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Political Interests in Rural China

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, Chinese peasantry has been viewed as a conservative social and political force. They are perceived to be ill-informed and lack necessary cognitive knowledge about public affairs and political events. Therefore, a popular view among Chinese intellectuals and the general population in China is still that Chinese peasantry is one of the main obstacles to Chinese democracy due to their conservative political culture and lack of political interest and sophistication. However, recent developments with regard to villager committee elections and increasing consciousness and willingness on the part of peasants to protect their rights through “rightful resistance” (O’Brien and Li 1995; Chu, 2001, p. 60) suggest that the Chinese peasantry has become more politically active than their counterparts in urban China and may end up leading democratization to the rest of China (Tyrene White 1992, 277). Indeed, the rural situation has been a trouble spot for the Chinese government since the late 1980s. Rural problems are often summarized as *san nong wenti* (“three rural issues”). All the three issues have direct

relevance to rural stability in China. In fact, rural instabilities such as peasant riots and sit-ins already occur frequently in the Chinese countryside. Fortunately for the Chinese government, few of these rural disturbances have happened in a large-scale and organized fashion.

To what degree are Chinese peasants interested in politics (i.e., national and local political affairs) and what factors affect their political interest? These are the two central questions that I am addressing in this paper. Study of these questions carries both theoretical as well as practical implications. The importance of political interest as psychological involvement in politics and public affairs has been well observed and documented by Western scholarship (Berelson, *et al.*, 1954; Verba and Nie, 1972; Huntington and Nelson, 1976; Milbrath and Goel, 1977; Gans, 1978; Hadley 1978; Verba *et al.*, 1978; Bennett, 1986; DeLuca, 1995). Psychological involvement in politics and public affairs is regarded as a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for active political participation. Sidney Verba and his associates observed in their empirical cross-national study that those who were more interested in politics out-participated those who were apathetic to politics (Verba, *et al.*, 1978, p. 71). Similar findings were also reported by scholars studying the former Soviet Union (Bahry, 1987; Bahry and Silver, 1990; Kaplan, 1993). For example, in their empirical study of mass political participation of the former USSR, Bahry and Silver (1990) found that those who were more interested in politics were more likely to engage in conventional and/or unconventional political activities. Therefore, the theoretical implication is that such a linkage between level of political interest and political participation may also exist in China, a transitional society. A practical implication is that if there is high level of political interest among Chinese

peasantry found in this study, it may indicate a certain degree of political uneasiness on the part of the peasants and may lead to higher level of peasants' participation in conventional and/or unconventional political activities in southern Jiangsu province.

Given the intricate relationship between level of political interest or psychological involvement in politics and likely participation in political activities, it becomes important that we understand who are more likely to have higher level of political interest and what factors may lead someone to be psychologically involved in politics. Level of political interest as a separate dependent variable, unfortunately, has not been sufficiently studied in an empirical fashion by China scholars both inside and outside China. In the limited number of empirical studies, political interest was either treated as an act of political participation (Zhu, Zhao and Li, 1990) or as an independent variable (Shi, 1997). Few of them explore the degree and sources of psychological involvement in China. A survey study conducted by Jie Chen and Yang Zhong (1999) in the mid 1990s did focus on the level of mass political interest and apathy and the contributing factors. They found that there was a relatively high level of political interest among Beijing residents, contrary to the prevalent perception that Chinese people were political apathetic and shifted their attention to pursuit of materialism after years of constant political campaigns between the 1950s and 1970s. They further found that age, gender, income, political status, political efficacy, and life satisfaction had significant impact on the levels of political interest among Beijing residents. However, this study was primarily conducted in an urban setting even though the sample did include a limited number of rural residents from suburban areas of Beijing.

This paper is based on a random public opinion survey conducted in the summer of 2000 in 12 southern Jiangsu counties. Jiangsu is a major populous province and one of the most economically and culturally developed areas in China. Southern Jiangsu is historically known as *yu mi zhi xiang* or land of fish and rice. Jiangsu's economic development has accelerated since the economic reforms in the late 1970s due to its successful rural industrialization drive led by the collective economy of township and village enterprises (TVEs) and massive foreign investment beginning in the 1990s.¹ Due to the province's long-held respect for knowledge and education and recent economic development, the educational level and literacy rate of the rural population in southern Jiangsu are much higher than those in most other rural areas in China.² I certainly do not intend to generalize the descriptive findings of this paper to the rest of rural China. However, the causal relationship analyses in this study can serve as strong indicators for the rest of the Chinese countryside since the analyses are done at the individual level (Manion 1994, 747). This is the same rationale as used in the "most different system" design advocated by Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune (1970, 34-39).

The survey, conducted in cooperation with a Chinese research institute,³ draws from the literate rural adult population (with rural residency status or *hukou*) over 18 years of age residing in 21 towns and townships in southern Jiangsu.⁴ Our sample obtained 1,162 valid responses of 1,270, using multi-stage random sampling procedures.⁵ We employed advanced and trained undergraduate and graduate students as field workers to conduct the survey. A field worker brought the questionnaire to the randomly-chosen individual respondent who filled out the questionnaire; the field worker then brought the questionnaire back to the survey center. As a result of this survey method, the response

rate is close to 92 %.⁶ Care was taken to minimize respondent effects and linguistic misinterpretations. The original wording of our questionnaire, first designed in the U.S., was reviewed by our cooperating research institute in China to fit the Chinese social and cultural context. Respondents were assured of absolute confidentiality and encouraged to provide answers that best captured their true feelings.⁷

LEVELS OF POLITICAL INTEREST AMONG SOUTHERN JIANGSU PEASANTS

How much do Chinese peasants still care about politics and public affairs after two decades of economic reforms? Literature on Chinese political culture and participation often describes three relatively distinct stages with regard to mass political interest in contemporary China. The first stage was before the 1949 Chinese Communist revolution when most Chinese seemed to be politically apathetic and ignorant (Zhu, Zhao and Li, 1990, p. 992). This stage was also characterized by one China scholar typified as a “popular isolation from politics” (Townsend, 1967, pp. 10-20). The second stage between the 1950s and 1970s was marked by a “participation explosion” (Ibid.) due to the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) sustained mobilization efforts that led to unprecedented enthusiasm on the part of the population about public and political affairs, especially during the 10 years of the Cultural Revolution. In fact, political participation (in terms of private citizens’ efforts to influence public affairs) in the Chinese countryside was much more active than many people think during this period. Peasants used various means to protect and voice their interest, including state institutions (such as local assemblies, mass organizations, elections, and media) and non-conventional activities (such as passive resistance and collective violence) (Burns 1988, 1-2). During the third

stage, which covers most of the post-Mao reform period and continues to the present, a popular perception among China observers is that the Chinese people are consumed with material goods and making money and have become increasingly apolitical and pragmatic.⁸ Deng Xiaoping's slogan "Getting rich is glorious" carries the day in modern China. Is this a true picture? An advantage of survey research, if properly done, is it enables us to describe with precision people's attitudes, opinions and orientations.

Political interest in this paper is defined as individual's degree of interest in and concern with government and public affairs. It should be noted that the concept of political interest in this study is different from the concept of political participation, even though the two concepts are somewhat related. Political interest is the psychological involvement for political and public affairs (Verba, Nie, and Kim, 1978, pp. 47-48; Bennett, 1986, p. 41), while political participation is about pattern of action or inaction in politics and public affairs (Bennett, 1986, p. 33). Although those who are more interested in politics are more likely to participate in politics, high levels of psychological involvement in politics and public affairs do not always translate into actual political participation due to institutional constraints and lack of resources. Even in a democracy, as Robert Dahl (1961, p. 280) has noted, it is considerably easier to be merely interested, which demands only passive participation, than to be actually active in politics; interest costs a little in terms of physical energy and time; and activity demands much more.

We used four questions in our survey to measure the level of mass political interest among southern Jiangsu peasants. They are: (1) "Are you interested in national affairs?" (2) "Are you interested in public affairs in your village and county?" (3) "How often do you talk about national affairs with others?" and (4) "How often do you talk

village affairs with others?” Our operationalization and measurement of political interest are derived from Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba’s seminal study of civic/political culture. Almond and Verba’s concept of “civic cognition” (1963, pp. 88-89) is equivalent to our dependent variable of “political interest”. According to Almond and Verba, political interest means “following governmental and political affairs and paying attention to politics”, which “represent the cognitive component of the civic orientation” (Ibid., p.88). In their study Almond and Verba used two straightforward indicators to measure civic cognition: (1) attention to political and governmental affairs in general,⁹ and (2) attention to major political event/activity such as campaign in a democratic system.¹⁰ Questions 3 and 4 were designed as supplement to the first two questions. As Ronald Inglehart notes, “(a) good indicator of political interest is whether or not people discuss politics with others” (Inglehart, 1997, p. 309).

For the first two questions, *not interested at all* is coded 1, *not quite interested* is coded 2, *interested* is coded 3, and *very interested* is coded 4. For the last two questions, *never* is coded 1, *occasionally* is coded 2, *very often* is coded 3, and *whenever we see each other* is coded 4. These four items were then combined to form an additive index to capture a collective profile of a respondent’s level of political interest. This index is used as the dependent variable in the multivariate analysis.

Our survey shows that the perception of a low level of political interest is not the case among peasants in southern Jiangsu. As Table 1 shows, about two thirds (close to 70 per cent) of our respondents were still interested or very interested in national affairs. This figure is surprisingly close to that found in two mass surveys among Beijing residents conducted in the 1990s.¹¹ A slightly lower percentage (but still majority) of our

respondents (about 63 %) cared for local and village affairs. Even though this figure is more than 25 % lower than what we found among urban residents in Beijing, the bottom line is that the majority of the peasants in our survey showed some or strong interest in national as well as local/village affairs. These findings seem to contradict the popular perception that most Chinese people, especially most Chinese peasants, are apolitical and not interested in public affairs and politics.

Table 1 goes about here

Even though most of our respondents were still interested in public affairs, the number of people who talked about politics with others was lower. Less than half of the respondents (close to 45 per cent) in our survey said they talked about politics often with others (see Table 1). This figure, however, is almost identical to that found in our Beijing surveys, indicating that rural residents in Jiangsu are as active as urban residents in Beijing in talking about politics and public affairs, which is remarkable given the stereotype about peasants' political apathy in China. A slight lower percent of our respondents (around 40 per cent) discussed local and village affairs with others often.

In fact, the level of political interest among southern Jiangsu rural population is comparable to or higher than those found in some other countries (see Table 2). For example, our Jiangsu peasants in the survey showed higher level of political interest than those found in the United States, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Japan, Mexico and South Africa. The figures indicating high level of political interest among our rural respondents in southern Jiangus province may not be surprising, considering that there

are many national and local issues, such as corruption at various governmental levels, abuse of power by local and village government officials, and government rural policies that Chinese peasants are truly concerned about. However, it is worth noting that fewer Chinese peasants (as well as Beijing residents for that matter) talk about politics than people in the other countries. A possible reason is probably due to the fact that China is still a less free country compared to the other countries and Chinese people are still somewhat hesitant to talk about politics and national affairs even though the political atmosphere has changed significantly from Mao's era.

Table 2 goes about here

EXPLAINING LEVEL OF POLITICAL INTEREST IN SOUTHERN JIANGSU

Association of socioeconomic and political factors with one's level of political interest has been explicitly studied in western political science literature (e.g., Almond and Verba, 1963; Verba *et al.*, 1971; Milbrath and Goel, 1977; Verba *et al.*, 1978; Bennet, 1986; DeLuca, 1995). Chen and Zhong's study on level of political interest in Beijing showed that a number of demographic, socioeconomic and political factors contribute to Beijing residents' interest in public affairs (Chen and Zhong, 1999). For example, their study found that middle-aged males, communist party members, and people with better economic standing tend to pay more attention to politics. In addition, their study also revealed a positive relationship between political efficacy and level of political interest. Finally, they also found that people who were less satisfied with government performance in various policy areas were more interested in politics and public affairs.

Drawing upon previous studies on this subject conducted in other countries and China I focus on the following demographic, socioeconomic and political factors to explain level of political interest among peasants in southern Jiangsu province: age, gender, education, income, party membership, life satisfaction, and perceived need for political reform.

Age

In western political science literature, a prevailing argument on the relationship of age and political interest is that young people tend to show less political interest than the old due to their preoccupation with other things such as establishing their career and forming a family (Jennings and Niemi, 1981; Bennet, 1986). In their study conducted in Beijing, Chen and Zhong found that this relationship held among Beijing residents, i.e., older people paid more attention to politics than the young and the age group that paid the closest attention to public affairs was the middle-aged. Therefore I hypothesize in this paper that age influence level of political interest among our Jiangsu peasants in a positive way, i.e., older people tend to pay higher level of attention to politics and public affairs.

Gender

It has been well documented in Western political science literature that there is a gender gap with regard to level of political interest and political participation. Kent Jennings once noted, “a raft of research around the world has demonstrated that, by most standards, men are more politically active than women,” and such a gap is narrower in more advanced societies and among people of higher socioeconomic strata (Jennings,

1997, p. 367). The gap is in part due to the traditional value of women's role in society and the perception that politics is a "man's business" (Lane, 1965, pp. 210-214; Bennett, 1986, pp. 69-70).

Promoting gender equality has been an official policy in the PRC since the 1950s. Chairman Mao was most vocal in creating equality between men and women in China between the 1950s and the 1970s. Indeed, both men and women were equally mobilized to participate in the various political campaigns launched by Mao in those years. However, gender equality in many areas was never completely achieved during Mao's era due in part to the deep-rooted Chinese traditional values that favor men over women and encourage women to be passive in society (Li, 1989; Lock, 1989; Robinson and Parris, 1990). This situation has not changed in the post-Mao era. Arguably women's status in China has gotten worse during the reform era. Blatant discrimination against women is especially a commonplace with regard to employment and in workplaces. Women's role in Chinese society is still perceived to be taking care of children and family. Women's status is particularly troublesome in rural China (Chu and Ju, 1993, p. 240). Chen and Zhong's (1999) survey study found that women were less attentive to politics than men in Beijing. Therefore, I hypothesize that men are more attentive to politics and public affairs than women among southern Jiangsu peasants.

Education

Like age and gender, education is often considered a major factor in affecting one's level of political interest and participation (Almond and Verba, 1963, p. 381; Milbrath and Goel, 1977; Verba *et al.*, 1978; Klingemann, 1979; Inglehart, 1997, p. 307).

There are a number of reasons for the positive relationship between education and interest in politics and public affairs. For one thing, education equips a person with the cognitive capability to receive and digest political information. Education also increases one's capacity to understand personal implications of political events and affairs and one's confidence in his or her ability to influence politics if given the opportunity. Empirical studies conducted in China show that education does indeed have an impact on individuals' attitudes toward public affairs (Zhu, *et al.*, 1990; Nathan and Shi, 1993; Jennings, 1997; Chen and Zhong, 1999). For example, in their study of Beijing residents Chen and Zhong (1999) found that education is positively related to one's level of attention to politics and public affairs. In a survey study of the Chinese countryside, Kent Jennings (1997) also found that peasants with higher level of education were more active in public affairs. I therefore hypothesize that level of education, measured by number of years of formal schooling, positively contributes to one's level of political interest among Jiangsu peasants.

Political Status

Claiming a membership of 65 million, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is no doubt the world's largest political party. In addition, there are millions of youth who are members of Chinese Communist Youth League (CYL), an affiliated front youth organization of the CCP. One of the requirements for joining the CCP and the CYL is his or her political consciousness or level of attention paid to current public affairs. CCP and CYL members are periodically organized in meetings to be informed about party and government policies and discuss political issues. Moreover, party members, who wish to

be promoted to the officialdom and climb the official ladder, have to pay close attention to both national and local political and public affairs. Thus, I expect that CCP and CYL members in my survey are more interested in politics and public affairs.

Financial and Social Conditions

If we accept Mathlow's theory of hierarchy of human needs, we should assume that one's interest in politics and public affairs is positively related to his or her financial conditions. Voting studies in the West suggest that people of better economic standing tend to be more active in participation in elections. Verba and Nie hinted another reason why economically better-off people are more likely to be involved in politics and public affairs: they have greater stakes in politics, i.e., vested economic interest (1972, p. 126). However, there is another argument suggesting that people with higher income are less interested in politics due to the fact that they are busy with making money (Lippmann, 1927). Some China watchers have the observation that people of higher income in China are preoccupied with grabbing business opportunities and they are less interested in politics and public affairs (Kristof and WuDunn, 1994). Another possible reason why people of lower income might be more interested in politics and public affairs is that it is more likely that they have more problems and complaints about their poor economic conditions and hope that the government will address their concerns.

In their study of Beijing residents Chen and Zhong (1999) did find that level of political interest was positively related to one's financial conditions. Therefore, I hypothesize that peasants of higher income and higher level of life satisfaction tend to pay more attention to public affairs and be more concerned with political issues in

southern Jiangsu province. The main reason is that southern Jiangsu province, being one of the most economically developed rural areas in China, has fewer problems that need urgent government help than the average Chinese countryside. I use two indicators to measure one's financial and social conditions: income and perceived improvement in one's economic condition and social status. Income is measured by annual family income while perceived economic condition and social status are measured by answers to two questions: (1) "Since the reforms my living conditions have noticeably improved" and (2) "Since the reforms my social status has noticeably improved." As shown in Table 3, overwhelming majority of respondents in our survey seemed to be happy with the improvement they experienced in their economic life and somewhat lower number of people felt satisfied with the improvement in their social status in the reform era. These findings are very similar to those found in two surveys conducted in Beijing in the mid 1990s (Zhong *et al.*, 1998, p. 779). *Strongly disagree* was coded 1 while *strongly agree* was coded 4. A summary variable for perceived economic life and social status improvement is derived from the sum of the scores on these two questions.

Table 3 goes about here

Perceived Need for Political Reform

Chinese reforms since the late 1970s, especially since 1989, have clearly tilted toward economic structural changes. Most of the so called political reforms are primarily administrative or bureaucratic reforms. Even though it seems that most China scholars have recognized that China in the reform era has been transformed from a Maoist type of

totalitarian system to an authoritarian system, the fundamentals of the communist political system have remained, such as the exclusive one party rule, the absolute political power of the CCP in governmental affairs, the strict control of party and government personnel by the CCP, complete or near complete control of official media, and lack of political freedoms and civil liberties. Meaningful and significant political reform efforts have been either discouraged or postponed for the sake of “preserving political stability” of the country to allow for economic growth and development. Yet, political reform is still a very much talked about topic in conversations among Chinese people. Many people believe that only meaningful political reform can check or slow down the rampant official corruption and provide genuine political stability in the country. Indeed, in our survey, a significant number of people (well over 50 per cent) believed that political reforms are sorely needed in China (see Table 4). I suspect that one of the reasons why many people pay attention to politics or public affairs is because they care for political reforms in China. Therefore I hypothesize that people who perceived a need for political reform in China tend to be more interested in politics and public affairs.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Table 5 shows the multi-regression results predicting level of political interest among southern Jiangsu peasants. All together, the independent variables explain about 10% of the variance in mass political interest in the survey population. Apparently, the basic demographic variables such as age, gender and education do matter in one’s level of political interest in the peasant population in southern Jiangsu. Specifically, older and better educated males tend to be more interested in politics and public affairs than the

young, the less educated and females. These findings are similar to those found among Beijing residents in the mid 1990s by Jie Chen and Yang Zhong (1999) except for the education factor. They are also consistent with evidence on political interest and participation found in China and other countries (e.g., Lane, 1965; Converse and Niemi, 1971; Jennings and Niemi 1981; Bennett, 1986; Li, 1989; Jennings, 1997).

Table 5 goes about here

In addition, as was expected, those who are CCP and CYL members tend to be more interested in politics and public affairs. As mentioned earlier, CCP and CYL members are expected or even required to pay attention to political events and public affairs. Moreover, many of the CCP and CYL members are village cadres whose job is politicking and who also have greater stakes in politics and public affairs.

Table 5 also shows that both income and perceived improvement in living condition and social status are positively related to a person's political interest even though the impact of income is statistically insignificant. It means that even when people life is improved, they are more likely to pay attention to politics and public affairs. This finding is important because it could spell trouble down the road for the Chinese government. The CCP has been struggling with the issue of legitimacy since the beginning the reform era (Zhong, 1996, pp. 206-212). There is no doubt that CCP's political legitimacy reached its lowest ebb with the brutal crackdown on Tiananmen demonstrators in 1989. One of the first things that Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin did after the Tiananmen incident was to lay out a new legitimacy basis for the CCP. The CCP

resorted to economic nationalism, traditional Chinese conservatism and eudaemonism as the re-legitimization claims to regain its political legitimacy (Ibid., p. 212). One of the purposes of this new re-legitimization drive was to divert people's attention away from politics and discussion of political issues to pursue material wealth. Findings from my survey among southern Jiangsu province cast serious doubt on the effectiveness of this strategy.

The multivariate analysis also shows that level of political interest is positively related to one's perceived need for political reforms in China. In other words, people who think China needs urgent political reforms tend to be more interested in politics and public affairs. The implication is that peasants who are interested in politics and public affairs do care about political reforms in China. Many people believe that Chinese economic reforms have reached a bottleneck stage and only meaningful political reforms can sustain and allow for further economic development. Rampant corruption and social injustice due to lack of governmental transparency and official abuse have caused serious social instabilities in China, especially in the countryside. Serious political reforms along the lines of political liberalization and governmental transparency could at least lessen the problems.

Since the survey was conducted in southern Jiangsu province, which is not typical of the vast Chinese countryside, I do not intend to generalize the findings, especially the descriptive findings, to other rural areas of China. Nonetheless, I do believe that the findings from this study are instructive for the study of mass political interest among Chinese peasants. First, it is very clear from the descriptive findings that Chinese peasants in southern Jiangsu showed a high level of political interest and attention to

public affairs. Economic growth and prosperity have not diverted people attention away from politics. The finding that economic better-off peasants tend to be more interested in politics and public affairs is particularly interesting and significant. The finding puts a question mark on the Chinese government's strategy of inducing the Chinese population to be apolitical and apathetic by promoting materialism and economic welfare. Moreover, if political interest is an indicator for an individual's potential political activity (Bennett, 1986, p. 37), the finding of relatively high level of political interest among peasants in southern Jiangsu province from this survey may imply a great potential for mass political participation and activities in the Chinese countryside.

Second, findings from this study also show that Chinese peasants are not that different from people in other parts of the world including urban China as far as the relationships between the level of political interest and some explanatory variables are concerned. The fact that the patterns of interactions between political interest and some determinants, i.e., age, education, gender and income coincide with results from earlier studies in non-Chinese settings and urban China (e.g., Lane, 1965; Sniderman and Brady, 1977; Jennings and Niemi, 1981; Bennett, 1986; Inglehart, 1997; Chen and Zhong, 1999) mean that these patterns are not uniquely western and may persist across cultural, political and geographic divides. Further studies on political interest and its determinants should be carried out in other parts, especially in inland and poorer regions, of the Chinese countryside to gain better and more comprehensive understanding of political interest on the part of the Chinese peasants.

Endnotes:

- 1 The southern Jiangsu economic development model is often differentiated from the Wenzhou development model that emphasizes private enterprises and the Pearl River delta development model that is based on massive foreign investment.
- 2 Illiteracy rate in Jiangsu is 9 % while the national average is around 19 %, see *Suzhou Statistical Yearbook*, *Wuxi Statistical Yearbook*, *Changzhou Statistical Yearbook* and Suzanne Ogden 1999, 4.
- 3 By mutual agreement we must maintain the anonymity of this organization.
- 4 The reason we decided not to include illiterate peasants in our survey is based upon the results of a pre-test conducted prior to the survey. Our experience with the pre-test is that most of the illiterate peasants had so many cognitive problems in comprehending the questions that we had to explain the entire questions. In fact, we observed that when the interviewers tried to explain the questions to the respondents they tended to inject their own opinions or biased examples. To avoid such biases and induced answers, we decided to eliminate the illiterate population from our survey. Fortunately, only 9 % of the rural population in the areas we surveyed is illiterate. We don't think this elimination should have major impact on our findings about peasants' participation behavior in VC elections in Jiangsu. Also, even though all the respondents have rural residency status, they do not necessarily work on farms. Many work in factories or TVEs.
- 5 A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to conduct the survey. Twenty-one towns and townships were randomly chosen after the first stage of sampling. Four villages were randomly chosen from each town or township after the second stage of sampling. The third stage of sampling produced approximately 16 households from each randomly chosen village. One individual adult was randomly chosen from each randomly chosen household as the respondent at the final stage of sampling in our Jiangsu rural survey. A total number of 1,270 respondents were randomly chosen; 1,162 responded to our surveys.
- 6 On the high response rate in China, see Tianjian Shi 1997.
- 7 On conducting public opinion surveys in China, see Melanie Manion 1994.
- 8 For this perception, see Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, 1994 and Arthur Lewis Rosenbaum 1992, 19.
- 9 The actual question of this indicator is: "Do you follow the accounts of political and governmental affairs? Would you say you follow them regularly, form time to time, or never?" (Almond and Verba, 1963, p. 89).

- 10 The actual question of this indicator is: “What about the campaigning that goes on at the time of a national election—do you pay much attention to what goes on, just a little, or none at all?” (Almond and Verba, 1963, p. 89).
- 11 On the two Beijing surveys conducted among Beijing residents in the 1990s, see Yang Zhong, Jie Chen, and John Scheb 1998.

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Table 5
Multivariate Analysis of Rural Political Interest in Southern Jiangsu Province

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Level of Political Interest</i>		
	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standard Error	Beta Weight
Age	.013	.006	.08*
Gender (female=0; male=1)	.704	.141	.17*
Education	.377	.094	.17*
Income	.001	.025	.00
Political status (CCP/CYL members=1, none members=0)	.521	.173	.12*
Life satisfaction	.223	.054	.14*
Perceived need for political reforms	.214	.081	.09*
Constant	6.612*	.565	
R squared	0.11		
Adjusted R squared	0.10		
N	740		

* $p < .01$

Table 1
Level of Political Interest among Jiangsu Peasants (%)

	Very Interested	Interested	Not Quite Interested	Not Interested At All	Hard to Say	N
Interested in national affairs	12.6 (14.1)*	55.7 (65.0)	22.3 (19.5)	5.4 (1.4)	3.8	1159
Interested in local/village affairs	6.0 (22.1)	56.7 (64.9)	27.1 (14.9)	4.3 (1.1)	5.8	1158
	Whenever We See Each Other	Very Often	Not Often	Never	Hard to Say	N
Discussion of national politics with others	2.5 (2.4)	41.8 (42.9)	47.8 (51.1)	5.7 (2.9)	2.8 (0.7)	1159
Discussion of local/village politics with others	2.5	38.2	48.8	7.1	3.3	1158

Source: Jiangsu Rural Survey 2000

*Figures in parentheses are combined findings from surveys conducted in Beijing in 1995 and 1997.

Table 2
Level of Political Interest in USA, UK, Netherlands, South Korea, Japan, Mexico and South Africa (%)

	USA	UK	Netherlands	South Korea	Japan	Mexico	South Africa
Respondents saying they are “somewhat” or “very” interested in politics	60	50	57	74	63	37	54
Respondents saying they “occasionally” or “frequently” discuss politics with friends	70	66	63	88	67	74	67

Source: 1990 World Values Survey, Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Countries*, pp. 308-309. The actual questions in the survey are: “How interested would you say you are in politics?” and “When you get together with your friends, would you say you discuss political matters frequently, occasionally, or never?”.

Table 3
Perceived Economic Life and Social Status Improvement (%)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Hard to Say	N
Since the reforms my living conditions have noticeably improved	41.7	47.5	6.8	0.8	3.2	1149
Since the reforms my social status has noticeably improved	22.9	43.3	18.4	4.4	10.8	1149

Source: Jiangsu Rural Survey 2000

Table 4
Perceived Need for Political Reforms (%)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Hard to Say	N
What is needed most in our country today is political reforms	23.2	33.5	16.7	3.6	22.9	1153

Source: Jiangsu Rural Survey 2000