THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

In this chapter, my aim is to bring together the themes discussed in 1978–1981 under the topics of democratic centralism, anarchism, and bureaucratism. Based on the press discussion, I will construct a comprehensive theory of democratic centralism in this chapter. In addition, I will use earlier Western research to evaluate the theory and to put my findings into a historical perspective.

Strictly speaking, there are three analytically distinct elements in the theory of democratic centralism: democratic centralism in the Party, the mass line, and the comprehensive theory of democratic centralism. Democratic centralism in the Party refers to democratic centralism in the original Leninist parlance: open discussion before decision making and united implementation after the decision is made. The mass line, then, describes the grassroots level dialogue between a cadre and the masses and the interaction between policies formulated by higher-level organs and popular initiative. Democratic centralism as a theory not only includes both of these conceptions,[1] but also deals with the complexity of the relations within decision-making and implementation processes. Below I refer to this comprehensive theory, unless otherwise specified.

The exact meaning of democratic centralism in Chinese parlance is comprehensible: it refers to the dialectical process of decision making consisting of popular input, decision making, and implementation. Democracy in democratic centralism involves popular initiative in both decision making and implementation. Centralism, then, could refer either to the leadership functions in democracy, the processes of decision making, the decisions themselves, or the discipline in implementing and obeying decisions. James Townsend summarizes that the mass line describes the central process in every political system: the conversion of demands and interests of individuals and groups into political decisions, and the application and enforcement of these decisions.[2] The same is true of democratic centralism in general. Stephen Angle identifies stages of input, policy formulation and adjust-

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[1] Dick Wilson and Matthew Grenier argue that Mao divided democratic centralism, originally the orthodox Leninist organizational policy, into two distinct elements: democracy stressing the mass line and centralism emphasizing organization (Wilson and Grenier 1992, p. 28).

[2] Townsend 1980, p. 417.

ment in democratic centralism,[3] stages that are actually common to the policy-making processes in all modern states.

The Chinese use the term democratic centralism to describe various kinds of processes. All of these accord with the general umbrella understanding, but are not necessarily fully compatible in the details. Firstly, democratic centralism was an organizational principle in the best Leninist tradition: it meant party discipline and obeying decisions which resulted from Party-wide discussion. Secondly, it was a method of democratic decision making in general, which required process-ing popular initiative and knowledge into decisions and implementing these deci-sions. Thirdly, it referred to interaction between leaders and the led or the political system and the populace. Fourthly, it was an epistemology combining practical and experimental knowledge with the more general and more comprehensive theoretical understanding.

History of democratic centralism in China[4]

I have no means to determine when in the parlance of the Chinese Communist Party the term democratic centralism acquired all of its present dimensions. The term, in its original Leninist meaning, has been in use since the early days of the Chinese Communist Party as is evidenced by its appearance in Party documents from that time. As such, it involved inner-Party democracy combining Party members' initiative with unified and disciplined execution of decisions.[5] Later, it encompassed the mass line leadership style. Quoting two separate speeches of the time by Mao Zedong, Stuart Schram sees that democratic centralism and the mass line were parallel already in Ya'nan.[6] John Wilson Lewis highlights a 1945 speech, in which Mao Zedong put forth the idea that the mass line must conform to democratic centralism.[7]

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[3] Angle 2005, p. 528.

[4] For a handy general summary of democratic centralism in Mao Zedong's writings, see Chi 1986, pp. 245–248. Nevertheless, I would be cautious about Chi's attempts to view these writings in an undemocratic light. For example, to refute the stance that army units should "ask the lower levels to discuss first, then let the higher levels decide," does not disregard the masses' influence as Chi 1986, p. 248, tends to claim, since any army in combat situations demands that its soldiers obey military orders, and this quotation says nothing about how democracy should be practiced among civilians in times of peace.

[5] See, e.g., "The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War" in Mao Zedong, Selected Works, vol. I, pp. 204–205.

[6] Schram 1989, p. 97.

[7] Lewis 1966, p. 79.

According to Stuart Schram, the concept of the mass line was not invented by Mao Zedong,[8] but he had utilized and developed practices resembling the mass line far before the official formulation of the concept. Arthur Steiner maintains that ever since Mao's early organizational activity among peasants in Hunan in the 1920s he had emphasized that the Party must rely on the masses, serve their needs, and draw its inspiration from them.[9] It was Mao Zedong who authoritatively summarized the mass line style of leadership in 1943 after the Party rectification campaign in his famous writing "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership". This style of leadership combines leadership and popular participation, a general policy and particular conditions, and leading and learning. Leadership must analyze experiences during the process to acquire even better knowledge of the situation and formulate even better policies.[10] The 1942 rectification campaign already stressed some epistemological questions closely linked with democratic centralism. It opposed two types of subjectivism, dogmatism and empiricism, the first ignoring practice and the second unable to use perceptual and partial knowledge in a purposeful and systematic way.[11]

The mass line evolved as a synthesis of insights gained through guerilla experiences, when face-to-face interaction was the main form of communication and the Party depended on the masses for survival.[12] The reality of the mass line changed considerably after the revolution. Brantly Womack emphasizes that the Communist Party no longer was situated in a competitive political environment. This situation fundamentally affected the democratic character of the mass line. As a result of the Party monopolizing power, popular influence faded.[13] Lowell Dittmer remarks that after the revolution, the elite's capability to transmit its messages increased due to new and more effective media, while the masses' abilities to communicate their views to elites did not correspondingly increase. This fact subtly altered the nature of the Party's contact with the masses.[14] John Gardner explains that the revolution could rely on the masses' participation and local knowledge more than on specific technical skills, but after the revolution economic reconstruction needed expertise and bureaucracy. In addition, Mao Zedong

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[8]   Schram 1989, p. 98.

[9]   Steiner 1951, p. 423. See also Kim 1969 for Jiangxi Soviet political style and organizational techniques. See especially pp. 78–79 for their relation to the future conception of the mass line.

[10]   "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership," in Mao Zedong, Selected Works, vol. III.

[11]   E.g. "Rectify the Party's Style of Work," in Mao Zedong, Selected Works, vol. III, pp. 36–42.

[12]   Selden 1972, p. 274; Starr 1979, p. 192; Townsend 1967, p 51.

[13]   Womack 1991 A, pp. 68–69, 73.

[14]   Dittmer 1974, p. 346.

wanted to speed up ideologically motivated social change, which could not be realized without resorting to commandism. Since some policies were no longer popular, the Party responded by downgrading the masses' right to discuss and modify policies. As a result, regimentation of the masses replaced genuine mass mobilization. [15] Moreover, Soviet models of administration and enterprise management insulated leaders from workers and stressed discipline over personal activism and incentive.[16]

John Bryan Starr maintains that in the communist base areas the mass line did not need to deal with hierarchical relationships among leaders. Hence, the mass line offers no solution to the alienation of the upper echelons of the organization from the masses, since this alienation is not only a question of cadre attitudes but also the sheer size of the organization.[17] James Townsend describes how after the revolution, "higher-level cadres no longer maintained the popular contacts that were to ensure 'a democratic' style in the absence of popular controls." Although sending cadres to the grassroots and soliciting people's opinions still added to the quality of cadres' relationships with the masses, they could not solve the post-1949 isolation of higher-level cadres from the people. In other words, the result was a recurring conflict between theory and reality. Although mass movements attempted to recapture the original mass line spirit, they provided only temporary solutions and eroded the Party's ability to produce voluntary action by the masses.[18]

Democratic centralism reflects the Chinese communist conviction that the masses' participation in political processes is necessary, but mass movements can have real and expected results only under the leadership of the Party. The strong Party role is the essence of democratic centralism. Only the romanticism of Cultural Revolution encouraged the people to liberate themselves (*ziji jiefang jizi*), although most leaders at the time, including Mao Zedong, did not even see the people's self-liberation as being in contradiction with the Party leadership.[19]

Still, there probably have been different interpretations about the proper roles of the Party and the masses throughout Communist Party history. Lowell Dittmer, analyzing these differences in light of the ideological conflicts of the Cultural Revolution, distinguishes between the understandings of Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi. Liu Shaoqi allegedly emphasized adherence to certain organizational rules, while issues themselves could be left open to debate. In contrast, Mao Zedong stressed the correct ideological substance, but was flexible with the form. Mao

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[15]   Gardner 1972, pp. 233–235.

[16]   Brugger 1976, pp. 133–134, 217.

[17]   Starr 1979, p. 193.

[18]   Townsend 1967, pp. 199–200.

[19]   Schram 1989, p. 189.

emphasized the importance of the masses' supervision over the Party more than Liu. Liu Shaoqi preferred that the masses' participation be organizationally mediated, while Mao Zedong promoted direct mass participation and unmediated contact between leaders and the led.[20] Such personalization is an oversimplification, of course,[21] but this comparison identifies the two tendencies inherent in democratic centralism and also illustrates that tension between its organizational aspect and inclusiveness-maximizing aspects exists. Of these two stances, the 1978–1981 press discussion mostly advocated "the Liuist" standpoint, although direct participation of the masses, so long as it is freed from the strict limits based on the prioritization of ideological correctness, had its supporters as well.

Radical Leftism expanded the role of the masses in democratic centralism. According to Dick Wilson and Matthew Grenier, Mao Zedong began to understand democracy as promoting the initiative of the masses and using centralism to direct these impulses coming from the masses. He wanted to encourage radicalism in society as a counterweight to the conservatism inherent in a vertically stratified bureaucracy.[22] Mao Zedong even started to reconsider his earlier conviction that centralization was more important than democracy.[23] The Cultural Revolution, albeit while promoting mass participation, challenged the democratic centralist tradition and altered the content of the mass line. The Cultural Revolution incorporated ideological criteria to complement, and even replace organizational criteria, such as democratic centralism and majority rule.[24] Stuart Schramm suggests that the Cultural Revolution replaced democracy and centralism with the concepts of rebellion and loyalty (*zhong*) to the leader. This pair likewise formed a dialectical unity, but in fact the result resembled unstructured plebiscitary democracy at the national level and arbitrary rule and confusion at the local level, when leaders were deprived of the power to make decisions.[25]

Simultaneously, the rebel attacks against the Party and the administrative hierarchies during the Cultural Revolution proved fatal to democratic centralist communication channels and patterns. As Lowell Dittmer shows, the Cultural Revolution disrupted intra-elite communication patterns within the hierarchically stratified structure of government and forced all authorities to face their constituencies on a public stage. The elite were forced to seek new patterns of commu-

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[20] Dittmer 1974, pp. 183–184, 286, 343.

[21] Not least since Mao Zedong's own statements do not clearly distinguish whether he expected that people should be consulted and political authority should be used according to their wishes or whether the masses should run things themselves (Schram 1989, p. 188).

[22] Wilson and Grenier 1992, p. 29.

[23] Schram 1989, p. 188.

[24] Dittmer 1974, p. 240; Tsou 1986, p. 84.

[25] Schram 1989, p. 190.

nication with the masses. Well-structured, hierarchical communication channels were replaced with direct communication between the elite and the masses. Communication between the elite and the masses now took place through the mass media and speeches. This new form of communication had the desired effect of dissolving bureaucratic barriers to relations between the elite and the masses, but in the absence of any gatekeeper to regulate the flow of information it had the dysfunctional effect of exposing the elite to direct pressures from the masses.[26] John Bryan Starr observes that in the Cultural Revolution, rebels were to act both as critics and administrators, which often were mutually exclusive roles. It was legitimate for the masses remaining outside of the organization to evaluate the administration critically, but when they became insiders they vitiated that legitimacy. Simultaneously, they lacked the experience and knowledge of efficient administrative work, making the masses' participation in revolutionary committees mostly token, not genuine.[27]

Lowell Dittmer describes how in the Cultural Revolution criticism and self-criticism became integrated with the mass line resulting in mass criticism. Previously, the mass line had governed the relationship between the elite and lower-level masses and cadres, while criticism and self-criticism had been an inner-Party mechanism of decision making, conflict resolution and discipline. During the Cultural Revolution criticism and self-criticism emerged as a form of mass mobilization and rectification as well.[28] During the Cultural Revolution the ideal way to supervise leaders was to subject their mistakes to mass criticism and to permit widespread discussion, "great debates," in which the masses would "present the facts, reason things out, and persuade through reasoning."[29] In fact, the Cultural Revolution changed mass-line politics from alliance-maximization to clear demarcation between oneself and the enemy.[30] Brantly Womack calls the resulting situation quasi-totalitarian: "It was characterized by competing factions that were mass-controlled" but the spontaneity of the masses was encouraged only as far as it supported the supreme leader.[31]

Lowell Dittmer surmises that the Cultural Revolution divorced the mass line from its connection to policy making, and as a result the mass line was deprived of any chance for reality testing. The result was uninhibited criticism from the masses and their expression of grievances.[32] David Zweig contends that during

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[26]   Dittmer 1974, p. 165, 320.

[27]   Starr 1979, p. 200.

[28]   Dittmer 1974, pp. 292, 316, 336.

[29]   Gardner 1972, pp. 238–239.

[30]   Womack 1991 A, p. 77.

[31]   Womack 1991 A, p. 77.

[32]   Dittmer 1974, pp. 332–333.

the Cultural Revolution the mass line degenerated into merely a demonstration of the masses' participation to support a leadership faction's own policy line, although during campaigns this participation was often the result of coercion or was ritualistic.[33] Likewise, Tang Tsou observes that the mass line became an empty slogan when personality cults displaced collective leadership, mass movements were turned against Party and state organizations, persuasion was replaced by uncontrolled terror, immediate interests of the masses were suppressed in the name of collective interests, and political penetration into society intensified.[34]

Beginning in 1978, China saw the revival of democratic centralism, as this particular study shows. Tang Tsou remarks that after 1978, the mass line again was emphasized as a method for finding a compromise between the Party's political interests and people's immediate socioeconomic interests.[35] However, Marc Blecher argues that the mass line was reformulated at this point. The spontaneity of the masses, mobilization, and direct political action were deemphasized; simultaneously more cooperative and responsive relations between leaders and the masses were emphasized anew.[36] According to Graham Young, the mass line was now restricted to economic modernization rather than the broader scope of revolutionary activity.[37] The new political language and institution building have continued to emphasize the democratic centralist style of interaction between leaders and the led. Now, however, the contradictions this interaction is intended to solve are no longer class conflicts but interpersonal conflicts in a community,[38] while on the level of the whole society the mass line is used to solve conflicts of interest. The new interpretation distinguished between the mass line and mass movements. It still underscores the mass line but has abandoned mass movements.[39]

The mass line and democratic centralist conceptions are still in active use. For example, one of the represents in the former president Jiang Zemin's theory of the Three Represents is that the Party must represent the fundamental interests of the broad masses, a clear derivative from the mass line tradition. Indeed, the Three Represents is explicitly read to refer to upholding the mass line.[40] Chih-yu Shih argues that the mass line was reintroduced especially after 1989 because student demonstrations made the government understand that it needs to increase popular supervision over the government and strengthen information channels between the

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[33] Zweig 1989, p. 95.

[34] Tsou 1987, p. 269.

[35] Tsou 1987, p. 288.

[36] Blecher 1983, p. 79.

[37] Young 1980, p. 68.

[38] Ann Anagnost makes this point in the context of village compacts in Anagnost 1992, p. 192.

[39] Tsou 1987, p. 271.

[40] Angle 2005, p. 526.

center and the grassroots.[41] Once again, as in 1978, when the Party encountered serious troubles, it sought inspiration from its tradition and found that its strength was its reliance on the masses.

Even today most political reform proposals introduced by Chinese intellectuals still stay within the bounds of democratic centralism.[42] However, the democratic centralist tradition no longer goes unquestioned in Chinese public discussion. Ding Yijiang observes that since the 1980s, Chinese intellectuals have begun to question centralism, either because centralized leadership is harmful to economic progress, or because the conception of unity of interests is challenged by a more pluralistic understanding.[43] Already in the discussion of 1978–1981 this trend was detectible. At the time, it was suggested that the people's participation and the people's will could be articulated by other means than Party leadership, contrary to the former conception of the mass line.[44] When in the early 1980s the press ran articles suggesting that the legislature, not the Party, should be the locus of democratic centralist popular input and centralizing, the actual message was to give precedence to non-Party institutions in the representation of the people. This was an obvious attempt to undermine the monopoly on power the Communist Party has as the single organ through which the people rule. Simultaneously, ideological aspects of democratic centralism were deemphasized when it was presented as a system-theory-like circulation of information between the system and its environment. Interestingly, though, the Party did not find the suggestion of adding non-Party democratic centralist channels as threatening, since China has thereafter strengthened its representative institutions. It has emphasized the people's delegates' role in the typical democratic centralist tasks of conveying the people's voice in decision making and participating in the deliberative process of lawmaking. Evidently, and somewhat surprisingly, the Party has not been hostile towards non-Party democratic centralist channels, as long as they do not challenge the Party, but cooperate with it.

Democratic centralism in the Party

Democratic centralism in the Party is the earliest stage of the theory of democratic centralism. Lenin introduced the term democratic centralism as a way to guide Party decision making. His aim was to pool the collective wisdom and ideas of

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[41] Shih 1999, pp. 174–175. However, it is possible that Chih-yu Shih overemphasizes the events of 1989 as a demarcation line.

[42] Angle 2005, p. 531.

[43] Ding 2001, pp. 9, 16–17.

[44] Young 1980, pp. 68–69, 83.

Party members through a process of open discussion and decision making by majority vote, and also to guarantee the unity of the Party activities and the disciplined implementation of the Party decisions. In Western research, the term democratic centralism is often interpreted in this original Leninist sense only. Scholars commonly define democratic centralism as discussion within the Party until a decision is made, followed by unified implementation of whatever decision was reached at the top.[45] Relatedly, democratic centralism refers to the hierarchical relationship between the center and the branches.[46] As a whole, democratic centralism in the Party is a principle of the Party's organizational unity.[47]

The conception of democratic centralism in the Party is a coherent one. It describes the model of the democratic decision-making process, which is in use, for example, in Western parliamentary democracies. The parliament is a forum in which elected representatives discuss laws in the making, pass them by a majority vote, after which these laws bind all citizens equally. If one personally disagrees with the law in question, he must still obey it, although he has a right to use various forums to suggest revision of the law. Similarly, the Chinese discourse simultaneously emphasizes the need to discuss policy proposals and the obligation to obey policies, although one should have full rights to preserve and express his divergent opinions even after the policy is made. Hence, the expression of opinions should be democratic, but implementation of decisions should be universal.

However, situating this principle in the Party functions instead of in the state decision making may lead to some undemocratic consequences. Party discipline itself is not undemocratic. Conversely, in Western democracies, party discipline is a means to help the government pass policies and budgets in line with its electoral mandate. Thus, party discipline can be a vehicle of accountability towards the electorate. However, Western political parties function in a competitive environment. If members of one party are not allowed to question a certain policy proposal, other parties can do so. Contrarily, in a one-party system, there is neither electoral choice between party platforms nor opposition parties. Therefore, there is a real danger that party discipline silences all voices of caution or doubt. Thus, in one-party systems functioning inner-party democracy is essential for democracy, unlike in Western democratic systems, where parties need not be democratic since the state system is. It is thus no wonder that apart from improving democracy in state institutions, inner-party democracy has been central for the Chinese theorization of democratization and its practical attempts to democratize.

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[45] Hamrin and Zhao 1995, p. xxxi; Lieberthal 1995, pp. 175–176; Nathan 1986, p. 64. For the formulation by Wang Ming, see Angle 2005, p. 525.

[46] Dittmer 1974, p. 85.

[47] Lewis 1966, p. 81.

Leninist parties adopted the principle of party discipline when they were still fighting for the power.[48] At the time discipline was needed for revolutionary activities, and the Party's decisions bound only its members. Even after gaining power, some unity in action is necessary for producing drastic social change. But for a Leninist party having a monopoly on power, absolute ideological discipline may be dangerous. This is not to say that all party members should not abide by commonly decided policies passed *by the state organs*, but requiring the same unanimity inside the party, which should be an organization for formulating policy lines, is likely to suffocate differing opinions and lead to the over-centralization of power. Even worse, especially during radical leftist periods, even those who were not Party members were required to obey Party discipline. Therefore, to evaluate whether party discipline conforms to democracy in one-party systems, one must estimate how absolute, how inclusive, and how direct the discipline is.

Often the ideal combination of free exchange of opinions and strict party discipline was not achieved in practice. Carol Lee Hamrin and Suisheng Zhao argue that in China party discipline encourages deference to those of higher status and obedience without questioning, because it permits no public doubts after the decision is handed down. Subordinates learn to communicate very indirectly and obliquely with superiors and direct argumentation is absent in meetings.[49] In practice, democratic centralism is sometimes used to demand discipline.[50] Even when democracy works properly, the emphasis on centralism suggests that, in fact, when a decision has been made, the issue is discussable only in a much more limited way.[51] Moreover, democratic centralism in the Party was not always conceptualized in terms of freedom of expression at all. When democratic centralism is described as the conduct of inner-party struggles to maintain the "truth" and organizational unity,[52] or as criticism and self-criticism, we are dealing with the expression of opinions in a much more circumscribed context than is customary in Western democracies.

Unlike in the West, in the Chinese political system intra-Party democracy is crucial to the democraticness of the system. In the absence of competitive elections measuring popular support of party platforms, for China to be democratic its party platform needs to go through the test of popularity during its formulation. Hence, the Chinese communists' party platform should be consultatively develop-

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[48]   Of development in China, see Angle 2005, pp. 524–525.

[49]   Hamrin and Zhao 1995, p. xxxi.

[50]   For example, demands for obeying democratic centralism have been used for pressuring reluctant people's congress members to vote for the Party nominated candidate they originally opposed (Xia 2000, p. 208).

[51]   Angle 2005, p. 525.

[52]   See, e.g., Lewis 1966, p. 79.

ed. Apart from the need for popular feedback as the criterion of democracy in general, intra-Party democracy is essential for guaranteeing comprehensiveness of social consultation. In the West, public elections, at least theoretically, provide such a guarantee. Stephen Angle stresses that for democratic centralist consultation to be satisfactory it must include not only leaders but also individual members in each group, making intra-Party consultation important.[53]

The mass line

The importance of the mass line approach both for the communists' success in revolution and for their democratic theory cannot be overestimated. The Chinese communists and Western scholars alike emphasize the role of the mass line in winning popular commitment and generating popular support for Communist Party policies.[54] With the mass line, communists have been able to minimize the application of overt party power.[55] Furthermore, the mass line is important, as John Wilson Lewis puts it, since "without a correct standard for dealing with nonparty Chinese, policy decisions may cease to be concrete and realistic and may even become inoperative."[56]

The principles of the mass line style of leadership are clearly stated in Mao Zedong's well-known teaching of 1943:

> In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily "from the masses, to the masses". This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action. Then once again concentrate ideas from the masses and once again go to the masses so that the ideas are persevered in and carried through. And so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time.[57]

Mao's famous slogan "from the masses, to the masses" means listening to and learning from those below, but also having a leadership systematizing these ideas, and returning them to the masses in a processed form.[58] John Bryan Strarr reconceptualizes this interaction to include stages of plebiscite, policy making,

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[53] Angle 2005, p. 538.

[54] E.g. Lieberthal 1995, pp. 64, 181; Steiner 1951, p. 422; Townsend 1967, p. 74.

[55] Lewis 1966, p. 75.

[56] Lewis 1966, p. 79. See also Starr 1979, p. 191.

[57] "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership" in Mao Zedong, Selected Works, vol. III, p. 119.

[58] Schram 1989, pp. 45–46.

and political education. Still, he sees that these labels obscure the fact that this process means dialectical interaction in which all of its elements, namely leaders, the led, policies and political reality, emerge qualitatively altered as the result of operation of the mass line.[59]

In addition with regard to communication between leaders and the masses, Western scholars have concluded that the mass line promotes equality and intimate communication between leaders and the masses.[60] The mass line expects that leaders are ready to serve their community and make sacrifices for its benefit.[61] As Tang Tsou puts it, the mass line requires that the Party can penetrate the masses and their formal and informal organizations. Therefore, cadres should live with the masses or spend time at the grassroots level, lead the masses by personal example, devote themselves to public duties and participate in physical labor.[62] Bill Brugger states that the mass line is meant to transform an organization into a community characterized by a network of interconnected human relations. The result should be the closure of the gap between the elite and the masses and the free flow of information through the organization.[63] James Townsend concludes that the mass line combines sustaining movement with popular support, control over bureaucrats and experts, and encouragement of bureaucrat's identification with the masses and commitment to popular welfare.[64]

Lowell Dittmer summarizes the aims of introducing the mass line style of leadership:

> The original mass line had three analytically distinct purposes: (1) to facilitate vertical communication between elites and masses; (2) to achieve consensus between elites and masses; and (3) to enhance the masses' sense of political efficacy by apparently deferring to their will in making and implementing decisions.[65]

The mass line was an important part of democratic centralism in articles published in 1978–1981. The mass line meant that a cadre should be receptive to the people's needs. He should share their living conditions and consult them, if not in daily life, as the grassroots cadres did, then during investigative tours (*diaocha*). In decision making, it was a local cadre's work to listen to the opinions of the masses. both in meetings and in routine contact in work and social life,[66] analyze

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[59] Starr 1979, p. 190.

[60] Blecher 1983, p. 63, Selden 1972, pp. 274, 276.

[61] Lewis 1966, p. 84.

[62] Tsou 1986, p. 29.

[63] Brugger 1976, p. 222.

[64] Townsend 1980, p. 389.

[65] Dittmer 1974, p. 331. Original emphasis removed.

[66] Blecher 1983, pp. 69–76.

these opinions, and discuss them with fellow villagers. In implementing decisions made at the higher levels, a local cadre was again supposed to discuss these decisions with the masses in order to help them understand policies and to find the most feasible ways for implementation. Indeed, even national-level leaders personally inspected the situation at the grassroots level. Many chose certain places they had close connections to as regular testing sites where they believed that people would reveal to them the true effects of a policy, while others made surprise stops on the route during their trips.[67]

However, limits to popular influence in the mass line are evident. Brantly Womack summarizes that the mass line seeks popular style and flexible policy, and is not even meant for providing the means for citizen and legislative control.[68] The aim of extensive mass participation is to inform the masses and translate policies into conscious political action. Since allegedly only the Party has a clear understanding of the long-term collective interest, popular participation is designed to produce popular execution of policy rather than popular formation or control of policy.[69] Although the mass line serves the political aims of the Party, it does not render the masses totally powerless. Indeed, the Party has recognized that it must respect the collective creative powers of the masses to achieve its goals.[70] John Bryan Starr concludes that the masses have authority in the mass line because the masses, like reality, constrain leaders and policies. This is a very limited sort of authority, but it can sometimes become greater than the Party because Party leaders' viewpoints are limited.[71]

In articles published in 1978–1981, the mass line and democratic centralism were never fully synonymous, although at the grassroots level the difference between them was not always clear. Both the mass line and democratic centralism referred to consulting the masses. Generally speaking, the mass line was the work method for interactions with non-Party people, while democratic centralism was used in work within the Party. Yet, the term mass line was sometimes used inside the Party, when ordinary Party members or lower-level cadres were consulted in accordance with the mass line method.[72] Analytically, the mass line did not only include the democratic centralist process of consulting the masses, but also other

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[67] Lieberthal 1995, pp. 65, 175.

[68] Womack 1991 A, p. 71. During the Mao era, the mass line sometimes provided chances for cadre criticism and thus some kind of control over individual leaders, albeit irregularly. Still, it is true that ordinary people had no control over whether their input was adopted in policy-making or not.

[69] Townsend 1967, pp. 73–74.

[70] Townsend 1967, pp. 72–73.

[71] Starr 1979, p. 191.

[72] See also Falkenheim 1978, p. 26; Lewis 1966, p. 82; Steiner 1951, p. 422.

standards of good cadre work, such as taking the lead in work and regarding the masses as equals. Nor did the elements in the mass line and democratic centralism overlap fully. Both the stages of "from the masses" and "to the masses" involved democracy and centralism, although if the mass line formula is seriously applied requirements for both democracy and centralism are adequately fulfilled.

Democratic centralism as the overall theory

"From the masses and to the masses" is a perfect, although not the only, example of the dialectics between democracy and centralism. In this special case it would be as relevant to talk as much about the mass line as about democratic centralism. However, democratic centralism comprises a much wider set of issues, some of them institutionalized. The scope of democratic centralism is wider than the mere mass line, also including many leadership processes not directly visible to the masses. Democratic centralism continues throughout the whole bureaucratic and Party hierarchy, although the local level forms a special case, because grassroots cadres participate directly in most collective tasks and live in the unit they should both lead and represent. On this basic level of both opinion solicitation and implementation, direct contact between leaders and the led were commonplace. This is the main level of the mass line.

Although democratic centralism was originally a principle of Party life, many of its implications were by no means limited to the Party and its members. Indeed, Mao Zedong's interpretation of the term democratic centralism was extended to Party relations with outsiders and was combined with the mass line leadership style.[73] The Party even used the mass line type of external criticism to maintain internal discipline within its own ranks in accordance with democratic centralism.[74] R. J. Birrell observes that the democratic centralist ideal reflects the essence of the mass line when it urges that the masses need to be involved in decision making before requiring them to follow decisions.[75] In contrast, John Wilson Lewis assumes that the democratic centralist organizational relationships within the Party became the model for the mass line types of relationships between the Party and the people.[76] These evaluations show how closely interwoven democratic centralism and the mass line are. As John Wilson Lewis maintains, the mass line process was seen to produce correct estimations of the current situation, which then became the source for party lines. By applying the mass line, the party

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[73]   Schram 1973, pp. 29–30.
[74]   Steiner 1951, p. 423.
[75]   Birrell 1969, p. 403.
[76]   Lewis 1966, p. 79. See also Angle 2005, p. 526.

line succeeds in combining the ideology and strategy of the revolutionary move-
ment with tactical necessity and political expediency. Simultaneously, the mass
line was needed to carry out the party line. According to this mystique of mass-
party identity, the mass line was thus a method to both create and reinforce party
lines.[77]

According to Stuart Schram, democratic centralism covers "both the funda-
mental dilemma of leadership as such, namely that of combining effective 'cen-
tralized unification' with active support and initiative from below, and the prob-
lem of the upward and downward flow of ideas evoked by the slogan of the 'mass
line'."[78] Thus, although democratic centralism deals with impulses from below
and from the top down,[79] vertical information flow is only one part of the process.
Shih Chih-yu summarizes that democratic centralism implies representation of all
localities and social strata, so that local representatives can "not only keep the
nation aware of the special situations in each locality, but also relate information
regarding national trends back to their constituencies."[80] In other words, horizon-
tal exchange of information is necessary for finding general trends and harmoni-
zing interests or, in democratic centralist parlance, for centralizing.

Franz Schurmann maintains that democracy and centralism correspond to
decentralization and centralization.[81] I have found very little support for Schur-
mann's understanding in my sources from 1978–1981. Economic and even polit-
ical decentralization were the orders of the day and were reflected in the criticism
of impractical decisions made far away from the levels at which they were then
implemented. Nevertheless, at the time, democratic centralism was used to call for
political democratization, not for decentralization of economic power. Yet, it is
possible that Franz Schurmann has not misunderstood or oversimplified the issue,
since in the 1950s the Great Leap Forward may very well have identified democ-
racy with decentralization and centralism with centralization. Nevertheless, such
identification is partial at best. True, in one sense democracy in democratic cen-
tralism refers to the plurality of opinions and lower level situations, while centrali-
zation refers to unity. However, both democracy and centralism are necessary
processes both in centralized and decentralized decision making and in implemen-
tation.

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[77]   Lewis 1966, pp. 87–88.

[78]   Schram 1973, p. 31.

[79]   Shurmann 1966, pp. 54, 86–87, 102.

[80]   Shih 1999, p. 157. He describes democratic centralism in the practical setting of the National
       People's Congress.

[81]   Shurmann 1966, pp. 85, 87. See also Birrell 1969 for an interpretation of centralism as
       synonymous with centralization and control from above, while treating the mass line and
       decentralization as more or less synonymous.

Some scholars have criticized the concept of democratic centralism as contradictory. Wilson Lewis argues that "democratic centralism" forms an apparent contradiction because it assumes that the vanguard party without interests diverging from those of the masses leads and the masses control policies through their participation. Thus, this understanding equates greater party control with greater control by the working class.[82] However, Lewis's criticism targets the Leninist vanguard party theory more than democratic centralism, which can be, and in 1978–1981 often was, interpreted without the ideological vanguard party role or even without assuming the Communist Party to be the centralizer. Still, Stephen Angle remarks that although democratic centralism does not logically require a single party, its emphasis on a single outcome and disciplined adherence to that outcome makes it fit well with the idea of single party rule and even the vanguard party system, which to be democratic must be responsive to popular input and must include consultation with the populace.[83] Hence, the mass line combines both populist strains and elitist elements derived from the Leninist tradition.[84]

Democracy in democratic centralism

Democracy in democratic centralism refers to all processes of popular influencing. In the terminology of democratic centralism democracy means initiative from below, such as direct participation, articulation of opinions, political meeting attendance, and voting in elections. Democratic centralism welcomes popular input at any stage of decision making, whether it is information gathering, agenda setting, decision making, policy implementation, or feedback about policy performance. According to democratic centralism, all occasions for popular input fall under democracy, not just institutionalized opportunities and opinions expressed in formal situations. Although this definition of democracy does not presuppose any particular democratic institutions, such as elections, it emphasizes that the leadership has the responsibility to arrange opportunities for the general populace to express their opinions.

Democracy in democratic centralism refers to popular input. Every participant is supposed to voice her understanding and opinions for the deliberative evaluation of different viewpoints. In China even electoral choice to a large extent takes place during the deliberative process preceding actual voting, when the electorate nominates candidates.[85] Democratic centralist popular input is essentially

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[82]   Lewis 1966, p. 75.
[83]   Angle 2005, p. 527.
[84]   Gardner 1972, p. 222.
[85]   See, e.g., Chan et al. 1984, pp. 66–69.

deliberative, not aggregative. Compared to elections, it is more issue- than person-centered. Indeed, although there is a longstanding tradition equating democracy in democratic centralism with the majority principle, many Chinese see that democracy refers to weighing all opinions equally.[86] In contrast to centralism, democracy stands for plural views as opposed to centralist unity. If centralism is the task of professionals, democracy refers to amateur participation.

In ideal situations, the field of Chinese democracy could be really exhaustive:

> Practicing democratic management... mainly consists of establishing three systems of political, economic and production democracy. Political democracy is the correct hand-ling of cadre – commune member relations, upholding commune members' meeting and management committee (or team committee) systems. Cadres of a production unit should be produced through elections, cadres should adopt democratic work styles and the mass viewpoint, stay in close contact with commune members, and place them-selves under supervision of the masses. Economic democracy is that all financial plans, expenditure, allocation of income, basic construction, and purchasing of large-scale property, should be democratically discussed with the commune members and resolved in commune members' meetings, then implemented, all revenue and expenditure should be timely reported, making the finances open. Production democracy means that all important matters concerning production, like the production plan, the arrangement of crops, measures of production technology, basic construction, the organization of labor, labor quotas etc. must all be decided through discussion in commune members' meetings, in order to oppose cadres, as a minority, running things on their own.[87]

Centralization

Centralism refers to leadership processes in political communities at all levels from the local to the national. These processes take many forms. They involve soliciting, analyzing and processing the opinions of the masses; they embrace information gathering; they refer to formulating and executing binding decisions; they include taking local conditions and concerns into account during policy im-plementation; and they contain the use of persuasion to guarantee popular consent to policies. All of these stages are familiar to democratic processes in Western democracies as well.

Centralization has many aims. Centralization is the way of extracting, even constructing, the general will from the wide variety of particular individual wills. In other words, the Chinese recognize that leadership is needed in decision mak-ing, since unanimity seldom prevails from the start. In addition, centralization is meant to place popular opinions in the context of long-term interest, considera-tions of feasibility, and the wider national interest. Expertise and ideology step in

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86   Angle 2005, p. 526. He cites Wang Ming's majoritarian interpretation.

87   Anon., *Lilun yu shijian* 1978:10, p. 45.

here. Centralization is supposed to lead to better policies because it mandates broad information gathering and consensus building. Thus, one aim of centralism is to make informed decisions. As Stephen Angle summarizes, in centralization divergent inputs are synthesized into a single policy output.[88]

Centralization is explicitly a means to strengthen the Communist Party leadership. Improving policy performance is one part of this plan. In addition, Shih Chih-yu concludes that the mass line approach helps the Party "localize, individualize, and departmentalize a potential political problem before it develops" but if the issue is wide-spread "the Party at the centre is in a position to deal with it at an early stage before the localities themselves realize that their concern has a nation-wide audience."[89] The third obvious aim of centralization is to minimize resistance to policies and start to implement change where resistance is low. In other words, the Chinese communists' strategy was to minimize resources needed for policy execution. Thus, the mass line even accepts a trade-off between minimizing resources and maximizing results, making the Party often ready to compromise unified policy implementation. Still, this means only compromise, not giving up the original policy aims. As John Wilson Lewis puts it, flexibility improves chances for successful implementation, but flexibility takes place within a rigid general framework and decreases sharply during the centralization stage of decision making.[90]

Sometimes articles tied centralism to discipline in obeying and implementing common decisions. Centralism itself perhaps refers to formulating binding decisions rather than to discipline itself. Centralism requires that democratic decisions be implemented despite an individual's own or a group's preferences. This is of course one of the main rationales of democracy in general: the point in making decisions together is precisely that these decisions will be obeyed by all. Democracy is about asking constituents to consent to policies that will bind them. We can hardly talk about democracy if decisions made by (representatives of) everyone are not implemented.

He Baogang claims that democratic centralism contains a theoretical contradiction between substantial popular control over the government and paternalist centralized power which renders democratic centralism essentially unworkable.[91] The democratic centralist conception combining democracy with leadership is, however, a coherent one. It would be naive to anticipate that the people's will as such will be transformed into decisions in any democratic system or even that the will of the people will always be the only or even the primary element in democ-

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[88]   Angle 2005, p. 528.

[89]   Shih 1999, p. 168.

[90]   Lewis 1966, p. 74.

[91]   He 1996, p. 53, 55.

ratic decision making. In decision making there are many other factors for the elite to consider than just popular will. Any democratic system must at times introduce new ideas, persuade the people to support policies, or make unpopular decisions. In other words, both direct and representative democracies need leadership.

The question is to what extent leadership is democratic. Elitism, to which He Baogang perhaps refers, is unfortunately a reality in actual democracies in the West and East alike. The contradiction between the ideal of popular control and actual elitism is common in nation-state-size representative democracies in general. Therefore, a certain amount of unequal distribution of power does not make a political system undemocratic if there are adequate systems of popular input installed. In articles published in 1978–1981 it was argued that democratic leadership comes only from centralizing popular opinions. Normatively, proletarian centralism, or any true centralism whatsoever, is based on democracy. Centralism respects democratic mass initiative and pays attention to the people's immediate interest. Centralism thus differs remarkably from authoritarianism. The Chinese sources differentiate between authoritarian work styles criticized for falling under the category of bureaucratism and the acclaimed centralist manipulation of the decision-making process.

The reality in China, of course, has deviated from this ideal often enough for the press to carry stories of coercion, of authoritarian leaders unwilling to consult either the masses or other leaders in their units, of a passive and compliant populace, or of harmful and unpopular decisions being implemented. Articles condemned arbitrary and dictated decisions made in the name of centralism. They condemned the habits of ignoring popular opinions or giving the masses only a formal but not truly influential role. Democratic centralism was not "your democracy and my centralization" (*ni minzhu, wo jizhong*). Irrelevant or mistaken decisions were much more harmful than the trouble of gathering and analyzing various opinions about the issue, articles informed readers. Still, a system built on moral checks on power[92] and democracy as a work style, as the Chinese system was, easily becomes vulnerable to authoritarian practices.

One explanation for the divergence between the ideal and actual centralization is the fact that the Party gives very few instructions on how centralization is to be conducted. As John Bryan Starr observes, centralization is a crucial but ambiguous stage. Although the leaders' role in it is made to sound minimal, systematization is actually based on the preconceptions of the leader.[93] Above the mass line level centralization perhaps becomes less subjective in policy negotia-

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[92] Pye 1992, pp. 28–30.

[93] Starr 1979, p. 191. See also Mansbridge 1983, p. 32; Stevens 1997, pp. 220–222, for information regarding leaders' similar role in other unitary democracies.

tions representing different interests, as will be shown in another chapter. Presumably, centralization is not tied to strict rules because it encourages flexibility and openness to new ideas. In higher level negotiations, and to a lesser extent at the grassroots, the aim is consensual and, unlike a majority decision, consensus is built in various, even unpredicatable ways. Still, there is enough proof that centralization can be arbitrary or manipulative. Victor Falkenheim thus is not mistaken in identifying the "centralist reality of mass line politics."[94] At worst, the authority of the Party centre was so strong that the grassroots cadres were unable to refine a policy dictated from above to suit local conditions, since targets were not originally based on assessments of the local situation and even corrective democratic impulses failed to reach the Party centre.[95]

The Communist Party and democratic centralism

The Party was explicitly seen as one, even the main, centralizer in the theory of democratic centralism. The slogan "centralism based on democracy and democracy under centralist guidance" (*minzhu jichu shang de jizhong, jizhong zhidao xia de minzhu*) illustrates the Party leadership role as the Party saw it. Originally this slogan referred to Party guidance in discussion and political activities,[96] but by 1978 this logic had been extended to all political life. A party is a natural centralizer of popular opinions and situations at the grassroots level in Western democracies since parties are the main instruments for reflecting people's demands and views in politics. The difference, of course, is that in China state policies are based on only one party platform and there is no popular contestation over choosing that particular platform. Another reason for the centrality of the Party role as a centralizer is derived from Chinese history. Party mechanisms for soliciting popular input precede regular administration. It is natural that such a sequence gives higher priority to Party functions than systems of state administration that developed later.

The Communist Party of China formulated the theory of democratic centralism for its own use. As Arthur Steiner puts it, "despite the emphasis on drawing the masses along, the mass line remains a tactic for leaders, not followers."[97] From the beginning, popular participation and empowerment were coordinated closely with Party aims and were meant to enhance its power.[98] Western scholars

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[94] Falkenheim 1983, pp. 48, 50, 53.

[95] Wilson and Grenier 1992, p. 30, explain the Great Leap Forward in this way.

[96] "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People" in Mao Zedong, Selected Works, vol. V, p. 389.

[97] Steiner 1951, p. 431.

[98] See an example in Selden 1972, p. 88.

tend to assert that popular influence was limited to tasks assigned by the Party. The mass line technique was not meant to compromise Party rule or dictate the Party's course of action. Instead, it was meant to increase popular responsiveness to Party policies, dissipate commoners' possible hostility toward Party officials, and maximize popular participation.[99] Kenneth Lieberthal even views the mass line as being a means to alleviate two problematic tendencies in dictatorships: losing touch with popular sentiment and political apathy among the populace.[100]

Democratic centralist political structures have been effective tools for ruling: they have fragmented opposition and are meant to keep the Party aware of what happens in society. The Party believes that democratic centralism makes its policies better and therefore more popular. Yet, the mass line possibly contained much more than mere instrumental value for the Party. The normative Party self-perception and its ideology emphasizes that the Party truly represents the people and must rely on them. Vague as that may seem, it seems that the Party saw the mass line as the most important part of good governance.

Although the ideal political process followed the "from the masses and to the masses" formula, it is obvious that the initiative often came from the leadership. After all, the leadership decides how to implement democratic initiative. Along with the genuine desire for the presence of the people's initiative in production and politics, goes the belief that there are certain goals and information about the general situation the Party knows better. In the eyes of the Party, the people's interest even includes Party leadership. In some of the articles published in 1978–1981 the Party leadership and people's democracy were even seen as being in a dialectical relationship. Without Party leadership democracy is not socialist but turns into anarchism; without democracy there can be no correct and efficient Party leadership since it needs democratic input and supervision as well as popular support for authoritative leadership.

Naturally, such a theory leaves no space for political opposition. Indeed, if the Party is the sole legitimate mediator of the mass line, there is no need to tolerate autonomous political organization.[101] Theoretically, autonomous political organization would even be superfluous, since the Party already contains and harmonizes all legitimate popular demands. Moreover, viewed from society, independent organization loses much of its meaning, since political negotiations are not conducted in arenas independent of the Party. In this situation, cost-benefit calculations favor corporatist or even clientelistic types of solutions. Moreover, the Party-centered interest aggregation pattern means that the Party must accom-

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[99] Lewis 1966, pp. 71–72; Lieberthal 1995, p. 64.

[100] Lieberthal 1995, p. 64.

[101] Dittmer 1974, p. 85.

modate various interests and policy positions. This is actually the point in democratic centralism: to make policy insiders speak for different social needs. This system transfers social conflicts within the Party. James Townsend summarizes that although the Party theoretically monopolizes interest aggregation, in practice conflict over aggregation between different Party lines has been prevalent. Yet, conflict between lines has mostly been contained. The Party has not dealt with conflict in public nor have different policy lines appealed to mass support, apart from the Cultural Revolution period.[102]

Manipulative element of democratic centralism

According to the Chinese communists, the popular will itself is too vague, scattered, and unsystematic a basis for formulating practicable policies that take long term interests into account. The leadership must balance the popular will with an assessment of the actual situation, expert information, and considerations of long-term goals, whether ideological or not, and process decisions on the basis of all this information. Nevertheless, unless policies are truly based on the popular will they will turn out to be difficult to execute, at least without resorting to coercion. Therefore, when the people themselves do not see the benefits of policies, cadres should introduce them to the reasons the decisions were made. When the people can understand why the decision was made and can influence how it is implemented in their localities, they can at least accept these policies or even be persuaded to support them.

Obviously, leadership processes involve more than just popular will in decision making,[103] whether this additional component is the will of the Party, as might be a Westerner's interpretation, or the combination of farsighted evaluation and comprehensive information about the situation, which is what the Chinese theory of democratic centralism assumes. Thus, the Chinese theory clearly recognized that while democracy needs popular will and popular interest as its basis, mere populism is not practicable and does not necessarily even represent popular interest in the long-run. Decisions based on the elite understanding of interest, not popular demands, and the use of persuasion to elicit contribution to common aims as they are understood by the elite are common occurrences in Western and Chinese politics alike. As long as democracy is representative, persuasion will be a part of democratic politics.

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[102] Townsend 1980, pp. 420–422.

[103] Indeed, the mass line does not mean yielding to mass pressures and just aiming to be popular. See, e.g., Lewis 1966, p. 86; Angle 2005, p. 527.

However, the centralist component of democratic centralism gives the Party a chance not only to lead, but also to manipulate the reality. Apart from learning about the feelings and ideas of the masses and involving the masses in political processes, the Party manipulates mass participation in the direction of the ultimate interest of the people as the Party itself defines it. Often, the Party provided the issues and the vocabulary, staged the mass participation performance, set guiding lines, and led the participatory process.[104] As long as mobilization gains popular support, no theoretical contradiction with democracy actualizes. However, if mobilization relies not on support but on the threat of coercion, democratic principles of freedom and individual autonomy are compromised.

According to the totalitarian view, in socialist countries the ruling party claims that it is capable of defining and representing the genuine and unified will of all because its ideology allows it to know this interest better than the people themselves can. Since the ruling party allegedly is able to rule according to the people's interests, it claims that its rule is democratic even without any popular input. [105] Echoing this perception, some Western scholars interpret Chinese democracy to be "a mystical solidarity of state and people – in fact, a kind of authoritarianism."[106] The problem with this understanding is that it assumes that political communication is unidirectional in socialist countries, an assumption that democratic centralism denies outright. In practice, communication from below is perhaps weak, but it is not nonexistent. The elite are perhaps selective in responding to popular demands, but there is adequate proof of some responsiveness.[107] It is true that democratic centralism aims at formulating unified positions and issuing binding policies, but it explicitly recognizes actual contradictions between various social interests.[108] The Chinese communists have even tried to establish some institutions or methods to guarantee that the Party does not distort popular opinion. The Mao era used mass criticism, which was based on the understanding that organization should serve the interest of the people and people

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[104] Starr 1979, p. 202. For a description of mobilization for popular participation, see Chen 1986, ch.3. Although the Party taught new vocabulary to the masses during the communist-led participatory process, the Party left some space for public opinion to influence local interpretation of this vocabulary. See Zhang 2004, p. 18, 21, 38.

[105] See e.g Holden 1974, pp. 35–48.

[106] Nathan 2000, p. 23.

[107] For example, the economic reforms are generally thought to have answered popular discontent over over-ideologized and materially scanty life during the Cultural Revolution. See, e.g., Peng 2004, pp. 1054–1055. Wenfang Tang and William Parish use the term social contract to describe this kind of responsive, but non-democratic relation between the communists and the populace. (Tang and Parish 2000, see p. 46 for an explanation of the adoption of the reformist approach and pp. 34–47 for the idea of social contract in general.)

[108] "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People", Mao, Selected Works, vol. V, pp. 384–421.

themselves know best if that goal is achieved.[109] In the reform era, competitive elections and more assertive legislatures now check that the Party's positions remain acceptable to the populace.[110]

The Chinese communists explicitly recognize that state interest and ordinary people's interests are not the same and that they require different kinds of policies to be served well,[111] although it is not certain whether they recognized that these interests could be conflicting. They understood that they must serve their potential supporters' immediate and perceived economic interests to gain mass support for the communists' long-term ideological visions.[112] Tang Tsou even argues that the mass line often led to moderation, not the intensification of class struggle because it required the Party to balance its ideological aims with peasants' immediate economic and social interests.[113] Evidently, the totalitarian claim that there is but one state will promoted as the common will is not true in China, although there might be less legitimate pluralism in the Chinese public discourse than in Western democracies. Therefore, it does not do justice to the Chinese communists to claim that they treated ordinary people as abstractions, gave them no voice over their own interest, and postponed delivery of their immediate interests. Ideally, the mass line assumes that the people need to be persuaded first and ideological aims must proceed in tandem with the people's own recognition of these goals as their own.[114]

He Baogang declares that in China what constitutes the collective interest is decided on by the enlightened elite.[115] It is true that the collective interest is defined by the elite. However, according to democratic centralism, this is because they have centralized more information than any individual has, not because they are enlightened. Indeed, the mass line demands that a cadre be first a pupil, then a teacher. In other words, he should not pretend to have knowledge without concrete study and reconsideration of data.[116] The mass line process recognizes the

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[109] Starr 1979, p. 194.

[110] Shih 1999, pp. 162, 204.

[111] "On Ten Major Relationships" in Mao Zedong, Selected Works, vol. V, pp. 289–292.

[112] See, e.g., Chen 1986, p. 504; Tsou 1987, p. 263–264; Tsou 2000, p. 217.

[113] Tsou 1986, p. 270–271.

[114] William Hinton, in his eyewitness account of a Chinese village during the revolution, introduces an illustrative example of how political education actually helped the people conceptualize their situation anew enabling them to improve their situation in ways they could not have thought of by themselves. Farmhands had customarily understood conventional wages for hiring labor fair, but when the Party showed them that a worker received a fraction of what he produced and called it exploitation, they rejected their old conceptions. (Hinton 1966, pp. 149–151.)

[115] He 1996, p. 48.

[116] Lewis 1966, p. 73.

interdependence of the Party vision of the collective interest and the interest of the masses, to which the Party must be responsive.[117] Although the Party believes in the common interest, this interest does not surface naturally, but only through the mass line type of interaction with the masses. Thus, the Party cannot unilaterally determine the interest of the people. Instead, the Party should act as a credible, neutral reconciler of differing interests.[118]

Nevertheless, appeals to correct ideology as one criterion in centralization can actually cause disregard for popular opinion. As Victor Falkenheim underlines, the mass line measures correctness with two possibly conflicting criteria, namely public acceptability and ideological soundness. These criteria can be stressed differently to justify any particular policy. Ideologically motivated policies of long-term social or economic change can be built on a narrow basis of support, with the expectation that success will eventually vindicate the policy. Alternatively the Party can seek the broadest possible range of initial support. Victor Falkenheim even claims that the leadership's anticipation of the level of the support for the program will determine the quality and frequency of mass inputs.[119] According to David Zweig, radical leftists sometimes ignored practical evidence and even used false evidence for propagating their own program because they believed in its ideological correctness. Still, there was a tendency to tolerate leftist extremism because of its normative power.[120] As long as ideology was a central element in centralization, Chinese mass line politics had a tendency to be selective in their responsiveness to local conditions and popular demands.

Centralism and social change

Visionary leadership was important for the Chinese communists because they endeavored not only to bring about popular rule, but also political and social change. Wider perspectives and long term visions are necessary to guide socialist revolution and transformation. Although the Communist Party emphasized popular

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[117] Starr 1979, p. 192.

[118] Shih 1999, pp. 154, 203–204.

[119] Falkenheim 1983, pp. 48–50, 53. Friedman et al. (1991) introduce this dilemma in practice. They contrast peasants' own initiatives for collectivization, Rural Work Department head Deng Zihui's attempt to build gradually Soviet-style collectives through peasant voluntarism, and Mao Zedong's ideological calls for rapid collectivization regardless of peasant resistance and harm to agricultural output. Of these, Deng Zihui's stance would count as being proper with regard to democratic centralism: he was "fanatic on grassroots investigation" (p. 254), and considered voluntarism and both the peasants' and the state's economic interests (pp. 170, 182–182). Yet, he worked for the orthodox socialist aim of collectivization, meaning that he did not compromise the ideological aims of social transformation either.

[120] Zweig 1989, pp. 38–39.

participation, it could not expect ordinary people to lead and initiate the process for redistribution of power and property since the people were sometimes not even able to fully comprehend all of the consequences of its revolutionary program. However, in order to draw loyal followers from amongst the masses, the Communist Party sought to make its policies appear rational from the masses' own limited perspectives as well.[121] The Party understands that successful political, social and economic transformation requires broad popular participation. Lasting results cannot be attained without ordinary people's devotion and cooperation. As John Wilson Lewis summarizes, mass participation speeds up the socialist transformation because it is presumed to unleash the masses' creative problem solving abilities, release mass activism and deepen the masses' understanding of revolution.[122] Participation enables people to understand and internalize revolutionary aims. The Party thus mobilized people to stimulate identification with its aims. For example, in revolution and land reform peasants committed themselves emotionally and through their deeds in struggle meetings against the old elite representatives.[123] Tang Tsou even asserts that the mass line was effective precisely because it was an uneasy synthesis of opposite tendencies, combining ideology with respect for sociopolitical reality, elite leadership with populism, mass mobilization with organizational control, coercion with persuasion, and the intensification of "political penetration into society while showing respect for the interests perceived by the masses and social groups themselves."[124]

As Tang Tsou demonstrates, Western theories usually assume that democratic institutions are already in place, but the Chinese communists originally began their mobilization work in a polity where basic equality and democratic institutions themselves were in want. Along with Marxist theory, this political environment had an impact on the communists' perception of people and their rights. They did not make plans for better designs for protecting individual rights under an existing regime. Rather, they wanted to establish a regime that would create conditions for human equality and wide popular participation. Thus, they did not look to legislation, but to revolution as the means of democratization.[125] Revolutions need leaders and political programs, and these leaders can seldom assume that individuals initially know the best ways to improve their condition. Instead, they must be mobilized.

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[121]   Chen Yung-fa, for example, stresses the Party's concern for peasants' material interests as an important motivation for popular support in Chen 1986, p. 504.

[122]   Lewis 1966, pp. 75, 96.

[123]   Selden 1972, p. 110; Chen 1986, pp. 220–221, 501.

[124]   Tsou 1987, p. 264.

[125]   See Tsou 1987, pp. 261–266.

Tang Tsou summarizes that unlike the Western conception of a citizen and her rights, the mass line assumes that the majority cannot exercise their rights effectively within the existing socioeconomic structure. Yet, if mobilized and organized, these masses can participate in political activism for socioeconomic justice. On the basis of this conception Mao developed the mass line "to mobilize the various social groups, to draw them into the political process as active participants, to take into account their interests in making decisions, and to rely on them in the implementation of policies." The Chinese idea of the masses, the mass line, and mass movements underscore active involvement and the performance of duties in political movements.[126]

For decades, the mass line was closely related to mass movements for political change. As Kenneth Lieberthal puts it, campaigns were meant to break down normal bureaucratic control in order to facilitate rapid social and economic change, to educate the populace in Maoist values and to motivate them to achieve goals set by the Party.[127] The mass line formula is well suited to political campaigns. Mass movements follow the campaign cycle, which begins with investigation, experimentation and propagation of the targets and methods, followed by intense mobilization and even struggle, and then consolidation and finding unity occurs, after which it is time to analyze achievements and problems and correct mistakes.[128] In other words, a mass movement contains phases of "to the masses," "from the masses," and feedback. According to Lowell Dittmer, Mao Zedong sometimes issued a cryptic slogan for practical development in a campaign and afterwards summarized merits and demerits of this experience.[129]

As laudable as attempts to create a more equal social and political order are, methods of political mobilization seem to have been almost too efficient, especially in post-revolutionary China. If there is not enough true democracy and equality, mobilization can either result in the pursuit of centrally determined aims at the cost of the people's welfare, as happened during the Great Leap Forward, or in the violation of equal political rights and personal dignity, as happened during the Cultural Revolution. Indeed, the Party even sought to utilize social cleavages to stimulate desired changes.[130] After all, mass mobilization was closely connected with the notion of class struggle. During mass mobilization the Party used

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[126] Tsou 1986, pp. 272, 276; Tsou 1987, pp. 265–266.

[127] Lieberthal 1995, pp. 66–69.

[128] Brugger 1976, p. 108–111; Gardner 1972, pp. 226–228; Lieberthal 1995, pp. 65–67; Womack 1991 A, p. 69. The mass line was useful in launching a mass movement. Chen Yung-fa describes a cadre's role as the catalyst because he was able to recognize tensions in the local community and use them to motivate the rural poor to take political action (Chen 1986, p. 162). For the campaign cycle in practice, see Chan et al. 1984, ch. 2.

[129] Dittmer 1974, p. 186.

[130] Falkenheim 1983, p. 48.

struggle to smash prevailing social inhibitions, make people commit themselves to the revolutionary cause, give people a sense of empowerment, and create a new kind of group identity.[131] To achieve these ends, Mao Zedong understood the value of violence as a means of facilitating change, although "struggle" was primarily a mental, and much less a physical, method.[132]

As Tang Tsou observes, a mass movement mobilized for social change can infringe upon civil rights because it emphasizes socioeconomic rights over civil and political rights and claims that mass movements can legitimately override law and traditions.[133] Therefore, warnings of totalitarian democracy by J. L. Talmon are not totally unwarranted. Talmon describes how in totalitarian democracies a political power with a philosophy about the perfect society assumes as its messianic task the bringing about of this utopia by repressing all opposition and by inciting people to carry out mechanical acts of support in elections and public meetings.[134] In China many conventional forms of participation, such as voting, were weakened and routinized, while mass movements, which originally were a means of socioeconomic empowerment, became a means of sustaining mass enthusiasm.[135] Ordinary Chinese were never as passive as J. L. Talmon describes, but independent grassroots activism could prove no less repressive. Therefore, Brantly Womack calls the Chinese system during the Cultural Revolution quasi-totalitarian because it combined mass-controlled factions with terror and demands for absolute loyalty to the leader.[136] After Mao Zedong's death, even the Chinese themselves realized that mass movements as applications of the mass line can conflict with citizens' rights.[137]

Political education

The totalitarian theory interprets political education in socialist countries as political indoctrination, even brainwashing. After all, the totalitarian theory assumes that in socialist countries the party claims to know the true will of the people, perhaps even better than people themselves know. Accordingly, the party allegedly interprets any inconsistency between this party-defined true will and personal

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[131] Lieberthal 1995, pp. 68–69; Selden 1972, p. 110.

[132] Gardner 1972, pp. 220–221.

[133] Tsou 1986, pp. 273, 277.

[134] Talmon 1955, 249–254.

[135] Townsend 1980, p. 414; Tsou 1987, p. 267.

[136] Womack 1991 A, p. 77.

[137] Tsou 1987, p. 271.

experience of a person's own interest as false consciousness likely to be eradicated when the person understands his true interest.[138]

The totalitarian model expects that political communication during political education is one-way communication. According to the Chinese theory, this assumption is not true. Jack Gray and Patrick Cavendish have pointed out that mass-line-style political education by no means refers only to educating the masses. Rather, the leadership should also learn about the masses' aspirations from the masses themselves. This process minimizes traditional elitist tendencies; and it also teaches the formerly politically passive masses to articulate their opinions.[139] Moreover, I argue elsewhere that communication itself is a much more complex process than the simplistic totalitarian communication model assumes. It is actually impossible for the center to fully control media content, the reception of messages, and horizontal communication between ordinary people for interpreting vertically transmitted messages.[140]

My Chinese sources maintain that political education does not necessarily require full acceptance of political messages.[141] Instead of aiming at full submission, political education builds support for certain policies or tries to facilitate the understanding of politics by the people. Thus, transparency, or a purposely created image of transparency, of leadership motives is an important part of political education. After all, political participation itself requires knowledge about specific issues and politics in general. Although the Chinese communists were themselves certain of the desirability of their political message and often rewarded the demonstration of ideological belief, the practical aims of political education probably were to enhance popular consent and minimize resistance. The democratic centralist theory assumes that a person can be converted only if he is rationally convinced, while for practical reasons the primary objectives in actual education probably were consent and obedience, instead of conversion. Obviously, actual political education in China had many other functions aside from just indoctrination. Still, as John Bryan Starr stresses, the understanding of political participation as not only necessary for the functioning of the political system but also as a form of political education itself limits expression.[142]

Western democracies give political education as well, both in order to create consent and to convert. David Easton uses the term associated outputs to describe statements and performances meant to help the constituency interpret decisions or

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138   Holden 1974, p. 44.

139   Gray and Cavendish 1968, pp. 49–50.

140   Salmenkari 2005.

141   My sources explicitly emphasized that the minority should have a chance to retain its opinion unless it is convinced.

142   Starr 1979, p. 222.

to persuade polity members to accept policies. Associated outputs by the government are meant to increase its support.[143] Shaohua Hu assumes that education about new socialist virtues conflicts with democracy.[144] In fact, all governments, Western democracies included, use political socialization to make the populace accept and obey their authority.[145] Whatever the decision-making system, agenda setting is fundamentally biased in favor of those who possess the most resources and certain problems do not become issues because of the way citizens have been socialized.[146]

The Chinese disagree with liberal democrats' assumption that political opinions are somehow private matters. As James Townsend emphasizes, because meetings depend on gathering the wisdom of all, the expression of opinions is not a personal, but a public matter.[147] For liberals, voting, which takes place in private, is the ultimate political act, and elections are not considered fair if outsiders influence the choice. To the Chinese, politics are a social affair. They expect politics to mean the rational exchange of opinions for the purpose of convincing others. In fact, the same is true in Western democracies, in which electoral campaigning or legislative discussions would have little meaning if they were not social and if participants did not believe that they could convince others. Thus, democratic politics based on private and pre-deliberative choice appear unrealistic. After all, the aim of politics is to make decisions about common affairs, and in democracy this includes making decisions together. As little as liberals like it, democratic politics is evidently about the search for the common good.[148] As Chih-yu Shih underlines, the goal of democratization in China is to make everyone consider the collective interest, which itself is what many Western theorists consider to be a problem.[149]

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[143] Easton 1979, pp. 357–359.

[144] Hu 2000 B, pp. 111–113.

[145] Hague et al. 1992, p. 135.

[146] Berry et al. 1993, p. 103.

[147] Townsend 1967, p. 76.

[148] Those liberals who reject the conception of the common good (starting from Schumpeter 1992, ch. 21) confuse the democratic search for the common good with the existence of the common good or with domination of certain pre-deliberative conceptions of the common good. The search itself is what makes the system democratic, regardless of the fact that the common good is not always found or realized. The search for the common good as a characteristic of democracy itself makes the regimes resorting to predetermined and dogmatic conceptions of the common good undemocratic.

[149] Shih 1999, p. 228.

Correct and incorrect opinions

As political discussion in China mainly takes place through the Party-defined channels, it is not unimportant to view how open these channels are for the expression of differing opinions. If there would be no space apart from the official opinion, as totalitarian theory would claim, we could not talk about democracy. On the other hand, if the ideal of democratic centralism were true, no channels outside the official ones would be needed because these channels would be able to incorporate all possible views. Then, ideally, everyone's opinions would receive due consideration in the system. In the ideal world where resources were not scarce that would mean that all constructive suggestions would be implemented. This would mean government by relying on popular opinion and full democracy in this sense.

James Townsend has claimed that the result of all debates in Chinese decision-making processes is predetermined since the Party ultimately decides which opinions are "correct" and which are "incorrect".[150] This understanding confuses knowing what is correct *a priori* and knowing it only after having participated in discussions about a policy and having tested this policy in practice. The Chinese communists do not claim that they possess the true answers from the start, but, rather, that they are able to discern the best policies emerging from discussion and experimentation. They do not understand themselves as being unerring, but recognize that they can make mistakes due to inadequate knowledge about the situation and alternatives. This kind of failure only means that more information and policy alternatives are needed. Indeed, the Party interprets the failure to generate support for a policy either as an indication of inadequate preparation of the policy proposal or the Party's failure to convince outsiders of its importance.[151] In other words, the Party either needs to gather and process information better or to engage in more responsive consensus building. Open discussion, then, is arguably the best way to avoid or correct mistakes since it allows information sharing and discussion of alternative strategies. Yet, not even democratic decisions are always correct according to this understanding, for the truth will be known only through practical testing.

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[150] Townsend 1967, p. 80. Even more extremely, James Townsend sees that socialist democracy listens to different opinions only in order to correct them through persuasion (Townsend 1967, pp. 78–79). However, elsewhere (on pp. 177–178) Townsend recognizes that mass opinions expressed during visits and meetings with cadres as well as through letters and wall posters contributed significantly to solving the masses' concrete problems and to information-collecting for decision-making.

[151] Shih 1999, pp. 209–210.

Even if the correctness of an opinion was decided *a posteriori*, the Party reserved the right to decide which opinions are correct or incorrect. Indeed, since the mass line is a process for centralizing correct opinions, certain views count more than others.[152] Whether people's demands are correct is determined by their conformity to Party policy.[153] This is a mark of elitism. Any government, Western governments included, decides which popular opinions it deems relevant for decision making. In a representative political context, the mass line type of transparency introducing reasons for rejecting a certain suggestion is democratic in nature, while the restriction of the publicity of views officially evaluated as incorrect is not.

The press discussion of 1978–1981 reveals that there are two kinds of correctness at play. Often correctness refers to feasibility. One task of local cadres was to explain why certain were suggestions not practicable. Obviously, this correctness is apolitical and the Party claims no monopoly on its definition. Instead, producers or people who felt the effects of a policy were experts. Thus, the Chinese commoners were expected to have a say in welfare and production issues.[154] Another criterion was ideological correctness. In ideological issues, the Party was the expert. Anti-socialist opinions were assumed to be wrong in any case, but many in 1978–1981, although not all, were willing to permit their expression nevertheless. The right to express only ideologically correct opinions is of course the antithesis of the pluralism so central to liberalism and also to democracy itself. Yet, avoidance of controversial topics, either because of repression or self-censorship, does not render all popular political input meaningless. It is possible that vivid democratic influencing concerning non-ideological issues takes place, although public expression of ideological visions is monopolized. In other words, demands of predetermined ideological correctness certainly limit democracy, but do not automatically block democratic influencing.

Many Western scholars have blamed mass line politics for being elitist. John Burns asserts that the mass line emphasizes the distance between leaders and the masses because it only solicits popular opinion, and leaves decision-making power in the hands of leaders.[155] Kenneth Lieberthal contends that the mass line reveals an attitude that leaders know best and citizens cannot understand what is good for them. It sees popular inputs as meaningful for gathering information, but it suppresses any attempts to promote independent political views. In other words, it encourages popular influencing through leadership-defined organs in matters

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[152] Starr 1979, p. 207.
[153] Steiner 1951, p. 428.
[154] Brugger 1976, p. 228–229; Unger and Chan 2004, p. 11.
[155] Burns 1988, p. 121.

assigned to them, but forbids independent organizations for channeling popular demands.[156]

Considering that the mass line purposely attempts to reduce elitism by opening accessible channels to the political system through gatekeepers placed in the people's everyday environment and by demanding that these gatekeepers work and live among the ordinary workers or peasants so that they can identify with ordinary people's concerns, these accusations of elitism need a specification. One is found in these scholars' own conceptual framework, which makes them expect arrangements typical in Western liberal democracies, such as electoral accountability and pressure groups. However, there are other reasons concerning the Chinese system itself. Democratic centralist self-image has never really admitted the actual hierarchical nature of the system. Thus, it mistakenly identifies receptivity to local opinion at the grassroots as the characteristic of the democratic centralist system as a whole, despite the actual democratic deficit on the administrative levels above the grassroots. Demands for hierarchical Party and bureaucratic discipline as one element of democratic centralism even intensify the problem by subjecting the administrative levels receiving genuine popular pressure to the decisions of levels least in touch with democratic inputs.

In practice, the concern for free expression of opinions in the democratic centralist process is not unfounded. Ideological criteria of expression can affect the truthfulness of the information expressed through the democratic centralist channels. Western scholars remark that free expression has been inhibited and that the quality of information processed in the democratic centralist process has been compromised as a result of stringent and constantly changing boundaries of legitimate dissent and by the fact that in China expressing opinions has made people vulnerable to criticism and sanctions.[157]

Furthermore, as the Party guides the consultation processes, the question of how to handle the relationship between free opinion and party discipline arises. The Chinese communist textbook understanding responds that everyone is allowed to express and keep their opinions and use institutionalized channels to demand that leaders reconsider and change policies, but everyone must unfailingly implement programs commonly agreed on. The same demand, of course, is valid in any democratic political system.[158] Nevertheless, since there was no clear definition of the role of the two elements, or they were even conceptualized with the same vocabulary, the demands for party discipline could be used to silence any expression of discord.

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[156] Lieberthal 1995, p. 181.

[157] Lieberthal 1995, p. 176; Starr 1979, p. 222.

[158] For an astonishingly similar understanding of Western liberal democracy, see Popper 1950, p. 124.

However, even biased political information flow can be beneficial to all participants if it increases mutual understanding, and possibly even leads to consensus. Tang Tsou argues that when the leadership superimposes its own aims and ideological conceptions on opinions expressed by the masses, the result does not necessarily resemble the original mass views. Still, the mass line can also be an effective method for achieving integration between the elite and the masses.[159] On behalf of a subordinate, convergence of understandings means co-optation, but mutual understanding is never one-sided. It requires that the political elite cultivate a better understanding of both the needs and wants of their subjects. Of course, the Chinese hoped to attain reliable information through the democratic centralist process, but unity may have been an even more central objective for the Communist Party. Benefits of political integration are not limited to the Party alone. James Townsend contends that in spite of its limits, mass political participation has contributed to the development of a national political community. It has generated loyalty to the central government and some understanding of national affairs among the populace at large.[160]

In terms of democracy, the problem of democratic centralist communication is thus not that it is unidirectional or elitist. It is not unidirectional and its elitist nature is not atypical for modern democracies. Instead, the problem is the narrow definition of the scope of political communication. Brantly Womack sees the Chinese political system as reflecting the opinions of the masses within the current horizons of Party policy only.[161] Lynn White remarks that in China democracy is seen as a technical problem and as a method of scientific planning. It includes democratic discussion, use of expertise, and testing before decision making, but does not address the question of winners and losers.[162] Brantly Womack even remarks that the "mass line provided a self-correcting, mass-oriented executive structure."[163] However, democracy needs popular participation not only in the execution of rules but also in the making of rules.

Democratic centralism as political communication

Communication between leaders and the led is the single most important part of the theory of democratic centralism. Democratic centralism is a process of transmitting and collecting information. Democratic centralism contains a normative

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[159]   Tsou 1986, pp. 28–29.
[160]   Townsend 1967, pp. 196–198.
[161]   Womack 1991 A, p. 70.
[162]   White 1999 (2), pp. 646–647.
[163]   Womack 1991 A, p. 70.

model for democratic political communication. One aim of this communication is to increase convergence between leaders' and commoners' ways of thinking. In Mao Zedong's terminology, often quoted in 1978, a cadre participates actively in mutual education, where he is willing to learn from the masses and to teach them. Another aim of communication is to provide enough knowledge for making objective and informed decisions that take into consideration all interests involved.

Evidently, democratic centralist communication is also used to determine what the Party can do and how much resistance its policies will encounter. Indeed, the mass line approach was not majoritarian, but consensual, aiming at maximizing alliances and minimizing opposition.[164] The mass line seeks to achieve the greatest popular motivation and participation with the least hostility.[165] To this end, the Party prefers policies that are consultatively developed and substantively responsive.[166] According to Tang Tsou, the mass line led the Party to modify its class-oriented policies so that the Party was able to minimize opposition and maximize the number of people siding with the communists.[167] Recent history has witnessed economic reforms that demonstrate the Chinese communists' ability to manage a dramatic change, but in a gradualist and adaptive way, keeping resistance to policies low by beginning with easy issues and only then moving towards more difficult issues.[168] Obviously, democratic centralism is a method for minimizing resistance and thus the costs of implementation.[169] According to this perception, the masses and actual conditions are objective constraints that affect the leaders and policies.[170]

Logically, the theory of democratic centralism seems to expect a certain kind of information flow. The Chinese communists' preference for face-to-face communication shapes the decision-making process, causing meetings to be the most typical arena where decisions are made. There appear to be three different kinds of communication patterns at play. One is flat but in it power is unequally distributed. This pattern describes the situation at the grassroots level, when decisions are made about local issues. There is no hierarchy since local units have the full authority to decide these issues. The ideal arena for decision making is a partici-

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[164] Womack 1991 A, p. 70.

[165] Lewis 1966, p. 71.

[166] Falkenheim 1983, p. 49.

[167] Tsou 1987, p. 263.

[168] Yueh 2003, pp. 3–6.

[169] An analogy to Daoism can be made here. After all, Daoism urges one to proceed where resistance is low and to avoid exerting too much effort. Military strategist Sun Zi is one source for this kind of thinking, whom the communists openly studied. Of course, this strategy is also commonsensical when resources are scarce, as they were in the communist base areas before the revolution.

[170] Starr 1979, p. 191.

patory meeting typical for direct democracy. Still, there is clear asymmetry of power since local cadres have the power to centralize. Another pattern is a bureaucratic hierarchical channel. Information ideally flows from the grassroots organs to the center and in the opposite direction within hierarchical channels. But in terms of democratic centralism this pattern is also pyramidal: each node in the channel has contacts with several lower-level units or organs. Therefore, each node centralizes lower level experience. The third pattern is bureaucratic, but horizontal. It takes place in meetings between different democratic centralist hierarchical channels for exchanging information and coordinating policies.[171] There are many independent hierarchical channels, ranging from different ministries to mass organizations, transmitting sectoral or function-specific information all the way from local levels to the center. They need to coordinate information, policy proposals, and policies at different levels of the administration. In this pattern, centralization, perhaps most authentically, results from negotiation since participants are often relatively equal.

Obviously, the Communist Party promotes discussion and information flow primarily for decision-making purposes. This aim unavoidably limits the scope of information it welcomes and narrows the ideal of rationality. The theory of democratic centralism concentrates on unbiased communication within the political system and between the political system and its environment. Horizontal communication within society is totally irrelevant to it. Often the Chinese communists have even been ready to restrict the civil society type of horizontal communication because according to their theory there is no value in it. In addition, this kind of theory tends to see political communication itself in an instrumentalist light. As long as communication aims at better policies and self-improvement of the system, it is welcomed. The theory sees no rationale for any other kinds of messages. Again, the Chinese state has often restricted messages that do not contribute to these aims.

Such an instrumental conception of communication disregards some important functions of democratic communication. As Jürgen Habermas notes, if deliberation only serves bureaucratic rationality, it easily becomes blind to the external costs of the system and the rationality of the whole. Democratic deliberation needs communication independent of the state to provide a warning system that senses problems which need political solutions.[172] Dennis Thompson emphasizes that adequate democratic deliberation is not only limited to technical issues and should promote discussion about the values that underlie policies.[173] The Chinese

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[171] For the Chinese institutional practices of coordination, see Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, 141–142; Selden 1972, p. 218–224.

[172] Habermas 1996, pp. 350–351, 359.

[173] Thompson 1983, p. 236.

have not been totally unaware of the problem. The Cultural Revolution saw the surfacing of dissatisfaction with the mass line type of organizationally mediated elite – mass interaction, in which the masses are assumed to conform to various organizational rules while having only minimal influence. It criticized the tendency of this type of interaction to systematically ignore cues that did not adhere to prescribed forms.[174]

Furthermore, the democratic centralist model of communication seems to view the relation between the political system and its environment in harmonious terms. Being the political system's self-perception of itself, this model sees no reason why the system's own aims, such as good governance, popular welfare and nationalism, should not be in the interest of all citizens. In fact, citizens usually have both interests that are in harmony with and interests that are in tension with the official policies. Democratic centralist channels might serve the first kind of interests well, but they are likely to poorly respond to articulation of interests that conflict with the state perception of the common interest.

Andrew Nathan has analyzed how the Chinese tradition of democracy has paid attention to communication between the government and the people as a way to promote unity of will in the pursuit of common ends. If the liberal theory of democracy is built around the ideal of containing conflicting interests, the Chinese theory tries to educate people to follow their instincts for social cooperation and transform their private interests into public interests.[175] Apart from possible cultural tradition, the Chinese communists' practical experience with the need to mobilize the people during decades of revolution certainly played a role in the formation of the mass line type of consultation and perception of common interests shared by the communists and the people. I postulate that the relation between the mass line and perceived harmony of interests is neither accidental nor merely cultural or ideological, but it is causal. The democratic centralist model of communication simply leaves room only for public expression of interests that are in harmony with state-promoted interests.

Democracy as work style

Articles published in 1978 mainly discussed democratic centralism as a work style (*zuofeng*). As such, it mainly manifested in a cadre's personal contact with the people and with colleagues. This contact should be reciprocal, non-coercive, and non-hierarchical. In practice, this meant that a cadre should be willing to listen to the masses and accept their ideas and criticism. Simultaneously he should be

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[174]   Dittmer 1974, pp. 285–286.

[175]   Nathan 1986, pp. 49, 57–58, and p. 65 for Mao's relation to this tradition.

ready to set an example for the masses and educate them in politics. He should remain as close to the masses as possible in his daily life and engage in serious consultation with them. Instead of coercion he should resort to education and persuasion if the masses are unwilling to accept the official policy.

Democratic centralism as a correct work style combines willingness to hear differing opinions with leadership through persuasion. Inside the Party and the administration this meant collective leadership, in contact with the masses it meant the mass line. Neither the deliberative atmosphere within the leadership nor close relations with the masses can be institutionalized. A democratic work style essentially depends on the personality of the leader and the group dynamics inside a community or within a decision-making organ. As James Townsend has observed, the mass line style of leadership "depend[s] on an organic, intuitive relationship between cadres and masses rather than on institutional and legal controls."[176] Brantly Womack remarks that the mass line makes no division between control and spontaneity or between legislative and executive functions. Hence, the mass line type of popular participation cannot evolve into citizen and legislative control.[177]

Understandably, concentration on a subjectively motivated work style meant that the Chinese first adopted normative and non-institutionalized methods for impelling cadres to practice mass line leadership. James Townsend remarks that Chinese communists see quality of leadership, rather than institutional controls, as the way to ensure democracy and observance of mass demands. Adherence to the doctrine demanding that leaders be responsible to the people thus became the point to emphasize.[178] Cadres received education on the normative qualifications of good and efficient leadership. Moral beliefs can be extremely effective in guiding a person's activities, but only to the point that she herself has internalized these values. Guarding against those who had not, the Mao era mobilized the masses to supervise cadres through open criticism and popular pressure. Again, the emotionally draining experience of open mass criticism sessions could be very efficient for making cadres refrain from behaviors for which they could be later criticized.[179]

James Townsend argues that the mass line model leaves popular influencing devoid of guarantees as long as formal institutions do not provide channels for popular control over leaders and pressure group formation is prevented. Still, the mass line exposes leaders to some degree of popular influence that has verifiably influenced the execution and formation of policies, although the receptivity of the

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[176] Townsend 1967, p. 176.
[177] Womack 1991 A, pp. 70–71.
[178] Townsend 1967, pp. 178–179.
[179] See, e.g., Chan et al. 1984 and Li Lianjiang 2001.

Party relies only on the knowledge of the need for popular cooperation and direct contacts with the masses at the grassroots.[180] By 1978, the Chinese themselves had understood the need for regular checks that only institutions, such as elections and legal responsibility, could provide. As Chih-yu Shih notes, political reformers use electoral competition to compel the Party to adhere to the principle of consultation and to ensure that the Party does not distort genuine mass opinion.[181]

Chinese democracy significantly depends on subjective elements, not institutions. However, the hardcore issues of democracy are very difficult to institutionalize. Voting is an institutionalized method for ordinary people's input, but elections are rare and information relayed by vote is minimal. With regard to agenda setting, popular initiative proves to be a very clumsy method compared to uninstitutionalized channels like civil society activities, media, contacting, lobbying and the like. Thus, there are few institutions to compel leaders to act upon popular will even in Western democracies. For democracy to work, we actually assume existence of many uninstitutionalized, even informal ways of influencing.

Despite personalized leadership, democratic centralist theory emphasizes the personhood of a leader surprisingly little, at least that was the case during the 1978–1981 discussion. When a central question in electoral democracies is choosing the person best able to represent voters' interests and policy preferences, according to democratic centralism it is relatively unimportant who leads. Democratic centralism does not ponder who, but how. Perhaps this tendency emerged due to the communists' anti-elitist tradition assuming that even the poor and uneducated could be good leaders if they devoted themselves to the cause; or it may involve an assumption that for the people it is relatively unimportant who leads them as long as he possesses outstanding leadership qualities and follows the correct leadership style. In democratic centralism the content of the decision is important, but the people making the decisions are not.

Benefits of personalized politics

If the traditional Confucian state needed intermediaries because it had insufficient capacity to directly reach localities, the Chinese communists use hierarchical personalized relations to have direct control over localities and to facilitate popular feedback. The communists probably have been willing to accept the inherent capacity problems such personalized rule creates as a tradeoff for more flexibility, popular activism and persuasive capacity.

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[180]   Townsend 1967, pp. 178–179, 197–198.

[181]   Shih 1999, p. 162.

The personalized approach in democratic centralism has many advantages over institutionalized political communication. Personal political contact permits the transmission of detailed and diverse political messages. Compared to electoral democracy, the mass line is probably superior when it comes to transmitting detailed information about each person's views. Compared to the civil society type of influencing, then, the benefit of the mass line style appears to be that leaders directly hear the opinions of not only activists but also of ordinary community members.

Personalized contact reduces the need for political skills in meaningful political participation. James Townsend notes that personal contact helped diminish obstacles to political participation for illiterate and uninformed peasants during the early stages of Communist state building in China.[182] The personalized context makes politics more interesting to amateurs since face-to-face supervision and guidance make politics vivid, concrete, meaningful, and flexible.[183] Moreover, access to the political system was near and easy. Both in state enterprises and in villages the nearest leader used to work and live among the people, which meant that people knew and had access to the gatekeepers of the state and Party organs. Few resources and formal skills were needed to have some kind of political voice. It was assumed that cadres would systematize popular input, even if it was poorly articulated, and present it in more formal form to the administrative levels above.

Jane Mansbridge observes that face-to-face contact is conducive to finding mutual ground and thus in helping people taking part in the discussion see where interests converge. Personalized relations are likely to create trust, solidarity, and sympathy for the problems of people one personally knows.[184] Especially in a small community where shared interests are concrete, mutual understanding and concern for other people are likely to develop. Often, leaders even have the same concerns as ordinary villagers or workers. This feeling of sympathy and belonging to the same community probably aids in persuasion in both directions: commoners can convince their leaders of their needs, and simultaneously commoners become more likely to understand the imperatives their communal leaders face when they have to execute unpopular policies.

In face-to-face situations communication can use informal channels or be non-verbal. The mass line leadership should be receptive to informal communication.[185] Often, a cadre living among his constituency can know the general opinion even without systematic consultation. Through his daily contact with the people, a cadre becomes aware of many complaints that are not introduced publicly in

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[182]   Townsend 1967, p. 49.

[183]   Lewis 1966, pp. 71–72; Townsend 1967, p. 176.

[184]   Mansbridge 1983, p. 8–10, 33.

[185]   Blecher 1983, pp. 71–76.

meetings. As a responsible cadre, he should then work consciously to diminish all causes of public complaint. He might also know that he can make villagers accept his rationale for a particular decision even without asking their opinion. Research literature gives examples of how leaders continue to decide collective affairs relatively autonomously until community strife emerges, causing the leaders to open channels of participatory democracy.[186] Ann Kent even argues that lack of democratic and legal structures encouraged the development of the informal political condition that facilitates communication and mutual understanding between leadership and the masses.[187]

In addition, democratic centralism recognizes other forms of communication in addition to the voice option. Discontent can be expressed with facial expressions or non-cooperation. A good leader can analyze commoners' attitudes expressed as enthusiasm, reluctance, disinterest, or silence. Researchers have found that Chinese commoners even expect their leaders to read these signs.[188] In a small community the exit option is effective. Absenteeism, slowdown, or poor quality work can effectively communicate reluctance or opposition. If community members can unite their ranks, they can make leaders concretely feel that the leaders only form a minority even without words. Indeed, Ann Kent argues that the Chinese system even pressed for informal ways of communication from below, partly because official channels did not always transmit popular inputs adequately.[189] Informal and non-verbal communication can thus even compensate for the shortcomings of formal communication.

Disadvantages of personalized relations

Disadvantages of personal relations in politics are evident as well. Although the tendency for consensus building in face-to-face relations is beneficial in many ways, it often causes group conformism and social pressures. Such pressures limit expression of discontent and alternative views and can make people accept less than ideal solutions. The press discussion in 1978–1981 reveals that many leaders interpreted unanimity and outward obedience as consensus and demanded unanimous support from the masses or subordinates. In terms of democratic centralism, this situation is a failure of communication. However, group pressure can be useful for other communist aims. In criticism and self-criticism sessions, group pressure can lower the threshold for internalizing the messages of political educa-

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[186] Unger and Chan 2004.

[187] Kent 1993, pp. 79–80.

[188] See an example in Yang 1989, pp. 52–54.

[189] Kent 1993, p. 80.

tion. James Townsend interprets that small groups with personalized relations generate group pressure for conformity and for the control of political thinking.[190] However, Mark Selden argues that face-to-face criticism and social pressure can also help in the creation of a more equal relationship between members of a leadership body or community regardless of their official rank.[191]

Personalized communication itself is subject to distortions. People often tend to interpret what others say in ways that conform to their own opinions or expectations. It is thus likely that even well-meaning cadres interpret orally transmitted messages from their own perspectives. Thus, centralization is not neutral because it relies on people, who have natural psychological tendencies to interpret their own views as shared and opposition as insignificant.

When leaders and the led live together, it is difficult to avoid personalizing disputes. When leaders had considerable powers to allocate goods and services, they had the means to discourage criticism and punish those who criticize. The articles published in 1978 constantly disapproved of practices such as making critics "walk in too small shoes" (*chuan xiao xie*), that is, discriminating against critics by way of the distribution of work or goods. They mention also "hat factories" (*maozi chang*), referring to the systematic labeling of critics as anti-socialists or opponents of the Party and marking them politically. Without institutional checks or outside interference the people were relatively powerless to protect themselves against such reprisals. Indeed, informal politics makes policy making an arbitrary, personalized, and unregulated affair.[192]

Personal relations without institutional checks tend to distort equal distribution of power and information, not least in a culture stressing emotion (*ganqing*) in human relations like that of China. They are open to favoritism, nepotism, and graft. The same personalized relations that, according to democratic centralism, should be used for mapping popular sentiments can be the means of enhancing economic, political, and personal dependence. Andrew Walder calls these dependencies principled particularism.[193] Many other studies mention that personal relations cemented by a shared background, such as clan, birthplace, or former workplace, affected distribution and networks of power.[194]

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[190]   Townsend 1967, p. 176.
[191]   Selden 1969, pp. 107–108.
[192]   Kent 1993, p. 80.
[193]   Walder 1988.
[194]   See, e.g., Tanner and Feder 1993.

Unity of opposites

As the term democratic centralism consists of the unity of opposites, both of its components have their own important roles in the process. Neither democracy nor centralism can function properly without the other. Centralization can be successful only if it is based on democracy, but, simultaneously, democracy becomes meaningful only if the popular will is centralized into practicable policies that are actually executed. Both extremes, centralism without democracy and democracy that ignores centralism, are harmful. Nevertheless, the fact that the proper balance between democracy and centralism needed constant emphasis in the press itself demonstrates that it was not easy for a cadre to give enough attention to both at the same time.

Given that only the balanced application of both democracy and centralism counted as socialist democracy, ignoring this balance deserved to be called neither democracy nor centralism. Democracy without centralism counted as anarchism, ultra-democracy, tailism, or bourgeois liberalization. Centralism without democracy stood for bureaucratism and commandism. Before 1978, there had been many other terms for the improper balance between democracy and centralism. Mistaken conceptions of democracy included problems like individualism, tailism, and adventurism, while excessive centralism was called commandism, bureaucratism, warlordism, and isolationism, involving problems like a disregard for mass opinions or alienating the masses. A conceptual difference was made between cases when decision making was divorced from the objective reality and from the masses. The first type of error was called subjectivism, while the second type was labeled sectarianism.[195] In this way, as John Wilson Lewis points out, deviations from the correct balance of democratic centralism are understood to reflect ideological errors, not contradictions within the Party organization itself.[196] Labeling problems in the accommodation of both democracy and centralism as ideological errors reflects an understanding that the two are never contradictory. In fact, central demands and popular demands can be fundamentally conflicting, and then it is only possible to serve one at the time, as will be seen in a later chapter in which I will deal with localism.

Democracy and centralism were merged together in the same dialectical way as many other basic concepts of Chinese political theory discussed in 1978–1981, such as the people's democratic dictatorship or rights and duties. Dialectics sees that the two sides of the concept are interdependent to the extent that one element

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[195] E.g. Lewis 1966, pp. 81, 84; Steiner 1951, pp. 427–435.

[196] Lewis 1966, p. 81.

cannot function properly without the other. Yet, they must be properly balanced because one aspect alone or in excessive quantity either causes the whole to lose its usefulness or even to become something else. When the proper balance sets the limits for the existence of the phenomenon itself, distortion of this balance means a conceptual leap to another kind of phenomenon. Unless the two are properly balanced, neither of democracy nor centralism can be spoken of; rather other phenomena like anarchism, autocracy, or bureaucratism come into play.

The Chinese understood this kind of balance as Marxist dialectics. Yet, the Chinese dialectics does not treat democratic centralism in the same chronological way the Marxist dialectics investigates social change. Instead of solving a certain social contradiction as a step towards producing a new kind of social situation, the Chinese examine democracy and centralism in cyclical interaction. This inter-action is ahistorical, although it always sees phenomena in their particular social and material contexts. Although interaction between democracy and centralism is cyclical, when the dialectics of democracy and centralism is applied to a practical problem the chronological pattern of contradictions and their solution producing a new social situation manifests. Both components of democratic centralism are ideally of relatively equal strength, unlike in Marxist historical analysis. Marxist historical materialism sees historical conditions as producing a certain class composition and ownership system, in which at each particular moment one class dominates. However, the domination of either democracy or centralism means imbalance and inefficiency.

The Chinese understanding of dialectics certainly fits the common simplification of the Hegelian logic of having two opposites (thesis and antithesis) which in a higher analysis produce a higher level of unity (synthesis). Still, I see this kind of dialectics as resembling some traditional Chinese conceptions. Although it is difficult to ascertain any direct influence, certain familiar elements in Confucianism and Daoism must have made Hegelian dialectics attractive to the Chinese communists. In Confucianism, the Doctrine of the Mean taught maintaining proper balance and avoiding extremes. Daoism, then, derived the dynamics and even existence of the whole universe from the interaction between polarities. These polarities, *yin* and *yang*, manifest in numerous pairs of seeming opposites, such as darkness and light, cold and warm, feminine and masculine, weakness and strength, disorder and order. Both polarities together produce the whole. Neither of the polarities is bad as such, and both are needed for the balanced whole. Each extreme is only temporal and indicates improper balance, seen in natural calamities or illness, for example.

The Daoist kind of dynamic view of interaction in the constantly changing universe was very typical for Mao Zedong. He saw contradictions in almost all possible elements needed for development, from differences amongst various as-

pects of the economy, levels of authorities, nationalities, and political stances.[197] He commented that "In any given thing, the unity of opposites is conditional, temporary and transitory, and hence relative, whereas the struggle of opposites is absolute."[198]

Mao Zedong often saw disequilibrium as a positive force stimulating development,[199] but the reformist leadership appears to have preferred balance. This middle-of-the-road interpretation can very well be understood as a product of the Cultural Revolution, which illustrated all too well the harms extremism can cause. According to the interpretation in 1978–1981, Lin Biao and the Gang of Four had disturbed the proper balance of democratic centralism in every way possible: they had suppressed democracy, they had incited anarchism in order to destroy centralism, and they had used dictatorial measures against the people and not only against the bad elements. Yet, the reformist line possibly interpreted social development in terms of finding properly balanced development and detested Mao Zedong's attempts to manipulate development through imbalances and contradictions. In this they may have been closer to the Confucian Doctrine of the Mean instead of the Daoist manipulation of the course of events.

Keeping the correct balance

The understanding of democracy and centralism as a dialectical relation of two parts within one whole explains why the search for the balance requires attention to both parts, but not always in equal proportion. Both aspects should be present all the time, but if one part is neglected to some degree it needs to be emphasized. After the Cultural Revolution, democratization was needed in order to increase regime legitimacy; but articles emphasized centralist limits when their concern was to prevent social unrest. In other words, changes in emphasis did not reflect theoretical change but were situational. Search for the correct balance does not render the whole concept meaningless, contrary to what He Baogang assumes. He claims that democratic centralism is mere rhetoric because the Chinese leadership uses it to sometimes emphasize democracy and at other times to stress centralism.[200]

Attempts to maintain the correct balance between democracy and centralism have been understood in several ways. Stephen Angle sees the dialectical combination of democracy and centralism as suggesting ongoing dynamism and flexibi-

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[197] "On Ten Major Relationships," in Mao Zedong , Selected Works, vol. V, pp. 284–307.

[198] "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People", in Mao, Selected Works, vol. V, p. 392.

[199] "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People", in Mao, Selected Works, vol. V, p. 395.

[200] He 1996, p. 53.

lity.[201] The Chinese communists certainly see that the combination of receptivity to popular demands and the leadership's autonomy in decision making serves both immediate popular interests and long term visionary development. Alternatively, ordinary Chinese tend to analyze their political climate in *fang-shou* cycles, as if the leadership would sometimes loosen and sometimes tighten its grip on the society.[202] *Fang – shou* cycles are often explained in factionalist terms as reflecting varying strengths of leadership factions within the national decision-making bodies. However, instead of cycles, the development described by *fang-shou* cycles may actually be linear and proceed towards a wider legitimate sphere for public expression, regardless of temporal attempts to redefine limits.[203]

The third possible explanation is instrumental. When the Party emphasizes either democracy or centralism, it perhaps chooses the balance that suits its other aims, such as economic modernization or social stability. Many scholars interpret democracy in democratic centralism in instrumentalist terms.[204] Actually, in 1962 Mao Zedong himself said that centralization is more important than democracy, but genuine centralization is possible only on the basis of democracy. In the absence of democracy, it becomes impossible to centralize situations correctly and ensure willing implementation.[205] This statement definitely suggests instrumentalism, but possibly the wording is only situational.[206] Even if this statement is meant to be instrumental, it by no means devalues democracy. After all, it sees democracy as a necessary condition for centralization and essential for the proper functioning of a political system. It by no means can be cast away at leaders' will. Thus, Marina Svensson is surely mistaken in arguing that since democracy in China is a utilitarian conception, it can be postponed if national interests so require.[207] Mao's claim was just the opposite: democracy itself is essential in the address of the national interests.

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[201] Angle 2005, p. 525.

[202] In the West, this approach has been used, for example, in Baum 1994.

[203] Zhongdan Pan explains periods of tighter control with the leadership's need to define and emphasize limits when they have been tested by actors like the media, see Pan 2000, p. 104.

[204] He 1996, p. 43; Svensson 1994, p. 2.

[205] Schram 1989, p. 107.

[206] The 1962 speech analyzed the situation after the Great Leap Forward. When saying that democracy is needed for correct centralism, Mao meant that leadership needed reliable information from the grassroots in order to make correct decisions. The failure of the Great Leap policy had been precisely the result of the lack of truthful information, and if the statement was situational it was referring to the necessity of democracy for centralism in this context only.

[207] Svensson 1994, p. 10.

Freedom and discipline

The Chinese discussion, especially in 1979, equated democratic centralism with the dialectics between freedom and discipline. It is evident that any democratic political system needs to balance them. A healthy political life is a combination of the two: discipline and orders must be based on popular will, while freedom of action must accept limits from the society, law, and in China, also from the Party leadership. As the Chinese emphasized, a political system does not deserve to be called democratic if it cannot implement the democratic decisions it has made. Therefore, it needs discipline. However, without freedom a political system is not democratic.

Yet, although freedom and discipline form a dialectical relation, they do not seem to form the same kind of interaction than democracy and centralism do. They may be mutual conditioning, but there is no mutual interaction in the cyclically regenerating process between them. Freedom and discipline describe two aspects of citizen roles in a democratic polity, just like rights and duties, another much emphasized pair of citizen roles in the 1978–1981 press discussion. A democratic polity must offer freedom and rights to its citizens, but, simultaneously, it also asks them to discipline themselves and fulfill their social duties. Democracy is about popular participation, but it is also about abiding by popular decisions and fostering an aversion to harming the interests of others. However, the relation of these parts to the whole is unclear. Democratic centralism refers to dialectics, in which neither part is sufficient as such. Contrarily, it is meaningful to speak about discipline even without freedom or freedom without discipline, but democracy and centralism become impracticable without one another.

Perhaps the articles published in 1978–1981 equated freedom and discipline with democratic centralism because they saw discipline as a special form of centralism. Freedom, then, appears to be one aspect of democracy. Although the relation between freedom and discipline does not correlate with the overall theory of democratic centralism, it seems to be quite close to democracy and centralism as party principles. Democratic centralism in the Party definitely combined freedom to speak prior to the decision being made, and discipline in implementation thereafter. Of course, the discussion in 1978–1981 may have equated dialectics between democracy and centralism with dialectics between freedom and discipline simply because Mao Zedong had done so before. In his speech "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People" Mao wanted to stress that neither

democracy nor freedom are absolute, but rather, are dependent on specific histori-
cal conditions and need to be conditioned with centralism and discipline.[208]

Democratic centralism as epistemology

Apart from being a model of democratic political processes and normatively
correct leadership, democratic centralism refers to a certain form of epistemology.
This epistemology assumes that without ample empirical research of the situation
and popular moods a decision becomes inoperative. Democratic centralism means
continuous interaction of empirical research and policy formation. It subjects
policies and ideological dogmas to ceaseless empirical testing.

This epistemology is a form of Aristotelian empiricism, on which Karl Marx
based his notion that the theory must be based on the practice and should simulta-
neously be used to change the practice.[209] Mao Zedong, then, described this inter-
action in his article *On Practice*: "Start from perceptual knowledge and actively
develop it into rational knowledge; then start from rational knowledge and active-
ly guide revolutionary practice to change both the subjective and the objective
world."[210] The mass line style of leadership is a practical application of this epis-
temological principle.[211] As John Wilson Lewis explains, stages of the mass line,
namely perception, summarization, authorization, and implementation, are paral-
lel to the epistemological process of perception, conception, and verification.
Thus, faithfully following of the mass line increases the certainty and clarity of
political and technical knowledge.[212]

The mass line process starts with the practice, proceeds to analyzing the situ-
ation with the help of the theory, and continues by putting the policy into practice.
Here the masses represent knowledge about practice, while the leadership is pro-
ficient with theory. Good leadership, as well as good decisions, require interaction
between the two since neither actor is unable to work out the most viable solutions
on its own: the masses lack long term vision and are often not capable of system-
atic analysis of the situation, while leaders have limited practical experience and
cannot escape subjectivism unless they consult the plurality of viewpoints among
the masses.

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[208] "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People", Mao, Selected Works, vol.
       V, pp. 388–389.

[209] For an introduction to the development of Marxist epistemology, see Dutton and Healy 1985.
       See also Steiner 1951, pp. 423–424.

[210] "On Practice" in Mao, Selected Works, vol. I, p. 308.

[211] Starr 1979, p. 190.

[212] Lewis 1966, pp. 72, 96–97.

On the personal level, the mass line enables an individual cadre to break out from limitations of his subjective understanding and adopt a more objective evaluation of the situation. This is not to say that a cadre's understanding is subjective and the masses' understanding is objective. Instead, each individual's cognition is initially limited to his personal experience. Through listening to all kinds of viewpoints and experiences, including ones that contradict his own, an individual may transcend his own limited view. When this happens, he can relatively objectively compare all alternatives to find the best one. Likewise, when he learns about different interests involved, it becomes possible for him to take into account all relevant interests.

On the polity level, the chain of centralization of practice should continue from the local levels to the central government. Localities were to centralize local knowledge and pass it on to the next level of administration, which again would relay this information to the next level, all the way to the center. Likewise, all levels should relay the results that are centralized into laws, policies, rules, and political lines to the levels below them. However, generalized information seldom takes into account special local conditions and, therefore, localities should modify policies to suit particular local conditions. Information centralized in this way is, of course, not always correct nor can it answer to changing conditions and situations. Therefore, epistemology in democratic centralism is a continuous cyclical process of accumulating practical knowledge, processing feasible policies and programs, and correcting outdated or impractical policies.

The image the Chinese theory of democratic centralism provides about decision making is close to what Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg call the rationality model. According to this model, pragmatic officials evaluate alternatives on a rational basis, choosing the policy that appears to be the best one. Leaders' values, distinct perceptions of the common good, and various understandings of the best means to attain common aims explain differences among them.[213] Lieberthal and Oksenberg criticize this model for assuming that decision making takes place on the basis of complete information and that the relation between the problem and the solution is straightforward. Moreover, leaders may have other unarticulated reasons for preferring one policy to another.[214] Actually, democratic centralism does not assume complete information, but seeks rational decision making in the reality of incomplete information. Yet, democratic central-

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[213] Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, pp. 11–13. Despite its limitations, the use of such a perception of Chinese policy making by Western scholars can be justified on the grounds that this analysis coincides with the Chinese leaders' own perception of how they should make decisions. Yet, in terms of democratic centralism, the rationality model could be criticized for its concentration on the level of national leadership only.

[214] Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, pp. 13–14.

ism seems to assume that if complete information were available, all decisions made in the democratic centralist manner would be correct. As a result, the Chinese perception is vulnerable to the criticism by Lynn White that in China democracy is seen as technical problem solving, as if values would not affect decisions.[215]

The epistemology behind democratic centralism is in some ways similar to majoritarianism. It assumes that popular knowledge shared by many is more likely to be correct,[216] at least if this knowledge emerges from rational analysis and is not simply a commonly shared set of traditional "backward" beliefs. Although the minority opinion may turn out to be correct, it is more likely that the majority has a truer vision because it accords with the experiences of many. However, democratic centralism differentiates between epistemologically correct decisions and majority decisions. It recognizes the possibility that the minority is correct. Pure majoritarian vision is unappealing to democratic centralism because the epistemology aims at truth, not just whatever the majority upholds. As Stephen Angle notes, consultation is closer to giving advice than to voting. Therefore, the legitimacy of democratic input is seen to come from correctness, not from the support of the majority.[217] In terms of democratic centralism in the Party, the majority principle and party discipline prevail and the minority standpoint requires a procedural ratification before its implementation is begun. However, at the mass line level, majoritarian interpretation is problematic. At the grassroots, cadres naturally are a minority compared to the masses, although cadres allegedly are knowledgeable and experts in ideology. The criterion of ideological correctness thus provides one obstacle to majoritarianism. This criterion is likely to support the vanguard party type of solutions and, at times, has even led to the disregard of the majority position in the Party.

Evidently, democratic centralism assumes much flexibility and allows rapid and radical policy changes if feedback from the grassroots so requires or if the majority of decision makers become convinced of the need to adopt an alternative policy. Naturally, the ability to react to changes was most beneficial during the civil war, but it has also been evident in the People's Republic's history of demonstrating preparedness for relatively radical policy changes if earlier policies have proven to be failures or unsuccessful in responding to the needs they were supposed to address. John Wilson Lewis remarks that the mass line is a system for creating and manipulating opportunities. In one sense it even rationalizes opportunism.[218] He continues,

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[215]   White 1999 (2), pp. 646–647.

[216]   Similar assumptions are found in Western theories, see, e.g., Dahl 1989, pp. 141–142.

[217]   Angle 2005, p. 527.

[218]   Lewis 1966, p. 98.

Following the tortuous party line within the confines of mass line, party members and cadres are also deterred from turning their sense of frustration on the elite itself. The mass line doctrine stipulates that members must adjust to sudden changes by reappraising their own knowledge in the light of the new situation. Only infrequently do individual members find the opportunity to stand aside from the flow of policy to question the mass line itself.[219]

Influencing through implementation

Many scholars maintain that because Chinese commoners have few chances to initiate policies beyond the local level, influencing during the implementation stage is typical for China.[220] Influencing during implementation is in keeping with the theory of democratic centralism, which assumes popular influencing takes place in both the "from the people" and "to the people" stages. In local politics, ordinary people participate in decision making and even agenda setting,[221] but when it comes to national-level politics, ordinary people have a chance to influence policies mostly during the implementation stage. Nevertheless, the mass line significantly broadens policy implementation by encouraging citizen participation, as James Townsend remarks.[222] Although central policy formation was restricted to the Party elite, the center did leave a whole range of local matters to be handled at the local level with relatively little external direction both because the elite so desired and because they could not have controlled everything even if they wanted to.[223]

The theory of democratic centralism encourages a type of decision making in which the center or other authoritative levels decide to leave policies vague enough to provide localities and other grassroots units with space to implement policies according to local conditions. James Townsend relates how the central government often issues its decisions in the form of general statements to permit local innovation and experimentation. The specific policy emerges only after the center collects feedback about local experiences.[224] However, the center sets limits for local initiative.[225] Democratic centralism is meant to centralize general policy impulses and decentralize specific policy impulses.[226] The aim is to allow situational flexibility within the limits of firm operational principles.[227]

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[219] Lewis 1966, p. 99.
[220] E.g. Angle 2005, p. 530; Burns 1988, p. 1; Townsend 1980, p. 423.
[221] Blecher 1991, p. 132.
[222] Townsend 1980, p. 423.
[223] Gardner 1972, p. 230.
[224] Townsend 1980, p. 423.
[225] Schram 1989, pp. 102–103.
[226] Wilson and Grenier 1992, p. 28.
[227] Lewis 1966, p. 98.

As Stephen Angle observes, too much flexibility in the final stage would undermine the whole idea of centralism as a process of formulating central policy. Therefore, for democratic centralism to work, widespread participation is most important in the input stage. Unfortunately, the adequacy of front-end partici-pation has been a problem in China.[228] When the actual Chinese system directs popular and local influencing to the implementation stage, this influencing might even become so intense that it undermines the centralist aims of the state. As R. J. Birrell notes, although the Party is committed to the mass line ideology, it cannot decentralize power to the level suggested by this ideology because local cadres are likely to use power for local interests so that other central goals, like production and taxation, would be compromised. Therefore, the state has had the need to pro-liferate bureaucratic controls, which are detrimental to local participation.[229] Obviously, we find a vicious circle here. When front-end participation provides insufficient chances for popular influencing, it is primarily during the implemen-tation stage that people have the opportunity to voice their opinions on, and even opposition to, policies since they were not really able to comment on them during the actual policy-making stage. In order to be able to execute its policies, the state thus must limit the chances of articulation during the implementation stage. Con-sequently, the input process suffers as well. Indeed, Steven Angle emphasizes that because the policy-formation process is iterative and criticism of policies can be-come front-end input for the next democratic centralist cycle, muzzling people's reactions to a policy will again stifle front-end participation.[230]

Local initiative is closely linked to the Chinese communists' democratic aspi-rations. The local approach is natural considering that the Chinese communist ideal of democracy derives from the model of direct participatory democracy and the communist experiences of grassroots mobilization during the revolutionary wars. Furthermore, as John Bryan Starr notes, the Chinese communists have seen it to be even more important to develop participation in local questions that affect a person's life more deeply than national politics.[231] Victor Shaw considers the mass line conception to presume that if each member or social unit is integrated into the process, the whole society will be as well. It sees social wealth and order as being rooted in basic units. This understanding proceeds from good parts to a better system and takes coordination for granted.[232] Similarly, the democratic centralist theory equates local democratic participation within one social unit with

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[228] Angle 2005, p. 528.
[229] Birrell 1969, pp. 403, 443.
[230] Angle 2005, p. 528.
[231] Starr 1979, p. 213.
[232] Shaw 1996, p. 166.

democracy in the whole system and does not see coordination itself as problematic.

Apparently, one reason for permitting local initiative was the willingness to reduce the costs of implementation. The Chinese state was ready for a trade-off between unfailing policy execution and low-cost policy execution. The design probably followed the Chinese tradition of local self-rule here.[233] Furthermore, the communists had a good experience with reducing the need for above-nominated personnel and above-sent resources by mobilizing villages during the revolution, which could serve as a model for the contemporary situation. Maximizing local effort reduced the costs and responsibilities of the central government, but simultaneously meant that the center had to leave space for local interests and local initiative.

The communists probably appreciated local activism and local participation as signs of the new society. The original mass line design required regular popular participation in local affairs, and mass movements demanded active mass following. James Townsend maintains that the Party has encouraged local participatory projects that involve the development of local services in order to provide institutional opportunities for the people to accept Party policies as their own and to demonstrate this in political action.[234] Surely, the Party also comprehended the benefits of using local activists, who had local knowledge and the ability to mobilize locals by way of their own example and skills in persuasion, to contribute to the Party-defined ends. In addition, local activists, familiar with local people and conditions, are able to transmit information about the local situation and moods to higher levels of administration.

From the point of view of an individual, participation in implementation should increase the possibilities for democratic participation. The state probably hopes that political participation develops the participants' feeling that they can influence state decisions and also strengthens their commitment to the results. In other words, people should learn that their state is responsive and its policies legitimate. The ability to modify unpleasant policies locally, even if only by a small degree, most likely makes even unpopular policies psychologically much more tolerable and reduces dissatisfaction with the system. In addition, local participation can make the equal distribution of the burdens of implementation between the community members possible, and thus makes implementation itself more

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[233] Choate 1997, p. 4.
[234] Townsend 1980, p. 423.

acceptable.[235] When people feel that the process is fair they are more likely to abide the result. In other words, participation itself might legitimize the policy.

Popular participation at the local level directs people's attention to local issues. Since people's time and other resources available for political activities are limited, the chance to participate in decision making regarding local issues exhausts much of the available time and energy. Since the mass line type of popular participation focuses on local issues, this focus itself tends to shape the alternatives commoners are likely to consider. Instead of trying to affect, or even change, the political system as a whole, a Chinese peasant or worker would primarily direct his political initiative to changing the situation inside his own unit. Theoretically this is not the aim of democratic centralism, but, in practice, this is most likely the outcome of the pyramidal design of power.

Moreover, local participation increases awareness of the feasible limits of decision making arising either from limited resources or administrative imperatives originating in the higher levels of government. Therefore, political involvement is likely to make the present state of affairs feel legitimate. It would be an overstatement to conclude that beliefs beneficial to rulers are produced by rulers, as Jon Elster correctly notes.[236] Yet, popular participation is likely to help sustain the Communist Party rule in China, not least because it encourages a person to consider possible choices within the framework of the existing political system rather than seek alternatives to this system. The legitimizing outcome of the actual limitation of feasible alternatives is by no means peculiar to China or participatory democracies. All democracies have the same effect. Elections tend to focus voters' attention on the differences between existing candidates. In other words, a voter is encouraged to consider which of the candidates has opinions that somewhat converge with his own, instead of considering what his preferences really are. Jon Elster calls the situation in which preferences underlying a choice are shaped by the actual constraints of the situation as adaptive preference formation.[237] My

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[235] For example, when cadre families cannot escape birth control, other families are more willing to accept the policy because it affects every family in the same way. See, e.g., Lawrence 1994, p. 67.

[236] Elster 1983, pp. 116–117, 164–165.

[237] Elster 1983. Strictly speaking, Jon Elster is interested mainly in situations in which adaptation is unconscious, but voters can also consciously adapt their choices to the situation (on p. 123, Elster terms conscious dissonance reduction between preferences and options 'rationalization'). A good example is a rational voter who votes for an electable big party candidate instead of a marginal candidate with a more attractive platform because she concludes the likelihood that her favorite will be elected is too small. She therefore decides to maximize her political influence by voting for the second best candidate who has a good chance of being elected. In my opinion, attempting to maximize one's own interest within the existing situation is a rational way to act, although it is problematic to those theorists who see that the order of preferences should remain constant, and who therefore condemn strategic voting (e.g. Arrow 1966, pp. 12–13, 17). William Riker gives an example from ancient Rome where

assumption is that participatory politics cause adaptive preference formation that strengthens the communists' rule.

Activism and bureaucracy

Democratic centralism contains an inherent tension between popular initiative and administrative regularity within one institutional setting. The theory of democratic centralism assumes that institutions can combine the two, but sees this combination as being an unstable one. This tension has historical roots. Mark Selden has identified two different political cultures in the base area government: a mobilization approach in villages and a bureaucratic approach inside the administration. On the one hand, local leaders had revolutionary experience but had little knowledge about ideology and the long-term objectives. On the other hand, intellectuals, who manned regional-level administration posts, often had no experience with local conditions. The well-known Yan'an rectification campaign, then, attempted to combine flexibility and local autonomy with central command in the regular Party work.[238] Thus, the proper balance of democracy and centralism was achieved and combined activism with regular bureaucratic governance.

Its hostility towards bureaucratization partly explains why the Chinese theory of democratic centralism is ambiguous about the institutional setting for democracy. The theory explicitly assumes that all institutions can potentially become undemocratic. The theory maintains that all institutions tend to develop a special bureaucratic interest, which is against popular interest and disregards the plurality of practical situations. Barrett McCormick thinks that this attitude results in the misunderstanding of the role of modern bureaucracies,[239] but, along with Marxists, many other Western theorists are critical of bureaucratic states because they limit democracy and freedom of choice.[240] Many opine that there is a need to transform

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the Senate is divided on whether to acquit, exile, or execute the accused. A parliamentary leader in favor of acquittal, knowing that those favoring acquittal were the largest group, managed to manipulate the voting so that all three of the alternatives were voted on at the same time. However, the leader of the execution camp managed to manipulate the vote so that senators voted on whether the accused should be punished or not, and not on which punishment was preferred by each senator. The majority preferred punishment, and the accused was banished. (Riker 1986, pp. 84–88.) This is a classic example of strategic voting. In my opinion, another interpretation is also possible. This is a good example of preferences changing situationally. Preferences in different questions (in this case "How should he be punished?" and "Should he be punished?") vary even when a person is consistent in his opinion.

[238] Selden 1972, pp. 190–193.

[239] McCormick 1990, pp. 23–24. See also Schram 1987, p. 204, for criticism of adapting Max Weber's categories to China, which is what McCormick does in his study.

[240] For comments on the Weberian model cited by McCormick, see Held 1987, p. 159.

bureaucracies into more transparent and accessible organizations.[241] In the West also, bureaucracies are criticized for discouraging initiative and rewarding routine; for being rigid and rule-bound; for centralizing authority and protecting official lines of communication instead of inviting cooperation from outside; as well as for organizational rivalry and bureaucratic interest.[242]

Although Western bureaucracies are antagonistic to the democratic principles of transparency and direct control by the populace, they belong to modern democratic designs because they are needed for implementing laws and policies passed by democratically elected legislatures and executive organs.[243] Marxists emphasize the need for bureaucracies that are more transparent and less insulated from popular inputs.[244] Still, in my opinion, the Chinese bureaucracy is not more transparent or less insulated than it is in modern Western democracies. In this respect, their design has not been very successful. However, faithful to their theory, the Chinese have made a concrete choice to open the implementation process to popular influencing. This means that the Chinese have compromised execution according to unified standards resulting from bureaucratic routinization. Evidently, the Chinese have chosen to make a trade-off between efficient execution on the one hand and a certain amount of popular control over implementation on the other.

Flexibility is sought after in the democratic centralist leadership style. However, this flexibility, meant to diminish bureaucratism in the sense of authoritarianism, could simultaneously be a cause of bureaucratism in the sense of irresponsibility and inefficiency. Lack of clear rules allows for the avoidance of responsibility for mistakes and mismanagement. Thus, it leaves space for bureaucratic and even corrupt maneuvering. Latitude in implementation can mean more concern for local conditions and democratic initiative, but decentralization can serve local bureaucratic interests as well. Therefore, the mass line type of solution to the problems of bureaucratization is partial at best.

Cultural dimension of democratic centralism

The Chinese democratic centralist system seems to have obvious similarities with power structures in traditional Chinese society and in other contemporary East Asian countries. This would indicate that there is something cultural in the demo-

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[241] Selznick 2002, p. 88.

[242] E.g. Selznick 2002, pp. 86–87.

[243] This is the basic assumption of the model Dennis Thompson calls the hierarchical model of bureaucracy. See Thompson 1983 for this model and for his criticism of its divergence from practice in the Western countries.

[244] Held 1987, p. 125.

cratic centralist design.[245] Of course, both the democratic centralist system in China and the network state in contemporary Japan essentially belong to new political structures responding to modern needs and by no means are similar to traditional Confucian structures. Still, the prevalence of hierarchical personalized relations of power and horizontal structures of intra-elite negotiation indicates that traditional political culture may have played some role in structuring power in a certain manner in these new contexts. Nevertheless, regardless of having a cultural element, both Chinese democratic centralism and Japanese network governance serve contemporary needs, express modern ideologies, and serve modern state power.

Democratic centralist arrangements resemble in many ways the practices in contemporary Japan and the political organization promoted by its Liberal Democratic Party. Jeffrey Broadbent uses the network state model to depict Japanese politics. In Japan, state power operates through informally institutionalized social networks and personal ties. Networks of power underline persuasion and cooperation within the decision-making group, instead of political conflict as stressed by Western electoral theories. Although participants represent different immediate goals, often according to their organizational mandate, a common understanding of the rules of policy making and of wider national goals facilitate communication and trust. Intra-elite negotiations create a collective sense of possibilities and aims, even when sectoral interests are known to diverge. Instead of being directly responsive to popular demands, the elite become aware of social issues when some of their own members become concerned with the issue. The elite's stance on the issue then begins to form during a gradual political process. Japanese decision making thus responds to social needs and demands, but the state is left with ample autonomy to choose the issues and interests it promotes because it deals with matters within exclusionary elite networks outside of the public sphere. This allows the elite to present its policies not as concessions to public demands but as paternalistic, autonomously generated policy changes.[246]

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[245] I am indebted to Steven Angle to point out that similarities between the Chinese and Japanese systems could be interpreted as an existence of an institutional and theoretical alternative to Western models. However, my comparison between the Chinese model of democratic centralism and some findings in Western scholarly literature concerning Japan cannot yield more than tentative hypotheses. I only suggest that there is a possibility that many aspects of democratic centralism in China may be of non-communist origin and cultural factors may be at play in their formation. Likewise, further empirical study might establish that there is a distinctive institutional model to be found in East Asia and perhaps elsewhere. Yet, before meticulous comparative empirical research is conducted it is impossible to prove that similarities between the countries are not superficial. Still, in my opinion it is useful to demonstrate that this kind of research might find genuine cultural continuity or a distinctive model here.

[246] Broadbent 1998, pp. 28, 92–95, 132–133, 294–295, 347.

Jeffrey Broadbent remarks that networks become less reciprocal outside of the Japanese ruling elite. The network state operates in horizontal mode at the top, but in vertical mode outside of it. The state attempts to persuade and guide localities and social actors whose ties to the central government are few and tends to subordinate them to ministerial priorities, instead of enhancing their autonomy. Local levels have networks too. These facilitate local projects but give little bargaining power for changing national priorities. Thus, local networks work along with, not in contradiction to, the central state aims.[247] Although Japanese decision making is highly consultative among the national-level decision makers, after they have made the decision the issue stops being political and the deliberations thereafter are assumed to deal with technical questions of implementation only. This approach seriously limits the political influence of those remaining outside of the national political elite.[248]

Ordinary people's connections to the state usually take the form of personal networks as well. Jeffrey Broadbent shows how the Japanese community leaders act as gatekeepers to the hierarchical political system. Local leaders are loyal to their own political patrons and simultaneously expect ordinary community members to be loyal to them. In return, the local boss uses his connections to his superiors to provide resources for his community. He actively enhances community members' political obedience towards higher-level authorities through personal networks, persuasion and status seduction. When local complaints are brought to the local boss, he brings them to the attention of his superiors and asks them to solve problems. Thereby, commoners obey him because he provides material benefits, patronage, and services. However, if the higher-ups are unresponsive to local needs, a conflict between the local boss' paternalistic responsibilities emerges. He can either side with his community or with the above-set policy, and in either case he can bring with him a considerable part of the community, for its members have personal loyalties to him.[249]

Although the network model emphasizes communication, this communication is by no means equal. Jeffrey Broadbent observes that Japanese leaders accept that democracy demands that they explain their decisions publicly, but this does not mean giving the public a role in decision making. Moreover, when a leader personally comes to explain policies to his constituency or honors people with personal visits to persuade them, often the aim is to utilize the leader's prestige and symbolic attention to local needs in the silencing of dissent and in the justification of paternalistic, above-made decisions. This kind of communication

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[247]   Broadbent 1998, pp. 95, 347.
[248]   Apter and Sawa 1984, pp. 204–205.
[249]   Broadbent 1998, pp. 142–147, 174–175, 192–196, 210.

actually imposes state preferences on the populace, albeit in a non-coercive manner.[250] Still, as Susan Pharr argues, paternalistic and harmony-preserving cultural expectations make Japanese leaders sensitive to public moods.[251] Nevertheless, presenting matters as unobjectionable and already decided sometimes appears undemocratic to the public.[252]

However, such hierarchical personalistic relations do not automatically serve soft social control over the populace. If leaders so desire, these relations can become a tool for promoting popular participation in decision making. They can be used to gather public suggestions, to cooperate with citizen bodies and to arrange open meetings for leaders to meet residents. When ordinary people are invited to participate, leaders become more concerned with the people's welfare.[253]

Scholars often remark that consensus is the preferred mode in Japanese decision making. Consensus building is effective in a group or community of people with long-term, face-to-face relationships. Consensus building seeks an outcome that accommodates various competing needs and viewpoints within the group. Its goal is conflict accommodation.[254] However, demands for consensus can involve power. Jeffrey Broadbent argues that the Japanese political elite use the cultural preference for outwardly harmonious decisions for control and domination. Since dissent to achieved consensus is culturally immoral, the elite can demand adherence to decisions even when these decisions are made in ways which minimize public awareness, participation, and debate. Jeffrey Broadbent calls this method "governance by non-decisions," in which the elite use power by manipulating the public agenda.[255]

Although consensual decision making often works well within a closely related decision-making group or community, Susan Pharr notes that capacity for consensual decision making often becomes stretched beyond its capacity when decisions involve outsiders. When conflicts occur, the Japanese system aims at privatizing conflicts. Rather than provide an institutionalized model applicable to similar situations, it deals with them informally and on a case-by-case basis.[256] To isolate, marginalize and contain protest, the elite use soft social control, including

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[250] Broadbent 1998, pp. 161, 188, 197.

[251] Pharr 1990, p. 222.

[252] Broadbent 1998, pp. 161.

[253] Broadbent 1998, pp. 264–269.

[254] Pharr 1990, p. 208.

[255] Broadbent 1998, pp. 210, 256.

[256] Pharr 1990, pp. 208–209. The same methods are at use in Chinese conflicts. See, e.g., Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li's description of intra-village conflict (O'Brien and Li 1995), which shows that village leaders used what Susan Pharr calls as status seduction, marginalizing, and closing of elite ranks against the complainants.

social connections, status seduction and control of information.[257] In other words, the Japanese system prefers particularistic solutions. Moreover, Susan Pharr argues that privatizing social conflict and leaving its resolution to local levels frees the national elite to pursue other state goals.[258] That is, localizing and particularizing issues increase the state's autonomy in making decisions and considering large-scale and long-term aims, when lower-level authorities deal with direct popular pressures and individual problems.

The Japanese pattern of power relations obviously resembles the Chinese arrangements in many respects. Both power structures rely on hierarchical, often personal and sometimes informal, relations extending from the top of the system to the bottom. These structures facilitate communication in both directions, although the system favors communication originating at the top. Intra-elite deliberative consensus building is typical for China and Japan alike, although the interests consulted are not the same.[259] Still, in both systems the dominant party and the state leaders decide which interests to consult. Ministries' and interest-based organizations' role in representing their sectoral interest in negotiations among other elite members, who more or less share the same overall national goals, is the same in both systems. Both systems cultivate community-level gatekeepers to the political system and subject these local leaders to administrative hierarchy. Both China and Japan use community identities and the elite-defined general interest to particularize popular complaints and to maintain a high level of state autonomy. Moreover, both have used these means to discourage independent organization. Maintenance of the elite-commoner distinction and clear separation of the political system and its environment has resemblance. Commoner-regarding but elite-led politics seem typical for both China and Japan. In both countries, the elite can use hierarchical networks for co-optation and control, but also, if they are so motivated, for popular feedback. Consensus building is common in both systems.

A careful reader has surely identified many dissimilarities between the Japanese situation and Chinese democratic centralism. Although Japanese and Chinese leaders alike value consensus, the Chinese communists have been willing to engage in open conflict, at least if it helps unite people behind their aims.[260] If the Japanese system uses hierarchical patronage to create deference and make people

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[257] Broadbent 1998, pp. 185–191, 292.

[258] Pharr 1990, p. 217.

[259] Apter and Sawa 1984, pp. 204. Liberal Democrats in Japan mainly invite representatives of bureaucracy and business to inter-elite negotiations with them (Curtis 1999, p. 62; Hrebenar 1992, pp. 271, 276–277).

[260] Solomon 1970, pp. 315, 322–323.

politically passive,[261] the Chinese system deliberately wants to activate the population, although it promotes participation largely for elite-initiated aims. It is only natural that the Chinese communists and the Japanese conservatives adapting traditional institutions and political cultures to modern uses do not end up with exactly the same practical solutions. Still, both seem to have found useful elements in the Confucian ideological heritage of consensus, hierarchy, informal politics and personalized relations. After all, there is a surprising amount of resemblance between the solutions chosen by the two political parties at different ends of the political spectrum and the two states with differing social systems and stratifications.

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[261] Broadbent 1998, p. 195–196. Likewise, a Chinese leadership uses its ties to populace to produce political deference, when it seeks to wear out a protest. See O'Brien and Li 1995, pp. 771–773.

DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM IN WESTERN POLITICAL TERMINOLOGY

It is time to evaluate the theory of democratic centralism in terms of theories of democracy in general. To deepen understanding about the Chinese theory of democratic centralism, I will compare it with some focal issues in Western theories. However, many of these issues are not central in the Chinese theorization, having its own practical and theoretical concerns. In this chapter, I will try to derive the Chinese democratic centralist viewpoint about such central questions of Western democratic theory as representation, accountability, and leadership.

In addition, it is time to evaluate whether or not it is appropriate to call a democratic centralist polity democracy. W. B. Gallie has argued that democracy is a contested concept. Its meaning and definition are disputed. However, Gaillie argues that each meaning and standard of democracy should be taken seriously on its own terms and understood within its own framework.[1] I am somewhat sympathetic to this argument, but I find the relativistic possibilities it suggests unsatisfactory. In my opinion, it is not sufficient to create a new concept that makes China some kind of democracy just because it claims to be one. Nor is it sufficient that China should be a democracy in some distorted sense, such as "vanguard democracy", under which a revolutionary party holds the state power until citizens are ready to take democratic control,[2] or "totalitarian democracy," which uses popular votes and public meetings as acts of identification with the general will and popular sovereignty. Totalitarian democracy represses all opposition and postpones actual freedoms until all opposition is eradicated and its ideal society as depicted in its all-embracing guiding philosophy materializes. In fact, totalitarian democracy is dictatorship, albeit one resting on popular enthusiasm.[3] My opinion is that the Chinese theory can rightfully be a theory of democracy only if it really is about something universally accepted as democratic, which neither vanguard democracy or totalitarian democracy are.

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[1] His article "Essentially Contested Concepts", originally published in 1956, is quoted in Collier and Levitsky 1997, p. 433.

[2] Macpherson 1966, pp. 17–22. There has naturally been much criticism against including vanguard democracy in democratic forms of government at all. James Hyland, for example, correctly distinguishes democracy from democratic intent (Hyland 1995, p. 62).

[3] Talmon 1955, pp. 1–6, 251–253.

Recognition that democracy has a universal basis, albeit multiple representations, makes dialogue between different theoretical approaches and democratic political systems possible, even desirable. It becomes possible to learn from both strengths and weaknesses of each theory, both for theoretical purposes and for the practical aim of building more democratic systems. Accordingly, the Western conceptions of democracy can suggest ways to improve the Chinese political system, but likewise Chinese conceptions of democracy might show where Western democracies need improvement.

Participation and representation

Even if democracy today usually refers to representative democracy, originally the term referred to direct democracy only.[4] Contemporary Western democracies belong to a historically relatively new type of representative democracies. When political units expanded to the size of a modern nation-state, the huge majority of the populace could not directly participate in decision making. To overcome problems of scale, citizens now elected their representatives to decision-making posts and bodies. Representative democracy is not only indirect but also competitive. Political competition is essential for representative democracy, because citizens need be able to choose their political leaders to secure some elite responsiveness and accountability to popular opinion. To offer meaningful choice for the electorate, political issues tend to be divided along interest-based or ideological lines between party platforms and candidates. At best, representative democracy thus refers to institutional means for overcoming problems of popular participation in a political unit being too large for polity-wide personal contacts. Furthermore, representative democracy was not designed only as a political system for popular participation, but originally many advocates for electoral representation favored it exactly because it allows only limited popular power.[5]

I do not question whether this kind of political system is democratic. Rather, I would like to ask whether *only* this kind of polity is democratic. To define democracy only as modern Western representative democracy seems to reveal cultural hegemonism and a predisposition about the size of a political community that is contestable. Western critics blame China for insufficient political competition and, thus, classify China as undemocratic. Although Western political theorists often take elections and party competition as prerequisites for democracy, in fact, they cannot be, since original democracies did not practice them.

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[4]   This point is made by, among others, Arblaster 1987, p, 82.

[5]   Arblaster 1987, pp. 62, 87.

Electoral representation is democratic compared to authoritarian systems, but, apart from authoritarianism, direct democracy mostly does not practice popular voting. Therefore, elections cannot demarcate democracy. Jack Lively has listed different claims for the rule of the people, of which three are democratic: that all participate in governing; that all are personally involved in crucial decision making; and that rulers are accountable to the ruled. The first two arguments with strong popular involvement are forms of direct democracy, while only the third one refers to a representative government.[6] The Chinese theory of democratic centralism advocates the stronger second alternative, while Western representative democracies fall under the third category with weaker commoner[7] participation.

Political competition is typical for some forms of democracy only. In many premodern or non-Western cultures, and even in many modern Western communities and associations, an adversary[8] type of competitive politics is neither acceptable nor an effective form of influencing. Although in modern impersonal systems cleavages offer political choice for commoners, in the setting of a small community a divisive approach may hinder rather than promote efficient political influencing.[9] A small community, say a village, depends on mutual cooperation for running common affairs. Often a small community, association, or professional group benefits from maximization of potential cooperative partners, not from sharpening the contrast between alternatives and distancing political opponents. Even in nation-states, much of democratic politics is not competitive. Deliberative democrats claim that democratic popular participation cannot be substantial without popular participation in agenda setting. This means popular participation in democratic deliberations for public opinion formation. According to them, deliberations usually aim at finding mutual understanding and an informed solution to the problem at hand.[10]

In representative democracy, elections are means to particular ends and should be viewed as such. Elections are the means for institutionalizing popular participation on an equal basis, boosting governmental accountability, and

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6   Lively 1975, p. 30.

7   I use the term commoner as opposite to the established term (political) elite. In political sciences, the term elite refers to political insiders, like politicians, sometimes also to those possessing politically meaningful resources. Accordingly, I refer to a person with no more than average political powers or resources with the term commoner. As used in this text, the term does not signify any class difference.

8   I borrowed this term from Mansbridge 1983, pp. 4–5.

9   See, e.g., Le Blanc 1999, pp. 70–71.

10   For good vindications of deliberative democracy, see, e.g., Christiano 1996 and Dryzek 2000. For evaluations of how deliberation helps in reconceptualizing the problem and finding mutual ground even when people genuinely and fundamentally disagree about ideal solutions, see Miller 1992.

encouraging governmental responsiveness towards the electorate's will. In my opinion, other institutional arrangements designed for these ends and involving popular input and participation can be democratic. For example, ancient Athenian democracy preferred face-to-face assemblies and the selection of functionaries by drawing lot. Even in contemporary democracies, there are mechanisms other than elections for making leaders accountable. These include not only direct pressure from civil society, but also delegated mechanisms like separation of powers and independent oversight agencies.[11] It simply is not self-evident that in the absence of elections the government does not solicit the people's opinions,[12] nor that elections automatically make the government respond to popular opinions. Besides, formal structures of accountability in democracy are strong in theory, but in practice they are often undermined by concentrations of power and influence.[13] The special merit of elections as the method for popular input is that they provide a calculus for popular input, but interpreting this calculus is not without problems.[14] Besides, Anthony Arblaster questions whether Western elections, in which electors express their preferences of candidates and parties, can be said to demonstrate any consent on the behalf of electors to particular policies the elected legislative initiates or passes.[15]

Accountability

One important Western democratic tradition concentrates on the idea of democracy mainly as a means for supervising the leadership. This tradition is often called protective democracy.[16] It takes the corruptibility of power as a significant threat and, thus, emphasizes institutions to check power and make the powerful accountable to the majority. By contrast, the Chinese theory seems to assume that people are basically good and willing to find rational solutions and mutual understanding.[17] Therefore, limiting power and securing accountability has not been a central theme in the Chinese theory. Actually, this duality is not cultural, but inherent in Western theories of democracy. Barry Hindess shows that the republican ideal of democracy sees representation as a cause of corruption since it promotes private interests in politics and subverts equality and self-government of the

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[11]   UNDP 2002, p. 65.

[12]   Unlike, e.g., Holden 1974, p. 49 claims.

[13]   UNDP 2002, p. 69.

[14]   See, e.g., Pennock 1979, pp. 277–286; Sartori 1987, pp. 108–109.

[15]   Arblaster 1987, p. 85.

[16]   E.g. in Macpherson 1979 and in Held 1987.

[17]   He 1996, pp. 96–119.

community.[18] The idea of accountability is based on this representative conception of democracy. Further, Hindess continues to argue that there is not one single set of criteria for democracy even in the West, since what appears to be democratic control from one tradition of democracy, appears as corruption to another.[19] It is the republican ideal from which Marxist and, subsequently, the official Chinese understanding of democracy derives.

The main reason for many Western scholars to classify China as a non-democratic country is its insufficient democratic accountability, remediable with direct elections of national leaders.[20] For the same reason, lack of citizen control over decision makers, some Western scholars have evaluated that the mass line type of influencing does not count as democracy.[21] However, accountability of the leadership towards the electorate is only one element of democracy. Apart from accountability, the other core principle of democracy is participation.[22] The question is then whether there is a possible tradeoff between different components of democracy. Can a political system make up in depth of participation what it loses in accountability and still be democratic? The ancient Athenians would have answered positively. In direct democracies, like that practiced in ancient Athens, accountability was not a central question at all. The Chinese theory of democratic centralism mainly, although not exclusively, derives from direct forms of democracy.

Of course, although it is totally legitimate to think that equal participation is more democratic than representation, but the criticism of inadequate accountability in China is not lessened thereby, because in reality Chinese people are represented in national politics. The argument that Chinese democracy involves participation without influence,[23] can be criticized if solicitation of popular opinions really works in democratic centralism, but is more or less correct when it comes to the fact that commoners in China have no means to hold national-level leaders accountable. Even if all important viewpoints were to be rationally considered in democratic centralist decision-making processes, ordinary people have no means to demand more accountability when important viewpoints are misre-

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18 Hindess 1991, pp. 180–181.

19 Hindess 1991, p. 174.

20 Elections are seen to make leaders accountable, not only because the populace can choose the kind of leaders it feels suitable to represent itself, but also because a leader usually wants to be reelected and knows that her record in office will have an impact on the next electoral result. For more details, see Powell 2000, pp. 10–13.

21 Townsend 1967, p. 176; Womack 1991 A, pp. 70–71.

22 The Inter-Parliamentary Union's Universal Declaration on Democracy, cited in UNDP 2002, p. 55.

23 Nathan 1986, p. 227.

presented or ignored. Thus, China would evidently be more democratic if it were represented by an elected and accountable national leadership.

The Chinese theory of democratic centralism has not totally overlooked accountability. The Chinese have experimented with participatory methods to guarantee accountability. They have preferred constant popular supervision, instead of electoral rotation, to guarantee responsiveness of the leaders. Continuous and direct popular feedback on every issue is seen more empowering than periodical elections. For disciplinary purposes, the Chinese Communists have advocated criticism sessions as a method of popular supervision of their leaders. It is even a relatively common understanding among the rural Chinese that public criticism is a more effective method of guaranteeing accountability than elections are.[24] Obviously, the Chinese have emphasized the responsiveness of their leaders instead of institutionalized responsibility towards the electorate.[25]

This is not to say that accountability has not been a problem in China. According to Victor Falkenheim, both Maoists and reformists have complained about the incapacity of limited "small democracy" to give commoners a role in shaping state policy and to check unpopular policy lines, whether the "revisionism" of the 1960s or the "ultra-leftism" of the 1970s.[26] By 1978–1981, the Chinese had been awakened to the fact that without institutions making the leadership accountable to the people, democracy remains on an unpredictable basis. As the result, in 1978–1981 such democratic institutions as elections, recalls and the rule of law received much attention in the Chinese press, although less than the participatory aspect of democracy. One main argument for increasing accountability was to guarantee that the people's initiatives would be paid attention to. Another was that accountability would discourage cadres from violating the people's right to express opinions. Although articles appreciated accountability, they were extremely skeptical towards electoral responsibility alone. Without continuous processes of participatory feedback and supervision, people would be left very marginal powers.[27] Often electoral and legal accountability were only meant to be corrective methods if participatory forms of supervision failed.

Democratic centralism and representation

The 1978–1981 discussion about democracy used the language of representation in several contexts. Statements like "the people may take back the powers they

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[24] Li Lianjiang 2001; Ogden 2002, pp. 212–213.
[25] For elaboration of the terms responsiveness and responsibility, see Pennock 1979, ch. 7.
[26] Falkenheim 1983, p. 57.
[27] According to articles, fully represented participation was a problem in bourgeois democracies.

have entrusted (*weituo*) to a cadre" or "because direct democracy is not yet possible due to economic, infrastructural, institutional and ideological backwardness, for the time being the people can influence only through their representatives" were common phrases in articles. Legislators were called "people's representatives (*daibiao*)". These expressions often had a connection with elections. The terminology of representation was sometimes used to emphasize that leaders are accountable to the people, but on other occasions to affirm unequal political powers and the need for Party leadership. Whichever, the terminology of representation was not central in the press discussion. Instead, the term leadership was a more central concept describing the relation between leaders and led. For example, the Leninist vanguard party rule was defended mostly because of the Party's ability to lead the proletariat in revolution and socialist construction. Thus, terminology emphasized strategic vision and the talent of mobilization. The Party was to mobilize the people to act themselves, not to decide for the people.

Western political sciences have distinguished several forms of representation. One basic distinction is that between delegates and trustees on the basis of whether a voter evaluates a candidate's platform or ability. A delegate is bound by her electoral program, while a voter gives his trustee a right to use her independent evaluation in decision making as long as voters' approval of her performance is regularly measured in elections.[28] Since there are no party platforms, seldom even campaigning, in Chinese elections, which moreover are indirect above the local level, delegation does not apply to China.[29]

It may be more surprising to Western readers that the trustee model seems not to describe the Chinese understanding of representation either. The trustee model leaves much discretion to the representative, and many Western theorists expect leaders in socialist countries to have considerable autonomy vis-à-vis the commoners' demands.[30] Yet, the trustee model is contrary to the mass line conception of democratic solicitation. Actually, democratic centralism requires a representative to remain in constant contact with their electors. This solicitation takes place more often than in either the delegate or trustee model, but popular opinion is less binding than in the delegate model. Instead of encouraging a trustee's independent judgment, democratic centralism obliges that leaders receive immediate popular feedback about every issue. Still, democratic centralism idealizes neither autonomy from, nor prioritization of, social demands, but wants to find a balance between the two.

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[28] For this basic distinction in Western electoral theory, see, e.g., Holden 1974, pp. 76–80.

[29] Still, when there is campaigning, the conception of delegation is not totally absent in China. In village elections, voters sometimes require village leaders to fulfill their campaign promises. See, e.g., Ogden 2002, p. 185.

[30] E.g. Holden 1974, p. 49.

Logically the theory of democratic centralism could lead to two kinds of perceptions of representation. One logical answer would be that one never cedes any of his sovereignty. Hence, representation in the sense of delegation would not happen. Quite the contrary, a person should always have a say about the decisions concerning him, both when they are being made and when they are being executed. The higher levels relay and process lower level opinions and information, but they have no legitimacy to make decisions without consulting him. Interestingly, there seems to be quite a strong conviction of individual autonomy in this view. Election winners are supposed to lead their units with skill and vigor, but not to represent its members, except in the sense of having a duty to make local moods and situation known to the higher levels. The respect of personal sovereignty is understandable and even customary in the context of direct democracy.[31]

A milder formulation would examine solicitation of popular opinions from the perspective of a cadre or representative himself. Here a cadre or a delegate is required to consult people before taking the decision. The difference with the strict version of this argument is that while the strict version requires that cadres must consult *all relevant people* before the decision making to obtain their consent, the milder version states that *all cadres* must consult (some) concerned people before the decision to form an objective understanding about the matter. The 1978–1981 press discussion supports at least this milder version of individual sovereignty. However, it is probable that democratic centralism demands more than soliciting popular opinions. Possibly it maintains that a democratic decision requires that everyone is at least formally given a chance of expressing his opinion, even if he never uses this opportunity in practice.

Different types of representation

In the Western literature, democratic representation mainly means the democratic process for the electorate to designate their representative.[32] Jane Mansbridge describes this type of representation as representation by promising. This term refers to the traditional electoral representation, in which a candidate promises what she will do during her term in office. However, there are several criteria for democratic representation, which may be conflicting. Since there are plural criteria, it is likely that polities do better in some criteria than others.[33] Thus, the

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[31] For example, Rousseau's respect of individual autonomy to the point that everyone is granted full non-transferable sovereignty is familiar (Book 2, chapters 1–4, in Rousseau 1998, pp. 25–34). For Rousseau's idealization of direct democracy, see book 3, chapter 15, in Rousseau 1998, pp. 95–97.

[32] See, e.g., Birch 1993, p. 74.

[33] Mansbridge 1998.

fact that the Chinese political system has not established the kind of electoral accountability Western democracies have does not automatically mean that there is no democratic representation in China.

Apart from representation by promising, Jane Mansbridge has classified three other types of representation. In anticipatory representation a representative maintains communication with her electors to know their moods and to explain her policy choices to them. In introspective representation a representative is chosen for his previously known personality or ability. In surrogate representation a representative puts forward viewpoints of a certain group she belongs to regardless of her electoral district limits.[34] All these three forms of representation are known in China. This is not surprising, considering that Jane Mansbridge maintains that they are deliberative and not aggregative. Therefore, their success is not measured numerically but in terms of accuracy of information and presence of all important social issues and interests in decision making.[35]

Anticipatory representation is exactly what the mass line is about: representing through ongoing communication with commoners. The ideal of each individual's constant input in collective matters sounds very democratic and equal. Practice seldom meets this ideal. According to Jane Mansbridge, in direct democracy most participants are in fact, although informally, represented by those who speak.[36] The silent are not in control of processes through which collective decisions concerning them are made. Jane Mansbridge has found inequality also when a person communicates a group's views to higher levels. Although he should report all viewpoints, he often turns out to present his own view about the situation as the collective opinion.[37] These situations Jane Mansbridge observed in American direct democratic settings resemble complaints the Chinese press made in 1978–1981, such as allowing democratic deliberation by others as long as the Party secretary himself can decide in the end (*ni minzhu, wo jizhong*).

Studies of Chinese voting behavior reveal a strong tendency to introspective representation. An ideal candidate is known for his reputation of hard work and skill.[38] In addition, the Communist Party appreciates leaders' moral integrity. Yet, the voting system encourages surrogate representation, although morally it combines surrogate representation with anticipatory representation. It promotes communication between a representative and his electorate in the sense of anticipatory representation, while communication within each representative institution is based on a representative's role in surrogate representation.

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[34] Mansbridge 1998.

[35] Mansbridge 1998.

[36] Mansbridge 1983, pp. 211, 251, 274.

[37] Mansbridge 1983, p. 213.

[38] Chan et al. 1984, pp. 29–30, 36; Burns 1988, pp. 104–105; Shi 1997, pp. 39–40.

Functional representation

In expectation of surrogate representation, the Chinese have arranged their representative organs with maximum representation of all viewpoints and interests in mind. Therefore, they combine regional representation with sectoral representation.[39] Quotas are assigned for minimum representation for groups like workers, peasants, Party members, military, women, minority nationalities, and intellectuals.[40] The ideal, thus, is that all major interests and backgrounds are represented in the congresses. In Western political theory, there are several names for such a form of representation, the most common of which perhaps is functional representation.[41] Other terms exist as well. Researching the people's congress system in China, Kevin O'Brien calls this kind of representation sociological representation[42] while Bruce Jacobs calls it comprehensive representation[43]. Anthony Birch has used the term microscopic representation because he sees that this type of representation reflects the main characteristics of the population within the legislature.[44]

A skeptic could also claim that the purposeful constitution of the legislature so that all main social strata are represented counts for what Anthony Birch calls symbolic representation. Symbolic representation means that someone or something represents "a larger or more abstract entity in a symbolic way."[45] Pre-

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[39] Actually, the Chinese have not been content to organize only one set of representative bodies. Apart from the legislative People's Congresses, they have also preserved the Political Consultative Congress structure preceding them. In this way they have one organ for regional representation and one for social representation. However, social representation in China does not take place exactly in proportion with the size of groups within society. Social groups like intellectuals and Party members are purposely overrepresented, while the peasantry is deliberately underrepresented.

[40] About considerations of social representation, see Chen An 1999, pp. 104–107.

[41] According to many theorists, such as Cawson 1983, functional representation does not take parliaments as the primary units for representation but comes close to corporatism or associative democracy. In other words, functional representation takes place within organs designed for negotiations of a certain group interest among members of the group. Chinese communists have a strong tradition of corporatist representation as well, in which certain single-interest organizations represent their members' interest in policy negotiations among political elites. Therefore, the term fuctional representation refers to more than just reserving a certain number of seats in the legislature for certain groups. However, the Chinese design does not leave as many autonomous civil society roles for these single-interest organizations as associative democracy would. For associative democracy, see Carter 2002. See also Kane 2002 as an analysis of arguments for and against formal recognition of group representation.

[42] O'Brien 1990, pp. 82, 84.

[43] Jacobs 1991, pp. 179–180.

[44] Birch 1993, p. 72.

[45] Birch 1993, p. 73.

sumably, the Chinese have taken such close care for having all legitimate social groups represented not only in order to consult all groups, but also as a symbol of political inclusion of and consent by the represented groups.

The composition of Western legislative organs usually emerges through competitive elections in which electors should be able to choose a candidate whose platform resembles their own preferences best. Functional representation reveals a deliberative, not an aggregative conception of popular opinions. Instead of finding which candidates or policy platforms enjoy the most popular support, functional representation prioritizes wide inclusion of interests. Having representation of all affected social groups in a decision-making body allows delegates to communicate on how a planned policy would affect the social group they represent. As Shih Chih-yu explains, in China sectoral representation is essential for finding a consensus about collective interest among all partial interests, but also to make all sectors and strata aware of the collective interest.[46]

Most Marxist-Leninist countries instituted systems of functional representation, and leading theorists of functional representation have often held some kind of socialist or anarchist sympathies. Perhaps the idea of functional representation reflects a wish of including all social groups, especially those numerically many but underrepresented in bourgeois parliaments. Similarly, many advocates of social representation in the contemporary Western legislatures advocate real inclusion of the presently underrepresented groups like women or minority nationalities.[47] Originally functional representation may have reflected refined social stratification in socialist theoretical analysis or emerged as a byproduct of the often functionally-organized labor movement. Whatever its origins, in the 1978–1981 press discussion functional representation seems to have been taken as granted, since it was neither theorized nor criticized.

Some Western theorists assume that interest representation would be contrary to collectivist political ideals because collectivism tends to stress what is in common and not differences between people.[48] However, functional systems of representation typical of socialist countries are built on the assumption of differing group interests. Actually, there is no contradiction in stressing collectivity and divergent interests. Mao Zedong saw society as consisting of numerous contradictions. Solving these contradictions was a requisite for social progress and the inclusion of the groups making contradictory claims would provide for good governance.[49] Obviously, collective decision making should take into considera-

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[46]   Shih 1999, p. 228–229.

[47]   See Kane 2002.

[48]   Pennock 1979, p. 355, Held 1987, pp. 137–138.

[49]   "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People" in Mao, Selected Works, vol. V, pp. 384–421.

tion all interests within the community. This becomes possible only if all interests have an outlet and preferably even representation in decision making. What is common among all interests is perceived only through consultation, it is not *a priori* evident.[50]

Thomas Christiano acknowledges that group-based decision making involves many problems. It legitimizes a certain group to decide about the matter, or in the case of functional representation, invites certain groups to articulate their interest in the matter, but costs of decisions are often not limited to these groups only. Further, when citizens devote themselves to a narrow area of policy making, overall supervision of the system suffers. Definition of group identities is not unproblematic. Even when a person clearly identifies with a certain group, her interests as a group member are not separate from her interests in other social affairs.[51] The Chinese system witnesses all of these problems. The decision of which interests to invite to negotiation tables is a way of using power, since the groups participating most likely can have their interests attended to better than outsiders can. The Communist Party enhances its own powers also when it fragments the field of politics and permits other groups and commoners to have their say in narrowly defined issues. Finally, group identities are not self-evident and the Party definition of groups sometimes diverges from people's own understanding of their interests or identities.[52] Still, when it has invited groups to formal negotiations, the Party cannot unilaterally control the process. Murray Scot Tanner even argues that the representation of a broad spectrum of factional, organizational, geographical and social interests inside the people's congresses in itself reduces the central ability to control representatives.[53]

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[50] That is, unlike David Held assumes (Held 1987, pp. 137–138), Marxism can acknowledge genuine political difference.

[51] Christiano 1996, pp. 172–174. He uses the term "normative pluralism" for decision-making systems in which the group decides about matters concerning it. This is not exactly the same as functional representation, at least when it involves deliberation between groups as it does in the Chinese representative institutions, but this criticism fits well with all forms of functional representation. To some extent functional representation can be understood as one form of "normative pluralism."

[52] For example, Tani Barlow shows that the official understanding of women through their public and revolutionary roles diverged significantly from women's personal experience of themselves in which their private family roles played an important part (Barlow 1994, pp. 344–346). Likewise, Uradyn Bulag criticizes the conventional Western understanding and Chinese practice of seeing nationality as the main identity for members of minority nationalities despite the fact that minority people themselves often define their identity with other than the ethnic criterion. Sometimes ethnic identity even conflicts with their personal hopes, for example when Mongols define themselves through nomadic culture, which excludes many personal aims of social and economic mobility. (Bulag 2000, pp. 179, 183–184.)

[53] Tanner 1999, pp. 57–58.

Democracy and opposition parties

One reason for Western scholars to count China as an undemocratic country is the absence of opposition parties. Absence of opposition is problematic in terms of electoral competitiveness, accountability, and political choice. It is difficult to envision how free and fair elections would be possible without legitimate opposition.

An important question here is whether a multi-party system is a prerequisite for democracy. Not all Western democracy theorists think so. For example, John Plamenatz notes that using Western systems as models makes some Western practices, such as the multi-party system, appear as if they were essential characteristics of free elections. Although for him free and competitive elections are a necessary criterion for democracy, Plamenatz maintains that such elections by no means require a party system. Non-permanent support groups or factions within one ruling party may very well offer sufficient electoral choice and perform other typical party functions in Western democracies.[54]

Other theorists recognize the possibility of meaningful democracy without elections. Jeffrey Berry, Kent Portney and Ken Thomson argue that all conditions for democracy can be met by participatory democracy. Open access to the agenda, extensive information to citizens about alternatives, and high rates of participation among the populace can be achieved not only in elections but in participatory processes. Equal weight given to all citizen preferences, translation of those decisions into final policy outcomes, and effective implementation of those policies are conceivable in good electoral and participatory systems alike. In brief, a participatory democratic process can be designed to be inclusive and to have a real effect in public decisions.[55] This is not surprising, since the original democratic process was a participatory process.

Party formation was not typical of earlier direct democracies in city states. In these monistic democracies, as Robert Dahl calls them, political associations were considered illegitimate, because the aim was to pursue public instead of individual good.[56] When there was no problem of scale and no need for representation, parties were not essential or were even considered as an obstacle to forming political consensus. Instead, an opposition party system is well suited to representative

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[54] Plamenatz 1977, p. 189. Actually, in some well-functioning electoral democracies party affiliation is not as central as in others. For example, in Japanese elections independent candidates are common and the Liberal Democratic Party factions are sometimes even more visible in elections than the party itself, although the party becomes central for legislative cooperation.

[55] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 53–56.

[56] Dahl 1989, p. 30.

democracies with direct national elections. Here political parties are useful for overcoming problems of scale and time. Parties are needed for organizing and funding campaigns for large constituencies. Simultaneously, parties facilitate electoral choice by helping a voter to pinpoint his candidate's political views on the political spectrum when he has too little time for keeping track of all candidates' viewpoints and political record. Both politicians and voters benefit from parties as ready-made alliances within the legislature facilitating the promotion of the party platform.

Theoretically speaking, electoral rotation between parties in power facilitates accountability, because the electorate can put electoral pressure not only on the conduct of individual politicians but also on political groupings and party platforms to be receptive to popular opinion and needs.[57] A one-party system is problematic in terms of accountability. The dominant party does not face pressure from outside as intensively as a ruling party in a competitive party system with electoral mandate, viable opposition, and rotation of power. Although a one-party system can have built-in institutional supervision by laws and courts, these only deal with personal misconduct. Competitive elections between candidates approved by the dominant party put pressure on candidates as individuals, but not on policy lines, unless there is an open faction system, which is now illegitimate in China. The Mao era used criticism sessions for popular supervision, but likewise they target only individual behavior, not the party platform. Public criticism succeeded in putting considerable psychological and social pressure on cadres, which might have worked well for democratic supervision, but worked poorly in terms of respect for human rights.[58] If there was an attempt to use this method to supervise the whole Communist Party during the Cultural Revolution, the attempt certainly proved catastrophic. The officially proclaimed "mutual supervision" system between the Communist Party and small democratic parties, like supervision through popular feedback or the officially controlled media, allowed the Communist Party itself to decide whether it welcomes this supervision or not. Finally, inner-party electoral supervision is not sufficient alone, not only due to its exclusiveness but also due to party discipline.

Bruce Gilley argues, specifically in Chinese context, that a multi-party system could promote regime stability. In China, political dissatisfaction becomes targeted at the political system itself, instead of politicians and parties as in the West. This means that to retain the allegiance of its people, the Party needs to deliver better governance than democracies. Furthermore, it means that protests

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[57]   Of course, electoral accountability becomes problematic if all major parties are similarly corrupt, unreceptive to popular needs, or if there is no acceptable alternative to the present ruling party.

[58]   Several practical examples can be found in Chan et al. 1985 and Hinton 1966.

target the political system, not single parties or individuals.[59] As logical as this assumption is, it is not the only logical possibility in the context of the Chinese political system. The Communist Party claims that it can actually produce much better policies because of the democratic centralist system, meaning that its policy performance itself would be sufficient to produce popular support. We do not take this claim for granted, of course. Still, there remain other logical possibilities. It is, for example, not self-evident that shortcomings are automatically attributed to the political system in a single-party rule. Commoners can also be dissatisfied with the performance of individual cadres or certain, but not all, levels of government under a single-party rule. Many Chinese actually recognize and utilize differences in different administrative jurisdictions. Therefore, protests can be, and in China often are, targeted at a certain administrative level and seek assistance from another level to solve the problem.[60] When successful, such strategies not only show, but also boost, belief in the system being imperfect, but ultimately just.

Moreover, democratic centralism urges administrators to persuade the public by giving them rational reasons for policy choices and even policy failures. It is quite likely that commoners tolerate even a less good government if they know the reasons for its decisions and accept those reasons as rational. That is, governments can educate the public not only to distinguish between policy support and regime support, but also to understand what is a realistic level of policy performance.[61] Therefore, it is not self-evident that public awareness of problems feeds dissatisfaction either.[62] If social groups bringing social problems in the light simultaneously work to fill gaps in governmental services, as they are expected to do in China,[63] or if media reports mismanagement and social problems so that the state always appears to be willing to solve problems brought to its attention, individuals can as well perceive that the state is receptive to their needs and demands.

Allegedly, another benefit of opposition party systems is representation of different interests and policy preferences in the society. With free party formation

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[59] Gilley 2004, p. 34.

[60] Chinese surveys repeatedly show that people trust in central government more than local governments (e.g. Shen 2005). See Li 2004 for how protests seek central support for local popular grievances. Likewise, petitioners calculate on which administrative levels they are likely to get a sympathetic hearing (O'Brien and Li 1995, p. 778). People are also aware of horizontal distribution of power between authorities in order to make controversial events possible (Salmenkari 2004, p. 244).

[61] In other words, persuasion can alleviate the sources of frustration that David Easton (1979, p. 269–271) gives as the reasons for the insufficiency of specific policy support: postponement of benefits, partial satisfaction of demands and the time lag between demands and policy outputs may become tolerable if one knows that something is being done for him.

[62] Unlike what is expected in, e.g., Gilley 2004, pp. 73–74.

[63] Frolic 1997, p. 60–61.

and candidate nomination, anyone can ideally bring new ideas and interests to the electoral competition. Moreover, parties and candidates ideally have an interest to attract voters by introducing issues important to the constituency. In practice, not all interests are well represented in Western party systems.[64] Moreover, opposition politics means that some, albeit the majority, are represented more than those whose party lost the elections. Anthony Arblaster comments that in direct democracies it is possible to say that because all have participated in the decision-making process, in fair and open process, they may be persuaded to accept majority position. However, in the representative process one cannot say that the minority was necessarily represented.[65] In sharply divided societies, majoritarian electoral accountability thus might mean systematic disregard of certain interests.

Some Western political theorists have found the results of electoral responsiveness to particular interests problematic. The need to attract voters has led to the creation of public programs swelling public budgets in order to please all possible groups.[66] This is an example of forgetting overall good when serving particular interests. Therefore, it becomes understandable that the Chinese see group interests only as higher level private interests, not public interests.[67] Andrew Nathan even claims that the Communist Party perceives open competition for office itself as harmful, since it subjects the state to manipulation by narrow interests.[68] Although this claim is perhaps a little overstated, it catches well one reason for the Party to prefer other forms of interest representation than party competition. Instead, functional representation provides different interests an access to the decision making but in the name of finding overall interest.

Political culture and party formation

David Held claims that party formation, unless it is suppressed, will be inevitable due to differences of interests and perception of issues within a polity.[69] However, I doubt that it necessarily is. For example, cultural factors may reduce the desirability of competitive party politics. Some cultures are averse to open conflict. Stephen Angle observes that although Chinese intellectuals now tend to reject strong claims of unity, they seldom accept strong claims of conflict. Instead of

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[64]   As is emphasized by feminists (see, e.g., Mendus 1994) and difference democrats (their views are introduced by, e.g., Dryzek 2000, pp. 57–62, and Kane 2002, ch. 4).

[65]   Arblaster 1987, p. 86.

[66]   Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987, pp. 102–108.

[67]   Shih 1999, p. 325.

[68]   Nathan 1986, p. 228.

[69]   Held 1987, p. 258.

political competition, most of them prefer systems of consultation, coordination and harmonization.[70] Moreover, contemporary political theorists are well aware of the fact that existing institutions shape political choices. Robert Putnam, for example, argues that the practical performance of institutions is shaped by the social context in which they operate. Institutions affect the identities, power and strategies of political actors; individuals pursue their interests differently in different institutional contexts.[71] Therefore, I could envision several other situations in which establishing opposition parties could prove counterproductive.

Circumstances could favor non-party politics if democratic politics were principally local politics. Local politics is a suitable ground for independent candidates because persons already familiar in the locality have little need for party platforms and party organizations to advertise themselves. Small electoral districts could have the same effect. In addition, local politics often tends to avoid emphasizing division because it is usually not beneficial to aggravate conflicts with one's neighbors, relatives, workmates, clients, and business partners. When groups and interests are easily identifiable and personalized, an independent candidate, or one-party candidate, might well be able to claim that he represents everyone in the locality, but opposition party politics could easily leave a part of the community feeling that they are unrepresented or underrepresented. In China these conditions hold. There, politics is often local and electoral districts are not only small but also community or workplace related.

Likewise, if a large number of important decisions take place outside of representative state organs, for example inside the dominant party, incentives to found opposition parties would correspondingly diminish. If there is little chance of beating this party in elections, those wanting political influence might prefer influencing through this dominant party either by joining it or addressing their demands to it. The Chinese Communist Party is in such a position. In this kind of situation, enlarging and affecting the party agenda from inside in order to accommodate different interests and viewpoints within one party becomes more attractive than opposition party formation. For a long time, a relatively similar situation prevailed in Japanese politics. There, the Liberal Democratic Party has almost continuously held power despite fair and competitive elections. During its rule, much of the decision making took place behind the scenes within the LDP-invited negotiations between itself, powerful interests, and ministries, sometimes even with opposition parties.[72] Allegedly, it thus was able to accommodate most

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[70]   Angle 2005, p. 532.

[71]   Putnam 1993, p. 8.

[72]   Curtis 1999, p. 62; Hrebenar 1992, pp. 276–277; Neary 2002, p. 83; White 1993, pp. 429–431.

popular interests and new policy issues.[73] When much decision making evades from legislative arenas in favor of negotiations invited by one political party, naturally this party is both able to recruit people with political ambitions from varying backgrounds and this system makes it difficult for the potential opposition to rule even if they win elections.[74] An virtuous circle enhancing the dominant party's strength is thus formed. There might even be something cultural that makes dominant party systems attractive to East Asian people.[75] It is even possible that the cultural ideal of outward harmony and consensus building encourages balancing the different cleavages and opinions of the entire electorate within one single party, and not in negotiations among several parties.

In addition, party formation would be far from sure in political cultures that favor issue-voting and floating majorities built around each issue. This accords with the idea of the deliberative type of decision making, such as is ideally found in the collective leadership in China. As Lowell Dittmer observes, collective leadership works well only as long as the identity of the adversary shifts from issue to issue. Permanent group formation undermines the trust and mutual respect needed between different participants and makes a faction not engage frankly in deliberations.[76] Likewise, Giovanni Sartori evaluates that optimal decision-making units, in terms of guaranteeing real participation of all members, are small committee-like units having changing majorities and producing positive-sum compensations over time to all. Instead of majorities in single issue voting, such units seek unanimous agreements brought about by offering side payments to those likely to lose in the arrangement.[77] Likewise, face-to-face meetings in local politics are likely to deal with concrete issues, form shifting majorities, and deal with positive-sum games. Actually, when Chinese communities are sharply divided between ideological camps, as during the Cultural Revolution, or between clans or religious groups, this division has mostly not resulted in effective interest representation, but in paralyzed government.[78]

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[73]   Kishimoto 1997, p. 132; Okimoto 1988, pp. 177–178.

[74]   Briefly about various interests and factions within the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, see, e.g., Hrebenar 1992, pp. 269–270. He lists views interpreting Japanese inner-party factionalism as providing an arena for policy competition and mutual restraining within the same party. Obviously, inner-party competition can check authoritarianism and create pluralism in Japan where electoral party rotation is rare.

[75]   For example, Samuel Huntington is sympathetic towards a dominant-party system as a possible East Asian variety of democracy. This party system consists of a mainstream party representing a wide range of views and a few parties representing narrow sectional interests. There is competition for power in this kind of democracy, but it does not lead to turnovers. (Huntington 1993, pp. 304–306.)

[76]   Dittmer 1974, p. 348.

[77]   Sartori 1987, pp. 236–237.

[78]   Chan et al. 1984, pp. 200–206; Lawrence 1994, p. 62.

Naturally, there is one clearly undemocratic factor diminishing appeal for forming opposition parties in China. Since China prohibits opposition parties and punishes those involved, it is dangerous to try to establish one. That is, the Chinese government has deliberately increased the costs of organizing, while it simultaneously has decreased the costs of local level participation and channeling political input through officially recognized institutions. Moreover, since illegitimate opposition parties have no input channels in the existing political system, their abilities to bring about any effect whatsoever depend on very costly forms of action with uncertain results.

Maintenance costs of intermediary organizations, such as political parties, leads to another question of the rationality of forming opposition parties in the Chinese context. Douglass North argues that creating intermediary organizations becomes cost-effective only if there are large payoffs to influencing the rules and their enforcement.[79] However, in China such payoffs are questionable. Tianjian Shi plausibly argues that Western political systems encourage influencing in the decision-making stage because institutions are so designed that formal laws and rules treat everyone in a similar situation in the same way. These kinds of institutional arrangements divert political acts of people away from the policy implementation stage and force them to work either on agenda setting or on policy formulation to pursue their interests. In China, formal decisions are vaguely worded in order to leave room for bureaucratic interpretation and flexibility. In this context, it makes little sense to organize for influencing decision making and legislation, because laws and regulations are not universally implemented anyway. Instead, in the Chinese context it pays off to influence implementation on a particularistic basis.[80] Instead of wanting to change general rules, it is logical that the Chinese seek particularistic solutions, even privileges. As Barrett McCormick observes, the mass line recognizes consultation during policy formulation and implementation. Consultations allow localities and units to pursue particularistic exemptions from central policy. In this situation, the bulk of political bargaining occurs within the bureaucracy and in particularistic terms.[81] This kind of political institution and political culture hardly invite opposition party formation and reward society-wide appeals to the constituency when the same result may be attainable in much more cost-effective ways through bureaucratic negotiation.

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[79]   North 1990, p. 87.

[80]   Shi 1997, pp. 9–12.

[81]   McCormick 1990, p. 85.

Democratic centralism and pluralism

Apart from not having direct national-level elections, another reason in the Western literature to hold that China is not democratic comes from the fact that China does not have many independent intermediary associations, such as political parties and interest groups, familiar to Western democracies. Pluralist theory augments the scarcity of chances of voting with the assumption that much of democratic politics takes place in other than electoral arenas. According to pluralists, citizens make their wishes heard through interest-based organizations pressuring decision makers through lobbying, campaigning, protesting, and attracting media coverage. In this model, freedom of organization and independent media guarantee that governments remain responsive towards the citizenry. Therefore, liberal democratic theory maintains that relatively independent civil society is a prerequisite for modern democracy.

China does not allow pluralist pressuring of the government. It restricts social organization and exercises political control over the media. It is safe to say that China is not a pluralist democracy.[82] It is actually doubtful whether all Western democracies are pluralist democracies and whether pluralism is necessarily democratic.[83] Theorists debate whether pluralism leads to desirable outcomes,[84] or whether interest group politics really conveys popular will into policy-making processes,[85] or whether pluralism compromises the democratic ideal of equal voice when the resourceful and well-organized interests gain a disproportionately strong voice,[86] or whether lobbying itself belongs outside of democratic politics because it is not characterized by governmental accountability and transparency,[87] or whether democracy should be based on the concern for public affairs instead of group interests.[88] It therefore seems that absence of pluralism is not fatal to a democracy.

Although all democracies probably need extra-electoral means to pass information about popular opinions to the government, it is questionable whether pressure groups and other non-governmental organizations are the only possible

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[82]   As Andrew Nathan puts it, China is pluralist only in the special, narrow sense that it invites bureaucratic interest groups and specialist to decision making (Nathan 1986, p. 229).

[83]   Birch 1993, p. 167.

[84]   E.g. Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987, pp. 103–106; Birch 1993, p. 165.

[85]   E.g. Dunleavy 1991, pp. 34–36.

[86]   Birch 1993, p. 166.

[87]   Lively 1975, pp. 59, 117–118.

[88]   Holden 1974, p. 165–166.

channels for relaying many-sided popular demands to the government. Leaving popular influence for civil society activities and organizations has been unattractive to the Marxists because unequal distribution of resources in the civil society does not guarantee equal influence to groups having fewer resources. Therefore, the Chinese state itself attempts to provide accessible gatekeepers on the grassroots level to equalize the costs needed for popular input. Yet, such a system does not provide power-free input channels either. The danger in relying only on the state for influencing is that there remain no channels for opinions unpalatable to the government.

Western political science emphasizes that intermediary associations, like political parties and interest groups, are needed to act as gatekeepers[89] to the political system when most individuals themselves have no access to decision making. In the context of a polity of nation-state size, Western decision makers are relatively inaccessible. However, in the Chinese political institutional setting, intermediate institutions are mainly superfluous since a person can contact political power easily in her daily living environment. Since access to power is near at hand, maintenance costs of intermediary organizations often exceed the benefits. In this context, official intermediary organizations are needed for representing shared but geographically widely distributed interests. Logically speaking, in this context it makes sense also that unrepresented or underrepresented interests organize themselves, but the Chinese state has made such organization, at least if it lacks official recognition, very costly.

Moreover, intermediary association is not very cost-effective if the optimal pressure on decision making does not take place at the national level, but within grassroots units at the implementation stage. As Tianjian Shi remarks, if public decisions are shifted to the grassroots, the scope of high-politics issues is reduced. On the polity level, it makes sense to demand policy outputs inclusive of all or similar for the entire sector or group. However, when influencing takes place within a grassroots unit, it becomes more effective to engage in particularistic rather than collective action. Organization increases influence on the policy-making stage when it is demanded that authorities allocate more resources to the interest, but if there is a contest over scarce resources already allocated to the segment, maximizing one's personal gain and excluding others becomes rational.[90] Indeed, Ray Yep questions whether the pursuit of collective action is a natural tendency since specific contexts in China often encourage particularist action that creates distinction rather than cohesion within groups. In addition, since the most successful individuals in the sector tend to develop intimate connections with the local state

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[89]   Easton 1979, pp. 88–96.

[90]   Shi 1997, p. pp. 9–20, 111, 272–273.

for mutual benefit, the possible leadership for potential collective action has little interest in organizing it.[91]

Intermediary political association is less appealing if there are ready forms of organization which can be used politically. Costs of specialized organization maintenance then often exceed benefits if some other organization is available at lower cost. Jeffrey Broadbent remarks that Western theory assumes that political actors are atomized individuals who have to organize for political action in modern Western-type societies. Actually, where a community is stronger, existing forms of collective organization can be used for mobilization against the state. Community-wide organization can then use existing material, political, social and cultural resources for mobilization.[92] The community is a very salient form of organization in China too, both for state-mandated interest articulation and for providing organization for protest activities.[93] Likewise, state-initiated corporatist-type organization in China provides some opportunities for political influencing. It is likely that existing organizations in themselves reduce the likelihood of founding competing organizations, not least because maintenance costs tend to rise and benefits of organization decrease when an organization is less inclusive and can thus mobilize fewer people.

Combining democracy and bureaucracy

The Western democratic model is usually built on the assumption that the implementation process needs autonomy from social pressures. When bureaucracy is insulated from popular appeals, implementation should be impartial. In this model, bureaucracy simply executes decisions made by the legislative and the government. Elected legislators, presidents, and mayors, then, not only decide the content of laws and policies that bureaucrats will implement, but also supervise bureaucracies and set rules for how they are run. Bureaucracies are thus indirectly under democratic control, since elected politicians control them and the rules they implement.[94]

Theoretically[95] the Marxist tradition does not recognize bureaucratic impartiality and efficiency.[96] Instead, Marxist theory maintains that administrators tend

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[91] Yep 2000, pp. 562–563.

[92] Broadbent 1998, pp. 182–183.

[93] See, e.g., Shi 1997 for using workplace channels for interest articulation, and Zhou 1993 and Cai 2002 for using workplace organization and even leaders for organizing protests.

[94] Dennis Thompson (1983) calls this model a hierarchical model of bureaucracy, but also lists other Western models of bureaucracy.

[95] Practice is another thing. Economic planning in socialist countries often aimed at bureaucratic efficiency and "rationality" of Weberian kind.

to develop their own bureaucratic interest. Instead of representing the interest of the people and of the country, bureaucrats pursue their own comfort and well-being. It is easiest for them to stick to their departmentalized and routinized tasks, regardless of whether the rules they implement answer to social needs. Marxism looks for more humane and less alienating forms of administration. Moreover, Marxist tradition explicitly calls for a more participatory and transparent polity in which all administration is subjected to direct democratic control.[97] For this end, Marxism demands that state functionaries must maintain constant interaction with the society. Thereby, all stages of decision making, from agenda setting to implementation are legitimate stages for popular influencing. Compared to Western democracies, the importance of policy input during the policy-making stage diminishes.

In the West, representative democracy attempts to give the populace a meaningful role in massive modern bureaucratic states. The Chinese have sought another strategy. They try to combine direct democracy with modern state bureaucracy. Instead of choosing their representatives to provide political guidance to the bureaucratic state, individuals should have widely available input channels to the political system and their voice should thus be heard in decision making. The locus of citizen influencing is thus different since it takes place mainly through grassroots gatekeepers, not through the accountability of leaders at the top of the system. This locus of popular influencing directly affects decision-making structures. While Westerners believe that direct elections of legislators and top executives demonstrate whether the majority of adult citizens approve policies, the Chinese control whether their leadership has correctly centralized popular input in the implementation stage. If there has been a centralization failure, ideally modification of the policy for local conditions in the implementation stage can correct faults in the policy.

The Chinese theory of democratic centralism understands representation as a far from ideal solution because it makes political communication indirect. Mao Zedong saw that all forms of government relying on indirect popular influencing

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96 That is, Barrett McCormick is wrong in assuming that Lenin did not understand the meaning of modern Weberian bureaucracy (McCormick 1990, p. 25). Rather, Marx, Lenin and Mao did not agree with the desirability of such a bureaucracy. Marxists are not alone in holding this belief. The New Right, neoconservatives and libertarians, have attacked bureaucracy for these reasons as well, although their solutions are totally opposite to those suggested by Marxists, namely introducing market forces into the production of state services and provision of free consumer choice for receivers of these services. Here citizens are not given greater democratic control over bureaucracies, as Marxists want, but greater choice between alternatives. As Patrick Dunleavy and Brendan O'Leary put it, instead of a voice option, neo-conservatives underline the exit option in political influencing (Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987, p. 121).

97 See, e.g., Held 1987, p. 130.

run the danger of bureaucratization. In terms of political communication, bureaucratism means elitism and authoritarianism. Instead of consulting the masses, bureaucratic deliberation takes place only within the leadership or administrative organs. Instead of forming a full cycle of information flow from the masses to the masses, bureaucratized communication appears to the masses only as commands from above. Even elections alone do not improve this distorted image of political communication much, since popular input remains sporadic and unspecific. Nevertheless, in fact political communication remains indirect within the hierarchical chain of democratic centralist structures. Commoners are factually represented in democratic centralism also, although ideally by people having themselves direct communication with the masses and groups they represent.[98] In the end, both Western and Chinese models leave each individual with very little influence, but at least ideally everyone is taken into account.

It is legitimate to argue that in China and other socialist countries bureaucratization has developed faster than chances for popular influencing. However, this is not a uniquely socialist development. Likewise, Western bureaucracies have grown simultaneously with the increasing role of the state in production of social services, partly perhaps because of democratic politics receptive to citizen demands. At the same time with the resulting bureaucratization, many citizens within Western democracies demand more channels for and equality in political participation.[99] Some scholars have identified the contradiction of Chinese aims of strengthening the state and demands for wider popular participation. They have opined that the Chinese communists have been biased towards state strengthening whenever the two aims have come in conflict.[100] However, relatively similar developments are found in the West, where many political theorists claim that more all-embracing bureaucratic states have limited people's possibilities for self-determination.[101] Bureaucratization challenges the meaningfulness of direct parti-

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[98] Lowell Dittmer depicts the Cultural Revolution as an attempt to establish direct communication between leaders and led. According to him, "Although this new communication network had the desired effect of dissolving 'bureaucratic' barriers to elite-mass relations, it had the dysfunctional effect of exposing elites to direct mass pressure ..." (Dittmer 1974, p. 320.) These pressures, often presented in face-to-face mass criticisms, had a paralyzing effect on the government. The Chinese experiments thus demonstrate the need for state autonomy for effective governance, but also the problems of direct democracies in creating sufficient autonomy.

[99] For example, those who support participatory democracy or deliberative democracy want more authentic participation, while feminists and other emphasizers of group rights demand more equal participation.

[100] Nathan 1986, p. 56, Tsou 1987, pp. 258, 273.

[101] These accusations have been heard from right and left. Different schools of political theory have looked for solutions from a limited state, participatory democracy, and civil society activities.

cipatory politics, but it likewise challenges the meaningfulness of a vote when the state agenda has became too wide to be controlled with a single vote.[102]

State autonomy

To govern effectively, states need a certain amount of autonomy. An autonomous state can transcend social demands for satisfying immediate partial or particular interests in order to formulate holistic solutions. Autonomous states can pursue their goals even against group and class interests.[103] That is, insulation from popular demands is necessary for effectiveness and impartiality of decisions.

By separating political processes into direct mass line contacts with the populace on the grassroots level and into bureaucratized inner-organizational processes of democratic centralism, the Chinese quite likely had an implicit understanding of the need for both state autonomy and popular participation in modern states. Evidently, the Chinese communists believe that by combining democracy and centralization they can have both direct democratic contacts with the whole populace along with efficient, adequately autonomous decision making. In the Chinese model, the state faces direct popular pressures only on the level of grassroots participatory units. This local participatory unit is linked to specialized bureaucratic administrative structures, which receive information through local-level gatekeepers. Decision makers in China can insulate themselves from direct popular demands when popular inputs enter into bureaucratic processing within the pyramidal state and party structures. Problem solving on a relevant level may seem ideal to the Chinese,[104] but the practice shows that there is obvious need for such insulation. Decision making is often passed to the levels not directly affected by consequences of the decision in order to facilitate considering all relevant viewpoints without the emotional burden of direct popular appeal or pressure from the interests involved.[105]

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[102]   Diamond et al. 1995, pp. 33–34.

[103]   Skocpol 1985, pp. 9, 14–15.

[104]   Shirk 1992, pp. 68–69.

[105]   Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, pp. 22–23; Tanner 1999, pp. 121, 128.

The press in 1978–1981 complained that the Chinese bureaucracy tends to avoid responsibility by passing decisions to the levels above. Usually this was explained as an attempt to avoid bureaucratic sanctions if mistakes occur. However, most probably pressures from below also caused cases to be pushed upwards in order to guarantee an impartial decision. Likewise, Western researchers surely recognize the need by superiors to mediate conflicts between the same level actors, but also allege that the factionalist and ideologically unpredictable policy-making environment during the Cultural revolution led leaders throughout the system to pass decision-making responsibility to higher levels (Tanner 1999, p. 52, 121).

Although some amount of political autonomy is necessary for efficient and impartial decision making, at the same time it brings democratic deficit. It means areas of decision making are left outside of popular control. Nevertheless, some theorists, Fareed Zakaria among them, see that unless decision makers are insulated from direct electoral and interest group pressure, politicians have a strong pressure to serve sectoral interests at the cost of the majority interests. At worst, this leads to ungovernability. Thus, he calls for more representative and indirect democracy in order to guarantee state autonomy and impartial judgment not dependent on particular interests.[106] Probably some state autonomy causing some democratic deficit is a requisite for formulating effective policies taking wider social interests and long-term aims into account. However, too much state autonomy is problematic as well. At worst, autonomous official initiatives are stupid, misdirected, partial or contradictory.[107] Accordingly, the Chinese Communists have aimed at combining maximal popular influencing with a relatively high level of state autonomy making it possible to weigh impartially differing interests and to use state policy for quick social transformation and modernization. Lianjiang Li argues that at the same time administrative layers protected the central government from popular indignation which mainly has been directed against levels implementing policies, not against the central state.[108]

The People's Republic of China has enjoyed relatively high state autonomy with an outstanding ability to execute policies it deems to be in the national interest even against the interest of powerful social groups. Land reform and collectivization in the 1950s, control of migration to urban areas since the late 1950s, or one-child policy effective since 1979 are all examples of such policies. Even though there have been secret migration and extra-quota babies,[109] all of these policies have been executed relatively successfully and without organized opposition. Few countries in the world could have risked support of their rule by adopting such drastic methods. Although these decisions indicate the ability to make policies with long-term and society-wide concerns in mind,[110] state autonomy has contributed to non-checked arbitrary policies as well. Some autonomous policy decisions led to devastating results, including even a serious policy-created famine. Therefore, a wide democratic deficit in the democratic centralist pyramidal structure of influencing is conducive to state autonomy even in its autocratic forms. Bruce Gilley argues that the costs of closed decision

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[106] Zakaria 2003, ch. 5 and p. 242, 247, 251.

[107] Skocpol 1985, p. 15.

[108] Li 2004, p. 249.

[109] See, e.g., Mallee 2000, Greenhalgh 1993 and White 2000.

[110] We can rightfully criticize these policies for being coercive, but hardly for disregarding long-term national interests.

making and democracy deficit in China include dictated policies that prove to be failures, disregard of some social groups, inequality, waste of talent, and dysfunction in governance.[111]

Nevertheless, massive scale policy failures do not describe the average level of state autonomy in China. More often, the Chinese state has proven capable but simultaneously concerned with popular interests, although not necessarily in the form that the populace itself would articulate its interest. Linda Yueh describes the Chinese economic reforms as succeeding in some extremely difficult tasks, such as maintaining distribution at state prices and simultaneously opening markets pricing these products differently. At the same time the government also proceeded gradually, choosing to minimize opposition to the reforms and postpone policies that would meet resistance from important groups.[112] In terms of democratic centralism this demonstrates a high level of capacity but also concern for popular response. I cannot prove how, even if, popular input really had an effect here. My point is not to demonstrate that democratic centralist influencing actually took place in making these decisions, although I believe it likely did. Instead, I want to make a prediction of what a democratic centralist decision would look like. Perhaps popular influence appears in these decisions more like a consideration of popular reaction as an objective condition to be taken into account, while it is difficult to estimate whether or not there was any direct popular pressure. Centralization, however, is a powerful factor in such decision making and becomes evident in the state ability to implement policies against its own functionaries' private interests.[113]

However, state autonomy created through democratic centralist hierarchical insulation can have serious effects on democracy. It surely means democratic deficit on levels above the grassroots. Moreover, such structures may direct local participation into local issues and leave locals without a voice in national affairs due to different scopes of political interest on different administrative levels. However, there is also a structural problem involved. If participatory politics takes place on the local level having its authority already limited by national and

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[111] Gilley 2004, ch. 3.

[112] For example, the state sector has been somewhat protected during the economic liberalization. See, e.g., Yueh pp. 5–6; Cai 2002, pp. 340–344.

[113] Linda Yueh shows that the dual price system benefited overall interest of the state such as maintaining relative equality and stability, but it certainly would have been in the interest of state functionaries to sell at markets those products they acquired from state distribution at a lower price. Much personal profiteering took place because of this system, but still the state was able to keep this on a manageable level and continue practicing this system. (In her presentation given June 7, 2005, at the 7th conference of the Nordic Association of China Studies.)

provincial administrative levels, this means that there are structural constraints to democratic decision making.

Institutionalizing insulation of decision making in ways other than representation may have a cultural factor. In Japan, demands towards the government are preferably dealt with not through institutionalized channels but through closed negotiations invited by the government or even through one-sided concessions by the government.[114] Susan Pharr argues that the Japanese model shows that a high degree of stability and governability does not necessitate responsiveness to open conflicts and maintaining institutional channels for the resolution of social conflict, as Western theorists often assume. The Japanese system prefers conflict avoidance and containment, as well as use of preemptive concessions and marginalization of protesters, to pacify the situation. It is reluctant to invite protesters to formal negotiations or to open regular channels for conflict resolution. This kind of social conflict management allows authorities to grant concessions on their own terms and thus to control the pace of social change. Such a system has been successful in providing stability without reliance on coercion, since it keeps the amount of social demands on manageable levels.[115]

Boundary maintenance and information overload

If the object of democratic politics is maximizing information about citizens' opinions and needs, the ideal would be a government listening to all citizens in every issue. This ideal may be objected on the grounds that it leads to putting too many pressures on parliamentarians and administrators, not allowing them to weigh calmly all sides and making them pay too much attention to well-organized special interests.[116] Besides, we may doubt the feasibility of such an ideal, since it would most probably cause an information overload handicapping the normal governmental work.[117] The Chinese would make the contrary claim. They maintain that the more popular input enters a political system, the more democratic the system is. A democratic state system, according to the theory of democratic centralism, must be prepared to process popular input, however vague and diffuse.

According to Gabriel Almond, Western political systems can effectively process popular initiative because of their boundary maintenance between the polity

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[114] For an example of inner-elite consensus building only indirectly responding to social demands, see Broadbent 1998, pp. 28, 92–95, 132–133, 294–295, 347. For examples of using concessions and benefits to pacify popular discontent, this time only partly successfully, see Apter and Sawa 1984, pp. 199, 205.

[115] Pharr 1990, pp. 11–12, 21, 216–217.

[116] Zakaria 2003, pp. 170–172.

[117] Easton 1979, p. 90.

and the society and within the political system. When social groups, such as interest groups, process interests into a relatively small number of alternatives, state organs will have a manageable amount of input. The less processed and the more diffuse interest articulation is, the more difficult it is to translate interests into public policy. Thus, if social groups gather and formulate interests before expressing them to the government, decisions become more calculable and responsible. Therefore, a political system characterized by diffuse and particularistic interest articulation will have poor circulation of needs and demands between the political system and the society.[118]

In the West, political parties and pressure groups centralize varying popular demands into one organizational voice. In China, lower-level cadres act as filters for the system. In practice, some local cadres complained of input overload in the press, but generally the Chinese press advocated wide consultation even after long experience with democratic centralist information gathering. It thus seems that the hierarchical system of centralization filters information and decreases direct popular pressures on leaders in much the same way that intermediate organizations in Western civil societies do. As Marc Blecher and Vivienne Shue observe, the Chinese state center keeps society at several removes. Central government is insulated through provincial and municipal governments and Party apparatuses. Both the administrative hierarchy and horizontally delineated administrative jurisdictions buffer interactions between citizens and leaders and different levels of government.[119]

Obviously, neither civil society nor democratic centralism relays "pure" popular opinion to decision makers. "Losing" some information during the centralization process is perhaps necessary for a government's normal functioning. After all, for policy making all details of personal experience and individual reasons are less relevant than the shared needs, aims and motives. Centralization is in the interest of a person sharing an interest or political purpose. Concentrating diffuse and various original inputs into a few well defined and rational policy proposals or social interests does usually make these proposals and interests more persuasive than diffuse individual voices are. Also, having the legitimacy to speak in the name of a large social group or stratum means numerical strength and thus credibility.

Of course, those who do the centralization are not neutral in the issue, although the Chinese Communists or Western bureaucrats or opinion leaders often claim to be disinterested. Centralization is a process that uses overt and covert power by choosing which opinions deserve to represent the group or to be considered in decision making. Power here is power of selection, representations, and

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[118]   Almond 1960, pp. 35–36, 39.
[119]   Blecher and Shue 1996, p. 203.

exclusions. Unavoidably, the political outcome is dependent on who can represent the group, how the rationality or usefulness of certain arguments or claims are evaluated, how the group is defined, and who is excluded from the group. The Chinese communists use this power sometimes very openly but sometimes probably even without recognizing that they are using power.

Popular will and centralization

It is time to evaluate what centralization means in terms of popular influencing and the democraticness of the Chinese theory of democratic centralism. The amateur Western conception of democracy sometimes suggests that in democracies governments act upon popular will and even political sciences often examines democracy from this angle. For example, electoral studies often deal with the measurement of people's preferences. This tradition advocates majority decisions, because they allegedly maximize the number of people whose will prevails,[120] regardless of the fact that already in the 1960s Kenneth Arrow demonstrated that voting cannot provide an objective method for calculating popular preferences if more than one issue is at stake.[121] Moreover, contemporary elections do not provide voters a clear choice between issues anyway, since, in this time of contemporary big governments, elections no longer provide a relevant choice between a few candidates differing on a few policy issues.[122] As a result, what voters actually wanted to communicate with their vote becomes undetectable.[123]

It is naive to expect that democratic governments simply put people's will into effect. John Plamenatz remarks that such occasions are rare and by no means restricted only to democratic governments. Although a democratic government should take account of popular demands and structure political institutions accordingly, Plamenatz argues that it is even a duty of a democratic government to refuse to meet widespread popular demands when its responsibility towards its citizens so requires.[124] Moreover, even a government wanting to execute the popular will, or the majority will as the best substitute for the popular will, would usually find this impossible because popular will is usually immeasurable, constantly changing, and contains contradictory demands, or at times is against

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[120] Dahl 1989, p. 138.

[121] Arrow 1966.

[122] Elections used to be centered around a few major issues, but nowadays issues and interests have diversified and consequently parties seek to appeal to general public (Diamond et al. 1995, pp. 33–34). In this situation it has become more difficult to identify what the voter communicated with his vote.

[123] Arblaster 1987, p. 85; Hyland 1995, p. 261.

[124] Plamenatz 1977, pp. 39, 98, 104–116.

popular interest.[125] Thus, even Western democracies do not and cannot make decisions that simply put popular will into action.

The Chinese theory of democratic centralism never saw that popular opinions and demands as such were put into practice. Rather, democraticness is measured in two terms, namely that decision makers analyze and collect popular input to process practicable and rational policies and that decisions are explained to the public so that it can accept the rationale for ending up with such a decision. John Plamenatz argues that we can speak of collective will when everyone's opinion is heard and the collective will is found either so that people themselves reach a compromise or they choose an impartial arbiter who makes, and if needed explains, the decision. In both of these situations participants may accept the result because they are convinced during the process that the resulting decision either was the best alternative or resulted from a process that was fair.[126] Likewise, in democratic centralism collective will arises from hearing everyone, using a cadre as an arbiter, and ending, in ideal situations, with everyone realizing that the result is better than their original proposals. In less than ideal situations, participants should accept the result because everyone was heard and it has been explained why their original proposals could not be met.

What should we say about the strong leadership involvement in transforming the popular opinion into something other than the original demands, sometimes even to the point that the decision becomes unrecognizable to those whom the government originally consulted in the matter? Can we still hold that popular opinion has any meaning or that any popular influencing takes place? Actually, Western democratic processes are elite-led as well. Whether it is about voting procedures or agenda setting, William Riker shows that leaders can and do manipulate the decision-making process to produce the result they desire.[127] Elites introduce most of the issues on the political agenda both in elections or referenda.[128] They form one dominant voice in the media, meaning that even in the West commoners' knowledge about political processes and understanding of relevant issues is strongly shaped by the elites.[129] Indeed, although liberal theory sees mass opinion influencing government, but it is also possible that mass beliefs follow the lead given by governing elites and policies adopted by the government.[130] Naturally, Western leaders process popular inputs. Much of democratic politics in the West consists of coalition building and compromise seeking among political

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[125] For a useful short introduction to the complexities involved, see Pennock 1979, pp. 262–264.

[126] Plamenatz 1977, pp. 104–106.

[127] Riker 1986.

[128] Arblaster 1987, pp. 85, 88.

[129] Page 1996, pp. 9, 107.

[130] Borre and Goldsmith 1995, p. 6.

elites such as legislators.[131] Very limited popular roles are even seen as ideal in some Western traditions of democracy. Even within liberal democratic theory, one tradition maintains that the people merely respond to elite proposed policies, while in other liberal traditions people actively engage in policy formulation.[132] Thus, failures in popular input systems, systematic political education, or manipulation of decision-making processes do not automatically make China undemocratic. After all, we find them in Western democracies as well.

Leadership processes are a part of Western democracies, not as an imperfection but for making democracy feasible. As Giovanni Sartori puts it, in democracies authority is needed for minimizing use of force. Instead, democracies try to maximize the use of legitimate and thus popularly supported authority.[133] Roland Pennock maintains that democratic leadership is needed for "initiating, coordinating, or energizing."[134] Popular will does not develop in a vacuum in Western democracies, but political elites actively shape the issues appearing on the electoral agenda. As Patrick Dunleavy conceptualizes, governments and parties do not engage in mere preference-accommodating, but also engage in preference shaping.[135] Roland Pennock argues that democratic leadership is needed when the interests and desires of the constituency collide. Leadership helps in narrowing the gap between different stands, seeking accommodation between opposing groups and modifying the original proposal accordingly.[136] This depiction of leadership processes in the Western democracies strikingly resembles centralism as the Chinese theory sees it.

Some Western-based scholars claim that the Chinese type of democracy governs in the name of the popular interest, and not of the popular will.[137] In light of Chinese theory this is an unfair conclusion. To the Chinese, popular will is one element in decision making, not something that should necessarily prevail over other considerations, such as feasibility, ideological convictions, long-term developmental targets, or national aims. The Chinese look for the best balance of policy aims, ideological correctness, popular satisfaction, and support for the policy, not primarily popular will. Yet, this conception does not make popular will

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[131] In derogatory parlance, they engage in logrolling and pork barreling.

[132] Holden 1974, p. 71. Some forms of liberal democracy doubt commoners' ability to participate in governing (Schumpeter 1992, especially ch. 21), while others complain that such elitist arguments are designed to hinder power sharing by groups in power (Arblaster 1987, p. 87, 89).

[133] Sartori 1987, p. 188.

[134] Pennock 1979, p. 488.

[135] Dunleavy 1991, pp. 98–104, 113, 119–128.

[136] Pennock 1979, p. 328.

[137] E.g. Nathan 1986, p.228; Svensson 1994, p. 7.

meaningless.[138] The importance of popular will in this design is evident not only in the centralization stage but also in the implementation stage. Then through transparency of elite intentions and persuasion, the mass line type of education smooths the friction between popular interest and popular will. The tension between representing the people's will and interest is inherent in Western democracies as well. In other words, democracies must balance between responsiveness and responsibility or, as Roland Pennock puts it, expression of desire and rational action.[139] Larry Diamond, then, conceptualizes this tension as finding a balance between competing values of representativeness and governability.[140]

One-party rule and democracy

For many Westerners, an unpalatable feature in the Chinese theory of democracy is that it gives the responsibility of centralization to the Communist Party, which is an organ with exclusive membership and ideological agenda. Having a democratic system depending on the power of one political party surely undermines some typical features of democracy, namely accountability and free electoral competition.

Western political theorists offer some possible ways that one-party rule could be democratic. C. P. Macpherson sees that the conditions for democracy within a one-party state are intra-party democracy and open party membership that does not require from its members more than an average person can contribute.[141] The Chinese Communist Party diverges from these requirements, for example, by limiting Party membership to activists with suitable social backgrounds. Nor would the Chinese theory endorse Jack Lively's demand for electoral competition between party factions as a precondition of democracy in one-party rule.[142] Evidently, the Chinese Communists believe that factionalism undermines impartiality in a deliberative process for finding the common good. Jack Lively's criterion fails because its standard is the Western model of aggregative electoral democracy transferred to a one-party setting. Instead of typical electoral representation by promising, the Chinese model combines anticipatory and surrogate forms of representation, that is communication with the electorate and communicating group interests into a deliberative decision-making process.[143] However, it is legitimate

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[138] For the analytical difference between decisions taking into account popular will and making decisions only with the people's interest in mind, see Plamenatz 1977, pp. 107–108.

[139] Pennock 1979, p. 260.

[140] Diamond et al. 1995, p. 31.

[141] Macpherson 1966, p. 21.

[142] Lively 1975, p. 45.

[143] This terminology is borrowed from Mansbridge 1998.

to assume that democracy requires institutions for popular supervision. Hence, Brantly Womack argues that party-state democracy is possible only if the party puts itself at risk to the people through public institutions.[144] Likewise, Stephen Angle remarks that a single-party rule could be democratic if it is truly responsive to popular input and consults the populace.[145]

The reasons to question another conception of C. P. Macpherson are deliberative as well. He maintains, controversially, that a one-party system may be legitimate if there is a general will that can express itself through a single party.[146] In one sense, the Chinese theory of democratic centralism assumes that the Party represents a general will, but this general will is a product, not a precondition, of political representation. According to democratic centralism, the general will can be centralized only after taking account of all particular wills. Accordingly, the general will itself cannot be the criterion for democracy, but the criterion must be something essential in the way to bring about the general will. According to democratic centralism, this criterion is constant popular input.

Brantly Womack takes seriously the possibility of genuine party-state democracy either permanently or as a stage of development facilitating transition to legislative democracy. Party-state democracy means effective power of the people within the framework of a single permanently ruling party. Hence, although party-state democracy shares some values and procedures of legislative democracy, it is fundamentally different in structure. He sketches conditions for party-state democracy to be truly democratic. Party-state democracy must provide inclusive, effective and responsive political leadership promoting popular interests and popular participation, abiding by the rule of law, and guaranteeing appropriate autonomy of individuals and groups. Since in party-state democracy the ruling party forms only a minority, this party must be inclusive to participation of all essential social groups and demonstrate political openness essential to democracy. Therefore, inner-Party democracy is essential to the functioning of party-state democracy.[147] Obviously the party-state democracy Womack envisions is not procedurally similar to democratic centralism as it was discussed in 1978–1981 but contains some recent aims of the Chinese leadership including rule of law and civil society type of arrangements. Still, if we accept that party-state democracy could be legitimate, its basic requirements could be used to measure whether a democratic centralist system is democratic.

However, if we accept that democracy can take place even in one-party settings, we must recognize some evident problems. It is not impossible that multiple

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144 Womack 1991 A, p. 84.
145 Angle 2005, p. 527.
146 Macpherson 1966, p. 27.
147 Womack 2005.

interests are represented within one party; they are even in the West. It is logically and perhaps even practically possible to contain all interests within one party, very much in the same way that different interests should be represented in a parliament. To contain all interests a party needs a large mass organization and a conscious strategy to collect information and opinions from all fields. This much the Chinese Communist Party does.

However, even if one party can contain all interests and even balance them, its organization has its own standards for the relative value of interests, which can diverge considerably from the standards held by commoners. This means that party programs may distort the mix of interests considerably. For example, the Chinese developmental state has favored industrial cities at the cost of more populous agricultural areas. This choice is institutionalized in the proportional discrimination of agricultural interest in organs of functional representation.[148] Moreover, the interests that the Party represents may deviate from those perceived by the ordinary people themselves. For example, Tani Barlow argues that the Party perception of women did not accord with an ordinary woman's self-perception, in which private roles in home and family were often more central than the public revolutionary role. Naturally, policies were usually designed with this idealized revolutionary woman in mind.[149] Likewise, the state standards for interest representation limit the ways people can advance their interests. If the state assigns representation to a certain kind of group interest, it thus limits group members' possibilities to influence in general issues or issues concerning other groups they belong to.[150] In the one-party system, the misrepresented or ignored interests have little chance to advance their interests or demand inclusion by establishing an alternative policy platform.

However, we must consider the official Chinese pride over their own system because, as the official jargon goes, in it interests are not antagonistic but can be reconciled within one system to the benefit of all. That is, is it possible that interests can be harmonized best within one system which transmits and processes all interests, as the Chinese claim? Is it possible, as Marxists argue, that representing interests through a competitive party system could actually represent

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[148] For malapportionment of electoral districts discriminating against rural areas see Jacobs 1991, p. 177. For the lack of organizations for corporatist representation of peasants see Unger and Chan 1995, p. 51.

[149] Barlow 1994, pp. 344–346.

[150] For example, political tasks assigned to women politicians center on women and family issues. This harms their career advancement, because they have no experience of other issues, such as economic issues (Rosen 1995, pp. 320–331). Besides, although deputies are selected to speak for a certain social stratum or interest, the fact that discussions in the people's congresses are organized on a geographic basis limits the chances to speak for this interest (Shih 1999, pp. 164–165).

mainly interests of the powerful and the resourceful? It is true that in multi-party systems the government represents the majority of voters, but opposition party supporters are often less well represented than supporters of the governmental party or coalition. In the case of permanent majorities, a parliamentary majority may systematically disregard some interests. Moreover, in political systems requiring self-organizing to promote and protect interests some interests tend to remain underrepresented because of lack of resources, able organizers, or social contacts useful in establishing parties and pressure groups. Therefore, it is not impossible that, at least to some small or formerly underprivileged groups and strata, harmonizing all interests inside one system gives more equal consideration to their interests. Moreover, interest-representation through this system requires few resources from the interest-holders themselves, because they can rely on inputs through the already organized Party. Nevertheless, Theda Skocpol remarks that even in the cases where states manage to work out policies that rationally balance different interests, there is a special state interest involved. State policies reflect prerogatives of state officials and the will to reinforce state authority or political longevity.[151] In addition, the Chinese communists had ideological interests that can hardly contain all mass interests,[152] and there can even be a contradiction between ideological aims and aims of the ordinary people or social groups. Finally, the party position in party-state democracy might be too strong to permit any real effect of the power of the people.[153]

Does communist government clash with democracy?

Some Western theorists seem to conflate communist government with authoritarianism.[154] Nevertheless, there is no logical necessity that communism and authoritarianism go together. Apart from some personal dislikes of communist governments by such writers, behind this predisposition lies some assumptions of liberal democracy that are of liberal and not democratic origin. For example, it is liberalism, and not democracy, that demands free economy and private property

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[151]   Skocpol 1985, p. 15.

[152]   Womack 1987, p. 487.

[153]   Womack 2005, pp. 25–26.

[154]   Even in serious research we can find undertones that the Chinese, if they could freely elect their leaders, would automatically vote the Communist Party out of power. In other words, these scholars assume that the Communist Party cannot enjoy democratic support. (For evaluations that the Communist Party rule does not enjoy legitimacy in the eyes of the ordinary Chinese, see, e.g., Harding 1998, p. 15.) This is a very different statement than is classifying the People's Republic of China as an authoritarian country, which according to electoral definitions of democracy is a true statement, since China now does not hold free elections.

rights.[155] This means that no government that denies private property rights can be a liberal democracy. Yet, that a government cannot be liberal, says nothing about its ability to be democratic. Quite the contrary, there even is the possibility that it redistributes property at the request of the economically non-privileged majority. Socialist states have claimed that they are more democratic than liberal democracies exactly because they have made popular economic redistributions.

Limiting political expression to only views according with a certain ideology, Marxism, is another legitimate Western objection to the democraticness of China. Opponents of totalitarianism warn that intolerance and possible coercion can follow from ideological legitimization of the rule. If a government implements policies it believes to be ideologically correct, it tends to be intolerant of opposing views. Somehow it is psychologically more urgent to wipe all opposition from the way of implementing what one perceives as the objective good for (almost) every-one.[156] Intolerance could be a problem even if centralization would succeed and the governmental decisions would truly mirror popular views. Many radical democrats have had a problem in perceiving that, as Barry Holden puts it, "the relationship between *the people* and the government is not the same as the relationship between *the individual* and the government."[157] In other words, even if a policy objectively represents the common good, it may be against an individual interest or the execution of such policy might violate an individual's rights.

Something like this actually happened in China. Consequently, during the Chinese socialist past, individuals were too often sacrificed in the name of common wellbeing.[158] There is an analytical difference between democracy and liberty. All democracies use political power and thus necessarily limit individual liberty, but the main point is how the decisions about these limitations are made. Even if both democracy and liberty belong to democratic values, the questions of popular government and individual rights are two different sets of questions. Thus, democratic, popularly endorsed human rights violations are possible.[159] Popularity of course provides no excuse for violating human rights and all violations should be criticized. Moreover, it is difficult to envision democracy without some

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[155] Parekh 1992, p. 164, summarizes liberal reasons for why democracies need to respect private property rights.

[156] Talmon 1955, pp. 2–3, 253–254.

[157] Holden 1974, p. 41.

[158] The case of Zhang Zhixin was the most famous human rights case appearing in the Chinese press in the late 1970s. About her tragedy, see Garside 1981, pp. 278–284. Another governmental abuse of individual citizens' interest sometimes mentioned in the press in 1978–1981 was misuse of labor power in massive campaigns.

[159] Salmenkari 1997; Zakaria 2003, pp. 18, 32–33.

liberty to make meaningful political choices.[160] Therefore, even if democracy and liberty are separate, polities too grossly violating individual rights in my opinion can be legitimately classified as non-democracies.

In my opinion, the Chinese theory of democratic centralism is a legitimate theory of democracy, even if it may require some other theories or practical solutions to accompany it before a fully democratic polity comes into existence. However, democratic centralism is not the only Chinese democracy-related theory and certainly not the only theory affecting the practice of democracy in China. It is entirely possible that other basic theoretical assumptions, such as, say, class or vanguard party theories, are undemocratic. They may have overrun democratic centralism on many occasions. For instance, Brantly Womack remarks that Marxist-Leninist ideology

> assumed the correctness of the party, played down the importance of political institutions, interpreted opposition as class struggle, and instituted state economic policy that pushed decision making up and towards the center. All of these factors worked against a significant voice for the masses ...[161]

Democratic centralism and practice

One objection to the democraticness of China is that its theory may be justifiably democratic, but in practice its political system diverges from the theory. This is not a fatal objection, though, as long as there are obvious attempts to practice democratic centralism. In other chapters I will demonstrate that, in light of what Western research knows about China, many features of a democratic centralist system are there. In the West as well, democracy in practice diverges widely from the theory and ideals of democracy. Political equality and availability of occasions for true popular influencing fall short of the ideal even in the West.[162] Further, as Anthony Arblaster remarks, Western democratic procedures sometimes produce such anomalies as electing governments by the minority of the votes cast, excluding ethnic minorities from effective power, and placing only a small part of powers under electoral control.[163] Yet, most Westerners probably conclude that Western democracies work relatively well even in terms of democracy.

How well do the Chinese political institutions work in terms of democratic centralism? One way to probe into this question is to see whether the Chinese themselves have been satisfied with their political processes. There is evidence

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[160]   See, e.g., Holden 1974, pp. 51–52, using this claim against the people's democracies.

[161]   Womack 1987, p. 502.

[162]   E.g. Held 1987, pp. 196–201.

[163]   Arblaster 1987, pp. 2–4, 64.

that even the political elites had misgivings about the system. According to Victor Falkenheim, both Maoists and reformists have complained about the incapacity of limited "small democracy" in shaping state policy and checking unpopular policy lines, whether "revisionism" in the 1960s or "ultra-leftism" in the 1970s.[164] The Mao camp complained that the system was elitist and bureaucratist, and provided very few chances for direct mass participation.[165] The commoners have shown their dissatisfaction with the unreceptiveness of the system as well. Indeed, throughout the Mao era, the weakness of channels for redressing injustices in society resulted in an accumulation of popular grievances and their eruption in mass campaigns.[166] During the Cultural Revolution the participatory institutions even spontaneously turned against the state because of the common frustration with the state policies and the restricted scope of popular participation.[167] Recently multiplied[168] protests demonstrate the shortage of channels for solving political conflicts.

Even if it were possible to judge in the light of practical evidence that China does not suffice as a democracy, this would not be enough to dismiss the challenge of the Chinese theory. Regardless of whether or not China is a democracy, political theory should establish how to evaluate the ideal democratic centralism: whether it is democratic or not.

If the theory proves out to be about democracy, a polity unfailingly practicing this theory should be a democracy. Suppose, for a thought game for analytical purposes, that future research would establish that China actually practices democratic centralism to the letter. How, then, should Western political sciences understand the Chinese system? One possible answer is that because a democratic centralist system opens channels for popular influencing, often even relatively effective and systematic ones, China can be evaluated to be a democratic country. Other possible interpretations are legitimate as well. This is the problem I now turn to.

Is there only one type of democracy?

In evaluating whether the Chinese democratic centralism counts as democracy, we come to the problem of defining democracy. This is not an easy task. There is no single commonly agreed conception even in the West. Barry Hindess even argues

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[164] Falkenheim 1983, p. 57.

[165] Dittmer 1974, p. 184, 285.

[166] Chen An 1999, p. 156.

[167] Blecher 1991, pp. 141–142.

[168] For increased numbers of protests, see, e.g., Lee 2000 B, pp. 219–220.

that Western traditions of democracy are contradictory and therefore "there is little point in trying to establish that any of them provides a truer account of democracy than any other."[169] One, relatively recent, tradition of democracy uses procedural definitions of democracy. For evaluating democracy in non-Western settings, such definitions are problematic. If only Western-initiated democratic procedures and institutions are defined as democracy, it is questionable to claim that they have universal value.[170] For example, such definitions of democracy would automatically demarcate democratic centralism outside of democracy, without even pondering the possibility of democratic institutional solutions other than their own.[171] However, if forms of democratic influencing and participation take many forms, scholars should engage in studying what kinds of influencing truly involves a democratic aspect. The existence of multiple accounts of democracy within Western tradition could make such evaluations controversial.

The Chinese theory is derivative from the long European tradition of democracy appearing in ancient Greek city states and continuing in the writings of Rousseau and Marx, among others. The Chinese theory of democratic centralism uses the term democracy in the original Athenian sense emphasizing rule by the people and direct participation in collective decision making on communal issues. Hence, the Chinese do not use the term democracy arbitrarily or spuriously but much in line with one established usage of the term even in the West. However, democracy in this usage is not wholly compatible with the tradition of representative democracy, which most Western theorists believe to be the only feasible form of democracy in contemporary nation-states with millions of citizens. China challenges this belief by having a practicable participatory type of polity.[172] Therefore, we should not claim outright that China is not a democracy, although it is true that China is not a Western type of representative democracy.

However, the Athenian conception of democracy does not help us in establishing outright whether China is democratic. Original Athenian democracy was institutionalized in small city-state wide political units, making direct participation

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[169] Hindess 1991, p. 174.

[170] I by no means claim that countries having different cultural and historical background cannot choose institutions of Western origin; in the course of modernization they often do. However, they can legitimately have other approaches to democracy if we rely on procedural definition only.

[171] Or, critics say, without even pondering why Western institutions are often at odds with the democratic ideal (e.g. Holden 1974, p. xiv).

[172] Participatory and widely inclusive institutions in China include some campaigns (at least campaigns for land reform and popular supervision over cadres provided chances for genuine participation), workplace democracy, and village self-government. I do not claim that this participation is equal and power-free, sometimes it is not even voluntary, but still the Chinese have managed to establish a polity in which popular political participation has played a more regular role than in most Western democracies.

in city councils possible. The only level in China having any similarities with this arrangement is the grassroots. Local-level administration, such as village councils, might qualify for democracy in the Athenian sense, but what about representative levels of the Chinese government or some other modern political innovations, like one-party rule? Strictly speaking it seems accurate to speak only of local self-government as democracy in the Athenian sense. Yet, some might evaluate even local institutions as insufficiently democratic in the Athenian sense, because in China, unlike in Athens, higher-level governments are there to constrain local politics.

Robert Dahl makes useful distinction between democracy and polyarchy in which the former is an ideal and the latter is a feasible form of democracy as it is practiced in contemporary Western nation-states. The term polyarchy can be used to differentiate not only between democratic and nondemocratic regimes but also between contemporary Western democracies and earlier direct democracies in small-scale city states. Polyarchies, emphasizing control over both decision makers and certain political rights, are representative democracies with free elections and civil rights protected by laws.[173] The term polyarchy[174] is in my opinion a handy tool for overcoming ethnocentric and historical prejudices against some political systems in some other times and places that satisfy criteria of democracy, but do not share contemporary Western political institutions designed to guarantee the democraticness of a political system. It is safe to conclude that China is not a polyarchy, lacking some essential features, such as free and fair elections to choose national leaders, freedom of expressing critical opinions about the regime and prevailing ideology, and associational autonomy.[175]

There are more transparent and widely used terms than polyarchy to demarcate the Western type of democracy. The term liberal democracy emphasizes the ideological tradition paying attention to institutions of representation and respect for civil liberties. The term electoral democracy stresses democratic method of elections.[176] Giovanni Sartori also uses the term competitive democracy to emphasize electoral competition in Western electoral democracies.[177] Brantly Womack names typical Western representative democracies legislative democracies

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[173] See characteristics of polyarchy in Dahl 1989, pp. 218–221.

[174] Use of the term polyarchy is not established, though. See criticism of its use in Plamenatz 1977, p. 152, for example.

[175] Dahl 1989, p. 221.

[176] Electoral democracy is used as I do in Sartori 1987, pp. 102–110, for example. Some other theorists demarcate between electoral democracy and liberal democracy and reserve the term electoral democracy for political systems organizing elections, but not respecting civic liberties. See, e.g., Diamond 2002, p. 26. My point, however, is to demarcate between democracies with national level elections and democracies in which elections are not the main method for citizen input.

[177] Sartori 1987, pp. 152–153.

to emphasize legislative aspects central to Western democracies.[178] All of these terms are useful in determining what the Chinese polity is not. Yet, we should recognize at least the theoretical possibility that the Chinese polity could be some other type of democracy instead. Nevertheless, the differentiation between Chinese direct and Western representative democracies does not fit, since China has many representative institutions along with direct ones.

The fact that China is not an electoral democracy means that there is at least one type of democracy China does not belong to, but there might be other types it could belong to. Joseph Schumpeter, when he introduced the procedural definition of democracy, argued that previous theories have been unrealistic and vague when they assumed that democracy could somehow represent common good and the will of the people. He called the latter kind of democracy the classical doctrine of democracy.[179] Although the term has been criticized[180] and is thus already outdated, it could be used to classify the Chinese theory into "theories based on the classical doctrine of democracy". After all, common good and popular will are central for democratic centralist decision making, and its ideals derive more from classical democracies of antiquity than modern representative forms of government.

Western theories of democracy can be divided roughly into two types: ones emphasizing accountability and ones stressing participation.[181] Participation is essential for democracy in general, but the protective aims of democracy make sense mainly in the setting of representative democracies. This division leaves us with protective and developmental forms of democracy.[182] The difference between the two forms is the scope of citizen involvement. If protective democracy leaves for the citizenry the task of dismissing incompetent, corrupt, or unpopular

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[178] Womack 2005, definition on pp. 26–27.

[179] Schumpeter 1992, ch. 21.

[180] For criticism of Schumpeter's division see, e.g., Pateman 1970, pp. 15–20; Hindess 1991, pp. 174–175; Birch 1993, pp. 51–52.

[181] Of course, any electoral democracy combines popular participation and accountability. Still, there are differences in whether they emphasize the popular role or elite responsibility. This division is seen for example in Barry Holden's typology, separating radical and liberal models of democracy along this line (Holden 1974, ch. 3), in C. B. Macpherson's division between developmental and protective types of democracy (Macpherson 1979, pp. 23–76), and in Albert Weale's typology consisting of unmediated popular government and party-mediated popular government on the one hand, and representative government, accountable government and liberal constitutionalism on the other (Weale 1999, pp. 24–35). Nevertheless, there are theories of democracy not directly fitting this division, including a pluralist vision of democracy.

[182] These terms are used, e.g., in Macpherson 1979 and in Held 1987. This division, although itself common, is expressed using many different terms. For example, Albert Weale makes a related distinction between accountable government and representational government (Weale 1999, pp. 29–33).

leaders in elections, developmental democracy values citizen participation as such. It is self-evident that China is not practicing protective democracy.[183] In the West, developmental democracy usually refers to representative democracy as well; if we typify China as developmental democracy some modification is needed. Perhaps "non-electoral developmental democracy" would be appropriate. However, this formulation might be superfluous since the developmental idea is common to all theories of participatory democracy. Participatory democracies differ from contemporary developmental democracies on the basis of political processes, which in participatory democracies take place mainly in meetings and assemblies. The term "participatory democracy" suits the Chinese ideal so well that I will examine it more closely in another chapter.

Is democratic centralism democracy?

One tradition measures democracy in terms of ideal principles of democracy. Usually the ideal form of democratic centralism fares pretty well with such criteria. For example, Jack Lively sees that there are three corresponding criteria to test democraticness: how widely the people are incorporated into the decision-making processes, the extent to which governmental decisions are subject to popular control, and the degree to which ordinary citizens participate in administration processes.[184] The Chinese theory of democratic centralism pays attention to all of these aspects and tries to maximize them. Therefore, ideal democratic centralism could qualify as democracy in this sense.

Procedural definitions often use meaningful elections of national leadership as the criterion of democracy. This definition may be useful in comparative political studies to compare contemporary states. Yet, in the theoretical sense it is problematic as the principle for distinguishing democracies,[185] not least because not all democracies in history were electoral democracies. Ancient Athenian democracy used lot, then seen as a more equal method than elections, to select members to its representative bodies. It was representative definitions of democracy which conceptually stretched the original term democracy, and not the opposite. Apart from the historical examples of non-electoral democracies, the contemporary world provides us examples of non-democratic elections. Andreas Schedler

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[183] I use the terms protective and developmental democracy in their established sense, unlike He Baogang, who sees Chinese democracy both as protective and developmental democracy because China protects and develops its collective interest, although not individual liberties as Western democracies do (He 1990, p. 31).

[184] Lively 1975, p. 51.

[185] Not least because it is controversial when elections are actually free and fair. See Diamond 2002, pp. 22–23.

coined the term electoral authoritarianism for contemporary authoritarian govern-
ments legitimizing themselves in controlled and manipulated elections.[186] There-
fore, it is legitimate to judge that mainland China, not holding direct elections of
its top leadership is not among electoral democracies, but this definition cannot be
used to claim that the Chinese theory of democratic centralism is undemocratic.
Democratic centralism is fully compatible with elections and representative bo-
dies. As a theory of political communication between leaders and commoners, it
could very well be interpreted as a theory of democratic representation.

Democratic centralism cannot be classified as undemocratic because apart
from electoral accountability it seems to contain other elements of democracy
Western political theorists require of democracy. Indeed, if "one of the core ideas
of democracy is that ... governments should pay attention to public opinion, [and]
ought to respond to the policy preferences of the people,"[187] the theory of de-
mocratic centralism fully agrees. If the main elements of democracy are political
competition and popular participation,[188] the Chinese system even encourages
participation. Even democratic accountability is not totally ignored in the theory
of democratic centralism. As Dennis Thompson notes, democratic responsibility
relies not only on the process of electoral accountability but also on the process of
deliberation meant to introduce to the citizenry the reasons behind the govern-
ment's decisions.[189] After all, socialist China has always been skilled in propa-
gating state aims to the populace.

One way to theoretically question the democraticness of the Chinese de-
mocratic centralism would be by challenging my original definition of democracy
as popular influencing. One possible answer is that an effort to influence decision
makers is a definition of participation,[190] not democracy. Tianjian Shi, using this
definition, even argues that participation is not automatically democratic.[191] In
other words, proving the existence of popular influencing would, according to this
definition, show the existence of participation, not democracy. In this light, China
could be highly participatory, although not a democracy. However, many Western
theorists of democracy define democracy in terms of popular influencing,[192]
meaning that this line of argument could only say that participatory China does
not fulfill our definition of democracy, although it does that of some others.
Vague as this answer is, it is perhaps near to what I pursue here. It would then say

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[186]   Schedler 2002.

[187]   Page 1996, p. 1.

[188]   These elements are seen as basic by Huntington 1993, pp. 109–111.

[189]   Thompson 1983, p. 236.

[190]   Participation is thus defined in Shi 1997, p. 5.

[191]   Shi 1997, p. 274.

[192]   Page 1996, p. 1.

that the Chinese can legitimately call their system democratic, but we do not, because our understanding of democracy is somewhat different.

Nevertheless, an opponent of calling China a democracy could save his argument by claiming that popular influencing is only one defining characteristic of democracy. Many definitions of democracy agree with the centrality of popular influencing in democracy, but it alone is not sufficient to make a political system democratic. Apart from popular participation, something else would be needed. For example, S. E. Finer understands democracy to be "government which is derived from public opinion and is accountable to it", but he adds two further demands, namely free expression of this public opinion and the majority principle in decision making.[193] Sylvia Chan likewise argues that democracy "requires provision for the participation of all adult members of a society, freedom to formulate and advocate political alternatives, and the credible availability of political alternatives."[194] According to these definitions, it is in the freedom of expression and free group formation around different political stands that China may fail the test.

The democraticness of the Chinese type of popular participation could be challenged by questioning the quality of popular participation in China. Carole Pateman distinguishes full democratic participation, in which participants have equal powers to influence decisions, and participation in which leadership has the right to make the final decision.[195] Consequently, one could claim that the Chinese theory of democratic centralism only talks about unequal participation, which is not enough to be called democracy. For a democrat, though, this is a most dangerous argument, because nowhere in the modern world have democracies established fully equal arenas for political participation. Voting, the most equally distributed instrument for popular influencing in Western representative democracies, belongs under unequal participation as well, since although the participants have the final say about candidate selection, they have very little influence in nominating the candidates and choosing the campaign issues. If we follow this line of argument, we need to admit that democracy does not exist now on the national level, nor did it ever actualize in pre-modern city states, considering the severe inequalities in participation in them. The democratic ideal would become a practical impossibility in any polity including a considerable number of people if we use too strict criteria for democratic participation. After all, even such a devoted liberal democrat as Giovanni Sartori admits that electoral partici-

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[193] Finer 1970, p. 63.

[194] Chan 2002, p. 40.

[195] Pateman 1970, pp. 68–71.

pation in modern democracies mainly denotes symbolic participation giving voters the feeling of being politically included.[196]

Questioning the democraticness of democratic centralism

The Chinese theory of democratic centralism makes a strong claim for democracy. It does not advocate that democracy, the people's rule, should only mean majority rule but demands that all members of a polity should be heard in decision making. It wants to provide everyone a chance to voice his opinion about political issues, not only to vote for someone to represent him in decision making. Therefore, this theory should be seen as truly democratic in intent.[197] However, since its demands for democracy are so high, it is more challenging to judge whether democratic centralism is satisfactorily practiced, than judging, for example, whether there were free and competitive elections.[198] This means that although the theory, in my opinion, is democratic and logically flawless, it does not automatically lead to China being a democratic country. Furthermore, due to its abstract and arduous criteria, proving effective democratic centralist influencing becomes difficult. Theory does not suggest any convenient metric, such as the number of votes, to evaluate whether democratic centralist systems actually pass any substantive amount of information from the grassroots to the leaders. It is not problematic for democracy that much of the information flow is from the top down, but it is fatal if the information flow from the grassroots to the decision making arenas either does not exist or discontinues somewhere along the way.

It would be legitimate, in my opinion, to categorize China among non-democratic systems, because of insufficient institutionalization. This stand would admit that the Chinese system, if it practices democratic centralism seriously, might succeed in channeling popular influencing. Yet, democracy requires necessary institutions, such as direct elections, or polity-wide participatory councils. Otherwise, guarantees for meaningful use of democratic input and continuance of democracy depend on leaders' subjective will. However, this objection does not apply to a democratic centralist system properly institutionalizing popular input processes, say through referenda or transparent popular opinion gathering and measuring centers. C. B. Macpherson outlines solutions for combining democracy and pyramidal direct/indirect democratic state systems. He evaluates that such a system provides inadequate democratic control of the government without a

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[196] Sartori 1987, p. 233.

[197] I borrowed the expression democratic intent from Hyland 1995, p. 62.

[198] The judging of which is not non-controversial either. See Diamond 2002, pp. 28–29, and Schedler 2002.

competing party system.[199] Even if according to institutionalization criteria China would be undemocratic, democratic centralist theory and practice would not suffer the same fate. It would simply need to be added that democratic centralism with proper institutionalization would be democracy.

Stephen Angle and Brantly Womack have sketched some crucial points that the Chinese democratic centralist political system must solve to be adequately democratic. They see inadequate legal protection of individuals from possible abuse of power to be a problem for democratic centralist practice. There should be better guarantees for the right to voice alternative viewpoints and more chances for popular participation during the policy-formation stage. Robust consultation requires the state to recognize and protect plural social interests.[200] Brantly Womack maintains that in modern democracy leadership and policies must be at risk to the interests and opinions of the majority. Yet, as long as democratic centralism is only a matter of leaders' work style, control from below is absent. Instead of being majority rule, democratic centralism thus is equal only to leaders' concern for majority interest.[201] Challenging this evaluation, Stephen Angle assesses that democratic centralism clearly differs from benevolent absolutism because it demands that leaders consider people's interests on the basis of how people themselves articulate these interests. Moreover, democratic centralism recognizes that the people can demand and assess legitimate leadership and resist illegitimate leadership.[202]

Some might thus deny that China would be democratic even if democratic centralism is seriously and demonstrably put into practice. Yet, it is necessary to recognize that such a China would share many similar attributes with ideal Western democracies. For example, S. E. Finer has sketched three basic dimensions to evaluate governments in comparative studies. These dimensions, allegedly providing a continuum from democracy to totalitarianism, are three: participation – exclusion, coercion – persuasion, and order – representativeness dimensions.[203] An ideally democratic centralist system would naturally belong to a participatory, persuasive and representative kind of government. Obviously, even a less than ideally democratic centralist government cannot be a totalitarian government, which is characterized by just the opposite attributes: political exclusion, coercion and order.

However, it is possible to classify China, despite its failings, as a democracy if it seriously practices democratic centralism. We can utilize James Hyland's de-

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[199] Macpherson 1979, p. 108–114.
[200] Angle 2005, p. 528, 532; Womack 2005, pp. 31–32.
[201] Womack 2005, pp. 38–39.
[202] Angle 2005, p. 527.
[203] Finer 1970, p. 40.

marcation between so called "sortal" and "scalar" definitions. A sortal definition of democracy would set an exclusive categorization, making those systems not falling into the category of democracy belong to totally different types of political systems. A scalar difference, then, would mean that democracy means the presence of certain characteristics, which can be present in a greater or lesser degree.[204] In the words of Samuel Huntington, we are talking about democracy either as a dichotomous or a continuous variable.[205] I have opined above that procedural sortal definitions are biased in terms of the totality of democratic theory and history. Therefore, common features of democracy across the time and cultures have to be certain principles, such as the existence of popular participation, political equality, and accountability. Thus, we are then more or less left with definitions of democracy that are scalar. Most probably this would leave us to measure more than one aspect of democracy.[206] In my opinion, scalar definitions of democracy could measure such aspects of democracy as accountability, responsiveness, equality in participation, and equality in the system's responsiveness to different interests. Certain tradeoffs become possible with scalar definitions. Thus, if China were to prove out to be good in gathering popular initiative and encouraging grassroots participation, it could be forgiven some failings in institutionalization and political freedoms. This approach would allow recognition of China's successes as well as admission of some visible problems.

Stephen Angle takes a different path. He does not evaluate whether China is a democracy, probably because he is basing his argument on Rawls who accepts the liberal definition of democracy as the established meaning of the term. Instead, Stephen Angle evaluates whether the Chinese theory of democratic centralism could be legitimate from the Chinese and liberal democratic perspectives, respectively. He opines that the Chinese understanding of genuine democratic centralism could very well pass the criteria of legitimateness, but political reality in China seriously diverges from this genuine democratic centralism.[207]

Even if one holds that China as a country cannot be categorized as a democracy, it seems still possible to argue that there is real democracy in China if one separates what Giovanni Sartori calls microdemocracy and macrodemocracy, that is, group-centered democracies in workplaces and localities and large-scale democracies on the national level.[208] If one recognizes village self-government as

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[204] Hyland 1995, pp. 49–50; Weale 1999, pp. 17–18.

[205] Huntington 1993, p. 11.

[206] James Hyland himself suggests this possibility in Hyland 1995, pp. 68–69.

[207] Angle 2005.

[208] Sartori 1987, p. 11. Notice that Giovanni Sartori himself holds that microdemocracy is possible only under macrodemocracy. The Chinese evidence suggests that this is not the only possibility.

democracy but laments the absence of direct national elections, one could then come to the conclusion that China has developed processes of microdemocracy but lacks macrodemocracy. Actually, some China scholars researching popular participation in China make just this point. For example, Marc Blecher maintains that in China local participation helps build community, foster civic education, and stake out some concrete gains for participants. Local participatory politics is thus important even when it does not contribute to broader democracy, not only for these benefits but also for the fact that it contrasts with undemocratic politics on the levels above.[209]

Democracy or populism?

If the ideal of democratic centralism does not itself suffice for democracy, even though it would establish channels for expressing popular will so central for democracy, the question arises what should we call this system instead. Suppose that comparative empirical studies find that the mass line politics in China involves more people in political decision making and processes more detailed information about popular opinions than some selected Western electoral democracies do. The same study would perhaps also discover that these Western electoral democracies have far more sophisticated methods for popular supervision over decision makers and more channels for interest articulation. Logically speaking, this might very well be the result if these systems work ideally according to their political theories. What kind of system, then, should we call China if not a democracy?

One established term useful in this context is consultation. Some China scholars have described Chinese government as consultative. Harry Harding's term "consultative authoritarian regime"[210] could prove useful. Brantly Womack coined the term "mass-regarding" to describe how the Chinese Communist Party has been "responsive to the concrete interests and preferences of the masses without being organizationally accountable to them."[211]

I propose populism as a suitable term for democratic centralist China. Populism means that policies or party platforms are based on popular demands or are designed to have wide popular appeal. Populism attempts to build strong and devoted popular support by promoting popular policies without relying on democratic institutions. Nationalist or anti-elitist platforms are typical of populist parties, and even of populist autocracies. Evidently dictators can also be populists if

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[209] Blecher 1991, p. 140.

[210] Zheng 1994, p. 239.

[211] Womack 1987, p. 486.

they seek support from the middle and lower classes instead of socioeconomic elites. However, populism in dictatorships or in one-party systems, such as China, differs from populist party platforms in multi-party democracies in one important respect: populist parties in multi-party systems can ride on unfeasible or single-issue platforms, governments cannot. Instead, legitimacy of authoritarian populist systems must derive partly from policy performance and from answering some popular material or ideological demands. Still, they can derive their popular support from a few issues, such as clean government and welfare issues.

It is conceivable that sometimes populism might promote more popular policies than democracy. If popularity of its politics is the main aim of the government, institutional arrangements are of secondary interest. This neglect makes populist rule unpredictable. Electoral democracy guarantees at least minimal receptivity to the popular will, while non-democratic governments, populist autocracies included, have no institutional guarantee about continuity of popularly backed policies. Moreover, democratic politics provides outlets for all kinds of social interests and opinions, while populism often serves only some parts of the populace. Yet, the participatory element in the Chinese system could allow it to escape claims of mere populism. Seeing the people as active political actors, not only supporters, is a basic requirement for democracy.

It is possible to argue that despite populism China is undemocratic. However, one should then also recognize the possibility that there are non-democratic polities that fare better than democracies in putting popular will into practice. This is an admission many democrats are not willing to make. After all, some scholars propose that the difference between democracy and authoritarianism is a democratic governments' responsiveness to social demands.[212]

Liberal and collective democracies

Liberty and democracy are sometimes conflated.[213] However, liberty and democracy are not a necessary pair and in particular situations they may even be in contradiction.[214] Since China does not sufficiently respect human rights and freedom of political choice, China is not a liberal democracy. One term sometimes used for democracies without liberal values, is "illiberal democracy". However, this term usually refers to electoral democracies not guaranteeing the civil liberties of liberal democracy.[215] Thus, application of this term to China may cause unnec-

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[212]   Chan 2002, p. 190.

[213]   Lakoff 1996, p. 30.

[214]   Hayek 1960; Zakaria 2003.

[215]   E.g. Collier and Levitsky 1997, p. 440; Diamond 2002. However, Fareed Zakaria introduces examples of democratic but illiberal decisions in contexts of direct democracy also, such as

essary confusion. Instead, C. B. Macpherson's term "non-liberal democracy" catches absence of liberal values well,[216] although I do not accept as democratic his description of communist democracy as revolutionary vanguard party rule for democratization. In brief, it is not revolutionary mobilization that can make China democratic, but its popular feedback systems.

The centrality of civil liberties derives from a certain individualistic world-view. Therefore, non-liberal tradition could also be expressed in terms of collectivism as the opposite of liberal rights-centered individualism. An established term for democracies which promote collective rights and values over individual and group rights is "collectivist democracy".[217] In my opinion, it is a very suitable term for China. Some scholars have adopted this term. He Baogang maintains that Chinese democracy is collectivist democracy, because it prioritizes public interest over citizens' rights or even leaders' own interests and can demand conformity and sacrifices for common good.[218] I would argue that such collectivistic prioritizations are not unknown in Western democracies either, regardless of their individualistic theoretical base.

Chih-yu Shih takes Chinese claims for democracy seriously. According to him, in Chinese collective democracy individual interest is seen to result from the membership of a collective. Institutions are employed to promote collectivist goals and to resolve conflict among collective actors, even at the expense of individual rights. Political argumentation and negotiation are made in the name of interest of the collective unit, not the individual. Thus, the collective leader often determines collective interest, initiates action, and negotiates with other collective leaders. Although the negotiation is about competition over interests between collectives, it can be resolved using democratic mechanisms.[219] Democratic centralism surely has some obvious links to values and institutions which Chih-yu Shih understand as collective. Stephen Angle shows that democratic centralism depends on a careful balance of plurality and commonality. Too much pluralism would blur the conception of common good, which is needed for a democratic centralist regime. Therefore, a democratic centralist party-state cannot become a

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the popular assembly imposing the death penalty for Socrates because of his teachings (Zakaria 2003, p. 32).

[216] He finds communist and underdeveloped variants of non-liberal democracy. Macpherson 1966, ch. 2 and 3.

[217] Roland Pennock (1979) evaluates certain basic features of democracy and compares how individualistic and collectivistic outlooks influence institutional arrangements, as well as prioritization and choices between different aspects of democracy. However, China has not always chosen those priorities Pennock would see collectivism choosing.

[218] He 1996, pp. 46–47. Still, He Baogang also concludes that since the elite defines collective interest, it can promote its own interest in the name of public good (He 1990, pp. 33–35).

[219] Shih 1999, pp. xviii–xx, 325–328.

neutral, *laissez-faire* regime but must simultaneously continue to pursue shared goals for a better future and realize broadly inclusive consultative mechanisms.[220]

Conceptual innovation

Apart from finding an established term, such as populism or collective democracy, to describe the Chinese democratic centralist ideal, perhaps even reality, better than democracy, one could engage in conceptual innovation for finding a suitable definition for the Chinese political system. China studies have found some, to my mind useful, neologisms. Brantly Womack uses the term "quasi-democracy" to describe the system of Chinese and Vietnamese communists. These Parties have encouraged an interactive popular influence on policy, but have not understood that a competitive environment is essential to the actual functioning of democracy.[221]

If we seek to coin a new term for the ideal form of the Chinese type of democratic centralism, we should take seriously the standards David Collier and Steven Levitsky give for conceptual innovation: a new definition should increase differentiation but avoid stretching the concept of democracy or the proliferation of terms so that two or more terms would mean approximately the same thing.[222] There are several strategies we can opt for. One would be to find a proper attribute for the term democracy and create a special subtype of democracy particular for China. Such a subtype could define either a particular type of full democracy or a diminished subtype emphasizing the missing attributes of full democracy.[223]

There are some existing terms created in this way to define direct face-to-face democracies in contrast to representative electoral democracies. In my opinion, such terms as "monistic democracy"[224] coined by Robert Dahl for democracy in premodern city states or "unitary democracy"[225] invented by Jane Mansbridge are suitable terms for Chinese democratic centralist democracy. "Direct democracy", another, more common term for democracy derived from the institutions of ancient Athens, is useful only for the mass line type of grassroots microdemocracy.

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[220] Angle 2005, p. 533, 536.

[221] Womack 1987, pp. 485–486. Strictly speaking, Brantly Womack opines that the term describes the reality in China and Vietnam only in the period preceding the revolution giving the power monopoly to the Communists. Nevertheless, this description seems to extract much of the essence of the Chinese communists' theory about democracy. Hence, I would not limit its use to the republican period only.

[222] Collier and Levitsky 1995, pp. 431, 449–451.

[223] Collier and Levitsky 1995, pp. 435–438.

[224] Dahl 1989, p. 30.

[225] Mansbridge 1983.

Also "monistic democracy" may be usable only in mass line contexts, but the term unitary democracy fits grassroots situations as well as inter-bureaucracy negotiations. However, face-to-face democratic processes tend to leave a democratic deficit on the higher levels of government. Therefore, there is no logical contradiction in defining the Chinese system as simultaneously autocratic and widely practicing unitary democracy political processes.

Stephen Angle has demonstrated similarity between democratic centralism and a consultative form of democracy that Robert Goodin calls input democracy.[226] Another promising term to describe democratic centralist democracy is cooperative democracy, used by Yu Keping. This kind of democracy emphasizes cooperation between the government and the citizens in creating social and economic progress. Interestingly, Yu and Chinese scholars he cites see pressure from above and below as important to make localities work for national and the people's wellbeing.[227] This model reveals democratic centralism's hierarchical design and non-confrontational quality. Although it is based on contemporary Chinese discussions, it also fits well with the Chinese tradition emphasizing the usefulness of democracy for national progress.[228] Strictly speaking, democratic centralism does not always accord with Yu's model, since he emphasizes the importance of decentralization, pluralization and civil society. Therefore, the Mao era state was perhaps democratic centralist, but it was not a cooperative democracy. The reform-era state could possibly develop into true cooperative democracy.

Yu Keping also uses the term incremental democracy. This term refers to a democracy developing when a centralized political system allows a certain degree of political pluralization,[229] including organizational separation of Party and state on the one hand and state and enterprise on the other, emergence of civil society, rule of law, and local elections.[230] Incremental democracy proceeds from the particular local situation, not from any particular theory, and expects an incremental, path-dependent process of democratization.[231] For example, in the Chinese context, incremental democracy recognizes the East Asian tradition of active governmental guidance in local governance, civil society, and market economy.[232]

When innovating diminished subtypes of democracy that would characterize China well, it is possible to select several different aspects that one would emphasize as missing. If the term should characterize the limited nature of political

[226] Angle 2005, p. 538.

[227] Yu 2000, p. 13.

[228] Nathan 1986, chap. 3 and 4.

[229] Yu 2000, p. 5.

[230] Yu 2000, pp. 6–9.

[231] Yu 2000, p. 11.

[232] Yu 2000, pp. 12–13.

contestation, terms like "one-party democracy" or "party-led democracy" could be useful. He Baogang has coined the concept "paternalist democracy" to describe a system under which the masses keep watch over the bureaucracy under a mono-cratic central guidance. In this system central leadership rules in the name of public interest, as the paternalist leadership defines it, and justifies limitations of individual liberty in the name of collective good.[233] If the term should emphasize the absence of national elections, "consultative non-electoral democracy" would catch that well.

Collier and Levitsky also recommend the strategy of decomposing the term democracy into components like "democratic state" and "democratic govern-ment." In this way it is possible to avoid calling a particular country a democracy, although it may have democratic periods or elements in its rule.[234] Those who deny that the Chinese democratic centralism suffices for a democracy, might prefer to use the term regime instead of democracy here, using concepts like "consultative (non-electoral) regime". Other promising terms catching democratic elements in the Chinese polity but denying that it is sufficiently democratic would be "deliberative authoritarian system" or "participatory polity". However, China definitely is not pseudodemocracy in which democratic political institutions mask the reality of authoritarian domination,[235] but just the opposite: it can be understood as an authoritarian rule concealing many democratic practices and institutions.

In my opinion, democratic centralism definitely takes a democratic approach, but this does not necessarily make China a democracy. As I have shown here, it depends very much on the particular definition and standards for democracy one happens to defend whether China can count as a democracy. Much of this contro-versy could be avoided if people, regardless of the definition of democracy they happen to cherish, could agree on a list of democratic aspects of the Chinese political system. Perhaps it would be possible to agree that China practices "democratic consultation" and "democratic grassroots administration", regardless of what one thinks of, say, the centrality of competitive national elections in de-mocracy. It is possible to define democratic centralism as a "democratic process", itself insufficient to make China a democracy. Definition of each democratic element in the Chinese system could even involve concrete practices, like the mass line, which Tang Tsou defines as a democratic style of leadership at best, but not equivalent to liberal democracy.[236] According to Brantly Womack, demo-cratic centralism could be called democratic sentiment, but not a democratic

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[233] He 1990.

[234] Collier and Levitsky 1997, pp. 445–448.

[235] Diamond et al. 1995, p. 8.

[236] Tsou 1987, p. 264.

system.[237] Or as John Burns evaluates, there is a definite "democratic content" in Chinese electoral practices, but although a "democratic result" is not guaranteed, it cannot be dismissed as insignificant, even if it does not suffice for making China fully democratic.[238]

Democraticness of stages of decision making

If the Chinese theory of democratic centralism fails on the practical applications, this theory could very well be accepted as a prescriptive theory of democracy. As a democratic theory, the Chinese theory of democratic centralism gives a full picture of democratic processes from gathering popular opinions, through making decisions, to implementing these decisions. This conception of democratic processes could even be made into a normative model of democracy applicable to any democracy. It could be used to measure how democratic a political system is in all the three stages identified by democratic centralism, namely in collecting popular and factual input, making decisions according to democratic processes, and consulting people in implementation.

In this respect, the Chinese theory of democratic centralism resembles James Hyland's normative efforts to evaluate democracy in a more substantial sense than merely in terms of political recruitment or decision-making procedures. James Hyland has distinguished four stages of democratic process, namely agenda setting, comparative assessment, making the decision, and implementation, and he calls for equal powers over determination of outcomes in all of these crucial decision-making stages.[239] All of these stages are familiar from the Chinese theory of democratic centralism, of which collection of information and opinions is a stage of democracy, while in the analysis, decision-making and implementation stages democracy and centralism must be combined so that both leadership and popular opinion are present. The Chinese would fully agree when James Hyland concludes that the democraticness of a system should be evaluated by assessing how democratic each of these stages is both in quantitative and qualitative terms. This means that democraticness is evaluated both according to the ratio of those affected and their actual powers to influence. This evaluation, moreover, should allow measuring more democracy in one stage than in another.[240]

However, James Hyland deals with the issue mainly in light of Western democratic experiences. He, for example, sees equally weighted vote as the demo-

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[237] Womack 2005, p. 38.

[238] Burns 1978, p. 296.

[239] Hyland 1995, p. 57–67.

[240] Hyland 1995, pp. 67–69.

cratic method for decision making.[241] Here he takes representative democracy as the only modern form of democracy although other scholars have shown that direct democracy not only fulfills the definition of democracy as well but is also practicable in modern local government.[242] Hyland proposes, thinking of the modern bureaucratic state, that democratic implementation refers merely to executing decisions made. Thus, this stage does not need popular participation, but means that decision makers can control that decisions made in a democratic manner are effected.[243] The Chinese would give the people a much larger part in choosing forms for practical implementation and in participation in the implementation process itself. In addition, Hyland maintains that equality in agenda setting as well as in assessment and deliberation requires that no group can monopolize information and that the freedom of the press is crucial for unconstrained access to information.[244] The Communist Party ideological monopoly certainly violates certain principles of free democratic self-expression and thus the democraticness of the agenda-setting stage in China is somewhat questionable. Yet, the Party by no means claims to hold a monopoly on information about practical matters. Therefore, some space for popular participation in agenda setting remains in practical issues and in local-level deliberations, which in China take place largely in communal or workplace meetings. Moreover, agenda setting tends to be relatively elitist in Western democracies as well.

Other writers who recognize that popular participation in decision making can take place in different stages of the democratic process include Ann Richardson and Robert Dahl. Ann Richardson has outlined the steps of decision making to be: defining the issues, amassing information, establishing priorities or goals, adopting a particular position, implementing it, and assessing results.[245] According to Robert Dahl, in Western democracies only vote counting in elections and legislative bodies approximates democratic political equality manifested in the majority principle. However, democraticness can be evaluated in any stage of the decision process. Actually, the prevoting stage reveals many inequalities in Western democracies, rising partly from unequal distribution of wealth and resources.[246] However, Dahl is not making normative demands on political systems here, unlike democratic centralist theory does.

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[241] Hyland 1995, pp. 64–66.

[242] Jeffrey Berry, Kent Portney and Ken Thomson show that direct democracy could fulfill all Robert Dahl's criteria for democracy. See Berry et al. 1993, pp. 53–54.
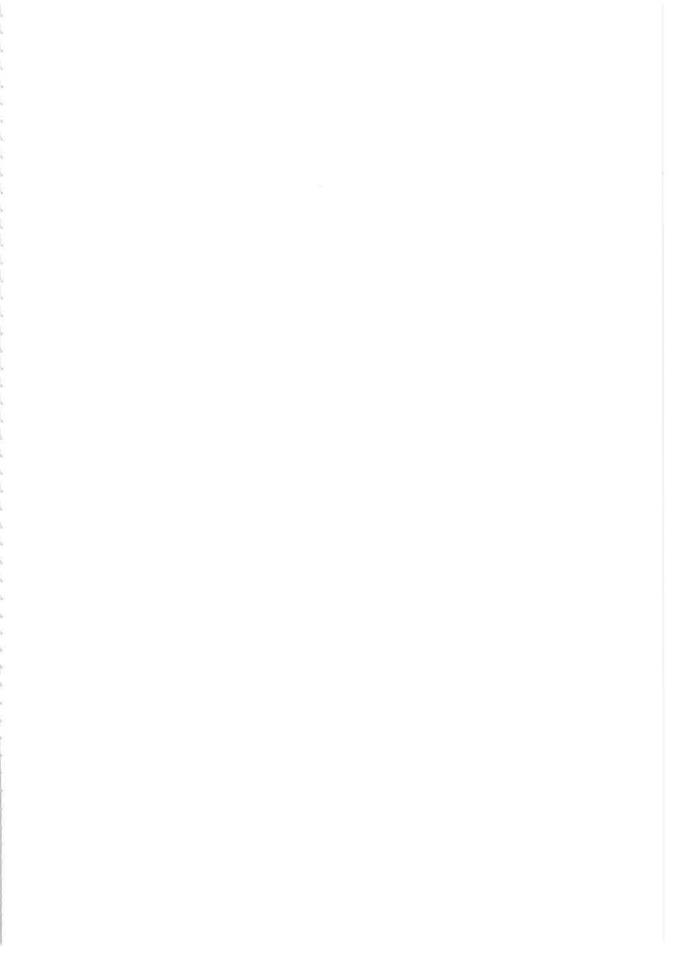
[243] Hyland 1995, p. 66.

[244] Hyland 1995, pp. 58–59, 63.

[245] Richardson 1983, p. 20.

[246] Dahl 1968, pp. 64–67.

According to this democratic centralist model, electoral democracy concentrates on measurable political equality and on institutionalizing equal democratic input, while it pays relatively little attention to continuous agenda setting, opinion formation, continuous popular feedback and to the democraticness of implementation. Deliberative democracy, then, pays attention to some of these neglected points, such as popular influence in agenda setting and opinion formation. The Chinese theory of democratic centralism is well developed in gathering continuous popular input and feedback about policies, as well as in popular participation in implementation. On the other hand, it has obvious failings in institutionalizing many stages of democracy and in limiting channels of popular opinion into the officially approved ones. Democratic accountability and checks of power are relatively neglected aspects in the theory of democratic centralism. Especially problematic is that it deals very little with the popular input into decision-making processes above the grassroots and institutionalized rules to guarantee equality of opinions. In other words, the Chinese system has a danger of slipping into authoritarianism with extensive consultative mechanisms.

DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM AS PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Popular participation is one basic feature of democracy. For example, Barry Holden contends that participation is both a logically and empirically necessary condition of democracy, and possibly its defining feature.[1] Samuel Huntington, for his part, sees democracy consisting of popular participation and electoral competition.[2] If citizens play no part in decision-making processes, a system is definitely not democratic. However, much more controversial is the requisite amount of and scope for popular participation in a functioning democracy. After all, some theorists argue that too much participation could sacrifice governability.[3] Nor is all participation democratic. Totalitarian theory reminds us that there can be wide-scale state-mobilized popular participation which does not present participants with any opportunities for political influencing, although it may provide them with chances for self-expression and a sense of belonging. Therefore, the meaningfulness of participation cannot be measured quantitatively.

A typical list of democratic participatory activities includes participation in voting, campaigning, party membership, pressure group membership, demonstrations, strikes, civil disobedience, advisory roles in administrative boards or social policy implementation, and community activities.[4] This list betrays that political institutions shape the forms of meaningful political participation. Therefore, it is problematic to only look for the familiar forms of participation to evaluate the extent of participation in other political cultures. As Verba, Nie and Kim argue, in different countries citizens choose different forms of participation, because activities relate an individual to his government in particular ways and consequences of activities are not the same in each country.[5] Moreover, the adequacy of the Western forms of meaningful popular participation is being questioned. Participatory democrats would like to supplement electoral democracy with face-to-face arenas for political influencing, while deliberative democrats seek more authentic democratic participation from civil society activities.

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[1]   Holden 1974, pp. 185–187.

[2]   Huntington 1993, pp. 109, 111.

[3]   Cited by Berry et al. 1993, pp. 198–199.

[4]   Birch 1993, p. 81.

[5]   Verba et al. 1978, pp. 51–52, 62.

In the spectrum of Western democratic theories the Chinese theory of democratic centralism falls neatly into the category of participatory democracy. In the West, both the theory and experiments of participatory democracy culminated in the 1960s and 1970s with the New Left. Marxist background has given both the Chinese theory of democratic centralism and the Western theory of participatory democracy a strong concern for direct and equal participation. Both Marxists and participatory democrats claim that Western democracies provide ordinary citizens with insufficient opportunities for meaningful political participation. In addition, both are critical towards the elitism of representative democracy.

According to the definition by Terence Cook and Patrick Morgan, "participatory democracy connotes decentralization of power for direct involvement of amateurs in authoritative decision making."[6] The Chinese mass line theory and practice share this ideal. The Chinese practice is of special interest, because Western theories of participatory democracy tend to be prescriptive theories about how democracy should work deriving from relatively limited practical experience. Western political theorists skeptical about participatory theory have often remarked that writers advocating participatory democracy seldom have either clear political theory or comprehensive recommendations for institutional arrangements bringing about a participatory democratic polity in modern times.[7] Therefore, the Chinese case provides both theoretical and practical evidence for evaluating both the strengths and shortcomings of participatory democracy. The Chinese theory may provide inspiration for developing more feasible and persuasive forms of participatory democracy, but it also reveals that some Western fears of extensive participation are grounded, even if others are not.

Terence Cook and Patrick Morgan have typified what a comprehensive theory about participatory democracy should include. It should sketch proper units for participatory decision making, their sizes and functions, and their relation to other decision-making structures. The theory should also describe how participatory-democratic decisions are made.[8] Others would like to know how the institutions of representative democracy are to be linked with those of direct democracy, especially if institutions are multi-functional and do not simply fall under a certain bureaucratic organ.[9]

The Chinese system of democratic centralism answers these questions. It sees that apart from territorial units, sectoral interests should adopt a participatory style of decision making. The ideal size of a participatory unit is that of a meeting. Participatory structures form hierarchies that combine direct member participation

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[6]   Cook and Morgan 1971, p. 4.

[7]   E.g. Held 1987, pp. 262–263.

[8]   Cook and Morgan 1971, pp. 22–39.

[9]   Held 1987, p. 263; Holden 1974, p. 225.

in the grassroots-level units with a chain of representative organs with members selected at the level below. Some of these pyramidal chains of participatory settings are multi-functional and form certain relatively self-governing administrative units; others are group-based and either form hierarchies of their own or are assigned to one bureaucracy. Units of participatory democracy can have overlapping membership because there are separate units for territorial and group interests. In decision making, the Chinese favor meeting-style procedures and a definite leadership, often provided by the Communist Party. The leadership takes the responsibility for agenda setting, invitation of expert input and the persuasion necessary in order to find the common interest. Apart from meetings within a single participatory system, this ideal promotes meetings to which representatives from different systems are invited.

Size of a polity

Despite the fact that participation is one basic characteristic of democracy, many advocates of Western representative forms of democracy have rejected participatory democracy as unfeasible or undesirable. One objection is that participatory democracy is possible only in small communities but not in modern large-scale nation-states. Allegedly the size of modern polities does not allow all polity members to participate in discussion about all important policy matters. Most Western theorists maintain that increased popular participation may perhaps bring about understanding and consensus within a small community, but hardly in modern nation-states, in which the number of people, geographic distances and competing group interests weaken common loyalty and mutual interest.[10] Moreover, participatory and deliberative solutions are possible only within a relatively homogenous group without large economic and social cleavages.[11]

This viewpoint does not recognize that the size and construction of political units can be arranged. The Chinese experience proves that it is by no means impossible even in a vast modern country to design the basic political units so that they preserve community relations and face-to-face contact in political participation. After all, the national-level political unit is seldom the only elected administrative unit even in modern Western democracies. Moreover, many Western participatory theorists have called for complementing national-level democracy with participation within the everyday environment, for example at workplaces or student unions.[12] However, other theorists clearly separate all forms of group-

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[10] E.g. Pennock 1979, p. 114.

[11] Held 1987, p. 280.

[12] E.g. Pateman 1970, pp. 46, 73–74.

centered or workplace-centered democracy from political democracy in state institutions.[13] Yet, this separation between state, social, and economic spheres of participation is a mere Western convention. The question of whether group- or factory-centered participatory units have a say in state affairs is again a question about administrative arrangements. The Chinese experience establishes that it is totally possible to arrange the administrative system so that the units that are related to day-to-day living are directly linked to the state.

Community-size political units are thus possible even in modern states, but whether or not they are desirable is a completely different question. A small unit, which makes face-to-face contact possible, facilitates the participation of every member, certainly. Indeed, a small unit heightens the intensity of self-government. The less populous the autonomic unit, the bigger a person's share of power, at least if power is equally distributed, and the better the chances for self-government.[14] However, some Western scholars remind us that intolerance and the social pressure to conform may be stifling in a small political unit.[15] Moreover, small communities without impersonal and legally circumscribed public power may intrude in the personal lives of their members and suppress minority opinions and beliefs.[16] Larger democracies, on the contrary, allegedly permit expression of more diverse beliefs and interests because in a larger unit it is less likely that a single view or interest will dominate the political arena. In addition, more impersonality gives an individual more neutral space for self-expression.[17] Presumably, some localities in China have witnessed strong social pressure against non-conformist self-expression or prejudice against certain ideas or interests. At least, there is strong evidence that in China communal decisions have been highly intrusive into the lives of all members of the community.[18]

In addition, Western theorists assert that the solutions to many modern problems require perspectives that are wider than local ones since small units fit for participatory democracy are likely to concentrate on local, even parochial, concerns. Instead, when important decisions are made in larger political units, citizens

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[13] Sartori 1987, p. 11.

[14] Hyland 1995, p. 261. Giovanni Sartori, believing that a worldwide political unit is the Marxist ideal, uses this reasoning against Marx, showing that self-government can be intensive only in a small self-governing polity (Sartori 1987, p. 64–66). However, this criticism is misdirected, since Marx advocates small political units, although internationalism between these units is one part of his project.

[15] Bulpitt 1972, pp. 287–288; Cook and Morgan 1971, p. 32.

[16] Held 1987, pp. 279–280.

[17] Dahl and Tufte 1973, pp. 13–15.

[18] About village compacts, one participatory, but intrusive institution in the Chinese countryside, see Shih 1999, pp. 292–294; about how local envy towards the wealthy in local politics, whether participatory or not, has inhibited chances for individual economic progress, see Zweig, pp. 140–141.

can control, even if only through voting, the most significant decisions.[19] Economic exchange on the modern scale, not to mention problems like pollution, are problems on a national, or even, global scale. A small unit cannot independently allot sufficient resources and command enough authority to solve these problems. Thus, small size sometimes disempowers people. However, the opposite is possible too. Decisions made in small units often affect the interests of non-participants,[20] leaving them without a say in issues concerning them.[21]

This observation illustrates one evident problem in Chinese democracy. The Chinese populace has mainly had a chance to express their opinions about local matters, while they have had little say in most national decisions, such as those regarding guiding ideological principles or national distributional priorities. Consequently, most national decisions probably reach a commoner only during the downward process of "to the masses" and appear to be more like political education than the outcome of real popular influencing in the national affairs. Unless a person joined the Party or engaged in public political theorization, there were relatively few channels for a commoner to influence national-level policy choices.

Thus, in decentralization lies a paradox. As Jane Mansbridge describes it: the small size of a political unit "does increase the average individual's power within his or her group, but also reduces the group's power vis-à-vis the rest of the world."[22] In decentralized political units local interests are served well, but division into small units neglects interregional and national needs.[23] This may even be the master plan in the Chinese communist political organization. It is evident that giving the people more say in politics was one important aim in establishing the political structure of village democracy,[24] but at the same time, the communists managed to create, purposely or as a byproduct, a system that fragmented any grassroots resistance.[25] Moreover, small units may have reduced power to negotiate with the higher administrative levels. At least, Western theorists main-

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[19]   Dahl and Tufte 1973, p. 13; Cook and Morgan 1971, pp. 16–17, 28–29, 34.

[20]   Holden 1974, pp. 227–228.

[21]   However, to my understanding, a nation-state does not escape this criticism. A political unit of any size decides on affairs affecting people of neighboring areas. Likewise, decision making that empowers some groups affects outsiders, regardless of whether we're talking about group-centered participatory democracy, corporatist negotiations, or pluralist interest group pressure towards the state administration.

[22]   Mansbridge 1983, p. 279.

[23]   Pennock 1979, pp. 458–459.

[24]   For the democratizing effects of the communist mobilization among the populace during the revolution, see Hinton 1966, p. 644, and for people's own pride in their recent political inclusion, see Friedman et al. 1991, p. 285.

[25]   Chen 1986, pp. 507–509.

tain that although consensus formation is easier in small groups, they are not taken as seriously as groups commanding larger membership.[26]

The relation between democracy and liberty are also problematic in a small community, both in internal and external terms. Local autonomy and local democracy have a complex relationship. Wide local participation might weaken a locality in terms of its external relations, while local autonomy may very well coexist with a local autocracy or oligarchy.[27] In China, both national leaders and the media have been concerned about local tyrants ignoring central policies and bullying local people.[28] At the same time, local democracy has sometimes legitimized local resistance against central policies. Directly elected local leaders have a strong claim to democratic legitimacy that can be used to pursue localist ends when local and national interests collide.[29] However, in terms of democratic theory it is questionable whether local popular resistance permits a locality to resist or boycott central policies, at least if the central government is democratically elected by the populace.

Even more debatable is whether it is advantageous to link the economic and social units of daily life with political power and administrative structures. Through this kind of arrangement the Chinese communists wanted to empower the masses within the environment they worked and lived in and provide them with easy access to decision-making structures. Apart from politicizing daily life, which can be evaluated in both negative and positive terms, this kind of arrangement generated clearly unwanted side effects. A Chinese worker or peasant was left fully dependent on his work unit or commune, both in the administrative and economic sense. As Andrew Walder has described, both economic and political dependency on the same organ may create clientele networks.[30] In other words, linking daily life with political power may increase, rather than decrease, political inequality and strengthen a leader's position when he has both political and economic power over the commoners.

Nevertheless, community-level political units have advantages too. Jane Mansbridge argues that face-to-face assemblies in small units may not be the ideal way of solving community conflict or protecting each individual's interest, but they may be useful for strengthening the sense of the common interest or the will to find it. Interest in the common good intensifies because personal relations in small units make people inclined to take others' feelings and opinions into

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[26] Berry et al. 1993, p. 56.
[27] Bulpitt 1972, pp. 287–288, 298; UNDP 2002, p. 67.
[28] For one example, see Blecher 1983, pp. 76–79.
[29] Ding 2001, p. 86; Kelliher 1997, pp. 79–80.
[30] Walder 1988, ch. 5.

account.[31] Participation in deliberation can make participants recognize the interests they share and to regard their differences in terms of the issue, not as a personal conflict.[32]

Adversary or unitary democracy?

The size of the polity is not the only aspect affecting the feasibility of participatory democracy. Jane Mansbridge has recognized that there are two types of democracies present in every modern democracy. She calls the form of democracy that strives for equal protection of all interests through equal vote and majority rule adversary democracy. This form of democracy is very useful when interests conflict. Then quantitative measuring is needed to determine which decisions would benefit the majority. Alongside adversary democracy there is unitary democracy, which assumes that participants share a common interest and, thus, can arrive at a consensus about how to best advance the common good. This type of democracy generally requires face-to-face contact to bring about goodwill, mutual understanding, and rational discussion, which are needed in order to discover where the common interest between participants lies. Instead of dividing power as equally as possible to protect each interest, according to this type of democracy, best results come about when power is given to those most able to promote the common good. She concludes that all communities have both common and conflicting interests, meaning that democratic processes should be designed so that unitary and adversary methods are adopted in appropriate situations.[33] According to Jane Mansbridge, unitary democracy is suitable for committees, organizations, workplaces, town meetings, and parliamentary discussions.[34] In addition, Jane Mansbridge sees that in non-Western decision making the preference is often to seek unitary ends through politics of harmony and compromise, instead of accepting that some interests may legitimately lose in majoritarian political processes.[35]

Many of the Chinese settings of democratic centralism are unitary in nature. Village meetings gather together villagers who most likely share common interests regarding many issues that concern their community. Likewise, Party meetings are again face-to-face gatherings of people, who, in many respects, share common backgrounds and expectations, even when the interests of units they

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31   Mansbridge 1983, pp. 278–286.

32   Warren 1996, pp. 255–256, 262.

33   Mansbridge 1983, pp. ix–x, 4–34, 270–277.

34   Mansbridge 1983, p. 32.

35   Mansbridge 1983, pp. 256–263, 294.

represent may conflict. Democratic centralist theory expects that inter-bureau-cracy negotiations and representative institutions alike seek the common interest through the exchange of opinions between people from different backgrounds.

Jane Mansbridge maintains that unitary democracy works as long as interests converge, but as soon as conflicts of interest arise, some methods of adversary de-mocracy should be adopted. If this does not happen, a unit of unitary democracy tends to suppress conflict. It may either try to keep divisive issues off of the agenda or press for unanimity.[36] Both of these pathologies are familiar to the Chinese political process, as was evident when the press discussion in 1978–1981 warned against forced unanimity and the postponement of difficult decisions. Not surprisingly, the press sought adversary democratic processes like majority vote to remedy the situation. Although Jane Mansbridge assumed that adversary methods are useful for making democratic decisions when conflicts of interest emerge, the Chinese experience had not led the Chinese communists to change their presump-tion that different interests can be balanced through rational discussion. Instead, the protection and legitimization of minority opinions and the objective measure-ment of support for leadership's proposals were given as reasons for supporting majoritarian voting. In addition, majoritarian voting was hoped to make responsi-bilities clear and speed up the decision-making process when consensus building proved lengthy. Likewise, the Chinese suggested that competitive elections would promote the talented to leading posts, which was not always the case with face-saving unitary elections with a single candidate or consensual promotions based on egalitarian criteria, such as years in office.

Desirability of political participation

The press discussion of 1978–1981 reveals several reasons for the Chinese theories of democracy to advocate wide popular participation. One of them was semantic. The meaning of democracy is rule by the people; and socialism is, among other things, rule by the majority.[37] Therefore, for China to call itself both democratic and socialist it must create conditions for wide popular participation. This means that the Chinese communists were not satisfied with representation, but demanded direct involvement in decision making by the entire adult populace. If ideally under socialism all should govern and take part in decision making in its all stages, in practice a weaker requirement of involving all in decision making and implementation in more or less direct ways proved satisfactory.[38]

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[36] Mansbridge 1983, p. 34.
[37] These definitions appeared in the 1978–1981 press discussion, for example.
[38] I follow here Jack Lively's classification and, with some modifications, borrow its two strongest interpretations of "rule of the people". See Lively 1975, p. 30.

Another reason for encouraging popular participation was historical. In China, the Communist Party's revolutionary success had relied strongly on popular participation and mobilization. In 1978–1981 it was quite common to refer to the Party traditions in the normative sense when calling for receptivity to the populace and responsibility towards it. This historical argument is closely related to legitimacy. According to the Chinese communists, a legitimate government must show concern for its subjects and allow them to make their will known in public matters.

Behind understandings about the relation of democracy and socialism, as well as in the adoption of a mobilization style of politics in the first place, lies the Marxist ideal of the general liberation of the human race. The true self-development and autonomy this liberation supposedly brings refers to the mastery over all forces determining one's life. Instead of being at the mercy of alien political and economic forces, one can become free only by participating in shaping these forces through decision making that pertains to all aspects of common affairs.[39] In what may come as a surprise to many Western readers, the reason for encouraging popular participation in China, thus, appears to be self-determination.

There are two paths for maximizing autonomous decision making in democratic theory. Not all democrats, of course, would choose autonomy as a central justification for democracy but many do.[40] Autonomy may be pursued either by minimizing the sphere of governmental activities and, thus, the political and legal intrusion upon individual choices,[41] or by maximizing political participation in order to maximize individuals' influence in collective decisions that concern them. The Chinese, along with most Marxists, reject the possibility of attaining freedom through limiting state control. The Marxist theory warns that freedom from political control does not in and of itself lead to more freedom, especially if an individual is consequently subjected to economic and social forces totally outside of her control. Therefore, Marxists attempt to bring all forces affecting an individual under popular control by expanding the political sphere. Autonomy is realized when all matters affecting an individual are under democratic political control. Here autonomy does not refer to unconstrained individual decisions, but to the chance to participate in decision making regarding all matters concerning us. A political system thus maximizes individual autonomy if every individual's opinions shape the political outcomes. The typical Chinese perspective of autonomy was social and collective, and thus nearer to the Western conceptions of empowerment or popular sovereignty than individual liberty.

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[39] Strictly speaking, it is not the Chinese theory of democratic centralism but Marxist historical materialism that makes this assumption.

[40] For a discussion about autonomy as a central justification for democracy see Weale 1999, pp. 62–74, 90–91.

[41] This is a classical liberalist doctrine, revived, e.g., by Hayek 1960.

Participation and liberty

There is an open controversy among Western political theorists whether partici-
patory democracy would increase liberty or clash with it. Many Western individu-
alists expect that extensive participation cannot be voluntary, and if participation
is compulsory, it violates freedom, which is a central principle of democracy.
Opponents of extensive political participation maintain that it is inimical to liberty
not to let a person choose whether he wants to participate or not. They fear that
the politicization of all arenas of human life would leave no legitimate limits to
governmental activities.[42]

Supporters of participatory politics respond that the boundary between the
public and the private is a political problem, itself requiring public deliberation.[43]
It is well-known, for example, that distinguishing between the legitimate political
sphere and privacy has silenced many important political questions, such as subju-
gation of women or racial discrimination because the issues have been classified
as private. However, the participatory inclusion of formerly unrepresented groups
like women has not necessarily politicized issues that formerly belonged in the
private sphere. For example, domestic violence or household chores have until
recently also belonged to the private sphere in socialist China.

Even if private issues appear on participatory agendas, the result is not nec-
essarily liberating. David Held argues that by allowing democracy to prevail over
all other considerations, participatory democrats expect that the questions of indi-
vidual liberty and distributional matters can be left to democratic negotiations or
to the democratic will of the demos. However, other theories of democracy are
legitimately concerned about whether democratic reason always prevails. Partici-
pation itself does not necessarily lead to consistent and desirable political out-
comes, partly because of the tensions between individual liberty, social justice and
democratic decisions.[44] The Chinese communists, at least in the Mao era, have
generally prioritized social justice and wide popular participation over the
individual's own right to choose. Although I do not automatically condemn such
prioritization, it has brought with it disregard for individual liberty and dignity, for
example when the state promoted redistribution of property through popular
participatory processes.[45]

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[42]   Parry 1972, pp. 31–32.

[43]   Hyland 1995, pp. 126–127.

[44]   Held 1987, pp. 263–264, 281.

[45]   For eye-witness descriptions of humiliation and violence during the participatory politics of
       land reform, see, e.g., Hinton 1966.

Even some Western theorists maintain that since collective autonomy comes into being only through participation in common affairs, relative diminution of the area of individual autonomy can be justified.[46] Nevertheless, extensive politicization involves risks not always obvious to the advocates of wide participation. Mark Warren reminds us that although an autonomous person needs to be able to stand up for his rights in the political field, he at the same time needs the emotional comfort and security of private and non-political social relationships.[47] The Chinese experience illustrates that not everyone is willing to antagonize personal relations for political activism.[48] Terrence Cook and Patrick Morgan warn that "what Stalin called 'engineering the soul' may be inherent in direct democracy," because if everyone governs, all are supervised as closely as legislators are in the representative systems. If representative systems allow more freedom for private citizens, it is not self-evident that the same is true in participatory democracies.[49] In other words, extensive politicization can diminish individual autonomy because it might subject individuals to constant supervision. There is evidence that something like this has happened in China.[50]

Participation and empowerment

Empowerment of ordinary people is one of the main rationales for participatory democracy both in China and in the West. Western participatory democrats call for increasing democratic participation on the grounds that freedom, equality, and justice are not possible as long as citizens remain merely passive subjects.[51] The delegation of power to representatives and consent to the resulting policies are not enough to make a polity democratic.[52] Therefore, participatory democracy represents the democratic ideal better than representative democracy.[53] It is not democratic to leave citizens under the constraint of a wholly external agency in political matters,[54] but rather, those who will be affected by the decisions should have a right to influence their outcome.[55]

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46   Hyland 1995, pp. 121–122.
47   Warren 1996, p. 258.
48   Walder 1988, p. 167–169, 249.
49   Cook and Morgan 1971, p. 33.
50   Shih 1999, pp. 286, 293–294; Walder 1988, pp. 123–124.
51   Barber 1984, pp. 146–147.
52   Hyland 1995, p. 233.
53   Berry et al. 1993, p. 45.
54   Hyland 1995, p. 109.
55   Richardson 1983, p. 52.

The Chinese rationale for increasing participation in order to curb bureau-
cratism is evident also in the Western argumentation for participatory democracy.
Indeed, participation widely distributes authority and coercive power and, thus,
counters bureaucracy and guards against tyranny.[56] Participatory democracy
brings the government closer to the people.[57] It makes government more respon-
sive to the citizens' preferences.[58] The Chinese and Western advocates of popular
participation agree on the need for popular supervision of self-interested power
holders.[59] Yet, the Chinese do not share the individualist starting point often heard
in the West. If Western supporters see participatory politics as providing people
with the means to defend their own interest,[60] the Chinese even advocate the use
of use popular pressure to prevent decision makers from deviating from the
common interest.[61] If radical Western theorists advocate participation against
structures of power and domination,[62] the Chinese have seldom recognized that
participatory acts against elitism are legitimate even against socialist power
structures. In another sense, though, the Chinese saw wide popular participation as
a way to alter power structures and redistribute power and wealth. Like Western
advocates of participatory politics, they advocated democratization of all authority
structures, not only state structures. Therefore, both Chinese and Western
supporters of participatory democracy have maintained that participation can give
commoners some control over workplace and community affairs.[63] Both maintain
that political equality can be enhanced when common people learn to use their
political power by participating on the level and in issues familiar to them.[64]

Western sympathizers of participatory politics argue that participants can
direct resources towards their own ends.[65] There is evidence that in the Chinese
participatory political settings common welfare issues have been central, but I
have no way to prove whether this was an intended or unintended result of wide
participation.[66] Whichever the case, the Chinese can perhaps agree with the

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[56]   Cook and Morgan 1971, p. 15; Parry 1972, p. 19.

[57]   Berry et al. 1993, p. 1.

[58]   Berry et al. 1993, p. 6.

[59]   Weale 1999, p. 104.

[60]   Parry 1972, pp. 19–20, 21.

[61]   Birrell 1969, p. 423; Shih 1999, p. 270.

[62]   Hyland 1995, p. 220.

[63]   Holden 1974, p. 223–225; Pateman 1970, pp. 35, 42–43, 106.

[64]   Socialization through participation is the central argument in Pateman 1970, see, e.g.,
       evidence on the page 82.

[65]   Richardson 1983, pp. 63–64.

[66]   Lee 1991, pp. 167–169, argues that Chinese industrial units allocated more resources to
       social benefits than the state intended. Shih 1999, p. 288, notes that villages are themselves
       proud of their services, while higher-ups are not very interested in the issue.

Western claim that a participatory regime promotes freedom since it calls on its citizens to provide for themselves things which a despotic regime might provide for them.[67] The provision of local services, as well as the mobilization of ordinary people to participate in policy implementation, may reflect the Chinese communists' attempt to increase popular self-government. Unfortunately, such mobilization has not always been voluntary.

Western participatory democrats advocate participatory democracy because of freedom it generates. Only participation makes the political autonomy essential to democracy possible.[68] Participatory politics brings freedom because it gives people a say in political decisions.[69] To this, the Chinese would probably agree. Yet, when it comes to the use of participation to ensure that individual liberties are not encroached upon,[70] the argument relies on a Western individualistic worldview. Although these arguments appear convincing, political participation does not automatically generate freedom and autonomy. Mark Warren reminds us that since becoming political makes a person aware of the differences he has with others, this awareness does not necessarily lead him to become more autonomous but can also lead him to become partisan or isolated.[71]

Whether participation truly empowers is a much debated question among Western political scientists. After all, participatory politics can even increase the power of the already powerful. At worst, participatory democracy might increase the power of the majority and the elite who have financial and media resources instead of giving voice to a plurality of opinions.[72] Quantitative studies show a correlation between participation and familiarity with politics, but Western theorists have disagreed about whether political participation enhances belief in one's own political competence,[73] or whether those who already feel efficacious tend to participate politics.[74] Western empirical evidence shows that people are more likely to participate if they find opportunities to do so.[75] Other studies, however, find that the number of participants does not increase with the provision of participatory channels, although participatory mechanisms tend to direct participation towards participatory, communal and cooperative political acts.[76] However, there

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[67] Taylor 1989, p. 171.

[68] Barber 1984, p. 132, 134, 146–147; Hyland 1995, p. 220; Warren 1996, pp. 256–257.

[69] Taylor 1989, p. 170.

[70] Hyland 1995, p. 109.

[71] Warren 1996, p. 257.

[72] Cook and Morgan 1971, p. 18.

[73] Cook and Morgan 1971, p. 7; Pateman 1970, pp. 46, 73–74, 105.

[74] Richardson 1983

[75] Elden 1981, pp. 49–51. Berry et al. 1993, p. 96.

[76] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 94–98, 284, 286.

is survey evidence that active participants in community politics feel politically
efficacious. Community participation increases one's sense of efficacy especially
among the formerly politically disadvantaged groups.[77]

Tyranny of the masses

Even if participation would empower citizenry, empowerment itself does not
guarantee that popular power is used democratically. Western skeptics of wide
popular participation have warned of the tyranny of the majority or even mob rule.
The most classical arguments against increasing direct popular participation are
that mass participation produces impulsiveness, extremism, and violations of an
individual's liberty in the name of the public good or public opinion.[78] Partici-
patory decision making does not automatically produce decisions that respect
democratic values and the equality of people's rights.[79] Others who take a cau-
tious approach warn that the right to participate does not in and of itself guarantee
that participants' opinions will become more democratic, tolerant, and public-
spirited.[80] Contrarily, representative democracies allegedly have procedures and
institutions for protecting all parties, including the minority, against extremist
views and manipulation of the public opinion. Moreover, elected representatives
usually know how to compromise and bargain over issues, which is not always
true of amateurs and citizen groups.[81]

In my opinion, the Chinese do not answer these concerns satisfactorily. The
Chinese Communist Party assumed that its leadership can provide the necessary
guidance, systematization, and expertise to popular participation. Already when
formulating the theory of the mass line, Mao Zedong probably recognized that
lack of a long term vision, extremism, and too much populism could hamper a
meaningful political mass movement. His answer was a simple one: direct mass
participation needs visionary leadership ready to balance populist agitation with
reason and calm down extremism and impulsiveness. However, despite the Com-
munist Party leadership, mass mobilization has sometimes erupted into mob rule.
Especially when the leadership was paralyzed during the Cultural Revolution, it
was unable to control extremism, factionalism, and political violence. Further-

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[77] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 265–270.

[78] This criticism of Athenian democracy is summarized in, e.g., Held 1987, p. 27, and Corcoran
1983, p. 17.

[79] Harris 1983, pp. 219–223.

[80] Held 1987, p. 280.

[81] Birch 1993, p. 86.

more, sometimes the Party itself promoted violence and extremism.[82] Obviously, the Chinese participatory system has been vulnerable to both extremist agitation and systematic disregard for individuals' rights.

Yet, the press discussion in 1978-1981 seldom saw that too much popular power could be a problem. Rather, increasing the power of the people was seen as the solution to factionalism and authoritarianism. Generally, articles were more concerned about non-democratic leaders than about the non-democratic masses. Many even argued that only majority rule can prevent tyranny. Nevertheless, concerns about mob rule were not absent from the press discussion because it wanted to curb some phenomena it viewed as the misunderstanding of democracy, which it labeled anarchism.

One reason for the Chinese theory of democratic centralism to refrain from considering problems of popular tyranny is, of course, its attempt to bring about the rule of the formerly oppressed strata of the society. There is more to it than this, however. The theory of democratic centralism does not advocate adversary democratic forms, which openly set majority and minority views against one another. Instead of simply adopting the proposal supported by the majority, decision makers should balance minority and majority views. It is thus possible that the theory of democratic centralism might even perceive deliberative decision making as the defense against the tyranny of the majority over the minority.[83] However, what was never pondered in China is whether state power could become so intrusive that it would actually violate the rights of individuals or groups.

Participation and legitimacy

One reason to support wider participation in China and the West alike is that popular participation and opinion solicitation keep the government attuned to citizens' and localities' interests and concerns, allowing the government to better provide for their needs.[84] Besides, those who will feel the consequences of the decision may have special insight into the issue and the ability to introduce new perspectives. Allegedly, better policies result from discussion because collective wisdom exceeds any individual's wisdom.[85] These arguments thus claim that participatory

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[82] During the pre-revolution campaigns for local political and economic control, the Party let popular indignation erupt into violence in order to teach peasants struggle methods and to make them side with the communists against the traditional village elite (Chen 1986, pp. 220, 501–502; Selden 1972, p. 135).

[83] Still, this conclusion is only speculation because the Chinese have never conceptualized problems in terms of the tyranny of the majority. However, this deliberative explanation can explain why majorities and their contents have not become an issue in China.

[84] Parry 1972, pp. 20–21; Birch 1993, p. 81.

[85] Cook and Morgan 1971, pp. 12–13; Pennock 1979, p. 442; Richardson 1983, pp. 60–61.

politics produces better and more inclusive policies, and thus improves policy performance. Yet, critics remind us that participation in decision making does not necessarily mean greater satisfaction with the results.[86]

Another line of argumentation claims that participation increases the government's legitimacy.[87] Western theorists maintain that after a person has participated in the selection of officials and can communicate her political opinions to decision makers, she is more likely to comply voluntarily with the government's rules and orders.[88] Participatory activities that stimulate decision makers to respond are especially likely to increase the sense of governmental responsiveness.[89] Because participation decreases frustration and alienation, the legitimacy it produces is beneficial for the political system and individuals alike.[90] Naturally, improved policy performance should indirectly enhance regime legitimacy, as has been emphasized in China.

Increased legitimacy has been seen both in positive terms, as social integration, and in negative terms, as social control and co-optation.[91] At worst, small-group participatory democracy is evaluated as pseudo-democracy, with palliative, co-optive, and mystifying functions.[92] Participation increases the acceptance of communal decisions but not necessarily autonomy, since it can bring about co-optation or even social pressures to comply.[93] Western evidence suggests that participatory democracy increases one's sense of external efficacy. In other words, in a participatory setting people tend to sense that the political system is responsive to citizens. However, people do not necessarily develop a stronger sense of internal efficacy that would make them believe in their abilities to understand and influence the political system.[94] Efficacy among the Chinese commoners reveals a similar pattern: the measure of external efficacy exceeds that of internal

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[86]   Cook and Morgan 1971, p. 11.

[87]   Some even see the right of political participation as a prerequisite for governmental legitimacy (Parry 1972, p. 22).

[88]   Birch 1993, p. 82; Lakoff 1996, pp. 179–180; Parry 1972, p. 36; Richardson 1983, pp. 57–59.

[89]   Berry et al. 1993, pp. 245–247.

[90]   Pennock 1979, p. 442.

[91]   Richardson 1983, pp. 58–59, 66.

[92]   Blecher 1991, p. 140, cites this characterization by Sidney Verba.

[93]   Holden 1974, p. 210.

[94]   Berry et al. 1993, p. 291; Finkel 1985, p. 893. In fact, the form of participation has a considerable effect on the resulting efficacy. Voting has a positive impact on external efficacy only, while more cognitively demanding participation also develops internal efficacy. Participation in protest activities, then, tends to decrease external efficacy. (Finkel 1985, p. 906; Finkel 1987, p. 461–462.) Likewise, Berry et al. 1993, pp. 204–205, gives some indication that those engaging in community participation were more confident over their abilities to understand politics than those not participating.

efficacy.[95] Thus, participation can serve to increase popular acquiescence to government authority. By making citizens believe that their government is responsive, participation contributes to regime stability.[96]

Co-optation can be inimical to autonomy by limiting the choice of strategies and arguments. If this is the case, Chinese participatory politics could make people readier to accept the regime and its policies.[97] Furthermore, it might mean that popular influencing mainly takes place through available government controlled channels.[98] Yet, co-opted channels are not necessarily ineffective for bringing about responsive decisions. At least Western empirical evidence shows that even if influencing through participatory channels established by the government sometimes makes participants more focused on seeking compromise, this is well-compensated by the superior efficiency of these channels compared to independent organizations that need to engage in more difficult tactics to be heard by the government.[99]

The governmental role in participation should not be seen only as a limitation. Participation is not automatically successful. According to Berry, Portney and Thomson, the support of local governments has been crucial for American neighborhood participation. Where it has been successful, local governments have helped in organizing neighborhoods, providing them with institutionalized channels to city governments, and have ensured that neighborhood participation is inclusive.[100] In China, officially sanctioned channels prove to be both frequently used and effective,[101] demonstrating that the government has been dedicated to providing meaningful channels for popular participation.

Co-optation is not an inevitable result of political participation that utilizes official channels. Along with a better understanding of the government's aims, a participant becomes more aware of the rules of the political process and thus more competent in political influencing. Thus, political skills acquired during participation either increase a person's loyalty towards the political system or help him resist inequalities in the existing order.[102] Moreover, active participants become

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95   Shi 2000 B, p. 546. I do not claim that this result necessarily is caused by participatory political structures in China, but the similar patterns are worth noting when examining the possibility of participatory democracy in China.

96   Finkel 1985, p. 893.

97   This is contrary to the expectations of those who assume tension between the government and the people is growing in China.

98   After all, participation through low cost official channels might be more cost effective than engaging in high cost oppositional activities, at least as long as participation through state promoted channels brings about *some* effect.

99   Berry et al. 1993, pp. 147–150.

100   Berry et al. 1993, p. 287.

101   Tang and Parish 2000, pp.195–196.

102   Cook and Morgan 1971, pp. 10–11.

aware of biases in the political arena. Consequently, their perception of equal treatment for all is likely to decrease. Still, this awareness generally is not found to be alienating, but rather, it makes them more motivated to deal with the perceived problems.[103]

Even if co-optation takes place, it does not mean that communication remains unidirectional. Participatory structures tend to increase leaders' attention to the popular voice as well. The Western evidence shows that community participation through official participatory institutions increases governmental responsiveness to popular preferences. Furthermore, responsiveness is not biased towards any particular group, since participatory politics seems to be able to balance differing demands and group interests.[104] However, residents' feeling of powerlessness is likely to increase when the government uses participation only for one-way communication and introduces its administrative decisions without expecting to encounter oppositional popular voices.[105]

Western promoters of participation maintain that participation creates a feeling of community and thus brings psychological satisfaction to participants.[106] Charles Taylor even argues that individuals identify with a political system only if they have some say in it.[107] Others assert that participation gives meaning to one's role at work[108] or in the community. Participation makes individuals appreciate the claims of other individuals and the community as a whole.[109] Some disagree and say that public deliberation sometimes makes participants aware of how their interests diverge from others' interests. Although participation sometimes enhances autonomy, at other times it may merely create a sense of separateness.[110] Yet, Western participants themselves report an increased sense of community and defused hostilities between differing parties.[111]

Moreover, there are different objects of legitimacy. It is possible that participation affects the legitimacy of a political unit, decision making procedures, the regime, or its policies differently. Generally, evidence shows that political participation is likely to enhance the legitimacy of them all. However, it is not evident whether poorly designed, strictly limited, or otherwise unsuccessful participation decreases the legitimacy of all of these entities or only some. Besides, even

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[103] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 184–185.
[104] Berry et al. 1993, p. 153–158.
[105] Broadbent 1998, pp. 160–161.
[106] Cook and Morgan 1971, pp. 9–10; Pennock 1979, p. 444.
[107] Taylor 1989, p. 179.
[108] Holden 1974, p. 223.
[109] Holden 1974, p. 210.
[110] Warren 1996, pp. 256–257.
[111] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 201–202, 237–243.

successful participation can increase the legitimacy of various political entities to varying degrees. It is not impossible that the participatory level gains legitimacy and bargaining power in relation to the state organs only indirectly under popular control.[112] Since participatory politics generally takes place at the local level, this might enhance the bargaining power of localities, or even their ability to partially refrain from implementing central policies.[113] The opposite is possible too. Western empirical research shows that participatory structures often focus mainly on the parochial issues. As a result, participants' became more interested in neighborhood issues than larger-scale issues.[114] Logically, this situation is likely to disempower local levels vis-à-vis the central state because the national level would be subjected to less popular pressure. Both of these results are relevant in evaluating Chinese participation: a direct popular mandate sometimes strengthens grassroots leaders vis-à-vis their immediate superiors in conflict situations, but keeps localities weak in contrast to the central government.

Costs of participation

Western individualist theories of democracy leave it to each individual to decide whether she considers participating worthwhile, since participation involves costs. As Giovanni Sartori puts it, the more people participate in decision making and the bigger the group whose backing is needed for common agreement, the more the costs of decision making increase. Simultaneously, in inverse relation fewer non-participants are exposed to external decisions.[115] Many Western political theorists doubt that common people have enough time, energy, and knowledge for intensive participation.[116] Even if they do, they may prefer other activities instead. Yet, promoters of participation do not recognize other types of interests aside from persons' political interests.[117] Contrarily, participatory theories of democracy seldom consider the costs of participation. Presumably, each individual should value political participation as an experience and as the means to empowerment. Weighing both arguments, Albert Weale concludes that no political

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[112] For the strong legitimacy Western participatory structures enjoy compared to representative politics, see Berry et al. 1993, p. 225.

[113] In later chapters, we will find that local evasion is common in China, although certainly not only because of leverage brought by participatory politics.

[114] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 172–173, 181, 188.

[115] Sartori 1987, pp. 217–222.

[116] Holden 1974, p. 229.

[117] Burnheim 1985, p. 65; Pennock 1979, pp. 463–464.

morality requires that one either stress participation or choose representative institutions to save commoners' time.[118]

Furthermore, costs are not constant, and practical institutional solutions can reduce costs. Thus, Westerners sympathetic to popular participation argue that citizens will find it worthwhile to spend time and energy on participation, if participation proves easy and effective. Well-designed institutions can create mechanisms for participation that match residents' time, money, and skills.[119] Nevertheless, the costs should not been completely ignored. After all, Western scholarship has demonstrated that the Chinese commoners understand participation to involve costs.[120]

In my opinion, much of Western criticism about the costs of participation is based on an implicit assumption that a participatory process would be relatively similar to representative politics. For example, Robert Dahl has calculated the immense time needed for a large populace to voice their opinions.[121] However, Robert Dahl equates this situation with voting. Actually, not everyone needs to voice her personal opinion during a meeting. It is enough that all viable propositions are voiced. Besides, not everyone needs to speak because in face-to-face situations people have many other ways of expressing content or disapproval.[122] Other critics argue that unless everyone always attends meetings in order to protect his interests, the result will be unrestrained minority government.[123] If all have to engage in defensive participation to guarantee that they are present when something concerning their interest is decided, it would allegedly be better if no one participated.[124] In fact, the exit option is often used in participatory situations. Those who disagree with the decision, even if they are present at the meeting, simply refrain from implementing it rather than voice their disagreement.[125] That is, participatory politics protects participants' interests in different ways than representative political institutions.

Some concerns remain, though. Robert Dahl remarks that participatory decision making is either time-consuming or leaves participation to a few active par-

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[118] Weale 1999, p. 105.

[119] Berry et al. 1993, p. 72.

[120] For example, peasants were paid to go to meeting or absentees were fined or coerced into participation in order to guarantee turnout in political meetings (Hinton 1966, pp. 261–264; Oi 1991, p. 149). Also, many Chinese workers took back the time spent in political meetings by taking some household cores, such as personal hygiene and laundry, with them to work (Walder1988, pp. 215–216).

[121] Dahl 1989, p. 227.

[122] Mansbridge 1983, pp. 272, 274.

[123] Holden 1974, p. 230.

[124] Weale 1999, p. 93.

[125] Marshall 1984.

ticipants. The result is a representative arrangement, but one not decided through equal vote. Therefore, the choices of those who represent others remain arbitrary.[126] Likewise, Jane Mansbridge observes that in participatory situations every participant formally gives her consent, but the interests of the shy or less articulate are underserved. Actually, most participants are informally represented by those who do speak up during meetings.[127] Moreover, the Chinese experience shows that those voicing their opinions first influence how others continue to discuss the issue.[128] These informal inequalities and the uneven distribution of power in participatory settings can be manipulated too.[129]

Critics claim that participatory decision making causes inefficiency.[130] It increases decision making costs and takes longer.[131] The Chinese example shows that discussions are time-consuming, especially when resources are cut back.[132] Contrarily, supporters claim that participatory decisions increase efficiency.[133] In practice, consensus building proves time-consuming, but consensual decision making helps avert delays in implementation. Participants are likely to consent even if their position does not win out because their participation in the preparation of the decision makes them regard the decision as legitimate even when it goes against their group's interests. Delays in implementation are also unlikely because the participatory process minimizes outside support for any group's attempt to change collectively decided outcomes. During participation, citizens become willing to understand reasonable demands, not least because those who benefit from them sit in the same meetings. Administrators and financiers see the lengthy participatory process as being worthwhile because it increases the quality of decisions and makes decisions binding and predictable.[134] As Jane Mansbridge puts it, consensual decision making brings efficiency to coordination and commitment, and results in a more comprehensive and informed decision.[135] Obviously, there is no single criterion for efficiency. After all, public preparation reduces

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[126] Dahl 1989, pp. 227–228.

[127] Mansbridge 1983, pp. 251, 274.

[128] Jacobs 1991, p. 184.

[129] The Chinese Communist Party manipulates mass meetings by securing in advance that some outspoken activists take the floor first or by securing beforehand the backing of Party members in meetings (Chen An 1999, pp. 199; Oi 1991, p. 150–151).

[130] Parry 1972, pp. 32–33.

[131] Richardson 1983, p. 62.

[132] For example, when reduction of personnel requires discussions with workers in all factory departments. See Brugger 1976, p. 133.

[133] Parry 1972, pp. 33–34.

[134] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 144–147, 208–212.

[135] Mansbridge 1983, p. 169–170.

costly delays at the stage when resources have already been allocated to the project,[136] although the process of decision making itself slows down somewhat.

Moreover, critics fear that participatory decision making might cause organizational conflict and confusion. Diffusion of decision making in many local or functional units allegedly increases the costs of bargaining, and even creates jurisdictional disputes. Small units are likely to defend their parochial interests against redistribution of resources in the name of overall justice.[137] Representative institutions allegedly make coherent decisions, while in participatory democracy other participatory organs or outsiders can block the decision made by one participatory organ.[138] Actually, early Chinese experiments with worker participation in management led to problems of coordination, such as hurried planning, material supply problems, and lack of a liaison between management and teams.[139] However, these organizational disputes are due to unclear organizational responsibilities and divisions of power, not due to participation itself.

Critics claim that participatory democracy might produce undemocratic and incompetent decisions.[140] In its attempt to equalize power, participatory democracy often disregards expertise and special skills.[141] The result is incompetent and dysfunctional decisions.[142] Diluting the power of nonpartisan experts can even enhance the authority of ideological activists.[143] Although these objections are mostly elitist ones and reveal a distrust of ordinary citizens' abilities, the danger that unitary democracies can be very sensitive to any differences in power appears to be real.[144] Recalling Chinese socialist history, the danger of disrespect of expertise and ideologization of even technical decisions seems real, although not inevitable.

Participation and governability

Some Western theorists suspect that extensive participation would negatively affect governability. They fear that the broad participation of uninformed citizens

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[136] Berry et al. 1993, p. 207.

[137] Cook and Morgan 1971, p. 34, 38.

[138] Birch 1993, p. 86.

[139] Brugger 1976, p. 271.

[140] Cook and Morgan 1971, p. 30.

[141] Mansbridge 1983, p. 247; Sartori 1987, pp. 167–170.

[142] Cook and Morgan 1971, pp. 34–35; Sartori 1987, pp. 163–165.

[143] Berry et al. 1993, p. 8.

[144] The Chinese example shows that participatory units can be hostile to the accumulation of individual wealth as well. See Zweig 1997, pp. 140–141; Perry 2002, pp. 299–301.

could threaten social stability. Therefore, social order and democratic political ideals allegedly can prevail, and the government can remain stable only under a mediocre level of popular participation.[145] These theorists doubt an average citizen's political abilities. In complex modern societies one can rationally cast a vote relying on information shortcuts and opinion leaders, but this is allegedly not enough in direct democracy.[146] If public opinion is uninformed, intolerant, and influenced by those with financial and media resources, creating a government that is highly sensitive to public opinion can prove dysfunctional, and even dangerous.[147]

Some theorists fear that wide participation would subject the government to direct popular pressures and, thus, would decrease the government's ability to make decisions with overall, long-term interests in mind.[148] However, the evidence from Western participatory systems shows that these comments are over-cautious. Participatory democracy has its own ways to enhance the government's autonomy from social pressures. When, participatory organs face direct popular pressures, they shield administrators so that they can play a more reflective and solution-seeking role.[149]

Some Western theorists warn that participation can lead to rising expectations the government cannot meet. This can make people cynical and consequently undermine governmental authority.[150] Critics fear that participatory democracy places many new and unreasonable demands on the government. These demands can cause information overload able to paralyze the government.[151] However, again Western experience proves these fears unfounded. Participatory mechanisms not only put additional political demands on the government, but they simultaneously provided intermediate-level forums to reconcile conflict the between the administration and residents.[152]

Other theorists doubt the ability of participatory organs to reach compromises. They argue that decision making in small self-governing units is more prone to

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[145] See, e.g., Milbrath 1965, pp. 144–149. This was one of the typical studies of the time which considered it normal and unproblematic that, for example, people with higher socioeconomic status participated more than average (pp. 114–128), while women were more passive political participators than men (pp. 54, 135–136). Kavanagh 1972 answers some typical elitist arguments against increasing participation on the grounds that popular participation allegedly threatens democracy and liberal values.

[146] Lakoff 1996, p. 180.

[147] Cook and Morgan 1971, p. 18.

[148] Birch 1993, p. 77.

[149] Berry et al. 1993, p. 187.

[150] These views are cited by Berry et al. 1993, pp. 8, 24.

[151] Berry et al. 1993, p. 199; Lakoff 1996, p. 181.

[152] Berry et al. 1993, p. 200.

disregard minority interests or deadlock than representative government.[153] When conflict is intense, proceduralism can deal with conflict better than a more emotional face-to-face setting.[154] Participatory democracy is counterproductive if it leads to persistent conflict and political alienation.[155] These critics shun intense participation because of the possible instability and extremism it can bring about. They see that the intensity of participation could undermine the rational consideration needed for moderation.[156] They expect that participatory structures draw in discontented people and are thus destabilizing the system.[157]

However, Western survey evidence does not show that participation would increase political discontent and alienation. Instead of frustration and anti-community attitudes, participators develop a deeper sense of community and a higher degree of trust in the government than inactive townspeople. Participators tend to develop a sense of the political responsiveness and effectiveness of participation. They feel that the process is open and learn about the opportunities available in the system. Even politically inactive people develop trust in the representativeness of participatory systems.[158]

Chinese participatory democratic experiments have sometimes produced ungovernability. They led to radicalization and extremism during the Cultural Revolution, perhaps because the Party, then under popular attack, was unable to act as the arbitrator in conflicts among participating groups and because participatory units were then often highly exclusive and ideologically committed.[159] Nevertheless, in normal times the Chinese participatory process has a built-in arbitrator provided by the Communist Party. Moreover, requiring the participation of all villagers or factory workers, not just activists, encourages moderation. Considering its ruinous experiences during the Cultural Revolution, it may be surprising that present-day China promotes participatory democracy precisely to increase governability.[160] Evidently, after decades of experience with grassroots participation, the Chinese communists still believe that public participation amongst one's peers moderates individualistic demands, forces localities to solve local conflicts themselves, and brings public pressure against those who attempt to individually evade common agreements and state demands. Curiously few are the

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[153] Pennock 1979, p. 439.

[154] Mansbridge 1983, pp. 273–274.

[155] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 29–30, 195.

[156] Holden 1974, pp. 229–230; Sartori 1987, pp. 118–119.

[157] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 179–180.

[158] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 174–180, 243, 247, 251.

[159] As Lowell Dittmer observes, the activism of the Cultural Revolution deprived not only those exposed to criticism, but also the silent majority, of any voice in the process (Dittmer 1974, p. 354).

[160] Kelliher 1997, p. 66; Lawrence 1994, p. 67; Zweig 2000, p. 121.

Chinese claims that commoners somehow would be too ignorant or selfish for participatory decision making.

Education through participation

One Western tradition speaking in favor of extending the scope of popular participation assumes that greater popular participation helps people develop their knowledge about and interest in political issues. Participation should increase peoples' skills of argumentation, organization and democratic influencing.[161] It gives participants feelings of dignity, self-respect, and self-fulfillment.[162] When participating, participants become aware of their true interests.[163] Participation generates informed understanding of alternative perspectives and, thus, tolerance towards different opinions.[164] In public life, people have to get beyond their narrow self-interest and consider the overall effects of the policy proposal.[165] Thus, local participation allegedly helps develop the skills necessary for national-level participation as well.[166] In sum, participation teaches people to take more active political roles.

Many theorists assume that political participation strengthens democratic values. Political participation increases participants' commitment to the collective good and to cooperating with others.[167] Participation enables a person to understand political problems better, evaluate information and policy alternatives more objectively, consider the wellbeing of others, and see the impact of his decisions.[168] As a result, a person gains more control over his life and becomes more responsible for his actions.[169] In other words, one learns public virtues through participation. Thereby, many political theorists assume a participant will become more tolerant, informed, and considerate of others.[170]

Some Western empirical studies are positive about the educative effects of participation. They find that workers develop the same skills in workplace democracy that are needed for participation in political life in general.[171] Participation in

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[161] Parry 1972, pp. 26–31; Pateman 1970, p. 74.

[162] Pennock 1979, p. 443; Richardson 1983, pp. 54–55.

[163] Richardson 1983, p. 56.

[164] Hyland 1995, p. 124.

[165] Berry et al. 1993, p. 258; Mill 1861, pp. 48–49, 156–157..

[166] Cook and Morgan 1971, p. 9; Mill 1861, pp. 66–69, 156–159, 268–269.

[167] Lively 1975, p. 140; Warren 1996, p. 241.

[168] Mansbridge 1983, p. 279; Cook and Morgan 1971, pp. 8–9; Pennock 1979, p. 442.

[169] Cook and Morgan 1971, pp. 15–16; Mansbridge 1983, p. 279.

[170] Warren 1996, p. 241.

[171] Elden 1981.

political activities exposes a person to conflicting ideas and increases individuals' knowledge about politics, while mere voting is not enough to produce similar effects.[172] American participatory programs for the poor actually trained then-underrepresented ethnic group leaders to also participate in administration in higher-level politics.[173]

Others are more cautious about assuming that participatory skills automatically spill over to the polity level. Edward Greenberg has found that in democratically managed workplaces workers develop a more cooperative work style and group responsibility than in conventional companies. However, these attitudes do not spill over to the society in general, but accentuate selfish attitudes in competition with outsiders.[174] Likewise, participation in neighborhoods improves understanding of neighborhood issues, but does little to enhance orientation to citywide issues.[175] We have surveyed evidence that participation increases a sense of community,[176] but this same sense of community can intensify competition with outsiders, especially when there is competition over resources, as between companies in the free market or Chinese localities competing for state allocations.

Empirical research in the West suggests that only cognitively demanding forms of participation increase political skills and self-confidence.[177] With more demanding forms of participation, community participation correlates with public-regarding attitudes and tolerance, but the research cannot establish whether these attitudes develop because of participation or whether people originally having these virtues are more likely to participate. Understandably, public-regarding incentives and tolerance towards dissent makes the decision to participate in community affairs more likely in the first place.[178]

Political theorists likewise assume that the educative effects of participation are not automatic. Jon Elster maintains that political participation can be educative and promote self-respect and self-realization only if a participant takes politics seriously.[179] This observation suggests that mobilized or formalistic participation can be ineffective in developing autonomous political skills. Chinese participatory politics is often blamed for being mobilized or formalistic. The fact that the

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[172] Leighley 1991.

[173] Berry et al. 1993, p. 34.

[174] Greenberg 1981.

[175] Berry et al. 1993, p, 188.

[176] Berry et al. 1993, p. 237–243.

[177] Finkel 1987, p. 461.

[178] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 229–230, 278. However, among traditionally more intolerant lower income groups the tolerance-increasing effect of participation seems to be evident (p. 226).

[179] Elster 1983, pp. 97–100.

Chinese have still learned skills for autonomous participation,[180] thus, indicates either that even Party-led participation was more meaningful to participants that some Western scholars have expected or that a person can learn the rules of the political game even during mobilized participation and then realize how to use them for her personal aims.[181]

Albert Weale agrees that participation may promote a sense of impartiality, but only if participation involves deliberation.[182] However, exposure to differing opinions and reasons during deliberation is perhaps not enough in and of itself. Psychological tests show that people are ready to consider differing opinions only if they can identify from the start with people or groups holding such views.[183] In a face-to-face communal setting it is likely that the whole community becomes some kind of in-group, providing incentives for mutual understanding, tolerance, and willingness to cooperate. However, community-wide in-group identification is not the only possibility. Identification with a smaller group, such as a clan, can promote intolerance and exclusion.

The Chinese press discussion of 1978–1981 did not raise arguments about the benefits of popular participation for individual development. Along with the Marxist tendency to emphasize collective benefits more than personal experiences, I assume that political culture partly explains this fact. The writers seemed to be confident that Chinese workers and peasants already had considerable skills of mass line participation, although they often emphasized that a Chinese commoner was not ready for direct national elections. Curiously, Western political theorists argue just the opposite: that citizens are not sufficiently mature for participatory democracy,[184] although their skills to elect national leaders are seldom questioned. This would simply suggest that people learn to use the political institutions that are available to them. After 30 years of socialism, a Chinese commoner has no particular problem in acting in participatory arenas.[185]

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[180] For studies showing that the Chinese participate politically to pursue interests and aims of their own, see Shi 1997; Jennings 1997.

[181] For studies suggesting that the commoners indeed saw benefits in Party-led participation, such as in anti-corruption campaigns, see Li Lianjiang 2001; O'Brien and Li 1999. For abilities to use mobilized participation for one's own aims, see, e.g., Chan et al. 1984, p. 250; Perry 2002, ch. 8; Shaw 1996, p. 211.

[182] Weale 1999, p. 93.

[183] See, e.g., David and Turner 2001.

[184] Not only opponents of participatory democracy are cautious. Likewise, those sympathetic to participation often assume that democracies demanding more citizen activism require some kind of transformation and education to develop less selfish citizens. See, e.g., Macpherson 1979, p. 99; Barber 1984, p. 265.

[185] It is, of course, possible that political theorists and scholars writing press articles had a more idealized picture of commoners' participatory skills than was the grassroots reality. Perhaps they even consciously ignored problems because they used the press to convince national

Personalized politics

Deciding matters in face-to-face situations, in which one has to face people with opinions differing from one's own, has many beneficial consequences. In personalized decision making harmony often becomes preferred over material self-interest.[186] Personal encounters and deliberation encourage people to find common ground with others. They provide participants with new information helping them to challenge simplistic stereotypes about the opponents and their opinions.[187] Face-to-face contact encourages participants to take responsibility for the implementation of common decisions.[188]

However, consensual politics in a face-to-face group is not always an ideal way for making decisions. Sometimes personalized politics forces superficial unity. Jane Mansbridge discovered that in order to preserve communal harmony and each individual's public face, differing interests or even mismanagement are often kept out of publicity.[189] In communal meetings individuals sometimes suppress their differing opinions to maintain harmonious relations with their neighbors and relatives. Also the awareness of the difficulty of finding support for diverging views in a small group may silence differing opinions.[190] This evidence comes from an environment where there is no political, economic, or religious group (such as the Chinese Communist Party) dominating local politics. However, the opposite is possible too. Participation sometimes increases awareness of differing opinions within the political community and increases one's willingness to oppose them.[191] Sometimes consensual decision making does not even aim at the mutual understanding and accommodation of all interests. Jane Mansbridge points out that demands for unanimity can work as a self-protective veto in times of mistrust.[192]

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leaders and to demonstrate the benefits of democratization and dismiss any objections. After all, the education about participatory skills under the rubric of anarchism may reflect permanent problems, not only temporary problems due to rapid changes in the political culture and institutions that made customary forms of participation outdated.

[186] Mansbridge 1983, p. 259.
[187] Warren 1996, p. 255.
[188] Mansbridge 1983, p. 172, 273.
[189] Mansbridge 1983, pp. 69, 73, 75.
[190] Mansbridge 1983, pp. 63–71, 273, 282–283.
[191] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 223–224.
[192] Mansbridge 1983, pp. 252–255.

Moreover, speaking in public is not always pleasant. Jane Mansbridge observes that fear of ridicule makes the less articulate avoid speaking in public.[193] Mark Warren makes the same point on the theoretical level. According to him, political action leads to social groundlessness and politicized identities because politics emerges when shared social knowledge becomes contestable. Political contestation might lead one to break the accepted rules of harmonious and predictable normal social behavior and to recognize that one's interests differ from those of some others in the community.[194] Participatory democrats often assume that political activity is an attractive and pleasant choice.[195] Mark Warren disagrees and argues that such adversarial mechanism as voting and litigation, being formal and even secret processes, are designed to reduce social groundlessness.[196]

Even in a Chinese participatory environment that usually encourages certain forms of activism, breaking social bonds and disturbing social harmony were not always an attractive alternative. Therefore, ordinary workers' passivity in public participatory arenas not only reflects the political risks of expression, as Andrew Walder emphasizes,[197] but also the unpleasantness of public self-expression in front of one's peers, especially if the issue could divide the workforce. Andrew Walder has revealed the unpopularity of political activists in the Chinese factory setting. He sees this as a deliberate strategy on behalf of the Chinese state to direct political discontent towards fellow workers rather than towards the management.[198] Shunning this kind of institutional intentionality, I would suppose, rather, that the roots of discontent are found in the lack of trust in over-politicized persons who broke the rules of proper social behavior and instrumentally disregarded their social bonds with friends and colleagues.

Moreover, I would interpret the outcome as a failure, rather than a success. The fact that only a minority opted to become political activists shows the limits of the Chinese communists' ability to politicize everyone, which quite likely was their ideological aim. If socialism tried to empower everyone through making them participate, this participation was often too costly to be pleasant for participants, not only in terms of time and effort but also in terms of social contacts. Activists politicized even their personal relations and conversations, if official policy

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[193] Mansbridge 1983, pp. 60–63.

[194] Warren 1996, pp. 244–254.

[195] Richardson 1983, pp. 56–57; Mansbridge 1983, p. 299.

[196] Warren 1996, p. 266.

[197] I.e., blots in one's personal files could disadvantage one in distribution of goods, apartments and jobs (Walder1988, pp. 90–92).

[198] Walder1988, pp. 167–169, 246–249.

so demanded.[199] Naturally, a rational person distances from a person who could accuse him publicly of any private matter or statement. In addition, an activist arouses discontent by siding with state interests against shared communal interests.[200]

Consensual politics and communal setting

An ideal setting for participatory democracy is a relatively small unit, like a Chinese village or workplace, where common interests are concrete and meeting-type popular input systems are feasible. Jane Mansbridge has detected three types of common interests: those based on the common interest in finding technically correct solutions in communal services and arrangements, those based on empathy with others one knows, and those based on adopting the common interest as one's own.[201] All of these types of common interests are likely to be found in natural communities. It is plausible to assume that Chinese fellow villagers or coworkers often have found their common interest in advancing the collective good, especially when their own material wellbeing depended on the economic success of their collective unit. Moreover, many presumably share community ethos making them proud of the success of their own unit to which they willingly contributed.

Thus, within a commune, some kind of collectivism is likely to develop, especially when members personally participate in collective affairs. Chih-yu Shih sees the background of what he calls collective democracy in collective culture and collective property rights. He defines Chinese collectivism according to three characteristics: having a culture that averts from the articulation of individualistic interests, making individuals dependent on higher-level units economically and for career mobility, and practicing a decision-making style in which collective deliberation precedes common action. In addition, the collective economy strengthens the incentives to work together in the name of the common good and decide matters together.[202] Simultaneously, a community or workplace setting must have strengthened the social pressure for maintaining unity, refraining from overt emphasis on the individual interest at the cost of the whole, and working together for the common interest.

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[199]   See Chan et al. 1984, p. 152, for some illustrative examples of using something said during personal conversation to condemn fellow villagers, even friends and colleagues, to condemn someone in struggle campaigns. See also Walder1988, pp. 90–91, for the activists' task to report the activities of their coworkers.

[200]   Chan et al. 1984, p. 87, gives examples.

[201]   Mansbridge 1983, p. 74.

[202]   Shih 1999, pp. xvii, xx–xxi, 295.

Although a community shares many interests, communal face-to-face democracy does not automatically bring this common interest to the surface. The same daily contact that facilitates the conception of the common interest sometimes leads to personal feuds and jealousies. It is possible that democracy sometimes intensifies communal division. Jane Mansbridge describes that it is difficult to separate issues from personalities in the communal setting. Not only is it emotionally draining to constantly face friends and neighbors whose opinions one has opposed, but issues in a small community tend to involve personal interests. Often communal decisions favor or disfavor some members.[203] Hence, participatory democracy can intensify or even cause personal conflicts. In China we find examples of how animosities between individuals or groups can even paralyze participatory democratic decision making.[204]

Inner-village unity can even be achieved through systematic minority repression. The Chinese Communist Party consciously built emotional unity within the majority by discriminating against the minority defined as class enemies. Mobilizing the poor for struggle sessions against class enemies, who at the same time formed the backbone of the old political order in villages, not only helped in eliminating political rivals of the Party but also created a feeling of mutual interest among poorer members of the community.[205] After the revolution, the class enemy minority could be attacked in every campaign to produce conformity among the rest of the community.[206]

Furthermore, there is no necessary link between a community setting and collectivist attitudes. Even an atomistic community is totally conceivable. A community may be a unit having a common interest with regard to many questions, but at times divisive cleavages or group interests can undermine, possibly even harm, communal interests. In Western China studies we find that collective identity was sometimes limited to those who belonged to one's lineage or shared one's religious beliefs,[207] sometimes so much so that the common village-level interest suffered.

Even when participatory community democracy works well, it does not automatically contribute to seeking mutual trust with other units. Inner-community feeling of unity enhanced through the participatory process can contribute to more rigorous competition with outsiders, with whom one has no emotional bond. That is, parochialism can result from participatory democracy. In his native village,

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[203] Mansbridge 1983, pp. 157–159.

[204] Chan et al. 1984, pp. 200–206; Lawrence 1994, p. 62.

[205] Chen 1986, ch. 3; Unger 2002, p. 40.

[206] Unger 2002, pp. 62–64.

[207] For influence of religious cleavages in village politics, see Hinton 1966, for clans and lineages, Gao 1999.

Gao Mobo shows that in a inter-village setting bigger villages tended to have their way even at the cost of smaller villages within the same people's commune.[208]

Apart from the communal setting, the Chinese are practicing participatory style of decision making in higher levels of the administrative hierarchy. Above the grassroots level, a natural community seldom forms, although sometimes a shared workplace or committee membership can create communal ethos. Marc Blecher and Vivienne Shue found that in the county government they studied, informal interchange, common revolutionary ethos, and shared interest facilitated cooperation, ability to focus on the public good, and consensus building regardless of differences and disagreements.[209] However, the situation is not the same when hierarchical relations are involved, especially if the higher-ups have the power over nominations or allocations to the levels below.

Intense political, economic, and social pressure at the local level is not easily replicated at the higher levels. Local-level cadres are directly dependent on peasants' or workers' cooperation for fulfilling the above-set plans.[210] Earlier, there were few means for local cadres to remove ordinary peasants or workers.[211] However, fellow villagers could pressure an unpopular cadre living among them in various ways ranging from impoliteness and gossips to outright sabotage.[212] A higher-level cadre hardly felt the possible unpopularity of his autocratic decisions as directly as local cadre did. Brantly Womack reminds us that in administrative hierarchy leaders are in a stronger position than they are in natural communities for a number of reasons. In a meeting administrators from different units do not have close relations with each other. Besides, recalcitrant subordinates can be removed by their superiors on a higher administrative level who often sit in the same meeting. Also, in this context, the use of the weapons of the weak appears to be overtly confrontational, and leaders are more isolated and vulnerable than they are in a community. The result can be an authoritarian relationship, with weak corporatist bargaining.[213]

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[208] Gao 1999, pp. 12–13.

[209] Blecher and Shue 1996, p. 43, 217.

[210] Birrell 1969, p. 423; Oi 1991, pp. 144–145.

[211] It was practically impossible to fire workers and restrictions of migration effectively kept people in their native villages.

[212] Birrell 1969, p. 423. For example, officials enforcing birth control policy have been subjected to sabotage and violence (White 2000, p. 107).

[213] Womack 1991 B, p. 328–329.

Unitary democracy and bureaucratism

Western and Chinese participatory democrats alike assert that participatory democracy can remedy the ills of bureaucratic decision making. Western advocates argue that mechanical and quantitative bureaucratic solutions have created many contemporary problems that could have been avoided with a qualitative approach in smaller and more personal communities.[214] Participation guarantees greater responsiveness to participants' demands.[215] Participation provides democratic control over decisions made by the bureaucracy.[216] Direct democracy allows each individual to protect his interests himself.[217] Participation reduces elitism, ensures that no interest is excluded, including the interest of disadvantaged minorities, and enables those who will be most directly affected by the policies to have a say in their formulation.[218] In reality as well, Western neighborhood participation has given people of all income levels more control over decisions that affect the quality of life in their communities.[219]

Participatory democracy, allowing every member of the society to influence politics, is a clear antithesis to bureaucratic routine and solutions based on regulations rather than on the consideration of particular needs. Therefore, it is understandable that participatory democracy appears to make the administration more receptive to people's concerns and needs. However, participatory structures may be relatively impotent in supervising bureaucracy. Carole Pateman doubts that amateur participators have enough information and experience to supervise the professional bureaucracy.[220] Hence, Albert Weale evaluates that representative democracy is able to check bureaucracy better than participatory democracy because professional politicians have time to familiarize themselves with the issues. After all, in contemporary politics only a few people learn to fully understand the consequences of decisions, when even modern bureaucracies handle so much specialized information that they must partition tasks into specialized bureaucracies.[221] Not surprisingly, later chapters will reveal that both the Chinese legis-

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214 Cook and Morgan 1971, p. 13.

215 Pennock 1979, p. 467.

216 Hyland 1995, pp. 115–116.

217 Mansbridge 1983, p. 275.

218 Cook and Morgan 1971, pp. 13–15; Pennock 1979, pp. 441–442.

219 Berry et al. 1993, p. 294.

220 Pateman 1970, p. 94.

221 Weale 1999, pp. 94–95.

lature and village assemblies have developed more representative organs to facilitate the democratic supervision of executives.[222]

Unitary democracy can even be the cause for some phenomena the Chinese understand as bureaucratization. Jane Mansbridge reminds us that consensus building, typical for unitary decision making, is time-consuming. It may even require repeated discussions after the decision is made in order to maintain consensus. Besides, in order to accommodate different standpoints, decisions are often formulated in vague terms, making it sometimes unclear what was actually decided upon.[223] Obviously, the Chinese type of democracy would require numerous lengthy meetings, often postponing the final decisions. Perhaps consensual policy making produces other benefits, such as more informed decisions that take all relevant interests into account and efficiency in the form of more popular and feasible policies with bureaucratic weight. Nevertheless, the Chinese press listed the maladies of bureaucratism, such as endless meetings and vague responsibilities.

Unitary democracy is not immune to authoritarian and even corrupt practices identified as bureaucratism in China. Leaders can manipulate the participatory agenda and process so that they dictate decisions in the name of consensus. In China, group pressure for unanimity was even combined with ideological weapons, making it handy to accuse dissenters of factionalism or of having a disregard for Party discipline.[224] Unitary democracy thus might not be very effective in supervising leaders. Furthermore, Jane Mansbridge observed that, to preserve outward harmony, American town meetings avoid dealing with personal misconduct in public.[225] Indeed, Charles Taylor notes that enforcing rules may disrupt the existing ties of affection.[226] Hence, where personal ties exist, individuals tend to apply social norms, instead of executing formal rules. Personalized politics means moving between political roles with formal rules and social roles with rules of proper social conduct. Socially proper concern for a person may even lead to exceptional treatment of both leaders and commoners, making co-participants ignore misconduct in office or to favor certain persons on a particularistic basis. Both immunity in office as well as favoritism are symptoms of bureaucratization as the Chinese understand it.

In order to avoid bureaucratization and inequalities in the distribution of power, many defenders of participatory democracy are wary of formal organization. Joyce Rothschild-Whitt lists that an organization can internally best sustain a

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[222] Ding 2001, p. 82; Oi and Rozelle 2000, p. 515; Tanner 1999, p. 74.

[223] Mansbridge 1983, pp. 166–169.

[224] Tsou 1991, p. 291, 293.

[225] Mansbridge 1983, p. 67.

[226] Taylor 1989, p. 161. He echoes Michael Sandels here.

participatory and collectivist organization by choosing goal-oriented methods and forms, using mutual and self-criticism, remaining relatively small in size, providing low economic rewards in order to emphasize commitment to the cause, being financially dependent only on its own members and clients, and diffusing its knowledge and tasks equally among members.[227] The Chinese administration has advocated similar measures. The anti-specialization drive, low wages, criticism and self-criticism sessions, face-to-face meetings, and institutional flexibility used to characterize the Chinese administration at all levels. Nevertheless, the Chinese communists ceased to be a social movement when the Party got hold of state power, and the permanent bureaucracy was needed for using state power in a nation-state. According to Joyce Rothschild-Whitt, the ideal situation for an organization to maintain its participatory character is one in which the organization is in opposition to the system and can retain its social movement orientation.[228] Giovanni Sartori reminds us that "the intensity of self-government stands in inverse relation to the duration of self-government."[229] Post-revolution attempts to preserve ideological zeal and moral purity in order to keep participation high could lead to political alienation[230] or to the state leading participatory attacks against itself, as happened during the Cultural Revolution. The Maoist attempt to dismantle boundaries between elite politics and participatory politics[231] resulted in ungovernability, and also in the dissolution of all organizations able to protect legal and human rights.

Participation and equality

Advocates of participatory democracy assume that the participatory design will distribute power more equally by allowing more people to participate substantially in politics. Actual redistribution of power in the Western participatory designs is far less equal than is hoped for. Critics, from participatory and representative ranks alike, claim that those who participate in participatory democracies are unrepresentative and elitist.[232] Yet, although participants are disproportionately from upper socioeconomic backgrounds, participatory structures empower lower income groups more than well-to-do people, who participate actively under any kind of democratic system. Although participatory mechanisms do not overcome

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[227] Rothschild-Whitt 1979, pp. 218–233.

[228] Rothschild-Whitt 1979, pp. 232–236.

[229] Sartori 1987, p. 66.

[230] E.g. Townsend 1967, p. 199.

[231] Or distinction between those inside and outside of state organization, as Dittmer 1974, p. 351, puts it.

[232] Richardson 1983, p. 65.

socioeconomic biases in the intensity of participation, they are not less representative than electoral democracy.[233]

Nevertheless, participatory politics encourages egalitarianism. Chinese villages distributed rare items and opportunities often through lottery or equally to all households,[234] quite likely in order to satisfy a communal sense of fairness and to avoid creating envy and division among villagers. However, these egalitarian efforts can produce unbeneficial results in other respects. Sometimes, emphasis on equal power makes participatory democracies disvalue expertise and special skills.[235] Designs to equalize power tend to diffuse responsibility. As the result, accountability suffers.[236]

According to Jane Mansbridge, citizens in unitary democracies tend to distrust overt desire for power because they fear that powerful members may detract from dedication to the common good. This causes them to be on guard about corruption of personality and to interpret conflicts in terms of will or personality and motivation, not in terms of differing interests.[237] We find the same pattern in China, where ideological and moral failings have been blamed for being the causes for bureaucratism, leading Mao era China to seek remedies from political education, instead of institutional solutions. In political campaigns, people accused their opponents of having ulterior motives. These tendencies seem to have undermined the tolerance of differing opinions and protection of minorities.

Jane Mansbridge observes that equal opportunity doesn't make citizens in either unitary democracies or adversary democracies equal.[238] In neither system are all participants equally represented. As Jane Mansbridge observes, in mass meetings the silent majority has no guarantee of representation since they have little means of holding speakers accountable or ensuring that someone articulates their views. They can only show their approval or discontent with facial expressions and comments addressed to people next to them.[239] Moreover, participatory decisions can be unrepresentative if they affect outsiders, who have no say in the matter.[240]

Inequality leaves room for elite manipulation. As Terrence Cook and Patrick Morgan remind us, advocates of participatory democracy often ignore formal procedures and emphasize the spontaneous realization of the popular will.

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[233] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 83, 95–97, 189.
[234] Chan et al. 1984, p. 219; Shih 1999, p. 290.
[235] Mansbridge 1983, p. 247; Pennock 1979, p. 463; Sartori 1987, pp. 167–170.
[236] Mansbridge 1983, p. 247.
[237] Mansbridge 1983, pp. 228–229.
[238] Mansbridge 1983, pp. 250–251.
[239] Mansbridge 1983, p. 274.
[240] Cook and Morgan 1971, p. 38–39.

Informality allows for the spokesmen's elitist manipulation, leaving the apathetic majority with only the role of ratifying elite decisions or even just implementing policies dictated above.[241] Giovanni Sartori even estimates that because participation is most intense in small groups, the small-group or vanguard theory of democracy is attractive to the advocates of participatory democracy. This theory assumes that the majority has only a passive role in politics.[242] Naturally, Giovanni Sartori is also referring to Marxists here. If we observe the situation in China, these concerns are more than justified. Although China has purposely established participatory systems in which all, not only the interested and articulate, participate, the most important decisions are too often made inside the vanguard party meetings or at the higher administrative levels. However, Giovanni Sartori's remark leads me to pinpoint one evident success in the Chinese participatory system. Indeed, the outreach of participatory systems is expensive and difficult to maintain for long periods.[243] The fact that many participatory institutions have functioned in China for decades must demonstrate commitment on behalf of the leadership.

Motivations for inviting popular participation

Participatory democracy has inspired some forms of participation in Western democracies. For example, residents have been invited to participate in local planning and zoning or consumers have been welcomed to participate in the determining of the quality of public services. When Western administration encourages popular participation it chooses relatively similar forms to those in socialist China: it invites residents and consumers to attend public meetings or invites their leaders to sit on committees. Moreover, their motivations for soliciting commoners' opinions are surprisingly similar to the reasons expressed by the Chinese communists.

Western administrators have welcomed participation for many reasons: some want to understand popular needs, some to maintain good relations with the public, some to assure themselves of the correctness of their policies, and others to persuade the public that the policy is acceptable.[244] These motivations are astonishingly close to democratic centralist aims. Using the Chinese vocabulary, administrators have wanted to meet their constituencies both in the "from the masses" and "to the masses" stages. Correspondingly, some Western administrators describe

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[241] Cook and Morgan 1971, p. 30–32.

[242] Sartori 1987, p. 114.

[243] Berry et al. 1993, p. 57.

[244] Richardson 1983, p. 115.

their participatory institutions as "a two-way communication channel between government and citizens."[245]

A skeptical reader might assume that the Chinese system gives only a secondary role to the public, but the same is true of the Western state-organized participatory systems. Western administrators usually give the public mainly an advisory or consultative status, or select some of its representatives to attend committee meetings, or even assume that some associations and unions represent the relevant sector of people.[246] Sometimes public hearings have symbolic meaning only because bureaucrats are not interested in sharing power with citizens.[247] This administration-centered approach is often shared by participators as well. Even members of Western participatory bodies often see that their role is to make government agencies do their jobs more effectively.[248]

Often Western and Chinese administrators alike trust in organized interests to convey popular opinions to them. The difference is in the independence of the consulted organizations. Western administrators usually invite independent consumer organizations to transmit popular concerns to administrative organs, but sometimes they even foster the development of novel organizations for public participation in order to use these organizations both in order to stay tuned into popular moods and to inform the public of its own viewpoints.[249] The Chinese state tends to create or authorize organizations with which it establishes a consultative relationship, although since the 1990s, societal NGOs have also been invited to share their information with official organs.[250] Even Western states sometimes authorize certain organizations, such as trade unions, to represent a sector of the population.[251]

Thus, the motivations for participatory democracy are relatively similar among the sympathetic Chinese and Western administrators. Obviously, these motivations differ considerably from those advocated by radical participatory activists. The state is firmly in control of official participatory structures both in the West and in China, and it decides how much influence it lets commoners have. For example, resident participation in American cities can be effective in smaller projects and in deciding how monies allocated to neighborhoods are spent, but city administration keeps projects vital to city development or important issues

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[245] Berry et al. 1993, p. 12.

[246] Richardson 1983, pp. 46–47.

[247] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 37, 42–44.

[248] Berry et al. 1993, p,. 58.

[249] Richardson 1983, pp. 47–48; Berry et al. 1993, pp. 57–69.

[250] Even non-registered NGOs have been invited to official meetings (interviews with Gao Guomin, May 2004).

[251] This is called corporatism.

like city budgets under its control, regardless of resident concerns.[252] Although the state creates participatory settings for its own use, usually these settings are not created without at least some hope for true popular input. Still, the decision-making power remains with the government. However, the Western experience suggests that governmental intervention does not only limit participation, but can also guarantee conditions for its longevity. Too often participatory schemes dry up after exhausting their initial energy unless the administration sets up regular channels and means of participation.[253]

Apart from demonstrating the relative similarity of forms of government-invited participation, another conclusion arising from this comparison between Western and Chinese forms of participatory democracy is noteworthy. In the West, we certainly classify resident and consumer participation in bureaucratic decision making as democratic. Therefore, it is fair to recognize that similar institutional arrangements are democratic in China too. However, there is a difference between having democratic institutions and being a democracy. Few Westerners would hold these participatory institutions are essential to Western democracies, partly because such arrangements are still relatively uncommon and uninfluential compared to elections. Thus, recognizing the democraticness of the Chinese popular input systems does not necessitate the automatic conclusion that China is a democracy.

Participation and leadership

Western advocates of participation seek more power-free forms of democracy, while the Chinese theory of democratic centralism takes leadership for granted, not only for ideological guidance but also for facilitating participation. A Western participatory democrat like Benjamin Barber, on the contrary, asserts that "leadership takes on a problematic character" in participatory democracies.[254] If the Chinese see that leadership is needed to bring out all the participatory potential of the people, instigating them to express opinions and helping them to analyze different viewpoints, Benjamin Barber thinks that leadership passivates the people.[255] Apart from moral leadership and leadership for a transitional period, Barber's strong democracy acknowledges only natural leadership and facilitating leadership. It even expects facilitating leadership to flatten inequalities of political expression caused by differences in articulateness, personality, and experience in

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252 Berry et al. 1993, p. 63–65.

253 Berry et al. 1993, p. 46.

254 Barber 1984, p. 238.

255 Barber 1984, p. 238.

order to balance natural leadership based on these skills. Facilitating leaders should be neutral and lead participation to guarantee that there will be no maldistribution of opportunities for expression.[256]

Not only the Chinese communists, but also Western critics of participatory democracy critically evaluate participatory attempts without leadership. Giovanni Sartori, for example, argues that the government is not only responsible to the people, but it is also responsible for its decisions. Thus, abolition of leadership, which ensures responsible decisions, runs the danger of highly irresponsible politics.[257] Even Western administrators promoting citizen participation act as if they would agree about the need for responsible leadership, even when they welcome ordinary people's expertise in regard to their neighborhood matters. At least, in American participatory cities, neighborhood associations often win in local issues, but when a project involves sizable tax revenues and jobs, administrators side with developers. When larger concerns are at stake, common welfare wins over small group preferences.[258]

The Chinese explicitly agree with Western critics who distinguish between authority and coercion. Because authority enhances voluntary obedience, they take authority and leadership to be typically democratic compared to ruling through domination and physical power.[259] According to the Chinese, leadership is needed for introducing the issue to the public, soliciting opinions of the inarticulate, persuading people to accept policies against their personal or local interests if overall interest so requires, evaluating feasibility of policies, and centralizing different popular comments into the decision. Mark Warren even remarks that participatory democracy may generate, rather than undermine, institutional authority because democracy gives justification for authority, although authority naturally creates some inequality.[260] The Chinese communists even take this argument one step further, claiming that without organization and systematic plans for the future course of action, true equality remains impossible. According to them, social equality requires united and rational struggle against all inequalities.

Radical advocates of participatory democracy in China and the West alike have promoted what Terrence Cook and Patrick Morgan call the self-determination form of participatory democracy, while the actual Chinese and Western participatory structures have usually aimed more modestly at co-determination. In other words, if the participatory ideal implies self-government by fully equal

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[256]   Barber 1984, pp. 238–242.
[257]   Sartori 1987, p. 170.

[258]   Berry et al. 1993, pp. 141–144.
[259]   Pennock 1979, pp. 472–478; Sartori 1987, p. 188.
[260]   Warren 1996, pp. 258–260.

members of a community, real forms of participation only supplement professional political administration with amateur participation.[261] Although the ideal democratic centralist process perhaps takes place in self-determining units, in practice administrative hierarchies of a nation-state only give co-determinative status to local participatory processes.

Participation and influence

Ann Richardson comments that participation cannot be defined in terms of its influence or power that participants hold because the latter is sometimes difficult to identify and the former can be established only after the result is known. Influence cannot be measured with the outcome of the political process either because democracy as non-coercive decision making necessarily relies on compromising, bargaining and deliberating, which often tend to produce results different from the original political positions and preferences. Moreover, it is not necessarily a result of my influencing, that the outcome I preferred was selected. She thus defines participation "as the introduction of a new set of actors into the various processes or activities of policy development or delivery". [262] Unfortunately this definition is controversial in the case of socialist China known for mass campaigns and mass mobilization which, nevertheless, may have left little space for mass initiative. In one sense the ordinary Chinese have participated in activities of a political nature when they have been repeating slogans in mass movements. Used in this sense, one must differentiate participation from influencing. Mere participation in the decision-making process itself does not guarantee that one has a chance, or even a will, for influencing. Instead, one's opinions can be ignored, even ridiculed by others, or one can be co-opted and thus tamed by the promise of participation. Psychological research tells to us that people have a disposition to ignore the opinions of those they do not identify with.[263] Therefore, presence during a decision-making occasion does not prove that influence took place. The central issue, both in terms of evaluating the potential of participatory democracy in general and the democraticness of the Chinese participatory theory and structures in particular, is whether participants have real influence in the process.

Measuring democratic influence is by no means easy. Often it is even difficult to define what counts as influence in decision making.[264] Besides, it is

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[261] Cook and Morgan 1971, pp. 4–5.

[262] Richardson 1983, pp. 23–28.

[263] David and Turner 2001.

[264] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 101–102.

generally impossible to know whether each participant had equal influence over a democratic decision. The only thing we can know is that participants had equal rights to voice their opinions and that decision makers had an obligation to take cognizance of them.[265] Even more difficult it is in deliberative settings typical of participatory democracy. According to Ann Richardson, when administrators invite the participation of commoners, it is difficult to determine who exercises power. After all, committees often do not vote about decisions but make decisions "by interpretation" letting someone summarize the previous discussion. Yet, during the consultation process people can convince others or block some ideas from being presented.[266] Still, both city administrators and participants in American neighborhood associations generally evaluated these associations as having had impact on decision making.[267]

Ann Richardson maintains that during participatory discussions all parties may gain but not necessarily equally. Although commoners have unequal power compared to that of decision makers, as advisors they can try "to win decision-makers around to their point of view." Commoners can negotiate, bargain, introduce new views, and try to convince administrators. They can engage in strategic or collective action, which usually proves more effective than influencing as an individual, who can easily be ignored.[268] Because of the decentralized citizen participatory structures and the competition for resources between them, participatory democracy seldom produces an effective single voice of "the people." This makes them weak initiators of new programs, although they are good at evaluating proposals made elsewhere and articulating residents' or consumers' complaints about them.[269] Thus, participatory democracy strengthens the link between citizens and officials and fosters more equal distribution of influence.[270]

Social psychology suggests that by expressing consistent opinions, the minority can make the majority consider alternatives to their original position, but these alternatives are not necessarily limited to the ones expressed by the minority.[271] It is therefore likely that commoner participation itself can cause administrators to weigh a greater number of alternatives than they otherwise were prepared to do. Thus, even if minority views will not be adopted, they may have influenced the process. This actually seems to be the case with popular partici-

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[265] Plamenatz 1977, pp. 170–171, 183.
[266] Richardson 1983, p. 86–87.
[267] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 178–179.

[268] Richardson 1983, p. 74, 84–85.
[269] Berry et al. 1993, pp. 107–109.
[270] Berry et al. 1993, p. 134.
[271] De Vries and de Dreu 2001, pp. 1–7.

pation. The Western evidence shows that institutionalized citizen feedback makes the administration more attuned to citizen concerns. Popular input consequently affects priorities and selection and creates boundaries for the local agenda. Although citizen participation usually deals with issues raised by the government, it also introduces new viewpoints and concerns. Gradually it may push the administration to address problems that are not being satisfactorily dealt with.[272]

Because interaction and bargaining make the results of discussion unpredictable, those who have established participatory arrangements cannot ensure that their view wins, Ann Richardson maintains. Even if commoners are without formal power, it does not mean that they necessarily lack effective power, especially if they are able to mobilize resources for their cause.[273] In American residential participatory systems, administrators need to cooperate with neighborhoods because they want to avoid delays in implementation and open conflict, which can be damaging to a politician's career.[274]

Even when we can count the proportion of popularly initiated decisions or decisions modified because of popular input, which Marc Blecher has found to be quite high in Chinese villages,[275] the amount itself does not provide us with the whole picture. It tells us little about how many important problems were discussed in public. Even if popular participation would at times really cause policy change, it could prove systematically ineffective to have real influence in more substantial issues. Carole Pateman, studying workers' participation, seriously questions "the extent to which any part-time management body of 'ordinary workers' can really control full-time expert staff."[276] The contradiction, according to Pateman, is that to give the maximum number of workers a chance to participate, participation must be arranged on a part-time basis. As a result, they lack time to develop skills to effectively participate in the discussion of higher policy matters.[277] The same imbalance between professional and amateur participants probably prevails in the Chinese setting, and is even aggravated by the fact that political information is

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272   Berry et al. 1993, pp. 111–114, 125, 127, 133.

273   Richardson 1983, p. 95.

274   Berry et al. 1993, pp. 112, 288–289.

275   Blecher 1991, p. 132, finds that even 38 percent of local policy issues were first raised by ordinary peasants. In American residential participation, the vast majority of new items on the agenda are initiated by conventional sources, including local government, business, and interest groups. Neighborhood associations account for only 10 percent of all issues. Thus, citizen participatory structures have not done much to empower the neighborhoods in the agenda-building process. (Berry et al. 1993, pp. 106–107.)

276   Pateman 1970, p. 94.

277   Pateman 1970, p. 97.

largely disseminated through the same administrators whom the commoners were supposed to supervise.

Likewise, there may be important issues participants themselves avoid bringing to the table. Presumably, in China and the West alike commoners learn to interpret the decision-making process itself and tend to raise problems more likely to receive administrators' attention and avoid expressing problems that are not likely to gain sympathetic hearing. For example, Kay Ann Johnson writes of a Chinese village where all women urgently felt the double burden of collective work and household chores, but remained silent in public meetings about their collective burden, because male cadres were not likely to attend to such problems. At worst, they could have even reacted by demanding that the women participate in physically more demanding work that until then had been reserved for men to show them that their workload is already reduced.[278] Obviously, issues inviting unsympathetic hearing not only from administrators but also from other participants who belong to the dominant groups in local society could make people to prefer silence.

One romantic view in some Western writings is that participation is valuable because it teaches the underprivileged to oppose the government.[279] This basic assumption is easy to challenge. It is quite unrealistic to assume that participation is influential only when the locus of power changes. These instances are far rarer than those in which participants have some influence in the state of affairs. The conflict model of participation[280] resorting to confrontation, may add new issues to the political agenda or put much pressure on the decision makers, but controversial activities might marginalize activists or even the issue itself both in the eyes of administrators and the wider public. The consensus model trying to expand access to the existing power structures uses much less visible tactics. It requires a willingness to compromise, but cooperation may be rewarded with permanent inclusion of the group or the issue in policy-making routines. Actually, the form of participation itself does not dictate its effectiveness. If the result counts, the conflict-model-type zero-sum game approaches are usually costly and seldom bring immediate results, while the positive-sum approach often leads to compromise. The positive-sum approach assumes that participants' interests are in some respects shared by the government, while the conflict model expects that interests collide. Ann Richardson concludes that administrators and consumers have both common and conflicting interests. Therefore, participation benefits both

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[278]   Johnson 1983, p. 206.

[279]   E.g. Smith and Anderson 1972, pp. 314–317.

[280]   I have borrowed the dichotomy between the conflict and consensus models from Smith and Anderson 1972, p. 304.

sides to the extent that interests are congruent, but may benefit one group at the expense of the other when interests conflict.[281] The conflict model views co-operation with government with suspicion because it is wary of co-optation. This caution may to some extent be warranted. After all, participatory democracy increases mutual understanding. Survey data from Western participatory institutions demonstrates that participation increases concurrency between leaders' and citizens' viewpoints. Yet, the influence can go in both directions: it may indicate true citizen influence or elite manipulation of public opinion alike.[282]

Direct and indirect democracy

Often the terms participatory democracy and direct democracy are synonymous in Western literature, but in the case of socialist China this equation is more problematic. A system that practices direct democracy at the grassroots but indirect popular control at the levels above is not completely a direct democracy. The mass line practices at the grassroots clearly belong to direct democracy, but commoners' direct influence stops very soon above that, actually at a much lower level of administration than in Western democracies, which elect legislatures and even presidents. Thus, the Chinese concentration on methods of direct democracy when the political system is actually hierarchic may disempower commoners above the local level.

China follows the Marxist model of the pyramid structure of direct democracy, in which communities administering their own affairs elect delegates to the higher-level councils, which again elect delegates to the national-level council. This system received a mixed reception in the West. Some skeptics admit that the merit of hierarchical assemblies, compared to national legislatures, is permitting amateurs' participation at the basic level.[283] A cautious defender, C. B. Macpherson, recognizes that this kind of system did not guarantee effective popular control in the Soviet Union and sees the system especially vulnerable to political apathy.[284] This model is designed to involve all branches of the bureaucracy under mass supervision, including those that are outside of electoral control in Western democracies.[285] At least at the grassroots level, this system has to some extent brought the local economy and bureaucratic implementation under popular control. However, this model leaves some other areas of the bureaucracy outside

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[281] Richardson 1983, p. 94.

[282] Berry et al. 1993, p. 120, 126.

[283] Cook and Morgan 1971, pp. 18–19.

[284] Macpherson 1979, pp. 109–111.

[285] Held 1987, p. 130.

of popular control. When the Chinese political system has added several layers of bureaucracy under only indirect mass supervision on top of the direct democracy at the grassroots level, could it be that coming to the top level, mass supervision would actually become so insignificant that it would not even count as much as electoral pressures? How much can indirect elections reveal about popular will, especially when, hierarchically speaking, the higher level has power over the levels electing him? Furthermore, is it not possible that such a system sometimes produce an illusion of popular support, when in reality there is no objective calculus to establish that the information that flows upward really reflects popular opinions?[286]

Interpreting democracy as continuing from the grassroots to the national level throughout the Chinese system is problematic because it assumes an analogy between local micro-democracy and national macro-democracy, which according to Giovanni Sartori cannot be conceived as an enlargement of micro-democracy.[287] Although units of micro-democracy can be included in the pyramidal structure of direct democracy units, the difference between democracies on the two levels is real. Community-type interaction with daily face-to-face contact cannot be duplicated at the higher level, even if all meetings would be held in the most deliberative and open spirit. There are two possible solutions to this situation. One would be to introduce the representative system of national democracy to complement local participatory structures.[288] Another would be to establish an organ for national-level centralization of direct popular opinions on national issues. This solution has supporters among Western political theorists. For example, Robert Dahl has outlined a plan for creating mini-populuses to be consulted during the legislative process.[289]

The Chinese government has made some attempts to adopt the latter solution. They have promoted wide social discussion in the press and convened all kinds of conferences to deal with certain issues or items of legislation. They have used polling to gather information about popular opinions.[290] The most systematically used method in China, though, has been the consultation of corporatist organizations meant to represent a certain strata of the population. For example, the All-

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[286] A similar kind of illusion is possible in an electoral system as well. Although voting provides an objective calculus, many political theorists argue that a vote in national elections reveals very little about voters' support for particular policies. See, e.g., Pennock 1979, pp. 277–286; Sartori 1987, pp. 108–109.

[287] Sartori 1987, pp. 11, 15.

[288] This is the position of many Western advocates of participatory democracy. See, e.g., Berry et al. 1993, p. 293; Miller 1983, pp. 154; Pateman 1970, pp. 109–110.

[289] Dahl 1989, p. 340.

[290] Ogden 2002, pp. 100–101, 384–388.

China Women's Federation has been consulted and voiced its views on issues concerning gender issues.[291]

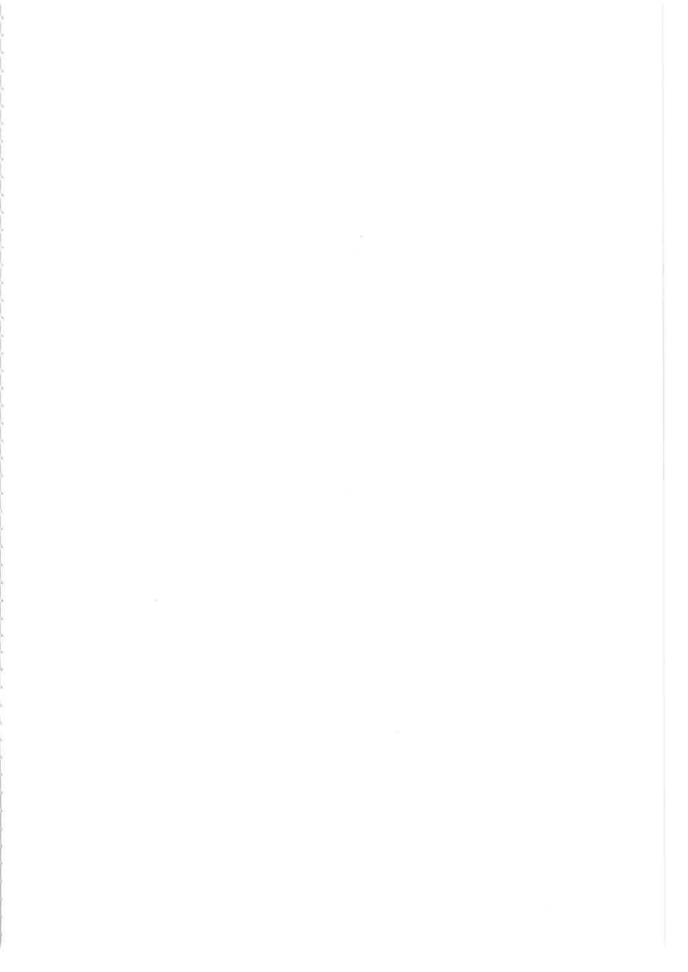## Evaluating Chinese participatory democracy

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that the Chinese mass line tradition belongs to a type of participatory democracy. The first lesson of this observation is that since democratic centralism in China builds largely on the tradition of "direct democracy", it should not be rejected in terms of the representative type of democracy only.

Another conclusion to draw is that the Chinese experience indicates that participatory democracy is feasible. After all, decades of experience has not made the Chinese doubt the benefits of grassroots democracy. However, the Chinese experiments also demonstrate that successful participatory experiences are led by an authority creating conditions for participation, distributing political information, evaluating the feasibility of popular suggestions, and overseeing that local participation takes place within the framework permitted by national laws and policies. Nevertheless, the Chinese experience cannot totally eradicate Western theorists' fears of radicalization, costs of participation, manipulability of the participatory agenda, or inadequate respect for minority views in consensual decision making.

Even if participatory democracy is feasible, it raises theoretical questions about its place within a democratic system. I by no means claim that participatory democracy is meaningless if its scope is only local affairs. However, if this is the case, its limitations must be recognized. As Bill Brugger puts it, direct participatory democracy raises questions about the scope of such decision making, the vertical distribution of power, and the relationship between policy formulation and execution as well as between politics, policy and operations.[292] Even if participatory democracy is efficient only at the local level, in policy execution, and in deciding about operations and some local policies, it has a meaningful role. However, if this is the case, other democratic forms and institutions are needed for popular participation in national-level politics. Still, if participatory democracy would prove empowering, even if only in grassroots affairs, it should have an unquestioned place in the theory of democracy.

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[291]　See practical examples in Jacka 1990, 15–18; Howell 2003, pp. 198–202; Rosen, pp. 333–334; Wang 2000, p. 69.

[292]　Brugger 1976, p. 17.

DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM, DELIBERATION, AND CONSENSUS

Aside from being concerned with popular participation, the Chinese theory of democratic centralism is a theory about communication between leaders and the led. In this chapter, I will compare the Chinese theory of democratic centralism with some Western theories and observations about political communication and information flow inside a democratic political system.

Comparison with the systems theory

Presenting democratic centralism as cyclical communication between people and their leaders reminds a keen student of Western political theory of another model, namely that of systems analysis. Both Mao Zedong, in his 1962 speech, and David Easton, who first applied systems theory in politics in the 1950s and 1960s, were relatively uninterested in decision-making structures and political institutions. Neither of the two models is institution-centered, but rather, each describes information processing within political systems in general. Naturally, the resulting description of democracy is not procedural. Instead, Mao and Easton emphasize the flow of information into and within the decision-making systems. Using Easton's terminology, they study input of support and demands into the political system, which then processes information into decisions, or output, to be implemented. Implementation of these policies will then generate a cycle of feedback information about popular support and demands, which might cause the system to improve its outputs.[1] In these models popular influence takes place when the system interacts with its environment. It appears as input of popular demands and feedback of popular support. Both models differentiate between the system and outsiders. In other words, both assume the existence of a division of labor between the political elite inside the system and the wider populace who for political influencing need access to the system.

Although the two theories coincide in their interpretation of the basic cycle of information during political processes, their terminology is not identical. Democracy in democratic centralism is not exactly the same as inputs, nor is centralism

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[1]   Easton 1979.

equal to outputs.[2] Rather, for Chinese communists both the democratic popular influence and the leadership functions of centralization take place during both the input and output stages. David Easton's understanding of input as the flow of demands and support into a political system and to authorities coincides with democracy in the theory of democratic centralism; but in his model the filtering and processing of demands are part of the input processes, while in the Chinese understanding they belong under centralism. In Easton's terminology gatekeepers are persons who control the access to communication channels and thereby process input. They reject unsuitable demands, forward realistic demands to higher levels, and formulate some into a more relevant format for decision making.[3] Yet, in terms of the theory of democratic centralism, they are already performing centralization at their own level, although they process the information that represents democracy in relation to the levels above theirs. David Easton describes the gatekeepers' task in a way that could be seen as a textbook example of centralization when he views them as participating in demands "collection and combination. Demands will frequently be assembled, fused, synthesized, or in some way reformulated so that they are different after they have been further transmitted by the gatekeepers than they were upon reception."[4]

In a similar way, Easton's output processes are not exact equivalents of centralism. Decisions, or authoritative outputs in David Easton's terminology, belong to centralization and outputs alike. However, what Easton calls associated outputs, namely statements and performances interpreting and explaining decisions,[5] are not only centralism in the Chinese theory, but also constitute an arena for democracy because in the mass line processes they should allow ordinary people not only to understand policies, but also to shape them for local implementation.

David Easton and Mao Zedong see the environment of the political system and the kind of information that flows inside the political system in different terms. According to David Easton, inputs consist of demands and support. In the Chinese view, information about the actual situation in the environment should flow in the system. Demands and support are seen as a part, although not a negligible part, of the political reality, when they help to indicate problems and provide a pool of ideas. Along with material resources, a leader should have information about nonmaterial resources, such as popular needs and receptivity to policies. Support is thus important at the input stage, but is also essential in implementation. Somewhat similarly, David Easton understands that the input of support makes it

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[2] This equation is almost made by Franz Schurmann 1966, p. 54, who defines democratic as impulses coming from below and centralism as impulses coming from above.

[3] Easton 1979, pp. 136–137.

[4] Easton 1979, p. 137.

[5] Easton 1979, p. 357–358.

possible for a political system to implement its decisions.[6] However, from Mao's point of view David Easton misses something when he does not examine the flow of factual information into and within the system. Distinguishing between factual information and popular demands, the Chinese communists manage to build a certain amount of state autonomy and consider popular interest along with popular demands, as is necessary for combining responsive government with responsible government.

Since democratic centralism is a method for gaining an accurate picture of the situation, the Chinese communists saw the importance of gathering the most detailed information possible. Somewhat naively, they did not anticipate any problems in processing large quantities of information, nor did they expect to encounter bottlenecks in information channels. David Easton reflects on problems like response failures and channel failures when the system receives more information than it is able to process efficiently.[7] Interestingly, in China information overload was a reality at the grassroots level, where cadres had to process information that had not formerly been centralized and systematized in any way. As a result, many local cadres complained that centralization of varied information and opinions was more troublesome than making decisions on their own.[8]

If systems theory is a descriptive model designed to facilitate comprehensive research on political systems of all kinds, democratic centralism is not only a descriptive but also a prescriptive democratic theory. Instead of merely describing a political system, democratic centralism explicitly demands maintenance of the balance between democratic inputs and effective outputs since neither ungovernability nor unresponsiveness to the populace is desirable. Systems analysis, on the contrary, sees feedback processes as being universal and not exclusively democratic, although David Easton notes that democracies welcome input from larger parts of society than other systems.[9]

Consensus and democracy

It is usually agreed that democracy cannot exist without any consensus and will to compromise,[10] and similarly there cannot be democratic freedom of expression without having any open cleavages and differing opinions. Consensus is not

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6   Easton 1979, p. 211.

7   Easton 1979, p. 66.

8   The press systematically dismissed grassroots cadres' complaints about the overload of information and demands as authoritarian attitudes, but, most likely, information overload was real, perhaps along with attitudinal problems.

9   Easton 1979, pp. 252–253.

10   See, e.g., Lively 1978; Sartori 1987, pp. 90–92; Holden 1974, pp. 187–188.

democratic if it means compliance to leaders' opinions and leaves ordinary people without the means to articulate their differing views. If, on the other hand, consensus is based on open discussion and opinion formation, there need not be anything undemocratic about it.

Consensus is not identical to unanimity. Jane Mansbridge defines consensus as a product of seeking out, hearing, and taking into consideration all opinions and then "converting initial disagreement into agreement or at least into universal willingness to go along with the result."[11] Consensus is thus different from unanimity, everyone sharing the same opinion. Giovanni Sartori remarks that consensus often does not reflect actual consent, but the common acceptance of something.[12] Consensus means that all participants agree about the decision made, although their reasons may differ. Some perhaps agree just because the decision-making process is legitimate, although they have reservations about the policy. In the Chinese theory and in the press consensus and unanimity were clearly separated. In the vocabulary of democratic centralism, the minority must implement the policy, although they have their reservations about it and may try to convince the majority to change its mind.

One common attack against the democraticness of socialist systems confuses consensus with unanimity. According to this criticism, the tradition based on Rousseau and Marx aims at formation of general will, meaning that there is a single will which by their definition is truer than individualistic self-regarding wills. Therefore, decision makers claiming to represent this single, united, and true will can insulate themselves from any demands based on individual wills simply by negating their value compared to the will of the whole as formulated by those in power.[13] However, this is a misconception of consensual processes. This misconception takes unanimity as the starting point, preventing any expression of differing opinions, while Rousseau and democratic centralism see consensus as resulting from the extensive exchange of opinions. Contrary to the Western assumption that the leadership defines general will *a priori*, the mass line called for decision making based on popular input, consultation and social feedback. Instead of claiming that there is one general will, Mao Zedong explicitly recognized legitimate interest conflicts, so-called contradictions, which must be identified during the policy-making process.[14]

This kind of consensus building is actually not that different from Western democratic processes. Western political theories often concentrate on political

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[11]   Mansbridge 1983, pp. 163–164.

[12]   Sartori 1987, p. 90.

[13]   See, e.g., Holden 1974, pp. 42–45, 49–50.

[14]   "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People" and "On Ten Major Relationships" in Mao, Selected Works, vol. V, pp. 384–421 and 284–306, respectively.

cleavages and conflicts because a meaningful vote by an electorate or within legislatures requires choice. However, within legislatures and governments, consensus and majority building become important and policies are deliberated and accordingly modified during the different stages of the decision-making procedure. Compromise and harmonization of interests take place, for example in the form of logrolling, which means majority building behind a certain proposal by making concessions to another party's priorities. Also, the result of Western lawmaking is one general will binding to all. One can have and express differing opinions about the content of a law or regulation, but bureaucrats are obliged to implement it and citizens to obey it nevertheless. Theoretically, the difference between the Chinese and Western processes of consensus building is that in China the whole population is at least symbolically involved in consensus building, while in the West it takes place only among the representatives selected by the populace by a formal process of delegation.

China and Western democracies also differ when it comes to the objectives of consensus. It the Chinese policy making has concentrated on consensus over the policy, Western democracies emphasize consensus about the decision-making procedures. The Chinese are flexible about decision-making institutions but are ready to take time to build consensus over the policy content among all interests and bureaucracies concerned.[15] Contrarily, Western democracies emphasize decision making according to procedures over which there is consensus, but do not mind open conflict about policy content or majoritarian exclusion of minority opinion.

Another possible objective of consensus is the consensus about long-term policy aims. Shared aims facilitate consensus building. In China, these consensual aims are more pronounced than in the West and are sometimes expressed in ideological language.[16] Nevertheless, Western and Chinese politicians alike seek common ground in political negotiations and persuade the general public by appealing to overall consensus over aims like economic growth, social justice, and certain

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[15] A good monograph revealing how organizational flexibility is combined with arduous and lengthy consensus building between bureaucracies in China is Tanner 1999.

[16] Marxist language may sound unfamiliar to the average Western reader, but the translation of its aims into more neutral vocabulary reveals that the aims are relatively similar to the nationalistic and economic aims Western political elite often share. For example, if attainment of communism is translated into the aim of building a more equal and affluent society, in many postwar European countries the populace and legislatures have consented to these overall aims. In the West different viewpoints about concrete means to attain these shared ends and the relative value of different aims are often expressed as differing ideologies or party platforms, but in China they are expressed as interpretations of one ideology and party line within one party. This situation makes Chinese ideology very flexible, making it fluctuate between positions that in the West would belong to different ideologies and different party platforms.

nationalistic aims. Andrew Nathan demarcates between the Western (liberal) political philosophy recognizing conflict between national and private interests and the Chinese thought relying on the fundamental harmony of these interests.[17] However, he is actually speaking about two different levels of aims: on the practical policy level the Western and Chinese theorists alike recognize the variation of interests and plurality of understandings of the proper means to achieve certain shared aims, while political socialization and collective self-interest often make both Westerners and the Chinese consent to certain fundamental aims. Western theory explicitly recognizes the possibility of permanent conflict over these fundamental aims, but more often the conflict-centered view about Western politics is based on conflict over concrete policy issues, while the Chinese trust in harmony is based on shared values and interests often found on a more abstract level.

It is possible that a working deliberative democracy and group-based unitary democracy require more devotion to the united aims than is conventional in Western party politics. At the group or communal level some common interests are relatively concrete, but above this level common interest becomes far more abstract. Therefore, a political group devoted to common aims is perhaps mandatory for unitary democracy at the national level. The Chinese Communist Party is such a group. However, the possibility that consensual unitary democracy could not work at the national level without a shared ideology or a dominant party is somewhat alarming to Western pluralists. John Ferejohn observes that although consensus building is easier in a smaller unit than it is on a national scale, it becomes problematic if in-group decisions are not made in equal or democratic ways, if decisions affect outsiders, and if coordination and collective action require coercive methods.[18] Critics may also question whether the system of democratic centralism can ever become fully democratic if it requires a power monopoly.

Nevertheless, there are undeniable advantages of consensual politics. Theoretically, the rationale of consensus is preserving individual freedom since one cannot be coerced to accept decisions he opposes.[19] In practice, consensual politics encourages communication and identification with the whole community and common good. It thus discourages assertions of narrow self-interest. It exhorts the group to listen to all members and understand all sides. Thus, it elicits more information during the process and is likely to lead to better decisions.[20]

Consensual decision making has its disadvantages too. It is time-consuming, especially if consensus seeking leads to remaking decisions. Pressure to compromise might produce weak decisions that do not satisfy anyone. The decision-

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[17] Nathan 1986, ch. 3.
[18] Ferejohn 2000, p. 80.
[19] Weale 1999, p. 127.
[20] Mansbridge 1983, pp. 163–165, 171–174; Rosenberg 2004, p. 9.

making process can be manipulated, or some might refrain from implementing policies they do not believe in. Even if consensual politics strengthens mutual interest, it simultaneously makes differing interpretations of the common interest a major source of disunity, and it cannot totally avoid dealing with differing private interests that divide the group.[21] Radical opinions may be favored, as they were in China during the Cultural Revolution, because there is no calculus of consent, there is no guaranteed voice for those under attack or for the silent majority, and there are no alternative leadership candidates aside from the self-promoted activists available.[22] Chinese communists have tried to tackle some of these problems with active Party leadership, but a strong Party position weakens claims for democratic equality and freedom of expression. Further, the Party can even use consensual decision making to advantage its own the agenda-setting role.[23]

Cultural and structural background for consensual politics

Perhaps Western political culture legitimizes open conflict, while the Chinese political culture allegedly nurtures outward harmony, as some scholars claim.[24] However, political culture probably has more influence in how differences of opinions are expressed than whether they are expressed. Chih-yu Shih alleges that the Chinese political culture makes people express their interests not as individualistic interests, but as a collective interest of the state or a collective unit.[25] Likewise, as was seen in the earlier empirical chapters, the Chinese deliberative political culture encourages expression of different opinions as different conceptions of the ways to attain the common good.

Anthropologist Carolyn Stevens has observed decision making in Japanese volunteer organizations. She finds that volunteers use a non-confrontational communication mode of polite hesitation (*enryo*) as a tool for decision making and conflict management. It is a method for making better decisions because it encourages people to refrain from assuming definite positions before having heard all the information and opinions. During a formal meeting, participants hold back their opinions and a complex case usually remains without conclusion. This is not a mark of indecision but gives time for participants to formulate their position and for leaders to hear all opinions. After the meeting, the issue is discussed informally, often during occasions when is alcohol served, to make members feel free to

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[21] Mansbridge 1983, pp. 165–167, 171.

[22] Dittmer 1974, p. 354.

[23] Womack 1991 A, p. 70.

[24] For claims of Chinese cultural aversion of open conflict, see, e.g., Pye 1992, pp. 198–204.

[25] Shih 1999, pp. xviii–xx.

even express opinions that might fail to achieve support or cause disagreement. After listening to informal discussions, the leader makes the decision based on his understanding of the general opinion. A formal decision is made in the following meeting, in which participants, if satisfied with the result, simply agree with the leader's opinion because all major issues were already dealt with during the preceding informal discussion. Decisions like this appear to be unanimous, but actually people who disagree use the exit option or non-attendance to register their position.[26]

Carolyn Stevens correctly remarks that *enryo* is used partly because it signals politeness in Japanese social etiquette.[27] Possibly, other East Asian cultures like China encourage this method as well. However, apart from culture, there might be a tendency towards this kind of communication and decision-making mode in unitary democratic situations regardless of cultural background. After all, volunteer organizations often make decisions according to the model of unitary democracy. Thus, fear of reprisal, which is absent in Carolyn Steven's example, may not be the only, or even main, explanation for the Chinese commoners' preference to register their opinions in informal occasions.[28] Instead, this preference may have its roots in the reluctance in a unitary democracy to stand out in public before hearing all sides, and perhaps it is reinforced by cultural ideals of outward harmony.

F. G. Bailey argues that consensus seeking is most typical for organs that combine both decision making and executive functions. Because these organs need to guarantee the disgruntled minority's cooperation for implementation, they are more likely to seek solutions acceptable to all.[29] The Chinese grassroots administration is typically a unit that combines decision making and implementation. Therefore, we may expect that this kind of institutional setting encourages the seeking of solutions that all can either accept or be persuaded to tolerate. In this kind of environment, dictated decisions are very likely to suffer from implementation difficulties.

Robert Marshall has shown that in Japanese hamlets' decision making, unanimity is likely to result if corporate resources are at stake. However, formal voting often becomes necessary when implementation requires villagers to relinquish control of privately held resources. Even then, if individual positions are widely known and the opposing minority is extremely small, hamlet members may skip actual voting.[30] If this result is applicable to China, it would suggest two things. Firstly, it shows that seeking unanimity is a natural, although not the only,

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26   Stevens 1997, pp. 206–207, 215–227.
27   Stevens 1997, p. 218, 222.
28   E.g. Oi 1991, pp. 149–152.
29   Bailey 1972, p. 9.
30   Marshall 1984.

method for communal decision making in the East Asian cultural setting. Secondly, unanimous decision making without a formal vote could be typical for collective agriculture, while new patterns of decision making are likely to evolve when resources are privatized and conflicts of interest become more pronounced.

Consensus and the minority opinion

Regardless of consensus-building efforts, sometimes consensus is not achieved. Jane Mansbridge has observed that in these situations unitary democracies often shift to majoritarian methods, like voting.[31] If the group still sticks to consensual processes, some pathologies may result. Many Western theorists assume that these situations favor minorities. Robert Dahl maintains that unanimity gives a veto to any one person opposing a policy,[32] suggesting that consensual decision making would lead to tyranny of the minority. In fact, Robert Dahl assumes here that the consensual decision-making process is voting, which it actually seldom is. After all, consensual decision making most typically takes place in face-to-face situations and the process is mostly deliberative, not aggregative. However, a substantial or influential minority might still slow down a consensual decision-making process. Therefore, some Western political scientists suggest that consensual decision making favors the *status quo* because it gives those resisting the change more power than they would have in a system that allows a simple majority to change the rules.[33] For the same reason, a consensual decision-making process allows defensive minorities to demand concessions as preconditions for giving their support. Even if scholars like Douglas Rae and Albert Weale see this situation as the minority exploiting those who want to change a policy,[34] the Chinese communists and other supporters of consensual decision making may value concessions to the minority because they want decisions to serve the interests of all, not only the majority. According to Susan Shirk, Chinese decision making explicitly aims at sharing and balancing the costs and benefits between participants.[35]

Many other theorists, however, conclude that consensual decision making may benefit the majority. Although consensual decision making is often willing to compromise and accommodate minority viewpoints,[36] sometimes weaker parties have to concede more than others to guarantee consensus.[37] Whichever the case,

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[31]   Mansbridge 1983, pp. 4, 46, 75.
[32]   Dahl 1989, p. 153.
[33]   Rae 1975, p. 1274.
[34]   Rae 1975, p. 1273; Weale 1999, pp. 127–128.
[35]   Shirk 1992, p. 77.
[36]   Mansbridge 1983, p. 174.
[37]   Weale 1999, p. 143.

consensual decision making does not equally protect all interests.[38] On many occasions, especially if the threat of a deadlock looms, social pressure to make a majority decision appear to be a decision reached by consensus intensifies.[39] Leaders may manipulate the process by appealing to unity regardless of the existence of conflicting interests.[40] Jane Mansbridge even observes that to preserve unity the minority is not likely to reintroduce its concerns later.[41] Exactly for this reason, Albert Weale prefers voting over consensus. In voting, a minority loses but is allowed to keep its position on the agenda.[42]

It is also possible that consensus is created through the systematic exclusion of a minority. The Chinese communists created cohesion and unity among the majority by directing the majority of discontent towards the former wealthy classes.[43] Mistreatment of the class enemies during campaigns warned ordinary people about the costs of the open expression of dissenting opinions.[44] The exclusion of the minority was thus used to create the feeling of shared purpose and emotional inclusion in the in-group, both beneficial for forming consensus. The exclusion of those opposing the new social order and the creation of cohesion among those likely to benefit from it were both conducive to radical programs for social change. This seems to suggest that consensual inclusion of only like-minded individuals can speed up consensual decision making and even favor dramatic social remodeling.[45] Yet, from an ethical point of view, such minority exclusion is most questionable. Likewise, political equality, which is a central precondition for democracy, is compromised.

When consensus fails

Although the demand for consensus within a disagreeing group may lead to minority suppression, often it leads to implementation on the mutually accepted level only. Participants tend to resort to non-cooperation if the decision reached by a seeming consensus does not really meet their approval.[46] According to Jane

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[38]   Rae 1975, p. 1273, and Mansbridge 1983, pp. 265–268.

[39]   Mansbridge 1983, p. 164.

[40]   Broadbent 1998, p. 256; Mansbridge 1983, p. 293.

[41]   Mansbridge 1983, p. 170.

[42]   Weale 1999, p. 143.

[43]   Solomon 1970, pp. 315, 322–323; Unger 2002, pp. 39–40.

[44]   In the 1960s, many campaigns in Chen village started or ended with struggling against class enemies (Chan et al. 1984, pp. 71–73, 145–146).

[45]   This is supposing that Chinese decision making during the social transformation actually was consensual, which is not an established fact. However, I use the democratic centralist model here to hypothesize that it was and speculate on the possible consequences.

[46]   Mansbridge 1983, pp. 143, 230, 262–263.

Mansbridge, the sometimes vague wording of the consensual decision is to blame. To make it acceptable to all, the decision is often formulated to accommodate all views. As a result, participants are sometimes left with a divergent understanding of what was actually agreed upon.[47] Robert Marshall has found that as long as implementation is possible without each member's contribution, people participating in a consensual process refrain from stating their opposition to the majority opinion.[48] In other words, true calculus for the popularity of a decision becomes evident during implementation, not when the decision is made. The exit option may be more appealing in consensual decision making than the use of the voice option.

At worst, non-cooperation by one party paralyzes the whole effort, reduces the size of the group cooperating, or leaves the costs of cooperation for others to bear. Then unitary decision-making structures give more autonomy to a large minority "than most Westerners think practicable."[49] Even superficial observation reveals that in China mechanisms for forcing people or organizations to obey formal decisions are weak.[50] In China, disobedience is a conscious strategy for influencing. The mass line doctrine and ordinary Chinese alike expect leaders to read the signs of non-cooperation and to modify policies as a result.[51] However, prevalence of non-implementation is not itself a mark of democracy of any kind, but rather, in authoritarian situations in which people are given no say, evasion is a useful weapon of the weak. Disobedience is often a sign of the illegitimacy of unpopular or unreasonable decisions.[52] Therefore, apart from unitary democracy, authoritarianism can explain the widespread evasion. Either way, policy subversion through non-cooperation suggests asymmetry of power.

Refraining from implementation is not the only exit option provided by consensual decision making. In China, membership in many unitary democratic units

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[47] Mansbridge 1983, pp. 167–169.

[48] Marshall 1984.

[49] Mansbridge 1983, pp. 262–263, quotation on p. 263

[50] For example, one only needs to read or watch Chinese investigative journalism to see that China has problems in compelling even local governments and state enterprises to obey the law.

[51] Yang 1989, pp. 52–54. The behavior whereby an inferior makes his superior aware of complaints by withholding deference when dealing with his superior, and in this way providing the superior with a chance to correct the situation on his own initiative, instead of articulating demands openly, might be culturally attractive. After all, we find a similar kind of pattern in Japan. See Pharr 1990, pp. 30, 111, 116.

[52] E.g. Friedman and al. 1991, p. 120, tell a story of a cooperative leader's decision to respond positively to the state call for more cotton, even if cultivation of other plants could prove more profitable, causing "nocturnal destruction of cotton plants" as a form of protest.

and associations is compulsory and leaving the group is often impossible.[53] However, independent action is, according to my own observations, a common and effective choice in China. Jane Mansbridge observes that in unitary groups, especially in times of indecision, the power is used by people who take independent action outside the consensual process.[54] While others are still discussing the issue, they already act. In China, independent action is not only an answer to delays, but also useful in getting things done when a person cannot get her proposal on the deliberative agenda or when a person expects his suggestion to be rejected during the formal, sometimes deliberative, sometimes authoritarian, decision-making process. Hence, as Douglas Rae remarks, consensual decision-making structures have vulnerability points that leave open the possibility for some nonconsensual outcomes. In fact, this means that private power has escaped from public forms of power.[55]

Sometimes participatory situations bring about psychological distortions of the optimal decision-making process. Jon Elster argues that an individual's preferences are non-autonomous if a person adapts his references to what is seen as being possible or to other people's preferences.[56] Adaptation is likely to bring a less than optimal number of alternatives into the public discussion, at least if hearing all viewpoints is understood to be optimal. However, the resulting reduction of alternatives can also be conducive to finding a widely acceptable solution during a deliberative or participatory process. Yet, it is good to remember that not everyone is equally autonomous in participatory decision making. In other words, some wield more influence than others.

Although group dynamics often facilitate mutual understanding and concern for mutual interest, normative pressures for consensus may lead to premature consensus or artificial agreement.[57] Yaacov Vertzberger examines group decision-making situations in which shared beliefs, goals and emotional affection can lead to risk taking, instead of informed and rational decisions. Psychologically, group discussions can make the group overconfident about the decisions it makes. Especially if past decisions have proven successful, a group may develop an illusion of control and invulnerability. Intra-group information sharing often produces misconceptions about social support or illusions of having canvassed all policy options. Yet, in reality, information sharing in group discussions can be secretive

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[53] According to my own observations, in Western associations leaving the group is quite a common option for members who have developed conflicts with others or who have become dissatisfied with the policies chosen.

[54] Mansbridge 1983, p. 165, 169.

[55] Rae 1975, p. 1294.

[56] Elster 1983, p. 22

[57] Weale 1999, pp. 142–143.

or partial, especially if the goals are not really shared or if personal or bureaucratic interests are involved in the decision. The quality of the decisions also suffers when members' psychological dependence on the group increases due to highly stressful situations or because decisions involve potentially serious consequences. Diffusion of risk among group members may increase risk taking. Devotion to its charismatic leader or shared values among group members can produce risky decisions. Group discussions tend to amplify an initially dominant position, and often the most committed members are seen as the most persuasive. Finally, a group sometimes becomes entrapped by its original decision and its justifications, making it difficult to reverse a wrong decision.[58]

These pathologies have actualized during the history of the People's Republic. National leaders' collective leadership sometimes caused psychological illusions of correctness and invulnerability leading to risk taking, as is evident in the unrealistic aims and disregard for information contradicting the top leaders' visions during the Great Leap Forward. Presumably, local-level decision makers are no less vulnerable to these pathologies. Moreover, the Chinese political system itself is vulnerable to negative consequences of group decision making. According to Yaacov Vertzberger, shared values among group members, selection of decision makers among like-minded people and those loyal to the group leader, preference of unanimity, and peer pressure in decision-making processes that demand that participants state their positions publicly, all increase the likeliness of group dependency and conformity.[59] All of these factors are present in China, not least because the Communist Party selects the majority of leaders.

Unity of popular will

The totalitarian model assumes that in people's democracies the government rules in the name of a single popular will, which is claimed to be a more genuine will than people's individual wills are. The interest of all is thus unified and can be expressed by a single party. This unified will is executed by an unlimited government since any limitations to its power would be seen as limiting the implementation of the will of the people.[60] Western theorists find this model undemocratic because there is no place for the people to voice their own perception of their will and because, considering the plenitude of individual viewpoints, the single conception of the common interest allegedly must be coerced.

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[58] Vertzberger 1997.
[59] Vertzberger 1997.
[60] Holden 1974, pp. 35, 42, 44.

The first problem with this understanding is that it does not differentiate between pre-deliberative will and the will formed during the policy-making process. A rational individual can consent to an outcome, even if it diverges from his individual preferences, either because the decision-making process managed to negotiate a solution satisfactory to all or because the decision was made in a process he sees as authoritative and legitimate.

The second problem is that the Chinese do not claim that there is only a single interest in the society. The Chinese theory even presumes differing interests and opinions. The Chinese theory, although not always the practice, recognizes at least three forms of legitimate disagreement. Firstly, all pre-deliberative ideas among the masses, even ideologically incorrect ones, are permitted, although ideally an understanding of the correctness and incorrectness of views becomes clarified during the course of deliberation. Secondly, those who are not persuaded during the decision-making process may retain their opinions if they remain unconvinced. These differing minority views are seen as a useful supply of alternative strategies that can be activated if the chosen policy fails. Thirdly, legitimate disagreement could arise because of so-called contradictions. Contradictions are natural differences of opinion and interest due to previous experience, social background, levels of education, industry, or geographic area. Contradictions are not solved by making people think in the same way but by finding compromises between different legitimate interests and concerns.

Contradictions in the Chinese parlance come close to what Western theory calls cleavages. According to Mao Zedong's analysis, the main cleavages in Chinese society consist of contradictions between different economic areas, industries, levels of government, and nationalities. In addition, he saw the possibility of contradictions between political forces inside and outside the Party as well as between interests of the state, the production unit, and the producer.[61] Mao Zedong was not only keenly aware of differing interests in Chinese society but also of the need for compromises between these interests.

Conflict or harmony of interests

What differs between standard Western political theory and the Chinese understanding, then, is not the recognition of cleavages and differing interests itself, although the two traditions may perceive conflicts of interest differently. Andrew Nathan has discovered that Western liberal democrats emphasize conflicts of interest, while the Chinese presume that the harmony between personal and national interest can be achieved.[62]

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[61]   "On the Ten Major Relationships" in Mao, Selected Works, vol. V, pp. 284–307.
[62]   Nathan 1986, ch. 3.

However, politics is not always about interests and is even less about egoist interests. Jane Mansbridge emphasizes that, apart from self-regarding interests, we also have other or public-regarding and ideal-regarding interests.[63] Public interest may go against my personal interest narrowly defined, but I support it because it is in public interest (my interest being taken into consideration often enough in the formulation of the public interest) or because it is in my interest to have a functioning political system and orderly society. Peter Jones argues that, apart from wants, judgments are often expressed in politics. Judgments assess the consequences of different policies. He distinguishes conflicting wants from conflicting judgments. Judgments are not demands to be satisfied, but claims that are correct. Therefore, a person has an interest not in his own judgments as such, but in the most correct judgments.[64] Even if the satisfaction of needs involves conflict over scarce resources, attempts to find correct judgments about a desirable course of action can be shared regardless of personal benefits.

Other Western theorists even conclude that politics is not about maximizing personal interests, but about finding a good public policy.[65] In privacy a voter may or may not cast her vote for selfish reasons, but in public arenas selfish motivations are not effective because in public a person needs to persuade others to share her opinion. Indeed, citizens tend to use arguments about the public good when they join in public discussion about politics.[66]

Seeing politics as a sphere of competition of interests must partly arise from the nature of electoral competition itself.[67] Because the tradition of liberal democracy views elections as the paragon of political activities, it naturally ends up emphasizing competition and conflicts of interests. However, even liberal theories of democracy usually expect an ultimate harmony of interests. As Barry Holden remarks, liberalists assume that in the political marketplace of civil society the optimal interest of the whole will emerge if every individual can freely pursue her own interest.[68] Jack Lively demonstrates that the pluralist theory of conflicting interest actually assumes that these interests are reconciled and balanced by the state, either because the state arbitrates between interests or because in democ-

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63 Mansbridge 1983, p. 26.

64 Jones 1988, p. 19–29.

65 Plamenatz 1977, ch. 6; Sartori 1987, p. 190.

66 This logic is expressed well in Elster 1997, pp. 12–13.

67 Robert Lane remarks that electoral competition is even more antagonistic than market competition. Markets can be assumed to bring some benefits to capitalists, workers, and consumers alike, but political competition produces clear winners and losers not only among political parties and candidates but among voters as well. In Robert Lane's words, in the political zero-sum game "only a little over half the citizenry gains its partisan objectives." (Lane 1986, p. 396.)

68 Holden 1974, p. 36, 161.

racies public policy must satisfactorily accommodate all interests in order for the incumbent officeholders to avoid electoral defeat. This actually means that the theory assumes that consensus is the end product of the political process.[69] That is, although the Western political process itself is full of conflict, Western political theory tends to presume that the result of the political process is harmony of interests. The Chinese emphasize the resulting harmony, not the contention between different viewpoints and interests during the policy-making process.

Although the Chinese theory generally allows expression of differing opinions through legitimate channels, under the rubric of anarchism it criticized those political activities that do not recognize the official political procedures and the state role in mediating differing interests. Likewise, there is a limit to legitimate political conflict even in the West. Western democracies forbid forms of political influencing harmful to the system itself. Even if they allow more space for political agitation than the Chinese, they strictly forbid anti-system political action, such as terrorism. Thus, even Western theories of democracy assume some kind of "civicness", willingness to cooperate, compromise, and obedience of mutual decisions to be the preconditions for democracy.

Democratic centralism and pluralism

The ways in which individual and group interests are pursued in China differ from the pluralist model. The basic assumptions of pluralism are that the society is an arena of diverse and conflicting interests; that all legitimate interests have a right to be taken in account in the formulation of public policy; that group interests are primary to the interests common to all other polity members; that the state acts as a conciliator between divergent interests; and that polity members need to have the right to pressure the state in order to guarantee that their interests are taken into account.[70] Of these, the Chinese communists agree with the right for social interests to be heard in the policy-making process and with the state's role as conciliator. They disagree with the promotion of interests through pressuring the state and understand the common interest to be more important than group interests. Like pluralists, the Chinese communists view the state as impartial, but they allow the state more powers to guide group formation and organization in society. Pluralism refers to group-initiated societal organization around certain cleavages, while the Chinese system is cautious about independent association, especially if it contains the possibility of pressuring the authorities.

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[69] Lively 1978.

[70] Modified from Lively 1978, pp. 188–190.

The Chinese theory recognizes the legitimacy of the expression of differing interests. The Chinese political system has even established interest-based organizations, such as democratic parties and mass organizations, to represent social interests in decision making. Thus, China has even acknowledged the need for organizational representation of interests. Yet, they do not see these organizations as contenders for power or for visibility in the public space, but as entities to be consulted. The role of interest-based organizations in China is to seek to convince decision makers of the group's needs and its share in the collective interest. This role differs from lobbying in pluralist theory in the semi-official nature of the democratic centralist process and in the absence of direct social pressure on the government.

The Chinese communists do not encourage open and divisive competition between cleavages and interests, and they require both participants and institutions to respect the ideal of unity and compromise. This unity-seeking model is derived partly from the deliberative ideal and, perhaps, partly from the Chinese harmony-seeking culture. According to the theory of democratic centralism, the Chinese interest-based organizations can be conceived of as participants in the public sphere, but not necessarily, and certainly not exclusively, as participants in civil society. Their role is to contribute to deliberations about public policy, while their independent social networks and resources are irrelevant to this theory. The Marxist tradition probably plays a role in this disregard of the independence of society. Marxists disdain the ability of private interests to manipulate political decision making due to their strength in civil society. In a socialist state-organized or state-regulated society, the state arguably reduces imbalances in the distribution of material and political resources and sees to it that groups with fewer resources are also consulted. However, the negative side of the positive promotion of socially weaker groups is, thus, strong state involvement in social organization and also in the definition of relevant social interests. The strong governmental involvement may create inequalities of its own since the state can dismiss or favor some interests, just as civil society can.

Consent

The liberal theory of democracy emerged from the demand that government should be based on consent.[71] Government by consent means that "the existence and activities of the government should be consented by the people."[72] As Bernard Manin summarizes, individualism demands that political power and rules

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[71]　Rae 1975, p. 1271.

[72]　Holden 1974, p. 39.

are legitimate only if they are based on the will of free and equal individuals. Ideally, political legitimacy relies on unanimous approval, but realistically democratic decision making is majoritarian because it should be efficient, but still produce legitimate decisions.[73] Robert Dahl maintains that a democratic government must rule by consent, because consent is necessary for human freedom and dignity, but also because a rational person is likely to want/prefer that the government does not act without his content.[74] In fact, people can give their consent to undemocratic government or policies as well.[75] Consent does not imply influence. As Barry Holden puts it, consent refers to reactions to someone else's proposal, not to an attempt to have one's own proposal implemented.[76] Anthony Arblaster thus opines that since consent leaves initiative to the government and parties, it is too passive a concept to give the people the role democracy requires.[77]

In its democratic sense, the idea of popular consent is actually a demand for authentic representation. Representative systems recognize that although only a minority can take part in the actual process of decision making, the majority should have a chance to express their opinion about resulting policies. Direct democracy looks for consent too, but its aim is to find consensus, not just to elicit a person's consent. The fact that the Chinese theory of democratic centralism pays so much attention to popular consent reveals that the Chinese government is a *de facto* representative government, although at the grassroots-level democratic centralism makes use of the consensual elements of direct democracy. Yet, the Party self-image is probably more consensual than its representative reality is.

In democratic centralism, the methods for generating consent are centralization and persuasion. Centralization should aim at producing policies that have enough convergence with mass opinions in the first place, while persuasion is applied when the resulting policy does not initially meet popular expectations. One important question in terms of democracy is, whether centralization and persuasion are sufficient to produce enough consent for authentic representation. The crucial part here is the success of centralization since persuasion does not make any political system democratic. Dictators, advertisers, and school teachers all try to persuade us, but when persuasion is unidirectional it does not fulfill the requirements of democracy. Persuasion may be essential for using power in non-coercive ways, which is one requirement for democracy, but it is not democratic as such.

Another problem for democratic centralism, and for all deliberative designs, is how to know that the people actually consent. The concrete act of giving con-

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[73]   Manin 1987, pp. 340–341.

[74]   Dahl 1976, p. 15. In addition, he sees popular consent as increasing regime stability.

[75]   Arblaster 1987, pp. 90–92.

[76]   Holden 1974, pp. 39–40.

[77]   Arblaster 1987, p. 93.

sent is hard to locate, unlike with voting. Even more difficult is measuring the actual amount of consent in deliberative arenas, where opinionated elements often dominate the deliberation, leaving the silent majority underrepresented.[78] In liberal democracy, elections provide a handy calculus of the percentage of people supporting the incumbent government. Liberal democrats assume that people give their consent to the government when they vote in elections.[79] However, it is much less clear whether and how the people give their consent to the government's policies. Even if a voter obviously gives a mandate to general policy lines, most decisions and legislation take place without having been or becoming an electoral issue. Moreover, it is questionable whether those who abstained from voting or those whose candidates lost gave their consent to the government, although all voters showed consent to the selection process. As James Hyland remarks, even if there might be nearly unanimous consent to democratic procedures, there is no unconditional consent to whatever decisions are made.[80]

From the point of view of the Chinese theory of democratic centralism, elections are inadequate indicators of popular consent to particular policies. Therefore, the Chinese theorists prefer constant popular input. They might claim that the feedback function included in the mass line processes allows the masses to demonstrate their acceptance of or discontent with policies. They even maintain that democratic centralist feedback provides more timely and targeted information about local moods than Western electoral feedback gives. Contrarily, Western political theorists contend that what is missing in the Chinese system is final control by the citizenry,[81] who in the West can at least vote those having made unpalatable decisions out of power. Of course, there is a discrepancy between theoretical and true participation by the people in China, but the same is true of casting ballots and consenting to policy outcomes in the West.

Liberal democracy is looking for active consent to governmental policies by the citizens because it is concerned with the possibility that the government violates ordinary people's rights and freedoms. Indeed, Barry Holden concludes that the liberal idea of government by consent essentially refers to limited government since the idea justifies opposition to the state that violates individuals' rights.[82] Since the Chinese theory of democratic centralism was created by the Party, it advocates popular consent from the point of view of the Party or state aims, not from

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[78]   The extreme example is the Cultural Revolution, which allowed vocal activists to dominate social and political life, while there was no calculus of their popularity among the population in general. See Dittmer 1974, p. 354.

[79]   E.g. Weale 1999, pp. 80–81.

[80]   Hyland 1995, p. 72–73.

[81]   E.g. Townsend 1967, p. 74, 178.

[82]   Holden 1974, p. 39.

the point of view of an individual. The Party wants to make its policies popular. Therefore, the aim of promoting consent is guarantee the ability to mobilize. Instrumentalist as this approach is, it need not be undemocratic: legitimacy of their policies and even a popular mandate for their rule have probably been important considerations motivating the Chinese communists' to be concerned with popular consent.

Deliberative democracy

The Chinese theory of democratic centralism is a theory about decision making through public and intra-bureaucratic discussions, aiming at reaching a workable consensus. It thus sees politics and the democratic process in a deliberative sense. Therefore, it is worthwhile to compare it with the now fashionable Western theory of deliberative democracy. This comparison can help in the evaluation of democratic centralism in many ways. Firstly, the Chinese theory is often compared unfavorably to the standards of electoral democracy. Hence, it is good to underline that the Western, even liberal, theory of democracy can vindicate many presumptions of the Chinese theory. For analytical objectivity, research should try to find similarities, not only differences, between Western and Chinese conceptions of democracy. Secondly, it will be of interest to examine how the theory of democratic centralism diverges from the theory of deliberative democracy. This comparison can highlight some possible strengths and weaknesses of the theory of democratic centralism. For example, it becomes possible to scrutinize where democratic centralist communication meets or does not meet Western democratic standards. Simultaneously, Chinese experiences can provide some evidence about the practicability and limitations of deliberative democracy, thus far dealt with on quite a theoretical, even idealistic, level in the West.

Although many Western deliberative democrats identify with liberal values, their understanding of democracy differs in many ways from the conventional liberal approach. They perceive that deliberative democracy can contribute to liberal democracy by making it more authentic because it allows effective citizen participation and is more compatible with the democratic ideal, which, apart from equal distribution of power, also includes equal participation in collective judgment.[83] While the conventional liberal theory has concentrated on voting and election procedures, deliberative democrats find their inspiration in other democratic processes, such as parliamentary deliberations and public opinion formation. Instead of popular roles in formal selection, deliberative democrats inquire into the agenda formulation that makes this selection meaningful. Voting is essentially

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[83]   Dryzek 2000, p. 29; Warren 2002, p. 173.

a private act and any interference with casting a ballot is manipulation or even corruption, while agenda formulation is typically a public process of persuasion through a reasoned argument. Deliberative democracy sees democratic politics not as conflict and compromise between private interests, but as rational agreement among the public.

Thomas Christiano has determined that the desirability of public deliberation can arise from instrumentalist, intrinsic, and justificatory values. Instrumentally, deliberation can produce more just and legitimate decisions. On the individual level, deliberation develops citizens' virtues, such as autonomy, rationality, and morality. Independent of the results of deliberation, participation in deliberation can embody mutual respect between citizens and be a part of a good life. In addition, deliberation helps justify decisions because they are made deliberatively among free and equal citizens.[84] Likewise, the Chinese maintain that deliberatively made decisions are better because when all varying interests and viewpoints are heard, contradictions between different interests can be solved, expertise can be utilized, and alternative proposals can be pooled. Participation empowers commoners, respects their vast practical knowledge, and teaches them to consider public rationality. Moreover, the Chinese saw that decisions involving deliberation and persuasion are more legitimate[85] than imposed decisions are.

Deliberation and the state

Democracy as a process is strongly tied to the state. As John Dryzek points out, as long as the state is the main locus of collective decision, deliberative democracy has an orientation to the state and seeks discursive mechanisms for the transmission of public opinion to state policies.[86] Likewise, Jürgen Habermas remarks that communication circulating in the public sphere can be converted into political power only if it enters into the political system. Only then is communicative power converted into administrative power. The deliberation can have an effect in law making only to the extent that normative inputs can be translated into administrative language that rationalizes administrative decisions.[87] While the theory of deliberative democracy deals with deliberation within liberal institutions or with the ways deliberation enters into the decision-making processes, it speaks largely about the same processes that the Chinese theory of democratic centralism deals

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[84]   Christiano 1997, pp. 244–246.

[85]   Or as the press put it in 1978–81, everyone will enthusiastically implement policies when they can participate in their making and implementation.

[86]   Dryzek 2000, p. 162.

[87]   Habermas 1996, p. 327; Habermas 1997, pp. 55–56.

with. Both theories see that deliberation can make administrations, legislatures, political parties, or other authoritative institutions more public-oriented and, therefore, provide more chances for commoners to influence politics. From the viewpoint of political power, popular input thus makes democracy more real and provides decision makers with a better understanding of the issue at hand.

Western deliberative democrats sometimes scrutinize deliberative arenas within the state, such as parliamentary, judicial or constitution-making processes.[88] For example, John Rawls advocates the use of public reason in establishing rules representing common and agreed values as bases of the use of political power. Since the laws it passes are binding, the decision-making system should be commonly, although not unanimously, agreed on. As Rawls put it, then even "those who oppose it can nevertheless understand how reasonable persons can affirm it."[89] This design conceives public deliberation very differently from the Chinese theory of democratic centralism. John Rawls examines public deliberation in the process of creating a legitimate form of procedural democracy, after which a citizen can leave much for the system to do; while a democratic centralist system ideally involves everyone in constant discussion about policy content, but gives commoners little control over procedures or the form of government.[90] Ideally both processes can make laws and regulations legitimate: a person can consent either because she agrees that decisions were made through a legitimate process or because she had some impact in making or interpreting a particular policy.

The Chinese theory of democratic centralism concentrates on deliberation inside the decision-making system and between the political system and its environment.[91] For the Chinese, the ideal arena for political discussion is connected to the state because these connections providing entry to decision making arenas are expedient for political influencing. State-organized deliberation should thus lead to a visible connection between deliberation and policy outcomes. However, if the Chinese evaluate connections to the state in terms of inclusion, efficacy, and influence, Western theorists have been more cautious of the resulting state control over agenda setting and even deliberation itself. Among others, John Dryzek prioritizes the pursuit of deliberative authenticity, rather than easy accommodation with the political system. Regardless of instrumental benefits to be gained by

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[88]　See, e.g., Dryzek 2000, pp. 12–17; Habermas 1996, p. 299.

[89]　Rawls 1997, pp. 94–96, 123.

[90]　Sometimes even institutions and procedures have been introduced for the mass line type of discussion in China. For example, the several-year-long period of press discussion, conferences, and polling preceded the drafting the marriage law amended in 2001.

[91]　Some Western deliberative democrats likewise emphasize the interaction between deliberation within decision-making bodies and deliberation within society at large. See, e.g., Warren 2002, p. 174.

entry into the state, the danger of co-optation is real. Although entry into the state can facilitate the group's achievement of its goals, at worst inclusion brings only symbolic rewards. Conditions for a group's authentic inclusion in the state are quite demanding because inclusion in the state constrains the kind of interactions a group can engage in. Inclusion in politics and inclusion in the state are not one and the same. Therefore, inclusion of as many groups as possible does not automatically empower society. Actually a limited state can be beneficial to democracy since pressures for greater democracy usually emanate from civil society. Fruitful exclusions guard against any reversal of democratic commitment of the state and facilitate future democratization. Entry into the state means a loss to democracy because it reduces the vitality of civil society and forms an obstacle to pressuring government from civil society.[92] Thomas Christiano remarks that general agreement with the state may contribute to the stability of the system, but the diversity of views is fertile in creating a more just system. Moreover, he sees no value in the stability of an unjust system.[93]

Many Western theorists emphasize that deliberative democracy relies on the public contest of reasons as a way to check power.[94] As long as deliberation occurs within the state, for example in its representative institutions or legal system, deliberation is subject to major constraints upon the degree to which authentic democratic control can be exercised.[95] Communicative will formation both monitors and programs the exercise of political power. It does not rule by itself but points the use of administrative power in specific directions.[96] Free collective deliberation can be normative precisely because it is unburdened of any immediate economic or political functions, although this freedom can render deliberation relatively powerless compared to political power and money.[97] Since democratically constituted opinion and will formation depends on the supply of informal public opinions, democracy cannot rely solely on procedurally regulated deliberation. Therefore, deliberative politics needs the interplay between democratically institutionalized will formation and informal opinion formation, which develops in structures of the public sphere that have not been subverted politically.[98]

Western deliberative democrats underline the idea that public opinion should have an important role in agenda setting and in the criticism of policies and insti-

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[92]   Dryzek 2000, pp. 8, 82, 85–88, 97.

[93]   Christiano 1997, pp. 249–250.

[94]   E.g. Knight and Johnson 1997, p. 288.

[95]   Dryzek 2000, pp. 170–171.

[96]   Habermas 1996, p. 300.

[97]   Warren 2002, p. 178.

[98]   Habermas 1996, p. 308.

tutions. If democratic centralist communication mainly aims at building legitimacy, or even when it allows public evaluation of policies, it fulfills the democratic promise of public deliberation poorly, or only partially. Jürgen Habermas demarcates between communicatively generated power aiming at reason and administratively employed power aiming at effective implementation.[99] The Chinese believe that a democratic centralist process can simultaneously attain both aims, unlike Western theory which emphasizes that the sphere of autonomous association and speech is necessary to complement state-centered decision making, because it is impossible to decide *a priori* the correct balance of values.[100]

Moreover, Jürgen Habermas warns that modern bureaucratic-corporatist states easily become prisoners of the rationality of their subsystems. Therefore, public democratic opinion and will formation is needed for informing the state about external costs of such a system and rationality of the whole.[101] It is easy to see how the needs for effective implementation can distort communication and leave deliberation only an instrumental role. Predictably, the Chinese type of participation is often claimed to invite opinions about implementation,[102] not about wider questions of political lines and priorities. As Lynn White summarizes, in China democracy is often seen as a technical problem, a method of scientific planning, including democratic discussion, use of expertise, and testing before decision making. However, value choices behind the decision are not addressed.[103]

The deliberative setting of civil society

Deliberative democrats often, and somewhat idealistically, emphasize democratic self-government in civil society more than direct democratic political influencing of state decision making. John Rawls demarcates between public, social, and individual reasons. To him, civil society falls under social reasons. The difference between public and social reasons is that there is only one public reason, while there are many social reasons. In other words, political will, especially the constitution, is binding, while there is room for various private and associational voices.[104] In terms of John Rawls' differentiation, most deliberative democrats value the plurality of social reasons, although they recognize that there still needs to be a connection between these social reasons and the public reason formulated in the

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[99]   Habermas 1997, pp. 55–56.

[100] Hefner 1998, pp. 27–28.

[101] Habermas 1996, p. 350–351.

[102] E.g. Burns 1988, p. 1; Lieberthal 1995, p. 64; Townsend 1980, p. 423.

[103] White 1999 (2), pp. 646–647.

[104] Rawls 1997, pp. 99, 123.

state organs. Contrarily, democratic centralism deals with the formation of public reason, and here it is nearer to traditional understandings of democracy as a form of decision making than the civil-society-centered models are.

Jürgen Habermas, among many others, idealizes the power-free, autonomous and self-organizing arena of communicative power.[105] He maintains that deliberative democracy is not state-centered, but requires autonomous spheres which political and economic powers cannot control.[106] Compared to the state, civil society provides an arena for more authentic deliberation and more social freedom and deliberative equality.[107] According to John Dryzek, since the deliberative ideal requires non-coercive communication, deliberation cannot exclusively rely on state institutions. Civil society is a more attractive site for deliberative democratization because it is relatively unconstrained. In civil society, outcomes are less subordinated to the reasons of the state and less compromised because of strategic reasons for pursuing an office or seeking access to the state.[108]

Jürgen Habermas compares deliberations within state organs and within civil society. He observes that decision-oriented deliberations, such as those taking place in parliaments, are regulated by democratic procedures. These deliberations aim at finding solutions to problems and justifying decisions. Contrarily, deliberations in an unregulated public sphere only indirectly influence decision making by evaluating reasons, interpreting values and discovering issues and solutions. Thus, they can identify problems and discover new ways of looking at problems. Autonomous public spheres are open and inclusive and their structures are fluid and emerge more or less spontaneously. However, although communication in the general public sphere is less restricted, it is more vulnerable to the repressive and exclusionary effects of social inequality and systematically distorted communication.[109]

Democratic centralist perception is limited to political communication between the political system and its environment. It ignores the need for authentic horizontal communication within civil society. Political discussion in China is far from being independent of governmental powers. Not only are the procedures for entering the public arena regulated, but so too are the questions to be discussed. Thereby, the Chinese democratic centralist practice restricts the ability of public deliberation to identify new problems, introduce new viewpoints, and find new solutions. Hence, the Chinese public sphere does not provide an adequate pool of alternative visions or a sphere for neglected interests and viewpoints to request

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[105]   Habermas 1997, pp. 58–60.

[106]   Habermas 1996, pp. 298–299.

[107]   Bohman 1997, p. 322; Dryzek 2000, p. 8.

[108]   Dryzek 2000, pp. 103, 162.

[109]   Habermas 1996, pp. 307–308; Habermas 1997, p. 56–58.

entry into politics. It provides an imperfect arena for the discussion of the value-basis of decisions, although this defect is somewhat mitigated by the official ideology's ability to accommodate and express different policy lines and value choices, as the discussion in 1978–1981 proves.

Since the Chinese public sphere is controlled by the state, there is wide asymmetry between powers of the state and social actors. However, such a design to some extent has distributed the power and resources at the disposal of different social actors more equally than Western civil societies have, although it may have even aggravated asymmetry of power between the state and individual or societal voices. Indeed, theoretically Marxism perceives civil society as a sphere of inequality and exploitation and idealizes a polis of universal and undifferentiated citizenship.[110] It appears to me that the trade-off between freedom of social deliberation and more equal participation has been real, but at the cost of trivializing issues of deliberation and democratic influencing. Trivialization of issues has served empowerment and equality as well. When deliberations centered on practical workplace or village issues, ordinary people were capable of contributing to discussions. However, it simultaneously reduced the ability of societal deliberation to control nationwide high-policy issues.

In Western theories of deliberative democracy the unit of deliberation is usually the society as a whole, while in the Chinese theory the basic unit is one's own community or workplace. If society-wide deliberation usually needs mediums like civil society associations and the media, in a community one can participate personally. Direct democracy is quite a natural setting for deliberative democracy. When participants meet face-to-face, they all must listen to all opinions expressed and react to competing views. Compared to civil society, the benefits are that within a community, the resources a person needs in order to be heard are relatively small in number and that authentic direct democracy really forces participants to consider the opinions of others. One problem with the civil society model is that it assumes genuine deliberation in the context in which a person can choose the media she subscribes to and the associations she joins. No deliberative or persuasive function is completed if a person merely reads and watches media that shares his opinions and joins associations that strengthen his original views. Although the elite and highly educated people probably need to rationally consider inputs from many kinds of groups, the educative and power-equalizing functions of deliberative democracy do not fulfill their promises if commoners can avoid being exposed to varying viewpoints challenging them to modify their opinions. In communal politics, as promoted in China, a participant is likely to be exposed to opinions and interests contradicting his own.

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[110] Hefner 1998, p. 16.

Institutions

Regardless of the ideal of deliberation in the unstructured and informal sphere of civil society, deliberative democracy actually needs institutions. As John Ferejohn stresses, deliberative democracy needs institutions to organize and regulate deliberation, to make authoritative decisions and to implement decisions. For implementation, even deliberative democracy at times needs to resort to coercive mechanisms.[111] As John Dryzek puts it, institution-free conditions of deliberative democracy and the absence of a powerful agenda setter mostly produce meaningless, arbitrary, unstable, and chaotic outcomes.[112] Thus, the institutionalization of deliberation decreases instability.[113] Moreover, John Ferejohn points out that results always depend on the particular form of decision-making procedures or institutions. Thus, meaningful deliberation becomes possible only when a person can predict what kinds of effects her participation could have.[114]

Some theorists see the state as an important facilitator of deliberation. Indeed, institutions can be designed to improve the quality of deliberations, for example by guaranteeing the availability of information, transparency of the deliberative process, and absence of coercive threats, force, and bribery.[115] James Bohman argues that democratic institutions are needed to correct inequalities in deliberation, both in terms of reducing political poverty concerning the ability to use deliberative means and in terms of constraining unequal social power by the participants with many resources at their disposal.[116] Joshua Cohen contends that the state can financially support arenas of deliberation in order to provide more equal chances for participation in deliberation. He sees that state-supported arenas could guide deliberation towards concern for the common good by balancing the influence of localist and issue-specific forums, which do not necessarily engage in open-ended deliberation.[117] Although the state has a role in facilitating deliberation in Western and Chinese models alike, state-supported civil society activities advocated by the Western deliberative democrats obviously differ widely from the Chinese kind state-organized arenas of public deliberation.

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[111] Ferejohn 2000, pp. 86–87.

[112] Dryzek 2000, pp. 39–40.

[113] Cohen 1997 A, p. 82.

[114] Ferejohn 2000, pp. 82, 84, 88.

[115] Ferejohn 2000, pp. 86, 94.

[116] Bohman 1997, p. 343.

[117] Cohen 1997 A, p. 85.

Due to Marxist legacy and perhaps the indigenous communist history of village-level mobilization, the Chinese deliberative institutions mimic the form of direct democracy among assembled citizens. Some Western deliberative democrats are sympathetic to direct democracy forms of deliberation as well. According to John Dryzek, reasoned agreement through public deliberation is possible through face-to-face interaction, either at the local level or even on a larger scale, for example if people are selected by lot to sit on citizens' juries.[118] Likewise, democratic deliberation in a worker council can be useful for creating an autonomous workplace.[119] In small traditional societies, equal political deliberation has been conducted by assembled citizenry.[120] David Miller even proposes that, to facilitate face-to-face deliberation, decisions could be parceled out for deliberations by sub-constituencies. Alternatively, lower-level deliberating bodies could feed arguments and verdicts to higher-level deliberating bodies, although lower-level deliberation should not bind the levels above but allow new deliberations on higher levels.[121] The latter suggestion is actually an adequate description of the democratic centralist system of hierarchical deliberative arenas.

Other Western theorists have openly expressed doubts about direct democracy forms of participation. As Joshua Cohen puts it, large gatherings do not necessarily encourage deliberation or the rational evaluation of arguments.[122] Indeed, adequate public deliberation can very well take place within the context of representative government, which demands accountability of leaders to their constituency and expects discussion about laws and proposals to take place both in the legislature and in civil society.[123]

Mostly, deliberative democrats have envisioned democratic institutions that closely resemble contemporary Western institutions for transforming public deliberations into formal laws and policies, perhaps because their target is to make Western democracies more authentic[124]. Many deliberative democrats see that competitive and issue-centered party politics would provide a good arena for large-scale social deliberation about political aims.[125] Elections are a means to force the politicians to listen to public deliberations,[126] and simultaneously they

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[118]   Dryzek 2000, p. 50.
[119]   Cohen and Rogers 1983, pp. 162–165.
[120]   Warren 2002, p. 174.
[121]   Miller 1992, p. 67.
[122]   Cohen 1997 A, pp. 84–85.
[123]   Knight and Johnson 1997, p. 289.
[124]   Dryzek 2000, p. 29.
[125]   Christiano 1996, p. 219, 246; Cohen 1997 A, pp. 85–86.
[126]   Dryzek 2000, p. 54.

give the public a reason to participate in deliberation and listen to various opinions.[127]

Party politics is allegedly beneficial for the quality of deliberation as well. Indeed, political parties have the role of limiting the range of proposed solutions, winnowing out less persuasive or harmful political views, balancing different demands in actual decision making, and reducing the information costs needed for ordinary citizens to familiarize themselves with issues.[128] As Bernard Manin observes, popular influence on the government becomes effective only if the issues are well-defined.[129] Thomas Christiano stresses that parties are vehicles to transmit citizens' conceptions to the government, and they monitor the government to ensure that it acts according to the people's mandate.[130] Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers see that party platforms provide an arena for deliberation on the society-wide level. Compared to deliberation in smaller units, like in workplace councils, society-wide deliberation improves the chances for overall public control.[131]

Many of the above-mentioned functions can be attained in one-party systems. The Chinese communists have emphasized the Party's role as centralizer of popular opinions. During the centralization process, it formulates popular input into well-defined proposals, harmonizes conflicting demands, and winnows out unrealistic demands. Party-led deliberation decreases the costs of information gathering for commoners. The Chinese emphasize the Party role in persuasion of the public too. Likewise, Western deliberative democrats understand parties' role as developing arguments acceptable to large audiences and persuading citizens to accept their reasoning. After all, for successful deliberative democracy it is not necessary that all citizens actively contribute to the discussion as long as their views are expressed and taken seriously.[132]

However, the one-party context does not provide competitive party platforms and thus it seldom provides a realistic choice between alternative political lines. Western deliberative democrats oppose single-party systems because they would impair the process of comparing and evaluating alternative policy choices.[133] As Bernard Manin puts it, the diversity of viewpoints is essential for individual liberty and for the rationality of the process. A choice is free only if several real

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[127] Christiano 1997, p. 251.

[128] Christiano 1996, pp. 195–201, 223; Cohen and Rogers 1983, p. 155; Manin 1987, pp. 356–357.

[129] Manin 1987, pp. 356–357.

[130] Christiano 1996, pp. 195–201.

[131] Cohen and Rogers 1983, pp. 161–162.

[132] Christiano 1996, pp. 244–247; Manin 1987, p. 358–359.

[133] Cohen and Rogers 1983, p. 156.

alternatives are available since the choice between only accepting or rejecting a given proposal is unbalanced, misleading, and excessively favors the sole positive alternative.[134] Therefore, the deliberation about national policy implementation that the mass line process provides does not grant adequate democratic choice by Western standards, although the mass line process may contribute to a truly democratic choice when local issues are at stake.

One standard feature of Western democracy is voting. Deliberative democrats often settle for majoritarian vote because it is unrealistic to assume that consensus always follows from deliberation. A majoritarian decision is needed if there is not enough time to form a consensus before something needs to be done or when the difference between opinions is irreconcilable.[135] Nevertheless, deliberation before a decision by vote is useful in screening out different positions and in providing citizens a chance to participate in a mutual learning process during deliberation.[136] Some theorists see other benefits in voting as well. Voting formally acknowledges agreement reached in deliberation and participants' commitment to implement the decision.[137] Voting legitimizes social pluralism and public existence of minority positions. Simultaneously, open opposition compels the government to justify itself before the public.[138]

Several deliberative democrats defend the combination of public deliberation and the majority principle as a combination of legitimatization and expediency. They see that when the final decision after deliberation is made by majority rule, participants usually see the result as legitimate, even if they think there would have been a better solution.[139] However, voting cannot guarantee the quality of decisions, not even when deliberation precedes preference aggregation. Yet, a decision can enjoy legitimacy that is partially independent of the contents or effects of the decision because it has emerged from an open process.[140] However, others believe that the legitimacy of the outcome does not derive from representing the will of all, or the majority as its approximation, but from general deliberation preceding the vote.[141]

According to Thomas Christiano, the decision-making process must be complemented with a standard independent of the deliberative procedure itself

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[134] Manin 1987, pp. 355–358.

[135] Christiano 1996, p. 178; Cohen 1997 A, p. 75; Cohen 1997 B, p. 414; Knight and Johnson 1997, p. 308; Manin 1987, p. 361–362; Miller 1992, pp. 55, 60.

[136] Christiano 1996, p. 178; Cohen 1997 A, p. 75.

[137] Richardson 1997, pp. 366–375.

[138] Manin 1987, p. 359–361.

[139] Cohen 1997 B, p. 414.

[140] Ferejohn 2000, p. 86.

[141] Manin 1987, pp. 343–344, 351–352, 360–362.

because there are no just ways for evaluating the best argument on the basis of epistemological or rational standards, which themselves are contestable. Therefore, voting and majority rule provide fair independent standards for decision making.[142] Some other theorists are more doubtful. John Ferejohn remarks that results always depend on the particular form of the decision-making procedures and institutions. Moreover, even when aggregating post-deliberative views, aggregative procedures produce arbitrary decisions as soon as there is sufficient diversity between preferences because aggregation depends on the procedure that is irrelevant to the reasonableness of the decision.[143] John Dryzek even suggests that deliberative democracy, when introduced in the context where voting is the main collective choice mechanism, will actually exacerbate the instability and arbitrariness of collective choice.[144]

Voting obviously is not the best means to pursue the benefits deliberation can offer, including rationality, equal consideration of various arguments, and mutual agreement. Hence, the Chinese communists never put very much emphasis on voting and elections. For them, voting seems to be only a means for ends like legitimizing different opinions,[145] making responsibilities clear, or ratifying leader selection. For the Chinese communists, the main aims of democracy are clearly deliberative: information gathering, negotiation of the proper balance of interests, persuasion, and mutual understanding. Likewise, some Western deliberative democrats like John Dryzek maintain that deliberative democracy seeks collective choice by reasoned agreement, not by majoritarian voting. Deliberative democracy should use rhetorical means, not elections, to make public policy responsive to public opinion.[146]

However, preference for the deliberative type of institutions does not reduce the effect of institutions on deliberative outcomes. As John Ferejohn stresses, the institutional nexus has influence on how people deliberate since when they do, they want to be able to anticipate the consequences of their choices. Deliberative institutions are not neutral with respect to the substance of deliberation. The

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[142] Christiano 1997, pp. 262–275.

[143] Ferejohn 2000, pp. 82, 84.

[144] Dryzek 2000, pp. 39, 44.

[145] This was a common argument in the discussion in 1978–1981. However, this expectation may not always be justified. John Ferejohn maintains that secret ballot sometimes reduces people's willingness to publicly argue against a proposal (Ferejohn 2000, p. 95). This effect is also found in China. Tianjian Shi finds that when Chinese elections were still plebiscites, people used to express their opinions in nomination meetings if they opposed authorities' choices. Since elections have become semi-competitive and started to use secret ballot, people often prefer not to speak out publicly among their colleagues in nomination meetings, but vote against the candidate they find undesirable. (Shi 1997, p. 42.)

[146] Dryzek 2000, pp. 47, 50.

institutional design has an impact on how we deliberate, provide incentives to strategize, influence how much information needs to be shared, and privilege some outcomes over others. Institutions should define who is entitled to speak, what kinds of decisions are possible, and how proposals may be modified. All of these regulations have substantial effects on the contents of public deliberation.[147] When deliberation has been invited by the Chinese Communist Party, the Party has largely determined the structure of deliberation, which issues are legitimate in deliberation, how much effect deliberation can have on decision making, and even the proper language of deliberation. Since people learn to adapt to the rules of the game, these structural rules may inhibit the *content* of deliberation much less than people unfamiliar with local institutions and political culture would expect. Still, they have much effect on issues and strategies adopted in public deliberations.

Autonomy

Western deliberative democracy pays much attention to the genuine autonomy of political actors and rationality as the criteria for preferring and selecting certain outcomes. According to Western standards, ideally deliberation allows anyone to argue for her views on an equal basis with others. Only reason, not power and position, should determine the outcome.[148] Persuasion must be rational and open to various reasonable views. Reasoning must be independent of the process of discussion. The deliberation process must be transparent and make it easy to understand arguments.[149] Thus, deliberation should proceed in non-coercive fashion and rule out domination via the exercise of power, manipulation, indoctrination, propaganda, bargaining, deception, threat, expressions of mere self-interest, and attempts to impose ideological conformity.[150]

Jürgen Habermas opines that public reason can steer politics only to the etent that the political system itself does not steer the production of these reasons. Opinion formation guarantees rationality only if deliberations do not proceed according to ideologically predetermined assumptions. Therefore, an unstructured and informal sphere of opinion formation must complement deliberations within the decision-making bodies.[151] Relevant opinions and conceptions of the common good should emerge during free deliberation, and not be prior to deliberation.[152]

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[147] Ferejohn 2000, pp. 88, 90–96.

[148] E.g. Cohen 1997 A, pp. 72–75.

[149] Christiano 1996, pp. 116–118.

[150] Christiano 1996, pp. 116–118; Dryzek 2000, p. 2.

[151] Habermas 1997, p. 56–58.

[152] Cohen 1997, pp. 82–83.

According to these standards, Chinese democratic centralist deliberation remains far from the ideal. In China, deliberation is essentially limited, and it is justified to speak of limited rationality here. What I mean here by limited rationality is that democratic centralism in China ideally aims at reasoned, deliberatively identified solutions, but these solutions are not pooled from among all possible solutions, only from ideologically acceptable and instrumentally expedient ones. Unlike Western deliberative democrats who recognize many legitimate sets of values, in China the Party upholds ideological hegemony. Western deliberative democrats maintain that even the political system itself should be among the possible objects of deliberation,[153] but in China deliberation mostly aims at finding a good solution to a certain problem or even at only persuading constituencies to accept the above-given policy. However, the press discussion of 1978–1981 effectively demonstrates that public deliberation in China can accommodate discussions about value choices and institutional change, even when the questioning of the political system and ideology is prohibited. Evidently, the Chinese conception of deliberation extends outside of the narrow instrumentalist rationality of policy making and legitimacy building. Besides, certain Western deliberative theorists have been willing to exclude from public deliberation views that do not respect the liberal values of equal and rational discussion,[154] although the majority would not limit the content of the discussion beforehand.

Joshua Cohen describes political autonomy in a deliberative polity using these words:

> By requiring justification on terms acceptable to others, deliberative democracy provides for a form of political autonomy: all those who are governed by collective decisions ... must find the bases of those decisions acceptable. And in this assurance of political autonomy, deliberative democracy achieves one important element of the ideal of community. This is so not because collective decisions crystallize a shared ethical outlook that informs all social life, nor because the collective good takes precedence over the liberties of members, but because the requirement of providing acceptable reasons for the exercise of political power to those who are governed to it ... expresses the equal membership of all in the sovereign body responsible for authorizing the exercise of that power.[155]

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[153] E.g. Cohen 1997 A, pp. 72–75.

[154] For example, John Rawls sets quite demanding conditions for deliberative tolerance and rationality, leaving the opinions that don't meet his criteria vulnerable to claims that they need not be taken seriously (see, e.g., Rawls 1995). As John Dryzek describes, for Rawls "public reason is a set of commitments that individuals must adopt before they enter the public arena, not what they will be induced to discover once they are there." (Dryzek 2000, p. 15.)

[155] Cohen 1997 B, p. 416.

The Chinese communists could describe their political community forming around all three of these aspects: shared ethical outlook, the collective good, and voluntary acceptance of the use of power.

From a psychological viewpoint, the concept of autonomy becomes more complex than most deliberative democrats assume. After all, people can adapt their wants to attainable alternatives or accommodate their views to those of others.[156] Psychologically, these adaptations help a person manage information overload and psychological stress; socially, they facilitate mutual agreement. Still, deliberative democrats see that these adaptations compromise the rationality of deliberation.

Drawing from social and developmental psychology, Shawn Rosenberg criticizes deliberative democrats' idealistic view of personal autonomy and rational deliberation. Deliberative democrats assume that people naturally reflect on their own and their opponents' arguments in a logical and reasoned way, which psychologically is often not true. People tend to utilize various cognitive shortcuts, such as prejudices, emotional commitments, or preexisting preferences, to interpret information. In addition, deliberative democrats assume communication itself to be a neutral and successful medium of social exchange, while in reality communication has a structure of its own and some are more familiar with this structure than others. Thus, individual autonomy is not simply a matter of personal freedom, but needs social circumstances to facilitate a person's development into an autonomous person. Moreover, deliberation does not only require cognitive capacities, but successful deliberation also depends on emotional engagement fostering the commitment to seriously consider the common good and positions of others. Hence, deliberative democracy needs institutions to provide incentives for development of personal autonomy and the ability to deliberate rationally.[157]

This, of course, is something that the Chinese communists have emphasized all along: commoners need to be educated to become capable and responsible political actors. Obviously, the question of how to combine equality and autonomy with above-given education of how to become autonomous is a more complex issue than deliberative democrats or Chinese communists usually recognize. Shawn Rosenberg reminds us that those who facilitate deliberations use power. Thus, the potential for abuse of power is real, and it is difficult to check these abuses institutionally.[158] Chinese communist history adequately demonstrates how the unequal distribution of power between political professionals and the amateurs they are training manifests in the manipulation of the process and the agenda.

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[156]   Elster 1997, p. 17; Cohen 1997 A, pp. 77–78.

[157]   Rosenberg 2004, pp. 4–15.

[158]   Rosenberg 2004, pp. 14–15.

Equality

Equality is a more challenging issue for deliberative democrats than it is for electoral democrats, who claim that, as long as the number of votes is distributed equally, citizens' preferences are counted equally in decision making. Indeed, the deliberative process should be conducted with the aim of qualitative equality, which is the principle of adversarial decision making.[159] As political theorists note, in deliberative democracy it is difficult to assess the equality of opportunity to influence, not least because deliberative democrats see democracy as a process of rational persuasion during which an individual may start to see his interest in a different way than he did when the process began. Therefore, there is not necessarily any straightforward way to assess how the preferences of each individual relate to the collective decision.[160] Often one cannot even identify a connection between someone's contribution in deliberation and the final result.[161] Thus, James Bohman argues that in a deliberative process influence cannot be measured by the ability to produce the desired outcome since deliberation is a public process for social, not individual freedom. Rather, deliberative influence is measured according to effective participation in deliberation.[162]

In terms of deliberation, equality means that decisions are based on the force of the best or most compelling argument.[163] Although equality does not necessarily mean that everyone actually participates in deliberation with the same intensity, it requires that particular participants are not advantaged because of political or economic power.[164] Equality in deliberation also means that participants are not able to use non-deliberative means, such as threats, to exclude some topics from deliberation, or circumvent the political process altogether.[165] In China, the Party is able to use its political power to gain an advantageous position that creates asymmetries in the power to contribute to the public deliberation. The Party is able to use non-deliberative and even coercive means. It, for example, limits access to deliberative arenas and systematically excludes some viewpoints. Therefore, the ideal of power-free deliberation does not actualize in China.

The need for division of labor makes the issue of equality even more complex. Not only in China, but also in the West, much of the deliberation takes place

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[159]   Christiano 1996, p. 178.
[160]   Knight and Johnson 1997, pp. 301–302, 309.
[161]   Bohman 1997, p. 337.
[162]   Bohman 1997, p. 334.
[163]   Cohen 1997 B, pp. 415–416; Knight and Johnson 1997, pp. 287–289.
[164]   Knight and Johnson 1997, pp. 287–289.
[165]   Bohman 1997, p. 334, 338–339.

inside legislatures, parties, and administrative organs. In fact, a considerable part of public deliberation in Western deliberative models takes place in the form of authoritative persuasion, either when institutions having legitimate authority provide reasons for any decision that is contested,[166] or when political parties try to persuade citizens to vote for their platforms.[167] Therefore, the Chinese communists are by no means unique in conceiving political persuasion as an essential form of political deliberation. As Bernard Manin puts it, persuasion is needed in political deliberation, for people often cannot evaluate all the effects of the policy and tend to neglect issues not affecting them personally, even if these issues are of great social importance.[168] John Ferejohn notes that even democracies must use coercion, but deliberative democracy should offer the public the reasons for why the state imposes its will upon citizens.[169]

However, deliberative democracy has a special quality that makes division of labor attractive. Quantitative equality is claimed for protecting one's individual interest against other claims to the same limited resources,[170] but deliberation is about finding a reasoned agreement about the best public policy. Thus, Joshua Cohen argues that the principle of deliberative inclusion is not only giving equal consideration for all interests, but also finding politically acceptable reasons.[171] Thomas Christiano opines that equality in deliberation is not the numerical equality of letting everyone voice her argument, but it is qualitative equality. It is not important that a person voices his opinion himself, but that the opinion he believes to be true is presented in the deliberation. Each view should have equal hearing. A person's interest is better served not by having more people state the same view but by providing more time for dealing with each relevant view. In this way, holders of a certain opinion can learn more about the issue during the deliberation process.[172] Obviously, such an understanding could lead to a conclusion that Jane Mansbridge draws: as long as the issue is about the common good, it is in the interests of everyone to have the most capable people as possible advance this interest.[173] The same could be true of each particular view about the collective good: that I want my view to have as capable articulators as possible in public deliberations. Of course, the Communist Party sees itself as fulfilling these wants and needs.

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166   Knight and Johnson 1997, pp. 287–289; Cohen 1997 B, p. 415.
167   Christiano 1996, pp. 244–247.
168   Manin 1987, p. 356.
169   Ferejohn 2000, pp. 76, 86–87.
170   Mansbridge 1983, pp. ix–x, 28–31.
171   Cohen 1997 B, p. 417.
172   Christiano 1996, pp. 91–93.
173   Mansbridge 1983, p. 78.

Still, Thomas Christiano argues that everyone has interests in inclusion in deliberation because non-participation harms an indivdual's own and others' perception of the value of this individual and his interest. In addition, non-participation leads to alienation and offers no incentives for attempts to understand the common good.[174] Joshua Cohen states that deliberative inclusion is needed for the inclusion of all interests and for the acknowledgement of citizens' reasons for addressing public affairs.[175]

However, John Ferejohn argues that it is unrealistic that every person could actually participate fully in public deliberation, but construction and expression of reasonable views must be accomplished by representatives. If the aim is not consensus among all persons, but consensus among reasonable views, deliberation by representatives can produce adequately responsive policies if all reasonable views are on display in the representative body.[176] However, deliberation taking place among better-informed persons is suited to producing good policies based on good reasons, but this kind of deliberation is not very democratic nor is it conducive to educating citizens to adopt reasonable views about the issue. It does not necessarily make policies appear justified to those not having deliberated.[177] Thomas Christiano remarks that since deliberation in modern democracies requires intellectual division of labor, there have been significant difficulties in establishing rational social deliberation on the society-wide level and giving equal position to citizens to evaluate arguments.[178] According to John Ferejohn, the solution would be for the government to adopt a tutelary role for non-participants. This role can be democratic if people are exposed to different views and can reconsider their opinions.[179] In China, the Party certainly has adopted a role as a facilitator and educator of public deliberations, at least in some issues, but this role itself reveals unequal distribution of power between the Party and ordinary people. Moreover, it has reserved different functions for intra-elite negotiations and deliberations by the public at large.

However, few theorists suggest that inequality may be caused by the structure of deliberation itself. As James Bohman puts it, inability to formulate publicly convincing reasons can limit effectiveness of some deliberators. The result is inequality not only in the prevailing public reasons, but also in the prevailing definition of adequate public functioning.[180] Shawn Rosenberg opines that it is not

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[174]   Christiano 1997, pp. 259–260.
[175]   Cohen 1997 B, pp. 422–423.
[176]   Ferejohn 2000, p. 96.
[177]   Christiano 1996, pp. 120–123; Ferejohn 2000, p. 97.
[178]   Christiano 1996, pp. 126–127.
[179]   Ferejohn 2000, pp. 97–98.
[180]   Bohman 1997, p. 334, 336.

enough for the equality of deliberation that deliberative institutions provide settings for free exchanges of ideas. Rather, the reasons for inequality are more fundamental. Because social contexts prepare people differently for reasoning and deliberation, some have developed better abilities to form logical arguments, justify them, and accept differing opinions. Inequality of deliberative capacity advantages more capable participants. Therefore, deliberation must be designed to foster cognitive development producing more competent communicators able to engage in a collaborative effort to make good and just policy.[181]

James Bohman contends that capability failures are troubling for the deliberative ideal since the process should not reward groups better situated and discriminate against groups having insufficient capabilities to participate in deliberation. Politically impoverished groups easily suffer from exclusion from the public sphere, although they cannot avoid political inclusion. That is, they have no voice in public deliberation during the making of political decisions that nevertheless regulate their activities. Often their silence is interpreted as consent by more powerful deliberators.[182] The Chinese communists certainly sought public inclusion of the formerly disadvantaged, but this attempt created new inequalities, such as systematic discrimination of formerly dominant social strata, exclusion of the old elite's arguments and language of domination from the public agenda, and the introduction of a new intellectually demanding ideological language which was only partly mastered by the newly included although it was required for full political inclusion.

Consensus and deliberation

Some deliberative democrats conclude that public agreement would ideally be consensual. The idea of deliberation seeking a reasoned agreement is a fundamentally consensual idea. Others, however, point out that consensus is often unattainable because participants' criteria for acceptable reasons vary and because they weigh reasons differently.[183] Indeed, in a pluralistic world, consensus is unattainable, unnecessary, and undesirable. Instead of consensus, the deliberative aim should be a workable agreement about which action to take, but for different reasons.[184] Nevertheless, these arguments might confuse consensus with unanimity since according to one common understanding, consensus refers to agreement about something but does not require that those who consent share the same

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[181] Rosenberg 2004.

[182] Bohman 1997, pp. 332–333.

[183] Cohen 1997 B, p. 414.

[184] Dryzek 2000, pp. 48, 170.

reasons or priorities.[185] Obviously, Western deliberative democrats should better define what each of them means by consensus. Otherwise, there is a danger of conceptual confusion leading some to criticize others for opinions that both sides actually share.

Gerald Gaus points out that if it is public justification that is sought through public deliberation, consensus is not a likely outcome. People arrive at consensus only if they are willing to compromise, not when what they seek is truth and reason.[186] Yet, normally, consensus in politics does not look for truth, but for a widely acceptable policy. People can consent to implementation of a certain policy regardless of widely different premises and values they happen to hold. After all, everyone does not need to think that the policy in question is the best one, they only need to view it as necessary or beneficial to some legitimate groups. In Chinese politics, deliberation is a means of making an informed policy and of sharing the benefits and costs of policy implementation justly and widely. Sharing information and forging a compromise between different interests are natural aims for political deliberation, while search for truth is a subject for philosophical pursuit. Bernard Manin favors deliberation exactly because politics is not about truth but about the confrontation of values. Argumentation about values is suited to the nature of political debate aiming at finding out which values win the approval of the substantive part of the audience.[187] Nevertheless, politics is not necessarily about values either, but about the social effects of a policy. Therefore, the Chinese view of aims of political deliberation seems to be a realistic one, although sometimes value conflicts seriously obstruct the possibility of finding a compromise and then deliberation can be one way to clarify the issue and discover whether there is any mutual ground or not.

Some deliberative democrats find consensus problematic because it might force unity or it might form for allegedly non-rational reasons. Indeed, people often adapt their wants to available alternatives or accommodate their views to those of others.[188] Therefore, Jon Elster holds that collective decision is more authentic if it is less than unanimous since unanimity often results from conformity rather that from rational agreement.[189] In real-life consensus building in China and elsewhere social and even emotional reasons play an important part. Factors that facilitate consensus are rational since it is rational for a person to see the consequences of their decisions in a context wider than the narrowly defined context of analytical, should I say academic, rationality often idealized by Western theo-

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[185] For definitions of consensus, see, e.g., Mansbridge 1983, pp. 163–164; Sartori 1987, p. 90.

[186] Gaus 1997, p. 232.

[187] Manin 1987, p. 353–354.

[188] Elster 1997, p. 17; Cohen 1997 A, pp. 77–78.

[189] Elster 1997, p. 16.

rists of deliberative democracy. Maintaining good relations within a community to guarantee chances for future cooperation, or withholding effort likely to fail in order to spare one's limited resources of time and intellectual capacity for more essential issues, are both rational approaches. The Chinese experience emphasizes the social aspects of deliberation at the cost of the Western ideal of autonomy. However, in my opinion the Western conception of deliberation is idealistic and fails to recognize that, in addition to information sharing, communication has social aims.[190] Because political deliberation is a communicative and social process, it may be much better suited to fulfilling the social promise of communication than intellectual pursuits. In other words, it may be more useful for creating political communities of all sizes than for finding the best policies.

However, communication is not always conducive to finding mutual ground or shared identity with others. Mark Warren remarks that political participation often makes people realize their differences with others with the result of making them partisan or isolated.[191] Many Western deliberative democrats emphasize that deliberative means cannot convince all participants if the disagreement is caused by irreconcilable values.[192] As John Rawls lists, different opinions can arise from differing experience, conflicting evidence, chosen priorities, vague concepts, and different normative considerations.[193] Deliberation can mitigate differences of experience; it can clear misunderstandings caused by unclear concepts or arguments; it can rationally compare conflicting evidence and find an agreement about how to interpret this evidence. Often politics can even, to some extent, serve different priorities at the same time. However, what it usually fails to do is to convince people of another person's values. Furthermore, sometimes there is no way to compromise between value-based viewpoints.[194] Nevertheless, the Chinese refuse to recognize that different opinions can arise from reasons that make disagreement fundamental.

Contrasting it with the tradition of Western political theory that views politics as conflicts of interest, Andrew Nathan points out the ease with which the Chinese perceive the unity of personal and national interests.[195] However, there is less of a

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[190] Habermas 1983, p. 286, distinguishes that social actions can be oriented either to success or to reaching understanding. Although most deliberative democrats treat deliberation mainly as orientated to successful political outcomes, deliberation can be considered as successful also if its product is mutual understanding only.

[191] Warren 1996, p. 257.

[192] Ferejohn 2000, pp. 77–78; Gaus 1997, pp. 215, 222.

[193] Rawls 1995, p. 248.

[194] Western literature often uses the example of abortion rights: the aims of guaranteeing a woman's right to control her body in the case of pregnancy and protecting the life of a fetus cannot be achieved simultaneously.

[195] Nathan 1986, pp. 57–58.

problem here than Andrew Nathan believes as long as we are talking about interests. After all, in many issues there is relative convergence between national and personal interests and compromises between interests are possible. If the harmonization of interest is often attainable, the harmonization of values is likely only if people share the same value system. Traditional cultures or shared ideologies can create harmony of values to some degree, but in the modern pluralistic world it is unlikely that all polity members share the same values and priorities. Still, for a long time conflicts between values in Chinese decision-making bodies were somewhat mitigated by shared Marxist ideology and the pursuit of national progress, but even then the Party was often divided on prioritizations. For example, a proper balance between equality and economic efficiency has been a contested issue throughout the history of the People's Republic. Nowadays, when a large part of the population no longer believes in Marxism, a dispersion of values means that value conflicts are likely to intensify and deliberative means, such as persuasion, are not always effective for legitimizing some contested solutions. In this situation, procedural legitimization, such as voting, could facilitate the legitimization of political outcomes.

Deliberation and quality of decisions

Many Western theorists argue that deliberation improves the quality of decisions.[196] Some deliberative democrats have sought support for deliberative democracy from the epistemological advantages of deliberation. David Estlund sees that public deliberation can provide more than just random likelihood of correctness which, nevertheless, is not enough to request a minority voter to change his opinion of what he sees as right. Yet, if the decision accords with the public view, he has a reason to obey this collective judgment of what is right in this situation.[197] In addition, deliberation is likely to make decisions more reasonable and justifiable.[198] Because deliberatively made decisions are more likely to be correct than individual judgments are, such decisions are legitimate and fulfill a socially integrative function among the populace at large.[199] These arguments resemble the Chinese justification for democratic centralism. They believe that the majority opinion after a many-sided deliberation pooling the experience and ideas of many is more likely to be correct, but minority views are needed to provide alternative visions for future deliberations.

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[196]   Christiano 1997, pp. 255–256, 261.
[197]   Estlund 1997, pp. 186–187, 196–198.
[198]   Manin 1987, p. 363.
[199]   Estlund 1997, p. 174; Habermas 1996, p. 304.

However, the issue is not that simple. As David Miller notes, the epistemic conception of democracy that expects that deliberation should arrive at a correct answer is unrealistic since decisions often must be made although no resolution can be deemed objectively right. Although deliberation often makes the outcome legitimate because all points of views were heard during the process, legitimacy is not the same as correctness of the decision.[200] Henry Richardson has pointed out the tension in deliberative democracy. Its deliberative aspect emphasizes deliberation about the public good, while democracy deals with citizens' claims. Deliberation looks for objectivity and uses cognitive standards to evaluate the public good. Therefore, it is inclined to regard "democratic institutions merely as imperfect procedures useful for arriving at a plausible rendering of the public good." Democracy, then, emphasizes the procedure for taking citizens' wishes into account, but maintaining procedural standards easily leads to the disregard of cognitive standards for good deliberation.[201] China is a good example of the anti-institutional tendency that can be partially explained by way of the deliberative ideal. In its pursuit for truth through deliberation, it has neglected procedural regularity. Moreover, too often the Party perception of "truth" has prevailed over citizens' claims, partly because of deliberation that is biased in favor of the Party-proposed solutions, but partly, perhaps, because concrete claims by citizens have been less persuasive in decision making than well articulated but ideologically-colored visions of the collective good.

Leaving epistemological claims aside, deliberation might improve the quality of decisions in other ways, which are perhaps more natural outcomes of social communication than the pursuit of objective truth. Deliberation facilitates the sharing of information about and the pooling of various views on the issue. Thomas Christiano assumes that more just decisions are likely outcomes of the deliberative process because it increases awareness of different interests and views. Simultaneously, participation in deliberation increases citizens' public-mindedness and understanding of differing viewpoints, although sometimes, negative traits like indecisiveness may result.[202]

Deliberation likewise facilitates concerted action. Jon Elster shows that rational actions taken individually can end up as failures in terms of collective rationality because of isolation, perverse interaction structures, or lack of information. By concerted action people are able to overcome such failures.[203] In other words, communication can help people act in concert to promote mutual well-being and to avoid situations when isolated individual action causes losses for all.

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[200] Miller 1992, pp. 56–57.
[201] Richardson 1997, pp. 349–350, 359–360.
[202] Christiano 1997, pp. 247–249.
[203] Elster 1983, p. 29.

In addition, deliberative democracy could be an effective method for solving complex social problems because it integrates a variety of different perspectives.[204] David Miller argues that deliberation helps in the finding of mutual agreement about how to solve the problem at hand. Deliberation limits the range of proposals because shared information will convince some participants to support arguments more reasonable than their original one, and because public deliberation filters non-public opinions, including narrowly self-regarding opinions and those incompatible with public morals. Deliberation can help in the uncovering of different dimensions of a question and can make it easier to solve separate dimensions individually. Even when disagreement over the issue prevails after deliberation, participants can often still deliberatively agree on the norms of evaluation or on the procedure able to make all participants feel that the outcome is reasonable.[205]

In the Chinese theory of democratic centralism one main rationale for deliberation is information sharing. In the chapter dealing with Chinese political institutions, I will show that Western scholarly literature describes how in Chinese policy making, inter-bureaucratic negotiations and bargaining are used to facilitate concerted action. The Chinese seek solutions that benefit all parties and that share the burdens of implementation, and these solutions require deliberations in order to enable various views to be taken into account and, simultaneously, to guarantee concerted policy implementation.

Caution for deliberative democracy

As an ideal, deliberative democracy is attractive: ideally it gives everyone a chance to influence the content of state policies and makes decisions on both a rational and popular basis. In reality, it is not certain that these promises are delivered. It is very possible that rationality and popularity do not go together. As John Ferejohn puts it, the aims of deliberation and democracy differ. If deliberation aims at justice, democracy seeks decisions acceptable to the majority.[206] Likewise, the aim of deliberative democracy to have educative effects on participants differs from the political aim of making decisions. Thus, there is a tension between seeing politics as an end or as an instrument.[207] The two elements can clash in other ways too. Indeed, deliberative norms can slow down decision making and even impair the government's capacity to deal with economic and social change.[208] In

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[204] Dryzek 2000, p. 173.

[205] Miller 1992, pp. 56–57, 60, 65–66.

[206] Ferejohn 2000, p. 99.

[207] Elster 1997, p. 19–25.

[208] Ferejohn 2000, p. 101.

other words, a deliberatively satisfactory result does not always respond to the needs of politics.

Likewise, it is not certain that deliberative democracy shares power equally. Critics warn that deliberation remains elitist and therefore undemocratic. Modern government is simply too large and specialized to permit equal deliberation, and public life is governed by too many nonpublic events and actions in which deliberation has little leverage. Moreover, attempts to make institutions more democratic and open them to a wider range of citizen inputs would probably undercut the deliberative capacities of the system.[209] Deliberative democrats even argue that the structure of ideal deliberation is not neutral. Deliberations should be dispassionate, reasonable, logical and treat issues in "neutral" ways. In compelling all participants to adopt standard ways of argumentation, deliberative democracy actually forecloses opportunities available to marginalized groups and reinforces existing hierarchies.[210]

Despite the ideal, the rationality of deliberation itself is not automatic. Private interest often determines how a person understands the general interest and it can even be presented to public deliberation in the language of general interest, thus distorting how general interest is perceived.[211] Deliberation can be manipulated and is vulnerable to strategic action, although information sharing itself may provide a chance for corroboration of the veracity of speakers.[212] Jon Elster has remarked that engagement in rational discussion does not itself ensure rational results. Therefore, institutions and procedures need to be taken seriously to avoid errors caused by immature agreements. Structures are also needed for ensuring stability and robustness, since rational discussion could prove a fragile basis for common action. Structures, however, can reintroduce an element of domination to the deliberative process.[213]

John Ferejohn cautions that even if people reach an agreement, it is not always self-evident how to implement the decision, how to coordinate the tasks of implementation, and how to interpret the decision in particular cases. Further, if full consensus is not reached, there must be ways to make those who disagree comply with the decision. However, predictable institutions can ameliorate these problems. Moreover, reliable enforcement mechanisms need to operate in a way that is substantially autonomous from public opinion, because this design lessens

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[209] See Ferejohn 2000, pp. 99–101, for an introduction of these arguments.

[210] See Dryzek 2000, pp. 63–65, for an introduction of such views.

[211] Elster 1997, pp. 17–18.

[212] Dryzek 2000, pp. 36–37.

[213] Elster 1997, p. 16, 19.

the responsibility of each participant in the discussion for carrying out collective actions, possibly against his will.[214]

All of these problems are familiar to Chinese decision making. Western research literature and the Chinese press discussion alike show the frequency of unclear responsibilities, manipulation of the agenda, and delays due to lengthy consensus building. However, the Chinese Communists have also learned to deal with these problems. Unfortunately, usually their solutions do not satisfy Western demands for democratic equality. The theory of democratic centralism makes the Communist Party the guarantor of deliberative rationality, but its supervisor role evidently limits deliberation. The chapter about Chinese political institutions will demonstrate that according to Western research Chinese policy making is negotiative, but deliberations take place between administrative or corporatist groups. In other words, public involvement in deliberations is not very common. Despite the deliberative political culture, decision making remains relatively elitist and possibly even authoritarian.

China and deliberative democracy

Although the Chinese theory of democratic centralism appears to be deliberative and about democracy, it does not automatically make democratic centralism a deliberative democracy. Inequality of power, lack of genuine independence of public opinion, and serious limitations to the legitimate scope of deliberations seriously compromise the Chinese claim of democracy. Against this background, it becomes understandable that Brantly Womack understands the public's involvement in Chinese decision making as consultative rather than deliberative.[215] Although this study uses the term deliberative for all political processes of negotiation and persuasion through rational argument, it does not require that these deliberative processes are democratic.

Asymmetries of power and a technical approach to deliberation are not the only problems of democratic centralism in terms of deliberative democracy. Consultation of the masses in my opinion is both a deliberative and a democratic approach, even if it is not, in and of itself, necessarily sufficient for making a political system democracy. How, then, should one evaluate another standard occasion of exchange of opinions, namely criticism and self-criticism? Criticism and self-criticism were mainly intra-Party methods for reevaluation and formation of common position.[216] As Lowell Dittmer describes,

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[214] Ferejohn 2000, pp. 89–90.

[215] Womack 2005, p. 40.

[216] It has been successful in making participants conceptualize a situation anew, creating a willingness to speak one's mind, making participants analyze their own motives, and generating unity, as an eye-witness report by William Hinton (1966, pp. 460–464) shows.

> The process of criticism and self-criticism was meant to facilitate the open airing of
> differences between Party members and to encourage discussion of alternative policies.
> It was meant not only to maximize the policy options considered but to provide a forum
> for the expression of grievances and a small-group disciplinary technique.[217]

In terms of equality and respect for human rights, this design does not appear democratic, at least when it involves psychologically draining and sometimes even physically violent criticism. It presents a very distorted image of deliberation even if it offers chances for speaking one's mind and truly finding a common position. In some sense criticism and self-criticism sessions can be conducive to serious self-expression and willingness to listen to others. Mark Selden contends that criticism and self-criticism can break traditional hierarchical leadership conceptions and overcome differences in values. It forces leaders to persuade and motivate the group and continuously explain and defend policy.[218] However, many aspects of the process, such as group pressure, exhaustion, emotional excitement, and possible punishments of "wrong" opinions, can diminish the rational content of the discussion. In fact, the process often rewards people who hide their true opinions and participate in emotional drama.[219]

Non-deliberative forms of direct democracy

In the West, some supporters of direct democracy have sought to extend the use of direct popular participation on the national level in the forms of referenda and citizen initiative. Present-day technology makes it possible to conduct more referenda and even provide technical devises for every adult member of a polity to express his or her opinions about all important issues.[220] Although the Chinese leadership has utilized polling for information gathering to facilitate popular input for democratic centralist decision making,[221] it is unlikely that the theory of democratic centralism would favor referenda. One reason is the same that many Western critics have pointed out, namely that the power to influence without adequate background information and personal responsibility over the results would easily cause irresponsible and inconsistent voting behavior.[222] According to critics, dys-

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[217] Dittmer 1974, p. 337.

[218] Selden 1972, p. 198.

[219] See Chan 1984, ch. 2–5, for good examples of peasants learning to shout what was expected (see p. 150) and exaggerate accusations during campaigns.

[220] For literature evaluating the democratic possibilities of new technology, see, e.g., McLean 1989; Arterton 1987.

[221] Ogden 2002, pp. 100–101, 384–388.

[222] E.g. Sartori 1987, pp. 115–118. Thomas Cronin shows that initiatives and referenda have not considerably increased citizen control over politics or their knowledge about the issues, the

functional, unaccountable, and even irresponsible decisions are thus likely to result.[223] In other words, private, non-deliberative forms of decision making are not very suitable for making decisions about public affairs, because they prepare people poorly to consider real needs in the society.[224]

Democratic centralism is not just a process for choosing the alternative that has the backing of the majority. Democratic centralism is a process where discussion and reasoning is expected to increase every participant's knowledge about the matter. A commoner is likely to learn about how the issue relates to available resources and long-term and large-scale political aims, while a cadre learns about local ideas and moods. The democratic centralist process brings benefits like information sharing, opinion formation, consensus building and decision making which cannot be achieved in referenda, unless they are preceded by the adequate exchange of opinions and political education. However, polling fits well with the ideal of democratic centralism. In polling, the elite pool popular opinions to gather information about the situation and later deal with this information in intra-elite deliberations as one aspect they have to take into account.

The Chinese might also dislike the referendum because of its simplistic majoritarianism. In the words of Giovanni Sartori, a referendum sets up "an outright zero-sum mechanism of decision making, that is, a literal majority rule system that rules out minority rights."[225] The deliberative ideal in China assumes that the ideal solution accommodates the interests of all. Democratic centralist deliberations seek a positive-sum game, although the outcome perhaps does not serve all parties equally well.[226] Chinese policy making, like democratic centralist consultation, ideally aims at political harmony where all affected parties benefit, are compensated for, or at least, are made to accept the necessity of the decision.

Democratic centralism and the civil society

Democratic centralist channels for popular opinion differ from civil society in the Western democratic theories. The concept of civil society usually refers to the public but non-official social sphere. Nowadays, society and civil society are mostly understood as two different concepts. Civil society mostly refers to political and civic activities, not including economic transactions and organizations.

selection of which is still greatly influenced by money and special interests (Cronin 1989, pp. 224–231).

[223] Zakaria 2003, pp. 194–195.

[224] Arterton 1987, pp. 22–23.

[225] Sartori 1987, p. 115.

[226] Lampton 1992, p. 39.

As Robert Pekkanen puts it, civil society is the organized, non-state, non-market sector.[227] Civil society is an arena for horizontal interaction between citizens or their groups. To provide the people freedom to pursue their own interests and influence the state from outside the state structures, it needs to enjoy some genuine independence from the state control.

The Chinese theory of democratic centralism examines political influence from different premises. It probes into how the people gain access to the decision-making systems and, thus, pays no attention to political influencing other than the direct influencing of the decision-making organs by the people. Democratic centralism does not reject civil society outright, but it is blind to the need for an arena for communication other than the vertical communication between leaders and the led. It largely ignores horizontal communication between the people and between societal units.

The two main elements of civil society are free association and the public sphere.[228] The public sphere refers to public but largely non-official social interaction in deliberative terms. As John Dryzek defines, "The communicative power that the public sphere can exert over the state is diffuse and pervasive, felt in the way terms are defined and issues are framed, not in the direct leverage of one actor over other."[229] Because democratic centralism depicts civil society in the communicative sense, it examines civil society as a public sphere only.[230] This disregard of horizontal association has caused the Chinese state to often disapprove of political organization and sometimes even of channels of horizontal communication. No wonder Thomas Lum sees democratic centralism as an obstacle for organized dissent and interest group formation independent from the state.[231]

The demarcation between the state-controlled and independent communication arenas says nothing about the effectiveness of the influence of social actors and public opinion. In the West and China alike, the crucial factor for public opinion and civil society voices to have influence in decision making is the will of

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[227] Pekkanen 2003, p. 118.

[228] E.g. Schwartz 2003 B, p. 35.

[229] Dryzek 2000, p. 101.

[230] Of course, I am not claiming that the Chinese public sphere corresponds with the ideally functioning public sphere. Chinese publicity is not power-free, but the state maintains that it has a right to interfere in public activities of any kind and monitor the press. Jürgen Habermas opines that bureaucratic socialism undermines the public sphere simultaneously in both private and public contexts of communication because it supervises private communication and suffocates spontaneous public communication (Habermas 1996, p. 369). Yet this fact itself does not automatically mean that the media could not print or air authentically discursive content.

[231] Lum 2000, pp. 168–169.

the elite to accept these popular initiatives. Although horizontal organization makes it possible to create social pressure to back group demands and to voice views that the government finds unpalatable, direct contact with the decision makers can be very effective as well. Often officials are more attentive to the message if the state has already recognized its social or semi-social articulator as a legitimate representative of certain interests. As Tony Saich observes, the Chinese NGOs benefit from their officially recognized status since they don't need to compete with other civil society actors to be heard by the government. Ties with the state even enable social actors to manipulate official institutions to their advantage.[232] Likewise, Andrew Nathan notes that in China, use of the state channels allows one to exchange cooperation for influence, which usually brings about results more efficiently than social activism.[233]

Democracy and civil society

Contemporary Western political theory maintains that civil society is essential for democracy for several reasons. Roughly these reasons can be classified into four types. The first rationale understands civil society as a place to learn the civic virtues needed for participation in democratic politics. Allegedly, participation in civil society activities instills habits of cooperation, tolerance, public-spiritedness and a sense of social responsibility. People thus learn to balance private interests with public solidarity.[234]

The second type of reason sees that civil society is needed for some democratic functions. Thus, civil society is needed to deepen democracy.[235] Civil society is essential for popular opinion formation and articulation.[236] Civil society can introduce issues on the public agenda and legitimize new forms of political action.[237]

The third possible argument is that civil society activities resemble the democratic ideal more closely than modern states do. Giovanni Sartori observes that public opinion as the horizontal dimension of politics corresponds well with the democratic ideal when democracy mainly takes place within a vertical system of government. [238] Since modern polities and economies have grown vast and

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[232] Saich 2000, p. 139.

[233] Nathan 1986, p. 43.

[234] Hefner 1998, pp. 5–6; Macedo 2000, pp. 64–67; Putnam 1993, pp. 89–90.

[235] Hefner 1998, p. 6.

[236] Putnam 1993, p. 90; Pye 2000, p. 31.

[237] Dryzek 2000, p. 101.

[238] Sartori 1987, pp. 131–132. Sartori himself is not referring to civil society here, but to elections and referenda as methods to express public opinion. However, this argument itself is applicable to the necessity of civil society as well.

impersonal, associational networks of civil society provide "people-sized" institutions and arenas for meaningful self-expression. Associational activities have become the center of communal life in mass societies.[239]

The fourth type of justification is the classical argument for freedom. It assumes that pluralization of the centers of power makes domination by any single power less likely. In this design, civil society counterbalances the power of the state and forces the state to respect individual interests.[240] Civil society can pressure the government with political instability to force it to respond. Thus, it can reclaim power from the state and economy.[241] Dispersion of power is also desirable within civil society because overlapping membership in different associations guarantees freedom from any one association.[242]

The Chinese design for a democratic centralist polity can fulfill some of these aims. Apart from civil society, communal or workplace participation teaches the virtues of cooperation, concern for shared interests, and social responsibility. People even learn about ways their polity functions and thus become more capable political actors. Democratic centralism provides a channel for interest articulation and popular input. Community-level participation provides chances for horizontal communication and meaningful self-expression within a unit where a participant concretely sees the effects of policies. Although other kinds of institutional designs can produce the same kinds of beneficial effects that civil society does, the fourth type of justification proves tricky for democratic centralism. Democratic centralism does not create a counterbalance to formal power but probably enhances it.

Yet, a democratic centralist polity might educate its members about political skills more effectively than a liberal polity generally does. Regardless of the theoretical assumptions, in practice there need be no bridge between civil society activities and political participation. Robin Le Blanc has demonstrated that a volunteer ethic can work against political integration, if volunteers perceive politics as being corrupt and alienated from the issues of daily life, which are important for a participatory ethic based on shared social responsibilities. In this situation, social activists can consciously reject political routes to social change.[243]

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[239] Hefner 1998, p. 28; Macedo 2000, pp. 64–65.

[240] E.g. Hefner 1998, pp. 6, 15; Pye 2000, pp. 30–31.

[241] Dryzek 2000, pp. 101–102.

[242] Macedo 2000, pp. 66–67.

[243] Le Blanc 1999, pp. 84–85, 91–92.

State – society dichotomy

Liberal democrats often assume distinctive spheres for the state and for civil society to be characteristics of democracy.[244] However, the opposite is not true. As Giovanni Sartori remarks, less power for governors does not necessarily bring more power to the governed. Instead of a zero-sum game, the relationship is often a minus-sum game: both parties lose if the result of governors' loss of power is ungovernability.[245] Likewise, a strong state and effective civil society often complement each other.[246] Frank Schwartz concludes that actually neither the state nor civil society can function effectively without the countervailing force and support provided by the other.[247]

Further, democracy and civility can be menaced as much by uncivil societal forces and unequal distribution of power within civil society as by the state. Hence, modern freedoms need effective guarantees from the state.[248] Heath Chamberlain emphasizes that the essential feature of civil society is not only its relative autonomy from state. A civil society group should have a degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the state, society, and the economy alike, resisting the overwhelming power of each of these. In addition, the group should guarantee relative autonomy for its members.[249] Against this background, Michael Frolic argues that the state-led civil society in China can provide state assistance for individuals' emancipation from the tight grip of traditional society.[250] Furthermore, in democracy a legitimate state should rule. A democratic state should retain sufficient autonomy to mediate among competing interest groups, instead of being captured and overwhelmed by societal interests in civil society.[251]

Thereby, the relationship between the state and civil society cannot be described merely in oppositional terms. Still, China studies have sometimes interpreted oppositional forces as manifestations of civil society.[252] David Yang remarks that the image of an autonomous civil society championing popular liberties, asserting the democratic aspirations of the masses against authoritarian

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[244]   E.g. Lakoff 1996, pp. 24–25.

[245]   Sartori 1987, p. 122.

[246]   Diamond et al. 1995, p. 29; Putnam 1993, p. 176, 181.

[247]   Schwartz 2003 B, p. 28.

[248]   Hefner 1998, pp. 15–18.

[249]   Chamberlain 1998, pp. 79, 81.

[250]   Frolic 1997, pp. 57–58.

[251]   Diamond et al. 1995, p. 30; Yang 2004, p. 26.

[252]   E.g. McCormick et al. 1992 and Sullivan 1990 interpret the 1989 demonstrations as a manifestation of an emerging civil society.

hegemony, and valiantly resisting the advances of an autocratic state is a romantic but mythical construction. Instead, state-society confrontation is mostly latent and the normal relation between society and the state is best described as semi-loyalty.[253]

Even in the West, social autonomy from the state is relative. The state shapes associational landscape everywhere, not only through policies and laws, but also because many citizens' groups are founded to compete for state-distributed resources. Many Western states even promote civil society organization, which tends to make the relationship between state agencies and social organizations symbiotic, not oppositional.[254] Frank Schwartz asserts that civil society must be understood in relation to the state, not in opposition to it. The nature of this relationship must be assessed empirically rather than presumed on the basis of theory. There is considerable variation of possible relationships: either engaged or disengaged, collaborative or conflictual, even corruptly collusive or co-optative. The state-society relationship can form a zero-sum, positive-sum or negative-sum game.[255]

Moreover, the ideal of clear demarcation between the state and society is not respected in the reality of Western political systems. Norbert Bobbio identifies simultaneous processes of the publicization of the private and the privatization of the public in industrially advanced societies. The state increasingly intervenes in civil society; simultaneously contractual relations typical of the private sphere enter the public decision making arena.[256] Michel Foucault sees that the result of the liberal state perceiving its role technically has been pluralization of the modern state, contributing to the relativization of the boundary line between the state and society. As a result, the state now participates in social negotiations, delegates tasks to the private sector, and takes on new social tasks.[257] Adam Seligman even argues that modern Western individualism itself makes it problematic to represent the collective and, thus, support the distinction between private and public realms. The result is projecting the private into the public realm and the reassignment of public definitions to the private realm.[258]

On the national level, democracy needs the state. In our modern nation-states democracy manifests in opportunities available for commoners to influence state

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[253] Yang 2004, pp. 2–3, 9, 25.

[254] Pharr 2003, pp. 318–319, 323; Yang 2004, pp. 11–12.

[255] Schwartz 2003 B, p. 28.

[256] Bobbio 1989, pp. 15–17.

[257] Michel Foucault uses the term governmentality to refer to this technical role of the state. See its definition in Foucault 1991, pp. 102–103. For the kind of state – society relations this conceptualization of the state role produces, see Gordon 1991, p. 36.

[258] Seligman 1998, pp. 103–105.

decisions. Civil society is thus politically influential when it gains entry to and establishes contact with the state. John Dryzek defines democracy as a generation of public opinion and its translation into state action.[259] Thus, if civil society is to have a democratic role, autonomous and oppositional aspects of civil society are not absolute. However, during the democratization process an oppositional civil society might have a role in forcing the regime to share power and be responsive towards society.

Finally, the state-society dichotomy assumes too simplistic of an understanding of the state, in China and elsewhere. As Edward Gu argues, in China neither the state nor society is a monolithic block, but both are fragmented into shifting alliances of persons and groups sharing certain standpoints or interests. Actors in this "social game" shape their strategies with the existing institutions in mind, but simultaneously restructure the state-society relations and create new public spaces.[260] For example, local associations can align with local interests and pressure the local government to confront the higher administrative levels.[261]

Blurred state – society boundaries

The democratic centralist model sees no dichotomy between the state and society. Democratic centralism conceptualizes the interaction between the state and society from the perspective of decision making. To maximize input from society, the Chinese communists have sought to infiltrate the society with their own gate-keepers as receptors sensitive to social needs and demands. As James Townsend concludes, the mass line blurs the distinction between governmental and nongovernmental activity and uses official institutions and uninstitutionalized means alike to secure popular acceptance of a policy.[262] Within the democratic centralist framework the permeating boundaries between the state and society are understood as influence. Simultaneously, the Chinese participatory approach ideally invites every member of society to participate in the functions of the state. As Tang Tsou puts it, the revolutionary ideal of popular participation in political movements as a way to change social reality leads to the immediate linkage between political power and civil society.[263] This linkage should not be understood only as the presence of political power in everyday life, but also as at least the temporary inclusion of the whole populace in the state.

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[259] Dryzek 2000, p. 54.

[260] Gu 2000 A, p. 141–142.

[261] Ding 2001, p. 60, finds examples of this in China.

[262] Townsend 1967, p. 74.

[263] Tsou 1986, p. 276.

Against this background, it is not surprising that the conception of the state-society divide is missing or unpronounced in practical political activities and theoretical inquiry in China. Marc Blecher and Vivienne Shue found that local governments understand that it is the government's responsibility to solve all kinds of economic and social problems, often on its own initiative. Initiatives emerging in the private sector were thus linked with local state organization and routine.[264] Likewise, social interests turn to the state as their ally against other social interests or to find a neutral arbitrator from the state.[265] Also common people seek solutions from the state. As Yan Jiaqi puts it:

> it is not only China's party and state leaders who believe they have the right of leadership over all matters in a locality, department, or unit and enjoy the "right" to issue various instructions; the people also hope that the leaders do so, inquire into and solve the problems in the area, department, or unit.[266]

Likewise, in Chinese intellectual debates, the state-society relation is usually seen as cooperative, public-private dichotomies are blurred, and the consensual ideal is emphasized both for the state and society.[267]

Previous research has found many reasons for the unclear demarcation between the state and society in China. Instead of idealizing an autonomous civil society, traditional Chinese society sought state patronage and supplemented the government in the maintenance of local infrastructure and services.[268] Likewise, Chih-yu Shih argues that modern collective culture encourages constant trespassing of the state-society demarcation. Since legitimate discourse in collective culture is about the collective good, people try to speak in the name of the collective interest and use state channels to pursue their demands even when they act individually or for their own aims. Collective units, then, act selectively in the name of either the state or society, depending upon the context. The best strategy for influencing is mingling with the state, which has expanded too much to efficiently regulate activities within itself.[269] In the Chinese context, the private realm simply is not separate from public life and political solutions.[270] Brantly Womack notes that the integration of the state and society is natural within a small and defined ecology of community, which in China prevails over the larger society.[271]

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[264] Blecher and Shue 1996, p. 44.
[265] Zhang 1997, pp. 147–148.
[266] Yan 1991, p. 104.
[267] Yu 2000, p. 14.
[268] Pye 2000, pp. 33–34.
[269] Shih 1999, pp. xvii–xviii, xx.
[270] Zhou 1993, p. 56. See also Shi 1997, p. 111.
[271] Womack 1991 B, p. 324.

Naturally, political preconditions have an effect too. Richard Baum and Alexei Shevchenko demonstrate that when political power is monopolized, it becomes expedient and strategically optimal for social forces to seek access to the state and allow themselves to be co-opted. Hence, the system downplays the importance of autonomy, self-organization, and well-defined boundaries, and emphasizes accommodation instead. This arrangement is mutually beneficial and empowering because responsiveness to society's demands strengthens the state.[272] Collaboration with social groups minimizes the administrative burden of the state and extends the social basis of governance.[273] The result is associational life in which the public and private spheres are not clearly distinguished, but the public dominates.[274]

As Ray Yep puts it, in China quasi-governmental organizations are assigned a role in policy making concerning their field, but are at the same time they are required to assume certain responsibilities for the effective implementation of the resulting policies.[275] Many scholars emphasize the controls such a relationship brings. Close links to the state limit civic organizations' autonomy and render them ineffective as counterweights to state power.[276] Associations' semi-official status permits the state to control its leadership selection and finances, among other things.[277] However, as Gordon White observes, associations are left with a certain amount of autonomy and influence, even if they cannot develop into autonomous pressure groups.[278] Likewise, Tony Saich argues that interrelationships between the state and associations are symbiotic because associations have devised strategies to negotiate with the state a relationship that maximizes their members' interests or allows them to influence the policy-making process.[279]

Moreover, as David Yang argues, the fault-line between the state and society need not be the only, or in fact, even the primary, political divide.[280] For successful deliberative outcomes, the organizational form is unimportant compared to the ideas and aims that can be shared within and outside the state organization. As Cecilia Milwertz observes, civil society and state relations can be cooperative. For example, the Chinese women's movement has developed within a network of social and state actors sharing feminist values.[281]

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[272]   Baum and Shevchenko 1999, pp. 358–359.

[273]   Yep 2000, pp. 563–564.

[274]   White 1994 B, p. 214.

[275]   Yep 2000, p. 564.

[276]   Yang 2004, p. 3.

[277]   Gu 2000 B, p. 100; Yep 2000, p. 555–558.

[278]   White 1994 B, p. 214.

[279]   Saich 2000, p. 125.

[280]   Yang 2004, p. 20.

[281]   Milwertz 2002, pp. 6–8.

Blurred boundaries do not only mean state expansion, but also society's intrusion into the state. As Tony Saich remarks, when the state attempts to extend its organization and supervision, it moves to accommodate a wide range of articulate audiences. Hence, it opens up to receive greater influence from society and imports fault-lines of social conflicts from society into official organizations.[282] This state-society hybrid, or merger between state and society, actually means that state and society interpenetrate one another and consequently transform themselves and each other.[283] Co-optation of societal forces simultaneously means the colonization of the administration by societal interests. Instead of hierarchical domination, the arrangement can even resemble collaboration between partners, at least between the local state and a resourceful social group.[284] These kinds of relations can even undermine central control if they align the interests of the local state closer to those of society or opens up public space for the articulation and pursuit of societal interests.[285]

Blurred state – society boundaries seem to be common in East Asia. In Japan boundaries between state and society are permeable, rather than demarcated. For example, the Japanese state creates auxiliary associations having quasigovernmental status.[286] According to Susan Pharr, the Japanese model even has had some resemblance to the state socialist systems but, instead of suppressing civil society, the Japanese state has concentrated on encompassing and shaping civil society.[287]

The mass line and second society

Sometimes in Western research, the conception of civil society is based so heavily on the state-society dichotomy that its suitability for describing the Chinese situation has been questioned.[288] As Ray Yep remarks, one reason for Western scholars' turn to the corporatist approach was the desire to overcome the conflict-centered aspect of the civil society paradigm.[289] Apart from corporatism, other state-

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[282] Saich 2000, p. 127.

[283] Baum and Shevchenko 1999, pp. 346–347, 354; Yang 2004, p. 19.

[284] Yep 2000, p. 566.

[285] Yang 2004, pp. 13, 17.

[286] Pharr 2003, p. 334.

[287] Pharr 2003, p. 335. According to her, the resemblance to socialist systems was especially pronounced during the period between the two world wars.

[288] For example, Shi 2004, p. 226, defines civil society with its relation to the state and consequently notes the absence of civil society in China, although there may be a civil society gradually emerging.

[289] Yep 2000, p. 563.

society models make sense in the Chinese context as well. On the basis of the mass line model, I would like to suggest the suitability of the second society approach. After all, the second society conception seems to aptly describe the role of society according to the Chinese official understanding.

Second society is a concept introduced by Elemér Hankiss. He uses it to describe the non-official sphere of a socialist society. According to him, behind the officially recognized political, social and economic activities, socialist societies have another decentralized, non-ideological, private, and semi-legal or illegal sphere of horizontal networks. This sphere is called the second society. It includes the non-official economy, communication, social interaction, culture, and consciousness. For example, cultivating private plots and continuing to practice traditional religious beliefs are part of the second society when the first society promotes a planned economy and Marxist ideology. Elemér Hankiss found that the second society is not the official first society's opposite. Rather, it is characterized by the absence of the dominant features of the first society.[290]

Although the theory of democratic centralism, concentrating on influencing through official channels, does not appreciate civil society, it obviously explicitly legitimizes the existence of the second society. Even if socialist China has seldom recognized unauthorized forms of organization, it has generally recognized the small-scale private economy, collective enterprises outside the state plan, private religious convictions, and communal social interaction. The Chinese state has even recognized that the second society needs legitimate[291] input systems in the decision-making structures. The result was the mass line.

The mass line permits interest articulation. It legitimizes public and personal contact with officials. The mass line recognizes the existence of political interests, needs, and opinions in society. It establishes channels for the state to hear these social interests, needs, and opinions and mandates that decision makers should take them into account. Thus, even if the Chinese socialist state sees pressure groups as illegitimate, the state recognizes that social interests need legitimate routes to decision making. This suggests that the Chinese state acknowledges existence of society, albeit not a civil society in the Western liberalist sense. This legitimate society resembles the second society, but is not the second society in its totality. The state was selective as to which parts of the second society it legiti-

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[290] Hankiss 1988. In his study, Hankiss observed Hungarian society. As far as I know, earlier China studies have used only some parts of Hankiss' theory. For example, Nee and Young 1991 have adopted the term second economy, referring to non-official sphere of economy.

[291] Elemér Hankiss found that the first society was complemented with a non-legitimate sphere of corruption, clientelism and favoritism (Hankiss 1988, pp. 36, 38–39). Similar kinds of access into the state distribution of goods have existed in China as well, but they are not legitimate channels.

mized. At times the state could prohibit private production, for example, although it generally was tolerated, sometimes even encouraged.

When the state legitimizes the second society and builds input systems for social interests, the state does not remain autonomous from society. The mass line is a process in which the first society organization establishes communication with the second society. Yet, the state is still able to choose the interests it responds to because the second society mostly lacks independent horizontal organization. As Elemér Hankiss notes, the second society has not been able to develop its own organizational principles for horizontal linking. The second society, thus, is dependent on the vertical organization principle of the official first society, and merely functions outside of its organization without an organization of its own. Interest intermediation like this "switch[es] interests coming 'from below' into the vertical system of institutions of the first society and consequently strengthen[s] the hierarchical power structures of the regime."[292] This observation authentically describes a democratic centralist system as well.

The second society type of social organization and articulation are pursued not only by the state but by societal actors themselves. Lynn White argues that civil society and the public sphere do not accurately capture development in China, where social forces often use non-public methods and avoid the open articulation of views. Thus, pluralization happens, but not in opposition to the state and often even without declaring one's organized status.[293] In China, first society organization is so dominant that even protests are often organized through first society structures. Xueguang Zhou discovered that in China the state monopolizes formal organization, leaving social interests unorganized. Thus, state-organized institutions, such as a workplace or school, impose organization on otherwise unorganized individual interests even for collective action challenging the state.[294]

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[292] Hankiss 1988, pp. 20, 30–31, 37.

[293] White 1999 (2), pp. 632–637.

[294] Zhou 1993. Likewise, Jeffrey Wasserstrom and Liu Xinyong observe that official organizations provided leadership skills for student leaders in the 1989 demonstrations (Wasserstrom and Liu 1995, pp. 385–388).