



A HYBRID MODEL OF DEMOCRACY  
WITH POLITICAL MERITOCRACY  
IN RURAL CHINA

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# A Hybrid Model of Democracy with Political Meritocracy in Rural China

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Ongoing debates on political meritocracy had been aroused since Daniel Bell's book *The China Model* was published in 2015. Controversy focuses on substantial issues concerning whether political meritocracy is a real thing and whether it is a good thing. Bell gives out positive answers and further justification for both of the issues.

Bell in his book explores China's special political system based on its political culture and political practice, theorizing the China Model as a hybrid system of political meritocracy, experimentation and democracy. For Bell, political meritocracy he emphasizes is in the first place not just an ideal but a real thing which means it is not only a political culture but also a political reality existing in history as well as in the contemporary era. The China Model is exactly a realistic version of political meritocracy, although there is still large gap between the model's ideal and reality, which also happens in democratic regimes. Bell's academic inspiration mainly stems from Confucian tradition, and realizing the meritocratic characteristics of China's actual political practice drives him to theorize political meritocracy in a more reality-directing way.

Also, political meritocracy is a good thing. According to Bell's definition, a political system of meritocracy should aim at selecting and promoting political leaders with superior ability and virtue to serve the people, which means a merits-based mechanism is a core principle for leader selection, and serving the

public is political elites' ultimate responsibility.<sup>1</sup> From China and Singapore's successful experience in economic and social fields in recent decades, political meritocracy is building its reputation in the practice domain. Bell saw the secret of China's rising, believing that much contribution was made by China's political system.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, western observers still question the value of political meritocracy since one person, one vote becomes the only legitimate way to confer political power in the norm of electoral democracy. In this sense, political meritocracy, in its way of leader selection is not readily accepted by western democrats. Bell, with his multicultural background and experience devotes himself to reducing the cultural misunderstanding and ideological bias between the east and the west. He works on disenchantment of the hegemony of electoral democracy in political discourse and defends political meritocracy as an ideal parallel to electoral democracy. What he proposes further is that political meritocracy could be a new independent standard to evaluate political progress or regress.<sup>3</sup>

Much miscomprehension focuses on Bell's sharp critique on the limits of democracy and distorts Bell's original opinion into an extreme one that democracy should be replaced by political meritocracy. That's not true. Bell respects important democratic values and also doesn't want to see democracy collapse.<sup>4</sup> Actually, his expectation is both political meritocracy and democracy could reconcile the best part of each other, improving defective governance by adopting the merits from each other.<sup>5</sup> Therefore,

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Bell, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 6, 32, 110.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 180.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 151.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2, pp. 9-10.

what he advocates is not pure political meritocracy but a hybrid system concentrating merits from both political meritocracy and democracy. Indeed, the prerequisite for such a further movement should be taking political meritocracy seriously.

Above is my basic understanding of Bell's book, which I think is quite an insightful and meaningful exploration of a hybrid system of democratic meritocracy exemplified by empirical China. In such a mixed model, Bell argues for different political principles for different levels of government, which suggests that political meritocracy is best suitable for the central government, and electoral democracy for the local society. Where I differ from Bell here is that I think political meritocracy in a hybrid system should not limit its function only to the central level of government. Actually, from what I observed, there is also a hybrid model working in China's rural region which combines democracy with political meritocracy.

## I

### **A Hybrid Model in China's Rural Society**

As Bell describes, the first plank of the China Model is local democracy. Support for such an institutional arrangement is motivated by the belief that democracy works best at the local level. It's commonly known that China started village self-governance of electoral democracy in rural areas in late 1980s. Until 2008, it has basically realized the direct elections for more than 99% villages throughout the country.<sup>6</sup> The village committee, the main autonomous body in each Chinese village, is

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Civil Affairs, *Progress Report of Nationwide Village Elections: 2007* (Beijing: China Society Press, 2008).

elected by all legally qualified villagers to take charge of the public affairs in the local community under the guidance of the village party branch. Therefore, the rural governance in the past decades has been mainly conducted by the two organizations.

However, is there any other possibility for better governance in rural China except for pure democracy? What has happened in recent years shows a new political picture in China's rural society where a hybrid governance model of democracy with political meritocracy is working in many villages. This new model presents hybrid and meritocratic characteristics, and also gains some positive effects on managing public affairs especially on poverty alleviation. Now it shows a tendency toward being popularized in more rural areas as the result of a successful political trial.

In terms of the organizational structure, the hybrid system supplemented the village committee and village party branch with two new mechanisms, which are the first secretary and the village council.

The first secretary refers to the party cadre who comes from upper level of government and is appointed and sent to help the undeveloped rural areas. The first secretary system is actually the upper-level political meritocracy's extension to the rural society as a supplement for local democracy. In general, first secretaries are selected, cultivated or promoted by the system of political meritocracy. Some of them are political officials who have passed competitive civil service exams to get a position in the upper government. Some of them are selected graduates from top universities with brilliant education background or good performances as student cadres when in university. Before they were finally appointed as first secretaries, most of them had to be evaluated on a daily basis. So, there are at least two-round tests before making a first secretary. The upper-level governments send out their outstanding representatives to help out villages

with poverty problem and feeble party organization. In April 2015, the Organization Ministry of the Central Committee of the CPC (CCCPC), the Office of Central Rural Work Leading Group, the Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development of the State Council (LGOPAD) together released the *Notice of Selecting and Assigning Outstanding Cadres to the Villages Serving as the First Secretary*.<sup>7</sup>

The village council is an autonomous organization originally formed spontaneously among villagers at the grassroots level before being formally conducted in more areas. It is a relatively meritocratic organization based on one person, one vote. There are many provinces including Anhui, Guangxi, Guangdong, Jiangxi, Hebei, Heilongjiang, etc. having village councils in their natural villages. In August 2013, the People's Congress of Anhui Province was the first in the whole country to officially confirm the legal status of the village council, outlining in the rules of the *Organic Law of the Villagers Committees of the People's Republic of China* that villagers can build village councils voluntarily through an election process. Now, most village councils in natural villages or village groups are elected by "one person, one vote", a process similar to that of village committee elections. Normally, a village council consists of 5-9 members with a chairman included. Research shows most members are local elites of "the Five Elderly", who are elderly party members, elderly village cadres, elderly exemplary people, elderly teachers and elderly soldiers. Through village meeting, local residents exercise rights of electing council members who are willing and capable to promote public good and help the poor. Some members of the village council are

<sup>7</sup> See Xinhua news on April 30th of 2015, *Notice: Selecting and Sending First Secretaries to the Villages with Poverty and Weak Party Organization*, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/2015-04/30/c\\_1115147291.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/2015-04/30/c_1115147291.htm).

even incumbent village cadres in the local village committee, and they play a compatible and coordinating role in the communication between the village council and village committee. In summary, the village council is a new secondary self-governance organization for villagers' self-governance.

The meeting of the first secretary from political meritocracy and the village council from electoral democracy promotes the formation of more mixed way of governance in the rural China. On the basis of universal suffrage at the grassroots level, this new governance model is composed of the villager council, the first secretary, the village committee and the party branch. Then how does the new model work? To be brief, the new model is a cooperation among the four organizations above.

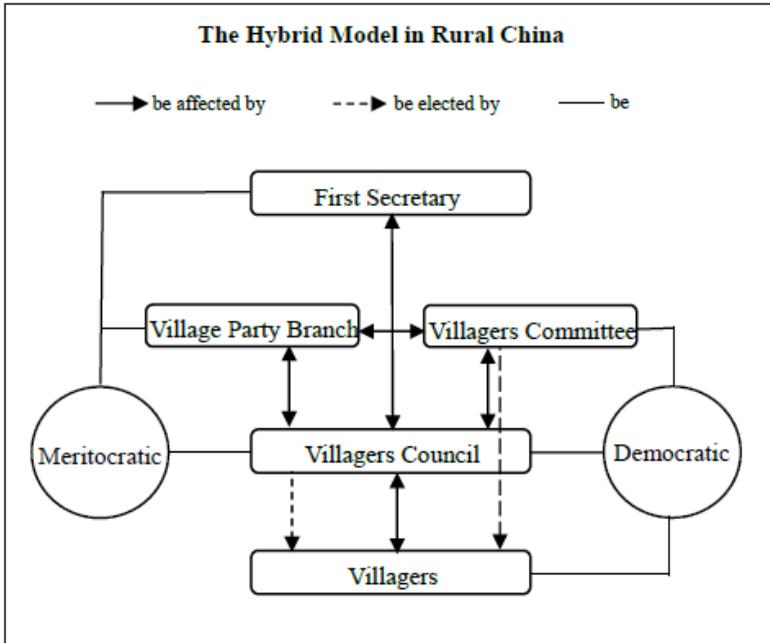
Above all, as both party members of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and upper-level political officials, first secretaries are mainly responsible for settling problems of targeted poverty alleviation and weak party organization. They are "equipped" with both financial and human recourses (working groups). Most of them are ordered to spend at least 4-5 days a week living in the village and to make more scientific and effective plans for poverty relief. Normally, the first secretary will get a general understanding about the current situation of the target village by communication with the village party branch, the village committee and the village council. Next, visiting the villagers' homes and keeping close contact with them would help the first secretary assess the real condition of the villagers' life and get their trust gradually. But still, when the first secretary works out a plan and needs to mobilize the mass, he usually has to negotiate with the village council first. Through the village council, villagers' will and opinion can be collected and conveyed back quickly. If initial ideas or plans are accepted or advocated by the mass, the first secretary is given access to take further action and

cooperate with the village council members to guide the villagers. Besides combating issues of poverty, the first secretary is also in charge of improving the local party organization. In communication and cooperation with the local elites, the first secretary has a good chance to know their ability and virtue, sometimes, some non-party members of the village council with excellent performance in the village affairs might be invited or recommended to join CPC.

As a secondary self-governance organization in the local community, the village council also undertakes more and more work in rural public affairs along with the village committee and plays an increasingly important role in coordination, cooperation and even supervision. The actual duties of the village council include the following:

1. Organizing meetings and discussions with villagers on public affairs to make democratic decisions.
2. Offering public services including road building, cleanliness, infrastructure construction, recreational activity, etc. by motivating and guiding the mass.
3. Helping resolve neighborhood disputes and conflicts.
4. Coordinating the relationship among the villagers, the first secretary and the village committee.
5. Supervising the village committee and village party branch.
6. Motivating the villagers to help vulnerable people who are elderly, weak, poor or disabled.

The new hybrid model of the relationship between villagers and local organizations can be structured as the graph below.



Consider the following case, which is representative of the way the model works concretely in a poor village.<sup>8</sup> There is an administrative village S with three natural villages located in the rocky desertification region of Guangxi province. Village S is a weak and poor place with harsh natural and agricultural conditions. In addition, other striking difficulties impeding the

<sup>8</sup> Information is mainly from interviews with local cadres of County T.

development of Village S are the very common issues in contemporary Chinese rural society—the hollowness<sup>9</sup> and lack of human resources under the process of urbanization.<sup>10</sup> Before the first secretary Z came to the village from the Agricultural Bureau of County T (where Village S is affiliated) in 2015, Village S has three village councils for each of its natural villages. The three village councils are mainly constituted by local elites. Each village council has about 6-9 members, including rural elites like incumbent village cadre (0-1 for each natural village), villager group leader, retired village cadre, village doctor, village teacher, religious people and venerable elders. These three village councils gain much trust by local residents and effectively unite the villagers to participate in democratic management of the daily routine. After the first secretary Z made an investigation of Village S and its surrounding countryside, he figured out a plan to alleviate poverty by developing sericulture. When he wanted to do propaganda and mobilize the villagers to participate, he found that the local people did not trust him very much since they didn't know him well only in a short time. The villagers felt uncertain about this new cadre from outside the village, so they responded negatively. In this situation, Z decided to start his work by convincing the village council people first. He made a great effort towards explaining the advantages and feasibility of developing sericulture in Village S and motivated the village council people to visit other villages around, where the adoption of sericulture had led to economic advantages for the villagers.

<sup>9</sup> Hollowness refers to a social phenomenon in China that under the binary structure of urban and rural areas, large amounts of middle-aged rural labors moved to the city which resulted in the outflow of talents and population in the rural China.

<sup>10</sup> Guo Zhenglin, *The Power Structure in Rural China* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2005), p. 105.

Through unremitting efforts, the village council members agreed to have a visit to those model villages mentioned by Z. They together took rented buses to other villages for investigation and reached a consensus on the desirability of sericulture. When they came back, the village council representative explained the details to the villagers and persuaded them to have a try on Z's idea. Then, Z arranged another two visits for some other villager representatives to check again. In the end, almost all villagers agreed to develop sericulture together thanks to the mobilization of the village council and Z himself. Then this important decision was finally made. Soon after that, a sericulture cooperative was built up with several other villages, constructing 650 mu of land to plant mulberry, which later contributed to a substantial increase in villagers' incomes. In late 2015, Village S successfully overcame poverty, becoming a successful governing model in County T. The first secretary Z was appointed to a new position managing more governmental affairs, as a result of his outstanding performance in Village S.

In fact, as well as the story above, there was also much interaction among the two new mechanisms, the village committee and the village party branch. The first secretary Z also had to negotiate important affairs with the village committee and work together with the village party branch to serve party organization. What's more, I learned from a conversation with another local cadre in Guizhou Province that the village council is a potential training platform where the village party organization can find its future party members based on their outstanding performance. On such talent hunting, the first secretary often holds more sway since he has a closer daily contact with those local talents.

To sum up, in the mixed governance model, the first secretary is the role carrier of political meritocracy and the village council

represents electoral democracy. Effective cooperation between each other could happen under appropriate conditions for better local governance.

## II

### **Why Does Meritocratic Democracy Work in the Local Area**

The new hybrid model in the rural China can be generalized to a kind of meritocratic democracy where electoral democracy of self-governance plays a major role in local public affairs, and meritocracy offers upper political power with intellectual resources as a supplemental support for local development.

The question of why meritocratic democracy works in the local area can be divided into two issues concerning why democracy works at the bottom and why political meritocracy also works there with democracy.

On the first issue of choosing democracy as the basic way to conduct local governance, Bell outlines three theoretical reasons to justify that democracy is most suitable for local society. First, people are more likely to have a better knowledge of their candidates since they live near. Second, there are more direct interest correlation and mutual influence between local people and local affairs. Third, local societies are more tolerant of mistakes under electoral democracy.<sup>11</sup> These factors are basically in line with the actual situation of rural China. Since rural China is an acquaintance society, the villagers are normally well-informed of other people, including the village cadres and candidates living

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Bell, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 168.

close to them.<sup>12</sup> What's more, village residents tend not to be concerned about upper politics but are more interested in local affairs.<sup>13</sup> So, it's reasonable to say there is an advantage for democracy's working in local society.

Besides the theoretical reasons, there are also practical reasons for the democratic characteristic of the current mixed model. First, the insufficiency of human resources is an urgent situation in the rural China leading to poor governance. With the expansion of village-repeal and town-combination all over the country, the task of public management is becoming much heavier than before. At the same time, the hollowness is more serious than ever. Under such circumstance, many Chinese villages fall into destitution, persistent poverty and disorganization. For example, Luoping Town of Wuning County in Jiangxi Province had about 130 natural villages and reduced its 10 administrative villages to 5 after China's rural tax-fee reform and village-repeal. However, there were only 3-5 village cadres there, which led to much more burden and difficulty in local governance.<sup>14</sup> The situation above is quite popular in many Chinese rural regions, which hastens the birth of more types of autonomous organizations, so that the village committee's heavy burden might be shared and eased.

Second, advancing more forms of democratic governance is beneficial for the whole national reform. According to CPC's guiding advice, modernizing local governance system and

<sup>12</sup> Fei Xiaotong, *From the Soil : The Foundations of Chinese Society* (Beijing: Beijing Publishing Group, 2004), pp. 6-9.

<sup>13</sup> Lang Youxing, *Developing Democracy: Political Elites and villager Election* (Xi'an: Northwest University Press, 2009), p. 158.

<sup>14</sup> Jiu Zuwen, "The Village Council Creates a New Climate", *Contemporary Jiangxi Journal*, 2010, p. 12.

governance capacity is in line with the proper meaning of “deepening the reform in all-around way”<sup>15</sup> goal. In 2012, the former Chinese President Hu Jintao proposed that China should improve local-level democracy by broadening the scope and channels of self-governance and enrich democracy’s content and forms to enable people to conduct self-management, self-service, self-education, and self-oversight. Different types of local-level democracy are welcomed in the exploration of the grassroots governance.<sup>16</sup> In 2014, China issued the annual *No.1 Document of the Central Government*, further advancing the initiatives of improving rural governance and exploring effective ways of village self-governance in different conditions. The document suggested rural areas could carry out pilot programs of self-governance based on village community or village group (as the smallest unite) which has the collective ownership of land.<sup>17</sup> In short, the central government creates better policy environment for enhancing local democracy in order to benefit the local and even the whole society.

Nevertheless, local society also needs meritocracy as a supplement for better development. In China, the village is always synonymous with the term, poverty. Substantial development is as significant as procedural democracy, even more urgent. With the aim of substantial improvement of farmers’ life, elites’ contribution is necessary. Therefore, how to make local democracy more meritocratic becomes a more valuable issue. In fact, with respect to the academic focus on the

<sup>15</sup> See *Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the CPC*, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2013/1112/c1024-23519136.html>.

<sup>16</sup> See *Report to the Eighteenth National Congress of the Congress of the Communist Party of China* on Nov 8, 2012, [http://www.xj.xinhuanet.com/2012-11/19/c\\_113722546.htm](http://www.xj.xinhuanet.com/2012-11/19/c_113722546.htm).

<sup>17</sup> See [http://news.xinhuanet.com/2014-01/19/c\\_119033371.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/2014-01/19/c_119033371.htm).

grassroots governance, there is a perspective transition from western liberal democracy towards meritocratic consideration. To be specific, in the past, scholars were far more concerned with how to restrict political power and avoid individual's arbitrary behavior, rather than how to make local elites play their parts better to serve the public.<sup>18</sup> But in recent years, more academic research has concentrated on meritocratic governance within local electoral democracy. Some influential scholars even make claims about a “meritocratic path” to democracy in the village, emphasizing the importance of political elites as a theoretical response to the very realistic and urgent situation in the rural practice.<sup>19</sup> The very realistic situation of contemporary rural China as discussed before is the shortage of human resources, especially young talent. In terms of rallying talented individuals, current democratic governance is not sufficient. So, making democracy itself more meritocratic is driven by the actual need in the local society.

Simultaneously, political considerations based on the nature and reality of China's rural society also shape people's further understanding of what democracy means to them. Electoral democracy can be understood as a political mechanism aiming to select more meritorious people to rule the local society with broad political participation by the mass,<sup>20</sup> which is quite a Schumpeterian way<sup>21</sup> to define democracy. In fact, theorists in

<sup>18</sup> Tianyuanshiqi, *Rural Leaders in China: Connection, Cohesion and Agrarian Politics* (Jinan: Shandong People's Publishing House, 2012), p1.

<sup>19</sup> See works written by Tong Zhihui, Lang Youxing, He Xuefeng.

<sup>20</sup> Lang Youxing, *Developing Democracy: Political Elites and villager Election* (Xi'an: Northwest University Press, 2009), P212.

<sup>21</sup> As an influential democratic elitist, Schumpeter's theory of competitive democracy emphasizes more on the instrumental significance of democracy as a mechanism of ruler selection.

favor of a meritocratic path in rural governance don't counterpose political elites and the mass. They put more weight on political elites' leading function, intellectual contribution and responsibility for the people with the purpose of serving the local community.

Therefore, it's not difficult to understand why China's local society needs democracy with more meritocratic characteristics. Also, it's understandable to argue for the second issue of why political meritocracy contributes to the hybrid model. In short, political meritocracy can supplement what local democracy lacks and has advantages in promoting local democracy.

In the hybrid model, the first secretary represents institutional power from political meritocracy. The practical reason to conduct the arrangement of sending first secretaries to rural areas is mainly that there is still a large population of village people living in serious poverty. Actually, before the policy was formally implemented in 2015, many provinces had some successful experience of upper cadres entering the villages to help with development. Therefore, as a formal political action, sending first secretaries is a direct and rational response to China's poverty issues. Admittedly, China has made a great contribution to poverty relief worldwide in the past twenty years, which is also quite outstanding performance for itself. But there were still 128 thousand poor villages with more than 70 million people in poverty according to the latest poverty standard of an annual income of ¥2300 per capita from 2014, which obviously posed a big challenge to rural China's further development and full realization of the national development goal in 2020. Formally from 2015, a large number of first secretaries respectively from the provincial, municipal, county and town organs were sent to the poor villages in almost every province. To be specific, Anhui province has sent 18 thousand first secretaries to the poor villages

since 2001.<sup>22</sup> There used to be more than 120 people being asked for detainment by the village people and village cadres in the fourth group with 2000 first secretaries in 2014.<sup>23</sup> Guangxi Province sent 3000 cadres as first secretaries to the grassroots from 2012 to 2014.<sup>24</sup> The number in Henan Province was more than 14 thousand from 2011 to 2015. In 2016, China selected and sent 18.8 thousand outstanding cadres in total to act as first secretaries to support weak and poor villages. The first secretary system is on the frontline of poverty relief and party organization construction throughout the country.

There might be possibility that the central government conducts such arrangement on the basis of previous successful experience in pilot areas. The current practice further shows the merits of political meritocracy in the local hybrid model.

First, upper political elites can offer their intellectual power, material capital and social capital to promote local governance. As upper political elites, first secretaries being dispatched to the villages can be understood as a supply of rural leadership for the purpose of improving the scarce capacity in leadership at the grassroots level.<sup>25</sup> On what constitutes a good leadership, Bell has discussed the importance of intellectual ability, social skills and virtues which are equally necessary for rural cadres. First secretaries are intellectually competent on average since most of them have a relatively higher education background and formal

<sup>22</sup> Wang Xiaoxia, “To Send Real and Right- The First Secretary Work Investigation in Anhui Province”, *China Poverty Alleviation*, Vol.15, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Liu Limin, Wu Kaizhi, “Take Full Advantage of The First Secretary in the Construction of the Beautiful Village”, *Theory Research*, Vol.5, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> See [http://www.gxzf.gov.cn/zjgx/jrgx/201509/t20150927\\_478468.htm](http://www.gxzf.gov.cn/zjgx/jrgx/201509/t20150927_478468.htm).

<sup>25</sup> Wang Yahua, Shu Quanfeng, “The Poverty Alleviation of First Secretary and Leadership Supply in Rural China”, *Journal of China National School of Administration*, 2017.

position in the upper government.<sup>26</sup> They're more likely to have wider range of knowledge, broader horizon and richer experience. Additionally, financial and social resources they carry prepare better conditions for them to realize their ideas. The social capital here mainly refers to upper political elites' social network which comprises their social relations with other governments, social and business sectors. Some evidence indicates many first secretaries take advantage of their social capital to get more valuable information and substantial help for fulfillment of local tasks. In sum, excellent first secretaries have many advantages to contribute to local development by their meritocratic power.

Second, upper political elites can exercise a coordination and supervision of the local governance. Since first secretaries are interest-irrelevant with any interest group in the village, their independence makes their authority more acceptable to facilitate the coordination between the villager group and the local cadres. As the first leader of the village party branch, the first secretary has political power and convenience to supervise party members' behavior and attitudes at work.

Third, by the standard of political meritocracy, the first secretary mechanism makes the whole China Model more progressive. Working and living with poor people in poor areas is both education and training for young political elites. Having tough experiences in rural society helps enhance the upper cadres' ability to deal with complex problems and develop their real sympathy for the worse-off. As shown in the survey, among all the local cadres, villagers in County T of Guangxi are most

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p84. Survey suggests 58.16% of the first secretaries have bachelor degree and 27.55% have master degree. Compared to most local cadres with education lower than high school, first secretaries are intellectually competitive.

satisfied with the first secretaries.<sup>27</sup> Good performance allow the first secretaries to move on in their career, while by contrast, poor performance may cause their recalls which is obviously no good for their future career.<sup>28</sup>

### III

#### Conclusion

The rural hybrid model reveals that political meritocracy as a supplemental strength can reconcile and cooperate with electoral democracy in a harmonious way at the grassroots level. What's more, political meritocracy from upper power is capable to promote local democracy, which shows the inclusiveness and flexibility of the whole China Model.

At the practical level, political meritocracy makes up the deficiency of local democracy and benefits local governance. Political meritocracy transfers large numbers of political talents with material and social resources to conduct national policy for rural areas. Many studies and reports manifest there is positive influence of the first secretary policy besides villagers' satisfaction. Local democratic management also learns much from capable upper cadres with their working groups. Although, there are still imperfections in the current practice including weak participation and some ineffective interaction among local elites and villagers, overall village poverty and feeble organization are substantially improving.

At the theoretical level, political meritocracy takes heavy responsibility for the local community managed by democracy. In

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p84.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p83.

China's Confucian tradition, the government should take great obligation for the well-being of the people.<sup>29</sup> The same goes for contemporary China. Powerful and extensive political actions are only possible when driven by a powerful central government, of which great responsibility for the society is a core feature. Also, political leaders selected by the meritocratic system (exams and tests) are regarded as political talents with superior ability, which leads to their heavier social responsibility than that of normal citizens. When local democracy encounters trouble from both internal and external factors, political meritocracy is both capable and obligated to give a hand.

Therefore, political meritocracy works not only at the central level but also at the local level with democracy. To conclude, a hybrid model reconciling electoral democracy with political meritocracy is possible and desirable for rural China or places with similar situation.

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<sup>29</sup> Tongdong Bai, "A Confucian Version of Hybrid Regime: How Does It Work, and Why Is It Superior?", *The East Asian Challenge for Democracy-Political Meritocracy in Comparative Perspective*, edited by Daniel. A. Bell and Chengyang Li, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p65.