

Causes and Consequences of Grievances in Rural China\*

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The new Chinese political leadership has already distinguished itself by focusing efforts—rhetorically, symbolically, and substantively—on the plight of the Chinese peasant. This is the distinctive tone President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao have set since taking over China's top two leadership positions during the First Session of the Tenth National People's Congress in March 2003. The widening gap between rural and urban China has become increasingly salient, galvanizing public debate and popular protest. Resolving the "three rural issues" (*san nong*)—referring to farming, peasants, and the countryside—and the problem of "peasants' burdens" (*nongmin fudan*) appear to be high on the new administration's list of priorities. Researched and written by two peasants-turned-authors, *An Investigative Report of Chinese Peasants* (Chen and Chun 2004), a poignant account (supposedly able to reduce all but the most hard-boiled readers to tears) of peasant hardships, and selling over 100,000 copies in its first month, has elevated public attention and public sympathy to new heights (Ma 2004). The magnitude of peasants' burdens dominates each of this book's nine chapters.

Peasants' burdens refer to the wide array of taxes and fees imposed on peasants, often irregularly and illegally. Despite their complexity and significant regional variation, rural taxes are commonly divided into three basic categories: (1) agricultural taxes (*nongye shui*), (2) township and village levies (the so-called *san ti wu tong*), and (3) miscellaneous local fees—the so-called "three arbitraries" (*san luan*).<sup>1</sup> The technical details of rural taxation are beyond the scope of this paper, and are covered thoroughly by Bernstein and Lü (2003), Aubert and Li (2002), and Lin et al. (2002).

In the wake of fiscal decentralization, local governments have been effectively cut off from higher-level support and are overwhelmingly dependent on local revenue (Wong 1997;

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<sup>1</sup> The "three arbitraries" are sometimes translated as the "three irregulars," and include arbitrarily levying fees (*luan shoufei*), arbitrarily levying fines (*luan fakuan*), and arbitrarily apportioning (*luan tanpai*). To these three "arbitraries" is sometimes added "arbitrarily launching inspections" (*luan jiancha*).

Wedeman 2000). Local fiscal autonomy has both strengthened the taxing authority of local governments and put the maintenance and development of local infrastructure (roads, schools, hospitals, and so on) at the mercy of local tax collection efforts. In some areas, this policy has stimulated local leaders to invest government funds in local industry. Successful township and village enterprises (TVEs) form a solid tax base for local government (Oi 1992, 1998, 1999; Walder 1995, 1998). In these areas, TVEs tend to carry the bulk of the tax burden, and peasants' burdens tend to be lighter.

But what happens in areas that have failed to industrialize? Khan and Riskin (1998: 238) write that "in poorer localities, particularly those without prosperous township and village enterprises, local governments commonly impose various taxes and fees to support local services." Similarly, Bernstein and Lü (2003: 68) write:

The most important determinant of income levels and the severity of burdens on farmers was the extent of development of township and village enterprises, whether collective or private, commercial or industrial....TVEs became the pillars of the local economy and the source of revenue for local development. Local governments were able to count on TVEs to generate profits and taxes. A high level of nonagricultural enterprise held out the prospect that revenues from TVEs could relieve farm households from some or all of their burdens.

In this paper I use recent survey data to test four propositions advanced by Bernstein and Lü (2003): (1) taxes and fees imposed on peasants are highly regressive, (2) TVEs reduce this peasant burden, (3) taxes and fees are a major source of peasant grievances and complaints, and (4) the legal system remains, for the most part, inaccessible and unhelpful. The research on rural grievances remains largely anecdotal and overly reliant on official government data stitched together by a smattering of scattered case studies and media reports. This paper represents the first attempt to measure the causes of rural grievances using large-scale survey data. After identifying important causes of grievances, my next task in this paper is to measure responses

and reactions to grievances: What do peasants do about the various problems they encounter? Finally, I conclude this paper by evaluating the significance of grievances and tax burdens on overall life satisfaction.

The data used in this paper were collected in the winter of 2002, a watershed in the history of China's rural tax burden. Rural tax reforms were tested in 2000-2001 (Hsieh 2001), with Anhui Province serving as the experimental laboratory (Bernstein and Lü 2003: 201-4). In March 2004, at the Second Session of the Tenth National People's Congress, Premier Wen Jiabao promised to abolish agricultural taxes nationwide within five years. In the same month Heilongjiang and Jilin Provinces announced that its peasants would no longer pay agricultural tax effective immediately. At the same time Henan, Hebei, Anhui, Shandong, Liaoning, and six other provinces announced tax reductions (Sun 2004). By capturing the situation of rural grievances when the problem of peasants' burdens may have reached its apex, this survey project establishes an important empirical baseline.

In this paper I am mainly concerned about the question of peasants' appealing to higher authorities. Under what conditions are grievances contained within villages? Under what conditions do grievances spill over to higher levels of government? How prominent are formal legal channels—the courts, lawyers, and other judicial offices—in the overall landscape of grievances and disputes?

### **Taking Grievances Above and Beyond the Village**

The history of peasant appeals to higher authorities in China has deep roots (e.g., Ocko 1988; Macauley 1998). The tiered, step-by-step nature of working through layers of government administration remains a very prominent feature of the disputing process in China. In contrast to the "naming, blaming, claiming" (or "dispute pyramid") approach to the study of American

disputing, in which disputants appear to jump into the legal system when an informally negotiated or mediated settlement is not forthcoming (Miller and Sarat 1980/81; Sarat 1985), bureaucratic solutions occupy a central place in the Chinese disputing process.<sup>2</sup> The administrative party formally responsible for resolving a given problem is rarely ambiguous, and administrative hierarchies are such a central dimension of social and political organization that "going up a level" (*zhao shangji* or *zhao lingdao*) in pursuit of a remedy is the most natural—indeed the default—course of action when the responsible party fails to satisfy the complainant (Shi 1997: 51-4; Xin 1999: 448).

This tiered character of disputing is poignantly revealed in Zhang Yimou's classic film, *The Story of Qiuju*, about a peasant woman's pursuit of justice after informal conciliation efforts failed. Working her way up through township and county police channels, she eventually found her way into the city court system with the help of a lawyer. In a study of 179 peasant appeals to the *The Farmers Daily*, the majority of the complainants had worked their way up through each successive level of government—the village, township, county, city, and provincial governments—and were in Beijing appealing to central government authorities because all earlier attempts had failed. While in Beijing, most complainants approached three or more central government offices and media outlets (Zhao 1999). Indeed, official regulations prohibit skipping or bypassing administrative levels (Li 2001: 585n585). According to Bernstein and Lü (2003: 183): "Complaints should be made to the next higher administrative unit or to the one above that. If petitioners didn't abide by this rule and contacted a higher administrative level, the higher level should not accept the complaints, unless 'it regards it as necessary to deal with it directly.'"

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the underrepresentation of bureaucratic solutions to everyday conflict in the United States is one of the main criticisms of the "naming, blaming, claiming" model of disputing (see Emerson 1992).

There is no doubt government leaders, fully aware of intense and widespread rural discontent, perceive an immediate threat to social stability. The *xinfang* system (literally meaning "letters and visits"), originally established in the 1950s, has been strengthened in recent years in order to contain the growing volume of conflict and preserve social stability. The *xinfang* system includes a large network of offices vertically spanning many levels of government and horizontally spanning many administrative jurisdictions. Besides the official Xinfang Administration, there are *xinfang* departments in the State Council, in the public security system, in the courts, in the procuracy, and in the Women's Federation, just to name a few examples. Indeed, most government offices are potential sites for citizen complaints. The term *shangfang* (literally meaning "to appeal to a higher authority," which can be virtually *any* government authority) is almost synonymous with *xinfang*. Besides these terms, additional vocabulary to describe taking grievances above and beyond the village include "reporting situations" (*fanying qingkuang*), "filing a written complaint" (*gaozhuang*), "lodging a complaint or appeal" (*tousu*), and "reporting a complaint" (*jubao*).

The party's overriding goal of preserving social and political stability is supported by the *xinfang* system; one of its explicit functions is to preserve stability by containing and resolving conflict before it escalates and spreads. The renewed importance attached to the *xinfang* system led to the promulgation of the *Regulations on Letters and Visits* by the State Council and of the *Provisional Rules on Public Security Organs' Accepting Complaint Petitions* by the Ministry of Public Security in 1995. Since then, China's leaders have continued to promote and buttress the *xinfang* system: "Between April 14 and July 21 of this year [2003], Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao, Zeng Qinghong,<sup>3</sup> and other comrade leaders issued a series of directives on doing good *xinfang* work

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<sup>3</sup> These leaders are, respectively, the president, the premier, and the vice-president of China.

and reducing the problem of repeat complaints and collective complaints from the masses" (Wang and Huang 2003).

At the current time, China's overall economic and political position is a good one. However, following the deepening of the reforms and a shift in the structure of interests and gains, some contradictions and anxieties in social life have already sharpened. For example, the ranks of laid-off workers have expanded in some areas, and life has become more difficult; in some areas the burdens of peasants have grown too heavy, gravely impacting the enthusiasm of peasant production; in some areas crime is bad; and so on. All these conditions are factors contributing to collective visits and the instability of government and society. *For all these reasons, failing to handle matters properly will harm social stability.* (Li 2002, emphasis added)

But there are indications the xinfang system is in crisis, stemming in large measure from the growing burdens of peasants, land disputes, local corruption, vengeance and retribution (particularly on the part of local leaders), and judicial favoritism (*sifa bu gong*) and the perversion of justice (*xunsi wangfa*) (Zhao 1999; also see Luehrmann 2003: 863). Nationally, the volume of complaints brought to xinfang offices increased every year between 1993 and 2002. Only the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003 could reverse this seemingly unstoppable upwards trend. SARS, of course, did not reduce grievances, but only the incidence of official complaints during a time when people avoided crowded, public places for fear of contracting the virus. The result of this accumulated, backlog of complaints was that between June and September, following the World Health Organization's proclamation of China's successful control of SARS, the number of complaints made in xinfang offices was about 60 percent more than in the same time period the previous year (Wang and Huang 2003).

The source of what appears to be a crisis lies with the inability of village and other local leaders—including the staff of local xinfang offices—to resolve problems and prevent them from becoming appeals to higher levels of government. A phenomenon of the "three 80-percents" has emerged: on the basis of survey research, over 80 percent of visits have been determined to be (1)

complaints about basic-level government, (2) complaints made for good reason, or (3) complaints that were produced by the neglect of local agencies (Zhao 2003: 24).<sup>4</sup> Given a shortage of other avenues of redress, the xinfang system is popularly viewed as a "cure-all" (*wanjinyou*) for an impossibly broad range of issues. Owing to their unrealistic mandate, xinfang personnel complain that they are "in charge of everything but can take charge of nothing, cannot overlook anything but are able to neglect everything" (Zhao 2003: 23).

Complaints made at local xinfang offices are typically handled in one of the following manners. The first method is to forward supporting documents brought by the complainants to the relevant government agency—which, more often than not, was already approached by the complainant to no avail—and to send the complainants home. A second method is to summon leaders from the complainants' place of residence to accompany the complainants home and resolve the matter locally. In either case, the actions of the xinfang office serve to bring the grievance full circle and to make "the destination the same as the origin" (Zhao 1999). Hence the growing volume of unresolved complaints finding their way to higher-level authorities. Under these circumstances, from the standpoint of government leaders, the looming threat to social and political stability is palpable: "The majority of people who make complaints by visits have mastered the practice: 'a major ruckus leads to a major resolution, a small ruckus leads to a small resolution, and no ruckus leads to no resolution'" (Zhao 2003: 23-24).

In 1989 China introduced an administrative litigation system to provide yet another channel for lodging complaints against state leaders. Yet it is clear that administrative litigation in the court system—known popularly as *min gao guan* ("citizens suing officials")—barely makes a dent; compared to other channels, the formal legal system is rarely invoked. While just

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<sup>4</sup> In another published report, the various "80 percents" are actually "over 80 percent" and refer to collective complaints. A fourth "80 percent" is: "over 80 percent of complaints reflect problems created by the reform and development process" (Wang and Huang 2003).

over 98,000 administrative litigation cases were accepted nationally in 1998 (Li and O'Brien 2004: Table 1), province-level authorities in Hunan Province handled over 300,000 complaints in the same year; this figure is for only one province, and does not include complaints processed through lower-level xinfang offices (Luehrmann 2003: 857). In 1995 over half a million labor disputes were brought to xinfang offices across China (Oakley 2002: 112). In the first three quarters of 2002, 8.6 million complaints were made nationally in xinfang offices at the county-level of government and higher (Wang and Huang 2003), a case volume over 80 times greater than the number of administrative litigation cases. Nevertheless, administrative litigation has been hailed as an important step (Pei 1997; Peerenboom 2001), albeit with severe limitations (Li and O'Brien 2004).

*Min gao guan* appears even less applicable to China's rural context. Not only are courts less geographically accessible to villagers than they are to city residents, but they are notoriously hostile to rural petitioners (Bernstein and Lü 2003: 190-6). At the same time, Chinese lawyers (*lüshi*, the only category of legal counsel besides state prosecutors formally qualified to do trial work) are almost exclusively urban creatures; they are very hard to find in the countryside (Michelson 2003: 32). Consequently, Ian Johnson's (2004) poignant portrayal of peasants using the legal system to fight injustice at the hands of local tyrants notwithstanding, we should not expect the formal legal system to occupy a prominent place in the larger landscape of disputing in rural China. Furthermore, given the tiered nature of disputing in which complainants seek resolution through bureaucratic channels, villagers who end up in the legal system tend to be there only after each prior step failed in a long series of conciliatory and administrative attempts. In short, villagers do not go straight to court; rather they are reluctantly pushed backwards into the legal system with particularly sticky problems no other office was able to redress. Problems

as sticky as these are rarely even resolved by the courts. In general, we should expect that the higher up the chain the dispute forum is, the stickier the problem, and the less likely a happy ending will be forthcoming to the complainant. Conversely, the lower on the chain the dispute reaches its conclusion, the more likely the complainant will attain a satisfactory outcome.

## **Data and Methods**

The survey on which this paper is based was completed in January and February of 2002 in several dozen villages in Shaanxi, Jiangsu, Henan, Hunan, and Shandong Provinces as well as the city of Chongqing (formerly of Sichuan Province, and now under the direct jurisdiction of the central government). The survey sites were not selected randomly, but purposively. The counties included in the survey were chosen with the goal of maximizing regional and economic variation.

The original plan was to survey 100 households in each of 5 villages in each of 5 counties, totaling 3,000 households in 30 villages. In the end 2,970 usable questionnaires were gathered. But instead of 30 villages in 6 counties, our sample includes households in 55 villages in 7 counties. The deviation from the original design is concentrated in the Shandong survey site, where 444 households in 23 villages were surveyed, of which 19 households in a single village were located in a separate, neighboring county. In this paper, I exclude this errant village, as well as an additional 18 villages in which fewer than 15 households were interviewed. (Of these 18 villages, 12 are in the original Shandong sample.) After dropping these cases, 2,902 households in 37 villages remain: 10 villages in the Shandong sample, 6 villages in the Henan and Hunan samples, and 5 villages the Henan, Jiangsu, and Chongqing samples.

Figure 1 shows the location of the samples. The Jiangsu and Shandong counties are coastal, while the remainder are inland. Located on the outskirts of major cities, the Jiangsu and Chongqing counties are urban satellite villages, while the remainder are relatively isolated. Table

1 captures the magnitude of variation among these counties. By all measures—per capita GDP, nonfarm work, the proportion of households with telephones, and so on—the disparity of wealth is phenomenal. The county in Jiangsu Province happens to be one of the richest rural areas—if not *the* richest rural area—in China. Just outside Shanghai (falling under the jurisdiction of the city of Suzhou, and near the cities of Wuxi and Changzhou), Taicang County belongs to the area of Jiangsu Province south of the Yangtze River known as Sunan. Good overviews of the villages of Sunan have been written by Li (1997: Chapter 5) and Kung (1999). Some particularly famous villages receiving international publicity include Mabei Village (featured in the 1994 BBC documentary film, *The Giant Awakes*) and Huaxi Village (Hong 2001). Compared to an average per capita GDP of 4,881 *yuan* for the other five counties and compared to China's national per capita GDP of 8,184 *yuan* (SSB 2003: Table 2-7), Taicang's per capita GDP in 2002 was 35,169 *yuan*. Next in order of economic development is Shandong Province's Jimo County. Much has also been written about rural Shandong in celebration its successful TVEs (e.g., Oi 1992, 1998, 1999; Walder 1998; Wong 1997).

Figure 2 captures various dimensions of village-level variation. The villages in this sample are clearly polarized between rich and poor, industrialized and non-industrialized. With respect to wealth and development, opportunities to work outside the village, and housing style, there is a conspicuous dualism among the surveyed villages. As we can see in Subfigure A, almost all the villagers of Taicang live in apartment complexes. A large proportion of Zhong County's villagers also live in this style of housing, which is not surprising given its close proximity to Chongqing. Subfigure B shows the heavy economic reliance in Taicang and Zhong Counties on work opportunities in nearby cities; even Yuanjiang County, which is not far from Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province, depends on income generated by its migrant labor

force. Subfigures C and D are entirely consistent with all images of Sunan region: Taicang is heads and shoulders above any other county in the sample in terms of nonfarm employment in general and employment in TVEs in particular. Given its reputation for successful TVEs, it is somewhat surprising that so few villagers in Shangdong's Jimo County are employed in TVEs. But of course the TVE success story cannot be generalized to every part of the province.

In the following section I first evaluate the magnitude and determinants of the peasants' burdens. The burden is defined as the sum of three sources of government levies: (1) agricultural taxes, (2) local government levies (*ti liu kuan*), and (3) other miscellaneous fees, fines, and levies. I lumped these three categories together rather than analyze them separately because it became clear that villagers in different locations classify local fees and taxes differently. For example, in some locations, the respondents included all local government levies in the agricultural taxes category.<sup>5</sup>

After analyzing the burdens of peasants, I turn to an analysis of peasant grievances. The presence of a grievance is identified from a list of 17 grievance types plus an open-ended "other" dispute category, allowing a respondent to report a maximum of 18 and a minimum of 0 grievances. If a respondent reported a grievance, she was then asked whether she (1) "took the loss and learned to live with it" (*chi dian'r kui, ren le suan le*), or, as I label this category in this paper, "lumped it" (see Felstiner 1974), (2) resolved the problem herself in consultation with her adversary (labeled "self-help" in this paper), or (3) sought the help of a third party. If the respondent indicated seeking the help of a third party, she was asked to describe the third party. The interviewers were instructed to record the respondent's description on the questionnaire form verbatim. Among the observations retained for the analyses in this paper, 578 unique third

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<sup>5</sup> Since this phenomenon was not anticipated, the survey administrators did not clarify these categories to the interviewers during training sessions. Thus, only by aggregating the three categories can we defensibly assume comparability across villages and counties.

parties were recorded for 956 separate grievances. Some of these responses include multiple third parties: two third parties are reported in 98 grievances and three third parties are reported in 17 grievances.

There are pros and cons of recording open-ended responses verbatim. On the plus side, open-ended data are extremely rich, carrying the original voices of the involved parties. The crude categories created from these detailed responses were dictated by the respondents, not by the *a priori* assumptions of the researchers. The cost of this richness, however, is the sheer difficulty making such coding decisions. Given that numerous classification systems can be derived from the original data, the benefits of recording data this way clearly outweigh the costs.

One of the goals of this paper is to measure the causes and consequences of going above and beyond the village—of climbing up the administrative hierarchy—in pursuit of justice. What counts as "going above and beyond"? My cutoff point is the village (*cun*), not only because this is intuitively sensible, but also because village officials represent the largest category of third-party intermediaries. Officials at higher levels of government administration, defined as the township (*xiang* or *zhen*) or higher, are treated as being beyond the village. Likewise, officials in government agencies, such as the Land Administration, Housing Administration, and Family Planning Administration, to name just a few examples, are classified as being beyond the village. Finally, in some analyses, the "beyond the village" category also includes police and official judicial channels. The lowest levels of public security administration and the legal system are at the township. In other analyses, however, police and legal channels are pulled apart and treated as independent categories. As much as I would have liked to separate lawyers from the courts and other branches of the judicial system, the small numbers of responses in these categories simply did not permit me from doing so. Only five response categories representing six

grievances include the word "lawyer." In addition to these categories, I created a final category for seeking help from informal relations, in which kin relations (immediate and extended family members), friends, and respected village elders who do not hold official posts are included.

After analyzing the conditions under which villagers choose different courses of action (or inaction) in response to a grievance, I continue with an analysis of the degree of satisfaction with the outcome of an encounter with a given third party. If a respondent indicates seeking the help of a third party, she was asked whether the *outcome* of the encounter and the *process* of the encounter exceeded, matched, or fell short of expectations. The purpose of asking these questions separately was to evaluate whether procedural justice and distributive justice are valued differently, and, if so, under what circumstances (see Tyler 1990). But since the answers to these two questions are so highly correlated, I examine only evaluations of outcomes in this paper.<sup>6</sup>

I conclude this paper with an analysis of overall life satisfaction. In particular I evaluate the importance of grievances and the burden of taxes and fees for how people report their general satisfaction with life.

## **Findings**

The empirical findings reported in this section validate the main propositions advanced by Bernstein and Lü (2003). First, the tax burden in rural indeed is regressive. Second, areas characterized by successful TVEs are also characterized by lighter peasant burdens. Third, areas characterized by heavy peasant burdens and low incomes report the most grievances and disputes, particularly grievances and disputes associated with agriculture, land, and water use. The survey

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<sup>6</sup> In this survey, outcome and process are answered identically in 84 percent of grievances. This is not dramatically lower than the 92 percent of identical answers in a similar survey carried out in Beijing in the summer of 2001 (Michelson 2002).

data also indicate that formal legal channels are very seldom used in rural China. Furthermore, on the rare occasions they are used, their users report overwhelming and almost unanimous disappointment.

## PATTERNS OF BURDENS

The magnitude of the peasants' burdens exhibits the kind of variation we might expect according to the scattered information available. To a real degree, however, the exercise of comparing different estimates is plagued by the problem of comparing apples and oranges. Some estimates measure only township and village levies (*san ti wu tong*), while some estimates measure all sources of taxes and fees. Premier Zhu Rongji stated in 2001 that township and village levies accounted for 10 percent of peasant incomes. One estimate puts the various levies at over 15 percent of peasant incomes in poor villages and below 5 percent in wealthier villages (Bernstein and Lü 2003: 52, 60-1). In one area, township and village fees amounted to 19.8 percent of peasant incomes (Chen and Chun 2003: Chapter 2), while in another area the peasant burden as a proportion of income in 1997, 1998, and 1999 was 11.99, 11.41, and 13.2 percent respectively (Chapter 8). In the early 1990s, villages reported by Lü (1997: 210) were forking over 14 to 15 percent of their incomes to local government agencies, while in other areas villagers were paying anywhere from 20 to 40 percent (Wedeman 2000: 492). Before the 1995 experimental tax reforms in Anhui Province, one county reported burdens of 30 percent of net incomes (Bernstein and Lü 2003: 184).

By any accounting method, these burdens exceed the 5 percent limit stipulated by State Council regulations implemented in 1986. But just how is this 5 percent limit calculated? Village and township levies are imposed as a head tax on each member of a household. This head tax

may not exceed 5 percent of the per capita net income for the entire township. For example, if the per capita net income for a given township is 1,000 *yuan*, the village and township levy may not exceed 50 *yuan* per person. This tax is therefore only equitable if the township averages for household size and household income exhibit no variation. At equal incomes, larger households pay a proportionally greater amount of tax. At equal sizes, poorer households pay a proportionally greater amount of tax.<sup>7</sup>

Among all the households in the survey, the average burden of all taxes and fees was 12 percent of total gross household income. Predictably, Taicang, with its spectacular TVEs, has the lowest peasant burden, at 6.2 percent. The two counties with the highest burdens are Hunan's Yuanjiang (23.4 percent) and Henan's Ru'nan (14.1 percent). Aubert and Li (2002) found the peasant burden to be the heaviest in Hunan, Henan, Hubei, and Anhui. Bernstein and Lü (2003: 62), too, report the highest tax burdens in the central provinces and the lowest in the coastal provinces.

Figure 3 reveals both the regressive nature of rural taxes and the correlation between the tax burden and grievances. The villages most reliant on agriculture, and therefore with little to no alternate sources of tax revenue, are taxed the most heavily (Subfigure A). Since reliance on agriculture is also very closely (and negatively) associated with income, the correlation between peasants' burdens and income is also strong and negative ( $r=-.59$ ). The villages principally dependent on agriculture, with little in the way of local industry, and therefore with low incomes are those that report the highest numbers of grievances (Subfigures B, C, and D).

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<sup>7</sup> Consider three households, each with four members. Assume a village and township levy of 50 *yuan* per head. With a total net income of 4,000 *yuan*, Household A's burden is 5 percent, exactly the maximum allowed according to the State Council regulations. With a total net income of 2,000 *yuan*, Household B's tax burden is 10 percent. Finally, with a total net income of 10,000 *yuan*, Household C's burden is only 2 percent.

It is worth noting that the Shandong county appears to be somewhat of an outlier. Not only is its tax burden (13.7 percent) higher than we would expect of a coastal area in a province famous for TVEs, but the respondents from this county reported very few grievances relative to respondents in other similarly poor farming villages with high tax burdens. One possible explanation is relatively low levels of cooperation from survey respondents. Reluctant and uncooperative villagers may also be the cause of the large numbers of villages with few respondents in the Shandong sample (discussed in the section on data and methods). But if they are not merely artifacts of the survey process, the seemingly low levels of grievances despite high peasant burdens and low incomes are worth investigating further.

Although several variables appear to be associated with the peasant burden, the scattergrams are bivariate and therefore do not tell us which, if any, of the variables are spurious, explained away by other variables. A regression analysis at the village level shows that reliance on agriculture remains significant in the final model. In the individual-level models, household reliance on agriculture, household income, household size, and village-level reliance on TVEs are all significantly associated with burdens. As a sizeable portion of peasants' burdens are in the form of a head tax, it is not surprising that the burden increases with household size (Table 2). In short, the regressive character of rural tax comes through loud and clear.

#### CORRELATES OF COMPLAINTS

Of all respondents, 43 percent did not report a single grievance, 16 percent reported one, 11 percent reported two, 10 percent reported three, and 20 percent reported four or more. As we can see in Table 3, the most commonly cited grievance is a problem with a neighbor (18 percent of all grievances), followed by water use (10 percent), heavy agricultural burdens (*nongye fudan*)

(10 percent), a domestic/household problem (9 percent), a problem with land or housing property ownership (7 percent), and a family planning problem (6 percent). Table 3 also shows that, overall, the plurality of reported grievances (47 percent) were dealt with and resolved directly with the adversary, the other involved party (or parties), what I label "self-help." One-third of all grievances are lumped. The category of seeking help from village leaders (8 percent) is larger than both seeking help from informal relations (6 percent) and seeking help beyond the village (7 percent).

Not surprisingly, divorces and problems that may be criminal matters involving the police are the least likely to be lumped or resolved through self-help. Problems concerning children's education are almost always resolved by approaching the schools directly. Labor problems are frequently resolved by approaching the employer directly.

In light of the seemingly endless reports of peasant protests and appeals to higher authorities, including collective complaints in the xinfang system and stemming from the problem of burdens, it is somewhat surprising that grievances associated with "agricultural burdens" are lumped as frequently as are internal household/family problems (44 percent). One interpretation of this finding is that the concerns voiced about a potential flood of complaints caused by peasants' burdens are overblown, that the overwhelming majority of such grievances (88 percent) are either lumped or resolved by direct negotiation (self-help). An alternate interpretation is that the volume of lumped grievances should be far more worrisome to leaders concerned about maintaining social stability; these lumped grievances represent latent conflict that could be galvanized into full-blown, overt conflict with the right catalyst. Using the sampling weights to extrapolate the volume of grievances to the total rural population in these six counties, the 24 instances of seeking help above and beyond the village over agricultural

burdens represent  $24 \div 4,757 \times 6,155,629 = 31,056$  instances. Meanwhile, the 205 instances of lumping agricultural burdens represent  $205 \div 4,757 \times 6,155,629 = 265,273$  potential instances of appealing to higher authorities, which should be of greater concern to government leaders.

It is possible that respondents are double-reporting grievances. More specifically, it is possible that some of the reported grievances reappear in the "dealings with a government office" category. After indicating a problem in dealings with an administrative or government office, the respondent is asked to report the name of the particular office. Individuals who reported problems with family planning offices also tended to report family planning grievances separately. Another possibility is that this pattern reflects a phenomenon of snowballing grievances, that new grievances are created in the process of trying to resolve earlier ones. For example, it seems entirely plausible that an individual with a grievance about a village leader's enforcement of the family planning policy who appeals to a higher-level family planning office will subsequently feel aggrieved by this higher-level administrative office. The question of double-counting or snowballing grievances cannot be answered with the survey data, but only through in-depth follow-up interviews.

As we saw in Figure 3, there are major differences by county in the volume of grievances. A regression analysis of the volume of grievances, of disputes, and of instances of seeking help above and beyond the village also captures this dramatic inter-county variation (see Table 4). Before introducing the county variables, the burden of taxes and fees is a statistically significant predictor of the total volume of grievances (Model 1 for "# Grievances Reported"). However, this variable is clearly a proxy for the county; this effects disappears when the county variables are introduced (Model 2). In all analyses in Table 4, Henan and Hunan are at the top in terms of volume of grievances, volume of disputes, and volume of appeals above the village. Bernstein

and Lü (2003: 191, citing Pei 1997) report that Henan and Hunan are the most litigious of all provinces: these two provinces alone accounted for 28 percent of all administrative litigation in 1994. Meanwhile, respondents in the coastal sites of Taicang and Jimo report the lowest numbers of grievances, disputes, and appeals to higher authorities.

It is also worth noting that a connection to a relative holding a post in a county- or higher-level government office is positively associated with seeking the help of a third party, and especially with seeking help outside the village. There is also a clear gender division of labor in seeking help. Men are significantly more likely than women to travel outside the village to appeal to higher authorities. This is consistent with Zhao's (1999) finding that among 173 peasant complaints brought to *The Farmers Daily* in Beijing in which the gender of the complainant was known, 150 were made by men. It is also consistent with data from a law firm in Beijing showing that women were more likely than men to consult by telephone while men were more likely than women to consult in person (Michelson, forthcoming). It is also interesting that elderly household members are more likely than younger members to leave the village in pursuit of justice. In the study of complaints made to *The Farmers Daily*, 125 out of 184 were made by people between 35 and 60. One possible explanation is that opportunity costs diminish with age; younger people are more likely to lose larger amounts of income from taking time off work to pursue the resolution of a grievance. But confirmation of these tentative explanations must await in-depth interviews with the individuals who act out this drama.

Table 5 contains a regression analysis of the correlates of selected grievance types. Before introducing household income into the equation, the burden of taxes and fees is a statistically significant predictor of a grievance over agricultural burdens. This effect disappears, however, when income is introduced, indicating that the burden of taxes and fees is a proxy for

household income. Not surprisingly, a household's amount of farmland is also a significant predictor of a grievance over agricultural burdens. The Henan and Hunan counties tend to be more likely than the other counties to report any of these selected grievances, while the coastal counties in Jiangsu and Shandong tend to be the least likely to report any of these grievances. The relatively high probability that respondents in the Henan and Hunan samples report grievances reaches its height in the case of agricultural burdens.

The positive association between household size and family planning grievances could be explained by any or both of the following: First, a large family may be large because it has already exceeded birth limits stipulated by family planning regulations. Such a situation would make such a family an obvious target of enforcement. Second, a large family is more likely to have members at risk of getting pregnant. In any case, the volume of family planning grievances is not trivial (see White 2000).

The associations summarized in this section are represented graphically in a scatterplot produced by the results of a multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) (Figure 4). The MCA algorithm behind Figure 4 was calculated using methods detailed in Greenacre (1984). MCA scatterplots are interpreted intuitively: the closer together the dots, the closer their association. Perhaps the most famous sociological application of MCA appears in Bourdieu (1984). The top of half of the graph contains the sample locations and the grievance types associated with both low income and a heavy tax burden. Both Henan's Ru'nan County and Hunan's Yuanjiang are located in this top section, far removed from the other four counties. Smack in the middle of these two counties is the agricultural burdens grievance. Meanwhile, at the extreme bottom-right corner, defined as the high-income, light tax-burden quadrant, is Sunan's Taicang County. Also in this quadrant is the other coastal sample, Shandong's Jimo County.

## COURSES OF ACTION (AND NONACTION)

In this section I discuss the findings of an analysis of actions—and the lack thereof—taken in efforts to redress grievances. Of the 578 unique descriptions of third parties provided by respondents, not a single one contains the words *xinfang* or *shangfang*, which should not be surprising insofar as these are often generic terms for appealing to government offices. The responses do show a hefty incidence of appeals to higher levels of government administration: 57 contain the word "government" (*zhengfu*) (74 grievances), 50 contain the word "agency" (*suo*) (77 grievances), 42 contain the word "department" (*bumen*) (48 grievances), 31 contain the word "leaders" (*lingdao*) (34 grievances), 20 contain the word "bureau" or "administration" (*ju*) (21 grievances), 15 contain the word "office" (*ban*) (17 grievances), 10 contain the word "organ" (*jiguan*) (12 grievances), 6 contain the word "bring to the attention" (*fanying*) (6 grievances), and 4 contain the word "higher level" (*shangji*) (4 grievances).

Some responses capture the tiered character of disputing, moving upwards through successive layers of government. One respondent appears to have emulated Qiuju: a 70 year old male from Yuanjiang, in response to a dispute with a neighbor, sought the help of village cadres before moving to the township government and police substation (*paichusuo*). He eventually ended up appealing to the city government. The combination of village and township levels appears in 24 responses (25 disputes); the combination of township and county levels appears in 8 responses (8 disputes). Since the respondents were only asked to supply information about a single third party, these data undoubtedly underreport the incidence of layer-by-layer, hierarchical movement through bureaucratic channels.

Formal legal channels (lawyers, courts, and judicial offices) are very unpopular choices. Even in hypothetical disputes, respondents appear very unwilling to turn to lawyers and courts. Respondents were presented with three hypothetical disputes: an economic dispute, a property dispute within the family, and an injury sustained from a physical beating. After reading each dispute description, the respondents were then asked to select three sources of help from a list of nine possible choices. Only 16 percent of all respondents indicated choosing a lawyer or a court for any of the three slots for any of the three hypothetical disputes.

Looking at the data on actual disputes, out of 4,757 grievances, in only 90 (less than 2 percent), was either a lawyer, court, or some other office of the judicial system (e.g., *sifa ban*, *sifa bumen*, or *sifa jigou*) approached. If we take all "disputes"—i.e., instances of seeking third-party help—as our denominator, these 90 instances of seeking formal legal help represent 8 percent. These 90 instances were reported by 79 individuals. These 79 individuals represent 5 percent of all individuals reporting grievances and 11 percent of all individuals reporting seeking the help of third parties. Given the very low incidence of selecting formal legal channels, I collapsed this category into "seeking help above and beyond village leaders."

At the end of the questionnaire, after the main battery of questions on grievances and disputes had been asked, respondents were then asked if they had ever consulted with a lawyer for any reason. Excluding the six respondents who had already indicated seeking a lawyer over a dispute they reported, an additional 89 respondents indicated seeking the help or advice of a lawyer. In response to the question that followed this one, an additional 61 respondents indicated consulting a lawyer for some other reason, such as on behalf of a friend or relative. If answers to these two questions are mutually exclusive (a dubious assumption given that 45 respondents

answered yes to both questions), a total of 119 respondents (or 4 percent of the sample) experienced some kind of encounter with a lawyer.

Table 6 contains a multinomial logit analysis of the odds of taking various courses of action in response to a grievance. What emerges instantly is the effect of income: Income increases the odds of taking any course of action other than lumping it. Conversely, poverty increases the odds of lumping it. This analysis confirms many of the patterns we observed earlier. The odds of resolving the grievance through direct consultation with the adversary (self-help) are highest in children's education, household responsibility land (farm land contracted by villages to households), consumer, and debt collection problems. Grievances over household responsibility land and other resources contracted (*chengbao*) by households from their villages also vastly increase the odds of seeking the help of village leaders.

The odds of seeking help from informal relations (friends and other family members) are expectedly high for household/family problems. More interestingly, the findings also show that the odds of mobilizing informal relations (a.k.a. *guanxi*) increase dramatically for problems related to dealings with government and administrative offices. Meanwhile, a problem with a government or administrative office diminishes the odds of seeking formal administrative or legal help. The interpretation is obvious: *guanxi* is a substitute for formal procedure including law; administrative difficulties tend to be resolved through *guanxi*, not formal appeals, much less administrative litigation. This interpretation is buttressed by the finding that the odds both of seeking help from informal relations and of appealing to authorities above and beyond the village are significantly higher among those who report close relatives in official positions of authority.

The gender and age effects are consistent with those we saw in Table 4: The odds of appealing to higher authorities outside the village are greater for men and the elderly. Finally, the

magnitude of the latent, potential conflict posed by the peasants' burdens is seen in the finding that agricultural burdens increase the odds of lumping it.

## EVALUATIONS OF OUTCOMES

One of the flaws in the design of the survey instrument, for which I am largely responsible, is that a respondent's evaluation of her disputing experience was only elicited if she indicated seeking the help of a third party. In other words, respondents were not asked to evaluate the outcome and process of lumping it or resolving the problem through direct consultation with the adversary (self-help). This limitation notwithstanding, we can still compare evaluations of outcomes produced by different kinds of third parties: informal relations (kin, friends, and respected village elders with no formal post), village leaders, administrative/government offices, police, and formal legal channels. The results of a probit analysis presented in Table 7 show that formal legal channels are not only unpopular numerically, but also deliver wildly unpopular results. Formal legal channels are more likely than any other category of third party to yield disappointing outcomes. The help of police is also disappointing. However, the disappointing effect of police involvement disappears after controlling for the nature of the problem (Model 3). That is, police tend to deal with problems that are inherently troubling, such as property damage and loss—precisely the problem most likely to produce disappointing results. Legal channels, in contrast, are uniformly disappointing regardless of the nature of the dispute. Close behind property damage and loss are dealings with government offices and agricultural burdens. That is, regardless of the respondent's county and regardless of which whom the respondent approaches for help, these problems increase the probability of disappointing outcomes.

These findings closely resemble those from a similar survey conducted in Beijing in the summer of 2001. The earlier Beijing data show that lawyers are uniformly disappointing, regardless of dispute type, while the courts tend to yield relatively satisfactory outcomes.<sup>8</sup> The Beijing data also show that the disappointment associated with police involvement disappears when controlling for dispute type: dealings with government offices and property theft and loss are the disputes most likely to lead to disappointment (Michelson 2002).

Why are legal channels so disappointing? When providing information about sources of help, most respondents reported only a single source of help, probably the final one if multiple sources were sought. Only 77 respondents reported 86 instances of seeking multiple sources of help (i.e., spanning more than one category of help). A task for future research is to gather complete disputing histories rather than truncated sound bites. Without more complete disputing histories, it is difficult to know how a respondent ended up in a lawyer's office or a courthouse and therefore difficult to say with any degree of certainty why disputes that percolate up to legal institutions tend to reach disappointing conclusions.

Total methodological despair is unwarranted, however. An analysis of the small number of multiple channels reported does permit an imperfect but highly suggestive view of dispute trajectories and their consequences. It appears that only the stickiest, most intractable grievances

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<sup>8</sup> The separation of lawyers and courts is problematized by what appears to be a significant incidence of reporting the use of courts and not the use of lawyers when in reality lawyers and courts were both involved. An analysis of answers from the rural survey to the two questions about consulting with lawyers that were asked after the main battery of questions about grievances and disputes suggests that some of the disputes over which respondents earlier indicated seeking the help of courts or judicial offices also involved lawyers. For example, a respondent who at the end of the questionnaire indicated seeking the help of a lawyer over "a dispute about peasants' burdens" had earlier indicated seeking the Village Committee, the Township Government, and a court in response to a dispute about "agricultural burdens." One respondent who at the end of the questionnaire indicated seeking the help of a lawyer over a contracting (*chengbao*) dispute had earlier indicated seeking the help of the Township Government and judicial departments (*sifa bumen*) in response to a household responsibility or other contracting dispute. Two respondents indicating at the end of the questionnaire consulting with lawyers over divorce matters had earlier indicated going to court because of a divorce.

move up the administrative hierarchy and ultimately find their way into the legal system. And it appears intractability does not often permit happy outcomes. Table 8 shows that disputes in formal legal channels were more likely than disputes in any other category to have worked their way up from other channels after failing to attain resolution in prior attempts. Of all disputes brought to formal legal channels, we know that at least 30 percent had also worked through other channels. Of all disputes involving police, at least 27 percent had been through other channels. Only at least 16 percent of disputes brought to village leaders and only at least 10 percent of disputes brought to informal relations were also brought to other third party types. The pattern is clear: Disputes brought to informal relations are the most likely to be resolved by informal relations and therefore not taken elsewhere. Disputes brought to village leaders are also more likely than disputes brought to other types of third parties to be resolved by village leaders, obviating the need to take the dispute to the next above the village. Only the truly difficult problems move through multiple channels, and these are the problems least likely to enjoy happy endings.

These associations are represented graphically in an MCA scatterplot (Figure 5). As with Figure 4, the associations can be interpreted qualitatively by eyeballing the proximity between dots. The bottom-right quadrant contains dispute types associated with appeals to higher-level authorities and disappointing outcomes. These dispute types include property damage/loss, personal injury, and agricultural burdens. The top half of the scatterplot includes dispute types associated with satisfactory outcomes obtained through the help of informal relations, including consumer disputes and household/family disputes. In the bottom-left quadrant are dispute types more likely brought to village leaders, such as problems with farm land and other resources contracted by villages to households, problems with neighbors, and water use problems.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COMPLAINTS

In this final section I try to evaluate the larger significance of grievances and the peasants' burdens. Do grievances have an impact on overall life satisfaction? Do peasants' burdens diminish general happiness? The regression models in Table 9 answer these questions unequivocally. The peasants' burdens exert a dramatic and detrimental effect on overall life satisfaction. Burdens not only produce grievances, but, together with these grievances, they erode also the general happiness of those who are subjected to them. Factors that contribute to life satisfaction include perceived physical health, a relatively high level of education by rural standards (regular high school), a village cadre in the household, and household income. Respondents who reported agricultural burdens separately are even more unhappy than those who objectively carry a heavy tax burden but do not report an agricultural burdens grievance.

The negative effects of peasants' burdens and agricultural burdens are each stronger than the positive effect of perceived physical health. By far the most powerful effect on satisfaction is income. These findings contrast greatly with the American pattern, at least the American pattern of 1973. Over thirty years ago, income was not a statistically significant predictor of life satisfaction in the United States. Perceived health, on the other hand, was statistically significant (Clemente and Sauer 1976). In the case of rural China, it is also noteworthy that the effect of perceived health diminishes to about half its original size after income is introduced to the model. This finding suggests that perceived health is a proxy for income. It suggests both that poorer people are less healthy because they are less able to afford healthcare, and that people who are less healthy earn less income because they are less able to work.

## Discussion and Conclusions

[this section is incomplete]

If I had time to write a proper conclusion, I would reiterate my argument that the real concern among government leaders should not be the actual spillover of conflict from the villages to higher levels of government. To be sure, the volume of appeals to higher-level authorities is far from trivial. Indeed, many villagers in this study had clearly invested substantial efforts and time pursuing redress above and beyond the village.

The picture one paints of rural grievances is determined by one's perspective. From the perspective of the government offices to which peasants appeal, the picture is of peasants vociferously and militantly complaining almost uniformly about local problems irresolvable in the localities. From the perspective of the villages, on the other hand, only a tiny minority of grievances stemming from peasants' burdens ever leave the villages. Almost half of the time, peasants who report burdens as a grievance simply lump it—they bite the bullet and swallow their losses. If remedies to peasants' burdens are not forthcoming, there is a real risk that this huge volume of latent grievances will reemerge and escalate into real conflict. At the current time, visible, overt conflict over peasants' burdens represents the proverbial tip of the iceberg. This situation is clearly more volatile than if visible, overt conflict represented the bulk of the iceberg.

The critic might propose a counter explanation looking something like this: villagers who are already depressed, miserable, and unhappy with their lives are predisposed to gripe. That is, the causality runs in the opposite direction. A preexisting condition of being unsatisfied with

their lives predisposes these grumpy people to complain about items listed for them. According to this logic, grumpiness explains at least a portion of the large volume of latent grievances over which no action in pursuit of redress has been taken. Extending this logic, the critic might propose the possibility that villagers predisposed to gripe also artificially inflated their tax burdens. Such a critique should only be considered credible if grumpy villagers are distributed roughly equally across the six counties in the survey. The results of this study show that the geographical distribution of grumpiness is far from equal, that the distribution of grumpiness exhibits a systematic pattern. In rural areas economically reliant on farming, peasants are bled to support local government expenditures. In rural areas with thriving TVEs and other sources of revenue, especially in the coastal provinces, on the other hand, peasants are spared the kinds of burdens their counterparts in the poorer, central provinces are forced to bear.

With heightened attention to the plight of the Chinese peasant, growing public sympathy, and a seemingly attentive central government administration intent on reducing the peasants' burdens, the situation may change rapidly.

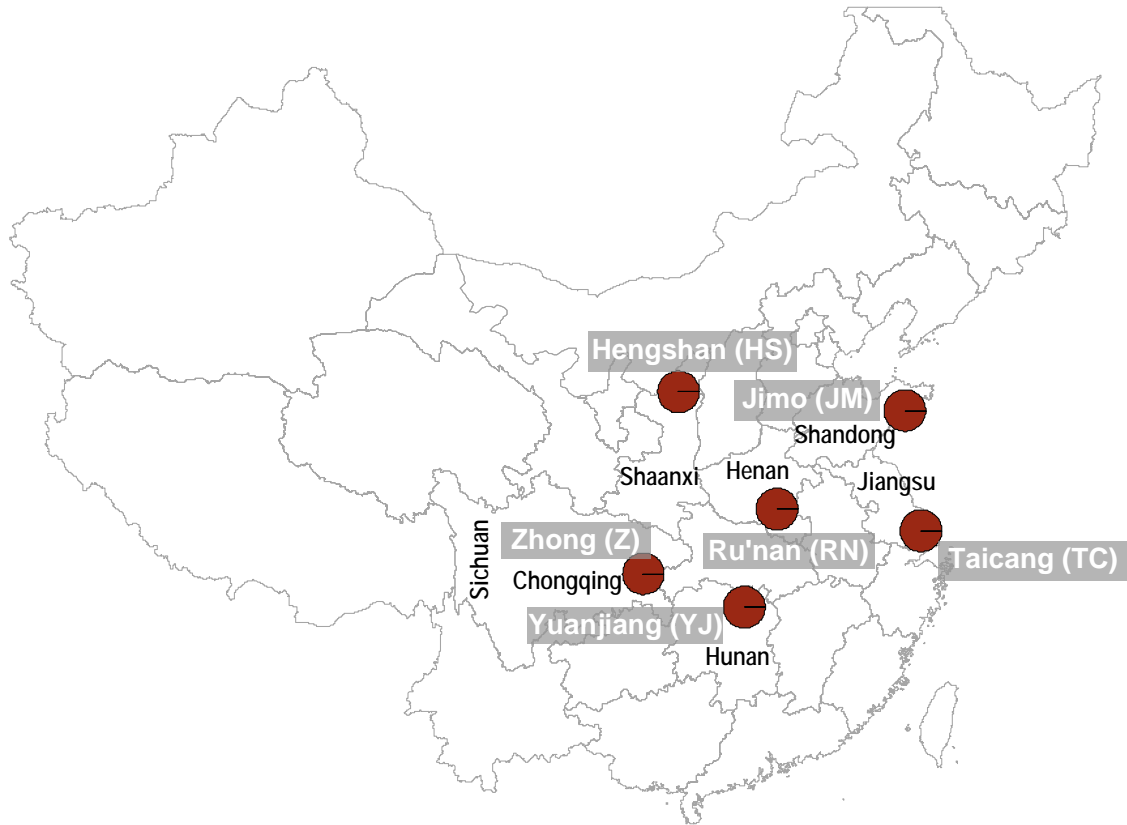
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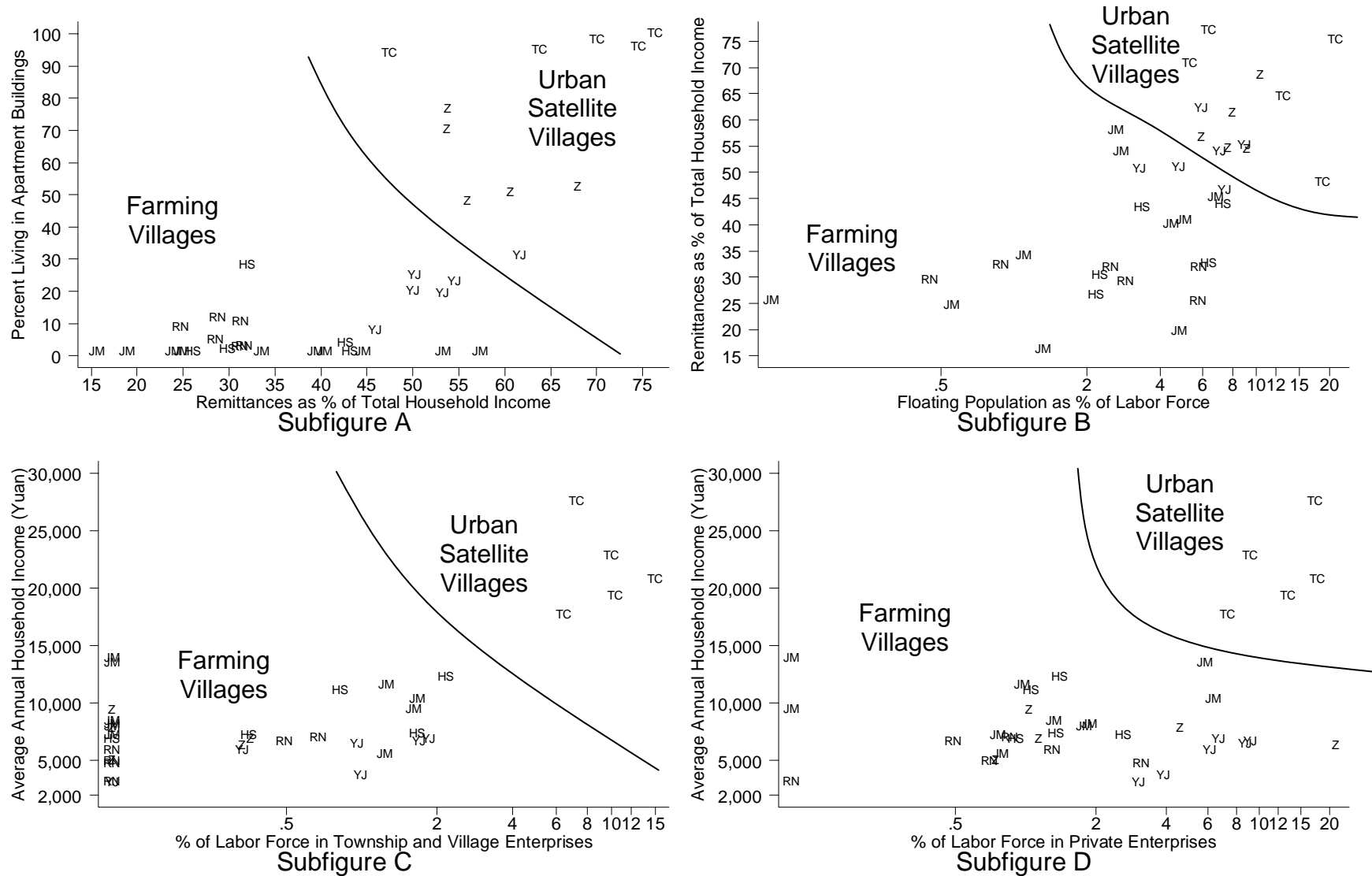
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**Figure 1. Map of Survey Sites**



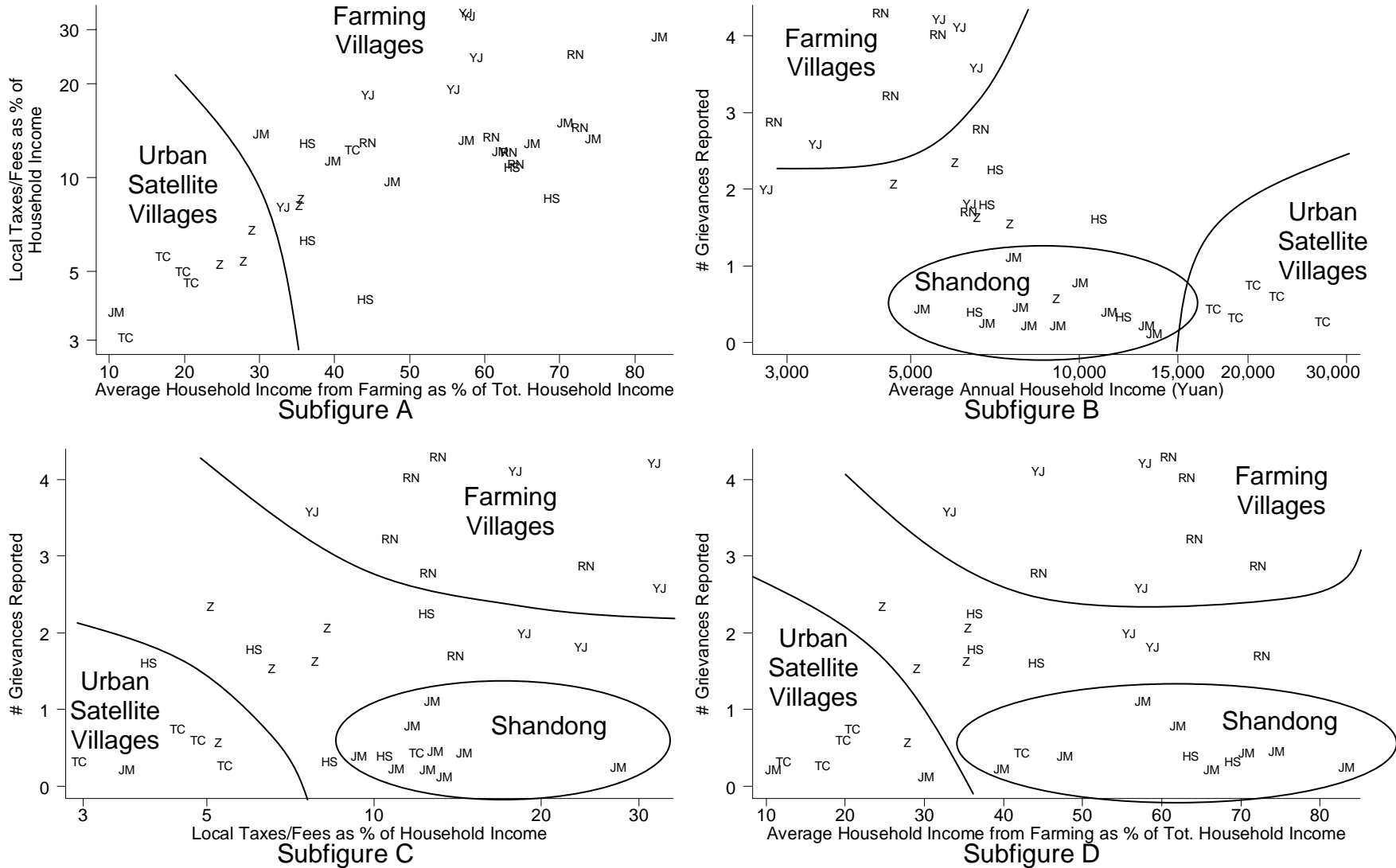
NOTE: County names are shaded; province names are unshaded.

**Figure 2. Village Characteristics**



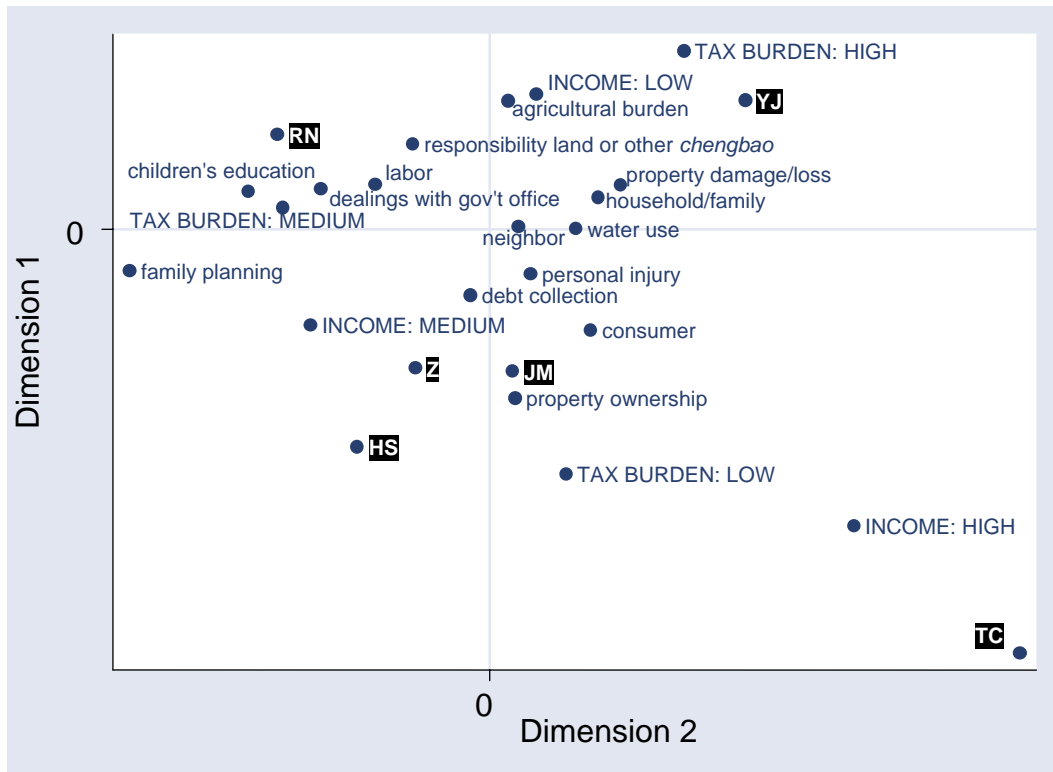
NOTE: n=37 villages; Subfigure A:  $r=.74$ ; Subfigure B:  $r=.60$ ; Subfigure C:  $r=.81$ ; Subfigure D:  $r=.55$ . "Remittances" includes the income of all household members earned through working outside the village, either in short spells or permanently (i.e., it may not be limited to money remitted, but may also include money brought back after a spell working in an outside location).

**Figure 3. Village-Level Correlates of Local Tax Burdens and Grievance Volumes**



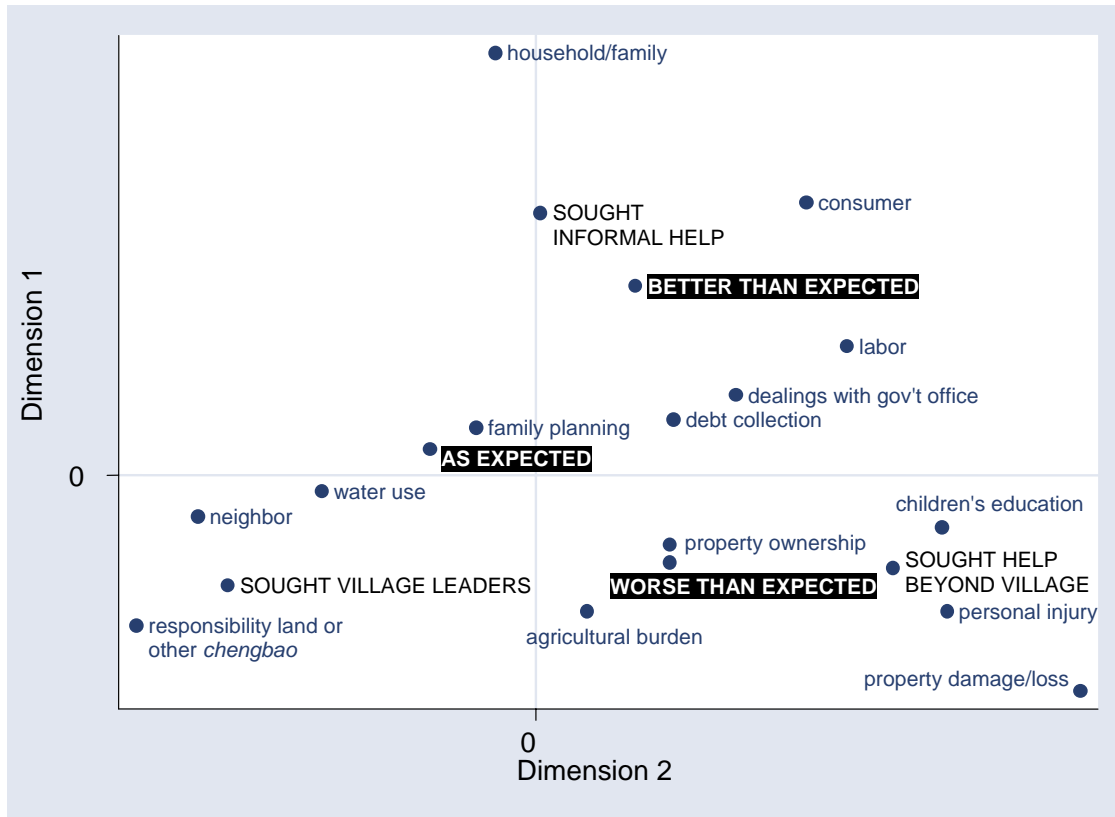
NOTE: n=37 villages. Subfigure A:  $r=.75$ ; Subfigure B:  $r=-.63$ ; Subfigure C:  $r=.36$ ; excluding Shandong  $r=.57$ ; Subfigure D:  $r=.17$ ; excluding Shandong  $r=.42$ .

**Figure 4. Multiple Correspondence Analysis of Grievances and their Correlates**



NOTE: Grievance types are in lower-case text. Counties are indicated in black boxes. (See Figure 1 for full names corresponding to acronyms.) Correlates appear in upper-case text. 4,777 grievances reported by 1,627 individuals in 37 villages. 90.8 percent of spatial variance is explained by two dimensional solution. A third dimension would explain an additional 7.4 percent. "Divorce," both categories of "accused of personal injury or theft," and "other" disputes were excluded owing to small numbers.

**Figure 5. Multiple Correspondence Analysis of Disputes and their Outcomes**



NOTE: Dispute types are in lower-case text. Channels of help are indicated in upper-case text. Evaluations of outcomes are in black boxes. 873 disputes among 539 individuals in 32 villages. 92.5 percent of spatial variance is explained by two dimensional solution. A third dimension would explain an additional 5.1 percent. "Divorce," both categories of "accused of personal injury or theft," and "other" disputes were excluded owing to small numbers.

**Table 1. Selected County-Level Characteristics**

county	SURVEY DATA		OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT STATISTICS (2002)					
	sample size	mean per capita household income	per capita rural income	total population	rural population	per capita GDP	% non-agricultural labor force	% households with telephones
Taicang (Jiangsu)	501	3,505	5,796	448,900	270,000	35,169	40%	98%
Jimo (Shandong)	387	2,168	3,677	1,069,000	960,000	12,195	24%	73%
Yuanjiang (Hunan)	500	2,026	2,357	749,400	600,000	4,577	20%	42%
Ru'nan (Henan)	499	1,420	1,994	830,900	740,000	3,387	10%	27%
Zhong (Chongqing)	515	1,324	1,731	969,400	840,000	2,547	12%	22%
Hengshan (Shaanxi)	500	1,791	981	322,600	300,000	1,701	8%	14%

**SOURCE:** various statistical yearbooks

**NOTE:** All monetary data are in *yuan*.

**Table 2. Tax Burden (Local Fees/Taxes as % of Household Income, Logged), OLS Regression Analysis**

	Village-Level Models					Household-Level Models	
	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3	MODEL 4	MODEL 5	MODEL 1	MODEL 2
# household members						.006	.012#
farm land (log of <i>mu</i> )						.402***	.162**
% village labor force in private enterprises	-.045*	-.020	-.021	.007	-.014	-.006	.001
% village labor force in TVEs		-.060#	.019	.009	-.045	-.067#	-.053#
total household income (log)			-.695**	-.391*	-.252	-.413***	-.166***
income from farming as % of total household income				.019**	.017**		.016***
SAMPLE							
Jimo (Shandong)					.355*	.482**	.348**
Ru'nan (Henan)					.200	.482**	.406**
Taicang (Jiangsu)					.875#	.926*	.805**
Zhong (Chongqing)					.124	.043	.248*
Yuanjiang (Hunan)					.858**	.738***	.834***
cf. Hengshan (Shaanxi)							
Intercept	2.519	2.517	8.616**	4.906**	3.533	4.678***	2.159***
R <sup>2</sup> †	.135	.180	.369	.578	.724	.453	.669
n			37			2,783	

NOTE: #  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$  † Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> in village-level models. Household-level models use Stata's commands for survey data that adjust for clustering effects within counties and villages and add sampling weights; total population = 3,451,978. "cf." denotes the reference group. 1 *mu* = 1/6 acre or 0.067 hectare.

**Table 3. Grievance Types by Reponses/Actions Taken**

	lump it	self-help	seek informal relations	seek village leaders	seek help beyond village	row total	column total
children's education	14% (22)	80% (112)	1% (2)	0.3% (1)	4% (6)	99.3% (143)	3% (143)
water use	40% (203)	53% (258)	1% (7)	4% (19)	1% (8)	99% (495)	10% (495)
labor	42% (104)	46% (118)	6% (13)	1% (3)	5% (14)	100% (252)	5% (252)
agricultural burdens	44% (205)	44% (202)	2% (7)	6% (28)	5% (24)	101% (466)	10% (466)
debt collection	27% (61)	59% (136)	6% (13)	4% (8)	4% (11)	100% (229)	5% (229)
consumer	26% (90)	60% (204)	8% (25)	0% (0)	6% (19)	100% (338)	7% (338)
household/family	44% (200)	39% (170)	15% (60)	2% (7)	1% (3)	101% (440)	9% (440)
property damage/loss	35% (86)	46% (116)	1% (3)	5% (11)	14% (35)	101% (251)	5% (251)
neighbor	32% (278)	48% (404)	5% (38)	13% (105)	3% (27)	101% (852)	18% (852)
responsibility land or other <i>chengbao</i>	21% (51)	48% (119)	3% (9)	24% (60)	4% (12)	100% (251)	5% (251)
other problem	36% (25)	31% (23)	8% (5)	9% (7)	16% (12)	100% (72)	1% (72)
family planning	24% (65)	43% (128)	10% (26)	14% (36)	9% (27)	100% (282)	6% (282)
property ownership	27% (101)	38% (122)	5% (16)	11% (38)	19% (58)	100% (335)	7% (335)
dealings with administrative/gov't office	25% (34)	36% (47)	17% (22)	8% (13)	14% (18)	100% (134)	3% (134)
personal injury (PI)	28% (37)	32% (43)	5% (5)	8% (11)	27% (34)	100% (130)	3% (130)
accused of PI or theft	18% (6)	35% (12)	16% (6)	6% (2)	26% (11)	101% (37)	1% (37)
divorce	21% (8)	28% (11)	13% (5)	7% (3)	31% (16)	100% (43)	1% (43)
accused of PI or theft—involving police	0% (0)	0% (0)	38% (3)	0% (0)	62% (4)	100% (7)	0.1% (7)
TOTAL	33% (1,576)	47% (2,225)	6% (265)	8% (352)	7% (339)	101% (4,757)	99.1% (4,757)

NOTE: Grievance types listed in descending order according to the likelihood of seeking the help of a third party—i.e., the sum total of columns 1 and 2 (lump it + self-help). Instances of grievances are reported in parentheses; n=4,757 grievances reported among 1,589 individuals in 37 villages. Percentages are calculated using sampling weights. Total population of grievances = 6,155,629. The column total and some row totals do not equal 100 percent owing to rounding error. The denominator is the sample at risk of experiencing a given grievance. Only respondents who have been divorced can be at risk of a divorce-related grievance. Only households with members of child-bearing age are at risk of a family-planning grievance. Only households with farmers are at risk of a grievance over the "agricultural burdens." Only families with children in school are at risk of a grievance over children's education. Only households that have lent money are at risk of a debt collection dispute. Only individuals who have been employed by another party are at risk of a labor grievance. Only individuals who have been injured are at risk of a grievance over a personal injury. And only individuals who have experienced property damage or loss are at risk of a grievance over such an issue. Only individuals who have injured others or damaged the property of others are at risk of a grievance over such an issue. For the remaining grievance types, all respondents are assumed to be equally at risk.

**Table 4. Poisson Regression Analysis of Counts of Grievances, Disputes, and Seeking Help Beyond Village (Marginal Effects)**

	# Grievances Reported		# Disputes Reported (Instances of Seeking Help from Any Third Party)		# Instances Reported of Seeking Help Beyond Village	
	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 1	MODEL 2
female	-.146	-.030	-.074#	-.025	-.044*	-.024#
age	.002	.001	.002	.002#	.002*	.001**
education: regular high school or more	-.061	-.099#	-.001	-.013	.016	.006
any village-level cadres in household	-.176	-.281	.066	.047	.077	.054
any kin county- or higher-level cadre	.967***	.061	.547***	.097*	.230***	.063***
# household members	.135**	.111***	.024	.013	.004	.003
local fees/taxes as % of hh income (log)	.325*	-.088	.053#	-.045#	-.001	-.025**
SAMPLE						
Jimo (Shandong)		-1.143*		-.224**		-.065*
Ru'nan (Henan)		1.733**		.598***		.162***
Taicang (Jiangsu)		-.989**		-.191**		-.040#
Zhong (Chongqing)		.250		-.078		-.022
Yuanjiang (Hunan)		1.769**		.149		.069#
cf. Hengshan (Shaanxi)						
overall mean count	1.732**	1.296**	.389***	.273***	.108***	.076***

NOTES: # p<.10 \* p<.05 \*\* p<.01 \*\*\* p<.001. n=2,876 individuals. The models were calculated using Stata's commands for survey data that adjust for clustering effects within counties and villages and add sampling weights; population = 3,582,849. In the analysis of "# Grievances Reported," the addition of "total household income" to Model 1 negates the effect of "local fees/taxes"; but this effect disappears in Model 2 when controlling for the survey site. Income is not statistically significant in any of the other models. "cf." denotes the reference group. Poisson regression coefficients were converted to marginal effects with Stata's *mfx* command.

**Table 5. Probit Analysis of Probabilities of Reporting Selected Grievance Types (Marginal Effects)**

	Responsibility Land or Other Contracting (Chengbao)									
	Agricultural Burdens		Other Contracting (Chengbao)		Family Planning		Water Use		Property Ownership	
	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 1	MODEL 2
female	.006	.007	.007	.007	.008	.008	.010	.011	-.009	-.009
age	.00004	-.0001	.001	.001	-.0004	-.0003	.001	.001	.0003	.0003
education: regular high school or more	-.042*	-.036*	.001	.002	-.028***	-.027**	-.021	-.018	-.014	-.013
any village-level cadres in household	-.023	-.014	.007	.007	-.042	-.040	-.075	-.073	-.050#	-.050#
any kin county- or higher-level cadre	.004	.005	-.005	-.005	.021	.022	-.003	-.002	.066*	.067*
# household members	.004	.006	.002	.002	.027***	.027***	.005**	.006**	.012**	.012**
farm land (log of <i>mu</i> )	.039	.054#	.021	.022	.023	.025	.076	.080	.024	.025
local fees/taxes as % of hh income (log)	.027*	.0003	.008	.006	-.016#	-.021#	-.003	-.011	-.017	-.020
total household income (log)	--	-.045*	--	-.003	--	-.010	--	-.014	--	-.004
SAMPLE										
Jimo (Shandong)	-.088	-.074	-.052	-.051	-.107**	-.105**	-.145*	-.141*	-.057	-.055
Ru'nan (Henan)	.352***	.349***	.149*	.148*	.113**	.112**	.106	.105	.157*	.156*
Taicang (Jiangsu)	-.065	-.037	-.062*	-.061*	-.086***	-.084***	-.100*	-.093#	.036	.040
Zhong (Chongqing)	.091	.080	.031	.030	-.041	-.042	.090	.089	.070	.070
Yuanjiang (Hunan)	.252**	.242**	.087*	.085#	-.034	-.035	.224*	.221*	.013	.012
cf. Hengshan (Shaanxi)										
overall predicted probability	.129	.126	.071	.071	.075***	.075*	.140***	.140**	.101***	.101**
n (individuals)	2,723		2,782		2,370		2,782		2,782	
population	3,410,736		3,448,661		2,927,508		3,448,661		3,448,661	

NOTE: #  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Models for "agricultural burdens" and "family planning" include only the sample at risk; it is assumed that all households are at risk for the remaining models. In Model 1 for "agricultural burdens," the tax variable remains statistically significant even when "farming income as % of total household income" is added (which is not statistically significant). The models were calculated using Stata's commands for survey data that adjust for clustering effects within counties and villages and add sampling weights. "cf." denotes the reference group. Probit coefficients were converted to marginal effects with Stata's *mfx* command. 1 *mu* = 1/6 acre or 0.067 hectare.

**Table 6. Multinomial Logit Analysis of Responses to Grievances (Relative Risk Ratios)**

	Self-Help vs. lumping it	Informal Relation vs. lumping it	Village Leaders vs. lumping it	Above Village Leaders vs. lumping it
female	.847#	1.054	.746	.633#
age	.999	1.002	1.007	1.025***
education: regular high school or more	.868	1.192	.889	1.141
any village-level cadres in household	.939	.842	1.451	1.786#
any kin county- or higher-level cadre	.902	1.507*	.943	1.730*
# household members	.984	.904	.998	.940
farm land (log of <i>mu</i> )	.894	.827	1.034	.635**
local fees/taxes as % of hh income (log)	1.011	.983	1.312#	.954
total household income (log)	1.182#	1.549***	1.370**	1.345*
<b>GRIEVANCE TYPE</b>				
water use	1.153	.195**	.249***	.067***
debt collection	1.649#	1.325	.366*	.200***
family planning	1.434	1.880	1.188	.577#
consumer	1.855**	2.116	.000***†	.410*
neighbor	1.240	.962	1.090	.155***
labor	.839	.713	.054***	.162***
responsibility land or other <i>chengbao</i> dispute	1.992*	.909	2.835*	.339**
agricultural burdens	.873	.180**	.327#	.185***
household/family	.777	2.724*	.144***	.014***
dealings with admin./gov't office	1.079	2.596#	.632	.615
personal injury	.891	1.150	.731	1.504
property damage/loss	1.182	.143*	.396*	.653
children's education	4.654***	.232	.043**	.408*
cf. property ownership				
<b>SAMPLE</b>				
Jimo (Shandong)	1.421	1.250	.950	1.187
Ru'nan (Henan)	.710	3.248#	1.458	1.063
Taicang (Jiangsu)	.437*	.180*	.428	.375***
Zhong (Chongqing)	.817	.354	.488	.335
Yuanjiang (Hunan)	.496*	.268	.378	.298**
cf. Hengshan (Shaanxi)				

NOTE: #  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .  $n = 4,469$  grievances among 1,531 individuals in 37 villages. A relative risk ratio of 1.000 means one's chances of responding to a grievance in a particular way neither increase nor decrease. A relative risk ratio of 2.000 means one's chances double. A relative risk ratio of 0.500 means one's chances are halved. The models were calculated using Stata's commands for survey data that adjust for clustering effects within counties and villages and add sampling weights; population = 5,787,234. "Divorce," both categories of "accused of personal injury or theft," and "other" disputes were excluded owing to small numbers. † denotes a coefficient that is truly zero; there is not a single instance of bringing a consumer dispute to a village leader. "cf." denotes the reference group. 1 *mu* = 1/6 acre or 0.067 hectare.

**Table 7. Probit Analysis of Probability of Disappointment with Dispute Outcome (Marginal Effects)**

	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3
<b>ACTION TAKEN</b>			
informal relation	-.085	-.073	-.062
administrative/government channel	-.027	-.023	-.010
police	.193*	.174#	.096
lawyer, court, or judicial office	.325***	.332***	.309***
cf. village leader			
<b>INDIV./HH BACKGROUND</b>			
female	.062	.059	.064
age	-.001	-.002	-.002
education: regular high school or more	-.036	-.038	-.043
any village-level cadres in household	.029	.029	.009
any kin county- or higher-level cadre	.035	.047	.050
# household members	.009	.023#	.014#
any member of the hh working outside (dummy)	-.067#	-.072#	-.064
# hh members working in TVE	-.157#	-.165*	-.173*
<b>SAMPLE</b>			
Jimo (Shandong)		.157	.182
Ru'nan (Henan)		.066	.052
Taicang (Jiangsu)		.098	.105
Zhong (Chongqing)		.087	.079
Yuanjiang (Hunan)		.200#	.171
cf. Hengshan (Shaanxi)			
<b>DISPUTE TYPE</b>			
water use			-.023
debt collection			.094
family planning			.030
consumer			-.070
neighbor			.058
labor			.124
responsibility land or other <i>chengbao</i> dispute			.115#
agricultural burdens			.237**
household/family			.067
dealings with gov't office			.268**
personal injury			.051
property damage/loss			.314*
children's education			.054
cf. property ownership			
overall predicted probability	.341	.340	.336*

NOTE: # p<.10 \* p<.05 \*\* p<.01 \*\*\* p<.001. n=882 disputes among 544 individuals in 32 villages. The models were calculated using Stata's commands for survey data that adjust for clustering effects within counties and villages and add sampling weights; population 1,167,382 disputes. "cf." denotes the reference group. "Divorce," both categories of "accused of personal injury or theft," and "other" disputes were excluded owing to small numbers. Amount of farm land is not statistically significant in any model. Probit coefficients were converted to marginal effects with Stata's *mfx* command.

**Table 8. Overlap Between Channels of Help**

	% disputes for which this is the only reported channel type	% disputes for which additional channels are reported	TOTAL (# disputes)
lawyers and courts	70%	30%	100% (90)
police	73%	27%	100% (60)
administrative/government	79%	21%	100% (214)
village leaders	84%	16%	100% (391)
informal relations	90%	10%	100% (203)

**Table 9. Satisfaction with Life, Ordered Probit Regression (Marginal Effects)**

	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3
female	.094*	.096*	.078
age	.006#	.006#	.006
education: regular high school or more	.203**	.192**	.124*
perceived physical health	.319***	.306***	.166#
total # grievances reported (log)	-.191***	-.139#	-.131#
any village-level cadre in household	.524**	.529**	.515**
local fees/taxes as % of hh income (log)	-.314***	-.307***	-.126*
annual household income (log)			.432***
SELECTED GRIEVANCES			
agricultural burdens		-.268**	-.211*
responsibility land or other <i>chengbao</i> dispute		.073	.042
family planning		.054	.055
water use		-.042	-.062
property ownership		-.033	-.051
SAMPLE			
Jimo (Shandong)	.308*	.316*	.227
Ru'nan (Henan)	.079	.124	.201
Taicang (Jiangsu)	.019	.034	-.249
Zhong (Chongqing)	-.077	-.077	.052
Yuanjiang (Hunan)	.016	.017	.147
cf. Hengshan (Shaanxi)			
overall predicted satisfaction	.029	.038	4.004
n		2,757	
population		3,424,064	

NOTE: #  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . The dependent variable is the answer to the following question: "Overall, you feel (5) very satisfied, (4) somewhat satisfied, (3) so-so, (2) somewhat unsatisfied, or (1) very unsatisfied with your life." The selected grievances are dummy variables that are not mutually exclusive. The models were calculated using Stata's commands for survey data that adjust for clustering effects within counties and villages and add sampling weights. "cf." denotes the reference group. Neither amount of farmland nor farm income as a percentage of total income is statistically significant in either model. "Any kin county- or higher-level cadre" is not statistically significant. Ordered probit coefficients were converted to marginal effects with Stata's *mfx* command.