

German Scientists may shed new light on China's democratization

A group of German scientist made public their attempt to analyze local direct elections in the People's Republic of China. Gunter Schubert of a protestant research center in Heidelberg noted the importance of further research in the fields of local self-governance in Chinese villages in the latest issue of *Asien*, a journal of the *German Association for Asian Studies*. The research project "Village and Urban Neighborhood Elections in the PRC: Driving Forces of Democracy or Institutional Arrangement to Consolidate One-Party Rule?" was initiated by Schubert and Thomas Heberer, professor of political science at the university of Duisburg, and is funded by the *German Science Association* and the *Ministry of Economic Cooperation*. Schubert notes in his article that although village elections have been introduced in the 1980s, scientists only recently started to do research on the implications and scope of such elections. Research projects so far have focused on the procedural quality of village elections, the changing relationship between peasants and village committees, and the new role of party cadres in local politics after the introduction of local elections. Schubert and his research team aim at shedding new light on the role of local elections in China's political development by analyzing the competitiveness of elections, the attitudes of the ordinary people towards the elected officials and their newly gained political power, and the impact of such elections on national politics. Moreover, Schubert tries to answer the question how local cadres deal with the double bind of "democratic accountability" towards the electorate and their obligation to obey the party line. Schubert's research team plans to use semi-standardized questionnaires to interview voters and party cadres at all levels of government. The team will visit villages in three provinces: Guandong, Shandong, and Jianxi. The first has been selected because it is considered a "model region" (good electoral implementation and strong economic

development), the second is believed to be an “average region” (lower degree of electoral implementation and economic development), and the last is viewed an “under-average region” (low degree of electoral implementation and economic development).

Project discussion paper *Village Elections in PRC: a Trojan Horse of Democracy?* ([http://www.uni-
duisburg.de/Institute/OAWISS/download/doc/discuss19.pdf](http://www.uni-duisburg.de/Institute/OAWISS/download/doc/discuss19.pdf))
by Gunter Schubert

Taiwan: a model for China?

In his paper, Schubert also poses the question whether local elections in China will have the same effects on the overall political development as they have had on Taiwan’s liberalization and democratization processes. This assumption can neither be categorically denied nor confirmed. What has been proved, however, is that fully-fledged local self-governance was the key to Taiwan’s democratic opening (see Christian Schafferer *The Power of the Ballot Box: Political Development and Election Campaigning in Taiwan*).