Politics and Autonomy in the Local State – County and Township Cadres as Strategic Actors in the Chinese Reform Process
Funded by the German Research Association (DFG), 2008–2012

Any substantial assessment of China’s state capacity cannot be undertaken without a careful analysis of the local state. County and township cadres are of utmost importance here – a fact which has rarely been researched so far. They have a high degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the central state and are the decisive actors concerning the implementation of China’s agricultural policies and the government’s efforts to reform the system of rural finance. It is the local cadres who decide about the central state’s success to maintain social stability and regime loyalty among China’s peasants.

What kind of rationality do local cadres follow when they carry out central policies? To what extent do they develop a collective identity that makes them a self-conscious strategic group in China’s political system, and how does this impact on state capacity and regime legitimacy?

The project intends to find answers to this question by a systematic analysis of the implementation of the “Construction of new countryside” comparing different counties and townships. By that, it makes an important contribution to the understanding of political development in contemporary China. Field research has been conducted in several counties between 2008 and 2010.