离休干部的遗属，抚恤金应该是每个月六十块钱，已经有半年没给了，之前给了但也没有给够（六十元），是执行更早之前比较低的标准给的。

这件事说完以后呢，这是大年三十，她就说自己等着这笔钱过年，有一个姑娘，是开铲车的，也没正式工作，过得也不咋地，生活也很窘迫，也帮不了她多少。她的目的就是拿到欠的生活补助费，指着这个过年。

B: Specifically, there was a story on the Chinese New Year's Eve, which impressed me most. It was 1998. I was on duty³⁶. It was a heavily snowy morning. Roads were muddy and snow was half a foot deep. I thought, as I write in my diary, on such a snowy New Year's Eve, there would be no petitioning at all.

On 8:30am, here came this old lady. I invited her indoors. And she acted very humbly and modestly. She was worried her shoes would contaminate the floor, and didn't come in until she cleaned them a bit at the doorstep. I had a bad couch and a chair back then. She didn't sit on the couch. Well it was bad, but a couch after all. She took the chair with great manners, and didn't even sit tight. So in her eyes, the Party committee was a solemn place. Her problem was that being a widow of a retired cadre, she hadn't received allowances for half a year, which should be 60 yuan per month. Even previously she was only paid with the older policy, which was lower than 60 yuan.

That being said, it was the Chinese New Year's Eve, and she expressed hopes that she could receive the money for the festival. She had a daughter, who drove a forklift for a living. The daughter was not formally employed, and with a kid, was also leading a poor life. So the old lady wanted the money for a better festival.

X: 所以老太太希望能当天就拿上这笔钱？

X: So she hoped to get the money on the very day?

B: 那不可能，她自己也知道，那肯定拿不上。

她是这么说，但这种说法，这种诉求是为了加强组织的重视。她慢慢就上感情了，就愿意诉说苦衷了。就谈到当年怎么和她老伴儿结婚的。

³⁶ In case of emergency, state apparatuses arrange that one or a few officials stay on duty during national holidays, and the holiday duty usually rotates by the day among officials.

B: Impossible. She knew it. It was impossible. She saying this was a way to get attention from the Party organization. As she spoke, she gradually turned more emotional, and more willing to pour out her heart, including how she and her husband got married.

X: 这是个什么企业？

X: What enterprise?

B: 省上的机械厂，在城东。

B: A machinery plant, east of the city.

.....

B: 老太太讲到后面就开始哭，默默流泪。从上午八点半，后来到十一点，说不好意思，耽误了你一天的时间。

B: The lady then started crying, silently. She stayed from 8:30am through 11am, and even apologized to me that she took my time.

X: 后来怎么解决的呢？

X: How was it settled?

B: 她人走之前，我先是打了电话，给主管厅局，机械厂的主管单位是机械厅（工信厅的前身），她也没有材料，不会写字。她应该是试探性地看能不能解决，听院子里其他人说，才来省委，觉着这里能管用。但她本身应该也很忐忑。

我电话里提了要求，也很严厉，三天之内要必须把补助费交齐，也包括之前没按新政策给的差额，也要一次补请。厂里没有能力的话，主管厅应该垫上，这是他们自己的事情，我还说算我一份，否则力度不够。

我害怕他们不给解决，我说厅里、厂里领导个人来凑，算我一份，咱们一起凑钱给老太太垫上，后来第二天就解决了。我也说出方法来了，又是过年，时间特别。

年后上班第一天，初六她就又来了，说是专门感谢来了。第二天厂里就把钱送到家里去了。

B: Before she left, I made a phone call to the department in charge of the factory, the machinery department (predecessor of today's Department of Industry and Information Technology, 工业和信息化厅). She didn't have any material, nor could she read or write. She was only attempting with us; she said she heard about us from some neighbor. But she wasn't sure if it could really help.

I made requests to the machinery department on the phone, strict ones: they should pay up the unpaid allowances in three days once and for all, including making up the balance of the older and lower allowances. If the factory doesn't have the money, the department should pay. After all it resulted from their wrongs.

I still worried that they might postpone it. Then I strengthened my tone a bit. I said, if the department doesn't have the money, the factory and the department leaders should pay the lady personally, and in that case, count me in as well. And it was well solved the next day. After all, I did give out an applicable way, and it was the New Year, a special time.

Finally the first day of work after the festival, she visited my office expressing gratitude, and told me the factory brought the money to her house the next day.

X: 那么就是我们转交到主管厅，主管厅再向单位施压？

X: So we usually transferred to the related department, and the department then pressures the employer?

B: 是，这属于信访的工作原则，归口交办。也有和地方政府的问题。

04年前后有某县的离休干部，来我们这里上访，投诉拖欠离休费和医药费。他反映自己的离休费拖欠很久了，至少一年以上了，家里情况也非常困难。找县上、单位，包括市政府，最后找到我们。

按道理我应该把事情交给市局去处理。那天感觉家里很困难，急，想尽快解决这件事，说到“门难进，脸难看，事难办”，我就按电话本，把电话打给县委书记办公室了。我问，你是书记吗，他说我不是，我想电话没打错啊，那书记是哪里，但我是直呼全名的，这跟只叫他书记的语气是不一样的。意思也是公事公办的。

他就说，那你有事你说，我就怀疑就是他本人，或者他的秘书。我继续问书记电话多少，你能解决问题吗，他也坚持让我说事情，我这儿还忙着呢。一直说到快要说僵了，他连是谁都不告诉我，说得就不太好。我后来话就说得不好听了，说要去组织部查查这个电话你到底是谁。

我就去组织部查了之后，发现换成了新上任的张书记。我就又打电话，这次我就直问他是张书记吗，他就知道我真的去查了，语气也好多了，我说，你刚刚为什么不呢，为什么要说自己忙着呢，你事儿多，我事儿也不少，他就让我说什么事。

我说不说事，先说你的态度问题。你书记都是这样子，难怪你们县的老干部要告状告到省里来，态度这么牛气，我还报了家门，是省委单位，组织对组织你都不跟我报名字，你说我要不要跟组织部刘部长汇报一下你的工作情况，“表扬表扬”你。他立刻说，你是领导你批评。

他后来态度软化，我也不能揪着人不放，后来也知道他其实是个不错的人，最后事情也就得到了解决，就完了。

B: Yes, it is a working principal, assigning case files to related offices. And I also encountered lower localities before.

In 2004, a retired cadre petitioned for retirement allowances and medical expenses in default. It was at least over one year. Besides, his family was worse off economically. He had been petitioning to the county, the employer and the municipal authority, and finally, us.

Procedurally I should forward it to the municipal bureau. But I felt it was too urgent for such a poorly funded family. He also mentioned that he had run into indifferent response by the county authority. I dialed directly to the county Party secretary. I asked, are you the secretary. It answered no. I was sure I dialed the right number, and then asked where the secretary was and whether you could put him on the phone. I called “secretary” before a full name, and the tone was tougher, meaning I was taking things seriously.

The guy there didn't answer my question, but said, "Speak of your business anyway." I suspected it was himself or his secretary. Thus I continued to ask for the secretary, and question whether he could fix my problem. He didn't give in, and insisted I speak of my business. He even impatiently said, "I am pretty much busy already." The dialogue was deadlocked, since he refused to tell me who he was. Long story short, I threatened I would go to the Provincial Organization Department³⁷ and find out who he was.

No bluffing, I went to the organization department, and found out he was Secretary Zhang who just assumed office shortly. I called him back, asking whether he was Zhang. Having known that I really did go to the organization department (and I had strong connections there that could help me check out his file so quickly), he spoke in a much more friendly and softer tone. I said, "Why did you not tell me just now? You said you were busy, and I'm as busy!" Then he asked what affairs I called him for.

"No," I said, "I'd rather talk about your attitude first. You the secretary speaks this arrogantly to someone like me who identifies himself as a provincial government official. No wonder that retired cadres from your county had no way to complain but come to my door. Refused to tell me who you are. Now you tell me, should I report this to the organization department and Director Liu about your doing, *compliment* you a bit?" Zhang promptly said, "Boss you are welcome to criticize me, please."

Since he had softened up, I shouldn't hold him up to it too much. Later I learnt from others that he was actually a pretty nice guy and cadre, not indifferent to the masses. And the petitioning was perfectly addressed, and so it was ended.

X: 这是一次比较特殊的处理吧?

X: It was quite unusual, wasn't it?

B: 是的, 因为是直接打到县里, 最后市局一周内也给我回话了, 事情就解决了。

还有过事业单位, 大概在 05、06 年, 社科院的老教授, 当时已经去世了, 拖欠医疗费一百多万, 他的儿女经济能力很好, 所以没报销自己也垫着了。老人走了以后, 儿子就来了, 解决报销。国家拨款, 应该和国家机关没有任何区别。一百三十多万, 数额大, 印象深。跟社科院联系过了之后, 发现这还不是一个老干部, 还有其他老干部, 都要解决。

这是一个督办件, 就是要跟踪要结果的。当时是四个本子, 一是接待访客的来访件, 二是来信上访的信访件, 三是领导批复的信访件, 四是要向下要结果的督办件, 这是最基本的四种案件。

我们把信件转到社科院, 人也来访了, 也有信, 带着信来的, 谈完以后留下一封信, 当时很多上访群众是这种情况。转过去以后就希望他们报回结果, 他们的回复是分期解决, 分三次补交, 一年内解决。

B: Yes, normally I should not have called the county directly. The municipal bureau responded to me one week later, and solved the problem.

³⁷ The Organization Department is charged with the personnel power over the CCP cadres, whether in the Party organization or in the government.

Public organizations as well. Social sciences academy, 2005 or 2006, a senior professor. The professor had already passed actually. The unpaid medical reimbursement exceeded one million *yuan*. His children were economically capable, and thus they covered it. After the professor passed, the son came to us. It should have been paid with state revenue. It was such a large number, over 1,300,000, and left me a deep impression. I contacted the academy, and found out they were also faced with other cadres and professors' expenses.

It was a supervised-to-be-done case, which requested a closed case. I had four notebooks back then: one to record visitors; one to record letters; one to record those who were responded by the provincial leadership; and one to record these cases that I needed to track. This was my basic typology of petitioning cases.

I forwarded the letter to the academy. The petitioner came with a written letter, and left the letter upon leaving, which used to be a common pattern of petitioners. Finally, the academy responded that they would reimburse the expenses separately three times within the year to come.

X: 所以这些事是完美解决了，那么有很难解决的事情吗？

X: These cases were all perfectly solved. Were there cases difficult to solve?

B: 有，这类事也不少。

这个事情就记不清了。儿子、姑娘陪着老人一起来的，大概是在 04 年之前。老先生在门口敲门，一开门他们就跪在门口了，还喊“青天大老爷”，我说要请他进门，这样不好看，对我个人、对组织都不好看。我请他们起来，他们也不起来，他们这是在给你制造一种压力，他身子很重，拉不动他。我就拜托他儿女拉他起来，他们也不配合，应该是事先商量好了。

我也就没招了，就只能在他前面也跪下来，他就赶紧起来了，我说您是老同志了，您怎么能跪着，就都起来了。他也接受我了。我觉着要解决上访问题，不管是对下属单位还是对上访群众，要先让对方接受、信任你个人，然后才会接受你这个组织，否则先入为主就会认为你们官官相护，那就没办法了。

但他反映的是级别问题，觉着自己应该晋升到什么什么级别，自己被上级打击报复了，这就是不合理的要求。但是政策说得清楚，他的情绪摆不平，他如果不接受你个人，可能还会说是政策本身不合理。所以解释这件事，我还是得说，组织角度上说要坚持原则。

B: Of course, and quite a few.

This I really cannot remember clearly. The senior was accompanied by son and daughter, in the early 2000s. He knocked the door, and the second I opened the door, he kneeled down at my door, shouting “just savior official!” I asked him to stand up and sit down on my chair, and said this looked ugly not only on me, but on the bureau. He refused to stand up. This is a way to create pressure on you. And I tried pulling him up to his feet, and he was too heavy. His children didn't help me as well. Apparently it was a prepared strategy.

I was out of moves. I kneeled down in front of him. Then he just stood up. I said, “You are a senior comrade, and how could you kneel to me?” We both stood up. I would say,

to solve petitioning, whether to other relevant offices or to the petitioners, you must make yourself accepted and acknowledged by them as an individual, personally; only then can they accept and acknowledge your organization. Otherwise the petitioners would just presume officials all share a conspiracy of silence. That'd be the worst.

But his problem was about career promotion. He felt he should've been promoted long ago, if not for retaliation by his superior officials, which was unreasonable. Therefore in explaining this to him, I had to insist our Party's organizational principles.

II. DESCRIPTIVE DATA FROM THE BACKGROUND WEBSITE OF THE GOVERNOR'S MAILBOX

The table below is made with data collected in February 2017 from the background website of the Governor's Mailbox, which contains three months picked from the year of 2017 on the basis of randomness.

The Content	June 2016	November 2016	December 2016	Total
Complaint on Neighborhood Services	6	48	11	65
Household Market Dispute	31	24	36	91
Land Ownership Dispute	no data	20	17	37
Immigrant Workers Unpaid	33	19	35	87
Traffic Issues	17	17	12	46
Noise Pollution	5	4	1	10
Environmental Protection	22	9	19	50
Education	41	26	20	87
Senior Welfare	no data	14	16	30
Policy Advice	47	48	51	146
Registered Residence & Social Security	no data	16	17	33
Malpractice by Governmental Offices	37	30	36	103
Malpractice by Village Cadres	no data	19	19	38
Expression of Gratitude	no data	1	1	2
Total	377	295	293	965

**III. 2017 ANNUAL TASKS ON S PROVINCE INTERNET GOVERNMENTAL
SERVICES PLATFORM BUILDING, REPORTED TO THE STATE COUNCIL
AND DISCLOSED, EDITED AND TRANSLATED**

Sub-project #1 Online Services Platform Building

Fiscal Season 1:

To draft the building-up schemes, and complete the process of project approval;

Fiscal Season 2:

To develop the platform for data sharing and exchange, and that of governmental services management system;

Fiscal Season 3:

To run performance tests and security tests for the online platforms;

Fiscal Season 4:

To conduct the online trial operation.

Sub-project #2 Construction of the Provincial Governmental Services Center

Fiscal Season 1:

To launch the construction project to upgrade and renovate the Provincial Governmental Services Center;

Fiscal Season 2:

To recruit staff members for the Center, and to draft the Center's regulations for work management;

Fiscal Season 3:

To install indoors office facilities and equipment, and the on-the-site public services system;

Fiscal Season 4:

To conduct the trial operation.

Sub-project #3 Normalization and Optimization for the Governmental Services

Fiscal Season 1:

To define the system of the provincial governmental services administration;

Fiscal Season 2:

To disclose a full list on the content of governmental services; to straighten up the administrative licensing by the provincial departments, including the processes and materials required for licensing;

Fiscal Season 3:

To simplify the processes online, combined with the online trial operation of the platform; to locate and correct errors, and to form a model applicable across the province;

Fiscal Season 4:

To initiate other public services of the province, following the above steps.

Sub-project #4 Construction of a Standardized Process**Fiscal Season 1:**

To draft a full content of a standardized “Internet Governmental Services” system;

Fiscal Season 2:

To set up a series of standards on the administration of the province’ services centers on the ground;

Fiscal Season 3:

To set up technical criteria on the online services, especially those on open government data;

Fiscal Season 4:

To generate a guiding document on the online governmental services platform building for municipal localities.