EVIDENCE OF DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

By now, this study has dealt mainly with theoretical implications of democratic centralism. My purpose, however, is not merely theoretical, but I intend to show that the theory of democratic centralism could provide meaningful terminology, viewpoints and explanations for Western research[1] of the Chinese polity and society. There are some motivations for comparison of the Chinese theory with Western research about Chinese society. One is defensive. Some might claim that there is no point in researching the Chinese theory, since the communist government uses the word democracy only as rhetoric without any practical content, perhaps in order to deceive its own citizens and naive foreigners. Even showing casual similarities with the Chinese theory and Western descriptions of Chinese practice proves that the impact of the theory on certain practical solutions deserves to be researched.

Another reason for comparing the Chinese theories with Western observations of Chinese practice is my endeavor to encourage more dialogue between Western and Chinese research traditions. Comparison can provide some new viewpoints and possible explanations for phenomena. By interpreting certain practices in terms of the democratic centralist ideal, I hope to open new ways of looking at some phenomena. The theory of democratic centralism can reveal much about possible Chinese motivations in designing political institutions or in favoring certain strategies for political influencing. Comparison can even produce new research questions. For example, connections between the theory of democratic centralism, on the one hand, and typical byproducts of participatory types of decision making that can be found in Chinese grassroots units, on the other, should be pursued further. A word of warning against drawing too hasty conclusions is warranted. Western empirical research is usually based on empirical evidence collected for the study of topics other than democratic centralism. Strictly speaking I can show only similarities, not causality between democratic centralism and the researched phenomena. I cannot demonstrate the presence of democratic centralism, but I can suggest the possibility of its presence.

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1 By Western research here I mean research published through Western academic channels. Nowadays is not uncommon that some writers in these academic arenas are of Chinese origin.

However, the independence of the original research question in the Western research literature and my theoretical research benefit my research, since I need to evaluate possible limits, practical or theoretical, of an ambitious democratic centralist ideal objectively from outside. Western research is not necessarily more objective, because its theoretical frameworks and customary interpretations guide observation and expression, but it is mostly independent of the Chinese categories, such as democratic centralism itself. This is an obvious advantage, since it is sometimes difficult to separate observation from its analytical framework. I can demonstrate the problem well with a case where democratic centralist analysis has evidently influenced the interpretation, probably without the Western researcher being aware of its impact. After fieldwork and a conference, both arranged by the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs, Kevin O'Brien makes a typology about how village autonomy is practiced in different villages. He observes two aspects: popular participation and execution of unpopular state policies. As a result, he finds four types of village administration in China he names as "up-to-standard", "authoritarian", "run-away" and "paralyzed" villages. Up-to-standard villages demonstrate a high level of popular participation and execute state policies effectively. In authoritarian and run-away villages local cadres are wedged between their superiors and villagers. In authoritarian villages cadres use the authority of the state to fulfill their tasks and disregard popular participation, while in run-away villages cadres prioritize responsibility towards the people and perform tax collection and state mandated tasks poorly.[2] This demarcation is essentially democratic centralist. Centralism demands lower levels to execute state policies, and democracy requires popular participation. The first three of Kevin O'Brien's types obviously correspond to democratic centralist, bureaucratist and tailist types, respectively. The fourth one is a collapsed government which disregards both democracy and centralism. Therefore, Kevin O'Brien's typology perhaps tells us more about the official Chinese conceptualization of problems in local administration than it tells us about actual problems in the villages.

Time frame

Choosing a representative period is one problem in examining democratic centralism in practice. In Communist Party propaganda and cadre education, democratic centralism has been central throughout its history. The Chinese political system both before and after 1978 drew inspiration from the theory of democratic centralism for its political arrangements and forms of political communication. Yet, changing social, political and ideological circumstances must have affected actual

2 O'Brien 1994 A.

application of democratic centralism. Below I will refer to studies about Chinese society throughout the years of the People's Republic, but first I will inquire into some social and historical changes having had an impact on the practice of democratic centralism and the mass line.

One Western view dates the period of the genuine mass line politics to the early years of the communist movement and the People's Republic. Brantly Womack argues that the competitive political environment preceding the revolution of 1949 made the Party dependent on popular support for survival. In order to be able to mobilize the masses for the revolutionary cause, the Party actively consulted the populace and responded seriously to mass criticisms, demands, and moods. The post-revolution monopoly of power fundamentally affected the democratic character of the mass line. As a result, popular influence faded.[3]

Marc Blecher assumes that commoners participate actively when their chances to influence decisions are real. When the state brought redistributional reforms to an end and arrogated economic control to itself, it simultaneously marginalized issues that could be decided locally. These changes moved most meaningful economic issues outside the participatory agenda. Moreover, extensive politicization distanced many participants, who found abstract political campaigns irrelevant, incomprehensible, or even disillusioning.[4] Obviously, after communists gained national political leadership, they prioritized regular administration and concrete performance over non-material things like depth of popular participation. The same conclusion is made by Bill Brugger, who observes that in enterprises democratization lost out to enterprisation. Emphasis was now laid on managerial control and discipline. In 1949 workers still had a say about production plans and even choice of products, but by 1952 worker initiative was restricted in matters of operational detail.[5]

We must, however, also take seriously the observation that older generations' traditional values made them relatively unwilling to openly challenge authorities. Perhaps, then, only post-revolution generations were educated to tolerate open confrontation. Therefore, grassroots politics probably became more lively somewhere in the 1960s or 1970s.[6] Yet, vivid depictions of the land reform campaigns show that when self-interest was evident, people became active, at least when the Party actively promoted participation from above.[7]

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3 Womack 1991 A, pp. 68–69, 73.

4 Blecher 1991, p. 135–138.

5 Brugger 1976, pp. 16, 134–135, 217.

6 Chan et al. 1984, p. 225, tell how the youth was ready to question openly the rationale behind the leadership choices, partly because cadres humiliated in campaigns hardly seemed invulnerable to them.

7 Hinton 1966.

Contrary to the first view, other scholars suggest that the period around the Cultural Revolution had a positive effect on popular influencing. It removed psychological barriers to opposing authorities and made clear distinction between the Party as an institution and its members, separating the acts of criticizing individuals and challenging the regime.[8] Simultaneously, anti-bureaucratization and anti-corruption campaigns had a democratizing effect on cadres.[9] Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li note that even today many ordinary peasants remember campaigns as the only effective means for demanding cadre accountability, because only the concrete support from the state center empowered commoners to challenge local cadre networks.[10]

Collective economy in itself must have increased political participation because there were more public issues on the agenda. During the era of collective economy, even distribution of goods, wages, rewards and punishments involved collective decision making. Unsurprisingly, even now villages having collective resources have more meaningful village democracy than localities having few resources to manage collectively.[11] During the Mao era, workers participated in managerial work in workshop decision making and through representation in factory revolutionary committees, but since reforms the market economy has subjected workers to full managerial authority.[12] Understandably, workers now complain that their influence has been reduced at the workplace.[13]

Political education and the collectivistic setting of the Cultural Revolution may have left a lasting effect on abilities for political influencing. There is even some indication in the direction that pre-reform politicization empowered people more than contemporary Chinese institutions do. Quantitative studies have found that older, less educated, and more traditional-minded people participate politically more actively than the populace in general.[14] Likewise, people who were adolescent during an intense period of political mobilization are more likely to engage in political activities such as appealing.[15] Another survey demonstrates that in China the middle-aged are more interested in politics than the young. Jie Chen and Yang Zhong explain this finding plausibly with life cycle situations, pointing out the burdens the younger generation has when establishing and rearing a family.[16] Yet, socialization to political participation could also play a part.

8 Falkenheim 1978, pp. 31, 32; Shi 1997, p. 78.

9 Falkenheim 1983, p. 56.

10 O'Brien and Li 1999, pp. 383, 385–386.

11 Oi and Rozelle 2000, pp. 531–532; Shih 1999, pp. 272–278.

12 Lee 2000 A, pp. 42, 45.

13 Tang and Parish 2000, pp. 139–140.

14 Kuan and Lau 2002. They also value democracy more, see Dowd et al. 2000, p. 196, 202.

15 Shi 1997, p. 230–231.

16 Chen and Zhong 1999, pp. 289, 296–297, 299.

Possibly, those having experienced the politicized atmosphere of the Cultural Revolution have continued to follow politics keenly. At least they still try to find political explanations and solutions to problems, while younger generations primarily look for individualistic solutions.[17] In addition, middle-aged people are more likely to have state employment providing some democratic centralist channels for political influence at the workplace. Therefore, political solutions are natural alternatives for them to seek.

Yet, it appears that politicization and polarization during the Cultural Revolution decreased meaningful popular participation.[18] The memory of exhausting struggle sessions during former campaigns taught the population to obey without questioning the rationale behind policies.[19] Moreover, the Cultural Revolution limited legitimate issues of participation. Andrew Walder discovered that before the Cultural Revolution workers could bring up their livelihood problems, but the Cultural Revolution disbanded the official labor union and made material demands illegitimate.[20] Thus, the dominant view in post-1978 China of the politics of the Cultural Revolution being authoritarian and non-democratic is justified, but one-sided.

Simultaneously, the Mao era political pressures must have facilitated the people's demanding that their cadres serve the people. Ideology required a cadre to live plainly, work hard, and to serve and listen to the people. Peasants even now refer to these values for checking cadre behavior,[21] but quite likely reformist some-get-rich-sooner attitudes give less formal ideological support for commoners' demands. For example, Mao era villagers used normative socialist discourse to demand that their leaders work hard in production too, to compensate for demands their leaders put on them.[22] However, such demands were not necessarily democratic. Although social pressures leveled material inequalities and in a material sense meant popular supervision, they did not automatically enhance commoners' voice option. Yun-xiang Yan remarks that the collective era leaders were loyal to the state and quite unreceptive to commoners' demands, but they were respected for their selflessness, commitment to public duty, and moderate, uncorrupted living styles.[23] The same social pressure limited choices available to villagers as well. David Zweig found that cadres sometimes yielded to envious

17 Dowd et al. 2000, p. 202.

18 Blecher 1991, pp. 136–138; Falkenheim 1983, p. 57.

19 See, e.g., Friedman et al. 1991, p. 212.

20 Walder 1988, p. 201.

21 See O'Brien 1996, p. 40; Li and O'Brien 1996, pp. 41, 45–46.

22 Chan et al 1984, pp. 83–84.

23 Yan Yunxiang 1995, pp. 224–226.

fellow-villagers' demands to redistribute an economically successful villager's property.[24]

The third argument is that economic reforms have made cadres more accountable to commoners. Reformist stress on law and formal institutions, such as local elections and village charters, may have provided people new means for demanding adherence to the mass line. Kevin O'Brien argues that decollectivization has freed peasants from economic dependency on the state and has given peasants new independent resources. Simultaneously, administrative, electoral, and legal reforms have given new means to peasants for resisting local leaders and wider access to media has made peasants aware of these alternatives.[25] Yet, Marc Blecher points out that many new institutions are nonparticipatory. Dismantling of political control over the economy, reprivatization of material issues, and channeling of political participation through representative or administrative institutions have left the Chinese peasantry atomized institutionally and tamed politically.[26] Compared to the earlier ideal, reformists limited direct popular participation.

Since economic reforms, an average peasant has had more autonomy and private resources. An influential Western view argues that these resources have altered village power relations so that cadres now need to take popular opinions into account. Susan Greenhalgh argues that after reforms, local cadres gained power relative to the state, but simultaneously they have lost some influence over society. Now they can employ fewer sanctions against the recalcitrant, since economic controls helping them enforce administrative control are now gone. Thus, local cadres now have a better opportunity to reshape central policies and, simultaneously, are forced to modify policies in response to social demands. The result is peasantization of policies.[27] Yun-xiang Yan argues that during the collective period cadre performance was measured by higher-level administration and rewarded politically, making local cadres inflate implementation. If a cadre attempted to resist state demands, higher-ups could replace him at once. Nowadays, cadres depend on independent farmers' cooperation and levy their own salaries from villagers. They have little authority and try to avoid upsetting villagers. As a result, they pay more attention to reactions from below, even when pressures from below sometimes make them resist state control.[28] The observation that cadres receive all the more pressure from the people, when villagers' economic and political resources grow and the state is less willing to invest in local administration and services, appears true. However, there are other factors at play as well.

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24 Zweig 1997 A, pp. 47–48, 112–113.

25 O'Brien 1996, p. 41.

26 Blecher 1991, pp. 139, 142.

27 Greenhalgh 1993, p. 221, 248–250.

28 Yan Yunxiang 1995, pp. 224–230, 234.

Attitudinal change among the populace perhaps encouraged popular participation in post-reform China. The household contract system distributing lands to peasants bred contractual thinking. It made peasants evaluate their leaders in terms of reciprocal obligation. In return for paying taxes, peasants require that local leaders respect their rights and deliver promises made by the state.[29] Private cultivation made economic interests more visible and made farmers more aware of their personal interest vis-à-vis communal interests, compared to the era of collective agriculture when cadres could disguise their own benefit as a collective policy.[30] Interest also diversified after the reform brought new opportunities, making interests conflict more often than during the period of collective economy.[31]

Deideologization has given more space for open opinion articulation during the reformist era. Thomas Bernstein argues that since reforms, leadership has been more receptive to social input because ideology lost ground. Before, ideological enthusiasm often caused deliberate disregard of the actual situation and popular demands. Since reforms, group interests have gained legitimacy and the decline of political control capacities has forced the leadership to pay attention to strategically important group interests in order to maintain stability. Farmers became more outspoken when political control loosened and there was no longer a threat of class stigma. Simultaneously, increased media exposure and mobility have increased their awareness of different possibilities.[32]

One effect of post-Cultural Revolution political change has been growing elitism in political participation. New political institutions and policy-making style have emphasized specialization and expertise, and economic reforms have made economic utility a political resource. Now economically influential groups such as private entrepreneurs have effective means for political participation.[33] In contemporary Chinese politics, entrepreneur voice is stronger than workers' voice and has more channels at its disposal.[34] Simultaneously, management has gained more power vis-à-vis workers.[35] No wonder that workers complain of their decreasing part in decision making.[36] Intellectuals have been another group benefiting from the change: in the new political climate favoring expertise, intellectu-

29 Li and O'Brien 1996, pp. 40–42, 52; O'Brien 1996, p. 37.

30 Bernstein 1999, pp. 201–202. Cadres could, for example, abolish private plots which they themselves had no time to cultivate when the central administration insisted upon extending collective agriculture (Zweig 1989, p. 130).

31 Zweig 1997 A, p. 131, 139–140, 145.

32 Bernstein 1999, pp. 200–202.

33 Yep 2000.

34 Chan 1993, pp. 46–49.

35 Tang and Parish 2000, pp. 131–140.

36 Tang and Parish 2000, pp. 139–140.

als have been invited to give advice even to the national leaders.[37] Even democratically minded intellectuals and students have taken it for granted that they are entitled to speak for the people.[38]

The crucial question is whether democratic centralism worked better when power was more decentralized to localities and enterprises or whether it was more prevalent when social structures designed for democratic centralist influencing were more inclusive than they are in today's market economy. During the Mao era most of the populace belonged to units with democratic centralist channels, but these units were left with limited autonomy. However, since reforms, units have sufficient autonomy to decide about affairs of popular interest, but fewer people belong to units providing democratic centralist channels and decision making in urban units is less participatory. Wenfang Tang and William Parish use survey evidence to show that urban political participation has declined.[39] This is only natural since more issues fell under collective goods and services under collective economy and many of these issues were decided collectively. Simultaneously, decentralized power does not necessarily benefit commoners but can enhance powers of local leaders or enterprise managers. As Tang and Parish show, nowadays job insecurity and dependency on managerial authority induce quiescence.[40] That is, exit option may increase independence, but not necessarily political power.

The fourth approach to dating of the active mass line participation would observe the general political atmosphere of the time. Jean Oi maintains that the state turned the mass line on and off. When the atmosphere allowed, peasants used overt methods such as protests and demonstrations, encouraged during radical periods, or formal channels, reinforced after the reform. When it did not, their influencing took covert forms.[41]

Whatever the most ideal time frame to study democratic centralism in practice, it seems justifiable to give special attention to the Chinese countryside. There are several reason for expecting active political participation in the countryside. One is that the countryside was under less strict political control.[42] Another is that Chinese villages have formed natural units for unitary democracy throughout the

37 For the circle of intellectuals cultivated by former Party Secretaries Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, see Goldman 1994.

38 Goldman 1994, p. 7; Perry 1992, pp. 151–152. For some elitist student posters in the democracy movement of 1989, see Han 1990, pp. 280–283.

39 Tang and Parish 2000, p. 205.

40 Tang and Parish 2000, p. 153. Contrarily, lifelong employment was empowering, since in the absence of power to fire workers managers had an incentive to guarantee workers' cooperation and respond to their needs. See, e.g., Walder 1987.

41 Oi 1991, p. 228.

42 See, e.g., Falkenheim 1978, pp. 30–31; Wolf 1984.

People's Republic. Urban work units have lost much of their original communal character now that all the more urbanites are employed outside the state sector and fewer live in workplace residential areas. Peasant families continue to live and work within their village and continue sharing some interests of the village as a whole, making it politically meaningful to participate in common affairs on unitary democratic terms.

Influencing through democratic centralist channels

The mass line type of popular feedback requires that everyone have channels of political influencing available in their daily life environment. As a result, the Chinese have multiple feedback opportunities at hand. For example, state employees know personally Party members, trade union representatives, and work unit management. They all are supposed to act as gatekeepers for separate democratic centralist channels.[43] The workplace has many official channels for mass participation: labor union for promoting welfare interests, workers' congress for expressing opinions about policy initiatives, and worker representation in workplace administration, and workplaces nominate candidates for people's congresses and other representative or advisory bodies.[44] Even if her position is low, a worker is quite likely invited to some meetings dealing with her workplace affairs; in traditional residential areas, residents can make suggestions for the residential committee to improve local services and environment; there is a special office for people's visits and letters at the local government and many government agencies. Workplaces, hotels, and trains have special books available for workers or customers to write suggestions and many services have supervision telephone numbers printed in a visible spot.[45] It is evident even for a casual visitor that the Chinese have many channels to make suggestions (*ti yijian*).[46]

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43 Ruan 1993 demonstrates how, but interprets this situation only as a form of control. The other aspect is that this relation was meant to provide an access to decision-making structures for commoners.

44 Shaw 1996, p. 145.

45 The Chinese do not use these methods only for complaint. Once I saw a middle aged man asking for the suggestion book in a train, which was provided at once. His feedback, read aloud by a fellow passenger, praised a very helpful and service-oriented attendant working in that car.

46 In the 1990s, I met many occasions when Chinese friends spontaneously suggested that I make proposals (*ti yijian*) in order to change troublesome practices at my university. Intuitively I believe that they would not have made these suggestions unless they believed that my proposal would be considered. Yet, not everyone has so rosy picture about suggestions: One of my friends related that her outspokenness in meetings negatively influenced her career mobility. As a graduate student at a Chinese university I also participated a criticism meeting organized for foreign graduate students to know our expectations better.

As Marc Blecher remarks, unlike in the West, in rural China everyone knows local leaders and has access to them.[47] Apart from formal channels like grassroots meetings and investigations, the Mao era state created many informal practices and opportunities for opinion articulation, including cadres' informal visits to neighbors or chats during the workday. Informal channels of communication were vital for learning views that were not expressed officially and hearing people who were reluctant to speak in public. This indicates, according to Marc Blecher, that socialist China encouraged democratic, spontaneous, and expressive participation, not only mobilizational and co-optive participation.[48] Moreover, the mass line paid attention not only to articulated opinions but also unexpressed concerns and needs in order to ameliorate political inequality by compensating for inarticulateness and to find more effective solutions to local problems. For this end, the mass line successfully encouraged intimacy and equality between basic-level cadres and ordinary farmers. The Chinese Communists thus created communities where common background with others enhanced cadres' understanding of local situations.[49] The mass line even created a political culture making the masses disrespect leaders who kept a distance from the commoners.[50]

Apart from providing input, mass participation has other functions, such as enhancing people's sense of efficacy, offering safety valves for dissatisfaction, checking cadre abuses of power, and promoting internalization of Party norms.[51] Furthermore, constant meetings keep everyone informed about the production situation and make everyone aware of production issues.[52] In addition, popular participation is used to maintain order in the workplace or village. Management organizes workers to discuss workplace rules and to evaluate the compliance of each unit member annually.[53]

Production and technology as well as personnel and welfare questions are defined as matters on which workers should have a say.[54] Ordinary workers and farmers participated actively in making decisions about labor remuneration, distribution of rare opportunities, organization of labor, leadership recruitment, and welfare.[55]

47 Blecher 1983, p. 66.

48 Blecher 1983, p. 65–66, 71–73; Blecher 1991, pp. 132–133.

49 Blecher 1983, pp. 63–65, 80.

50 Blecher 1983, p. 70.

51 Victor Falkenheim 1983, p. 50.

52 A worker interviewee in Walder 1988, p. 144.

53 Shaw 1996, p. 102.

54 Brugger 1976, p. 228–229; Unger and Chan 2004, p. 11.

55 Blecher 1991, p. 137.

In a socialist workplace, workers had a relatively good bargaining position. Lifelong employment left managers few controls over worker behavior. Dense social networks between workers and managers as well as among workers created an environment in which workers had many ways to make their opinions known. Apart from direct contacting of leaders, they could mount informal social pressure by means of foot dragging or gossip, for instance.[56] Likewise, in villages, leaders are dependent on fellow-villagers' cooperation in collective agriculture or nowadays in taxpaying. Indeed, village leaders must create a set of economic policies that are consistent with farmers' objectives, because their work depends on villagers' cooperation. Therefore, leaders shuffle resources between households to maximize village welfare and try to tie households to contracts through informal bargaining about burdens and opportunity sharing.[57] Shared values between workers and management have made it possible for workers to demand that leaders open participatory processes when workers feel their vital interest is at stake.[58]

Many Western-based scholars stress particularist aspects of political participation in China. As Tianjian Shi explains, the political structure in China makes it necessary to participate in politics, because government controls many daily life issues and distributions.[59] More equal access to participatorily redistributed material resources naturally extended participation among the populace.[60] However, issues of distribution and daily life necessities only partly explain active participation. Kent Jennings finds that only a minority of issues deal with personal economy and grievances. As often as personal economy, the issue centered on local economy or government and Party affairs, while agriculture and social issues occupied an even larger share of the issue domain.[61] Likewise, Hebert Yee and Wang Jinhong find that Chinese peasants do not participate mainly for personal interest, but for social issues or to supervise cadre work style. Questions like public security, agricultural policies or unequal distribution occupy much of the participatory agenda. This indicates that traditional obedience or self-regarding particularism describe poorly peasant participation today.[62]

Wenfang Tang and William Parish suggest that the high number of complaints in China might indicate that the Chinese are quite discontented.[63] This may be so. Yet, in a democratic centralist polity gatekeepers to the political system are

56 Tang and Parish 2000, pp. 131–132.

57 Rozelle 1994, pp. 121–123.

58 Unger and Chan 2004.

59 Shi 1997, p. 111.

60 Blecher 1991, p. 134.

61 Jennings 1997, pp. 365–366.

62 Yee and Wang 1999, p. 39.

63 Tang and Parish 2000, p. 191.

brought as near to each individual as possible. Closeness reduces time and effort needed for contacting when gatekeepers are known and available even for casual oral complaints. Closeness may even cause people to try to find political solutions to small matters if the most accessible authority happens to belong to the political rather than the economic or social elite. Therefore, the number of complaints in China may reflect more the fact that voicing complaints is relatively easy for the Chinese.

Scope of ritualistic participation

The totalitarian approach claims that political participation in socialist countries is totally ritualistic, or at best gives participants the emotional rewards of belonging, but no political influence whatsoever. It assumes that participation in socialism is meant to produce compliance and political indoctrination, not chances for influencing. Consequently, doubts about Chinese participation have much to do with authenticity. Although there obviously was much popular participation in China, it allegedly was of low quality showing compliance with elite mobilization.[64] Political and economic dependency on management presumably makes workers participate according to the structured pattern of ritual and the majority to remain passive.[65]

The Communist Party leadership in popular participation is rightfully seen as mobilization from above. The communists enhanced their own power through popular mobilization. As Chen Yung-fa demonstrates, in the revolution communists staged political participation to make people commit themselves emotionally to the communist cause. They manipulated inner-community grudges against the former elite to make excited poorer villagers denounce members of elite in public. There was no return to old power relations thereafter, but simultaneously villagers became dependent on the communists for safeguarding the new peasant power from restoration of the old patterns of village authority.[66] Ever since, the Party has determined the form, scope, and rhythm of legitimate political participation. They even decided who can participate and which issues participatory politics can deal with.[67]

Although there is plenty of evidence that political participation was often meaningful and gave participants real political influence, the totalitarian assumption might be partially, but not totally wrong. Marc Blecher observes that volun-

64 Townsend 1980, p. 431.

65 Walder 1988, p. 157.

66 Chen 1986, ch. 3.

67 Burns 1988, p. 172; Starr 1979, p. 202.

tary participation flourished when it dealt with economic issues meaningful to villagers. However, when issues revolved around abstract political and factional issues irrelevant or even incomprehensible to commoners, cynicism and ritual participation replaced enthusiasm.[68] Andrew Walder confirms that mutually contradictory, highly factionalist and abstract campaigns taught workers to adopt calculative strategies in political meetings. When they were expected to speak out, they knew how to perform according to expectations and to refrain from expressing their real opinions.[69]

In the name of organizing opportunities for participation, the Mao era state made political meetings practically compulsory.[70] Victor Falkenheim demonstrates that during the collective era China had no politically inactive or apathetic citizens. Most citizens participated in politics, but not always voluntarily. Yet, the Chinese varied in the quality and sincerity of their participation. As long as their participation rate remained above the minimum level, they could even set their own preferred level of political activity. Even if many complained that political involvement is time-consuming, competitive, empty, and potentially dangerous, the majority followed politics in the media and preferred to appear as average participators.[71]

Interestingly, it seems that many officially promoted forms of participation, such as wall poster (*dazibao*) writing, appeared ritualistic and above-directed to the Chinese.[72] Likewise, political campaigns can be unattractive arenas for non-ritualistic participation. Pressures for unity combined with close monitoring during campaigns allegedly made it potentially dangerous to use campaigns for non-official purposes.[73] But other scholars have found that campaigns have provided people opportunities to use the campaign for their own ends.[74] Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li even found that many Chinese peasants still hold that in Maoist campaigns the support offered by work teams sent from higher levels empowered peasants and resulted in improved cadre receptivity to the masses.[75]

Although expanding opportunities for meaningful participation quite likely increases participation, the Chinese experience demonstrates the validity of Western representative democrats' warnings that participation can be burdensome and

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68 Blecher 1991, pp. 133–139.

69 Walder 1988, pp. 145–147.

70 See, e.g., Hinton 1966, pp. 261–264; Oi 1991, p. 149.

71 Falkenheim 1978, pp. 21–22.

72 Falkenheim 1978, pp. 23–24. For personal experiences, see Gao 1999, p. 147.

73 Falkenheim 1978, pp. 25, 30; Burns 1983, p. 159.

74 Perry 2002, ch. 8; Shaw 1996, p. 211.

75 O'Brien and Li 1999, pp. 377–378, 384. They find, however, that peasants speak of idealized campaigns without the class struggle content of actual Maoist campaigns.

that some people are justified to be disinterested in politics.[76] Yet, the Chinese participation level and interest in politics have remained high even after participation has become voluntary,[77] suggesting that awareness of possibilities for political influencing and political education have provided people with meaningful political skills. Nevertheless, interest in political participation waned despite extreme politicization. Western observers give examples of people who would rather work for economic rewards or on necessary household tasks than sit in meetings.[78]

Political control or social pressure?

Western literature tends to explain reluctance to speak in public meetings in China with political risks.[79] However, similar reluctance can be found in face-to-face democracies without any ideological control. Hence, it might be that public participation under communal social pressures is explained by certain typical patterns of behavior more than by the presence of the Communist Party.

Jane Mansbridge found it was not at all easy to express one's opinions publicly in American face-to-face democracies, but the problems were psychological, not external. Since decisions were made in meetings with neighbors or co-workers, participants wanted to avoid public conflict affecting their relations with people they interacted with not only politically, but also in their daily social environment.[80] In other words, the setting of direct democracy makes people aware that in local politics one has a stake in his future relations with other community members. Not only can the act of speaking have future consequences for one's social relations, but it is also made publicly in front of people who are affected by the decision.

No wonder many wanted to avoid this emotional stress by keeping silent. To overcome this kind of inertia, possibly even aggravated by cultural norms of public harmony, the Chinese Communists paid much attention to how to encourage commoners to speak up. Communists staged participatory settings carefully, especially if meetings were meant to deal with intra-community conflicts. They investigated the matter first. They even held closed criticism sessions to wear down targets of criticism first. In a public criticism session that followed, they gave the floor first to critics who were trained beforehand. After political activists

76 Hinton 1966, pp. 261–264; Oi 1991, p. 149.

77 E.g. Jennings 1997.

78 Hinton 1966, p. 510.

79 E.g. Oi 1991, p. 151.

80 Mansbridge 1983.

or victims with emotionally moving stories, the hesitant majority was gradually drawn in due to emotional excitement, but also because they now had learned how they were expected to act from earlier articulators.[81]

To cope with the emotional stress of disagreeing in public with some of one's neighbors, American face-to-face democracies adopted signs of informality for making speakers feel at ease.[82] Likewise, informality has been one important element in the Chinese mass line leadership. To level the threshold for participation, grassroots leaders provided people chances to voice their opinions in informal situations, like during collective work or family visits.[83]

Jane Mansbridge describes how when people finally choose to speak up, they, having held their grudges long inside, are often angry and almost out of control. Sometimes there is a threat of violence involved.[84] In Chinese politics, personal grievances have sometimes burst into violence, sometimes with active support or passive acceptance by the Party. William Hinton has vividly depicted how village meetings during the land reform resulted in physical attacks.[85] The same psychological processes must have produced many victims during the Cultural Revolution, when individuals were subjected to intense, hostile, and emotionally colored accusations by a group. Marc Blecher observes that participatory politics concerning the issue of material redistribution could evince a tendency toward radicalism because political and economic authority coincide in it.[86] Yet, even participation without material redistribution could prove to be violent and escalating if participation deals with inter-community conflicts. Sharpening and personalizing of the conflict could result from dealing with disagreements and interest conflicts face-to-face. There are examples of face-to-face decision making becoming paralyzed because ideological or personal conflicts make cooperation, even communication, impossible between different parties.[87] However, at least as often participatory politics seeks communal harmony and compromise. In China participatory politics seems to have encouraged egalitarianism,[88] which is a solution diluting intra-community conflicts as far as possible.

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81 Chan et al. 1984, p. 50–61. See also Hinton 1966, pp. 155–160.

82 Mansbridge 1983, pp. 66, 160–161.

83 Burns 1988, p. 77.

84 Mansbridge 1983, pp. 62–65.

85 See examples in Hinton 1966.

86 Blecher 1991, pp. 134–137.

87 Chan et al. 1984, pp. 200–206; Lawrence 1994, p. 62.

88 Chan et al. 1984, p. 219; Liu 2000, p. 158; Zweig 1997 A, p. 44. Note that when items in short supply were distributed, both Chan et al. and Liu mention using lots as the way to decide the matter. Drawing lots was also a preferred method in the paragon of direct democracy in ancient Athens.

Jane Mansbridge observes that avoidance of public conflict made American townspeople decide crucial questions informally before the town meeting. They tried to work out solutions satisfying all parties and groups before bringing the issue to the public agenda. Thus, they proceeded from informal negotiation to formal unity.[89] Likewise, it was typical that cadres in China met informally before mass meetings to canvass opinions and discuss problems. Often they made preliminary decisions, which were then put to mass meeting for ratification.[90] In American participatory town or workplace meetings a candidate list for public posts was prepared in advance and the meeting was assumed to accept candidates unanimously. This method reduced fear of public humiliation should a candidate fail to be elected. These informal arrangements, according to Jane Mansbridge, protect communal harmony and personal dignity, but also leave some people isolated from the decision-making core and make them feel powerless to change already widely agreed proposals.[91] Similarly, candidate nomination in China is first discussed in villager small groups and in the Party branch before public candidate nomination.[92] Although Western literature usually emphasizes chances for manipulation by the Party,[93] informal preparations for a public meeting and a public process of leadership selection can be typical for face-to-face democracies in general.

Political education

Chang Tsan-Kuo, Wang Jian and Chen Chih-Hsien see that news in China is a form of socially constructed knowledge for public consumption, not just political indoctrination. [94] Similarly, political education not only disseminates state-promoted values but also provides ordinary people with knowledge and means to act in a certain political environment. Victor Shaw found that political study sessions were important occasions for gaining general knowledge: during them news was delivered and non-political workplace information and issues were dealt with. They involved very little direct control through ideology, as long as there was no open opposition. Political study mostly aimed at legitimation – justifying policy

89 Mansbridge 1983, pp. 101, 149, 161–162. See also Stevens 1999 about working out solutions informally to avoid public contradictions and making decisions not taking all views into account.

90 Burns 1988, pp. 77–78.

91 Mansbridge 1983, pp. 66–71; for the same observation with workplace democracy see ibid., pp. 161–162.

92 Chan et al. 1984, pp. 66–69; Unger and Chan 2004, p. 11.

93 See, e.g., Kennedy 2002, 459–460.

94 Chang et al. 1994, p. 55.

changes in order to remove opposition and motivate people for implementation.[95] Political study increased general knowledge about political affairs and production situation in one's unit, created a greater sense of identification with the political system and encouraged greater receptivity to elite demands and values; but study in small groups provided some space for citizen response as well.[96]

Politicization of workplace and village provided people with tools for independent political articulation as well. As John Gardner remarks, participation gave people new political skills. They learned to speak in public meetings, use new political vocabulary, and sometimes even internalized a new relationship with their leaders, whom they could turn for help but whom they could also criticize.[97] Tianjian Shi found that political study gives people resources for independent political activities. People get relevant information, become psychologically involved in politics, and some develop a strong sense of civic duty during political education. Some even use political study sessions for their own purposes, such as challenging local decisions, criticizing government policies, making suggestions, or embarrassing unpopular leaders.[98] Thus, although political study aims at political socialization, it may also lead to expression of unorthodox opinions.[99]

Lack of information disempowers people whose abilities to participate politically consequently suffer.[100] Therefore, political education in China has not only an indoctrinating but also an empowering effect. Ability to use officially acceptable language and arguments is itself empowering, because leaders everywhere tend to consider seriously arguments that they find comprehensible and reasonable. Neither comprehensibility and reasonability are neutral, but depend largely on shared vocabulary and values. As Tianjian Shi notes, the useful resources for influencing in China are information, access, and communication skills,[101] all of which are to some extent achievable during political education sessions. Generally speaking, the Chinese have learned officially persuasive language well. Andrew Nathan observes that the Chinese tend to analyze politics using official jargon and categories. They accept many official values, regardless of their possible skepticism of the political system. Simultaneously, they well understand and accept that facts reported in media have official meaning.[102]

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95 Shaw 1996, pp. 47–50.

96 Townsend 1980, pp. 410–411; Walder 1988, p. 144.

97 Gardner 1972, p. 230.

98 Shi 1997, pp. 188–189.

99 Townsend 1980, p. 414.

100 UNDP 2002, p. 75.

101 Shi 1997, p. 207.

102 Nathan 1986, p. 189, 191.

Mastery of the official language and value system is useful not only for persuading leaders in official participatory situations or personal contacting, but can be used against local leaders. Tianjian Shi has observed that political information does not necessarily make Chinese people more interested in politics, but it gives them normative power useful for dealing with bureaucrats.[103] Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li show that many Chinese engage in policy-based resistance. These protesters do not view policies, laws and leaders' speeches solely as instruments of domination, but as means to demand better governance. They cite laws, government policies and other official statements to demand accountability or even to challenge the local government. Thus, they find central policy a potential source of entitlement, inclusion, and empowerment.[104] Elizabeth Perry shows how during the 1990s both peasants and workers utilized Marxist normatism in their protests against corruption, cadre mismanagement, or economic exploitation.[105]

Political meetings in villages or work units must have reduced obstacles for political participation not only by spreading relevant information but also by giving the common people a clear image of political activism. The majority had a participatory model to follow. In political meetings, political activists spoke first and to avoid criticism others spoke only after they thus acquired a model to follow.[106] Apart from a particular participatory situation, this model was applicable to political career mobility in general. Thus, political meetings leveled inequalities in possibilities for upward political career mobility.

Yet, official forms of activism could prove disenfranchising too. Indeed, participation itself can produce discontent and alienation when it only involves implementation of unpopular policy, irrelevant ideological campaigns, or divisive criticism sessions. Then the contradiction between participatory local politics and undemocratic statism can frustrate participators.[107] Anita Chan observes that abstract Marxist discourse sometimes seems meaningless to common workers, even when workers' advocates use it to represent workers' interests.[108] Likewise, the Women's Federation has skillfully negotiated with the state and made it protect women's interests by coining a special Marxist theory of women, but to the general public such a discourse seems only old-fashioned conservatism.[109]

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103 Shi 1997, p. 215. This empirical observation challenges some of his own assumptions, such as that important political information would be secret and disseminated only through the grapevine (p. 215) or that informal channels of political information would be needed for participation (p. 238).

104 O'Brien and Li 1995, p. 770; Li and O'Brien 1996, pp. 29, 40–44, 53.

105 Perry 1999, pp. 315–320.

106 Oi 1991, pp. 150–151; Walder 1988, pp. 149, 153.

107 Blecher 1991, pp. 140–142; Townsend 1980, pp. 411, 414.

108 Chan, 1993, p. 50.

109 Wang 2000, p. 69.

Western theorists have suspected that participatory democracy might subject all community members to the special supervision reserved for decision makers.[110] This would mean moral, perhaps also ideological, control of everyone. To some extent this has been the case in China. Andrew Walder notes that in order to mobilize people, Party members' ideological and behavioral standards were meant to be extended to the whole populace. However, in reality the Party needed to incorporate non-committed outsiders by rewarding activism by differentiated material and status incentives.[111] Village self-rule has brought with village compacts, through which villagers regulate their own and their neighbors' behavior and even morals.[112] Still, as Choate notes, although village pledges seem intrusive to private life, actually they are agreed upon in open and lengthy deliberative processes and reflect local values.[113]

Sensing opportunities for participation

Many Western scholars have stressed limits and risks involved in political participation in China. For example, James Townsend evaluates that participation is risky in China, since it offers few guarantees of procedural justice or consistency. Although people learn the rules of participation, high demands for compliance and low predictability of consequences make the participatory process a weak mechanism for interest articulation and influencing in national affairs. Still, popular participation contributes to interest articulation and influencing in primary units and enhances identification with the community.[114]

The Chinese were totally aware of the limits their environment placed on participation. Knowing that there were sanctions for political mistakes, a person usually calculated the risks involved, incentives at stake, and likeliness of success before deciding to participate.[115] It was unwise to express dissatisfaction with political lines or with decisions already made, since such remarks could negatively affect one's record.[116] Fear of retaliation made many keep quiet about cadre misdeeds.[117] Yet, the risk was small if the complaint proved accurate or the suggestion brought benefits to the collective.[118] Nowadays, surveys indicate that political

110 Cook and Morgan 1971, p. 33.

111 Walder 1988, pp. 123–124.

112 Anagnost 1992, pp. 193–195; Shih 1999, p. 270–271.

113 Choate 1997, pp. 12–13.

114 Townsend 1980, pp. 431–432.

115 Falkenheim 1978, p. 26–27.

116 Walder 1988, p. 144.

117 Burns 1983, p. 149, 155.

118 Falkenheim 1978, p. 29

fear has no impact on participation.[119] Kuan Hsin-chi and Lau Siu-kai assume that participation is safe because in the Chinese institutional setting popular participation deals with grassroots-level concerns, which do not challenge regime legitimacy.[120]

Expression of production-related opinions has always been safe.[121] Even in the 1970s, Victor Falkenheim found that most participants expressed their views in meetings that dealt with important and not politically sensitive issues. Especially questions of economic distribution within the workplace or village aroused much discussion. But meetings dealing with technical issues tended to be dominated by the experienced, while activists spoke in political meetings.[122] According to Andrew Walder, workers actively voiced their views about routine production problems when workers' experience was sought out.[123] Obviously, there was space for non-risky participation, not least because the Mao era system valued producers' practical expertise.

Evidently, there is more than one type of political participation in China and demands for political correctness were not the same for all types. Some Western scholars dismiss all popular participation as meaningless,[124] but the fact that some participatory situations are constrained and ritualistic does not automatically imply that all occasions are. Tianjian Shi provides quantitative evidence that there is no bipolar divide between people successfully mobilized by the state and the politically passive. Instead, he found several modes of participatory activities, some officially recognized, others not. People engaging in a certain mode are less likely to engage in other forms.[125] Evidently, the Chinese have choice not only over the arenas on which to articulate their opinions, but also over preferred modes of participation.

Personality had an effect on willingness to participate. Demanding forms of participation require information, confidence that one understands local political issues, and belief in commoners' political role.[126] Idealists and self-assertive personalities were ready to confront local leaders and participated regardless of

119 Kuan and Lau 2002, p. 311; Shi 2000 A, pp. 238–239.

120 Kuan and Lau 2002, p. 311.

121 Falkenheim 1983, p. 56.

122 Falkenheim 1978, p. 25.

123 Walder 1988, p. 106.

124 See, e.g., Chan 1996, pp. 190–191, concluding that democratic participation to raise worker morale and incentives in factories is a mere formality because suggestions and production campaigns are appraised on the grounds of political conformity.

125 Shi 1997, p. 140.

126 Shi 1997, p. 226. Strictly speaking, Tianjian Shi finds that these are psychological requisites for appeals through bureaucracy, but probably this trait is also generalizable to other forms of participation through officially sanctioned channels.

dangers.[127] The belief that local levels should ignore unfair government policies evinced more confrontational attitudes.[128] Those having a high level of trust in central government were more likely to lodge acomplaint against local cadres.[129] During the radicalist era, serious participation seems to have been a youthful phenomenon. Youth had less experience, and more idealism. They had more future alternatives and fewer family duties and chores. Several informants told Victor Falkenheim that they had participated non-ritually only during adolescence, before developing a cautious attitude towards participation.[130] Other scholars found that villagers tolerated criticism by youth, because youth was expected to act rashly and to show their political activism.[131]

Chinese commoners are able to recognize when the larger political setting is favorable to participation. Elite conflict provided opportunities for popular influencing.[132] For example, villagers used possible internal division within the campaign work team assigned to the village to influence electoral choice.[133] When leadership was united in policy implementation, commoners demands and even protests often failed.[134] John Burns finds that peasants did not verbalize their perception of local interest but resorted to laziness and absenteeism when they knew that authorities were mandated to implement a state policy regardless of local opinions. But when the popular initiative accords with common local interest and could increase productivity, cadres even from above could interfere in local situations in the interest of local people. With a majority of local cadres on the villagers' side, peasants did not need to fear retaliation.[135] Peasants were sensitive to the macropolitical climate as well. When the top leadership opened whole new areas of state policy for mass debate, long-dormant demands surfaced.[136] Peasants have used encouragement from the national level to introduce popular practices or to change unpopular ones even against local leaders' opposition.[137]

Before participating, the Chinese evaluated the likelihood of their leaders to be receptive to their demands. Kay Ann Johnson, for example, relates how women did not complain of their combined collective and domestic workload publicly in

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127 Falkenheim 1978, p. 27.

128 Shi 1997, p. 224.

129 Li 2004, p. 243.

130 Falkenheim 1978, pp. 28–29.

131 Chan et al. 1984, pp. 58–59.

132 Burns 1988, pp. 174–175.

133 Burns 1983, p. 163.

134 See examples in Zweig 1997 A, p. 138.

135 Burns 1983, p. 155–159.

136 Falkenheim 1978, p. 30.

137 Burns 1988, pp. 79–80; Chan et al. 1984, p. 249.

meetings, because they anticipated that local male leaders would either ignore their complaints or would even retaliate by demanding that they take part equally in men's heavy agricultural work.[138] Cadres had many ways to make those expressing complaints "wear too small shoes" (*chuan xiao xie*) and distribute unpleasant tasks to them. Indeed, reprisals were possible if one criticized cadres controlling material distribution and career opportunities, although usually they were not very severe because retaliation was illegitimate and could be appealed for vindication.[139] Kevin O'Brien and Li Lianjiang find that most Chinese villagers avoid challenging their leaders, either because they have little knowledge of policies and channels of influencing or because they realistically sense their own weakness in relation to local authorities.[140]

Some practical considerations affected one's willingness to express critical views. In the countryside peasants had to consider leadership alternatives when criticizing a cadre. A village had a limited number of persons with necessary skills, experience, and inter-village connections.[141] Besides, according to Victor Falkenheim's interviewees, most cadres were regarded as good and hardworking. It, thus, was risky to challenge a good leader, because one would either be asked to do the task himself or one's own interest under collective economy could suffer if someone less competent were to take over.[142] Obviously, cadre legitimacy did not primarily derive from democratic work style but from leadership ability, especially the ability to lead production.[143]

Risks involved in public participation did not prevent people from participating. Yet, it may have encouraged the Chinese to use informal channels, such as personal contacts or casual remarks during daily interaction in a village or workplace. As John Burns remarks, peasants preferred such informal means, because permissible political behavior in Party controlled formal participatory institutions had narrow limits.[144] These channels were unofficial, but they were a part of democratic centralist communication the state promoted according to its mass line ideology.

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138 Johnson 1983, pp. 206.

139 Falkenheim 1978, p. 26.

140 Li and O'Brien 1996, pp. 33–34.

141 Falkenheim 1978, p. 30.

142 Falkenheim 1978, p. 30.

143 Still today, 60% of peasants surveyed agreed that a cadre may serve indefinitely if he performs well (Zheng 1994, p. 255).

144 Burns 1988, p. 9.

Limits of democratic centralism

Western literature reveals some limits of democratic centralism. The theory of democratic centralism does not even claim that occasions and channels for popular influencing are powerfree. Still, obstacles to self-expression were not as overwhelming as is often seen in the West. The Party allowed, even promoted, political expression in officially defined language through officially permitted channels.

The Party's belief in popular influencing was sometimes at odds with its belief in the ideological correctness of its own doctrine.[145] For example, Friedman, Pickowitz and Selden show how demands for ideological compliance and strict adherence to centrally promoted models undermined progress in peasants' living standards and even sometimes mandated the grassroots to take senseless action.[146] Yet, ideology was not only a limit for political expression, but also an asset in political participation. Victor Falkenheim's interviews show that the mastery of Mao's works or state statutes facilitated expression of one's own ideas in an ideologically acceptable guise. Yet, this strategy could backfire if it was interpreted as "waving the red flag to oppose the red flag."[147]

Apart from a method to gather popular input, democratic centralism refers to party discipline. Its democratic implications are often compromised where Party needs begin. In cadres' vocabulary democratic centralism sometimes emphasizes discipline. For example, village-level cadres once rejected calls for "democratic work style" by invoking democratic centralism and the need for stability.[148]

The theory of democratic centralism explicitly rejects the desirability of fulfilling every request coming from the masses. Indeed, although people had a right to seek improvement for their personal situation and to address a limited range of remediable problems within the framework of existing policy, one was not supposed to question state interest or state policy.[149] This same tone is evident in press articles about anarchism warning one from asking more than resources permitted. Apart from limited resources, agenda overload has made administrators refuse to consider even justified popular demands when they have to deal with too many incompatible popular demands.[150]

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145 See, e.g., Falkenheim 1983, pp. 48–50, 53.

146 Friedman et al. 1991.

147 Falkenheim 1978, pp. 28–29.

148 O'Brien 1996, p. 42.

149 Falkenheim 1978, p. 26.

150 O'Brien 1996, p. 43.

Furthermore, democratic centralism has not been the only administrative model or ideological doctrine in the People's Republic. When establishing the national government system after the 1949 revolution, the Chinese communists patched their own inexperience with models from the Soviet Union. The Soviet model undermined development towards wider popular participation in decision making. Bill Brugger relates how democratization in factories suffered first from inexperience and then from the Soviet style management model granting decisive powers to the factory manager.[151] Likewise, the Chinese press discussion in 1978–1981 admitted that Soviet influence had promoted authoritarian leadership style.

In the Mao era, class theory limited political expression as well. In some places, those having a bad political background were systematically humiliated in political campaigns to force compliance and create unity among the majority of villagers after divisive critique sessions.[152] Class enemies were even legally deprived of their political rights. Nevertheless, although they remained silent in meetings, cadres sometimes asked their opinion in informal situations.[153] Although class background limited expression by some people, it was simultaneously an asset to others. Those having peasant or worker background were less vulnerable to "mistakes" than those from excluded classes. Outsider inspection teams often even looked for reliable informants with good class origin to report the local situation and local leaders gave more weight to opinions by those with good class background.[154] Evidently, the system was selective as to whose political opinion it listens to.

One important limitation was restricted scope of participation. Bill Brugger notes that participatory discussion in factories took place only after the state had set production targets. Worker initiative was thus restricted to matters of operational detail.[155] Decisions made at higher levels often constrained participatory decisions leaving mostly superficial issues, such as trivial distributional issues, on the participatory agenda.[156] Marc Blecher sees that after the state control intensified, not only were issues marginalized, but the character of participation changed into a defensive and divisive conflict over limited resources. Local participation

151 Brugger 1976.

152 Chan et al. 1984, pp. 71–73, 145–146; Friedman et al. 1991, p. 212.

153 Blecher 1991, p. 133. Fictional stories even tell of how cadres could manipulate politics by agreeing with class enemies within the village that the class enemies publicly oppose some village plan in order to trick the upper levels into ratifying the village's unorthodox decision as upholding the correct class line (Shen 1987, pp. 321–322).

154 Falkenheim 1978, p. 28; Chan et al. 1984, p. 43–44, 48.

155 Brugger 1976, p. 134–135.

156 Walder 1988, p. 172.

was now used to express discontent with state policy or even to evade it.[157] Yet, citizen input through limited "production democracy" is "not insignificant in providing useful feedback, minimizing cadre–citizen friction, and helping in the smooth adaptation of policy."[158]

Finally, Western research confirms the evaluation in the Chinese press that the most critical factor determining the scope of participation was the work style of the individual leader.[159] Where leaders are supportive, popular participation is common and peasants have influenced effectively through elections.[160] But where authoritarian attitudes prevailed, the situation was different. Cadres' bureaucratic and non-consultative work style can constrain peasants' enthusiasm for participation and make them feel inefficacious and indifferent to politics.[161] Cadres could even resort to authoritarian and violent rural traditions, which provided a handy means to attack, verbally or physically, those who had complained too much.[162]

Meetings

The most common form of participation was attendance at community or workplace meetings because it is easy and officially encouraged, sometimes even mandated.[163] Due to mobilization, attendance at meetings counts for participation, but not always for influencing.

I have found few eyewitness descriptions of actual proceedings of a political mass meeting in the grassroots. William Hinton provides a vivid picture of land distribution and cadre rectification campaign meetings in a Chinese village.[164] There are some other detailed descriptions of mobilized campaign mass meetings based on interviews or historical sources. They tell that the Party had to engage in serious preparations to make people accuse their cadres or fellow-villagers in public. First, a Party-sent campaign team listened to people and gathered evidence. Then they rehearsed the accusation meeting with activists and possibly in a closed rectification campaign, wearing down campaign targets before putting them in front of the public. When the meeting began, activists opened accusations to draw

157 Blecher 1991, p. 141.

158 Falkenheim 1983, p. 57.

159 Falkenheim 1978, p. 31.

160 Burns 1988, p. 87; Jennings 1997, p. 370.

161 Yee and Wang 1999, p. 44.

162 Friedman et al. 1991, p. 212. For the tradition, see pp. 285–286.

163 Jennings 1997, p. 363.

164 Hinton 1966.

ordinary villagers in and to teach people to express themselves in the correct ideological vocabulary. At the beginning the Party encouraged emotional involvement and excitement, but in the end the campaign team pacified the often divisive, even violent, campaign by directing it against common targets and encouraging unity, leniency towards criticized cadres, and concrete production efforts.[165] Of course, the masses did not always respond like the Party wanted them to. They could use meetings to express unexpected demands or even ones discouraged by the Party.[166] Disinterested and disrespectful villagers sometimes chatted and watched television during the campaign speech, but remained silent for hours when their opinions were asked.[167] Sometimes an unexpected participant reaction could spoil a well-prepared criticism session.[168]

Western literature provides less evidence about proceedings of a normal political meeting. Sylvia Chan had a chance to observe some village committee meetings. In them, the majority spoke up freely. She found discussion to be rather unfocused. Items were not discussed in any order and participants had freedom to raise issues not on the agenda. The village head did not attempt to influence the direction of discussion; he just took notes of the discussion and disseminated some useful information during the meeting. Because meetings ended without formal decisions, Sylvia Chan was unsure how decisions were taken.[169]

This description resembles closely a meeting I witnessed myself. In May 2004, I attended a meeting in the Dashanzi artist village when a Chaoyang district people's congress deputy came to hear local opinions about the plan to preserve the village.[170] In that meeting the chairwoman directed the meeting very little: she asked people's opinions at the beginning and ended the meeting by saying that she had taken careful notes of the whole discussion. Although the discussion was diverted to questions on which the district-level people's congress has no power, she only once interrupted to ask people to state their opinions about the proposal

165 Chen 1986, ch. 3; Chan et al. 1984, ch. 2.

166 See, e.g., Chan et al. 1984, pp. 63–64, where villagers accused their cadres of not shielding their village from state demands. For using campaign accusation meetings to express unexpected, although justified, demands, see Liu 2000, pp. 173–174.

167 Liu 2000, pp. 172–174.

168 Chan et al. 1984, pp. 139–140. In fiction, see Shen Rong for workers using criticism against one leader to support him (Shen 1987, pp. 175–176).

169 Chan 1998.

170 This meeting perhaps is not typical, because three of the most vocal participants were foreigners, Taiwanese and American entrepreneurs and artists. It appeared to me that the meeting would have started with less lively discussion without them. Chinese artists began voicing their opinions much later. First their voice was articulated by the leader of the artist community. It was evident that the village leader was a recognized representative for the whole village, although the meeting was an example of direct democracy and everyone could state their views.

in question. The deputy mainly listened as well after he had introduced the content of the plan to preserve the area and asked for local opinions. What surprised me was the absence of any methods of formalizing agreement. Compared to what is customary in residential meetings or associations in Finland, no shouts of agreement or suggestions of vote followed any of the concrete proposals. For example, when two people each suggested that they knew an architect who could prepare a preservation plan, neither was formally selected. The chairwoman advocated electing artist village representatives to deal with officials, but this suggestion died after some mild criticism. In this meeting, most of the time only a few people spoke, while the majority remained as spectators. Moreover, many who spoke opposed suggestions made by others, and they often opened their mouths in an emotionally irritated state of mind. As long as a microphone circulated, one person spoke at a time, but later discussion became more animated and several persons spoke simultaneously. People came and went as they liked, some left out of boredom, but one left out of anger when his proposal met criticism. Even the people's delegate left after the meeting began to deal with intra-village disputes.

In the village committee meeting Sylvia Chan had a chance to observe, participants who were chosen to represent their group naturally made demands benefiting their constituencies. Yet, apart from self-interested suggestions, participants voiced public concerns. Interestingly, some even publicly grumbled about the township government and one even suggested to withhold payments to it until the problems are resolved.[171] Discussion in the Dashanzi artist village exposed intra-village tensions. For example, the conception of artistic freedom clashed with preservationist and entrepreneurial views about village development.

In addition to these examples, I once saw a televised mass meeting.[172] In it, a rural mayor first welcomed all participants and expressed his satisfaction that so many peasants attended this meeting to express their grievances. The television group assisted the meeting by providing videos about certain cases of excessive taxation and fees. The peasants attending then recalled their similar experiences. They spoke fast and with animated tones revealing considerable emotional stress, making it evident that although the meeting was televised for exemplary uses, the meeting itself was not staged. The mayor's assistant stood up at times to read relevant provisions about administrative fees. Once the mayor turned to one peasant and asked him to come to his office later to solve the case. After the dis-

171 Chan 1998.

172 Broadcast in Hunan TV satellite channel program *Xinwen guancha* (News probe) on Dec 21, 2000. The fact that the meeting was televised makes it atypical. The meeting was meant to be a model for others, and presence of television must have influenced articulation. However, this influence did not necessarily restrain articulation, because television crew protected and encouraged expression.

cussion the mayor thanked all. At the end, an old peasant among the public rose and asked for the microphone and said: "I am over 70-years-old and have worked here all my life, and I suggest that all legal payments we will pay and all excessive fees we refuse to pay." All participants applauded this concluding statement.

This example demonstrates that Chinese peasants are familiar with meeting techniques. This was obvious of the peasants' ability to articulate their concerns with a reasonable, albeit excited, even agitated, manner. Even more remarkable was the old peasant's skill in calming down emotional excitement with his concluding remarks. This man, possibly an old political activist, ended the meeting with a concrete, and evidently commonly agreed, proposal. Thus, unlike in the other two meetings, this meeting did not end without a concrete decision. During the meeting some particular cases were closed and the mayor opened a channel for solving at least one case outside the meeting.

Another important observation is that the Chinese peasants were able to utilize this meeting to pursue justice against local cadres with support from a higher-level official and the media. Interests of the masses and of the administration collude here: peasants wanted to correct injustices while the system benefited from recognition of sources of discomfort and from the possibility of rectifying problems. During the meeting peasants learned about decrees concerning fees and payments, which allowed some to understand that their grudges concerned legitimate payments. At the same time, mistreated persons received support from higher-level administration to redress injustices. In this way, the peasants learned about the legitimate scope of governmental power; simultaneously, the government learned about problems in the grassroots. This meeting thus provided a platform for the mass line type two-way communication leading to better mutual understanding.

My fourth examples of the contemporary political meetings comes from the documentary about the relocation of Fengjie preceding the opening of the Three Gorge Dam.[173] Since this film does not show a meeting in its totality, it tells little about meeting procedures. However, some conclusions are evident. It shows well that in this case villagers had no influence at all on the issue itself, having been already decided at higher levels. Therefore, from the official point of view, the purpose of the meeting was to distribute information only. Still, villagers did use the occasion for expressing why they saw the plan to be unfair. However, this does not mean that the meeting had only a palliative function. Villagers were not only venting their feelings, but some used the occasion to announce that they will boycott the government lottery for appointing new housing to the families to be relocated. Whether they used the meeting to mobilize people and how much the decision to abstain was influenced by the meeting itself is impossible to ascertain

173 Li Yifan and Yan Yun, *Before the Flood* (2004).

from the brief evidence. Still, public announcement of participation in a boycott surely must have encouraged some others who had harbored similar thoughts.

Another conclusion is that by delegating the issue for the grassroots-level leaders to execute, the higher-level governments are able to insulate themselves somewhat from popular pressures. Neighborhood committees and grassroots officials seem to face popular demands and discontent, including curses and violence, directly. However, this insulation is not total, since people appeal to the higher levels when they seek support for their stand against grassroots officials, not least because the grassroots officials often have no power to decide cases not conforming with the official regulations. The third conclusion is that the Chinese are by no means shy in expressing their disappointment and demands to officials, nor do they lack channels for trying to influence their lot. However, in this case their influencing mostly took place on a level not having authority to decide their cases.

Effectiveness of the mass line influencing

Availability of channels does not in itself tell how meaningful popular political participation is to citizens. We need data about whether these channels are used and whether common Chinese evaluate these channels as influential. There is plenty of evidence that the Chinese actively use the channels at their disposal. Marc Blecher found that the Mao era village-level politics was vivid. Both institutionalized and informal channels were in active use.[174] Kuan Hsin-chi and Lau Siu-kai observe that even compared with more democratic Hong Kong and Taiwan, mainlanders participate more actively. The purpose of their participation is instrumental, meant to solve daily life problems, and thus differs from the expressive protesting prevalent in Hong Kong.[175] Kent Jennings even finds that Chinese participation rates are comparable with the more developed and democratic Western countries, especially considering that his research dealt with rural Chinese whose educational level is much below the average level of developed countries.[176]

The mass line channels of influencing are effective too. According to Marc Blecher, participation in villages was rather broad and often effective. In his data, one third of local decisions were first raised by an ordinary villager. If peasants opposed a suggestion by cadres they were able to block it or to have it modified in almost half of the cases.[177] Wenfang Tang and William Parish found that official

174 Blecher 1991, p. 132.

175 Kuan and Lau 2002, p. 301.

176 Jennings 1997, pp. 362–365, 371.

177 Blecher 1991, p. 132.

collectivist type of influencing, such as contacting work unit leaders, government bureaus and local people's delegates, is not only the most used but also the most efficient way of influencing.[178]

There is contradictory evidence about the efficiency of political meetings in making leaders receptive to popular opinions. Melanie Manion has demonstrated that village leaders' opinions tend to accord with villagers' standpoints more in localities with competitive elections than in localities carrying on the mass meeting and mobilizatory politics.[179] This suggests either that in villages resisting democratization mass meetings are mainly an arena for top-down communication,[180] or that competitive elections open a new arena for exchanging views. Susan Lawrence, however, has found out that competitive elections do not necessarily produce the most accountable village leaders. In a democratic participatory village, villagers' choice in elections can be limited, but the village representative assembly provides an effective channel for supervising leadership and public spending as well as for making decisions about collective economy and services.[181] Jonathan Unger and Anita Chan introduce an example in which the workforce succeeded not only in opening a participatory decision-making process but also in turning down a draft for a management-favoring factory policy during this participatory process.[182] Local variance must explain these different findings, which, nevertheless, show that non-electoral means of accountability can work well under a leadership taking them seriously.

The effectiveness of democratic centralist channels naturally depends on the persuasiveness of the message and the resources available. Indeed, reasonability of the complaint in terms of the government policy line, good argument, and persistence increased the likelihood of a positive outcome. Group solidarity, often based on kinship or shared community, and the size of the group increase the likelihood of being taken seriously. In addition, official support by some faction or level of leadership increases the chances of having influence. Therefore, villagers seek support among leadership either on the local level, or ally themselves with local leaders against higher levels, or seek assistance from higher levels against local leaders. Success in appealing to higher-ups against local leaders depends on whether superiors are dissatisfied with the local leader or unit performance in general. On the other hand, formal and informal personal networks between

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

179 Manion 1996, pp. 743–744.

180 In other words, villages having leaders open to popular participation could also be the first to adopt competitive elections.

181 Lawrence 1994, see especially pp. 66–67.

182 Unger and Chan 2004.

officials on the local and higher levels can cause higher-ups to side with local leaders.[183]

Accessibility of channels of influencing must have an effect too. Unsurprisingly, Wenfang Tang and William Parish find that those closest to the government chain of command, for instance those working in the state sector, are most successful in resolving their complaints.[184] Party members appeal more than people in general. They have better connections and knowledge about the system. In addition, they have access to internal information increasing the normative power of their appeals.[185] Presumably Party education also increases the sense of social duty and the ability to formulate appeals in a way persuasive to the Party.

However, although Party members are active in voicing complaints, their complaints do not have positive outcomes more often than other complaints.[186] Quite likely this means that Party members tend to articulate many complaints because they have access to many channels and because they feel a responsibility to tangle with problems of principle or to convey other people's concerns to the Party. Hence, issues they bring forth may be less concrete. Moreover, anticipation of success may be less relevant to them if they feel that their primary responsibility is to serve the people and to provide information to the Party.[187] This explanation gets corroboration from the fact that people with an army background appeal relatively often due to their political experience and sense of civic duty.[188]

Despite relative effectiveness, official channels have many drawbacks. Victor Falkenheim notes that chances for success were also constrained for reasons inherent in the democratic process. The majority principle practically dictated that a member of a small lineage could never overrule the majority lineage. Likewise, marginal groups, such as sent-down youth, were powerless compared to the peasant majority.[189] The participatory process itself can reduce the effect of participation. Bill Brugger found that factory management did not always take worker representation in decision making seriously. Management often felt that worker participation dealt with trivial, unfeasible, or too abstract issues it did not want to waste time with. In the 1950s, worker representatives were unfamiliar with the representative process. Most were inarticulate and timid; others made narrowly selfish demands. Even if a worker representative had a serious attitude towards his

183 Burns 1988, pp. 2, 79–80, 187; Shi 1997, pp. 52–54, 62; Unger and Chan 2004, pp. 13–14.

184 Tang and Parish 2000, p. 198.

185 Shi 1997, pp. 214–215.

186 Tang and Parish 2000, pp. 199–200.

187 My explanation thus differs from the one given by Tang and Parish who read this result to mean that Party members are not very successful in resolving their personal concerns.

188 Shi 1997, p. 231.

189 Falkenheim 1978, pp. 30–31.

task, he received the meeting agenda too late to collect mass opinions. As a result, workers' delegates' opinions were unrepresentative of the general workforce. Therefore, management had little interest in listening to unrepresentative comments, and ordinary workers had little reason to take their powerless delegates seriously.[190]

Furthermore, participatory democracy does not necessarily equalize powers and reduce elitism. As Bill Brugger found, although worker delegates could take part in discussions, limited time for meetings kept discussion short. Thus, worker delegates actually only ratified decisions already made by management. Many worker delegates saw their role meaningless and stopped attending meetings. In some cases, ordinary worker delegates' passivity or inexperience resulted in usurpation of participatory organs by a small group.[191] In addition, deliberative decision making proved to be time consuming, especially if the issue was difficult and caused losses to some participants. To avoid losing time, management often made all the key decisions.[192] Despite the general rule of management domination, workers were sometimes able to force the management to open a meaningful participatory process when issues crucial to them were at stake.[193]

Moreover, participatory decision making can be inefficient if links between the decision and its implementation are weak. Bill Brugger demonstrates that decisions made in participatory factory arenas did not necessarily lead to prompt implementation of a decision if management ignored the decision.[194] Besides, participatory processes often lacked formal powers. An Chen observes that enterprise workers' congresses existed throughout decades, but before 1978 no major decision required their formal approval.[195] However, consensual decision-making style can also cause change without any formal decision if wide consensus prevails. Victor Shaw shows that if someone publicly chooses to challenge a rule or if relatively many workers complain about the same rule privately to leaders, a rule may be changed or ignored after consensus about its unreasonableness is reached among the majority.[196] This shows that participatory decision making can be effective when consensus is reached, but in the absence of common agreement

190 Brugger 1976, p. 225, 232–233.

191 Brugger 1976, p. 231–234.

192 Brugger 1976, pp. 132–133. Bill Brugger offers reduction of workforce as an example of an issue difficult to solve in a deliberative process.

193 Unger and Chan 2004.

194 Brugger 1976, p. 225–226, 231.

195 Chen An 1999, p. 40. These new powers were: making suggestions on plans, authority to veto plans, making decisions about worker welfare, supervising cadres and electing directors (pp. 40–41).

196 Shaw 1996, p. 207.

often remains ineffective. In a consensual setting, resistance by a powerful person, such as a factory manager, can block the whole decision, regardless of majority support.

Consensual decision-making style easily causes self-censorship. This can be beneficial for the decision-making process. Political theorists assume that in public arenas one tends to argue in the language of common interest, peer pressure making one censor most egoist demands.[197] Publicity might also help in keeping alternatives on a manageable level because people tend to present publicly views likely to receive some support. In addition, most participants would avoid upsetting co-villagers, co-workers, or local leaders in public. However, the consensual process can also mean that issues unlikely to pass are not brought to the agenda. Bill Brugger found that in workplace democracy the agenda was formulated in preparatory meetings. Often only suggestions having chances of passing were brought to open meetings. For example, the company trade union often refused to deal with controversial issues because it wanted to avoid taking a stand against the management.[198]

The setting of direct democracy allows manipulation by leaders, of course. In direct democracy and elections alike, leaders can limit alternatives so that no meaningful choice is left. Friedman, Pickowicz and Selden provide one example of leaders using ritualistic and compliant participation as a sign of agreement legitimating the policy. Sometimes everyone remained silent in a meeting and the policy set from above was agreed by raising hands, even if everyone harbored misgivings. However, if someone openly complained later, cadres referred to her submission through the empty democratic form to demand obedience.[199] David Zweig gives examples of how cadres opposing new governmental policy did not inform peasants about the policy change or purposely introduced consequences of the policy in a negative light. Understandably, peasants were thus either unable to demand change or joined with cadres to oppose a policy which actually would benefit them.[200] Manipulation of information is a formidable form of control both in direct and electoral democratic settings.

The existing Chinese participatory institutions seem to have provided inadequate power for commoners. The Chinese themselves have complained that the

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197 I am not sure this situation always prevailed in the Chinese participatory setting, where rewards and punishments were dealt out publicly. Marc Blecher finds that participatory politics concerning remuneration was often very divisive (Blecher 1991, p. 141). Likewise, Sylvia Chan observed that in village representative assemblies participants openly suggested that some public projects should be so organized that they benefit the participants' own neighborhood first before other areas in the village (Chan 1998).

198 Brugger 1976, p. 230.

199 Friedman et al. 1991, pp. 236–237.

200 Zweig 1989, pp. 186–187.

political channels available provide insufficient opportunities for popular participation and that leaders have not been very responsive to the commoners' demands.[201] An Chen asserts that Cultural Revolution unrest suggests that worker participation systems did not function to the workers' satisfaction.[202] According to Marc Blecher, growing frustration about limited powers left for local participatory politics made these participatory institutions turn against the state during the Cultural Revolution. This situation demonstrates the contradiction between participatory politics and undemocratic statism.[203]

Public and particularistic influencing

Western scholars have often presumed that the Chinese would typically participate politically in order to advance their personal affairs and interests. One reason behind this assumption is the prevalence of contacting, which is often seen as a form of participation suitable for seeking solutions to personal problems. Another reason is that in China popular participation has often dealt with distributional issues. In a community, distribution of rare consumer goods, pleasant jobs, rewards, and opportunities is personalized: some people receive them and others do not. As Tianjian Shi explains, political structure in China makes it necessary to participate in political ways, because government controls many aspects of daily life.[204] Naturally, this kind of participatory politics deals with issues of personal interest.

The third reason for Western scholars to pay attention to personalistic politics is their search for alternative methods of influencing, because conventional Western channels of participation are mostly absent in socialist China. It is logical to anticipate that when open channels are blocked, commoners find covert means of influencing. Pye argues that traditional Chinese faith in benevolent government taking care of all legitimate interests makes other interests seem non-legitimate. Since one cannot pursue such interests publicly, one must resort to personal relationships.[205] Thus, commoners would make their voices heard by cultivating relations with leaders.

However, this expectation seems problematic. Empirical evidence shows that personal claims have been expressed publicly in China both in political meetings and by victim protests and movements. Besides, even if people would generally

201 Dittmer 1974, p. 285, 334; Falkenheim 1983, p. 57.

202 Chen An 1999, p. 41.

203 Blecher 1991, pp. 141–142.

204 Shi 1997, p. 111.

205 Pye 2000, p. 34.

shun public expressions of individual interest, this does not necessarily lead to suppressing all public self-expression. More likely, non-legitimacy of individual interests would make people express political demands, including ones dealing with their personal interests, in public-regarding language. Possibly Confucian culture encourages the use of public-regarding language in politics, but democratic centralist political design could explain its use too. After all, face-to-face decision-making arenas increase pressures towards identification with the group and adopting the language of common good.[206] Predictably, scholars have found that in China collectivism and communal identity assume the use of public-regarding language emphasizing common good.[207] However, in fact self-regarding claims commonly appear in communal decision-making arenas in China.[208]

Still, many Western-based scholars stress particularist aspects of political participation in China.[209] Jean Oi, for example, asserts that neither the Western paradigm of group-based politics or the official mass line mode of influencing are prevalent in China. Instead, people use personal relationships and pursue their interest through personal ties to authority.[210] This assumption is problematic because it makes a contrast between the mass line and personal relationships, whereas the mass line in the community context takes place mainly through personal relationships in which formal and informal roles are interwoven.[211] Not all kinds of personal relations are legitimate in the mass line contexts, but it does not seem to me that Jean Oi demonstrates widespread illegitimate use of relations, such as bribery.

Clientelist models too readily assume that personal relations demonstrate dependency and have public meaning. It is questionable to regard all contacts with officials as state control,[212] especially in an environment where people meet officials regularly as neighbors, workmates, and even as relatives or friends. There can be many non-clientelist reasons for personalized contacting or personal favors,[213] just as there are many non-clientelist forms of influencing available.

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206 Mansbridge 1983, p. 5.

207 He 1996, p. 47; Shih 1999, pp. xviii, xx.

208 See an empirical description in Chan 1998.

209 Adrew Walder even names his model principled particularism. Walder1988.

210 Oi 1991, pp. 7–8, 26.

211 For the mass line in practice, see Blecher 1983.

212 See Brantly Womack's criticism of Andrew Walder's overemphasis of state power in his clientelist-type model in Womack 1991 B, pp. 319–323.

213 For example, in the Mao era a very small part of economic and social transactions were paid in cash. Even in more monetized economies we pay for some goods or services from people we know with goods or favors. In the West we witness transactions of the type: "If you help me to paint the house, I will arrange some tickets for the match. And I want you to stay for dinner after we have finished painting. If you ever need help in return, just ask." Exchange of

Therefore, the Chinese hardly feel efficacious just, or even mainly, because they get what they want through connections and gift giving.[214] Connections are not even very effective. Although the Chinese themselves assume that utilizing personal contacts (*guanxi*) is more influential than the use of regular channels, actually the opposite is true.[215]

The problem of clientelist explanations is that they do not differentiate between public and private roles. Contacting is the main form of political influencing in China, but not because it is used to advance mainly personal issues. Tianjian Shi correctly argues that the separation between communal and particularistic reasons for political contacting assumes an institutional arrangement that provides opportunities to organize and to participate both in policy formation and implementation stages. In addition, clientelism expects that political affairs are issues not directly related to people's lives. None of these conditions holds in China, where distinctions between policy formation and implementation and between private and public affairs are by no means clear.[216]

The message shapes the types of influencing chosen. It is typical to use personal connections rather than public arenas for advancing purely personal interests even in the West. For example, in normal situations people would express publicly concerns about wages of a certain group or all the personnel at their workplace, but would turn to the boss alone to request a personal pay rise. Especially in communal or workplace settings, where harmony and good personal relations with others are treasured, participants are likely to express exclusively personal interests outside of public arenas, at least if these interests conflict with other members' interests. Unsurprisingly, the Chinese seem to make the same distinction and turn privately to power holders with their particularistic requests.[217] It seems that Chinese farmers deal with their personal affairs through personalized contacts and opt for collective action in collective affairs. Kent Jennings found

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favors must have been even more natural in a society where cash was scarce. Yet, the logic of such transactions may be exactly same as with cash payments. Therefore, fair remuneration should be distinguished from those particularist relations that are exclusive and privilege one party against other people. Even gift giving proves very little in a culture where courtesy demands people exchange gifts as a part of normal social intercourse not only with those in power but also among equals, as is common in China. For Chinese gift-giving culture, see Yan 1996.

In addition, a dependency or patron-client relationship describes a continuous relationship. No single, separate transaction counts for dependency. Therefore, demonstrating that a transaction has once taken place cannot prove that a patron-client relationship exists.

214 As was presumed in Ogden 2002, p. 129.

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

216 Shi 1997, p. 141.

217 Andrew Walder found that factory workers used particularistic channels to ask for priority in distribution or a paid vacation (Walder1988, pp. 182–184).

that Chinese farmers distinguish between contacting for solving personal economic problems and collective action for solving matters of communal interest. They turn to people's delegates for personal matters, because their representatives' task is to work for their constituency even as individuals, while they turn to cadres on issues like collective economy and elections.[218] Possibly farmers are also more likely to offer opinions about public issues to cadres because they often meet cadres at public arenas, such as at the workplace or in a meeting.

However, the Chinese do not use contacting only for solving personal matters. Kent Jennings finds that when contacting leaders, only the minority of issues deal with personal economy and grievances. As often as personal economy, the issue centered on local economy or government and Party affairs, while agriculture and social issues occupied even more of the issue domain. Thus, the Chinese often act individually, but to solve collective concerns.[219] Likewise, Herbert Yee and Wang Jinhong find that Chinese peasants do not participate primarily for personal interest, but for social issues or to supervise cadre work style. Questions like public security, agricultural policies or unequal distribution occupy much of the participatory agenda. Therefore, traditional obedience or self-regarding particularism poorly describes peasant participation today.[220] Evidently, there can be many reasons other than clientilist for using personal connections and contacting in China, not least because contacting is the expected and often easiest way of political influencing under a democratic centralist system.[221]

Actually, personal relations are not a very attractive alternative for advancing one's interests. Tianjian Shi finds that *guanxi* cultivation is a risky way of promoting personal interest because it invites conflicts with colleagues and is opposed by the regime. Many shun using methods they take as immoral. Therefore, it is usually people lacking other resources to articulate their interests who resort to instrumentalist use of connections.[222] Common attitudes are against turning to

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218 Jennings 1997, pp. 364, 366.

219 Jennings 1997, pp. 365–366, 370.

220 Yee and Wang 1999, p. 39.

221 Obviously, the institutional setting shapes the nature of vertical relationships and contacting. I here disagree not only with some China-related research, but also some other generalizations. For example, Robert Putnam maintains that vertical relations are essentially relations of inequality, dependency, and particularism. He contrasts them to horizontal civil society relations allegedly breeding more equality and concern for public issues. (Putnam 1993, pp. 99–102.) I do not reject the possibility that vertical relationships are more prone to the development of clientelist relationships, because in contacting the petitioner is weekly situated compared to the administrator he approaches. However, in a civil society setting commoners may develop a similar dependency on their interest group leaders who represent the whole group in public. Thus, Robert Putnam's finding that in a civil society context people contact leaders less often (p. 101) is most expected since intermediaries do contacting on behalf ordinary group members. But it is unclear whether this reveals anything about clientelism.

222 Shi 1997, pp. 121–122, 255–257.

leaders for one's personal concerns, since the Chinese mostly see that it is one's own responsibility to solve personal problems.[223] Moreover, clientelism does not necessarily empower the client, but strengthens the patron. Clientelist relations were not used only for advancing interests from below, but they were also used by local leaders to divide villagers. For example, a brigade leader could build his power on selective patronage, favoring some teams and being able to count on their cooperation.[224] In this way, a cadre reduces the risk of united opposition against his command.

Chinese administrators and delegates may help those seeking their assistance not for clientelistic reasons, but because they believe that it is their public duty to serve the people wholeheartedly as Mao Zedong exhorted. Chinese political ideology urges cadres and representatives to heed popular concerns without specifically defining proper limits and modes for caring for the populace. This ideal may even be read to encourage maximization of "serving the people." Although corruption is definitely against the spirit of "serving the people," even trivial particularistic help for common people, like solving personal disputes or demanding that the administration repair broken sanitary systems, are not. Chih-yu Shih sees such particularistic representation as beneficial to the system. By solving citizens' particular problems, representatives consequently reduce pressures towards the government.[225]

Although there is no necessary causality between democratic centralist political structures and particularistic representation, democratic centralist systems tend to rely on personal relations between cadres and commoners. Personal relations tend to bring personal concerns to the front. There may even be a cultural background for this type of particularistic political representation because other East Asian countries, democracies included, tend to emphasize personalistic relations between politicians and their supporters. Many East Asian political parties have quite vague political platforms. Instead they emphasize the ability to solve people's livelihood problems of even a personal kind. Japanese conservative politicians, for example, have set up their own support organizations called *koenkai*. *Koenkai*s attend to local people's problems ranging from arranging marriages, jobs, and loans, to offering mediation and legal advice.[226] This tendency may have roots in Confucian tradition, in which a good governor expressed benevolence (*ren*) towards his subjects and was mindful of the common people's welfare

223 Jennings 1997, p. 368–369.

224 Chan et al. 1984, pp. 34–35.

225 Shih 1999, p. 168.

226 See Abe et al. 1994, pp. 177–179, for a brief but illustrative introduction about *koenkai* functions.

(*minben*). Confucian propriety requires those with status and resources to show largesse towards those turning to them for assistance.

Contacting

In China, contacting is the dominant mode of popular influencing and often the first choice for those who have grievances.[227] Kent Jennings assumes that contacting is a rational strategy in a relatively closed political systems,[228] but the reason for its prevalence might lie elsewhere. After all, commoners engage in particularized contacting considerably more often in American cities encouraging resident participation than in other cities, since participatory structures provide chances for contacting.[229] The same is true in China. Contacting is common in China because government officials and delegates are immediately accessible to people and because officials control and distribute many resources crucial to people's daily lives. Moreover, they are supposed to provide a conduit for the people towards the administration.[230] Moreover, mass line politics makes contacting with individual leaders legitimate and normatively powerful.[231] The absence of other channels, such as independent media, leads commoners to use appeals to authorities for exposing corruption.[232]

The popularity of contacting indicates at least two things. When people have channels of influencing at their disposal they are prone to use these channels. Indeed, the choice of the way to participate in the Chinese countryside relates with ease and access.[233] It seems safe to conclude that people tend to participate politically if they have easy opportunities for participation. Access to certain types of channels of influencing tends to direct participation. People are likely to choose those forms of influencing that are known to be easy and sufficiently effective. Wenfang Tang and William Parish demonstrate that giving workers a stake in their firm's decision making or welfare does not lead to docility and passivity, as some might assume. Instead, it makes workers direct their articulation of grievances through institutionalized workplace channels.[234]

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227 Jennings 1997, p. 364; Tang and Parish 2000, pp. 149–150.

228 Jennings 1997, p. 370.

229 Berry et al. 1993, pp. 91–94.

230 Jennings 1997, p. 364; Shi 1997, pp. 199, 201–202.

231 Falkenheim 1978, p. 25; Shi 1997, p. 47.

232 Chen An 1999, p. 237.

233 Jennings 1997, p. 370.

234 Tang and Parish 2000, pp. 153–154, 161.

Kent Jennings asserts that although contacting and appealing are typically individual or small group activities, in China they are often used in communal issues. Despite attracting solo actors, goods involved are often collective in nature[235] Tianjian Shi finds that contacting is used in a wide variety of situations and for various purposes. Some want to change government policies or administrative personnel. People ask their workplace leaders to use discretion or make adjustments to official policies, others challenge the legitimacy of policy according to certain official principles, and some challenge the interpretation of a policy. Some seek personal benefit, others vent their anger, and still others appeal to fulfill a social duty.[236] Appealers can use persuasive, confrontational or clientilistic strategies, all of which require different resources and serve different purposes. They can use normative arguments to persuade or ask benevolence from officials; they can refuse their cooperation; or they can offer goods or services in return for a favor.[237]

Contacting and appealing demonstrate trust in the political system.[238] This is only natural; since appealing requests state intervention, petitioners must acknowledge the legitimacy of the state and cannot act in too confrontational a manner. Appeals also rest on the belief that rulers and ruled share the same understanding of justice. [239] The belief in the central government's good intent can even encourage villagers to appeal if they simultaneously believe that the center needs the help of ordinary people to get information about violations of its norms in the grassroots.[240] Those who appeal tend to have trust in government and most of them drop their cases if they fail to get what they want through officially sanctioned means. Obviously, government norms are successful in shaping people's political behavior.[241] However, unsuccessful contacting may weaken petitioners' faith in the system and legitimate channels of expression.[242] Yet, even those who expect that petitioning will not solve their problem may use it as the first step, because only after officially sanctioned channels are exhausted do other tactics become justified.[243]

Chinese grassroots leaders are relatively responsive to demands made by ordinary citizens. Tianjian Shi explains this success with the mass line political

235 Jennings 1997, p. 370.
236 Shi 1997, pp. 46, 199–201, 229–230.
237 Shi 1997, pp. 45–46, 49, 51.
238 Li 2004, p. 243.
239 Thireau and Hua 2003, pp. 87, 97.
240 Li 2004, pp. 241–242.
241 Shi 1997, pp. 216–217, 139–140.
242 Li 2004, p. 245, 247–250.
243 Zweig 2000, p. 134.

culture that encourages officials to listen to commoners' demands as long as they do not conflict with state and Party interests. Local cadres often identify with their corporate unit because they live and work among commoners. Moreover, they need to pacify their subordinates, whose cooperation they need for fulfilling state demands.[244] Often grassroots-level leaders share common interests with workers or villagers, both aiming at maximizing local interests and minimizing local conflicts.[245] In addition, lower-level cadres prefer that their subordinates lodge complaints with them rather than with other officials in order to prevent popular grievances from damaging one's career.[246] Obviously, local cadres have an interest in solving problems and in demonstrating responsiveness to popular demands before they reach higher-level administrators. Higher levels are relatively ready to find solutions to complaints as well. Indeed, it is in their interest to reduce discontent, improve policy implementation, and facilitate cadre oversight.[247]

Although Western theories assume that appealing requires group power, interest in politics, and electoral threat to be efficient, Tianjian Shi finds that in China none of these assumptions is true.[248] Obviously, the mass line setting individualizes participation because the easy availability of gatekeepers of the decision-making system reduces the need for intermediary organizations. In this kind of system, intermediaries are not horizontally-built social organizations, but lower-level state organs, such as workplace or village administration, relaying local demands and needs to regional or national policy making. Indeed, surveys show that local cadres provide a much-used channel for contacting higher-level administrators for the wellbeing of their unit members.[249]

Apart from provision of channels, sanctions are at play too. Xueguang Zhou maintains that, apart from positive incentives for compliance, state denial of legitimacy of any organized interests outside its control inhibits collective action which is based on organized interests, but encourages particularism.[250] Still, I assume that simultaneously rational cost and benefit calculations make people prefer handy and relatively effective official channels. However empowering these channels sometimes prove, they may also incapacitate people. Indeed, when people are accustomed to dealing with the government through their community gatekeepers, they do not learn to deal with bureaucrats personally, a skill needed

244 Shi 1997, p. 47–48, 56.

245 Walder 1987, pp. 32–33.

246 Shi 1997, p. 199.

247 O'Brien 1996, p. 45.

248 Shi 1997, pp. 203–204.

249 Ogden 2002, pp. 212, 217; Shi 1997, pp. 46, 224–226.

250 Zhou 1993, p. 55.

for activities to protect themselves from their workplace.[251] It thus appears that the Chinese state is able to limit social networking by providing its own accessible channels, probably even more than by outright political repression.

Personal, perhaps even informal, channels might be the preferred form of influencing in a culture emphasizing the need to preserve social harmony.[252] Social harmony is valuable also in small communities, as in the villages and workplaces that happen to form the typical setting for Chinese popular participation. In this kind of setting, contacting and casual conversations could be an effective form of communication, not only for solving personal problems, but also for reversing a policy. An informal remark or a suggestion made in private saves both parties' face regardless of the outcome. By contrast, a public challenge might harm personal relations with a co-worker or a boss whom one needs to encounter and even cooperate with in daily life.

Contacting as the preferred form of political communication reveals much about the nature of power in China. Contacting makes sense when one believes that the person approached has the power to decide or the ability to influence decisions made by others. The Chinese convention of contacting workplace or village leaders reveals the prevalence of state networks. While Western political theory expects that people influence politically mainly through social networks, such as political parties, interest groups, and labor unions, the Chinese seem to turn primarily to official state networks. In addition, the preference of contacting through workplace and village channels implies that power in China is functionally loosely structured. It makes sense to complain or make suggestions about issues of various types through the same leaders, when the power of these leaders is multi-functional and not very departmentalized.

Finding alternative democratic centralist channels

Research shows that the Chinese first use the closest and most familiar channel. Wenfang Tang and William Parish have found that institutional contacting with the work unit leader is the dominant model of dealing with grievances in Chinese cities. Problems were more likely to be voiced through the workplace channels and workplace channels even proved more effective than independent channels. Concerns received attention, produced response, and even a solution to the problem more often than through other channels.[253] Even problems not related to work

251 Cai 2002, p. 333.

252 In Chinese elite and workplace politics alike open confrontation usually damages the prestige of all parties. See, e.g., Chen An 1999, p. 208; Shaw 1996, pp. 200–201.

253 Tang and Parish 2000, pp. 149–150. They show that about half of complaints in a work unit setting were voiced, of which about half were answered, of which about one fifth were resolved (pp. 191–192).

were most often voiced through the workplace channels.[254] Evidently, articulation in mainland China seems to concentrate in the mass line channels, and probably in problems solvable through such channels, simply because these channels are available.

At the workplace, a state worker has access to trade union representatives. However, this channel is used less than contacting the management or the government.[255] People turn to the labor union mainly on questions of salary and workers' benefits.[256] Apart from the workplace labor union, workers can present their case to labor arbitration committees consisting of representatives of the state, labor, and employers. Labor arbitration committees mediate conflicts between workers and management. Workers using this kind of arbitration are more likely to get their problems solved than not.[257]

Naturally, contacting workplace or village cadres does not always lead to the solution hoped for. Therefore, an ordinary Chinese has alternative democratic centralist channels at hand. He can appeal to higher administrative levels, mass organizations, legislators, or the media. Apart from the trade union, some other social organizations are easily accessible to members. The Women's Federation, Communist Youth League and professional associations provide access through their channels. Tianjian Shi found that membership in social organizations increases the likeliness of contacting officials above the workplace level. He explains this through the protection that social organizations provide against local cadres' retaliation.[258] Yet it is even more likely that appealing increases because alternative channels and connections are available.

Legislators are relatively accessible in China. Due to workplace-centered electoral districts, it is likely that a person working at any larger workplace can contact a people's deputy at her workplace.[259] Contacting delegates is not only a legitimate way to solve problems, but it is appealing because delegates have connections, but are not necessarily cadres who have direct power over the person.[260] Because the people's congresses have gained independent power since reforms, this channel is becoming all the more popular among the constituency. Alongside the traditional channels of the Party and government, people now increasingly turn to individual delegates when they encounter injustice.[261] The people's

254 Tang and Parish 2000, p. 196.

255 Tang and Parish 2000, p. 149.

256 Shi 1997, p. 59.

257 Lee 2000 A, pp. 47–48; Tang and Parish 2000, p. 159; Thireau and Hua 2003. Arbitration committees redressed workers grievances in 50–80 percent of cases (Lee 2000 A, p. 48).

258 Shi 1997, p. 243–244.

259 On electoral districts, see Jacobs 1991.

260 Jennings 1997, p. 364.

261 Chen An 1999, p. 213.

congresses deal with popular complaints as an institution too. For example, once when overtaxed villagers complained about their cadre, the people's congress disciplined him by dismissing him from his position as a people's delegate.[262]

Tianjian Shi assumes that people contact people's deputies usually for influencing agenda setting and policy formulation rather than implementation. He sees deputies as channels for bringing some problems or viewpoints to the attention of higher authorities.[263] Yet, scholars researching people's congresses find that deputies primarily solve voters' particularistic problems because for reelection they need to provide concrete benefits for voters.[264] Deputies themselves understand that their main duty is to do concrete good things for their constituency. Likewise, citizens expect their deputies to look after their material welfare rather than to represent them in politics.[265] People's deputies usually resolve their elector's particularistic problems at the discretion of administrators on a case-by-case basis so that these solutions are only rarely incorporated into formal legislation.[266] Confucian patriarchalism may explain this concentration on particularist benefits, since legislators in other East Asian countries appeal to their voters by resolving particularistic problems.[267] An Chen shows that institutional factors may be at play as well. He remarks that it is natural that concerns remain local when people's congress elections are held on the grassroots level.[268]

Appealing

The most common place to turn if workplace-centered influencing fails, however, is higher-level administrative channels.[269] Commoners can either write to or visit bureaus specially set up under different administrative levels and departments to deal with people's complaints. These bureaus investigate complaints or send them to the relevant department. When these bureaus find complaints valid, as they often do, they have powers to sanction, mediate, or inform parties about relevant regulations. [270] James Townsend has recognized that authorities receive a

262 Zweig 2000, p. 127.

263 Shi 1997, pp. 59–60.

264 Shih 1999, pp. 164, 168. For example, heating and traffic problems, redressing unfair court rulings etc. are typical issues deputies are involved in.

265 Chen An 1999, pp. 212–214.

266 McCormick 1990, p. 149. He finds these features typical for patrimonial leadership.

267 Abe et al. 1994, pp. 177–179.

268 Chen An 1999, p. 215.

269 Tang and Parish 2000, p. 195.

270 Thireau and Hua 2003, p. 94. In their sample, the bureau interfered in 40% of cases reported to it and sent 15.6% of cases to another administrative unit or to court for resolution.

significant amount of information about local conditions though letters and visits, compared to that provided by the representative structure.[271]

Still, Herbert Yee and Wang Jinhong assume that direct personal contacts to individual administrators in relevant bureaus have stronger influence than indirect approaches through letters of appeal.[272] David Zweig states that petitioning higher-level officials is attractive to the Chinese because of their traditional preference for mediation over formal justice in close-knit communities. Petitioning is a conciliatory way which does not create clear-cut winners and losers and harm future relations. It allows leaders to correct problems themselves. Moreover, petitioning is common also because the Chinese legal system and citizens' concept of legality are still weak.[273]

Research finds that the Chinese authorities support contacting and petitioning for various reasons. Petitioning allows seeking redress through officially sanctioned channels. Legitimate channels for contacts between government and the masses help to localize discontent and to preempt social protests. Contacting provides information about ordinary citizens' opinions and grievances, and leaders can use this information to identify prevalent social problems and to solve many grievances even when government's resources are limited. Higher administrative levels receive a more accurate picture of local affairs and cadre performance when they can supplement official reports with independent information. Petitioning helps in monitoring local administrators' performance and provides information needed for confronting official corruption and bureaucratism. This ability to correct many problems in a timely manner is meant to assure the people of the fundamental justice of the system and to separate the Party from the unpopular acts sometimes committed in its name. Moreover, contacting provides leaders an opportunity to persuade people to subordinate their private interests to collective ones as defined by the Party.[274]

The Chinese petition for various matters. Some seek government resources or services. For instance, they want government to solve a shortage of supply of energy or water. Others appeal to change lower-level decisions or to correct policy implementation in their own workplace or village. Others want to influence formulation of a policy.[275] Further, some want to influence leadership selection. Tianjian Shi argues that in the institutional setting where leaders are nominated from above, the effective way of influencing personnel selection differs from the

271 Townsend 1967, p. 178.

272 Yee and Wang 1999, p. 41.

273 Zweig 2000, pp. 122–125.

274 Nathan 1986, pp. 81, 228–229; Shi 1997, p. 199; Thireau and Hua 2003, pp. 87–88; Yee and Wang 1999, p. 34; Zweig 2000, p. 137.

275 Shi 1997, pp. 51–52, 60–61.

Western ways. In China, a flow of commoners' reports about their leaders' misdeeds to superiors can damage a grassroots leader's reputation or even force him out of office.[276]

Tianjian Shi interprets that appeals to higher-ups attempt to change the balance of power between oneself and local leaders. Since government policy is not monopolistic, people can borrow its normative power and demand that officials "faithfully implement" policies. Alternatively, they borrow someone else's power to influence local officials' decisions, or they can use clientilistic exchange for their benefit. To succeed, people need political knowledge, connections, or something to exchange.[277] Not surprisingly, Herbert Yee and Wang Jinhong find that the effect of a complaint depends on how it relates to government policies.[278]

Understandably, those who petition to the government do not question the legitimacy of the national authorities or policies. Instead, they demand that local cadres observe the official norms and pressure the state to act in conformity with its own norms.[279] They argue that local policy is unfair, that it is contrary to the government's policies, or that their own exceptional case deserves special consideration.[280] Isabelle Thireau and Hua Linshan find that when petitioners use official norms, they simultaneously reinterpret these norms, sometimes rather loosely, and test the limits of what is acceptable and what is not. Thus, they actually participate in the rebuilding of cultural norms.[281] However, Tianjian Shi has discovered that petitioners' behavior does not correlate with their belief in the responsibility of authorities. He thus concludes that petitioners seek to punish cadres they dislike.[282]

Contacting higher levels, although officially encouraged, is actually risky, because it means challenging local officials and engaging in conflict with them. Therefore, people tend to appeal to government only after having exhausted other means.[283] Petition invites retaliation especially if cadres have vested interests, such as a large income from corruption, in the issue.[284] Furthermore, higher levels often have an interest in protecting local cadres because it is difficult to recruit new cadres to replace them. In addition, personal relations between township and village cadres can make the township government side with cadres.[285] Not

276 Shi 1997, p. 200.
277 Shi 1997, pp. 17–20, 120–121, 207, 234–235.
278 Yee and Wang 1999, p. 42.
279 Lee 2000 B, p. 225; O'Brien and Li 1995, pp. 759–760. Thireau and Hua 2003, p. 103.
280 Shi 1997, p. 53.
281 Thireau and Hua 2003, p. 102.
282 Shi 1997, p. 239.
283 Shi 1997, pp. 120–121, 234–235.
284 Zweig 2000, pp. 124, 127.
285 O'Brien and Li 1995, p. 763, 776.

surprisingly, John Burns found that peasants campaigned vigorously if their economic interest was at stake but seldom above village level, because they suspected the upper levels of cadre-favoring.[286]

The effect of appealing is uncertain. Even when authorities take the appealers' side, they often offer only symbolic understanding or even use the opportunity for explaining difficulties they have.[287] Although the existing political opportunity structure favors cadres, many complaints lead to punishment or removal of cadres. Cadres are vulnerable especially if they have violated a state policy or law.[288] Still, investigations of cadre behavior are seldom conducted independently, but are usually Party dominated. Therefore, the process can protect corrupt authorities against whom commoners have lodged complaints.[289] At worst, higher levels delegate investigation of appeals to the very officials who are charged with various misdeeds. [290] In other words, the democratic centralist hierarchical communication model can itself prove to be an obstacle for effective popular supervision because the investigation system is not independent and neutral, but employs those who are guilty of malpractice. Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li find that appealing is an ineffective way to demand change in national policy, although a flood of letters and visits can make the state modify unpopular practices. However, appealing may have an impact when used to complain about local cadres' misdeeds.[291] Thus, they assert that even without meaningful democratization, villagers now have more say in the structurally changed mass–elite relations.[292]

Obviously, the Chinese polity offers many channels for commoners to seek access to the system. Presumably, the Chinese system has been designed to provide people more chances of inclusion, but also to provide information to higher levels passed through different gatekeepers or even democratic centralist hierarchy other than the one implicated in a complaint. Yet many open channels to the system does not necessarily empower ordinary people. Indeed, layers of local government can act as "firewalls" that protect the central government and keep complainants hopeful. The existence of numerous venues may long extend the hopes of complainants, but also proves disillusioning when they realize that their case is mired in endless buck-passing.[293]

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286 Falkenheim 1978, p. 27.

287 For a good example, see Lee 2000 B, p. 231.

288 O'Brien and Li 1995, pp. 779–781.

289 Chen An 1999, p. 237.

290 Li 2004, p. 245.

291 O'Brien and Li 1995, pp. 759–760.

292 O'Brien and Li 1995, p. 781.

293 Li 2004, p. 245–246, 249.

Ways to open democratic centralist channels

Established democratic centralist channels through the workplace or administrative authorities are recommended, much used, and even effective channels for popular influencing in China. There is evidence that the Chinese first try to promote their interests through contacting and petitioning and adopt other methods only if these efforts fail.[294] Nevertheless, not all problems automatically draw attention or receive fair hearing in the official channels. In these situations some Chinese try to find entrance to official decision making by other means. Some methods for finding a disinterested party to help to mediate or to open democratic centralist channels are officially encouraged. [295] These disinterested parties include the media, arbitration committees,[296] and courts. In fact, if an opportunity arises, commoners may turn to any entity with authoritative clout.[297]

The media is one democratic centralist channel for solving complaints. In the People's Republic of China, the media has a role in supervising lower level cadre performance. It receives letters from commoners, helps people to solve their problems, and investigates officials' wrongdoings. The press either investigates complaints itself or transfers investigation to other government agencies. Only a small amount of popular input is published and even then only if it falls within the guidelines of party policy. Many other messages, especially more critical ones, are circulated in internal publications available for decision makers.[298] Typical issues for contacting the press are offering suggestions to government, asking alleviation of special difficulties such as economic problems or shortages of public resources, revealing cadre misbehavior, and airing personal grievances.[299] In addition to concrete problems, the press is a channel for transmitting views about macropolitics to leaders. Tianjian Shi notes that the press is perhaps the most important way for commoners to participate in deliberations about national policy.[300]

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294 Lorenzen 2005, p. 9; Yee and Wang 1999, p. 42; Zweig 2000, pp. 124–125.

295 Even law courts often engage in mediation. See examples in Zweig 1997 A, ch. 6.

296 For arbitration committees for labor disputes, see Thireau and Hua 2003.

297 Tianjian Shi experienced that villagers turn to research personnel to channel their complaints to central authorities. Shi A 2000, p. 251.

298 Nathan 1986, pp. 155–157, 183–186; Shi 1997, p. 66. Yee and Wang 1999, p. 34, evaluate that contacting media would be effective only if the case is published, but in fact media provide materials for internal circulation in the administration. Hence, contacts to media can help solving the problem without making it public.

299 Bernstein 1999, p. 199; Shi 1997, p. 65; Yee and Wang 1999, p. 34.

300 Shi 1997, p. 66.

The recent boom of investigative journalism has increased situations in which the media appeals directly to public opinion.[301] The media can even put pressure on leaders to resolve the case at once so that the media can report its solution.[302] Nowadays rural people even sometimes turn to the media as the first channel to contact if local cadres prove unreceptive.[303] Research proves that the media is an effective channel to solve problems, especially useful in cases of grassroots cadres enjoying the protection of higher administrative level, because the media invites publicity these leaders usually want to avoid.[304] Consequently, reports of punishment of abusive cadres can inspire others to complain about their own cases.[305]

In recent years, the Chinese government has taught people to use law and the courts to protect their interests and to channel popular discontent through official institutions. Still, Herbert Yee and Wang Jinhong find that peasants seldom file administrative law suits because they are unfamiliar with the process or even lack a conception of the law.[306] Administrators can even pressure people to refrain from suing them and retaliate against people who bring legal action against them.[307] Furthermore, the likelihood of winning a case against administrators is very small, although partly the number of successful cases remains small because litigants may use law suits to pressure the local administrators into mediation or negotiations.[308] In other words, people often sue the government to force it to start a regular democratic centralist or deliberative process. It appears that the central government views the juridical channel in instrumentalist terms as adding one more check to guarantee undistorted democratic centralist communication. The aim, thus, is not protecting commoners against state power. As Yuen Yuen Tang remarks, the administrative litigation law is clearly an instrument for the central government to monitor administrative performance. One can only bring a suit against a specific administrative act but not against the policies themselves.[309]

Protests

Western scholarship and media often interpret protests in China as signs of dissatisfaction with the government.[310] Surely protests mark dissatisfaction, but

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301 For investigative journalism as public supervision (*yulun jiandu*), see Alex Chan 2002.

302 Zweig 2000, p. 135.

303 Ogden 2002, p, 150.

304 Tang and Parish 2000, pp. 194–195; Zweig 2000, p. 125–127.

305 O'Brien and Li 1995, p. 763, 779; Li and O'Brien 1996, p. 48.

306 Yee and Wang 1999, p. 42.

307 Tang 2005, pp. 36, 42–43.

308 Tang 2005, p. 30; Yee and Wang 1999, p. 35.

309 Tang 2005, p. 29.

310 Gilley 2004, p. 34.

possibly protesters believe that the higher authorities are competent and willing to interfere in problems brought to their attention.[311] As Suzanne Ogden comments, protests and demonstrations can be pleas for state assistance, since in socialist China the state is seen as a paternalist caretaker. Protests can also be a way to extract compensation when one has lost his work or home. Thus they are not necessarily directed against the state.[312] Yongshun Cai notes that Chinese protests are mostly directed against the specific entities capable of addressing the issue, because they usually want to solve concrete economic and welfare problems.[313] Remembering the long Chinese tradition of calling imperial censors hurrying to inspect any irregularities caused by tax strikes and popular riots, it would not be impossible that this tradition has left lasting marks in the Chinese political culture. Perhaps it has even been intensified by the Communist ideology based on the conviction that the people have a right to rise against oppression.

Research literature often assumes that sabotage and protest are used for pressuring government,[314] and their influence comes from shaping leaders' cost-benefit analyses.[315] This surely is a correct assumption, yet not the complete picture. Apart from concrete costs, there is a normative moral element at play. Popular protests have normative power in the Chinese culture. A Confucian ruler was supposed to benevolently care for commoners' wellbeing. In this tradition, protest or uprising against a tyrannical ruler was legitimate. The communist claim that they serve the people must have similarly rendered normative power to popular protests against local misrule. But legitimacy is a complex matter not lying with any particular party alone. A legitimate state responds to commoners' legitimate demands, but a legitimate state simultaneously has the responsibility of maintaining order. Yongshun Cai observes that local governments have no authority to repress citizen protests as long as their demands are legitimate and they refrain from using violence.[316] Likewise, commoners can make legitimate complaints, but not resort to illegitimate means or refuse to accept a compromise. This framework permits a strategic play of legitimacy-amassing by all sides, the result of which is not likely to be a zero-sum game.

Protests and civil disobedience are often the ultimate methods to open democratic centralist channels. Protesters often seem to want to open a deliberative process with those in power or bolster their bargaining power in negotia-

311 Li 2004.

312 Ogden 2002, p. 131.

313 Cai 2002, p. 329.

314 Cai 2002, Yee and Wang 1999, pp. 35–36.

315 Ogden 2002, p. 82.

316 Cai 2002, pp. 329–331.

tions.[317] The Chinese usually engage in protests only after their petitions are rejected or local officials resist implementation of corrections and compensations imposed by their superiors or courts.[318] Flexibility in adopting strategically either officially sanctioned means or protesting suggests that the question is not about anti-governmental activity. Rather, examples indicate that most protesters seek strategic alliance with some levels of government against other levels. Again and again, we find examples of local people using protests to draw higher officials' attention to their local problems, with the result that higher-ups investigate the matter and, rather than severely punish the protesters, correct the situation causing discontent.[319] Even when the solution is less than ideal, a protest, possibly inviting attention to the problem from above, might bolster protesters' bargaining position.[320]

Not only do protesters flexibly cross the line between official and non-permitted, but also the Chinese authorities provide access to official decision-making channels with the criterion of legitimacy, rather than legality in mind. Indeed, if protesters reveal improper activities committed by cadres, a typically Chinese official answer to protests has been that it is "not appropriate to regard their actions as illegal".[321] Even when authorities arrest identifiable leaders and use violence to suppress the protest, the state often arranges compensations for the mistreated people. Moreover, authorities' sympathies often lie on the protesters' side.[322] However, higher authorities' flexibility to weigh the situation does not mean that

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317 See examples in Cai 2002, p. 334. On rioting to draw official attention and to galvanize the regime to solve problems, see Bernstein 1999, p. 213. Mostly protesters have demanded negotiations concerning a particular problem, but sometimes protests have been used to demand formal inclusion. For strikes demanding worker representation in management, see Lee 2000 A, p. 48; Liu 1996, p. 105.

318 Zweig 2000, p. 125. Peter Lorenzen finds that demands gradually escalate until a satisfactory solution is reached or the group gives up. After official channels, the next step usually is peaceful public demonstrations, sit-ins, or strikes, and only then violence or rioting might follow. (Lorenzen 2005, p. 9)

319 John Burns gives a typical example in which some peasants had demolished a factory dormitory wall because the factory was built on their production team land without due compensation and jobs for the team members. This act was not deemed illegal and punishable outright, but rather the commune and police wanted to investigate the reasons for such an act. As they found that unrest resulted from injustice, they negotiated proper ways to compensate the peasants. (Burns 1988, pp. 73–74.) In the 1990s, tax riots made the central government intervene with the result that rioters were freed and the tax level was set at a reasonable level. See Yee and Wang 1999, pp. 36–37. For other examples of protests leading to mild punishments and higher level interference for solving the problem, see Lorenzen 2005, p. 6.

320 Cai 2002, p, 334.

321 The NPC verdict on one collective protest against procedural irregularities in elections is cited in Li and O'Brien 1996, p. 49.

322 For police sympathies, see Lee 2000 B, p. 222; Lorenzen 2005, pp. 9, 22. For sympathy of higher-ups, see Cai 2002, p. 331.

they automatically side with protesters having a just cause. Sometimes if there has been open protest involved, the higher levels could be reluctant to punish even corrupt cadres because they do not want to provide a formula for other villages to engage in protests.[323] Besides, the Chinese tradition mandates that they try to understand both sides, corrupted or abusive cadre included, and to accommodate claims on both sides.[324]

Kevin O'Brien has identified rightful resistance as one typical form of opposition in the Chinese countryside. It employs the government's commitments, laws, and values to demand that administrators to live up to them. Rightful resistance uses these instruments of domination, either sincerely or strategically, in hopes of finding a source of entitlement, inclusion, and empowerment. The resistors' aim is, thus, curbing power. This kind of resistance operates near the boundary of authorized channels and affirms existing channels of inclusion. To find elite support somewhere in the system, resisters exploit divisions among power holders.[325] Isabelle Thireau and Hua Linshan find that although they use official discourse such as laws, petitioners and protestors seldom aim at protecting legal rights. Instead, they use official statements as publicly shared standards of justice in order to demonstrate that the behavior of the party they complain about is unacceptable. By connecting their own misfortunes with state norms, complainants want to depict themselves and the state alike as victims of local government's poor implementation of central policies and laws.[326] Those who engage in rightful resistance appeal to higher levels against local cadres or make protests to draw higher levels' attention in order to make, with the assistance of higher-ups, local cadres live up to official policies and values.[327]

Use of officially shared language is one asset in demanding political inclusion. Protesters manipulate their public demands to arouse sympathy and to demand that leaders live up to moral standards. For example, protesters demand that administrators guarantee their subsistence, punish corruption, or live up to the

323 O'Brien and Li 1995, p. 763, 776. For more about the use of legal language to justify the protest, see Lee 2000 B, p. 224.

324 I have no evidence whether or how this tradition actually affects cases dealing with malfeasance. For an illustrative example of its role in labor arbitration committees, see Thireau and Hua 2003, pp. 95–97.

325 O'Brien 1996, pp. 32–33, 44–45. However, not all official commitments are used for strategic interaction with authorities but provide means to create solidarity and a sense of the justice of their demands among the protesters. Ching Kwan Lee finds that for unemployed state workers, collective memories of state socialism was a private or communal discourse, while publicly when demanding official attention they used legal discourse (Lee 2000 B, pp. 224–225).

326 Thireau and Hua 2003, pp. 97–99.

327 See examples in O'Brien 1996, pp. 38–40.

ideological standards of the Party.[328] As Peter Lorenzen stresses, the complaints are carefully phrased in patriotic and legalistic language, focusing on corruption or poor local implementation of national policies. As such, they do not question the legitimacy of the regime.[329] Ching Kwan Lee remarks that such an approach also limits possibilities available to protesters, because they cannot question legal policies even when these policies cause injustice or suffering.[330] The purpose for using slogans supporting government can be either strategic or show real trust. Indeed, some want to shame authorities by emphasizing that protesters put their faith in the government to resolve the situation. Others put real trust in just government, although they are skeptical about individual administrators.[331]

Peter Lorenzen argues that the Chinese government mostly tolerates popular protests as long as they follow the model of loyalist protest, because it is in the interest of central government to receive information about local administrators and about ordinary people's dissatisfactions. Since authoritarian governments' mechanisms to monitor local situations are weak, popular protest can help the government to control corruption and maintain political stability.[332] The government shares this conviction with its people. According to Lianjiang Li, many ordinary Chinese believe that they should help the central government to understand the real situation in the grassroots.[333] Likewise, even grassroots leaders often believe that peaceful collective action to pressure government is acceptable if the cause is legitimate.[334]

The state recognition of the legitimacy of some protests could be a byproduct of limitation of independent association. Collective action is usually needed to demand political inclusion if gatekeepers to the decision-making system are remote. In an ideal democratic centralist system gatekeepers are near, making it unnecessary to look for an independent intermediary organization for gaining access to decision making. The reality may be different. As Herbert Yee and Wang

328 For some demonstrating workers' slogans, see Lee A 2000, p. 52. She interprets that demands for food or schooling for children reveal workers' desperation. My reading is that protesters exaggerate their sometimes very real suffering to make their protest appear legitimate and to emphasize government's moral responsibility to heed their deprivation. Indeed, protesters usually combine complaints about economic suffering with accusations of local corruption or malfeasance (Lorenzen 2005, p. 8). A moral element is thus often explicitly included. For living up to Party standards, Li and O'Brien 1996, p. 46, tell the story of a man using a idealized description of Party members in Party manuals and films for criticizing actual Party members in their village.

329 Lorenzen 2005, p. 8.

330 Lee 2000 B, p. 232.

331 Zweig 2000, pp. 135–136.

332 Lorenzen 2005.

333 Li 2004, p. 242.

334 Cai 2002, p. 336.

Jinhong note, organized protest can be efficacious and pressure government to act since individual participation remains inefficient as long as the government is not interested in the problem.[335] That is, sometimes association becomes necessary to demand inclusion. Indeed, compared to urban areas, rural people often need to stage bigger and more conflictual protests to attract interest from higher levels of government.[336] This might show, apart from the national governments' developmental priorities, remoteness of the access to democratic centralist channels other than local leaders. If commoners complain about local leaders, collective action becomes rational. The very state that limits association perhaps implicitly recognizes this and tolerates unofficial association as long as the cause can be fitted to the central government's own aims. One of such aim is the ability to monitor local-level administration.

Scholars observe that Chinese popular claims are mostly put forward in an unorganized and fragmented fashion because communists do not tolerate organized confrontation.[337] To emphasize the risks of organization, the government often punishes identifiable protest leaders.[338] Still, this opportunity structure shapes political organization, rather than prevents it. Kent Jennings found that cooperative or collective behavior for solving a problem is actually relatively common in the Chinese countryside, especially considering that, apart from those controlled by the Party, available organizations are few. Still, cooperative activities are relatively common for solving collective agricultural or infrastructural problems.[339] Instead of formal organizations, community relations prove useful informal channels for communication and association. Thus, official units like villages and workplaces provide necessary networks for organizing collective action.[340] Often protest leaders are workplace authorities like cadres or factory

335 Yee and Wang 1999, p. 40.

336 Lorenzen 2005, p. 10.

337 Townsend 1980, p. 417; Zhou 1996, p. 15. However, at times, such as during the Cultural Revolution, collective action against government officials has even been officially encouraged (Shi 1997, pp. 77–78).

338 Cai 2002, p. 333; Lorenzen 2005, p. 9. However, authorities often absolve ordinary protesters as being misled by cunning leaders. The famous example of this kind of message is the official reaction to the student protests of 1989, the *Renmin ribao* editorial of April 24, 1989. The text is published in Li et al. 1991, pp. 43–45. Perhaps, this kind of formulation reveal patriarchal attitudes about commoners seen as politically incapable, and thus innocent. Or perhaps, as Jing Lin argues, rhetorical exclusion of tiny minority permits the Party to believe that its policies are supported by the majority (Lin 1991, pp. 67). However, another reading is possible. This is a strategy to minimize enemy strength. When only the core is blamed and punished for a protest, the majority can be persuaded to side with the government. This strategy reduces resources needed for the maintenance of order.

339 Jennings 1997, pp. 363–366.

340 Tang 2005, p. 45; Zhou 1993. See Cai 2002, pp. 340–341 and Lee 2000 B, p. 218, for the role of workplace housing in facilitating collective action.

leaders, especially if the conflict needs a negotiator with the government. As Yongshun Cai puts it, authority is transferable from one situation to another.[341] Furthermore, this situation reveals that formerly officially-appointed gatekeepers often remain legitimate gatekeepers even after the situation changes and the nomination comes from the social movement itself. In other words, people tend to seek similar mediated pattern of communication with officials and even through the same people in official and unofficial situations.

Xueguang Zhou discovered that in China the state monopolizes formal organization, leaving social interests unorganized. In this situation, state organization provides bases for mobilization for collective action through workplace and school contacts. The state has tied official organizations vertically to itself and eliminated any intermediate institutions of social negotiation. Hence, social conflicts are directed toward the center for political solutions. This means that it is not group interests, but state promoted mass mobilization and resource transfers that give simultaneous impetus for collective action. As a result, macropolitical conditions produce similar behavior patterns across organizations, groups and strata. Within this state-dominated opportunity structure, collective action in China aggregates large numbers of spontaneous individuals, whose behavioral patterns and demands, though not necessarily interests, converge.[342]

As plausible as this structural explanation appears, it may be incomplete. The pattern of seemingly leaderless collective protests emerging simultaneously among various groups and in separate places when grievances arise precedes the People's Republic. This was the organization model of the patriotic May 4th Movement in 1919, and it is also known in some eschatologist rebellions like the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. Obviously, this particular protest model has endured considerable social and political changes. Political culture can perhaps explain the legitimacy of this particular pattern and perhaps also the role of social networks in spreading such a protest.

Typically, to avoid official hostility the Chinese collective action is disguised as spontaneous action. To give an impression of spontaneity, organization is planned in secret and conciliatory and aggressive roles are divided among participants.[343] It is the rule of the game that protest organizations remain temporary and dissolve after the issue is resolved.[344] They should remain local and refrain from forming horizontal links.[345] Legitimate protests are conducted by narrow,

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341 Cai 2002, pp. 334–336.

342 Zhou 1993.

343 Shi 1997, pp. 73–80.

344 Zweig 2000, p. 139.

345 Cai 2002, p. 340; Lee 2000 B, 223; Shi 1997, p. 79.

well-defined groups and make claims only on behalf of their group.[346] Their level of organization is thus low and their demands remain non-political.[347] In other words, they are victim movements attempting to solve a concrete problem. As Lianjiang Li and Kevin O'Brien observe, policy-based resisters usually make local and parochial demands, not national ones. Their demands center on immediate economic interests and good governance. Such protests claim entry into local polity, but seldom demand civil and political rights. They usually do not question the legitimacy of central laws and policies.[348] Another form of legitimate protest makes an unselfish appeal to the government about an abstract issue, such as good governance.[349]

Logically speaking, the larger collective activity is the more strength it has. Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li find that collective action creates more credible pressure, since it becomes difficult to dismiss a complaint which has many backers and could cause widespread unrest. Collective action facilitates cost-sharing. When protest is collective, it becomes more difficult to wear it down and shared responsibility protects participants against retaliation.[350] Finally, greater numbers of participants can create more visible protests.[351] However, in the Chinese opportunity structure large group size is not always an asset. Yuen Yuen Tang found that Chinese protestors often fail to translate their number into a political resource. Moreover, higher-level authorities and courts might fear large-scale unrest and be more likely to suppress the group. Large size does not necessarily protect the group against suppression when authorities, as usual, target its leaders.[352] As a big group usually needs formal leaders and perhaps attracts outsiders, it could even be more vulnerable to the limits of the typical legitimate pattern of protest than a small-scale protest is.

Although collective action is not ruled out in China, it is often not worthwhile. Tianjian Shi remarks that even many activities that are collective elsewhere, such as electoral campaigns or strikes, are individualized in China, but they can still be effective. For example, campaigning against an incumbent is a demanding political activity, but it is not necessarily risky, since usually one persuades voters

346 Lorenzen 2005, p. 8.

347 Cai 2002, p. 337.

348 Li and O'Brien 1996, p. 54.

349 This type of protest is based on the Confucian tradition encouraging remonstrance, a selfless moral appeal to the rulers for public interest. For this tradition, see Nathan 1986, pp. 24–26. On a similar kind of Confucian moralism in the use of a public protest movement, see Perry 1992, p. 152.

350 O'Brien and Li 1995, pp. 773–774.

351 Cai 2002, pp. 332.

352 Tang 2005, pp. 47–48.

privately.[353] The effectiveness, of course, comes from the communal size of political units in China. Private face-to-face campaigning is effective, because the number of voters is not very large and because one can utilize existing networks of communication and trust. Likewise, individualized protests can be effective in China. Slowdowns can be a way of worker bargaining,[354] or a way to make managers aware of complaints,[355] especially in a culture where people expect superiors to read their discontent from unvoiced signs. However, often slowdown is used to communicate dissatisfaction about personal treatment, such as protesting disciplinary actions.[356] Thus individualized protests often concern issues that could not attract large following anyway.

More than indicating increasing dissatisfaction, the recent surge of protests might signify erosion of democratic centralist channels or their decreasing inclusion. There has been evidence on proliferating strikes and labor disputes in the 1990s, which some researchers explain by more open and permitted social conflicts.[357] However, another explanation is possible too. Possibly conflicts now erupt in public not because the number of conflicts itself has risen, but because unmediated conflicts have increased. Perhaps in state enterprises, where democratic centralist channels are available, conflicts are more often mediated before they burst into collective action because institutionalized channels of worker participation routinely relays workers' opinion to the management. Now that other forms of employment are becoming common, many people no longer have regularized means for political inclusion and, therefore, need to resort to protests to gain hearing. Indeed, workers having official trade union channels for influencing are less likely to participate in labor protests.[358] Furthermore, it seems that riots and public protests often emerge among groups not having official corporatist channels for representation, namely among peasants and the unemployed. In other words, it might be that collective action, even protests, becomes necessary mostly when democratic centralist channels are either remote or blocked. When the proportion of people who have handy democratic centralist channels available at their workplace or residential area is decreasing, the number of protests and other types of collective action will naturally increase.

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353 Shi 1997, pp. 110–111, 119.

354 Tang and Parish 2000, p. 154.

355 Mayfair Yang 1989, pp. 50, 52–53.

356 Shaw 1996, p. 208.

357 Tang and Parish 2000, pp. 158–159. More open social conflicts are reality in China. Increasing income differentials and emphasis on economic efficiency, instead of worker welfare, at workplaces mean that conflicts are likely to be more open and there are fewer means available for pacifying all sides.

358 Chan, 1993, p. 58; Zhang 1997, p. 143.

Although Ching Kwan Lee estimates that increasing numbers of public labor protests, sometimes attracting other disgruntled segments, show that now workers are not only challenging the enterprise, but also the state.[359] However, another explanation is possible. Increased number of protests reflect workers' worsening bargaining power and labor conditions due to economic reforms, but workers discontent seems to be directed at economic, not political power.[360] Therefore, workers may bring their protests to the public because they want state support against an exploitative enterprise. In other words, they seek negotiations with the state in order to make it discipline their work unit. Ching Kwan Lee shows that as a result of protest, the state actually sometimes guarantees worker welfare when their factory does not.[361]

Democratic centralist values

After the Communist Party has propagated democratic centralism and the mass line for so many decades among Party members and populace in general, it is likely that some democratic centralist values and practices have developed among the administrators and the populace. Sometimes scholars have been disappointed about the lack of familiarity of some participatory methods among the Chinese populace,[362] but it is more common to find relatively strong participatory attitudes. Kent Jennings found remarkably participatory-minded values among rural leaders in the 1990s. The majority of village leaders felt that commoners are able to consider even complicated matters and only a few agreed that it is all right if a capable and popularly trusted leadership makes decisions without popular input.[363]

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359 Lee 2000 A, p. 51.

360 See Blecher 2002, pp. 290–295; Cai 2002, pp. 329, 340.

361 Lee 2000 A, pp. 51–54.

362 Victor Falkenheim has demonstrated that many participatory concepts in the Chinese socialist vocabulary were either unknown or unpracticed by the commoners. No villager interviewee could define what "bottom to top" (*zi xia er shang*) planning was, and few knew cases in which anyone had "gone against the tide" (*fan chaoliu*) to challenge ideologically incorrect policies (Falkenheim 1978, pp. 26–27). However, neither of these are typical mass participatory methods, since the first looks for grassroots, not mass, participation in planning and the second was a politically risky method of political activism during the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, Victor Falkenheim's findings tell very little about familiarity with concepts of regular participation.

363 Of four counties selected for this study, in three counties 24% and in the one participatory-orientated county 12% of leaders agreed that "popular participation is unnecessary so long as the leaders are capable and enjoy the people's confidence." The statement "only some simpler issues can be put forward for considerations by the general public" received agreement ranging from 31 to 39 per cent. (Jennings 1997, p. 370.)

Simultaneously, cadres seem to demonstrate caution about peasants' ability to manage local affairs without democratic centralist guidance and mediation. Indeed, local leaders sometimes oppose village elections because they fear that villagers would act in self-serving, factionalist, or even vengeful ways which disregard the common good.[364] Although these beliefs certainly demonstrate a fear of power-sharing, they could also suggest the mass line assumption that popular participation is desirable, but under a leadership reminding commoners of collective good and national policies, if these tend to be neglected. This caution might also show that the same villagers, whose ability to influence through meetings and personal contacts is unquestionable, may be inexperienced in using electoral channels. In other words, political institutions shape people's behavior and prepare them differently for various kinds of activities.

Western studies reveal that democratic centralist vocabulary and values are evident in Chinese workplaces. For example, ordinary people sometimes complain that the leaders have not explained changed practices sufficiently to the masses.[365] Factory workers may complain that their manager does not tolerate criticism or inspect the situation on the workshop floor and sets himself above the workers.[366] In other words, he does not practice the virtues of a mass line type of leader. Or we find, unsurprisingly, that those factories where workers describe their factory manager as "democratic," have arranged better than average facilities for workers' welfare.[367] Sometimes ordinary Chinese use democratic centralist vocabulary to demand good governance. Indeed, commoners have referred to democratic centralism or to the mass line when they demand more cadre accountability or open and fair local elections; some villagers have threatened to withhold taxes until leaders improve their "democratic work style" or commit to "serving the people."[368]

Democratic centralist discourse has affected the ways that ordinary Chinese conceptualize democracy itself. Even in the late 1980s surveys demonstrated that the populace had a very democratic centralist understanding of democracy. Indeed, in a 1987 survey 75% of respondents identified democracy in terms of some official definitions of democracy, including democratic centralism, the mass line, or "being master in one's own house" (*dangjia zuo zhu*). 25% of respondents believed that "democracy under centralist guidance" is valid and 19% believed that

364 Kelliher 1997, p. 80.

365 Unger and Chan 2004, p. 21. Obviously, democratic centralist values caused this person to complain not about the policy itself, but about inadequate knowledge about its rationale and consequences.

366 Yang 1989, p. 48.

367 Woo 1994, pp. 286–287.

368 Li and O'Brien 1996, pp. 45–47. See also Thireau and Hua 2003, p. 100.

democracy means listening to and soliciting mass opinions.[369] In 1986, students at Peking University emphasized the class character of democracy and democratic centralism, but overlooked elections and power checks and balances.[370] It seems that in the 1980s the majority rule was still by no means a central aspect of democracy in Chinese thinking.[371] Ordinary people's ideas of democracy and political reform tend to echo the official discourse, and not to demand liberalist freedoms.[372]

Patriarchalism or democracy?

Defending local interests or people's welfare is not democratic in itself. Traditional patriarchal attitudes may benefit the people,[373] but they are not equivalent to democracy. Local leaders' concern for the welfare of their unit resembles the Confucian ideal of rulership.[374] The minimum requisite for democracy is that commoners have a chance to articulate their own vision of interests and that local leaders act taking the mass input into account. Otherwise we are talking about authoritarianism, albeit in its populist form. Although there is plenty of evidence of independent Chinese grassroots activism and serious participation in local affairs, there is also evidence of cadres serving local interests for patriarchal reasons.[375] Patriarchal attitudes are protective towards one's own group, but power relations remain hierarchical and the solution depends on a leader's benevolence, not on initiatives from below.

There is a difference between patriarchalism and mass line politics. The mass line requires a leader to listen to the mass opinions and to give transparent explanations about reasons behind policy choices. Although the mass line itself might

369 Zheng 1994, p. 255.

370 Zheng 1994, p. 257.

371 In a 1986 survey, few university students identified democracy with majority rule protecting minority opinions: only 34% favored this kind of majority rule, while 48% saw no major part for it in democracy (Zheng 1994, p. 256). However, in another survey 44% of peasants preferred majority decisions if disagreement exists. Letting each to do what one sees best (15%) or obeying leaders (25%) were less ideal (p. 255). The formulation of the question makes it impossible to know whether it was majority decisions or minority protection, or both, that student respondents rejected. The differing answers between the two groups could show that peasants have more personal experience of participatory decision making, including majority decisions, than students.

372 Zhu et al. 1990, pp. 996–997.

373 See Friedman et al. 1991, pp. 161, 262, for leaders making an analogy between family and their collective.

374 Nathan 1986, pp. 125–127.

375 Friedman et al. 1991, especially pp. 177, 258.

be a democratic method of leadership, it is possible that many local cadres have not made a very fine demarcation between it and patriarchalist concern about people's wellbeing. The problem of demarcation between the two is further complicated by difficulties in demarcating what counts for democratic articulation of opinions in an intimate village setting where political articulation is often informal. Villagers, for example, expect that a good leader socializes with them and stops to chat with them when passing by.[376] Sometimes people do not even voice their opinions, but use gestures, passivity, or even silence to convey their opinions. For example, Victor Shaw shows that silence in public meetings can forcefully communicate popular disapproval and make a cadre modify his proposal.[377] Obviously, it sometimes becomes difficult to prove when and how popular influencing took place.

Ordinary people may be respectful of authority and oriented towards harmony as well. Many Chinese still expect patriarchal government.[378] These people perhaps do not miss participatory rights as long as the government takes care of them. Nevertheless, the evidence given above shows that the Chinese are not politically passive onlookers and in many respects they hold participatory values. The Chinese participate politically when an issue important to them needs resolution.[379] For example, half of the respondents felt they have some influence at their workplace and would speak up about a decision negatively affecting their work.[380] Some even confront their leaders if patriarchalism fails.

The mass line politics seems to have created a unique mix of attitudes respecting both authoritarianism and popular power. Kuan Hsin-chi and Lau Siu-kai have found that the mainland Chinese strongly support moral government and paternalist leadership. They have an elitist conception of politics and see that the state takes precedence over the individual. Nevertheless, these traditional political orientations have a positive impact on participation in electoral and appeal activities, although they correlate negatively with adversary and protest activities.[381] It is easy to find other similarly anomalous results. Some surveys find that in

376 Friedman et al. 1991, p. 117.

377 Shaw 1996, pp. 195–196.

378 In one survey 2/3 of the respondents agreed that government officials are like family heads (Shi 2000 B, p. 550). In another survey, 74% of the respondents agreed that they should trust and obey the government that serves them (Zheng 1994, pp. 254–255). These results may indicate a prevalence of paternalist values, but may also reveal the mass line expectations that a leader should serve the people. In the latter case a more reciprocal relation between rulers and ruled would explain these attitudes.

379 For commoners successfully demanding voice, see Unger and Chan 2004.

380 Nathan 1986, pp. 169–170.

381 Kuan and Lau 2002, pp. 297, 304, 310–315.

China few see their relationship with the government as reciprocal,[382] but others find that most commoners and local administrators alike believe that ordinary people should have a say in decision making.[383] Kuan and Lau explain the co-existence of beliefs in authority and active political participation by people's susceptibility to institutional mobilization. These people would be politically inactive if left alone.[384] If, instead, these results indicate internalization of the mass line values, they could indicate that commoners in China believe that government has a moral duty to listen to popular opinions but centralization should be left to political elites. Lianjiang Li demonstrates the existence of such values. The common belief in competent central government without sufficient capacity to control local bureaucrats combines well with the assertion that central authorities need ordinary people's active help for obtaining information about local situations and even for fighting against subversion of its regulations by local bureaucrats.[385]

In the mass line leadership, autonomous decision making is balanced with transparency. Good leaders are enjoined to answer people's complaints and arrange meetings to explain state policies and local situation to them.[386] When needed, the state provided cadres with standard explanations.[387] The Chinese peasants have commonly believed in the correctness of the state policies and put the blame for failures on the local cadres instead.[388] Many distinguish between the intent and capacity of the center. Although they believe in the goodness of central policies, they see that the central government is unable to control its administrators and thus implement its policies as intended.[389] Perhaps this inclination

382 Shi 2000 B, pp. 548, 550. The statement in the survey was: "Individual is a cog in the machine."

383 Jennings 1997, p. 370; Ogden 2002, pp. 129, 226.

384 Kuan and Lau 2002, pp. 312, 314. One alternative explanation would emphasize rational calculation of costs and benefits of participation. Because mainlanders participate in concrete local issues, their participation perhaps either appears, or even is, more effective than political participation in more remote affairs in Hong Kong or Taiwan. As noted above, mainlanders have easy access to channels for influencing, probably easier than in Hong Kong or Taiwan. One is likely to participate when participation is easy and officially encouraged, regardless of values.

385 Li 2004, pp. 241–243.

386 For example, when the state requirements clashed with villagers' needs, leaders of one model village assured that a prosperous future was ahead but attainable only after a sufficiently long period of hard work (Friedman et al. 1991, pp. 250, 262).

387 Gardner 1972, pp. 226–227. See Friedman et al. 1991, p. 240, for explanations provided from above whitewashing the center and blaming weather and the Soviet Union withdrawing its aid for the Great Leap Forward famine.

388 Yan Yunxiang 1995, p. 237.

389 Li 2004, p. 238. Li attributes the legitimacy the central government enjoys to media campaigns showing national government in a positive light (p. 235).

results from the mass line style of persuasion with reason, but perhaps it also reveals a psychological need to believe in ultimate justice.

Perhaps the most common form of persuasion linked unpopular policies with popular ones or with successful results. For example, an able cadre was able to demand that villagers fulfill unprofitable state demands when villagers understood that the special position of their village as a model and a trustworthy supplier of the state also brought visible benefits to the village compared to neighboring areas.[390] This leads us to what Tang Tsou has described as one aspect of Chinese totalism. By linking different policies and by systematizing its program, the Chinese Communist Party made it difficult for its supporters to reject any particular policy, because they simultaneously benefited from other policies. Therefore, the Communist Party was able to rule by tradeoffs and sanctions, and by weighting different policies according to its current needs.[391] Unlike Tianjian Shi's assumption that because the Chinese seldom see their relationship with their government as reciprocal, few people want to replace the government even if it does not deliver what they want,[392] the mass line model would rather assume that few people want regime change as long as the regime fulfills some of their needs and explains to them how even unpopular policies relate to their own interests or national necessities.

Efficacy and empowerment

I proceed to some hypotheses about possible popular attitudes among people living in a democratic centralist polity. Since popular attitudes are testable, survey data can provide some evidence of the practice of democratic centralism in China. Logically speaking, it is reasonable to hypothesize that when all important decisions are made by others, albeit based on popular information, commoners would feel that they have little political efficacy, but simultaneously they would be relatively satisfied with the prevailing political line. Due to grassroots participatory processes, the effect of popular input concerning local issues should be more evident to the Chinese participants. Therefore, their feeling of lack of political influence should be especially pronounced on the national level, but should not correlate with dissatisfaction.

The available survey data suggests that the Chinese government enjoys a moderately high level of popular support.[393] Yet, people do not expect much

390 Friedman et al. 1991, p. 250.

391 Tsou 2000, pp. 222–223.

392 Shi 2000 B, p. 548.

393 Shen 2005; Zhong et al. 1997.

receptivity to their opinions. Instead, people generally think that leaders on local and higher levels care little about people like them. Moreover, although the Chinese may believe that their political system is responsive, they have not developed a feeling that they can have influence on it. In other words, external efficacy exceeds internal efficacy in China.[394] Andrew Nathan and Tianjian Shi found that the Chinese do not generally think that they could personally manage political affairs, but simultaneously especially the underprivileged strata expect to receive fair treatment in administrative processes.[395] Of course, these findings cannot prove the effectiveness of the democratic centralist popular influencing. There could be other reasons for the combination of political satisfaction and lack of efficacy in national politics. For example, the combination of satisfaction with improving living standards and powerlessness under the authoritarian system could produce similar results.

At the same time, the mass line politics seems to have lead to real empowerment on the local level. According to Andrew Nathan and Tianjian Shi, only 17.9% of respondents in their survey felt very confident that they understand national issues, while 47.3% said that they understand their work unit affairs very well.[396] Macropolitical indifference can very well coexist with active political participation for expressing specific grievances.[397] Participatory levels of the Chinese rural people in Kent Jennings' studies compare well with results in other countries, even when measuring such more demanding forms of participation as group-based efforts to solve problems and voicing concerns to leaders. He remarks that this result is noteworthy because individual resources for association, such as education, are far lower among rural Chinese than among Westerners or urban Chinese.[398] Thus the Western assumption that "the lack of individual rights [in China] creates a society of passive subjects rather than engaged citizens"[399] is simply not true. Suzanne Odgen concludes that studies of Chinese political participation lead "to the tentative hypothesis that the Chinese people are to a degree already acting as if they are members of an at least partially democratized political system."[400] Likewise, Tianjian Shi discovers that efficacy in China is at the low end of the level found in democratic countries.[401] Evidently, the Chinese

394 Shi 2000 B, pp. 546–547.
395 Nathan and Shi 1997, pp. 161–167.
396 Nathan and Shi 1997, pp. 162–163.
397 Scalapino 1998, p. 37.
398 Jennings 1997, pp. 362, 364–365.
399 Gilley 2004, p. 46.
400 Ogden 2002, p. 112.
401 Shi 2000 B, p. 548.

communists' attempt to raise commoners' political abilities has been neither fake nor futile.

Yet, surveys conducted in China cast doubt on the assumption that participation in the grassroots increases ability to act on all political levels.[402] In China, belief in one's competence to influence local affairs does not necessarily correlate with one's competence in national-level politics.[403] These results show that feelings of efficacy do not spill over from the local units to the whole system, even if the democratic centralist pyramidal system perhaps continues processing the same popular inputs on levels above the grassroots. Surveys show that although the Chinese tend to be interested in politics and believe that popular participation holds an important place in politics, they rather leave administering of the country to the leadership.[404] Tianjian Shi concludes that in China, along with internal and external efficacy, there is a difference between central and local efficacy. In China, people can exert influence over individual local leaders, but the institutional setting essentially prevents direct influencing in central policies. This institutional arrangement separates local efficacy from central efficacy, but still allows meaningful participation on the local level.[405] Understandably, people also think that they understand work unit affairs much more than national affairs.[406] Moreover, confidence in one's ability to understand work unit affairs makes one more likely to appeal, while central efficacy does not increase likeliness to act politically.[407]

Skepticism over one's own abilities to become a leader, of course, has much to do with the Chinese political system. It is realism on the part of those surveyed to assume that their chances to participate in national-level decision making are insignificant. In addition, this result could mean continuation of authoritarian political culture,[408] but it could be a byproduct of the pyramidal democratic centralist polity as well. In this kind of polity, popular input is dealt with mostly in nontransparent ways above the grassroots level and elites have the final say in decision making. These survey results demonstrate that the Chinese premise, that a country is ruled by the people if the people manage directly the grassroots and if the levels above repeat consultative and face-to-face decision-making style, fails to avoid democracy deficit on the levels above the grassroots.

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402 As is expected, e.g., in Cook and Morgan 1971, p. 9.

403 Shi 1997, p. 223.

404 Zhu et al. 1990, pp. 995–996; Chen and Zhong 1999, pp. 287–288, 293–294. For example, Chen and Zhong find that 71,4% of their respondents agreed that the wellbeing of the country is mainly dependent upon state leaders (pp. 293–294).

405 Shi 1997, p. 238–239, 266. This is unlike Western theory, assuming direct continuity from local efficacy to central efficacy, would assume (e.g. Pateman 1970, p. 97).

406 Shi 2000 B, p. 547.

407 Shi 1997, pp. 216, 223.

408 As interpreted by Chen and Zhong 1999, p. 294.

If grassroots participation does not automatically empower people on the national level, it evidently has increased ordinary people's knowledge about national politics. There is evidence that the Chinese communist rule has educated a more politically interested, active and competent citizenry.[409] Internationally compared, Beijingese were as much or more interested in politics than citizens of Western democracies, and they discussed politics very often.[410] This result is understandable also because in China many problems, which elsewhere require private or economic solution, are solved through political means.

In addition, it seems that the Chinese communists have been successful in their socialist aim of giving political voice to the previously underprivileged, such as less educated and more marginal groups like peasants and workers. In China, even those having little education are interested in politics.[411] Some surveys demonstrate that in China education or socioeconomic status has little direct effect on the probability of contacting and appealing;[412] others show that in China education and wealth are only weakly correlated with political efficacy.[413] Andrew Nathan and Tianjian Shi even found the unusual pattern that uneducated or lowly educated Chinese have higher expectations than the educated that the government would treat them fairly.[414]

The mass line setting has sought to reduce the costs of political participation by providing easy accesses to the political system. They have had success, as the frequency of popular political participation shows. However, Kent Jennings found that the People's Republic has not been able to eradicate the effect of education as a facilitator of political participation. He assumes that voluntary associations

409 A survey of Beijing residents shows that 70.7 and 81.1% of respondents are interested or very interested in national and local affairs, respectively (Zhong et al. 1997, p. 474); 43.4% like to discuss politics very often, while over 96% of respondents talked about politics at least occasionally (Chen and Zhong 1999, pp. 287–288). For other surveys showing that the Chinese are both interested in politics and discuss it often, see Chen et al. 1997, pp. 52–53; Zheng 1994, p. 256; Zhu et al. 1990, pp. 994–996.

410 Some surveys show that the Chinese are more interested in politics than people in Western democracies are (Chen and Zhong 1999, pp. 287–288). Other surveys give somewhat different results, but they still demonstrate relatively high interest in politics. Tianjian Shi found that the Chinese follow media and discuss politics more than in some democratic countries but less than in others. Yet, half of the respondents never discuss politics. (Shi 2000 B, pp. 542–546.)

411 Zhong et al. 1997, p. 475, shows that 77.4 % of urban residents and 47,9 % of rural residents in a Beijing survey were interested or very interested in national politics; and even 63% of those with primary school education or below said they were interested in national politics.

412 Shi 1997, p. 202, 226.

413 Shi 2000 B, pp. 552–553, 555.

414 Nathan and Shi 1997, pp. 164–166.

could reduce the skills required from particular individuals.[415] It thus seems that by individualizing autonomous political participation the democratic centralist system actually demands more political skills from the participant, who is less able to pool skills with others sharing similar interests or problems than he would be if organization was free.

China can provide evidence about how meaningful government-organized participation appears to citizens. Presumably, people are ready to participate actively only when they find participation meaningful. Participation would be meaningful, if it, for instance, was felt as interesting or because it is expected to have an effect. In the Chinese context, personal interest in politics has relatively little influence on participation.[416] This seems to suggest that the Chinese participate either when they perceive political activity to be useful for their aims or when they are mobilized. Psychologically, it is entirely possible that increased participation without increased chances to influence could cause alienation among those who feel frustrated or simply bored. Compulsory participation in a series of meetings discussing abstract ideological issues, especially when any slip of tongue may end up on one's political record, may lead to political alienation instead of willingness to participate.

Yet, survey results do not suggest frustration and political passivity. Rather, it seems that easily available channels to participate encourage voluntary participation whenever one has a good reason to advance one's interests through politics. Kent Jennings found that the rural Chinese not only participate actively, but are also able use different participatory modes in strategic ways. They select a particular participatory mode according to issue, opportunity structure, and their resources.[417] According to Tianjian Shi, even when voting is not counted, the majority of people in Beijing participated in more than one type of political activity. Only one-quarter remained totally passive, while the majority of people are politically active and many engage even in demanding forms of participation. Over half of them also participated in political activities outside their workplace, and one third engaged in some political activities not having official sanction, such as protests or clientelism. Still, users of unconventional activities usually engaged in officially sanctioned modes of participation as well. This indicates that unconventional strategies are not regime-challenging behavior but are adopted as an extension to conventional ones.[418] The frequency of autonomous political

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415 Jennings 1997, p. 371. See also Tianjian Shi's conclusion that although appealing in China does not correlate with education or interest in politics, as it would in the West, confrontational appeals fit the Western pattern. When issues become broader than particularistic welfare issues, education becomes an asset. (Shi 1997, pp. 221–223, 231.)

416 Kuan and Lau 2002, p. 311.

417 Jennings 1997, pp. 362, 370.

418 Shi 1997, pp. 104–110.

activities seems to indicate that the Chinese participate because they believe participation to be meaningful and probably influential.

Political frustration seems to appear in surveys in one way, though. Surveys show that the well educated and professionals feel disenfranchised and perceive the system unfair,[419] which is just the opposite situation from the West.[420] One possible explanation is that because socialism aims at empowering the unprivileged majority, the state not only took affirmative action to empower poorer classes, but at times even discriminated against the educated. As a result, intellectuals could be more disillusioned and fearful of political participation than an average citizen. Nevertheless, this is not the whole picture, since the educated have more, rather than less, democratic centralist channels at their disposal.[421] For example, intellectuals are overrepresented in the People's Congresses and in media discussions and have many corporatist organizations to speak on their behalf. Another possible explanation is that although intellectuals are not necessarily disenfranchised in absolute terms, in relative terms the situation may be different. If intellectuals feel competent to have more say than an average person,[422] they can be frustrated because they do not have more than an average voice in the system. Intellectuals can also have different goals for participation than an average person: Instead of local welfare issues, they perhaps want to influence national politics. As noted above, democratic centralism seems to leave a gap between the grassroots level and the national level when it comes to the feeling of efficacy. In addition, intellectuals are more exposed to Western norms, which may cause them to prefer systemic change over existing channels.

419 Tang and Parish 2000, pp. 203–204. Nathan and Shi 1997, pp.164–166.

420 Milbrath 1965, ch. 3.

421 However, their bureaucratic and corporatist channels can be relatively weak. Some groups of intellectuals, such as teachers, have very few and weak defenders in the system and are neglected in official prioritizations. See Paine 1992.

422 For Chinese intellectuals' belief that the educated should govern, see, e.g., Goldman 1994, p. 2. I myself have heard intellectuals lament that expertise is underused in Chinese politics.

DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM, POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS, AND DEMOCRATIZATION

This chapter will first inquire into the Chinese democratic institutions, including elections, village self-rule, legislatures and some inter-bureaucratic practices. Instead of giving an overall presentation of these institutions and institutional practices, however, this chapter will examine them only in terms of democratic centralism. This chapter reviews research that has usually been done for other purposes than to evaluate the role of democratic centralist theory in shaping institutions and institutional practices. Therefore, existence of a certain feature does not automatically mean that democratic centralism explains this finding. Still, showing that some typical features of democratic centralism or unitary democracy are present points to the possibility of a new interpretation, although further research is needed to verify the connection between this finding and democratic centralism.

Apart from introducing new viewpoints worth testing, this chapter intends to contribute to the research about democratization in China. If the Chinese institutions are based on at least a potentially democracy-supporting political culture differing from the Western one, this political culture and these institutions will most probably have an impact on how the Chinese system will (continue to) democratize in the future. Inquiry into the present day institutions could reveal that welcoming soil for democratization could be found where it was not perceived before. It could also shed light on indigenous Chinese expectations about institutions, their role in politics, and the needs they serve. If these expectations diverge from the Western ones, institutional arrangements may legitimately differ too.

This chapter thus aims at helping scholars to focus their research of democratization. Up to now, the Western research of Chinese democratization has largely examined institutions and practices familiar to Western political culture, and far too often it has only noticed the lack or poor development of corresponding ones in China. Since the Chinese process of democratization will most probably take place more or less in the context of existing political culture and possibly even available institutions, awareness of indigenous theories could help researchers to take note of processes and needs the Chinese government itself emphasizes in the path of democratization.

For a Western scholar, the theory of democratic centralism provides insight into the needs, motivations and ideals the Chinese have had when constructing their political system. This knowledge enables researchers to know better what kind of processes and practical problems are worth inquiring into in Chinese politics. In addition, it comes possible to evaluate better how successful the Chinese have been in their attempts at democratization. Indigenous theories are useful also for those who want to criticize China. Saying that "you don't act like I want you to" is a weak, and not very persuasive, type of criticism. Instead, knowing what the Chinese government itself is aiming at may give a critic a basis for saying that "you have failed in what you aimed at" or "your system produces side effects you yourself would like to avoid".

Choosing the able

Jane Mansbridge uses the term unitary democracy to refer to the tradition of decision making among a group solving problems together face-to-face. This setting has a strong tendency to consensual outcomes. Unitary decision making aims at finding common interest among participants.[1] Chinese villages and grassroots units, with their tradition of participatory politics, reveal some interesting similarities with elections in a New England town meeting Jane Mansbridge has researched.

New England townspeople understand elections as a means to find able people for advancing the public good. Unitary democracies tend to emphasize shared community or group interests, unlike adversary democracies which stress competing and conflicting interests and thus demand that power be shared equally in order to protect each particular interest.[2] Likewise, the Chinese tend to stress the ability to advance the common interest as the best criterion in candidate setting. Both the government[3] and ordinary electors[4] stress that competitive elections are a good method for finding able and devoted leadership for the community or workplace. Apart from elections, public perceptions of ability might play a part in meetings as well. Victor Falkenheim found that older workers and peasants are entitled to speak in technical matters, and tempered political activists are vocal in political meetings.[5] Perhaps this disposition reflects a common understanding of the expertise needed in different issues.

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1 Mansbridge 1983, p. 5.

2 Mansbridge 1983, in practice p. 88, in theory pp. ix–x, 4–5, 17–18, 30–31, 75–78.

3 Kelliher 1997, pp. 67–70.

4 Shi 1997, pp. 39–40.

5 Falkenheim 1978, pp. 25, 29.

An ideal leader, according to Chinese villagers, is diligent, articulate, able to defend local interests, and a professionally capable promoter of collective economy.[6] People participating in unitary democracies in American towns and Chinese villages alike tend to evaluate a person's competence for pursuing public good in office in terms of one's individual diligence at work and success in individual economic pursuits.[7] Interestingly, the tendency of looking for talent seems to have intensified since the introduction of competitive elections. As Sylvia Chan observes, the term for popular nomination, "sea nomination" (*hai xuan*), alludes to spotting talented people from the vast "sea".[8] Citizen participation in nominations has reportedly put forward more educated candidates than before.[9] This is not surprising, since earlier evidence suggests that commoners' criteria of competence could differ from the perception of the Party. Indeed, voters compared candidates on such grounds as cultural level, literacy, and size of family, not on ideological and political grounds.[10] Unfortunately, emphasis on production and managerial experience has disadvantaged women candidates in competitive elections.[11]

Because elections emphasize talent and experience, they do not threaten the Communist Party position. As An Chen observes, campaigns centering on technical expertise and economic innovation even obscure the democratic significance of elections, because electors prioritize economic progress over democratic choice.[12] An incumbent leader bringing welfare to the community easily stays in power because voters are more interested in the economy than democracy.[13] Moreover, as Suzanne Ogden notes, villagers' preference for leaders who are able to advance the local economy and resist some pressures from above often makes them elect local Party leaders, sometimes exactly because their Party connections are helpful for local economic pursuits.[14]

Because the primary aim in Chinese village elections is good management of local affairs and economy, village elections do not necessarily promote contestation of office and rotation of power. Scholars have observed that competitive elections are rarer in rich villages than in villages with average income. The richest villages with resources to please both the state and peasants often reelect cadres

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6 Chan et al. 1984, pp. 29–30, 36; Burns 1988, pp. 104–105.

7 For American city council democracy, see Mansbridge 1983, pp. 81–82. For China, see Burns 1978, pp. 285, 287; Kennedy 2002, p. 474.

8 Chan 1998.

9 Chen An 1999, p. 72.

10 Townsend 1967, pp. 136–137.

11 Rosen 1995, p. 327.

12 Chen An 1999, p. 38.

13 Shih 1999, p. 309.

14 Ogden 2002, p. 206.

without competition.[15] Villagers are highly motivated and satisfied because of improved living standards, although power remains centralized, even arbitrary, and discipline is tight.[16] Moreover, even when there is electoral competition, elections and village autonomy tell little about whether power is used democratically, since effective and entrepreneurial cadres can be popular because of their ability to develop the local economy and run local services.[17] Hence, as Allen Choate emphasizes, an instrumentalist interpretation of democracy is shared by the Chinese leadership and villagers alike. While villagers perceive democracy as the means for securing economic prosperity and social safety, the national leadership hopes that local self-rule ensures rural stability.[18]

Open pursuit of power is often viewed with suspicion in Western unitary democracies.[19] Likewise, many Western observers remark that in Chinese elections promoting oneself is culturally inappropriate, making campaigning controversial.[20] Suzanne Ogden explains reluctance to campaign through caution about the incumbent's ability to retaliate.[21] Sylvia Chan, however, remarks that the fact that losers usually have a chance to serve in village decision-making organs anyway explains the lack of serious competition in elections.[22] Others note that campaigning is not even necessary in Chinese village elections, since villagers know all candidates living and working with them in the same village.[23] Perhaps campaigning is even irrelevant for villagers' main criterion for selection, since in the American town depicted by Jane Mansbridge, the choices for leading positions are not made on basis of platforms, but personal reputation and competence.[24]

If there is campaigning in China, it often concentrates on concrete issues concerning collective material wellbeing and ways to advance it, and candidates may promise to contribute even if they are not elected.[25] Candidates thus seems to assume that villagers will vote for a good leader to advance their common affairs. Further, it appears that candidates use mediated democratic centralist channels to

15 E.g. Shi 2000 A, pp. 245–246.

16 Chen Weixing 1999, pp. 69–70.

17 Chan 1998.

18 Choate 1997, p. 15, 18.

19 Mansbridge 1983, p. 228.

20 Chan 1998; Jacobs 1991, p. 191; McCormick 1990, p. 143; Pastor and Tan 2000, p. 496; Townsend 1967, p. 63. Likewise, Suzanne Ogden observes that villagers feel discomforted if someone publicly requests a candidate to take a stand (Ogden 2002, p. 198).

21 Ogden 2002, p. 205.

22 Chan 1998.

23 Manion 1996, p. 738.

24 Mansbridge 1983, p. 102.

25 Chan 1998; Chen An 1999, p. 38; Choate 1997, pp. 10–11; Pastor and Tan 2000, p. 496.

communicate with their constituency more than direct appeals to the voters. At least Sun Long and Tong Zhihui find that candidates communicated more often with members of the village elite, such as villager representatives, than with villagers.[26]

Yet, campaigning or candidates' public statements introducing what they would do in office are becoming more common and are welcomed by voters.[27] Nowadays voters might even publicly remind an incumbent of unfulfilled campaign promises.[28] Evidently, a new kind of political culture which is not averse to public conflict might be developing. Still, this does not automatically mean legitimization of interest conflicts. Jane Mansbridge found that New England townspeople "portrayed the town's political conflicts as differences of opinion over who could best represent the interests of all."[29] In other words, they dealt with conflicts in a deliberative sense rather than as interest representation. Indeed, they even viewed factions or groups publicly advancing special interests as illegitimate.[30] Likewise, in China, electoral candidates customarily try to demonstrate to voters that they do not represent any particular issues. They claim they are not interested in being elected to give voters the impression that they are not pursuing their personal gain. They often avoid taking sides on concrete issues to avoid the risk of being accused of selfishness.[31] Still, the most prevalent objection expressed by opponents of more competitive electoral system has been the voters alleged tendency of electing candidates for individual, not shared interests.[32]

Not only in natural communities, but also in people's congress elections a candidate's personal ability is more central than her policy standpoints.[33] Candidates are nominated for their professional qualifications and have sometimes even been nominated by their workplace or community without them knowing. They might even be elected against their will. In indirect elections they do not campaign themselves, but the workplace or district canvasses votes for their nominee. Having a deputy from its own ranks brings prestige to the work unit or area and provides a channel for influencing.[34] Some of these representatives remain

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26 Sun and Tong 2002.

27 Chen An 1999, p. 73; O'Brien 1994 A, p, 44; Ogden 2002, pp. 197–198.

28 Ogden 2002, p. 185.

29 Mansbridge 1983, p. 95.

30 Mansbridge 1983, pp. 77–78.

31 Shih 1999, pp. 262–263, 313.

32 See, e.g., Kelliher 1997, p. 79, and Li 1999, p. 112, citing opponents emphasizing voters' likeliness to prioritize clan interest.

33 Shih 1999, p. 196.

34 Chen An 1999, p. 73, 78–82; Shih 1999, pp. 183, 187, 193. Shih interprets avoidance of individualistic campaigning as a sign of collectivistic culture.

politically inactive,[35] but many originally unwilling candidates feel that as elected delegates their duty is to keep in touch with the masses, represent public opinion, and perform their job well.[36]

Jane Mansbridge has found that in unitary democracy even the underrepresented are relatively satisfied with their condition because they think that the better educated and more articulate people are better able to advance the common interest. When interest conflicts are not immediately apparent, their close relations with decision makers makes it easy for the powerless to believe that the decisions are made in the interest of all.[37] An analogous situation prevails in China where a comparatively large percentage of the populace would let someone more competent than they themselves be in charge of public affairs.[38] However, although the Chinese mostly would not pursue high political office, most of them answer positively to the question of whether the government should listen to the common people's opinions.[39] This combination of elite roles and popular input is actually the mass line pattern of popular influencing.

Conflict avoidance

Andrew Nathan and Tianjian Shi found the democratic value of tolerance wanting in China.[40] However, another, democratic, explanation is possible. Jane Mansbridge found that face-to-face democracies in the United States tend to avoid open conflict.[41] Conflict avoidance is evident in the Chinese participatory politics as well. Victor Shaw discovered that open confrontation usually damages the prestige of all parties, the challenger and the leader thus challenged alike.[42] John Burns observes that Chinese peasants avoid challenging neighbors and leaders in public because they value harmony and respect leaders. In addition, fear of retaliation played some role in aversion of public conflict. Therefore, villagers seldom openly challenged their leaders but, when their economic interest was in question, eagerly influenced through informal channels or even illegal means. In peasant's

35 Chen An 1999, pp. 73; O'Brien 1994 C, p. 365.

36 Shih 1999, pp. 238–240.

37 Mansbridge 1983, pp. 87, 95–96.

38 Nathan and Shi 1997, p. 162, Shi and also Kuan and Lau 2002, p. 304; Zhu et al. 1990, p. 996.

39 Even rural grassroots cadres seem to believe that they should solicit mass opinions, at least on issues masses have the capacity to deal with (Jennings 1997, p. 370).

40 Nathan and Shi 1997, pp. 167–168. This finding has been challenged because of the formulation of the question, which is likely to produce intolerant answers (Ogden 2002, p. 103).

41 Mansbridge 1983, pp. 160–162.

42 Shaw 1996, pp. 200–201.

eyes, leader-initiated politics was legitimate, and ordinary peasants engaged in independent political activities only after the leadership had proven unsatisfactory.[43]

In unitary democracy in the United States many refused an office to avoid personal conflicts with fellow community members.[44] Likewise in China, regardless of the economic benefits of having political power, many villagers refuse to stand for elections, because leaders have to execute policies arousing hostility among neighbors and fellow villagers.[45] Along with the thanklessness of the job, people disliked the heavy workload and political risks associated with leading positions.[46] Conflict avoidance also explains people's willingness to cite only candidates' good points and reluctance to criticize them in nomination meetings.[47]

An ideal electoral candidate from the point of view of higher-ups and electors alike is someone having good relations with colleagues or fellow-villagers.[48] Even superiors prefer a leader respected by villagers in order to ensure villagers' cooperation in collective endeavors.[49] For this reason, some state enterprises test manager candidates in worker opinion polls before appointment.[50] Although villagers value the ability to protect local interests against state demands,[51] in many workplaces the ability to maintain good relations with the Party is valued as well.[52] Not surprisingly, competitive communal elections seem to encourage maintenance of harmonious communal relations. In 1978–1981 the Chinese press complained that too often a mediocre candidate who does not offend anyone (*lao haoren*) is elected instead of someone competent and active.[53] Jean Oi and Scott Rozelle even observe that villages having competitive elections are less likely to start contentious affairs such as land readjustments.[54]

In a small community, the possibility of public failure discourages people from running for public posts in Western and Chinese community elections

43 Burns 1988, pp. 81–82, 184.

44 Mansbridge 1983, p. 63.

45 Burns 1978, p. 281; Ogden 2002, p. 204–205. For the complexity of intra-village relations, see Townsend 1967, p. 63, on people resisting not only their own but also their neighbors' nomination.

46 Chan et al. 1984, pp. 68–69.

47 Townsend 1967, p. 136.

48 Burns 1988, pp. 104–105; Chen An 1999, pp. 35, 79.

49 Burns 1978, pp. 283–284, 288.

50 Chen An 1999, pp. 38–39.

51 Burns 1988, pp. 104–105. Yet, villagers also want to avoid selecting leaders controversial to higher-ups (Burns 1978, p. 288).

52 Chen An 1999, p. 35.

53 See also Chen An 1999, p. 34; O'Brien 1994 A, p. 53.

54 Oi and Rozelle 2000, p. 532.

alike.[55] Candidates in Chinese village elections often say that they are not interested in being elected or that they re only obeying the Party's suggestion that they be included in the candidate list in order to give voters the impression that it is not their personal failure if they lose.[56] In the 1979–1980 elections, the press devoted much space to preparing losers to accept that their loss in elections does not mean failure or one's unsuitability for the office. Westerners observing Chinese village elections have witnessed that candidates sometimes withdraw at the last minute,[57] possibly because, anticipating electoral defeat, they fear loss of face or because they prefer village unanimity over leadership. However, Bruce Jacobs comments that loss of face is mitigated by the official emphasis that nomination itself is an honor. Besides, in indirect elections the candidate himself does not feel stress, since many candidates do not even know that their name was put on the candidate list.[58]

Jane Mansbridge also found that to prepare for a New England town meeting, town leaders "do some groundwork beforehand, finding candidates who are acceptable to all and will agree to take office."[59] Likewise in China, the candidate list was sometimes, but not always, prepared in meetings among leaders before presenting it to the public. Indeed, such preparations made Party-backed candidates more electable, not only because there was no organized backing for independent candidates but also because many independently nominated candidates refused to run.[60] Moreover, many potential candidates preferred uncontested elections in a New England town meeting.[61] Likewise, the Chinese prefer consensual selection of representatives. Electors try to agree upon candidates who are mature, articulate and respected by their mates in public deliberations preceding the choice.[62] Therefore, along with Party control, the will to preserve communal harmony could explain the pre-1979 preference for one candidate per seat.

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55 See Mansbridge 1983, p. 115–116, for an American example, and O'Brien 1994 A, pp. 59, for a Chinese one.

56 Shih 1999, pp. 262–263.

57 Pastor and Tan 2000, p. 507. See a similar kind of American example in Mansbridge 1983, p. 67.

58 Jacobs 1991, p. 190.

59 Mansbridge 1983, p. 67. I myself have observed a similar situation in several Finnish and Nordic associations, in which the board drafts the initial candidate list in a preparatory meeting, but ordinary members can nominate other candidates in the general assembly.

60 Burns 1978, pp. 276–279. Likewise, meetings with limited attendance are held to prepare the agenda for the villagers' representative assembly (Oi and Rozelle 2000, p. 521).

61 Mansbridge 1983, p. 67.

62 See, e.g., Unger and Chan 2004, p. 11.

Village cleavages

There is no party competition in Chinese elections, not least because the Communist Party controls formation of oppositional power groups. This situation has made some scholars seek electoral competition based on group identities or local cleavages. The anticipation of the emergence of oppositional organizations able to challenge formal Party-dominated power has led some scholars to look for informal organization in local politics. They find that peasants increasingly identify with such informal organizations as clans and religious organizations and that these organizations can sometimes even obstruct implementation of state policies unless cadres enlist their cooperation.[63] Still, instead of oppositional politics, clans rather seek relations with formal structures of decision making.[64]

However, suppression is not the only explanation for the virtual non-existence of political opposition. An important explanation is the locus of elections on village and workplace level. Indeed, at the village level, where everyone knows everyone else, party platforms are not necessary for elections.[65] Since the scope of issues is communal, Chih-yu Shih argues that rather than absence of opposition, villagers' loss of collective identity can threaten the process of democratization in Chinese villages.[66] Robert Pastor and Qingshan Tan opine that the Chinese decision to start elections at the village level is a correct one, since people know candidates personally and realize their own interests are involved since village level public decisions directly affect their lives. However, villages are one of the most difficult places to introduce genuine political competition, because powerful small groups often control local politics everywhere. In China as well, clans, new entrepreneurs, or the Party are often accused of manipulating local elections.[67]

Furthermore, in a communal setting people typically emphasize the common good instead of individual interests.[68] In unitary democratic settings people typically avoid discussing party politics since party identification could cause an unnecessary split within the community or group.[69] In other words, in group based activities the main interest is the shared aim of the group and other interests

63 Ding 2001, p. 89–90; Yee and Wang 1999, pp. 30–32.

64 Yee and Wang 1999, pp. 31–32.

65 Pastor and Tan 2000, p. 506.

66 Shih 1999, pp. 272–273.

67 Pastor and Tan 2000, p. 508–509.

68 Mansbridge 1983, pp. 26–28.

69 American and Japanese evidence suggests that successful participatory politics often tries to keep out partisan politics to guarantee equal representation for everyone regardless of their party affiliations (Berry et al. 1993, pp. 50–51, 60; Le Blanc 1999, pp. 70–71).

receive less emphasis and perhaps even become less legitimate. No doubt, emphasis on the common good is also a self-protective choice, since within a village or a workplace the possibility of a permanent majority that has no need to compromise with other groups in majoritarian decision-making situations is greater than in a bigger and less homogenous populus. Even on the national level, Western theories of democracy agree that democracy seldom works well in a polarized setting where ethnic or religious conflicts make politics a zero-sum game. In representative democracies it is enough if representatives of different groups can work together, but participatory democracies require cooperation among all members. To work smoothly, participatory democracy must rely on its members' willingness to consider other people's opinions and interests.

Likewise, the Chinese examples show that division between leaders on the local level does not produce healthy democratic opposition, but instead non-cooperation paralyzes leadership.[70] Often factional or clan power is harmful to the collective interest and usually implies village mismanagement.[71] Quite likely, village division often coexists with favoritism and the use of public resources to reward one's own clan. Not surprisingly, researchers have found that where clans are strong, villagers believe that the last land reallocation was unfair.[72] Besides, local unity was essential for being able to protect local needs against state demands. In China, politically strong localities have a stable village-wide ruling coalition, while communities divided by cleavages or splintered in state campaigns remained powerless, even unmanageable.[73]

One should also ask what kind of cleavages would be relevant in a Chinese village setting. China watchers agree that clan or lineage has been an important cleavage in elections.[74] Considering the strength of clans in many villages, majoritarian elections in many cases could, and in some cases have, led to a systematic minority exclusion.[75] There are examples of village administration being paralyzed when a relatively well working non-democratic leadership balancing all clans in village politics is replaced in elections by one-clan dominance and deferred implementation.[76] A consensual setting provides some protection against minority exclusion, since political meetings provide an arena for publicly protest-

70 Burns 1978, pp. 285–286; Chan et al. 1984, pp. 200–206; Kelliher 1997, p. 79.

71 Burns 1978, pp. 290–292; Lawrence 1994, p. 62. On theoretical level, Wei Pan even argues that in local elections the majority principle is unfair because it leads to political dominance of larger lineage, instead of leadership by neutral officials (Pan 2003, p. 25).

72 Kennedy et al. 2004, pp. 14–15.

73 Friedman et al. 1991, p. 248; Lawrence 1994, p. 62.

74 Falkenheim 1978, p. 25; Kelliher 1997, p. 79; Shih 1999, pp. 263–264.

75 O'Brien 1994 A, pp. 43, 56, 59.

76 Kennedy 2002, pp. 479–481.

ing the worst inequalities. In contrast, majoritarian elections can even legitimize discrimination against minority clans.

Furthermore, clans are not likely to be organizations striving for democratization. One reason is that clans are authoritarian and patriarchal organizations, not likely to promote freedom of its individual members. Secondly, political organization strictly based on religious or ethnic identifications might not provide a fertile ground for democratic politics requiring toleration and compromise. Religious or ethnic politics based on an exclusive group identity such as a clan membership is not very conducive of the search for mutual ground and compromise. Clan power is a mark of traditional, perhaps even corrupt, rather than modern outlook.[77] Thirdly, group cleavages based on clan membership are seldom democratic. If the common interest within the group is based on birthright, it is difficult to see much democratic agenda, or even any constructive agenda whatsoever,[78] based on such an exclusive identity. As Bruce Gilley concludes, factionalism not a kernel of democratic competitiveness but a weakness brought by lack of democracy. It breeds family-like loyalties, not healthy political competition.[79]

Naturally, the Chinese people use local cleavages to pursue their interests. For example, some use factional rivalries to pursue their own interests by joining one faction and asking it to intervene on their behalf.[80] Group identities also facilitate independent organizing. Sometimes this organization is democratic, as in movements to protect workers' rights. Still, although clan and native place identities can help organizing workers' protests, they can also inhibit protests by splitting the workforce.[81] Sometimes clan provides an organizational basis for challenging the state objectives, such as paying taxes or family planning.[82] Although this kind of organization can perhaps check state intrusion and protect local interests, refusal to pay taxes hardly shows democratic motivations but is mostly the selfish action of free-riders, not responsible citizens.

Elections and deliberations

When evaluating evidence of Chinese elections and electorally selected bodies, it seems to me that elections coexist with a strong deliberative tradition. In many ways, it appears that the elections are meant to strengthen the deliberative process.

77 For examples, see Peng 2004, p. 1052.

78 Clans may have interest in local development, but these are based on local, not clan identity.

79 Gilley 2004, pp. 55–56.

80 Shi 1997, pp. 57–58.

81 Lee 2000 A, p. 50.

82 Ding 2001, p. 89–90.

In China, the deliberative process precedes elections. Chinese candidate nomination involves consultation of the electorate in the democratic centralist manner. In the collective era, selection of local unit leaders and representatives often resulted from discussion and consensus, rather than from voting. Elections formally approved leaders about whom there already was consensus. Thus, they often were unanimous.[83] According to Jane Mansbridge, a process proceeding from informal negotiation to formal unanimity is typical of face-to-face democracies in the West as well.[84]

China has by no means given up its consultative nomination process even now that elections are competitive. Before candidate nomination, voter groups gather to discuss suitable candidates, and afterwards, nomination meetings select the final list of candidates.[85] Active consultation of the population becomes evident with an extremely high number of people participating in the nomination of candidates. An Chen cites a study finding that as much as 88% of the electorate participated in the nomination of candidates for a local people's congress.[86] Not only voters, but also work units within electoral districts and political organizations negotiate about candidate nomination, especially in indirect elections. Chih-yu Shih gives a detailed account on the long process of negotiation and persuasion to find the most suitable candidate acceptable to all.[87]

Chih-yu Shih explains the need for a consultative nomination process through the cultural prejudice against campaigning for oneself. The consultative process is also natural in a collective culture in which candidacy is not a personal choice. Deliberation and consultation are needed to decide who is the best person to represent the collective interest, because in a collective culture the aim is not to find a person who represents a majority of individual voters, but one who represents the whole constituency.[88] Nominations by voter groups help in building voter support for candidates and small group discussions help in keeping the final number of proposed candidates on a manageable level.[89] In addition, I assume that the Party prefers consultation because it understands consultation as democratic. Customary practices probably play some role too: because everyone is accustomed to deliberative candidate nomination, the issue in developing democracy has

83 Chan et al. 1984, pp. 66–69; Townsend 1980, p. 417.

84 Mansbridge 1983, p. 67.

85 E.g. McCormick 1990, pp. 141–142; Nathan 1986, p. 200.

86 Chen An 1999, p. 72.

87 Shih 1999, pp. 179–182, 235–236.

88 Shih 1999, pp. 190, 195.

89 Jacobs 1991, pp. 183–185; Ogden 2002, p. 198. This is not an automatic result, though. Sometimes small group discussions produce far more names than can be nominated as candidates. See, e.g., Townsend 1967, p. 131.

not been giving up something but to finding new practices to complement old ones.

A deliberative process of nomination is also necessary because Chinese electoral law mandates that each candidate needs absolute majority backing to be elected.[90] This rule is based on the ideal of representation of the whole, rather than partial interests.[91] Indeed, for Chinese, socioeconomic and group interests appear only as higher level private interests, not public interests.[92] Candidates are not expected to represent partial interests, such as factional, regional, or class loyalties. The electoral system is designed to consult all interests during deliberations, but also to encourage consideration of the whole above partial interests. Chih-yu Shih estimates that several consultation rounds before candidate setting eliminates candidates who represent only narrow interests or hold radical views.[93] However, electors do not always forget their partial interests. Chih-yu Shih observes that splits along departmental, regional or familial interests in fact sometimes cause resistance to official nominations.[94]

An Chen maintains that the Party has favored "democratic discussion and consultation" as a method, because it leaves much discretionary power to the Party.[95] Yet, the Party needs to pay attention to villagers' electoral preferences in the process of consultation, because it needs villagers' cooperation in meeting its policy objectives.[96] Even when the Party does not back individual candidates, it specifies the desirable qualities of a leader at the nomination meeting and thus heavily influences electors' choices.[97] The Party probably does not see this as manipulation but as the mass line type of education likely not only to be beneficial for the overall interest but also to increase constituents' long term satisfaction with their leaders. Along with the Party influence, Bruce Jacobs notes that those who spoke first in nomination meetings had influence on later discussion and, thus, the final candidate choice.[98]

Western scholars have not always recognized consensual processes preceding elections or decision making. For example, one scholar found to his surprise that local cadre interference in candidate setting did not automatically make a selec-

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90 In other countries, this rule, for the same reason, is quite common in presidential elections.

91 Nathan 1986, p. 199.

92 Shih 1999, p. 325.

93 Shih 1999, p. 167.

94 Shih 1999, p. 186.

95 Chen An 1999, p. 100.

96 Manion 1996, p. 738.

97 Ogden 2002, p. 197; Townsend 1967, p. 123.

98 Jacobs 1991, p. 184.

tion unpopular.[99] However, other studies have concluded that a unanimous vote is used to "put a formal stamp of approval upon what had already become the consensus."[100] Consensual processes can be, and sometimes surely are, manipulated to authorize unpopular personnel choices. The Chinese themselves are aware of the manipulability of the consensual process. When voting by a show of hands was still the standard, villagers were dissatisfied that the process allowed officials to detect who votes for whom.[101] Still, misrepresentation cannot be taken for granted. In the era of competitive elections, even democratic villages sometimes select leaders simply by consensus on whom the villagers want to represent them.[102] Besides, candidate nominations in Western elections are often elitist and non-transparent, not giving much say to an ordinary voter. This is one reason for the necessity of genuine choice in elections. If the candidate choice itself is truly consensual, as it sometimes is not only in Chinese grassroots units but also in Western groups and associations, unanimous elections or even formal approval of uncontested candidates can be democratic.

Nowadays the Party uses secret ballot and choice between several candidates to measure the actual amount of popular support for the candidates emerging from consultation. As some scholars note, elections put pressure on the Party to select truly popular candidates and to take mass opinion into account.[103] As Chih-yu Shih puts it, the consultative process of candidate nomination reflects the mass line approach according to which the Party gathers, coordinates and reconciles opinions, but nowadays the Party uses electoral competition to guarantee that consultation does not distort genuine mass opinion.[104] In other words, elections provide an objective test for successful centralization and the mass line. Chih-yu Shih concludes that as long as the Party conducts consultations about candidate nominations seriously and with responsiveness to popular opinions, it can control most elections. After all, it is insignificant from the national perspective if Party-backed candidates lose in some districts.[105]

In a typical democratic centralist style, elections also measure the Party's ability to successfully persuade electors of its own aims, such as preferable candidate qualities or the social composition of the legislature. As Chih-yu Shih remarks, competitiveness forces the Party to do a serious job of persuasion and makes it act more democratically to achieve its goals. The Party even interprets

99 Kennedy 2002, pp. 467, 478.

100 Chen et al. 1984, p. 69.

101 Burns 1978, p. 279.

102 Lawrence 1994, p. 63.

103 Chen An 1999, p. 72; Jacobs 1991, p. 199; Shih 1999, pp. 183, 261.

104 Shih 1999, p. 162.

105 Shih 1999, pp. 194–195.

failure to have its favored candidate elected as a lesson of inadequate consultation or even a chance to receive feedback of evolving national trends.[106]

However, sometimes voting actually disqualifies the preceding deliberative process. If the Party has manipulated the nomination process openly, voters dissatisfied with the process may choose to vote against Party nominees.[107] To avoid such discontent, the Party often prefers giving only vague guidelines of the type of candidates it expects this particular electoral district to nominate.[108] According to Tianjian Shi, within a workplace setting characterized by lifelong social relations, now that the secret ballot is available people tend to avoid public confrontation in the nomination meeting even when they disagree with authorities about desirable candidates.[109]

The deliberative tradition is evident also when voters make their electoral choice. Many Western observers remark that Chinese villagers do not use secret voting booths, even if provided, or vote together as families, because of either illiteracy or social norms viewing voting secretly with suspicion.[110] When voting, people tend to exchange opinions about the quality of candidates or even show others their ballot.[111] Obviously, voters continue the nomination stage deliberation about desirable candidates even when voting. Of course, the fact that voting was for a long time carried out by non-secret vote, such as by raising hands,[112] may itself make publicity natural.[113]

In the deliberation-centered Chinese political system, elections are to guarantee the quality of deliberation in the post-election period as well. They are to check the representativeness and competence of representatives participating in communal or legislative deliberations. Indeed, between council sessions, representatives introduce to the group they are selected to represent matters dealt within councils for the group to discuss and form an opinion about. This public opinion is then introduced to the council and influences the way the matter is dealt with in the next session.[114] In addition, elected representatives have to be more

106 Shih 1999, pp. 184, 261, 266.

107 Jacobs 1991, p. 199.

108 Shih 1999, p. 167, 186.

109 Shi 1997, p. 42. Actually, the secret ballot in itself tends to reduce people's willingness to publicly argue against a proposal (Ferejohn 2000, p. 95).

110 Howell 1998, p. 96; Pastor and Tan 2000, p. 493, 497, 508.

111 Chan 1998; Ogden 2002, pp. 166, 200.

112 Elections conducted by show of hands were meant to eliminate illiteracy as a voting deterrent (Townsend 1967, p. 119).

113 Ogden 2002, p. 200, explains public voting by means of Chinese community-oriented values.

114 Unger and Chan 2004, p. 12.

attentive to public opinion and more accountable to their constituency to guarantee their reelection.[115]

A deliberative bias also seems to be evident in the unclear boundaries between the roles and powers of electorally selected and other organs. For example, Jean Oi and Scott Rozelle found that non-elected Party members have power within elected village organs. The Party even chairs village council meetings.[116] Naturally, in this way the Party can keep more power in its hands. Therefore, authoritarian tradition surely plays a part. At the same time, this arrangement shows the tendency to adopt the meeting type of unitary democracy, inviting deliberators representing different viewpoints and interests across organizations. This approach does not respect institutional boundaries with the result that electorally responsible organs compromise their institutional autonomy. Theoretically speaking, blurred institutional autonomy reduces the effect of institutional checks and balances. Sylvia Chan demonstrates that this is indeed the case with Chinese villages, where elected bodies are directly involved in decisions concerning village finances, which they are meant to supervise.[117]

Village self-government

Yijiang Ding observes that village self-government is a natural outcome of deliberate post-reform withdrawal by the state from grassroots social and economic life after the direct government control of the Mao era.[118] When the state delegated many tasks of administration and provision of services to village governments, it needed to delegate corresponding powers too.[119] However, in many places the initiative did not come from the center. Many villages reacted to the new power vacuum on the local level by establishing village self-governing institutions to emphasize collective responsibility. The first systems of local elections, village self-rule, and village compacts emerged spontaneously in some villages.[120] These local solutions emerged from local efforts to solve local disputes, provide for basic services after decollectivization or even to protect independent farmers' rights against cadre abuse.[121] It appears as if localities would tried to reestablish or continue structures of collective economy and the mass line decision making in

115 Xia 2000, p. 191.

116 Oi and Rozelle 2000, p. 521.

117 Chan 2003, pp. 196–198.

118 Ding 2001, p. 76.

119 Chan 1998.

120 Choate 1997, p. 5; Li and O'Brien 1996, p. 45; Shih 1999, pp. 261–262, 314.

121 Anagnost 1992, p. 183; Choate 1997, p. 5; Ogden 2002, p. 184.

the new sociopolitical environment. As Chen Weixing emphasizes, village autonomy continued the participatory structure and functions of the commune system, but without collectivized production.[122] However, the mass line political culture is not the sole explanation for the appeal of village autonomy. Allen Choate reminds us that already imperial China favored local self-rule.[123]

One motivation for creating democratic institutions for local autonomy was the need to increase governability. Western research emphasizes that village self-government was meant to answer the erosion of state power and growing lawlessness and mismanagement in localities.[124] Authorities granted village representative assemblies very real powers to supervise their leaders, in exchange for better economic returns and better compliance with state-mandated tasks.[125] After distributing fields for households to cultivate, local cadres' powers were drained and villagers could resist implementation of policies. Cadres often met refusals to pay fines or were even subjected to beatings and sabotage; others feared to use their authority or allowed themselves to be bribed.[126] In this situation, electoral victory was thought to make governing easier for the winners, who thus have adequate authority.[127] Peasants are thought to fund public projects voluntarily if they are consulted in planning.[128]

It seems that village self-government has succeeded in improving governance. It has reduced resistance to tax collection, improved social order, brought integrity to village finances, and provided social services to villagers.[129] Having themselves chosen representatives to approve collective decisions and to supervise cadres so that they are not exempted from negative policy effects, villagers are more likely to comply with decisions.[130] Where village council elections are democratic, villagers tend to believe that the council's decisions are fair.[131] Apart from better execution of state imperatives, improved governance has promoted local economic growth. Local stability, voluntary funding of public projects, and limitations of local cadre power can all support economic progress.[132]

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122 Chen Weixing 1999, p. 66. Likewise, Sylvia Chan (1998) points out that village self-government was meant to replace production teams under the commune system and continue elections and village autonomy. See also local motivations in Lawrence 1994, p. 62.

123 Choate 1997, p. 4

124 Kelliher 1997, p. 66; Zweig 2000, p. 121.

125 Lawrence 1994, p. 67.

126 Yan Yunxiang 1995, pp. 230, 232, 233–236.

127 Howell 1998, p. 103.

128 Ding 2001, p. 85.

129 Pei 1995, p. 76.

130 Lawrence 1994, p. 67.

131 Kennedy et al. 2004, pp. 11, 15.

132 Zweig 1997 A, p. 26.

Voluntarism is one important motive for village self-government. Village elections are to foster voluntary implementation of state demands, because elected leadership is supposed to distribute resulting burdens more fairly, because measures are now openly discussed and agreed on, and because elected leadership has legitimacy and authority.[133] The official logic understands that if grassroots leaders have authority derived from elections, they have legitimacy to persuade the people to accept even unpopular state policies. This legitimacy, then, guarantees that policies are truly implemented.[134]

The research literature suggests that village self-governance establishes formal and controllable avenues for expression of dissatisfaction. In this way it can reduce attempts to resolve discontent through protest movements or complaints to the higher-ups. By delegating conflict resolution to the grassroots level, the state can thus reduce administrative costs. The Party can diffuse responsibility by letting elected village councils implement unpopular policies. When village representative assemblies supervise cadres and offer a channel for expressing grievances and for discussing and modifying policies, villagers do not target their resentment on the Party. Hence, village democracy can reduce tensions between the people and the state and help in persuading peasants to support the Party policies. Simultaneously, establishing legitimate local power and replacing unpopular leaders with capable ones is likely to increase the legitimacy enjoyed by the Party and the state.[135]

Some Western scholars have argued that belief in the intrinsic value of democracy was not the state motivation for establishing village elections and village self-government,[136] or at least that village self-government was not publicly promoted as democracy because the top-level leadership would reject any argument that democracy is intrinsically good.[137] However, Yijiang Ding points out that apart from instrumental reasons, ideological and institutional ones played a part in establishing village self-government in accord with the communist ideal of popular sovereignty and the mass line.[138]

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133 Kelliher 1997, pp. 73–74.

134 O'Brien 1994 A, pp. 36, 40, 44–46. Manion 1996, p. 737. Kennedy 2002, p. 458. Kelliher 1997, pp. 70–75.

135 Chen Weixing 1999, p. 76; Howell 1998, pp. 91, 103; Lawrence 1994, pp. 67–68; Shih 1999, pp. 284, 299–302; Zweig 2000, p. 122.

136 Ogden 2002, pp. 184–185.

137 Kelliher 1997, p. 85.

138 Ding 2001, p. 79.

Some peasants[139] and top leaders[140] have both understood village elections as a form of mass line democracy. The state understands village self-government and associations as "grassroots democracy."[141] New village institutions are described as a "bridge" to bring the intentions of the higher-ups down to the masses and transmit the needs and voice of the masses upward.[142] However, democratic centralist vocabulary has been used to cast doubts upon free village elections as well. For example, some analyses describe possible contradictions between the Party and elected leaders as contradictions "between two principles of Party discipline... majority rule and hierarchical rule."[143]

The design of village autonomy reveals very democratic centralist roots. It follows the participatory and deliberative model of democracy, but sets strict democratic centralist limits for local initiative. It seeks to combine popular voluntarism and governmental demands according to the mass line model. In addition to reducing obstacles for mutual cooperation within the community, deliberation seeks to persuade people to implement state policies and to minimize opposition to their implementation. Obviously, village autonomy is supposed to increase the state capacity to rule through a very democratic centralist process. As Weixing Chen remarks, village self-government empowers villagers to manage their own affairs, but it does not empower the village in relation to higher authorities. Therefore, village self-government does not introduce a new constitutional division of power between the village and the state.[144] Indeed, village self-governance is limited to how to, and not whether to, implement state policies.[145] It is meant to ensure compliance in fulfilling state demands.[146] According to Daniel Kelliher, official argumentation even detaches self-determination from self-government. It is not about real popular sovereignty, although it gives villagers authority to decide vital local issues, such as services, collective enterprise and social order.[147] Ann Anagnost sees the village self-government as a hegemonic practice since "it represents the Party's efforts to rebuild, from the ground up, its exclusive claim to political leadership as representing the popular will."[148] In

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139 O'Brien 1996, p. 54.

140 See Shi 1999, p. 392, about the reasons for Peng Zhen to push through the village election law.

141 Ding 2001, p. 76.

142 Anagnost 1992, p. 190

143 Kelliher 1997, p. 82.

144 Chen Weixing 1999, p. 74.

145 Ding 2001, p. 91; Kelliher 1997, p. 73.

146 Howell 1998, p. 86, 91.

147 Kelliher 1997, p. 75.

148 Anagnost 1992, p. 179.

other words, even if democratic centralism pays attention to legitimacy, popular participation, and good governance and adopts mechanisms like local self-government to guarantee that these aims can be achieved, it never questions the rationality of the need for central power and the priority of central aims.

In line with democratic centralism, the Chinese top leadership hopes to make local leaders more responsive towards both the state and the people through such mechanisms as elections and village assemblies. Democratic centralist understanding of grassroots elections accentuates the elected leader's position as a link between the populace and the state. Elected village leaders must implement central state goals, but also respond to villagers' complaints from fear of being voted out of office. Indeed, elections can simultaneously check local state encroachment on peasants' interest and facilitate central policy implementation.[149] However, opponents of competitive elections argue that elections do not strengthen the democratic centralist chain to the locality, but weaken it. By reducing the relative authority of the state in villages, elections allegedly encourage localities to resist state policies.[150] There is actually some evidence that elections enhance the legitimacy of local government even against higher levels and encourages elected leaders to resist their excessive demands.[151] In other words, increasing a local cadre's responsibility towards ordinary villagers is desirable, but not to the point that he will prioritize local demands over state demands.

Generally, village autonomy seems to have provided for cooperation between the state and the peasantry. When elections increase village leaders' accountability, relations between villagers and their leaders are improved. This relieves tensions between the state and the village and creates connection and congruence between the state and peasantry.[152] However, democratic centralist theory would assume that apart from the possibility of electing someone whose understanding of local politics corresponds with that of the constituency, a leader having prestige and authority would be able to persuade commoners. Indeed, one task of the village council is villagers' political education.[153] Thus, according to democratic centralism, congruence is not automatically a product of a chance to elect leaders representing one's own views, but can partly result from superior persuasive capacity by leaders seen as legitimate because they have been electorally selected. Nevertheless, elections do not always seem to be effective in creating congruency. Chen Weixing notes that villagers still use extra-electoral means, such as appeals

149 Ding 2001, p. 81.

150 Kelliher 1997, pp. 79–80.

151 Ding 2001, p. 86; Kelliher 1997, pp. 79–80.

152 Chen Weixing 1999, pp. 66–67, 79; Kennedy et al. 2004, Manion 1996.

153 Oi and Rozelle 2000, p. 522.

to higher authority, to create congruency between villagers and their leaders if elections fail to produce it.[154]

The democratic centralist communication pattern is evident in the village council design as well. As Chih-yu Shih describes, a village council is composed of elected village team heads, who speak for their teams. It is their duty to communicate between village councils and team members. They are responsible for soliciting their team members concerns and opinions in public meetings. These meetings provide a chance for team members to express their opinions about issues on the agenda, but simultaneously team heads can prepare their teams for the decision to come. Because meetings are public, feedback is mostly public-regarding, since other villagers would criticize excessively selfish considerations, but promises made in public meetings also put pressure on leaders to fulfill their promises.[155]

Because in China democracy often means popular supervision, transparency is an important part of the mass line.[156] Therefore, democratic villages post local government agendas, local accounts, or names of those seeking Party membership on the village notice board in order to receive popular input.[157] In exchange for villagers' obedience, village autonomy makes local public spending transparent.[158] Important issues, such as proposals for major public expenditure, are now decided in public discussions or by village referendums.[159] Elections and village representative assemblies alike are a means to increase accountability. For instance, they can impeach corrupt officials or even force them to resign between elections.[160] Still, constraining village officials can be conducive to the implementation of national policies. Indeed, the central government tries to empower villagers to supervise local officials. It thus seeks to build a coalition between the center and the grassroots to make local officials more accountable to both.[161] Still, often legitimacy brought by popular elections has strengthened the position of village cadres in relation to local state organs or the Party, making it necessary for them to solicit the village cadres' support for policies or for the Party branch to place its own men in the village leadership.[162]

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154 Chen Weixing 1999, p. 71.

155 Shih 1999, pp. 278–279.

156 See the story in Friedman et al. 1991, p. 255. After a corrupt village accountant was replaced in the 1950s, the new one published accounts on a bulletin board and called it democracy.

157 See, e.g., Lawrence 1994, p. 64, Unger and Chan 2004, pp. 13–14.

158 Howell 1998, p. 103.

159 Pei 1995, p. 76.

160 Ding 2001, pp. 83–84.

161 Ding 2001, p. 81.

162 Ding 2001, pp. 85–86.

Interestingly, the process of village self-government, starting as direct democracy, has for practical reasons developed into representative democracy of a democratic centralist kind. Indeed, village assemblies inviting the whole adult population to participate turned out to be impractically large in practice. Therefore, villages on their own initiative often established more manageable villagers' representative assemblies.[163] Peasants found representative assemblies to be more effective ways of articulating their interests and participating in decision making.[164]

One new element in contemporary village democracy is village compacts in which villagers together agree about the norms for their behavior and the village council lists its commitments. Thus, village compacts provide standards for resolving intra-village disputes and making cadres accountable.[165] In consistency with the present official emphasis on the law and legal relations, village compacts evidently establish a legal means to forge adherence to the mass line. In addition, village compacts seem to represent a new comprehension of state-society relations in which social self-regulation is increasingly replacing administrative control. Chih-yu Shih observes that with village compacts the Party wants to free itself from daily negotiations over trivial matters. People used to depend on the Party to resolve intra-village conflicts, but now villagers themselves must form a local consensus over their solution. The Party is thus absolved from possible disappointments over the result and has more time to devote to larger developmental issues.[166] Ann Anagnost concludes that village compacts actually extend the Party-promoted norms throughout society, but through more participatory local politics, not through the Party's sovereign power.[167]

Shih Chih-yu discovers that instead of individual human dignity or property rights, village compacts emphasize fairness, harmony, and maintenance of order. Thus, penalties of violations can be collectivist in nature, such as public criticism, legal education, or depriving the violator of his business license or land rights.[168] Obviously, there is a strong undertone here stressing communal harmony and employing social pressure as a means of maintaining order and good communal relations, and even morals. Still, as Allen Choate remarks, clauses intrusive to private life are agreed upon in open and lengthy deliberative processes and they reflect local values.[169] The villagers feel that they must obey the compact exactly

163 Oi and Rozelle 2000, p. 515.

164 Ding 2001, p. 82.

165 Choate 1997, p. 12; O'Brien and Li 1995, p. 765.

166 Shih 1999, p. 313.

167 Anagnost 1992, p. 193.

168 Shih 1999, pp. 293–294.

169 Choate 1997, pp. 12–13.

because they have participated in its making.[170] Ann Anagnost describes village compacts as willed consent. "The institutions of horizontal surveillance and policing that the compacts entail imply that the 'people' have internalized their subjection and call it 'their own.'"[171] Regardless of their intrusiveness, the compacts obviously attempt to define the limits for political intrusion. Although village compacts are meant to limit the arbitrary power of local officials, Ann Anagnost asserts that they actually have become to some extent the very means to reconstitute the power they were intended to circumscribe.[172]

The People's Congresses as democratic centralist organs

In China, the people's congresses hold legislative power and are representative institutions elected by the people, albeit indirectly. They have adopted many democratic centralist tasks. For example, the aims of reviving the people's congress system in the late 1970's were very democratic centralist ones: rationalizing and popularizing authority as well as improving information gathering.[173] They were meant to open up a new, inclusive channel of political communication.[174]

The People's Congress system functioned as a democratic centralist information channel already in the Mao era. Kevin O'Brien emphasizes the role of the delegates during the output stage, including mobilizing popular consent for central policies and reaching different social groups. Simultaneously, delegates served as input channels for popular opinions when they reported local feelings to the government.[175] Even now the representative's motions sometimes initiate a lawmaking process, but more often they are bundled up with other similar demands. Gradually increasing evidence of problems contribute to the system-wide sense of urgency that shapes the policy agenda.[176] The National People's Congress also reminds the government of interests neglected in the governmental prioritization.[177]

The task of the people's congresses is to gather popular opinion and supervise that government acts upon people's concerns.[178] In order to be able to

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170 Shih 1999, pp. 293–294.

171 Anagnost 1992, p. 198.

172 Anagnost 1992, p. 178.

173 O'Brien 1990, pp. 126–127.

174 McCormick 1990, pp. 135–136.

175 O'Brien 1990, pp. 84, 86.

176 Tanner 1999, p. 76.

177 O'Brien 1990, p. 120. Tanner 1999, ch. 7 and 8, shows how the All-China Federation of Trade Unions has used the lawmaking process in the NPC to promote the rights of labor against the excesses of economic reform.

178 Shih 1999, pp. 216–217.

relay popular needs and demands to the system, the NPC set up its own office for handling popular complaints already in the 1950s.[179] Delegates conduct field investigations to familiarize themselves with social problems. Many units are even happy to receive investigations as a way to attract government attention to their problems.[180] Now people's congresses gather popular feedback through seminars, citizen meetings, opinion polls, and inspections.[181] Moreover, representatives are selected from people representing various social groups and strata. An ideal representative has her regular work and, apart from the short legislative sessions, remains in constant contact with colleagues and local people.[182] In the Mao era, this ideal was actualized in the recruitment of people like model workers and other local activists into the people's congresses. Apart from engaging in such a mass line type of information gathering and consultation, people's congresses have taken seriously the democratic centralist ideal of policy testing and feedback; they, for example, supervise policy implementation.[183] Nowadays people's deputies conduct their own research to prepare for policy making and investigate whether government plans are appropriate and popular before ratifying them.[184] The NPC even encourages local experimentation before lawmaking.[185] Thus it is unsurprising that Kevin O'Brien finds that people's congresses are better adapted to collecting information and rectifying administration than to representing diverse social interests.[186]

Kevin O'Brien has found that people's congress deputies blend seamlessly their expected roles as regime agents and remonstrators. They explain the government's policy to their constituents, but simultaneously ask the government to improve its performance. They are mediators promoting both the interests of the state and of society and willing to hear both sides. Instead of confronting the state power, they aim at harmonizing contradictions and coordinating conflicting demands. They point out violations of state policy that harm their constituents' interests. They exploit divergence between official normative rhetoric and implementation of policies, and between different levels of government. Since they scale their demands with state capabilities in mind, they are best at promoting

179 Tanner 1999, p. 95.

180 Shih 1999, p. 217.

181 Chen An 1999, pp. 207–208.

182 However, as John Bryan Starr remarks, although in lower level congresses this direct contact with the constituency is usually reality, delegates in higher level congresses usually have more indirect connection with their constituencies (Starr 1979, p. 220).

183 Chen An 1999, p. 202; O'Brien 1994 C, p. 368.

184 Chen An 1999, p. 202; O'Brien 1994 B, p. 89.

185 Tanner 1999; see especially the case studies in Part III.

186 O'Brien 1994 B, p. 101.

particularistic demands.[187] Since democratic centralism assumes that deputies facilitate communication between leaders and citizens, it is not surprising that O'Brien discovers that deputies find that their problem is insufficient time, not conflict between their two roles.[188]

The motivation for remonstrating for their constituencies does not fit well with interest representation. According to An Chen, deputies do not see themselves as defending abstract rights but bringing citizen concerns to the attention of government.[189] The mass line ideology encourages leaders to serve the people and Chinese deputies seem to have internalized this role. As Kevin O'Brien discovers, the reason for taking the role of remonstrator is not popular pressure, but either a sense of obligation or a craving for political status, respect in the community, or access to power.[190] Legislation is not central to deputies' agenda. Instead, they understand that their main duty is to do concrete good things for their constituency.[191] As remonstrators, they see themselves as helping constituents and using the power that the Constitution gives to the people's congresses.[192]

Serving the people is also what people expect of their deputies. As An Chen found, constituents look for deputies to solve concrete problems in their environment and in public services. Since elections are conducted on the local level, voters' concerns are local and voters find demands for political freedoms and a multi-party system irrelevant. Citizens expect their deputies to look after their material welfare rather than to adopt a broader political perspective.[193]

Kevin O'Brien concludes that delegates possess information rather than a mandate. They are legitimate complainers who open doors. They ask for better implementation of existing regulations, make suggestions, and appeal to fairness, instead of putting pressure on the government.[194] This observation leads to two democratic centralist conclusions. Firstly, delegates' role is to act as commoners' gatekeepers to the political system. Their task is to relay popular concerns to decision makers outside of legislature as well. This arrangement itself suggests that there is more power vested in institutions other than people's congresses. Another

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187 O'Brien 1994 C. Notice deputies' typical democratic centralist vocabulary when they explain the situation to their constituencies: According to Kevin O'Brien they emphasize priority of overall interest over partial interest or impracticability of demands (O'Brien 1994 C, pp. 366–367).

188 O'Brien 1994 C, pp. 369–370, 377–378.

189 Chen An 1999, p. 212.

190 O'Brien 1994 C, p. 376.

191 Chen An 1999, p. 212.

192 O'Brien 1994 C, p. 369.

193 Chen An 1999, pp. 214–215.

194 O'Brien 1994 C, p. 369.

observation is that since their role is to provide more information to the system their role is largely deliberative.

Against this background it becomes understandable that delegates, according to Kevin O'Brien, mediate relations within the ruling establishment and within society more than redistribute power between state and society. Remonstrance relies on a traditional respectful, selfless and morally powerful manner to gain access to state authority. In this manner institutional guarantees of representation are absent and delegates' linkage to constituents is limited. Remonstrating creates a climate of responsiveness without ceding power. When the government chooses to act, its concern for people's problems receives positive publicity. Thus, the state welcomes remonstrating, helping it to identify causes of popular discontent, correct injustices, diffuse opposition and prevent social explosions.[195]

The people's congress does not serve only for gatekeeping and information gathering, but also for democratic centralist harmonization of interests. Chih-yu Shih describes how the NPC as a gathering of deputies from all over the country simultaneously helps the Party to identify national trends and conveys a comprehensive picture about the national interest to different regions and sectors. It provides opportunities for pursuing local and sectoral interests as long as these manage to gain wide support, but serves to remind particular interests of their marginality if they fail to receive support from others. Simultaneously, common meetings remind richer areas of their responsibilities toward the whole and allow for poorer areas to learn from the more successful.[196] Likewise, the Chinese arrangement interconnecting the Party and people's congresses on certain levels and on different levels through nominating lower-level leaders as representatives to the higher-level people's congresses creates a mindset of reconciling local and national interests. It reminds participants of demands from above and from the constituency alike. Thus it encourages responsibility to reconcile between local, regional and national interests.[197]

The pyramidal hierarchy of democratic centralist institutions is evident in the organizational design of people's congresses. Not only there are people's congresses on different levels starting from local representatives mainly elected from workplaces and residential areas and continuing with congresses selected by the lower-level congresses, but these congresses are also linked with the same level administration and higher-level legislatures alike in the best tradition of combining vertical control through the administrative chain of command and dual rule encouraging integration on each particular administrative level. In addition, Chih-

195 O'Brien 1994 C, pp. 374–376.

196 Shih 1999, pp. 155–156, 228.

197 Shih 1999, pp. 156, 163–164.

yu Shih shows that delegates for higher-level congresses sometimes participate in local-level congress sessions to learn the situation in their locality. Likewise, lower-level administrators sometimes are selected as delegates to a higher-level congress.[198] This design suggests that higher-level congresses maintain the mass line type of relations with the level below. In other words, higher levels gather information about local moods from the level below, which itself is assumed to centralize the popular demands of its own constituency.

Although this design is meant to provide information about local and regional interests and demands, Chih-yu Shih discovers that the result may rather be confusion of hierarchical responsibilities. It becomes difficult for lower-level congresses to supervise administrators who have authority of both government and the people's congress on a superior level. Likewise, a delegate selected to the people's congress on a higher level as a lower-level administrator has a problem to supervise the government, since his administrative superiors sit in this government.[199] Moreover, double institutional affiliations, such as having provincial governmental representatives in the NPC, might create conflicts between partial and national interests.[200] Naturally, such conflicts may be conducive to using people's congresses for pursuing local interests, although the democratic centralist design does not encourage representation of local and sectoral interests.

Moreover, An Chen argues that in indirect elections popular will is increasingly weakened on each level, until it practically evaporates on the national level. Apart from indirectness of elections, the screening of candidates on each particular level tends to dilute the people's power. Thus, direct elections in the grassroots have a negligible impact in national politics. In this way, the Party manages to control the system and keep democracy at a distance from the central power.[201]

Consensual decision making in the people's congresses

During the Mao era, decision was ideally consensual. At the time, the people's congresses passed documents unanimously.[202] Western critics asserted that people's congresses had nominal power only when they always approved the government's decisions and transmitted the people's assent.[203] The consensus ideal prevailed in the election of representatives as well. One candidate per seat was the

198 Shih 1999, pp. 218–220, 230.

199 Shih 1999, pp. 232–233.

200 Ogden 2002, p. 253.

201 Chen An 1999, p. 64, 74, 85.

202 O'Brien 1990, p. 67.

203 Nathan 1986, p. 194.

standard practice. Consultation of people, Party committees, democratic parties, and mass organizations during the nomination process allegedly counted as adequate democratic input. Such a unanimous setting was highly controllable from outside by the Party. According to Kevin O'Brien, its final say over the candidate setting meant that the representatives often had stronger ties to the Party than to their constituency.[204] Yet, even during the Mao era representatives actually submitted some motions and suggestions during the NPC sessions.[205] Moreover, in the 1950s representatives still supervised administrative work and even subjected ministers to inquiries.[206]

Before 1979, policy disagreements were probably negotiated and interests consulted, but outside of public view, and probably the people's congresses had only a minimal role in these negotiations. Murray Scot Tanner demonstrates that Party tolerance to open disagreement has increased since the late 1970s. Now representatives' own legislative motions and voting against a proposal are commonplace.[207] By the mid-1980s, the NPC commonly demanded law proposals to be revised, often on substantive issues.[208]

Yet, the legislature still withholds proposals that are not likely to pass in voting. Instead of publicizing opposition, it rather continues consensus building.[209] Likewise, to avoid open conflict and causing the Party to lose face, the people's congresses may suggest that the Party withdraw in advance its candidate unlikely to receive a majority of votes, often successfully.[210] Usually people's congresses sought consensus with the Party committee before punishing officials or rectifying a legal verdict on the basis of its legislative oversight.[211] Obviously the ideal of consensus has not disappeared. Indeed, the Party Committee and the people's congress usually reach a compromise even without a vote, since each side respects the mutual constraints of their autonomy.[212] The consensual ideal can partly be explained by face-to-face contacts and the deliberative ideal, but cultural factors are at play too. According to An Chen, cultural emphasis on public unity and face-saving means that neither party will benefit if their failure at consensus building becomes public.[213] Because government officials care about saving face, people's

204 O'Brien 1990, p. 65.

205 For the number of motions, see Tanner 1999, p. 81.

206 O'Brien 1990, p. 77.

207 Tanner 1999, ch. 5.

208 O'Brien 1994 B, p. 98.

209 Tanner 1999, pp. 61, 222–223.

210 Xia 2000, p. 213. Even when the candidate list was still approved unanimously, consultations before elections have caused changes to the candidate list, see O'Brien 1990, p. 129.

211 Chen An 1999, p. 208; Xia 2000, p. 206.

212 Chen An 1999, pp. 197–198.

213 Chen An 1999, p. 208.

delegates can use public criticism and abstentions from voting to pressure the government and the Party to prepare matters well.[214] Naturally, face-saving concerns cause self-censorship too, when delegates want to avoid offending former colleagues in the government or embarrassing unpopular candidates in elections.[215]

Murray Scot Tanner ascribes the reasons for increasingly assertive legislatures to weakening party discipline and the top leadership's inability to keep factional and policy-based disagreements among them from spilling over into the legislature,[216] but it seems to me that the development has been intentional. The Party understanding of consensual politics has changed as well. Formerly consensus often meant unanimity, but since reforms consensus is increasingly seen to build up during deliberative processes. Now there is more tolerance of public diversity of opinions as long as consensus remains as the ideal result of deliberation. In other words, people's congresses have become deliberative, not merely integrative or aggregative, arenas.

Attitudinal change perhaps explains this development, but another possibility is that the people's congress system simply became a real arena of deliberation only after it was assigned a status as a separate democratic centralist channel. In other words, deliberation became meaningful only when congresses got real powers and independent status. Pluralization of arenas of democratic centralist centralization meant that the Party needed to engage in negotiations in various arenas, people's congresses included. It is not pluralization of interests vital to policy making following from the economic reforms,[217] but general understanding of the need of plural channels for popular input and consequently interest representation. As Minxin Pei concludes, the strengthened role of the NPC marks the trend towards institutional pluralism in China.[218] Moreover, pluralism may open channels for interest representation. Chen An predicts that political pluralism might emerge in China when regional and local leaders learn to use democratic processes to pursue larger autonomy from central control and when social interests become more complex and antagonistic due to the reforms.[219]

Murray Scot Tanner notes that institutionally the Chinese lawmaking process is not clearly defined.[220] This would be a natural, although not necessary, consequence of deliberative decision making between bureaucratic organs. Democratic centralism would emphasize consensus building, not institutional boundaries.

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214 Shih 1999, p. 217.

215 O'Brien 1994 B, pp. 98–99.

216 Tanner 1999, pp. 9, 233, 240.

217 As is suggested by Tanner 1999, pp. 8–9.

218 Pei 1995, p. 72.

219 Chen An 1999, p. 240.

220 Tanner 1999, p. 32, 46–47.

Moreover, Tanner discovers that the initiative for a policy proposal can emerge in any part of the system or even from outside.[221]

Researchers demonstrate that the NPC engages in prolonged consensus building. It takes part in inter-agency deliberations. It solicits opinions of different state agencies as well as lower-level people's congresses and concerned interests. Likewise, other state agencies consult people's congresses. In these negotiations the people's congresses hammer out an agenda and mobilize government agencies to implement proposals coming from the people's congress. Laws are drafted and redrafted and versions are discussed within the NPC as well as with governmental agencies.[222] Nowadays, more open processes allow interests that are neglected during the policy-formulation stage to try to find attention in the NPC. State leaders can seek support for their stand by publishing draft laws for popular discussion and for local experimentation.[223] Murray Scot Tanner even finds that the content of a law is mainly determined during inter-agency bargaining, while the Party or the NPC role is less central.[224] In other words, the NPC work style is consultative and deliberative. As Ming Xia puts it, the strategy adopted by the people's congresses is closer to deliberative democracy than pluralist democracy because it emphasizes the deliberation process more than the plurality and autonomy of political actors.[225]

An Chen maintains that decision making now necessitates cooperation and consensus building among the Party, government, and people's congresses since none of them has power to make policies autonomously. Failure to achieve compromise would paralyze the government.[226] In the decision-making process, people's congresses play a cooperative role. They do not cause trouble or delays, but suggest ideas, carry out arduous technical tasks during lawmaking, investigate and coordinate policy implementation, and sift out most incompetent and unpopular leaders.[227] According to Kevin O'Brien, the NPC members even understand lawmaking as an opportunity to realize Party policy. They supervise government and society in order to restrict violations and support national policy implementation.[228] An Chen remarks that political freedoms are not on the deputies agenda since institutional antagonism over ideology or macropolitics would undermine

221 Tanner 1999, p. 34, 211. He gives an example of academic debates giving the impetus for drafting one law.

222 O'Brien 1994 B, pp. 88–89; Tanner 1999, the case studies in Part III.

223 Tanner 1999, pp. 55, 143--148, 195–199, 226.

224 Tanner 1999, p. 25.

225 Xia 2000, p. 214.

226 Chen An 1999, p. 215.

227 O'Brien 1994 B, p. 90.

228 O'Brien 1994 B, p. 87.

chances for consensus building. Deputies tend to avoid open antagonism and challenging the Party because they believe that multi-party competition is unsuitable for China. The fact that deputies do not represent any ideology or interest apart from the officially approved ones gives deputies a legitimate role to advocate their agenda during the consensus building.[229]

Chih-yu Shih discovers that when opinions of the Party and the people's congress diverge, the Party interprets this as a failure of its political leadership. Disagreement indicates that the Party either needs to prepare its policy proposals better or that it has failed to convince the congress of the importance of this policy .[230] The Party can pressure people's congresses into "consensus" if necessary because the Party has the major role in the selection of deputies and it can enforce party discipline on its own members among delegates.[231] When the people's congress opposes the Party and government proposals, the Party consults deputies individually. This kind of persuasion gives much power to the Party, but requires also that the Party listen to deputies.[232]

Ming Xia affirms that people's congresses have started to compete with the Party for the people's mandate and predicts that in the future this institution-based contestation may become public.[233] Since the Party should provide political leadership to the people's congresses, but this political leadership should abide by the interests of the people, there are different understandings about whether party discipline or the deputy's role as articulator of the interest of the constituency should prevail if they are in conflict.[234] Nevertheless, the ideals of the pursuit of consensual solutions and the common good still limit interest representation. Indeed, sometimes deputies are accused of ignoring the common interest or violation of collective decision making when they pursue group interests.[235]

People's congresses and democratization

Many scholars tend to seek signs of NPC autonomy or even its defiance of Party control. Therefore, they pay attention to such phenomena as the people's congress rejecting law proposals or Party-backed candidates, taking onto the agenda issues embarrassing to the government, and supporting lower-level delegates who have

229 Chen An 1999, pp. 198, 211–212.

230 Shih 1999, pp. 209–210.

231 Chen An 1999, pp. 198–199.

232 Shih 1999, pp. 161–162.

233 Xia 2000, p. 212.

234 Shih 1999, pp. 209–210.

235 O'Brien 1994 C, p. 372.

run into trouble with local authorities because of their outspokenness.[236] However, other scholars show that when people's congresses have vetoed a governmental proposal, this did not mean ultimate rejection, but the proposal was returned to the government for better preparation or revision. Both sides expect that a compromise will be found in the end.[237] Negative votes naturally hurt the prestige of a leader and challenge Party nomenclatura,[238] but generally the people's congresses avoid direct challenge and nominate more competent or honest Party leaders to challenge the official Party-backed candidates.[239] Moreover, congress members seldom find electable and widely representative candidates, while the Party candidates are generally good, credible, and have wide support.[240] The majority of representatives concentrate on organization building through good Party relations instead of enhancing legislative independence.[241] Therefore, ordinary congress members are readier to challenge Party nominations openly than professional standing committee members working actively to expand the influence of the people's congress. Still, these challenges have been spontaneous and delegates have been willing to compromise if the Party gives signs that it expects the congress to comply with its wishes.[242] Only once has the NPC been in serious collision with the Party center, but even then the challengers followed one Party faction, the losing one.[243]

Ming Xia argues that people's congresses enhance their power through contestation, but to win respect they have to pay attention to how to deal with contestation. Therefore, they exploit the law and party line to supervise leaders, embed supervision into support for the government and establish alliances with other supportive actors, such as the Party, the NPC, the government, or public opinion. But when a congress shows its power, it does not escalate conflict if government officials express willingness to cooperate. This kind of contestation is institution-based and differs from political opposition.[244]

A deeply entrenched idea of the desirability of oppositional politics makes Western writers sometimes demand arrangements for the Chinese system that would seem strange even in our own political systems. For example, Andrew

236 See, e.g., Pei 1995, pp. 71–72. Note also the marginality of these forms of stubbornness or opposition he cites.

237 Chen An 1999, p. 204.

238 Chen An 1999, p. 105–106, 109.

239 Chen An 1999, pp. 112, 114; Xia 2000, p. 206.

240 Chen An 1999, pp. 110–114.

241 O'Brien 1994 B. Still, some delegates express a wish for more autonomy from Party control (O'Brien 1994 B, pp. 87, 93).

242 Xia 2000, pp. 208–209.

243 Chen An 1999, pp. 165–166.

244 Xia 2000, pp. 188, 195–199, 210–213.

Nathan laments that the National People's Congress "still performs tasks assigned by the party instead of providing an alternative to party control."[245] The assumption that the Chinese legislature could evolve into a body constraining the Party is implicit also when Kevin O'Brien argues that a certain period of cooperation with the Party is necessary for organization building in order to establish a position from which autonomy can be effectively pursued.[246] Yet, I know no Western country in which legislatures check party power. In fact it is just the opposite. In the West legislative agendas are controlled by the parties many of which demand strict party discipline. It is other parties in the legislature and not the legislature itself that checks party power. Therefore, the fact that the party programs shape the legislative agenda is in no way antagonistic to democracy, rather it is a customary practice in parliamentarianism. Strictly speaking the legislature will never check and balance the Party.[247] Rather legislature can use its legislative power to establish procedures which parties must comply with when they try to transform their party platforms into official policies.

Still, it is possible that in China party discipline will loosen and leave delegates more room for using their own judgment. There already is evidence of such a development. Loosening Party discipline may force the Party to a more scrupulous consensus building and policy-formulation process, but the Party itself encourages a deliberative policy-making style in order to improve the quality of decisions. Indeed, the Party has strengthened representative institutions and separated powers of the Party, government and people's congresses to assist the it to improve its rule and to check cadres' misconduct, not to compete with it. The Party wants to enhance regime legitimacy and to produce more rational and more popular policies without compromising the Party rule. The Party center never wanted to create a Western type of democracy, but only to repair some structurally weak aspects of the one-party system.[248] According to An Chen, the result resembles the Western cabinet system somewhat, but does not permit organized opposition.[249]

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245 Nathan 1998, p. 60. Andrew Nathan correctly points out that control of society through legislation is an alternative to direct control through the Party as was known in the Mao era. It is the first part of this sentence I target.

246 Kevin O'Brien (1994 B) compares the Chinese situation with medieval parliaments in Europe, but in my opinion such comparison is misplaced. Medieval parliaments preceded modern party politics, while the Chinese people's congresses try to strengthen their position in the context of party dominated politics. It is totally different to say that parliaments in Europe checked the power of the king than to say that a parliament should check parties. According to the customary separation of powers, the legislative branch should check the executive (such as a king or government), but not parties.

247 See this way of speech in Pei 1995, p. 71.

248 Chen An 1999, pp. 16, 97–98; Shih 1999, p. 230.

249 Chen An 1999, pp. 98, 139.

The new situation has allowed the people's congresses to develop their own bureaucratic interest.[250] Ming Xia shows that they are now ready to seek cooperation with the Party and government through competition if necessary. Although congresses sometimes challenge the Party, their aim is to forge reciprocal cooperation and uphold mutual restraints, not to produce clear winners and losers.[251] Nevertheless, the Party will control the legislature as long as the majority of delegates are Communist Party members and either the selection process or the absence of realistic alternatives will guarantee a majority of seats to its members. Only with the end of the one-party system can the legislature evolve into an arena in which the Party rule is constrained, and this constraining is then done by other parties in the legislature and not by the legislature itself.

An Chen discovers that people's congresses are not conducive to the creation of political opposition because the preferences and demands of Chinese constituencies are not threatening to the regime. Instead of macropolitical issues, such as the political system, people's congresses have concentrated on depoliticized issues like welfare issues. Simultaneously, absence of political opposition has enhanced the autonomy of the legislature because its confrontation with Party organs does not appear politically motivated.[252] Kevin O'Brien confirms that the NPC uses the strategy of acceptance and exploitation of subordination as a means for strengthening its organization and status. The NPC wants to clarify its jurisdiction and increase its capacity. For this it needs support from the executive. Attention and penetration by Party committees brings adequate budget, staff, facilities and access to information. A positive disposition by the executive towards the people's congress facilitates legislative oversight. Cooperation and recruitment of influential leaders opens doors to decision-making tables. High ranking officials as chairmen of the people's congresses have personal authority to ensure that other state institutions respect and implement the people's congress decisions.[253]

In this context, the people's congresses have gained supervisory powers and have become a more powerful arena for interest representation. Congresses now supervise government work through inquiries, appraisals of government officials and checking that the government enforces laws.[254] They are learning to use their power over the purse for supervising individual development programs, albeit not yet with budgeting in general.[255] An Chen contends that since the 1990s, the NPC has become an arena for regionalist bargaining for benefits and exemptions as

250 Chen An 1999, p. 172.

251 Xia 2000, pp. 193–194.

252 Chen An 1999, p. 17, 200.

253 O'Brien 1994 B.

254 Chen An 1999, pp. 206–210.

255 Shih 1999, pp. 215–216.

well as for pursuing group and professional interests.[256] In surveys, voters too consider that people's congress representatives should vote for the interests of their locality rather than national interests if the two are in conflict.[257]

An Chen remarks that democratization is possible in the people's congresses because of its depoliticized nature. The government expects that deputies, being in daily contact with the masses, contribute to government work and oversee that reform programs are implemented, but do not raise macropolitical issues. Voters have accepted this framework. They have elected Party members and professionals, while they have paid little attention to the political and ideological limits of elections.[258]

How to evaluate the more assertive legislature under single party control in terms of democracy then? If we emphasize democracy as a way to check authoritarianism, single party control over state institutions is fatal. However, single party control is not debilitating to the deliberative function of democracy. Single party control does not even prevent establishment of a democratic system of institutional checks and balances. It is fully conceivable that institutionalization and the rule of law force a ruling party to use regular legislative and executive channels to conduct its rule, because breaching legal procedures would deprive the decision of legitimacy.[259] Competitive elections even within a one-party context can provide accountability if available party and independent candidates provide a meaningful choice between candidates. Still, as An Chen asserts, the people's congresses' representative function and institutional capacity is now being maximized without compromising the ideological hegemony of the Party. People's congresses lack the function of representing ideology and competition between ideological lines. However, prohibition of political opposition makes legislatures weak actors compared to the Party and never subjects the Party to complete public control.[260]

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256 Chen An 1999, pp. 169–170.

257 Chan Che-po 2000, p. 224.

258 Chen An 1999, p. 87.

259 I thus disagree with scholars like Minxin Pei who argue that a one-party regime is at odds with the rule of law because the ruling party is above the law (Pei 1995, p. 68). Of course, one-party rule means that the party can change laws, but legislative procedures are too slow for arbitrary rule if the rule of law is upheld, for example, by an independent judiciary, perhaps one empowered with the power of judicial review of laws and with lifelong tenures to reduce its dependency on the executive and the Party.

260 Chen An 1999, pp. 214, 234–235.

Functional representation

Functional representation is typical of the Chinese representative institutions, which contain delegates representing all major interests and social groups. As Kevin O'Brien reports, Mao Zedong saw that direct mass line participation must be complemented with representation of different classes, organizations, regions, genders and ethnic groups. The primary aim has not been political competitiveness, but selecting functionally representative People's Congresses.[261] Election results are usually even reported in aggregate form, giving numbers of people representing different sectors and strata, which as itself indicates that candidates' opinions are noncontroversial. [262] Bruce Jacobs maintains that functional representation is based on the idea that deputies represent a single interest, not a wide range of interests in their constituencies.[263] However, in the deliberative sense they can be seen to represent certain knowledge and connections to their social stratum. Kevin O'Brien suggests that people's congresses are constructed, rather than elected.[264] Thus, in candidate setting the Chinese follow two separate criteria: delegates need to be outstanding individuals and represent different sectors broadly. [265] Still, ability can be constructive for working functional representation. After all, representatives with better education are favored because of their ability to make constructive suggestions on governmental affairs.[266]

Bruce Jacobs remarks that the Chinese emphasis on comprehensive representation gives little concern to the equal value of votes, which is so central for Western democracies. Broad representation of different groups leads to malapportionment. When government wants to give representation to some interests defined as important even if small, some electoral districts are small. The electoral system favors urban areas in order to guarantee that all interests, not just agricultural ones, are represented. Simultaneously, functional representation is meant to guarantee that those interests the state promotes, such as working class interests, are overrepresented and receive adequate attention.[267] In functional representation, Party members are overrepresented, while the gender quota is skewed toward male candidates.[268]

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261 O'Brien 1990, pp. 62, 79.
262 McCormick 1990, pp. 143–144.
263 Jacobs 1991, p. 180.
264 O'Brien 1994 C, p. 364.
265 Nathan 1986, p. 200; Chen An 1999, pp. 83–84; O'Brien 1994 C, p. 364.
266 Chen An 1999, p. 86.
267 Jacobs 1991, pp. 177–181, 199. See also Townsend 1967, p. 124.
268 Shih 1999, p. 231.

The Party prefers functional representation because it wants some representation for all important social groupings. Neither majoritarian nor proportional representation guarantee representation of certain minority groups, such as professionals and minority nationalities.[269] Functional representation helps in the formulation of national perspective and transmits information from and to the constituencies.[270] Functional representation gives socialist rule legitimacy and integrates social groups and strata widely to national politics. It gives different groups a voice in state affairs, but the demonstration of wide inclusiveness simultaneously legitimizes the Party rule.[271]

According to Barrett McCormick, functional representation reveals the Party ability to suppress social conflict and to gain formal legitimization for its activities. Simultaneously, it indicates the symbolic quality of elections and the regime's mobilizational capacity.[272] Still, functional representation need not be only symbolic. In order for the deliberative ideal of democratic centralism to work, all relevant interests need to be present in discussions. Functional representation is suited to deliberation since it maximizes the chances of sharing first-hand information and harmonizing differing interests.

Chih-yu Shih finds that production of a functionally balanced mix of candidates needs competitive elections only to guarantee seriousness of the deliberative and consultative process. In this system the Party has institutionalized the contradiction between its need to refrain from being too dominant to lose sight of social trends and its need to keep enough distance from the populace so as to maintain its macro-perspective planning vigor. In other words, it attempts to combine democracy and centralism.[273]

Still, combining functional representation and true electoral competition is problematic. Indeed, although the Party designs a balanced mix of candidates, democratic electoral choice can distort the balance. Moreover, the Party choice for the interest a certain constituency should represent does not necessarily coincide with the constituency's own perception of its main interest.[274] Moreover, the requirement to find functionally representative candidates complicates the selection of the final list of candidates.[275] The result is often that the electoral unit tries to find a candidate representing several interests allocated to the particular district in order to choose freely how to fill other seats in the district. Naturally, delegates

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269 Townsend 1967, p. 124.

270 Shih 1999, p. 157.

271 O'Brien 1990, pp. 79, 84.

272 McCormick 1990, p. 144.

273 Shih 1999, p. 196, 192.

274 Shih 1999, p. 157, 185–186, 230. For a practical example, see Shih 1999, p. 160.

275 Jacobs 1991, pp. 185–186.

selected to represent multiple quotas are seldom motivated to speak for all interests they are nominated to represent.[276]

Chih-yu Shih discovers that there is no guarantee that the delegate will actually speak for the sector or stratum he was chosen to represent. Besides, representational structures do not encourage delegates to advance sectoral interests, since delegates are elected from a geographical, not a structural unit. Hence, their reelection depends on representation of their constituency and solving constituents' concrete problems having little to do with their professional or structural status. Moreover, within the NPC, deliberations are organized in geographically-based groups, and on the local level the people's congress works with the government considering regional rather than structural issues. Such a design discourages formation of interest groups or lobbies in the people's congresses.[277] However, the contradiction between structural and geographic representation may be less pronounced than Chih-yu Shih assumes. Electoral districts are often drawn to include units representing a similar interest. For example, one electoral district can consist only of education institutes.[278] Thus, geographic and interest-based constituencies often overlap. Moreover, Kevin O'Brien finds that group representation takes advantage of delegates' weak electoral links to their electoral district.[279]

Functional representation idealizes firsthand knowledge of the situation in the grassroots. Yet, constant contacts with commoners did not necessarily improve delegates' ability to represent their constituency. The socialist ideal of involving people from all walks of life in legislation must have impaired the people's congresses' ability to conduct independent work. Indeed, since representatives are amateurs in legislative affairs and have little time to familiarize themselves with issues, the real power over drafting the laws and reports lies elsewhere, either with the Party or the government.[280] Chih-yu Shih notes that as the result the government is actually both drafter and enforcer of laws.[281] Further, deputies' part-time status makes it difficult to canvass support for an alternative candidate among other deputies they hardly know if they were to choose to challenge a Party-

276 Shih 1999, pp. 188–189, 231. Especially women are often nominated to fulfill not only gender quota but also other quotas, such as minority, democratic party, or overseas Chinese quotas (Rosen 1995, pp. 324–325).

277 Shih 1999, pp. 165, 232–235.

278 Jacobs 1991, p. 179.

279 O'Brien 1994 C, p. 371.

280 Chen An 1999, pp. 200–201; Shih 1999, pp. 212–213, 243–244. The Hundred Flowers campaign criticized the Party for deciding matters already before people's congresses convened or for submitting agenda too late for non-Party participants to familiarize themselves with the issue (O'Brien 1990, pp. 39–40).

281 Shih 1999, p. 244.

nominated candidate in indirect elections.[282] Therefore, in indirect elections Party nominated candidates have been more electable than those nominated by delegates themselves. Moreover, part-time deputies cannot devote their whole energy to supervising the government, while full-time deputies have an interest to side with the government.[283]

To enhance its ability to oversee administration and to conduct informed deliberation about draft legislation, since 1979 the NPC has been building a permanent bureaucracy and a subcommittee system.[284] Moreover, its professional standing committee has gained more importance.[285] This again shows that structures the Chinese understand as properly representative are too cumbersome to be properly functional. Like representative assemblies in villages, a less inclusive body again proves to be a more influential body. Obviously, a more representational design can increase popular influence compared to a body too large to give real voice to all participants. Still, inclusion itself empowers participants, albeit not necessarily the representative or participatory body itself. Lowell Dittmer notes that on the one hand the larger size of a meeting has made it easier for the secretary to control the agenda, but simultaneously larger meetings have given more people access to influence the policy process.[286]

However, a part-time, non-paid job as a deputy can also the enhance deputy's independence and even authority. Chih-yu Shih relates that the fact that many delegates are not particularly interested in reelection gives them autonomy from the Party. If they want to be reelected, they again need to be daring to speak out and act for their constituency because voters judge incumbents by performance in office. Some deputies even have more professional or sectoral knowledge than the Party has, making the Party rely on their professional knowledge.[287]

Functional representation is typical also in intra-Party elections[288] and in village institutions. Jean Oi and Scott Rozelle observe that villagers' representative assemblies often consist of representatives of special interest groups in the

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282 Chen An 1999, p. 82.

283 Shih 1999, p. 237.

284 Tanner 1999, pp. 73, 105–106, 222. Tanner cites comparative data showing that a subcommittee system can give a legislature considerable powers even in the absence of a multiparty system (p. 73). Among other things, subcommittees formulate an average delegate's general comments into legal language (p. 105). Understandably, the ability to present delegates' initiatives in more persuasive and feasible form increases the likelihood that independent initiatives will be enacted.

285 Tanner 1999, p. 74.

286 Dittmer 1974, p. 348. He refers to Mao Zedong's tendency to increase the size of decision-making meetings in the 1960's.

287 Shih 1999, pp. 205–207.

288 Jacobs 1991, pp. 195–196.

village. Youth, women, the elderly, teachers, and entrepreneurs all have a representative to act as a spokesperson for the group but also to communicate decisions to their constituencies.[289] This situation seems to accord with villagers' own preferences.[290] Democratic centralist ideals of consulting all relevant interests and communicative intermediation between decision makers and constituency are present in this design. Yet, it is not only consulting, but also compromising, that such a design serves. Ding Yijiang notes that inclusion of various social interests in village organs facilitates political accommodation and compromise. Thus it contributes to grassroots political stability.[291]

Whether functional representation is an effective channel for sectoral interest articulation again depends on the leaders own understanding of priorities, since although delegates and organizations of sectoral interest play a role in the policy-making process, they have no clout to compel attention. For example, although rural NPC delegates have urged more concern for rural problems, the top leaders sometimes became aware of them only after social unrest or reacted only symbolically to problems by offering verbal attention in documents and meetings.[292] Obviously, although democratic centralist channels convey much information, this information, even when it is about urgent problems, does not automatically lead to attention by decision makers. This situation either indicates an overload of the decision-making agenda due to too much information available to the leadership through various democratic centralist channels or it shows that the leadership's own values and understandings of national priorities makes it selective of the information it chooses to use for decision making. If this is the case, then the persona of a leader is as crucial for correct centralization in the center as it is in the grassroots.

The Party role in democratic institutions

The Communist Party has a definite role in all Chinese participatory and representative institutions, including elections, village self-government, and people's congresses' work. The Western research often examines this role one-sidedly as

289 Oi and Rozelle 2000, p. 519, 521.

290 For example, Sylvia Chan tells about a suggestion in a village council meeting that the old people's subcommittee should include a mother-in-law having good relationship with her daughter-in-law, because the subcommittee often has to mediate quarrels between mothers-in-laws and daughter-in-laws (Chan 1998). Note that apart from functional representation and appreciation of personal experience, this suggestion assumes that a person's own excellence in maintaining good intergenerational relations makes her able to solve the problems of others.

291 Ding 2001, p. 82.

292 Bernstein 1999, pp. 210–211, 218.

manipulation of the process for advancing the Party's aims. It is true that various level Party organs have sometimes been reluctant to accept new powers and thereby intrude into other institutions' work. For example, local officials have tried to control elections by nominating candidates regardless of popular resistance, limiting suffrage, holding indirect elections, refusing to use a secret ballot, gerrymandering, or coercing voters.[293] The Party might bypass legislatures if these prove obstacles to some Party aims, or replace people elected by the congress during the recess of people's congress sessions.[294] No doubt, vested interests and the desire to keep power in its own hands play a part. In addition, traditional paternalist attitudes distrusting villagers' abilities are at play.[295] The Party cadres may paternalistically believe that the Party knows villagers' interests better than they do themselves. This kind of assumption is not totally against the mass line ideal which gives the Party the role of educator, although simultaneously urging it to listen to the masses.

Even if the Party does not use any extralegal means, it has much power in the regular processes. As An Chen notes, now with competitive elections, the Party cannot decide who will be elected, but it can prevent those it opposes from running, since it examines candidates' qualifications and participates in the electoral committee deciding about the final list of candidates.[296] As James Townsend puts it, in the nomination process commoners are encouraged to assist in determining which candidates are qualified, but they are not free to select whomever they choose.[297] Although a wide majority of the candidates are now nominated by voters, the Party policy discouraging campaigning means that those backed by the Party are overrepresented.[298] Popular nomination itself does not necessarily increase the electability of those put forward because the numbers of those thus nominated are high and the vote between them is likely to split.[299] Moreover, for a long time Party branch ratification was needed for election results.[300]

Likewise, the Party has a strong grasp on the legislative work in people's congresses. As Kevin O'Brien notes, national and provincial priorities as the Party has defined them should guide the focus of lawmaking and legislative oversight.

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293 Chen An 1999, pp. 67–70; Ding 2001, p. 87; Kelliher 1997, pp. 82–83; Shih 1999, pp. 246–247.

294 Shih 1999, pp. 214, 241–242.

295 Ding 2001, pp. 87–88.

296 Chen An 1999, pp. 34–35. See also Jacobs 1991, p. 185.

297 Townsend 1967, p. 125.

298 Chen An 1999, pp. 72–73.

299 I am indebted to Unto Vesa, a Finnish observer of village elections, for pointing out this possibility.

300 Burns 1978, p. 280.

For example, party committees evaluate all important decisions in advance.[301] However, if the issue is not critical or if it involves legal expertise, the Party often leaves the decision to the people's congress itself.[302] The Party exerts power also because of its major role in the selection of deputies and because Party members in the legislature, constituting the majority of the delegates, are subject to party discipline.[303] However, deputies who are not Party members are allowed to use their own judgment.[304] Moreover, even Party members can appeal to the legal status of the congress or interest of the people when voting not in line with the Party.[305]

The Chinese political institutions are not designed for oppositional politics. As Weixing Chen observes, village elections empower the peasantry for the purpose of economic growth without undermining stability and the Party rule.[306] For pragmatist and materialist considerations, people have often chosen to vote for Party members because they are better positioned to serve the constituency.[307] The Party rule is not challenged in village elections, because peasants do not constitute a united force against the state, but identify with their villages and need the protection of the state if their leaders prove to be corrupt, incompetent, or repressive.[308] As An Chen remarks, since direct elections are held only on the local level, electors realistically expect delegates to work for local welfare issues. The result has been depoliticization of issues. Delegates usually consciously avoid sensitive macropolitical issues, while constituents usually see campaigning on such issues unrealistic, or even as campaigneering.[309] Still, although anti-system campaigning is rare, students and intelligentsia have on some occasions used elections to articulate macropolitical, even oppositional, issues.[310] Since independent candidates do not run on an oppositional platform, electable independent candidates usually fit Party norms and elections thus become one channel for recruitment of talent for the Party.[311]

Since the Party role in democratic institutions is weakly institutionalized but its leadership role is taken for granted, the Party sometimes takes over the leadership in elected organs, like village councils, village assemblies or electoral

301 O'Brien 1994 B, pp. 90–91.
302 Chen An 1999, pp. 164–165.
303 Chen An 1999, pp. 198–199; O'Brien 1994 B, p. 91; Shih 1999, p. 207.
304 Chen An 1999, p. 164–165.
305 Chen An 1999, pp. 198–199; Shih 1999, p. 209.
306 Chen Weixing 1999, p. 64.
307 Chen An 1999, p. 88.
308 Chen Weixing 1999, pp. 73–74.
309 Chen An 1999, p. 85.
310 Chen An 1999, pp. 66–67, 73.
311 Shih 1999, pp. 158, 208.

committees.[312] However, the same weakly institutionalized status of moral leadership means that democratic institutions can be used to check Party power as well. For example, a Party secretary losing in a village council election is under strong pressure to give up his position as Party secretary. Thus, the contest of village leadership positions in elections simultaneously subjects the local Party branch to electoral control.[313] In some areas, villagers have even demanded and gained the right to participate in the primary in inner-Party elections to screen out unpopular candidates before the final elections among party members takes place. It resembles a vote of confidence. This kind of two ballot system makes local Party leaders accountable to villagers, but leaves the final choice to the Party. The Party has agreed to this system because it helps to check corruption, increases the Party secretary's legitimacy and improves his relations with his constituency.[314] Likewise, the village assembly might succeed in altering Party decisions, when it succeeds in convincing the Party of the popular backing for its stand.[315]

The Party sees political organization and education as its tasks even within democatic institutions. According to Chih-yu Shih, the Party educates villagers to manage matters themselves instead of expecting the government to take care of everything. The Party organizes people to take part in village self-rule. The Party guides villages to develop the best ways to implement government policy under local conditions. It drafts village compacts, budgets and plans, and it nominates candidates for elections; but now when electors, village assemblies, or people's congresses can veto them, the Party is compelled to act selflessly for the public interest and to solicit villager opinions widely. The Party teaches people's deputies what their rights and responsibilities are and provides assistance to people's deputies in investigations.[316] The local Party branch screens candidates, chooses the method of voting, mobilizes villagers to vote, and administers the election process.[317] The Party has taught people to participate and use their voting rights.[318] However, the Party's organizational skills and technical knowledge are also a form of power. For example, in people's congresses bills prepared jointly by government and the Party committee are likely to pass, while most individual

312 Ding 2001, p. 88; Pastor and Tan 2000, p. 494.

313 Ogden 2002, p. 204.

314 Li 1999, pp. 109–110, 117–118.

315 Lawrence 1994, pp. 64–65. For example, a village assembly she researched gathered villagers' signatures in support of an alternate resolution and in this way pressured the Party and higher level administrators to change the policy.

316 Shih 1999, pp. 175, 259, 280, 304. In fact, lack of skills is one reason for some people's deputies to remain inactive (O'Brien 1994 C, pp. 365–366).

317 Chen Weixing 1999, p. 75.

318 Selden 1972, p. 129.

delegates lack the legal expertise to challenge them or to draft persuasive bills themselves. No wonder that the government dismisses many deputy proposals as impractical.[319]

The organizational role of the Party is not always understood in the Western research literature. For example, John James Kennedy expects that the Party nominations would correlate negatively with villagers' satisfaction in elections.[320] To his surprise, he found that in half of the cases villagers were satisfied with the nomination process in villages where the Party branch nominated candidates. Kennedy explains this finding by assuming that, as locals, village Party leaders are able to pick out candidates who reflect local interests and concerns and to provide enough meaningful choice for the electorate.[321] Still, he does not take into account that the Party is supposed to solicit popular opinions before candidate nomination. Actually, Kennedy's research gives mixed evidence about village cadres' true devotion to finding popular candidates, as can be expected, because villagers were dissatisfied with Party nominations in the other half of the villages. In brief, local leaders' devotion to promoting the mass line leadership is decisive for local democracy, but still depends on subjective motivation.

The Party also sees its role as necessary as a mediator between different groups. As Chih-yu Shih puts it, the Party is the only reconciliator between different surname groups, economic sectors and social groups in villages. It thus protects collectivism and wins respect for its role in mediation and consultation.[322] For example, when small groups propose mainly people from their own ranks in electoral nomination meetings, the Party persuades groups to take wider interests into account. It can organize joint meetings for groups to find candidates agreeable to all.[323] If a split between clans makes it impossible for any candidate to win a majority, the Party investigates the issue and persuades those involved to find a solution. The Party sees this not as undemocratic intervention but as majority building and seeking a solution satisfactory for all sides.[324] The Party sees to it that different groups are represented. For example, if villagers did not nominate any female candidate, the Party will make them add one to the list.[325] In the village economy, the Party coordinates and brings together different actors and persuades enterprises to contribute to the collective wellbeing of the village.[326] In

319 Chen An 1999, pp. 200–201, 211; Shih 1999, p. 243–244.

320 Kennedy 2002, p. 471.

321 Kennedy 2002, pp. 477–478, 482.

322 Shih 1999, pp. 311–312.

323 Townsend 1967, pp. 131–132.

324 Shih 1999, pp. 160–161, 166.

325 Shih 1999, p. 260.

326 Shih 1999, pp. 307–308.

Western political vocabulary this role means that the Party acts as the guarantor of the common good when partial interests might make individuals and groups lose sight of the collective interest. In terms of democratic centralism, the Party sees itself as a centralizer of partial interests and an educator making individuals and groups accept the overall good as their own.[327]

Those expecting contradiction between the state and society and perceiving the Party power only in repressive terms would assume that the disarray of many local party branches after the economic reforms[328] would have increased genuine popular participation. However, the result too often seems to have been disorder and insecurity rather than local empowerment.[329] Absence of Party control can undermine village democracy if strong societal forces, such as clans or successful businessmen, begin to monopolize local politics.[330] Apart from these authoritarian solutions, anarchic solutions are possible. Weixing Chen observes that a village assembly is either a leaderless body or a Party controlled body.[331] An authority vacuum can even lead to the collapse of village administration and the need for outside intervention.[332] Interestingly, in these situations the Chinese press has suggested more democracy as the remedy. Susan Lawrence gives an illustrative example of how meticulous Party work towards establishing village democracy can serve local needs and put an end to the incompetence and corruption of leaders who were unable to cooperate among themselves. In this situation a Party-assigned arbiter from outside made former clan and faction rivals sit and speak together.[333] In some areas one detectable reason for active participatory politics is a well-organized local Communist Party supportive of popular participation.[334] This result hints that a strong Party organization having internalized the Party's mass line values may be supportive for democracy.

Bureaucratic deliberation

Direct contact between the system and the commoners is not the only critical point in democratic centralism. In terms of evaluating the democraticness of de-

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327 The reconciliator and organizer role is evident also in the factory organization of the 1950s when the Party saw horizontal coordination between management and workers as its task (Brugger 1976, pp. 132–133, 235–238).

328 Yee and Wang 1999, pp. 38–39.

329 Ogden 2002, pp. 183–184; Yee and Wang 1999, p. 39.

330 Ding 2001, pp. 88–90; Ogden 2002, pp. 209–210.

331 Chen Weixing 1999, p. 75.

332 O'Brien 1994 A, pp. 51–53.

333 Lawrence 1994, pp. 62, 67.

334 Jennings 1997, p. 370.

mocratic centralism, continuity of feedback from below and consecutive deliberative processes are crucial. According to democratic centralist theory, centralization of popular opinions and moods should continue throughout the system. As long as popular input is welcomed and a deliberative decision-making culture prevails, the power concentration at the top is not a problem for democracy. After all, also many elected presidents or prime ministers emerging from parliamentarianism have formidable powers as well. Thus, I disagree with James Townsend, who maintains that popular participation cannot serve as a means of reconciling competing interests, since the Party regards itself as the only group capable of defining the true collective interest.[335] An elitist definition of collective interest is typical for all representative systems, democratic ones included. As long as the collective interest is deliberatively formed and based on authentic popular input and reconciles competing interests, democracy itself is not threatened. Instead, showing that grassroots participation and bureaucratic processes are disjointed would be fatal to the claims that the Chinese type of democracy is real. In other words, either disregard for popular input in the hierarchical flow of information or absence of inter-bureaucratic processes of deliberative balancing of different interests and opinions transmitted from below would render democratic centralism as undemocratic.

Western studies find that even a local program or a scholarly initiative have become an official policy.[336] We also know that the Chinese government has been responsive to some innovations emerging in individual villages or towns.[337] It is quite likely that some individual initiatives expressed through normal feedback systems have had influence on policy making or at least on higher level intervention in a local problem. Still, there is no systematic study of the influence of popular input in decision making, partly due to the non-transparency of Chinese decision making. As Thomas Bernstein remarks, a further difficulty is assessing impact when interest articulation is not independent from the state and Party bureaucracies. [338] Deliberative and consensual decision-making styles might complicate any attempt to demonstrate the origin of a certain idea even more.

It is much simpler to show that the Chinese policy-making process is deliberative and consensual and invites various interests to participate, as democratic centralism presumes. Some scholars have investigated the arduous harmonization

335 Townsend 1967, p. 80.

336 For example, research groups have been effective in promoting new ideas to the leadership (Bernstein 1999, pp. 206–207.) For one example, see Gu 2000A, pp. 148–151. See also Tanner 1999, ch. 7, for how an individual scholar's determination can affect the legislative agenda when the leadership is seeking a solution for a particular problem.

337 See Zweig 1997 A, p. 47, for decollectivization; Shih 1999, p. 314, for village autonomy; and Parris 1993, for a local effort to make Wenzhou an economic model.

338 Bernstein 1999, p. 198.

process between different bureaucracies and levels of administration. In numerous meetings during this process, attendants representing different interests try to reach a compromise agreeable to them all. Ming Xia even defines the Chinese system, characterized by ties among actors both within hierarchical organizations and across them, as network mode of governance. This kind of governance values communication and flexibility.[339] David Lampton remarks that bargaining limits leaders' powers, because they cannot guarantee efficient implementation unless they seek consensus with other relevant units.[340] The democratic centralist theory refers to network governance as collective leadership. Collective leadership seeks to strengthen leadership as a whole by limiting the powers of each individual leader or agency. Unlike factionalist theories predict, this kind of harmonization does not happen only within the top-level leadership but on every level of bureaucracy.[341]

Western scholars have found several patterns of negotiative decision making fitting well to the democratic centralist model. Murray Scot Tanner finds that on the central level the consultation process begins with limited participation by the principal departments concerned, but later incorporates other departments, provinces and mass organizations. Only after working out a relatively complete plan, does broader opinion solicitation take place with selected mass groups, localities, and basic-level units, such as factories and workplaces, included. At this stage, advocates and opponents of a policy publish information about opinion polls and meetings, often conducted among the like-minded mass groups, to convince others of their viewpoint.[342] Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg show that at first the center and provinces reach a general agreement based on the mutual benefits of a project. During the succeeding rounds of negotiations the agreement becomes more detailed and is adjusted to changing circumstances. Therefore, a complex issue involves more than one decision. Instead, a series of decisions and renegotiations is needed, including those concerning implementation.[343] Susan Shirk finds that in China decision making starts at the administrative level that is in charge of implementation. This level tries to reach local consensus, but passes the issue to higher levels if consensus building fails.[344]

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339 Xia 2000, pp. 192, 213.

340 Lampton 1992, p. 35.

341 For a typical factionalist model of interest harmonization, see Hamrin and Zhao 1995, pp. xx–xxvi.

342 Tanner 1999, p. 220.

343 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, pp. 25, 368–369.

344 Shirk 1992, pp. 68–69.

David Lampton refers to inter-bureaucratic negotiations taking place during policy initiation and policy implementation alike as bargaining.[345] Bargaining seems to accord with the democratic centralist ideal of democratic deliberations both in the centralist and democratic stages of decision making. Lampton has remarked that bargaining "provides both a means by which leaders and followers gain information and make choices ('calculation') and a means by which leaders control (or coordinate) subsequent behavior."[346] This description suggests that much more than bargaining takes place during the process. While the term bargaining emphasizes negotiations about the terms of exchange and mutual benefits, the Chinese terminology such as consultation or centralization refers to information gathering and suggests unequal relations between the centralizer and the level possessing practical information. Sometimes meetings between bureaucracies involve bargaining, even more often negotiation, but always exchange of information between all parties. Therefore, Nina Halpern suggests that, instead of the command model or the bargaining model, the competitive persuasion model would describe this process best. In this model, agencies compete with other agencies in offering persuasive arguments to support their preferred policies.[347]

Lengthy consensus building is favored for its advantages. Consultation is believed to improve the quality of decisions and to prevent an unhealthy concentration of power.[348] A consensual policy-making process guarantees successful implementation, since it binds all actors to the decision and reduces the risks of non-cooperation by unsatisfied organs.[349] Consensus building allows the Party to exploit the superior information of lower levels. When lower levels can find consensus among themselves, it even reduces the central load in decision making.[350] At the early stage of the Chinese communist movement, meetings and face-to-face contacts made it possible to recruit peasant leaders, many of whom were illiterate.[351] The benefits of consensus building include providing multiple information channels for the leadership; consulting expertise, views, and interests from many fields for decision making; integrating various organs and groups; encouraging scrutiny of all alternatives; and even providing for some checks against mistaken decisions. It may even be that if the administration is divided into units having

345 Lampton 1992, p. 51, 54–57.

346 Lampton 1992, p. 36.

347 Halpern 1992, pp. 126, 147.

348 Shirk 1992, pp. 74–75.

349 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, p. 23; Shirk 1992, pp. 68–69.

350 Shirk 1992, pp. 68–69.

351 Lieberthal 1995, p. 176.

relatively limited horizontal contacts, only the center will have a full picture of the whole, which atomizes lower-level resistance to central decisions.[352]

Apart from these concrete benefits, Western research has found that ideological reasons, such as the ideal of consultation and the normative rule of sharing and balancing costs and benefits between parties,[353] can explain the prevalence of inter-bureaucracy consensus building. Likewise, democratic centralism encourages balancing different demands and group interests through negotiations, partly for ideological reasons and partly because it promotes a consensual, face-to-face decision-making process. Marc Blecher and Vivienne Shue describe the consensual atmosphere, easy informal interchange and friendly disagreement among county leaders in the county government they researched. The ethos of the county government aimed at striking a balance between different areas and developments. Rather than commitment to socialist egalitarian redistribution, interpersonal relations and pork-barrel politics had much to do with the distribution of resources widely within the area. The resulting balance helped to maintain relative harmony and cooperative relations among various localities and agencies under the county jurisdiction.[354]

These deliberative and consensual processes aim at finding the harmony of interests. Andrew Nathan argues that the Chinese political philosophy has seldom recognized that individual interests can conflict with collective interests.[355] Yet, harmony of interests does not need to mean avoidance of conflicts. Instead, it can be the product of the consensual decision-making style seeking to find the shared interest in the issue on the basis of different particular interests. As Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg note, cooperation between agencies is guaranteed through mutual bargains and exchange.[356] Moreover, the common interest does not need to be found in one particular issue, but pork barreling is allowed, even encouraged. Nina Halpern observes that consensus building functions better if participants are put in a repeated-game situation, such as in long-term planning creating many potential future exchanges.[357] Likewise, units within a single region naturally have incentives for repeated-game thinking.

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352 Of course I am not claiming that the Chinese type of administrative division actually brought all these benefits it was perhaps expected to produce. Moreover, the recent simplification of the ministry system has demonstrated that, in the eyes of present leadership, it was not as efficient as the national leadership would prefer.

353 See Lampton 1992, p. 39, and Shirk 1992, p. 77, respectively.

354 Blecher and Shue 1996, pp. 216–217.

355 Nathan 1986, pp. 57–58, 63–65.

356 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, pp. 157–158.

357 Halpern 1992, p. 146.

Another factor facilitating consensual decision making is mutual affection and sympathy.[358] Not surprisingly, the Chinese meeting style often involves small group discussions and informal mixing.[359] Informal contacts and personal networks between individuals working within different bureaucracies are common too.[360] Although interdependence between various organs makes friction unavoidable, shared state employment, with expectations of career mobility between different state and Party organs, encourages collegiality and keeps conflict to a manageable level.[361] However, interpersonal relationships and repeated-game situations mean that consensus building also depends on factors other than deliberative rationality. Indeed, Murray Scot Tanner observes that when bureaucratic agencies bargain over policies, they naturally consider their own goals, resources, and priorities. Still, the compromise they are willing to tolerate also depends on risk avoidance when they themselves introduce new uncertain policies. Fear of losing face, the will to protect their own policy area, and the ability to arrange special exemptions may help in bringing the skeptics behind the generally approved policy.[362]

Because interests do not always find agreement by themselves, democratic centralism stresses that consensus building needs active leadership. In redistribution of resources and in financing infrastructure building, the higher level is often needed to make all lower-level actors see that the project is in their common interest.[363] When consensual decision making has caused delay or even gridlock, higher-level leadership intervention is needed.[364] Of course, sometimes even minimal common interest is not found. Then the consensual atmosphere tends to cause avoidance of open opposition. Instead, opponents undermine the policy through non-cooperation or by questioning the motives of those promoting a policy.[365]

While the typical Western model of politics stresses open conflict between different interests or policy propositions in which either parties in government or in opposition prevail, the Chinese democratic centralist model sees policy making as a positive-sum-game responding to the concerns of all participants, albeit in differing degrees. In practice, both of these models are partial. As some Western

358 Mansbridge 1983, pp. 272–273.

359 Lieberthal 1995, p. 176.

360 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, pp. 154–157; Xia 2000, p. 193.

361 Xia 2000, p. 193.

362 Tanner 1999, pp. 218–219.

363 See an example in Blecher and Shue 1996, p. 176.

364 Tanner 1999, pp. 220–221.

365 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, p. 166–167.

political scientists point out, in fact both adversial and consensual processes and situations of truly shared and fundamentally conflicting interests are common in politics.[366]

Many disadvantages of consensus building are typical of situations disregarding the possibility of truly conflicting interests.[367] In China, consensus building makes decision making arduous and protracted. Radical change is often rejected, delayed or watered down during the consensus building. Policy changes tend to be incremental and even disjointed because key decisions are often made in several different bodies.[368] Inter-agency bargaining is likely to produce inconsistency and incoherence between policies.[369] Sometimes, if consensus does not build up, the center even lets relevant ministries draft relevant regulations for their own field, even if the resulting regulations turn out to be confusing and contradictory.[370] Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg even claim that as a result China lacks one coherent national policy in some central developmental issues.[371] Furthermore, as a result of the consensual decision-making style, bureaucratic struggles arise because jurisdictions are often poorly delineated, directives sent down from the center are vague, and tasks are simultaneously delegated to several lower-level agencies. Still, the center may use consensus building as a tactic to build broad support for its policies by giving all actors a stake in the process.[372] Besides, a policy emerging as a result of inter-agency consensus building has enormous bureaucratic weight.[373]

One benefit of democratic centralist consensus building is that it strengthens the position of the coordinator, the Communist Party. Firstly, since there are no clear rules for meeting proceedings and issues requiring a certain kind of procedure, the political system is responsive to personal choices rather than institutional regulations. Organizers can, for example, bring outsiders into a discussion as a vehicle for testing ideas with a selected group.[374] Secondly, the Party decides who participates in inter-agency negotiations. In this way it can structure the decision making so that its most important constituents are taken into account in the

366 Mansbridge 1983, pp. 30–31. Or Sartori 1987, p. 229, recognizes that the outcome of a political decision can be either positive-sum or zero-sum, meaning that the outcome either benefits all parties or only one at the cost of others.

367 For more elaboration of consensus and conflicting interests, see Mansbridge 1983, pp. 31–32, 166–171.

368 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, p. 24; Shirk 1992, p. 76.

369 Lampton 1992, p. 37.

370 Tanner 1999, pp. 173–174.

371 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, p. 24. They refer to energy policy.

372 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, p. 340.

373 Tanner 1999, p. 218.

374 Lieberthal 1995, p. 177.

process.[375] Thirdly, the chairperson uses power when he sums up the discussions, usually for strengthening the Party position, but sometimes also for factional or personal advantage.[376] Fourthly, when the Party chooses the meeting participants, it makes sure that the majority and the chairperson are Party members. Thus, Party members dominate discussions and will win if a majority vote is taken. Yet, decisions are seldom made by majority principle, but by consensus. Controversial matters usually remain on the agenda until a solution acceptable to all is worked out. Still, the Party is strong enough to forge consensus, if confrontation occurs.[377] Fifthly, the Party can use its right to the final say about what constitutes common interest and use this understanding to choose whether it accepts or dismisses demands from mass organization or bureaucracies. If it dismisses demands as representing a partial or selfish interest contrary to the general interest, a mass organization or a bureaucracy either has to give in or be ready to confront the Party authority.[378] Therefore, Carol Lee Hamrin and Suisheng Zhao argue that bureaucratic coordinating processes are meant to build support for a policy, rather than achieving real consensus. They understand the process not as bargaining but as persuasion or even as intimidation.[379]

Deliberative and consensual decision-making style is built into the democratic centralist administrative design. Different administrative levels are designed to engage in both intra-regional and vertical negotiation and consensus building. Provincial and county bureaus work for central policy implementation, but simultaneously are expected to act as spokesmen for the local needs and provide information for the next higher administrative level about local conditions.[380] Simultaneously, provincial and county bureaus are responsible for policy implementation and development in their area. Hence, for lower-level administrative units they serve as regulators, advocates, development planners, and mediators of conflicts between lower-level units.[381] The higher-level administration needs to solicit opinions of the level below and to negotiate with it about redistribution of resources and financial burdens of developmental projects.[382] An intermediary-level

375 Shirk 1992, p. 69.
376 Lieberthal 1995, p. 176.
377 Chen An 1999, p. 195.
378 Townsend 1980, p. 419.
379 Hamrin and Zhao 1995, p. xxxv.
380 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, p. 345.
381 Blecher and Shue 1996, pp. 157–158, 187, 207.
382 Blecher and Shue 1996, p. 174.

administration studies and develops policy proposals originating from below and lobbies for these projects with the higher-level authorities.[383]

Asserting the existence of a deliberative political culture is one thing. A different question is whether it, combined with the mass line type of solicitation of popular opinions, is enough to make the system democratic. Ming Xia argues that the network mode of governance amounts to pluralization, but not democratization, since it involves little popular participation.[384] My own viewpoint is somewhat different. On the surface level, the findings of scholars researching bureaucratic negotiations in China seem to fit quite well with the democratic centralist model. Yet, their model of fragmented authoritarianism borrows the model of bureaucratic negotiations from the theory of pluralism. This is not to say that borrowers of the model assume pluralism in China. As Kenneth Lieberthal states, although the Chinese bureaucracies are fragmented, this fragmentation does not contain enough autonomy for pluralism.[385] Therefore, possibly it is simply typical of modern bureaucracies to relegate issues to different sub-organizations in order to be able to tackle complex problems. Because actual problems cut across administrative jurisdictions, it is mandatory to have some kind of coordination between organizations.[386] Consequently, showing that the Chinese bureaucracies are modern enough to have institutional segmentation, proves nothing about democracy or even whether the theory of democratic centralism is an accurate description of Chinese polity. Yet, Nina Halpern has suggested that "the dispersal of policy-relevant information among functionally specialized units can be an important cause of fragmented authority."[387] Construed in this way, many findings of scholars studying Chinese bureaucracies could be logical results of democratic centralist type of information flows and chains-of-command. The question of whether there is anything democratic in inter-bureaucratic negotiations based on solicitation of popular opinions still remains and the answer to it depends on the particular definition of democracy. The answer of theories of representative democracy is negative, but some models of deliberative democracy might accommodate this Chinese version.

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383 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, p. 131.

384 Xia 2000, pp. 213–214.

385 Lieberthal 1992, p. 12.

386 For an introduction to such views in the West, see, e.g., Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987, pp. 172, 178.

387 Halpern 1992, p. 125.

Communist Party and democratization

One common Western assumption is that the Communist Party is an obstacle to democratization in China. A more theoretical version of this argument claims that a single-party rule is detrimental to democracy.[388] Some scholars go so far as to refuse to call the recent development of local elections and village autonomy in China democratization,[389] probably because they see opposition party politics as necessary for democracy. Instead, they refer to such Chinese developments as local elections and more powerful representative institutions as political liberalization or institutionalization.[390] Contrarily, the Chinese official theory believes that the Party values do not contradict democracy and is confident of the Party's ability to democratize China. In fact, survey results reveal that the Chinese citizens also believe that the incumbent government has made progress in democratization.[391] Likewise, some Western theorists, such as Brantly Womack, believe that one-party democracy is possible if the party in question puts itself at risk to the people through public institutions.[392]

It is not uncommon that Western writers have looked for signs of erosion of Party power as providing fertile ground for democratization. Often Western writers take the erosion of the Party control over society and state agencies as a step towards the loss of the Party's power monopoly.[393] In one sense this is of course true: by encouraging autonomy of other democratic centralist channels, the Party recognizes a plurality of power centers and feedback channels from society. Yet, too often the disintegration of local Party power has resulted in ungovernability,[394] not in democracy. Ungovernability hardly offers a good start for democracy, as the international record demonstrates.[395] In reform-era China, localities without efficient leadership to organize community services are often deprived of many of them.[396] Western writers looking for signs of ungovernability seldom

388 Zhao 2003, pp. 335–336.

389 Zhao 1998, p. 55.

390 Gilley 2004, p. 22; Zhao 2003, pp. 335–337.

391 Zheng 1994, p. 256.

392 Womack 1991 A, p. 84.

393 E.g. Tanner 1999, p. 233.

394 See, e.g., Pei 1995, pp. 73–74.

395 The democratization efforts in countries recovering from a divisive civil war, such as Bosnia or Cambodia, show that there are hurdles on the road to building functioning democracy from a state of ungovernability.

396 O'Brien 1994, p. 51.

explicitly announce that in their opinion the degeneration of social order and the living standards of the Chinese people is a price worth paying.[397]

One trend in Western-based studies about democratization in China has looked for democratic movements and popular resistance in China, anticipating that it will either bring down the authoritarian system or push it towards democratization.[398] Yet, often revolutions for democracy have produced most undemocratic results. Nor is it certain that those who would replace the old government want to promote democratic values. There is evidence of undemocratic thought and practices even within the Chinese democracy movements,[399] which leads to skepticism over whether democratic activists are either motivated for or capable of leading a democratization process.

Since the evolution of a widespread political movement needs motivation, many critics of communism are looking for marks of a legitimacy crisis in China.[400] They find discontent and yearning for democratization in China,[401] but base their claim on unrepresentative samples, such as discussions with people they know. My own experience is that in China both discontented and contented voices are common and openly expressed. More representative survey evidence demonstrates that the Chinese incumbent government enjoys moderately high support, both among those who are content with China's economic performance and also among those who are politically active.[402] Surveys and other evidence show that the Chinese worry more about social order, economic development, and international status than democracy and human rights.[403] It is more than natural that the Chinese prioritize family, friends and career over the political system. I would too. Still, these kinds of survey results cannot be read to indicate that democratic rights are not very important to the Chinese, as some have done,[404] because politics and

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397 Bruce Gilley almost makes such a claim when he asserts that on the Chinese road to democratization violence may be necessary and morally acceptable in order to achieve greater justice (Gilley 2004, p. 109). This kind of disregard for individual suffering seems not only morally questionable but also contradictory, since sacrificing people's concrete interests and lives for one's own political ideal is exactly one of the things critics blame the Communist Party of China for.

398 Zhao 2003, p. 344. Gilley 2004, pp. 97–98.

399 For continuity of non-public politics and status hierarchies among them, see Wasserstrom and Liu 1995, pp. 381–382, 389–393. For their authoritarian personalities, see He 1996, p. 171.

400 E.g. Zhao 2003, pp. 353–355.

401 E.g. Friedman 2003, p. 123.

402 Chen et al. 1997. See also the assumptions they challenge. For other survey evidence of regime support, see Shen 2005.

403 Ogden 2002, pp. 177–178.

404 E.g. Ogden 2002, p. 123. Although Suzanne Ogden seems to interpret that these results show a lack of democratic aspirations, to me it seems remarkably high that around 10 percent pri-

democracy may be important to a person even when she prioritizes personal happiness.

Some Western scholars predict that in the future local elections will produce opposition, albeit perhaps in unorganized form,[405] or even lead to formation of opposition parties. Yet, Communist Party officials fare well in village elections. As long as they are competent and not excessively corrupt, their experience and public name make them likely to be elected.[406] Analyzing survey evidence, Tianjian Shi discovers that elections in China are not likely to change the political culture. They correlate only with psychological involvement in politics, but have little impact on democratic sentiment.[407] Moreover, communal politics is not necessarily a suitable context for emphasizing identities that divide the community. Robin LeBlanc finds that in local activities for common benefit personal political views are usually withheld to avoid conflict possibly harmful to the common interest. Thus, on the community level, political opinions are private matters, in contrast to the common good the community strives at.[408] Therefore, I doubt that village or workplace politics is conducive to opposition party formation.

Democratization might create and strengthen alternative power bases, but it can strengthen the regime too. After all, the Western political theory holds that democracy increases regime legitimacy and popular consent over policies. Suzanne Ogden argues that democratization in China can enhance the Communist Party rule. It is not democratization, but economic liberalization, administrative decentralization, and globalization that might undermine the Party rule.[409] Legitimacy, popular consent and ability to react to social changes and needs are the Party's own motivations for democratization. As Chih-yu Shi remarks, Chinese democratization is meant to improve political management rather to make concessions to social forces. It is meant to assist the Party to improve its ruling capacity and ability to reconcile different interests.[410] Nevertheless, it is not certain that the

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oritized freedom or democracy related issues. I assume that everywhere in the world people usually prioritize personal life over politics, and welfare-related issues in politics. Even in Western politics, welfare, social order and economy are common campaign themes in elections. Moreover, it seems questionable to interpret this result to mean that the Chinese would choose stability over freedom, as Suzanne Ogden does (p. 178), since degeneration of social order is a concrete and somewhat acute problem in China and is thus likely to be emphasized, while the customary amount of freedom is not especially threatened and is even expanding in China.

405 Harding 1998, p. 17.

406 Chan 1998.

407 Shi 2000 B, p. 555.

408 LeBlanc 1999, pp. 70–71. She made her observation when researching Japanese PTA activities.

409 Ogden 2002, p. 83.

410 Shih 1999, pp. 226–228.

Party will succeed in its aims. The Western democratization theory assumes that authoritarian governments have incentives to seek legitimacy through partial democratization, but consequently cannot control the process when new political interests surface and use democratic institutions for political diversification. Still, it cannot be taken for granted that the Communist Party has overestimated its capacity and launched forces it will not be able to control.

At least in the short run, it seems likely that democratization alleviates some social tensions and increases ruling capacity. As Kevin O'Brien remarks, a more active but cooperative legislature may increase state capacity and thus contribute to more efficient authoritarianism.[411] With the separation of Party and government functions, policy bargaining now belongs to the government arena.[412] This kind of power sharing is likely to strengthen the Party and to give it more oversight ability when it becomes detached from actual interest conflicts fought within the state apparatus. Possible popular discontent will thus not be targeted only at the Party, but primarily at the government.[413] Paradoxically, the Party might be seeking to develop a more effective grasp of bureaucratic affairs than it had when it monitored administration directly. After all, direct monitoring is vulnerable to distortions of information flow due to bureaucratic interests and may cause information overload. Susan Shirk reminds us that Western democracies reduce the costs of supervision of bureaucracies by relying on customer feedback. In this way, politicians are neither at the mercy of selective bureaucratic information flow nor need to monitor bureaucratic performance constantly but will probably be informed of irregularities by society.[414] Most probably not only the deliberative and popular input aspects of democratic centralism, but also the oversight over bureaucracies explain the recognition of the need for more democratic centralist channels than the Party itself can provide. Indeed, An Chen has found that one aim of giving real power to the people's congresses has been to put government under double control of the Party and people's congress alike.[415] Naturally, better oversight capabilities will enhance the Party capacity to rule.

Democratization in China

Numerous Western studies analyzed either reasons for why China is not democratic or scenarios of how China could become democratic. The first kind of ex-

411 O'Brien 1994 B, p. 102.

412 Shirk 1992, p. 68.

413 For the Party aims of diffusing political responsibility, see Shih 1999, p. 158.

414 Shirk 1992, p. 62.

415 Chen An 1999, p. 98, 117.

planation has blamed culture, socialist ideology, backward economy and outlook, democrats' own vacillation between democratic and authoritarian values, weak representative institutions, or unfavorable historical conditions for the failure of Chinese democratization in the 20th century.[416] According to Thomas Lum, for example, the main obstacles to democratization in China include "effective social controls, the strength of informal politics and centralism, lack of intellectual autonomy, and lack of organizational capacity of mass groups."[417]

The Western literature evaluating the (un)democraticness of the Chinese political system usually highlights the absence of national competitive elections and opposition parties. In fact, the absence of national-level competitive elections and party systems actually proves only that the country in question cannot be called an electoral democracy, while it can be still democratic in a participatory, more original, sense of democracy. Competitive elections and a multi-party system are essentially procedures for facilitating accountability in representative democracies. However, China has explored its own methods of democratic accountability by introducing direct mass criticism. Therefore, the lack of national-level competitive elections and an opposition party system does not automatically negate Chinese democracy. Still, if it appears that China has not found effective means for guaranteeing democratic accountability, it is warranted to criticize China for not establishing an adequate electoral system.

Another Western approach looks for conditions or institutions that are essential for democracy in the West. This trend examines such questions as whether there will be wider powers for the representative organs, wider electoral choice, a more competitive party system and more press freedom.[418] These are totally legitimate questions worth studying. Nevertheless, they only tell about the existence and function of certain institutions, but they by no means reveal whether the country in question has other systems of political representation and competition. Already a half a century ago Gabriel Almond suggested that comparative politics should inquire into what kind of structures non-Western cultures have for political recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation, political communication, rule making, rule application and rule adjudication.[419] In non-Western countries these functions may diverge notably from those of the West. Of course, these functions need not be democratic, but some alternative forms are. After all, the ancient Athenian republic had different institutional arrangements than the contemporary Western states have for these functions and still was a democracy.

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416 Good introductions to this type of argumentation are Hu 2000 B and Nathan 2000.

417 Lum 2000, p. 165.

418 See, e.g., Pei 1995.

419 Almond 1960, pp. 16–17.

In addition, Western scholarship approaches the question of democratization from the pluralistic perspective. It assumes that social cleavages are important for understanding how different groups make demands on and negotiate with the state. Demands for interest representation can lead to democratization. Although, for example, professional, ethnic and religious cleavages are by no means unimportant in China, Chih-yu Shih criticizes this trend for forgetting the most relevant group a Chinese shares interest with, that of his own locality or unit.[420] Some researchers of ethnicity in China, such as Uradyn Bulag, emphasizes the negotiability of identities. Not only has the state defined and recognized a certain number of ethnic groups, but also inside each ethnic group people's identities are not exclusively based on ethnicity and the meaning of ethnicity changes along with state policies.[421] Evidently, Chinese institutions have an impact not only on how interests are represented but also on formation of interest groups. Furthermore, it cannot automatically be presumed that there cannot be adequate means for interest representation through the existing Chinese institutions.

As is evident, I see that a fruitful approach, for theoretical, practical, and predictive purposes alike, would be to analyze in what ways China actually pursues democratization. Some scholars have adopted this approach. Wang Juntao finds signs of "hazy" or "gray" democratization in China; Suzanne Ogden sees inklings of democracy; Minxin Pei detects creeping democratization in progress.[422] The negative version of this question would ask in what terms China has a deficient record in democracy and how this record could be improved. Scholarship should look for China's own way and evaluate, even criticize this development. This approach would provide sharper weapons for criticism than approaches based solely on differences from the customary Western practices. Instead, a dialogue is warranted to evaluate how China could improve its own efforts at democratization and where their approach is ineffective or even detrimental to reaching the aims the Chinese government itself pursues.

Starting from the assumption that China is authoritarian or that the Chinese political system is based on a unitary type of democracy, leads to very different conclusions about future democratization in China. If there is only one democratic model existing in modern times, namely liberal democracy, China either adopts this model or remains authoritarian. If there is more than one legitimate democratic system, China may adopt a very different path to democratization. The difference between these two approaches can be illustrated with John Dryzek's summary of the three dimensions democratization can involve. Democratization can

420 Shih 1999, p. 324.

421 Bulag 2000, p. 179.

422 Wang 1998, pp. 51–52; Ogden 2002; Pei 1995.

extend either franchise, scope, or authenticity. In other words, democratization may aim at expanding the proportion of the population that can participate effectively in politics, extending the range of issues under democratic control, or making democratic participation more substantial.[423] Evaluating the scope or authenticity of electoral democracy in China and even the franchise of national-level leadership selection prove disappointing. However, in terms of participatory democracy, franchise proves to be satisfactory in China and the scope of democracy involves many authentic local-level issues. Moreover, there is no contradiction in saying that in one country unitary democracy prevails while adversary democracy is underdeveloped; that is, this system is practicing unitary democracy on the local level and authoritarianism on the national level.

For those who expect liberal democracy to appear in China, the alternative that China already practices another form of democracy could be disappointing. It is commonsensical, although not necessarily true, to expect that citizens under authoritarianism would prefer a freer political system. But would people living under one kind of democracy yearn for another kind of democracy? Of course, in the real world the situation is not so dichotomous. Institutions of liberal democracy and unitary democracy are not mutually exclusive. Some Chinese intellectuals openly advocated liberal democracy and even the Chinese leadership has borrowed many institutions and practices from liberal democracy. Yet, if China widely practices unitary democracy, it is safe to assume that not all solutions of representative democracy will satisfy the Chinese ideals of democracy.

Moreover, exactly because the Chinese system, be it democratic or not, is not unresponsive to citizen demands, many benefits that Western theorists argue China would win with democratization are already served under the present political system. For example, not only negotiations between parties but also democratic centralism "coordinates pluralistic interests and creates legitimacy in a complex society."[424] After studying participation in Beijing, Tianjian Shi discovered that the Chinese system, even without political transformation and democratic infrastructure, already provides links that serve participants' interest articulation well. Therefore, wide participation in its current form is not likely to lead to the formation of political opposition and Western-style democratic processes.[425] As a consequence, I see no such pressing need for democratization in the Western sense as many of my colleagues do.

423 Dryzek 2000, p. 86.

424 Nathan 1998, p. 61.

425 Shi 1997, p. 276–279.

Scenarios of democratization

Scenarios for Chinese democratization usually expect that history in China should follow Western paths of development. According to scholars, possible ways of democratization include strengthening of the Chinese public sphere, creating workable democratic institutions, developing the economy, as well as encouraging democratic movements, autonomous associations, and opposition forces.[426] Privatization of economic life, adopting new ideas and pluralization inside the Communist Party and government can provide resources for democratization.[427] However, it is not certain that democratization in China will follow the Western path. Indeed, common features between democracies can be results of democratization,[428] or they can even betray Western ethnocentrism or cultural hegemonism.[429]

One common Western expectation for a catalyst for democratization is so-called snowballing, meaning that foreign examples cause yearnings for democracy in China.[430] Thus, many Western commentators and even scholars forecast that accesses to foreign mass media and the Internet will spread the foreign democratic example.[431] I would be much more skeptical, expecting that commercialized modern mass media, Western and Chinese alike, may even pacify discontent by providing entertainment and consumption models for the people rather than encouraging their political aspirations. Freer political information in the media hardly gives an altogether attractive picture of tje democratization pattern of formerly

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426 These arguments are introduced and weighed in Lum 2000. For an already disproved prognostication following this line, see Glassman 1991, which reveals extreme determinist post-1989 optimism and predicts that China will follow the example by previously socialist countries in East Europe and the Soviet Union.

427 Gilley 2004, pp. 62–72, 86–94.

428 Chan 2002, p. 63.

429 Extreme cultural hegemonism is evident in Huntington 1993 who claims that Christianity improves chances of adopting democracy in general (p. 45) and gives the weakness of Christianity in China as one cause for China not becoming democratic in the 1980s (p. 105). A common view that the Chinese will become more dissatisfied with their own political system and will find Western ideas attractive if they can travel abroad or have access to the Internet or foreign media (see, e.g., Diamond 2000, p. xii; Gilley 2004, p. 70) reveals the ethnocentric belief that others will automatically find our political system superior to their own if they receive information about it. After all, we do not expect that popular discontent will increase here in the West when people travel abroad or have an access to foreign media.

430 I borrowed the term from Huntington 1993, p. 100. For a scenario emphasizing foreign pressures and examples as catalyzers of Chinese democratization, see Gilley 2004, pp. 77–86.

431 Diamond 2000, p. xii.

socialist, but now politically and economically unstable Eastern Europe.[432] Likewise, political scandals, corruption, and violence attract much attention in the Western media, but these features hardly make Western democracies seem a model to emulate. Even internationally, practice does not demonstrate any direct connection between Western influence and democratization.[433] Besides, Thomas Lum reminds us that political will is not enough for democratization. Rather institutions, organizational norms, and elite political culture all have an influence in democratization.[434]

Some advocates expect that Chinese democratization will start from the crisis of authoritarian rule.[435] As a result, they look for signs of economic crisis and social discontent. These theorists often expect that either a widespread social movement overthrows the Chinese government or prompts the more liberal part of the elite to take power and democratize.[436] However, some writers who believe in regime change relatively soon in China caution that regime change probably does not lead to the establishment of a democratic system. Instead, social disintegration and regionalism are likely to strengthen the forces that favor authoritarian solutions to prevent chaos.[437] Others evaluate that collapse of the Communist Party rule is unlikely, perhaps because economic and ethnic problems in China have not reached crisis level and the breakdown of social control mechanisms is not imminent. Moreover, the sudden collapse of its political system would be a disaster for China.[438] As Gordon White argues, the Communist Party has served as the main source of social and economic integration in China. As a result, the old forms of political organization are seldom democratic and all possible challengers remain weak. The likely result of erosion of the Communist Party power is a state of ungovernability, which does not provide fertile soil for establishing a well-functioning multi-party system or even for finding the necessary consensus over the new institutional arrangements. After all, the multi-party system is designed to express rather than control social conflicts.[439]

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432 For the East European experience making the Chinese cautious about quick democratization, see Zhao 2000, p. 2.

433 Clark 2000, p. 167, demonstrates that the influence of the United States in Asia might even delay democratization. See also Steve Chan 2000, p. 182.

434 Lum 2000, pp. 8–9.

435 Gilley 2004, p. 9.

436 For the latter scenario, see Gilley 2004, pp. 98, 118–119. The expectation of a popular movement to overthrow the regime was common in the aftermath of widespread demonstrations in China in 1989 and the collapse of socialist rule in Eastern Europe. See, e.g., Glassman 1991.

437 Waldron 1998.

438 Lum 2000, pp. 165–168; Svensson 1994, p. 12.

439 White 1994 A, pp. 83–84.

Thomas Metzger reminds us that millions of Chinese have vested interests in the contemporary system, which still enjoys stability and legitimacy, because the regime has delivered prosperity and provided more social space.[440] Gordon White argues that China is a developmental state and is not ready for instant transition to democracy. In a poor country with low educational levels, it is difficult to achieve high levels of public awareness and representation of divergent social interests in national politics, although meaningful participation on the local level, where it is easier for the people to recognize their own interest, is possible.[441] Understandably, nowadays scholars mostly predict that authoritarianism will continue in China, but there will be a progress towards social and economic liberalization under a single-party regime maintaining strict political control.[442] Suzanne Ogden argues that Chinese reforms may even have enhanced the ability of the Communist Party to remain in power.[443] In addition, comparative political theorists assume that state control over the economy and corporatism are factors likely to reinforce authoritarian rule.[444] State intervention in the economy and corporatist arrangements are typical of China too.

If there is going to be Western type democratization in China, it most probably will be gradual.[445] Perhaps the autocratic regime will seek legitimacy and governability through institutionalization, providing an opportunity for other political actors to exploit the resulting institutions for protecting their own interests.[446] China might follow the usually successful Western and East Asian sequence and first liberalize its economy and establish the rule of law before democratization.[447] Even if China then starts a Western type of democratization, there would be many challenges on the road to electoral democracy. In China, sheer geographic size will cause difficulties surrounding the introduction of elections.[448]

Fast democratization in the third world, Asia, or post-communist countries has often led to less than ideal results. Indeed, hasty democratization can deepen social cleavages and lead to social instability or violence. It can also lead to disillusionment, when inherited problems, like inequality and poverty, remain or even intensify. Democratization can leave society vulnerable to special interests of the

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440 Metzger 1998, pp. 19–20, 24.

441 White 1994 A, pp. 78–83.

442 Scalapino 1998, p. 38; White 1999 (2), p. 670; Zhao 1998, pp. 58–59.

443 Ogden 2002, p. 356.

444 Diamond et al. 1995, p. 29, 31–32.

445 E.g. Friedman 2003, p. 103; Diamond 2003, Zhao 2003.

446 Pei 1995, pp. 66–67.

447 Zakaria 2003, pp. 55, 91–92.

448 Oksenberg 1998, p. 33.

powerful and in effect disenfranchise the poor majority.[449] Irregularities in newly introduced democratic processes do not enhance citizens' trust either. Too often newly democratized countries limit political competition, do not observe legal limits of power, persecute political opposition, or even engage in political violence.[450] Cal Clark argues that in Asia democracy is associated with policy perversions, such as political gridlock and strong, often corrupt, distributional coalitions.[451] These negative experiences have made theorists like Fareed Zakaria argue that democracy is likely to fail or lead to violation of rights if a liberal political culture does not precede democratization. For this reason, Zakaria openly lauds the Chinese way of liberalization before democratization.[452] Suzanne Ogden, then, argues that a stable one-party rule may outperform a multi-party system in its ability to develop the country and to represent the broad national interest instead of narrow sectoral interests.[453]

Whether democratization will be successful will depend also on the ordinary Chinese people's understanding of the need for and uses of democracy. Some Western writers take popular yearning for democracy as granted.[454] As long as the evaluation relies on a scholar's personal impression and discussions with Chinese people, one can always find in China individual people who either prioritize democratization or feel democracy is not a pressing problem or even think that China is already proceeding satisfactorily in democratization. Summarizing his experiences, Harry Harding writes, "Relatively few Chinese regard democratic

449 Ogden 2002, p. 355; Pan 2003, pp. 18–19; UNDP 2002, p. 63; White 1994 A, p. 81–83.

450 UNDP 2002, pp. v.

451 Clark 2000, pp. 174–175.

452 Zakaria 2003, pp. 91–92.

453 Ogden 2002, p. 263.

454 For the view that ordinary people want democracy, but leaders obstruct democratization, see, e.g., Gilley 2004, pp. 15, 80. Bruce Gilley even writes: "those who advocate dictatorship, in China or elsewhere, have a burden to show that the people of these countries, if given a chance, would agree that it was a better system ..." (Gilley 2004, p. 10). Actually, advocates of democracy have the burden of proof, since they assume that the people in a certain country have wants which they themselves do not express (whether out of fear or out of disinterest). Some opponents of the conception of democracy under socialist systems criticize it for talking about abstract, not actual, people (Holden 1974, pp. 42, 44). A liberal democrat should not commit the same mistake when talking about subjects of socialist rule.

Furthermore, we find not only culturalist, but also majoritarian bias here. It is not self-evident that people with different cultural backgrounds share the same values as the writer. It is also questionable that majoritarian solutions are always preferred, especially in non-Western cultures. It is rational to prefer a solution that satisfies all to some extent, instead of prioritizing the majority preference. In other words, this rationality favors consensual or conservative solutions. Thus in addition to not proving that a majority wants democratization, the above-mentioned assumption does not prove that the culture in question would prioritize majority will.

institutions as ends in themselves; instead, they support whatever political system can govern their country best."[455] Surveys quoted by Suzanne Ogden do not demonstrate the centrality of democratization in the Chinese aspirations. Instead these studies reveal that the quality of personal life or political conditions for individual wellbeing, such as social order, economic growth, peace, social equality and environmental protection are prior to issues concerning the political system.[456]

Non-Western path of democratization

Instead of Westernization of the Chinese political system, I would inquire into the possibility of indigenization of democracy. Democracy will hardly work without a value system that supports it, but the values it is based on need not be liberal. It is enough that this political value system encourages political elites and commoners to act in democratic ways and respect democratic institutions. Gradual building of democratic institutions starting from local needs and political cultures probably brings more lasting results than hasty adoption of foreign models. In this regard, Douglass North emphasizes that apart from formal institutions there are informal rules of conduct, and these informal, cultural constraints may have substantive continuity even when formal institutions change.[457] Therefore all institutions need indigenization to work well in the new environment.

In the West, development of modern democracy relied on the middle class demanding more political representation and economic liberalization. Thus, modernization theory presumes that better education and middle class values will increase support for democratization.[458] It sees democracy as needing individualist values, the rule of law, and a civil society with economy and intelligentsia independent from the state, and assumes that a liberal economy and the rise of a middle class could produce them.[459] Accordingly, many scholars see that the growth of the private economy with the emergence of a special middle class interest, improving the level of education, urban values, and the availability of foreign ideas will create pressures for and eventually cause democratization in China.[460]

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455 Harding 1998, p. 15.

456 Ogden 2002, pp. 123–124, 177–178.

457 North 1990, p. 91.

458 Diamond et al. 1995, pp. 22–23 (note their qualifications too); Gilley 2004, pp. 64–66; Huntington 1993, p. 69; Zakaria 2003, p. 63.

459 Lum 2000, pp. 11–12.

460 Nathan 1998, p. 61; White 1994 A, p. 82; Zhao 2003, p. 354; Yee and Wang 1999, p. 42. Huntington 1993, pp. 68, even blames the smallness of Chinese middle class for unsuccessful democratization in China.

Yet, Andrew Nathan remarks that although conditions for democratization seem to be ripening, it is difficult to identify a political force in China likely to start the process.[461]

Cal Clark demonstrates that although superficially it may seem that general Asian democratization follows the pattern set in the Western theories, a closer look reveals that Asian democratization has correlated little with modernization and economic development.[462] Indeed, although East Asian economic growth created a sizable middle class, it was ready to accept quite limited political participation, until very recently.[463] David Goodman points out that in East Asia, middle classes have often grown out of state-driven modernization programs, making their relation to the state relatively harmonious.[464] Actually, the idea of democracy was imported to East Asia to serve for these same state-promoted modernization programs. Andrew Nathan emphasizes that the ideal of democracy arrived in China not through the middle class demand for a share of power but through a will to adopt Western modernity and was seen as a tool for rulers in economic development.[465] Some scholars even question the causality between capitalism and democratization. Chih-yu Shih suggests that economic liberalization may bring rights, but does not guarantee equality in the policy-making process.[466]

Up to now, the Chinese entrepreneurial middle class has not been very, or has been ambiguously, societal- or democratic-minded. Instead, personal relations to political leaders have been a more usual channel to influencing than open social action or association.[467] Bourgeois class awareness remains underdeveloped since its clientelist relationships to the state undermine horizontal class loyalties and ties. Such relations to the state are not confrontational.[468] An Chen explains that the Chinese bourgeoisie is often connected with the state bureaucracy or even originating from it. This means that many already have political influence, and those who do not usually look for cooperative relationships with authorities. When they seek for more political power, they tend to seek it by joining the establishment, such as through Party membership. Hence, members of the Chinese middle class seldom need to demand political rights for themselves. They may even fear that democratization would open up opportunities for everyone and jeopardize their

461 Nathan 1998, p. 62.

462 Clark 2000, pp. 160–167.

463 Steve Chan 2000, p. 185.

464 Goodman 1999, pp. 241–242.

465 Nathan 1986, p. xi.

466 Shih 1999, p. xiii.

467 E.g. He 1996, pp. 183–184; Wank 1995 A, pp. 61–70.

468 Lum 2000, pp. 14, 166.

special status.[469] Even less they want majority rule, because they are a well-to-do minority vulnerable to demands for more equality by the majority. Therefore, most of them want rule of law to protect property rights rather than empowerment of the people.[470] Moreover, the middle class is small in China compared to rural population, possibly too small to constitute a driving force for democratization.[471]

Even intellectuals will not necessarily prove to be a democratizing force. Merle Goldman maintains that most intellectuals have not a democratic, but a rational and technological outlook. Even democratic intellectuals tend to believe that in democracy the educated should govern and that they can speak for the people.[472] Current intellectual trends emphasize either the postmodernist and post-colonialist critique of the hegemony of Western definitions of modernity, its political practices included, or the cultivation of personal integrity, instead of political change, as a remedy for contemporary social ills.[473] Even among intellectuals there are not only democratic, but also neo-authoritarian voices. Most intellectuals grade stability over democratization. Even democrats among them often claim that China needs an indigenous form of democracy in which rule of law and social liberalization are pronounced, but truly competitive elections and independent political organizations are not necessary.[474] Chinese intellectuals often rely on the state for their income and sociopolitical status. When they demand democracy, they engage in loosely-structured and non-confrontational activities like offering advice to the government. Periods of organization and public expression have been short-lived and dissidents are few.[475] However, Suzanne Ogden sees that such non-confrontational activities have been effective in achieving greater political pluralization and even democratization.[476]

Moreover, surveys contain no evidence that those having the best access to foreign information, namely educated middle-class urbanites, have become more democracy-minded than before. Quite the contrary, their attitudes may have become more apolitical than in preceding decades.[477] Moreover, middle class attitudes seem not to be more democratic than in the populace in general. Income seems to be an irrelevant factor in Beijing for predicting whether respondents

469 Chen 2002, pp. 410–420.

470 Chen 2002, pp. 410–420; Wang 1998, pp. 50, 52.

471 Chen An 1999, p. 5.

472 Goldman 1994, pp. 2, 7. She speaks about the 1980s, but these opinions are common also today.

473 Xu 2001, p. 132, 134.

474 Harding 1998, p. 15; Scalapino 1998, p. 39; Wang 1998, p. 48.

475 Lum 2000, pp. 118–121.

476 Ogden 2002, p. 352.

477 Zhao 2000, p. 2; Dowd et al. 2000, pp. 189, 202–204.

value democracy and individual freedom.[478] Likewise, economic progress does not seem to correlate with democratic aspirations in the Chinese countryside. Tianjian Shi shows that both poor and well-to-do villages were less likely to have competitive village elections than areas of middle-level development. Middle-level development areas are most likely to pay attention to popular opinion, because they are most dependent on peasants' cooperation in both administration and public projects. In rich villages, both village leaders and villagers have vested interests in continuation of the rule that has generated prosperity for the village.[479]

Survey data reveals that in mainland China older people and those having low level of education seem to value democracy. Dowd, Carlson and Shen find this to be against their predictions, since the less educated are less exposed to Western values.[480] Still another survey establishes that traditional values correlate positively with political participation in China.[481] To me all of this evidence suggests that in China those having been socialized into the traditional Maoist participatory values embrace democracy and popular political participation. This seems to contradict both of the Western assumptions that the middle class would be crucial to democratization and that the civil society would be the main arena to learn democratic action and values.

Along with the less educated, there is another unexpected group that walks at the forefront of democratization in China. Tianjian Shi points out that in China democratization did not originate in cities among the middle class, but in the countryside among peasants.[482] After elections had proved to be an efficient method for replacing unpopular leaders in some villages, peasants in other villages became active in nominating their own candidates throughout the country.[483] Peasants are likely to have internalized the earlier political education for popular inclusion in participatory politics. Elections in villages were by no means unfamiliar in the countryside during the period of collectivized agriculture.[484] Hence, peasants are now able to demand reestablishment and improvement of institutions resembling their customary institutions, especially when they receive

478 Dowd et al. 2000, pp. 197, 200–203.

479 Shi 2000 A, pp. 244–246. See also Chen Weixing 1999, pp. 69–70.

480 Dowd et al. 2000, p. 193–196, 200–203.

481 Kuan and Lau 2002.

482 Shi 1999, pp. 386–389, 411; Shi 2000 A, p. 234. The original argument by the modernization theory is that modernization is faster in urban areas, where democratic values and behavior thus develops faster. This argument and prediction that urbanization in China is beneficial for democratization appears, e.g., in Ogden 2002, p. 92.

483 Shi 1999, pp. 402–403.

484 Burns 1978.

central support for their demands.[485] However, not all peasants look forward to democratization. There are fears that democracy would extend the state's intrusive and extractive capacities rather than increase leadership accountability and popular control over village affairs.[486]

Village self-rule developing in the Chinese countryside challenges the Western theory of democratization in another way too. In the Western theory, civil society is crucial for democratization, since it can monitor and resist abuses of state power; bring pressure for democratization; train new political elites; provide channels for participation, independent information, and expression of interests; and is the arena for civic education in democratic values.[487] However, the Chinese peasants' pursuit of democracy seems to suggest that civil society is not the only arena to learn democratic values and practices; the state can alco teach them. After decades of state-organized and mobilized participation, peasants now know how to use the skills thus acquired to pursue their own aims.

Thomas Metzger argues that liberal democratic thought is unlikely to take root in China any time soon because the basic assumptions of this ideal are themselves something that Chinese intellectuals tend to regard as problems of Western civilization. In writings by many Chinese intellectuals, the liberal ideal of fallible men competing in a political market and monitoring an incorrigible state is interpreted as the rule of morally and intellectually low impulses.[488] Hence, not only the idea of rule by the morally and intellectually superior men that many scholars have identified as a part of the Communist Chinese conception of democracy,[489] but also the democratic centralist ideal that each individual participating in politics must be educated to see the common good, are logical consequences of a cultural tradition that some legitimately value over the Western liberal tradition.

Future democratization

The Chinese are not prisoners of their political culture and are, thus, free to reject old forms of political influencing and choose new ones. Therefore, it is not impossible that mainland China would some day have an opposition party system. Yet, continuities are certain if the democratization takes place in an evolutionary way

485 The collective ideal has not had only political, but also economic meaning for villagers. In some villages collective agriculture has left the conception that individual fields are too small a unit of cultivation, and after redistribution of land to households mutual assistance either in cultivation or in the use of technology remains, now on a voluntary basis. (Judd 1994, p. 35.)

486 O'Brien 1994 A, pp. 51–53, 59.

487 Diamond et al. 1995, pp. 27–29, 55.

488 Metzger 1998, pp. 21–22.

489 He 2000.

under the Communist Party and are to be expected also in the case of regime turnover. Regardless of what kind of government China is going to have in the future, familiar institutions and practices will shape political culture and political institutions. Even the ways possible alternative power bases will organize themselves and articulate their positions are likely to be influenced by the existing political culture. For example, Democracy Wall Movement activists learned their practices of public critique in the Cultural Revolution,[490] while the official state-promoted organization patterns influenced the ways that student protesters in 1989 organized themselves.[491] Even if Western-style democratization takes place in China, present institutions and practices might have influence in the pace and pattern of democratization. As An Chen argues, institutionalization of citizen participation and representation can make transition to democracy smoother.[492] Democracy can be consolidated faster if it can be built on at least some familiar elements. This means that future democratic institutions in China will not be copies of Western institutions. They have not been elsewhere in Asia either. Indeed, in Asian democracies institutions central to democracy in the West, such as parties, legislatures, and autonomous civil society have been underdeveloped.[493]

My own prognosis is that the short-term development in China will be an evolutionary process of democratization under the Communist Party leadership. In the long term, other power bases will surely emerge, although it will probably take decades before any of them is powerful enough to challenge the Communist Party. In any case, the Party will remain a powerful actor in this future situation. If opposition forces emerge but remain fragmented, the Party is likely to continue to dominate the political scene and many interests might seek access to decision making through it instead of through opposition parties. This is the model of the Liberal Democratic Party dominance in Japan. If the opposition one day succeeds in riding on political and social discontent and the Communist Party loses its ruling position in a turnover, electoral perhaps, the Party will remain in the political arena and continues to compete for power. The Eastern European experience demonstrates that former, now democratized, Communist Parties can compete successfully in the multi-party political arena.

Whatever the democratizing process, the democratic centralist background would suggest that China will not democratize along the Western path. China simply has so strong a deliberative and participatory tradition that a purely liberal form of democracy is unlikely. With numerous well established methods of popular input, it seems unlikely that either Chinese elites or citizens would want to take

490 Goldman 2002, p. 163.

491 Wasserstrom and Liu 1995, pp. 384–389.

492 Chen An 1999, p. 9.

493 Clark 2000, p. 177.

elections as the primary means for popular input. Some surveys indeed demonstrate that commoners demand accountability through systems taking people's opinions into account, rather than through elections.[494] Likewise, some Chinese intellectuals argue that Chinese democratization should proceed towards "consultative rule of law." The system should provide extensive social consultation arrangements "so as to make the regime accountable to various social demands, though not a surrender to those demands."[495] These democratic centralist type of demands indicate that the existing political culture has an effect on which forms of political institutions are viewed as desirable.

Elections surely will have a place in Chinese democratization as a method for forging accountability. Still, the democratic centralist institutional design has had an impact on the Chinese electoral system.[496] The most important elections in this system are not elections of parliaments and presidents, but elections on the level nearest to the voter. There are other practical reasons for China to have introduced such an electoral system. On the grassroots level, the electorate is familiar with candidates and organizing local elections needs fewer resources and less political knowledge than national-level elections do. Presently, the Chinese electoral system above the directly elected local level consists of a hierarchy of indirect elections, but there are ideas and experiments for gradually extending this system to the next higher levels. Yet almost all other transitional states have adopted the design stressing national-level elections familiar from the West. Thus the Chinese exceptionality needs an explanation.

I could see two possible democratic centralist reasons for introducing elections from local levels up. One has to do with political culture: When popular political influence is customarily seen to proceed step by step through the administrative hierarchy, it would be logical to open up each layer one by one in the same order to direct electoral control. Starting from the local level up has an evident logic. As John Bryan Starr observes, questions deeply affecting a person are often deemed more important than national politics in Chinese participation schemes.[497] Another reason is theoretical: Since the mass line mostly takes place through local leaders, it makes sense to emphasize electoral control over these particular leaders. This not only empowers people locally, but also helps them to guarantee that their gatekeeper to the political system relays their wants and needs to the system effectively and accurately. Hence, elections on the mass line level should guarantee

494 Ogden 2002, pp. 212–213.

495 Pan 2003, pp. 33–38.

496 I refer to the existing Chinese institutional design here. The pyramidal design is not the only possible democratic centralist design, but it is the one the Chinese actually have.

497 Starr 1979, p. 213.

that they have an access to the political system through which they ideally become empowered within the whole system.

Existing institutions have an impact on articulation and representation of plural interests. Therefore, existence of an interest itself does not automatically lead to seeking channels for interest representation that are familiar to the Western democracies. As Tianjian Shi concludes, in China the present system provides links that serve participants' interest articulation well, but are unlikely to lead to formation of political opposition. Therefore, the Chinese example shows that wide popular participation is not dependent on the Western democratic infrastructure.[498] Still, I assume that political pluralization is going to continue in China and interest representation will become more open. Currently functional representation and representation of interests within the administrative system through bureaucratic agencies have provided channels for interest representation. The network mode of governance[499] is likely to continue, because East Asian political culture seems to favor intra-elite consensus building.[500] The Japanese example shows that the dominant party with superior connections to administration, social interests, and ordinary citizens can use such a system to guarantee it a position in political and social negotiations. In Japan, this system has enhanced the rule of the Liberal Democrats even within the context of a multi-party system.[501] Thus, my prediction is that a comparable system in China will prolong the Communist Party rule.

The deliberative political culture will probably have an impact on the formation of more assertive systems of representation in the future. On a surface level, the deliberative ideal would suggest that instead of pursuit of interests, political representation would form along different ideas of development. For example, the Chinese leadership has been divided between ideological and value-based questions like whether to promote more egalitarian or more growth-oriented economic development. However, the Communist Party monopoly of ideology sets limits on the development of legitimate ideological platforms. Therefore, I still assume that if interest-based political groups strengthen in the future, they need to recognize the priority of the general interest. If this situation continues, political groups would not be very stable because their members are expected to independently form opinions on issues other than the ones they have a mandate to

498 Shi 1997, p. 276–279.

499 A term coined by Xia 2000, pp. 192, 213.

500 Apter and Sawa 1984, p. 204; Broadbent 1998, pp. 28, 92–95, 132–133, 294–295, 347.

501 For Liberal Democratic Party connections with bureaucracy, powerful social interests, and voters, see, e.g., Broadbent 1998, pp. 188–196; Curtis 1999, p. 62; Hrebenar 1992, pp. 271–277.

represent.[502] Still, it is not impossible that regional and social interest representation will strengthen and break out of the present restraints.

What could be local traditions that might influence Chinese democratization? Legitimacy arising from material care for subjects' needs is pervasive in Chinese conceptions of good governance and even democracy.[503] Hence, the aspect of social welfare will probably be central in Chinese politics even in the future. This assumption is supported by the evidence from non-socialist East Asian republics, which have been able to combine economic growth and wide distribution of wealth. Another probable continuity would be a particularistic political culture, in which political contacting even in personal matters would be normal.[504] Apart from democratic centralism, such politics originate in the Confucian emphasis on benevolent officials considering each case in its personal and social context. Unfortunately, such a political tradition has led to distributional, even corrupt politics in those East Asian countries that have allowed direct popular pressures to reach the top levels of policy making. For the same reason, regionalism and a personality-centered party system is typical of countries like Korea, Taiwan and to some extent Japan.[505] Centrality of administration in policy making, at the cost of legislatures, is not only socialist but also an East Asian characteristic.[506] It is thus likely to remain in China. Consultative but exclusive decision making is another similarity between Chinese democratic centralism and Japanese democratic politics.[507] Therefore, the transparency of the Chinese inter-agency consensus building is not likely to be increased anytime soon. Still, Suzanne Ogden argues that deliberation and consensus building in the Chinese political system, although still mainly among elites, could even be a key to Chinese democratization.[508] Finally, the tradition of a ruling Party accommodating different perspectives and interests may be pervasive, since this pattern seems to be suited to the political culture in some other countries influenced by Confucianism if we can judge from the stability of one-party rule not only in China, but also in Japan.

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502 In other words, representatives of a certain interest or a region can have a united voice in issues concerning the interest they are representing, but should promote common good in other issues. This model diverges from the Western models of party platforms or representation of multiple interests within a delegates' constituency.

503 This *minben* ideal is introduced in Nathan 1986, pp. 125–130.

504 It is normal also in Japan, where one function of the Liberal Democratic Party politicians' campaign organizations (*koenkai*) is to provide particular services for voters, such as marriage or job introductions (Abe et al. 1994, pp. 177–179).

505 E.g. Helgesen 1998, pp. 198–205; Kang 2003.

506 Tanner 1999, p. 120.

507 Apter and Sawa 1984, p. 204.

508 Ogden 2002, p. 257. She credits this deliberative political culture to the traditional ideal of harmony.

My prediction is that in China democratization will be an uneven development in which there will be more than one pace and road for democratization. China has often been supportive of local innovation, partly because of infrastructural problems of central control and partly because of the democratic centralist ideal of local implementation. Already now democratization has benefited from various local innovations in the electoral system and village autonomy.[509] This multiplicity of local procedures will, at least in the short run, mean that local practices and even institutions vary.

My assumption is that progress in villages as natural communities with strong social cohesion proceeds towards systems of participatory and communitarian types of democracy, while the impersonal, atomized city context might provide a fertile ground for liberal-type democracy emphasizing individual self-determination and electoral representation. Village democracy can derive directly from customary administrative forms and units, while downsizing of state industries and urban transformation relocating residents into new suburbs has made Chinese urban life increasingly non-communal. Atomization is contributing to attitudinal change as well. In Beijing, older people tend value democracy, while the younger prefer individual freedom.[510] This suggests that in cities not democratic but individualist values are on the rise. Thus, individual self-determination is becoming preferred over collectively managed services. Although at the moment individualist values find their outlet mostly in the economic field, it is not impossible that in the future urbanites will demand more political say. Quite likely, ordinary urbanites will then seek democratic representation and possibly derive inspiration from Western models. Thus, the expectation that the middle class will prove crucial for democracy in China is not necessarily wrong, but the democracy it promotes will not be the only form of democracy in the future China.

509 Local innovations include not only innovations within electoral systems, such as more democratic forms of nominations, but also systems themselves, such as popular Party election primaries or township head elections. See Li 1999 and He and Lang 2000.

510 Dowd et al. 2000, pp. 189, 202.

DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM, AND THE LIMITS AND STRENGTHS OF THE STATE

In this chapter I will compare the Chinese theory of democratic centralism with some Western theories and understandings about the Chinese society. Western academic research scrutinizes China through certain theoretical frameworks, some of them widely shared, others more controversial. This chapter aims at establishing dialogue between Western models and the Chinese theory of democratic centralism. Although the Chinese origin does not necessarily make the theory of democratic centralism a more accurate description of actual Chinese policy-making processes than foreign models are, knowledge about domestic perceptions and motivations can help to construct more credible and complete models. Thereby, knowledge about domestic theories can facilitate Western theory formation and render more accuracy to Western images of China.

Although the Chinese theory does not depict the Chinese polity as it is, it sheds light on Chinese reasons for certain institutional arrangements or administrative practices. Rather than providing a description of Chinese realities, the theory of democratic centralism can explain motivations. Thus, it can provide alternative explanations for certain phenomena the Western research has investigated.

In a limited sense, comparison between domestic and Western theories can be used to test theories. It gives support to both approaches if the Chinese and Western theories both seek to explain the same phenomena or if their explanations converge. Although indigenous and foreign theories often deal with different kinds of questions,[1] it is not uncommon that some common patterns and problems appear in both. Although a unique viewpoint does not discredit a theory, it becomes more likely that phenomena under scrutiny are relevant when indigenous and foreign theories independently pinpoint the same phenomena. In these situations theory comparison can show where more empirical evidence is needed. When two explanations differ considerably, demonstration of difference may help construction of research hypotheses to test the validity of alternative theoretical explanations.

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1 For example, the Chinese theory of democratic centralism deals with political communication, while many Western approaches are interested in the scope of state power.

Totalitarianism

One common but controversial image of Chinese society is totalitarian,[2] although no serious scholarship applies it to reform-era China. Totalitarianism would assume that in countries ruled by the Communist Parties the state has direct control over every sphere of society and all individuals. There would be no horizontal links strong enough to form an independent society between atomized individuals.[3] A totalitarian country would be thoroughly controlled through terror and propaganda. All political decisions would be made by the highest possible state and Party organs. When it comes to political communication inside a totalitarian country, the press would only be a medium for repeating official ideology in order to indoctrinate and mobilize the people behind the ruling Party values and aims.

Conceptually, totalitarianism is logically problematic, because it assumes causality between unrelated aspects. As Jack Lively correctly observes, "Democracy is to do essentially with the locus of power, totalitarianism with its extent; the contraposing of the two is bound to lead to confusion."[4] Tang Tsou points out another basic error in the concept of totalitarianism. According to him, it mistakenly lumps regime type and state-society relations together, although these are two separate dimensions of a political system.[5] Moreover, in Western China studies the theory of totalitarianism suffers from vague use of the concept,[6] to the degree that its use appears tautological.[7]

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2 For a representative list of Western China studies using totalitarianism and other elite theory models, see Shue 1988, pp. 12–16. Many scholars who do not buy the whole totalitarian framework still share certain central totalitarian assumptions about the Chinese polity. Most of my critique of totalitarianism here includes all approaches that view China through a lens emphasizing (1) elite theory approach to power, (2) repressive control, and (3) non-existence of socially initiated organization. I am especially critical to the assumption that all power emanates from the center and is used by a few powerful individuals, as if a few leaders' will could somehow unfailingly be imposed on society.

3 Talmon 1955, p. 250.

4 Lively 1975, p. 57.

5 Tsou 2000, p. 236.

6 To demonstrate this, I analyze here just one argument. Andrew Nathan has taken a common schoolbook list of characteristics of totalitarianism as his definition. According to this characterization, a totalitarian state conforms to six criteria: "a totalist ideology, a single ruling party led by a dictator, a secret police that carries out political terror, a monopoly of mass communication, a monopoly of political organizations, and monopolistic state economy" (Nathan 1997, p. 49). The earliest form of Nathan's list that I have seen appeared in Friedrich and Brzezinski 1956, pp. 9–10. However, they listed these six features to describe traits all totalitarian countries possess, some in common with other types of modern governments. Using this list of characteristics as a definition of totalitarianism, as Andrew Nathan does, blurs the difference between some features facilitating totalitarianism and the essence of totalitarianism. This essence is rather total state control, rule by terror, and total state intrusion in

As totalitarianism makes too many claims at the same time, it is not surprising to find that in actual situations we find some features of totalitarianism in China, while others remain absent. He Baogang argues that a totalitarian-democratic dichotomy does not hold in transitional political systems like China. Thus, China can be partly totalitarian, and partly enjoy distorted forms of rights and freedoms.[8] Even the Cultural Revolution with certain totalitarian features, such as political purges, personality cult, and ideology based on loyalty to the leader, was simultaneously the time of autonomous association and unofficial publication among activist youth and workers. Thus, Brantly Womack has typified this period as quasi-totalitarian.[9]

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society. For example, Hannah Arendt hardly sees the features listed by Andrew Nathan as sufficient conditions for totalitarianism. She, for example, maintains an analytical difference between totalitarianism and one-party systems (Arendt 1966, p. 310) as well as between authoritarian and totalitarian one-man leadership (Arendt 1966, pp. 364–365). Although I do not claim that all definitions of totalitarianism should be exactly the same as Hannah Arendt's, a scientific definition should never make a concept lose its accuracy.

Moreover, Andrew Nathan replaces some of Friedrich and Brzezinski's features with others. Instead of concluding that China is possibly non-totalitarian because it does not fit into the original characterization, he tries to construct a special Chinese form of totalitarianism. Without crediting Andrew Walder, although obviously deriving from his insight, Nathan claims, for example, that work units were the instrument of political terror in China (Nathan 1997, p. 49). Here he forgets that Walder formulated his theory about work unit control in order to refute the totalitarian model. (Walder 1986, pp. 2–7.) Walder intends to demonstrate that the Chinese political control largely took place through political rewards and particularistic incentives based on personal relations. This hardly counts as terror. Nathan also maintains that a special feature of "Chinese totalitarianism" is that the Chinese leadership relied on the military rather than the secret police as a trump card in inner-party politics (Nathan 1997, p. 49). However, classical theorists of totalitarianism tend to see military rule as a form of authoritarianism rather than totalitarianism. Hannah Arendt takes it as a sign not of totalitarianism but detotaliarization if the army becomes the primary coercive institution instead of the secret police (Arendt 1966, p. xx), while Friedrich and Brzezinski not only distinguish between totalitarian systems and traditional dictatorships in which the power of the regime relies on the army, but also see that the military itself is a potential basis for resistance to the totalitarian rule (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1956, pp. 273–281).

7 Using the above mentioned criteria (Nathan 1997, p. 49), all communist one-party systems practicing planned state economy can be classified as totalitarian states by definition. A communist party is an ideological party; under state ownership the state owns the media; all states have organs or units performing functions of the secret police. Tautologies are logically true, no empirical evidence can prove or falsify them. That is, professor Nathan's definition says nothing about how much political repression the people face under a communist party's political rule and planned economic system. Actually even Hannah Arendt classified Mussolini's Italy as a non-totalitarian state, because it did not practice large-scale state terror (Arendt 1966, pp. 308–309), despite its corporatist economy and ideological one-party system.

8 He 1996, p. 230.

9 Womack 1991 A, p. 77.

The totalitarian model makes sense as an ideal type only.[10] As Hannah Arendt, a famous theorist of totalitarian tradition, herself asserted, totalitarian logic is fully realized only in concentration camps.[11] Normally some forms of social life and networks exist and state control remains only partial. Further, it seems unlikely that one or a few top leaders could make a populace of millions, even hundreds of millions follow its orders unfailingly. Even with a highly efficient bureaucracy and secret police a minority is assigned to supervise the majority. The result would be either far less than total control or a highly ineffective organization suffering from serious information overload. As Wenfang Tang and William Parish remark, the totalitarian model is inadequate because it ignores necessary bargaining processes within any large organization and the inability to maintain tight control when organizations become larger.[12]

As an ideal type, totalitarianism is immune to empirical counterevidence.[13] Even worse, the totalitarian theory is untestable on the basis of citizen behavior, or even of expressed opinions, since any system supporting comment could be interpreted as repeating official propaganda because of fear or indoctrination. Totalitarian theory does not recognize rational support for the system, because of, say, improving living standards, access to education, or gender equality.[14] Even less probable, according to a believer in totalitarianism, would be that a commoner could be satisfied with the system because it takes into account his interests or even opinions.

It actually seems that the Chinese themselves do not recognize they are living under a repressive or even intrusive state system. Andrew Nathan and Shi Tianjian are puzzled with their finding that the Chinese, compared to other nationali-

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10 Sartori 1987, p. 200. Instead of even claiming to be descriptions of reality, ideal types are analytical devices, which should help us in dealing with some essential features. It is, thus, allowable to ponder to what extent the totalitarian ideal type describes Mao-era China. For example, Jonathan Unger notes that the term "totalitarian" is true in the sense that the state could intervene in local affairs with dramatic results, but China differs from the Soviet Union since "in China the reach of the Party-state in the countryside was considerably more penetrating and comprehensive, not least because ... the Chinese Party had succeeded in gaining large numbers of adherents within the villages." (Unger 2002, p. 26.)

11 Arendt 1966, pp. 455–456.

12 Tang and Parish 2000, p. 185.

13 In other words, this would make it a non-falsifiable theory, see Popper 1959. I am fully aware that Popper, using his insight to question how scientific Marxism was, himself believed that socialist countries were totalitarian.

14 Wenfang Tang and William Parish have demonstrated that the Mao era to some extent fulfilled these promises of "social contract". This seems to indicate that many ordinary Chinese had rational rather than indoctrinated or emotional reasons to support the system. On increasing opportunities and improving living conditions during the Mao era, see Tang and Parish 2000, pp. 34–41; Gao 1999; Han 2001.

ties, feel that their government has not much impact on their lives.[15] Recognizing that the Chinese state extends to the grassroots and controls many fields Western governments do not, this result needs to be explained. Perhaps the Chinese government is not so intrusive and monopolistic as the Western theories have expected, because it is possible to avoid control or bend rules.[16] Possibly the Chinese do not find this control intrusive because they generally recognize its reasonableness. At least Victor Shaw, after having researched grassroots controls in practice, observes that social control in China, being instituted along with the basic arrangements of work and life, is perceived as necessary and reasonable. People internalize social control, which takes place through positive identification with the group and its responsibilities to the central authority. Control is non-confrontational, non-alienative, non-exclusive, flexible and negotiable. If people find control unreasonable they can try to fine-tune or revise it. Moreover, the sense of control is ameliorated by the accompanying benefits, when controllers are required to help and do good things for their subordinates.[17] In addition, democratic centralist norms encouraging the government to take into consideration popular opinions and make its decisions understandable through political education may facilitate internalization of social control.

Since totalitarianism is an ideal type only, instead of a social reality perhaps one should inquire into whether the Chinese leaders and Party attempted to centralize all power, atomize individuals and control them trough propaganda and terror. Although there is evidence that memories of systematic victimization during former political campaigns caused conformity towards state demands among the populace,[18] at the same time the state recognized articulation of social interests.[19] Evidently, atomization was not on the agenda or it was balanced with activities strengthening communal social ties.[20] Stuart Schram maintains that Mao Zedong actually regarded too much centralization to be self-defeating.[21] The mass-line ideology itself seems to indicate that even some political initiatives from below were welcomed, unlike the totalitarian presumption. After quantita-

15 Nathan and Shi 1997, pp. 155–161. However, perhaps there has been considerable change in this feeling, since an earlier survey by Andrew Nathan rendered different results (Nathan 1986, p. 170). It seems that in the 1970s people really felt that the state had an impact on ordinary people's lives, although the fact that emigrant Chinese were interviewed for this survey might have some influence on this result.

16 Salmenkari 2004; Walder 1986; Oi 1991.

17 Shaw 1996, pp. 234–235.

18 Chan et al. 1984.

19 To Hannah Arendt, Mao's admission of contradictions among the people hints itself at the non-totalitarian character of the Chinese system (Arendt 1966, p. x).

20 Shue 1988, pp. 54–69.

21 Schram 1989, p. 104.

tive research about political participation in Beijing, Tianjian Shi concluded that, unlike the expectation of totalitarianism, Chinese leaders do not suppress all interest articulation but allow and even invite political articulation that does not challenge the Party or its policy line. The state even encourages citizens to pursue low-politics issues in their daily environment.[22]

One aspect of totalitarianism appears testable. Totalitarianism requires massive bureaucracy executing central policies unfailingly.[23] Totalitarianism can hardly take place if bureaucracies cannot or will not execute policies strictly according to the central command. Indeed, totalitarianism expects that socialist rule actualizes in industrialized, bureaucratized environments, not in agrarian countries like China.[24] Western scholars questioning the totalitarian theory have tried to demonstrate that the Chinese bureaucratic apparatus was far too incomplete and ineffective for the needs of a totalitarian government. One strategy is to demonstrate weaknesses in the state reach to localities and society. Vivienne Shue argues that although the Chinese administrative hierarchical chain was long, in reality it was understaffed and functionally unspecified. Hence, this state hierarchy could not maintain very extensive integration with society.[25] The Chinese central state control was often indirect and it employed instruments ambivalently located between state and society that could frustrate some central state aims.[26] Barrett McCormick goes so far as to argue that the Chinese bureaucracy was not of the efficient rational-legal type, but of patrimonial type. Patrimonial authority is based on personal loyalties instead of office-specific duties and blurs the bureaucratic demarcation between private and official spheres. Such an organization is inefficient compared to rational-legal bureaucracies. Its charismatic legitimacy itself undercuts prospects for efficient bureaucratic rule.[27] Naturally, the bureaucracy a fully totalitarian system requires is of the rational-legal type.

Another trend stresses that the Chinese state was either unwilling or unable to keep its own ranks in strict order. Some researchers emphasize unspecified

22 Shi 1997, pp. 44–45.

23 Friedrich and Brzezinski 1956, p. 19.

24 Shue 1988, p. 71.

25 Shue 1990, p. 61. Lynn Paine discovered that some ministries were chronically so understaffed that they could monitor the local situation and policy implementation only during meetings with subordinates and occasional inspections. Paine 1992, p. 194.

26 Shue 1988, pp. 70, 104–105.

27 McCormick 1990, pp. 5–6, 63–64. Barrett McCormick borrows Weberian typology for his argument. Weberian classifications are controversial in China studies, though. For example, Stuart Schram maintains that traditional Chinese bureaucracy could fulfill conditions for Weberian bureaucracy and, thus, a rational type of rule. Schram 1987, p. 203–206. If we agree with his interpretation, bureaucracy in socialist China is probably not less modern than its imperial predecessors.

authorities and boundaries between bureaucracies. Murray Scot Tanner even depicts the Chinese lawmaking system as organized anarchy because of lack of institutional precision. Division of labor between institutions and the scope of their formal powers remain negotiable.[28] Likewise, Lowell Dittmer characterizes Mao Zedong's habit of calling *ad hoc* meetings and presenting ideas not yet having official ratification to public debate as "guerrilla war with bureaucracy."[29] A low level of bureaucratic specification[30] is a predictable product of a political ideology seeing bureaucratism as a curse. The totalitarian model sees political campaigns as a means of policy implementation and political indoctrination of the populace, but in China these same campaigns were often used against bureaucracy. From the point of view of the theory of democratic centralism ambiguity towards administrative institutionalization is to be expected as well, because the ideal decision-making forum would be interactive meeting place of differing interests and viewpoints. Democratic centralism would invite different parties in bureaucratic deliberations according to the issue, not according to institutional rules. It is not uncommon that China has several overlapping institutions either in different organs or even within one.[31] The more democratic centralist input channels and the more articulators of different viewpoints the better, a democratic centralist might state.

Other scholars maintain that the formal bureaucratic structures in China are penetrated by informal and personal networks, which undermine state capacity. As Barrett McCormick notes, Chinese society is not atomized the way that totalitarianism would expect. Instead, party penetration in society creates extensive patron-client networks, which undermine state legitimacy and bureaucratic efficiency.[32] Likewise, Jean Oi remarks that, as totalitarianism assumes, the Chinese state is a powerful and autonomous actor capable of penetrating to the lowest levels of society, but state control at the grassroots is ineffective, because penetration itself is characterized by personalized authority exercised in clientelist fashion. Thus, peasants could even influence in the system through personal networks and evasion.[33] As Richard Baum and Alexei Shevchenko note, totalitarianism never fully described Chinese state power, since the state was never wholly insulated from the demands of society or of its own cadres, nor were lower levels always faithfully responsive to upper administrative levels.[34]

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28 Tanner 1999, pp. 31–35.

29 Dittmer 1974, p. 185.

30 For the Chinese political system reflecting guerrilla-style management and minimizing hierarchy and specialization, see, e.g., Selden 1969, p. 150; Womack 1991 A, p. 69.

31 For example, there were three overlapping National People's Congress Standing Committee Party Groups (Tanner 1999, pp. 58–59).

32 McCormick 1990, pp. 7, 16, 58.

33 Oi 1991, pp. 84, 227.

34 Baum and Shevchenko 1999, pp. 354–355.

State strength

Although I doubt that the model of totalitarianism has ever portrayed social reality in China, its perseverance in academic discourse seems to indicate more than prejudice against socialism or at worst undervaluing of non-Western people's individuality. It appears that totalitarianism has succeeded in catching something real about the Chinese political system. Albeit not in a totalitarian manner, the Chinese state has occupied most political and even much social space in China. The state that is not structurally separate from the society may have been the ideal. There have been few formal limits to state power in China, where the state has intruded in economy and distribution, social stratification, and social organization. The state has been capable of leading major social changes relatively autonomously from social pressures. Under this statist reality, state aims have been more central than social aims.

Totalitarianism expects total power. Tang Tsou actually defines totalitarianism as meaning "unlimited extension of state functions."[35] Thus, totalitarianism expects power without any institutional and legal constraints, exposing an individual to state power without any social protection. However, this claim should be divided into two parts. It is true that at least in the Mao era there were no legal limits for state power. Absence of limits of power can result in a high level of state intrusiveness into society. Tang Tsou uses the term totalism to refer to a system in which state power has no official limits apart from those its leaders choose to adopt. It is still possible that practical or even political limits exist and constrain the reach of the state.[36] Further, Brantly Womack plausibly argues that nonexistence of formal institutional constraints to state power does not imply nonexistence of informal constraints.[37] For example, use of natives as local cadres meant that some local values, expectations and demands conditioned administrative norms and decisions.[38] Although the state admitted only a few legitimate restraints on its authority, its ambitions exceeded its actual abilities to control.[39] State control over everything is a practical impossibility already when it comes to gathering and processing all relevant information.[40] The paradox of all-embracing power may also be that the power itself becomes all the more easy to evade.

35 Tsou 1986, pp. xxii, 146.

36 Tsou 1991, p. 271.

37 Womack 1991 B, pp. 320–321, 323.

38 Shue 1988, p. 112.

39 Shue 1988, p. 70.

40 Lee 1991, p. 174.

Customarily Western literature assumes that unlimited power means a strong state. One specific feature of unlimited power under totalitarianism is that the ruling party controls or even takes over governmental functions.[41] This image dominates the Western literature about China as well.[42] Yet, such an organization seems to suggest weak bureaucratic specialization, which is often taken to mean inefficiency. It is true that in Mao-era China, cadres were omnicompetent and omniresponsible rather than specialized,[43] but this kind of unlimited power hardly can be as effective as bureaucratic specialization is. Moreover, the Communist Party differs from the state by being at least a semi-social actor. Tang Tsou has plausibly argued that Party organization provided stricter control over society than the state organization could have, because the state reach to society is less deep and extensive than the Party reach.[44] Yet, blurred boundaries were perhaps meant to open more accesses from society to the state. The result of blurred boundaries could be society influencing the state from inside.

Totalitarianism prevents the emergence of rival organizations, allegedly thus atomizing and passivizing individuals.[45] Extensive and formally unlimited state power can restrain oppositional politics. As Barrett McCormick puts it, combining legislative, executive and corrective powers in the hands of the same officials leaves no space for opposition.[46] Yet, it does not automatically lead to citizens' inability to maintain protective social networks. Although the planned economy severed some traditional social networks and exposed producers directly to state demands,[47] a community could to some extent cushion its members from state intrusion.[48] A common view among China scholars is that local and intra-bureaucratic social networks have always played a role in local politics in China.[49] The socialist rule has even created its own type of social networks. Instead of totalitarian social atomization and impersonal political system, Andrew Walder has found that in China the Party maintains instrumental-personal social networks with outsiders.[50] Besides, oppositional power does not always need be articulated.

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41 Finer 1970, pp. 92–94. A part of this totalitarian model is the absence of inner party democracy (p. 93), itself a disputed assumption. Chinese communists themselves believe that their organization is responsive to demands from members in general and from society as well. Although we do not need to accept that this counts as inner party democracy, the democratic centralist tradition shows that the claim is not without foundation either.

42 For a good short presentation of this logic in lawmaking, see Tanner 1999, pp. 15–16.

43 Shue 1988, p. 116.

44 Tsou 1991, p. 272.

45 Macedo 2000, p. 66.

46 McCormick 1990, p. 24.

47 Unger 2002, p. 22.

48 Shue 1988, pp. 106–116; Burns 1983, p. 153.

49 Oi 1991; Shue 1988; McCormick 1990.

50 Walder 1988, pp. 6–7.

Instead of using symbolic expression or participating in politics in order to create better rules, people with concrete resources can simply engage in activities that weaken the state.[51]

Even more questionable is to assume that closure of certain forms of political influencing would end influencing of any kind. It would be logical to assume that people would rather shift their energies to political activities effective for pursuing their interests and ideals. Many scholars indicate that this is exactly what happens in China. Tianjian Shi demonstrates that the regime has been successful in channeling private interest articulation into officially sanctioned channels. Yet, although the Chinese system can effectively block independent collective influencing, it fails to confine private interest articulation to officially sanctioned channels only.[52] Barrett McCormick argues that in the absence of open organizing for political demands, individuals and particularistic interests use patron-client ties to request exemptions from implementation of central policies. Thus, the central power is constantly undermined by passive bureaucratic resistance.[53]

Western academic writers have debated over the question of to what extent the Chinese state penetrated the local level, as totalitarianism expects, and to what extent localities have been able to evade some of the state control. In a famous debate, Vivienne Shue challenged the totalitarian view of absolute state control in Mao-era China,[54] while Jonathan Unger defended the conception of the strong state in China.[55] Despite differences, both seem to agree both that the evasion happened and that the state could keep it within limits.[56] The problem in this controversy is partly that random empirical evidence cannot solve the controversy since it is possible to find individual cases of both state unresponsiveness to local demands and evasion of state imperatives. Furthermore, I have argued elsewhere that the question arises partly from unanalytical use of the concept of state control. There can be several kinds of control: either routinized administrative regulation or irregular, but often highhanded, state intrusion.[57] It is possible that the Chinese state was unable to maintain continuous administrative regulation over localities, but was simultaneously able to intrude whenever it wanted.

Michael Mann distinguishes two different and unrelated forms of state strength. In one sense, the power of the state refers to autonomous, sometimes even despotic use of power. In another, it refers to the infrastructural power of the

51 White 1999 (1), pp. 31, 38–43.

52 Shi 1997, pp. 101, 270.

53 McCormick 1990, p. 22.

54 Shue 1988.

55 Unger 1989.

56 Unger 1989, pp. 119–122 and Shue 1988, pp. 70, 111.

57 Salmenkari 2004, p. 237.

state to penetrate society. In other words, the first denotes power by the state elite over the society, while the latter denotes the power of the state to coordinate social activities through the state infrastructure. For example, in the Western democracies, state powers for infrastructural encroachments have increased at the same time that despotic powers of the state are declining. In other words, Western democracies are "despotically weak" but "infrastructurally strong."[58] In the debate about state strength, Vivienne Shue clearly argues that the reach of the state in socialist China has been compromised because China is infrastructurally weak.[59] This conception speaks about state strength in one definite sense. However, it seems to me that those who maintain that the Chinese state is strong do not speak of despotic, autonomous power alone, but conflate two kinds of strengths.

The totalitarian model seems to expect that the two types of state power go together in socialist countries. According to Michael Mann, the apex of state power combines the non-evadable infrastructural reach of the state with the structural integration of social interests within the state. In this ideal type, all significant social power must go through the state structures.[60] Although it is logically possible that a state could simultaneously extend its despotic and infrastructual powers, I doubt that this actually happens. As I have argued elsewhere, high-handed state intrusion is needed to patch an inability to maintain effective administrative regulation. Harsh methods are often used to provide exemplary cases to dissuade others when the state is unable to sustain sufficient administrative regulation.[61]

The mass line and democratic centralist politics prepared the way for a more intrusive state. Indeed, by mobilizing China's villages the Party increased local political participation but simultaneously reduced local leaders' autonomy. The design allowed the Party to control institutions of participation and mandated local leaders to report the local situation to higher levels of administration.[62] Likewise, Chinese participatory structures render citizens to control, but give them no control over whether leaders decide to heed to their proposals.[63] However, state intrusion is perhaps only one element of the process. In the West, the introduction of democratic politics and increasing state intrusion was not only coincidental but also related processes.[64] A state can demand more from its inhabitants if it makes its demands more palatable to them, often by giving them a part, albeit often only

58 Mann 1984, pp. 188–190.

59 Shue 1990.

60 Mann 1984, p. 191.

61 Salmenkari 2004, pp. 237, 241–243.

62 Birrell 1969, p. 425; Burns 1988, pp. 8–9.

63 Nathan 1986, p. 227.

64 Mann 1984, p. 209.

a symbolic one, in decision making. It is thus not impossible that we find the same kind of pattern in China. Even if the primacy of state strengthening would be true for much of Chinese socialist history,[65] state strengthening does not necessarily mean a more overwhelming state. One strategy to strengthen the state would be to resort to voluntarism to reduce feelings of discontent among citizens and to decentralize administration.

Western researchers disagreeing with the totalitarian image of China generally assume that the Chinese state really would like to be infrastructurally strong and carry out bureaucratically efficient state regulation, but its infrastructural capacities are insufficient for maintaining this kind of control. Yet, it may be that the Mao-era ideal was neither an infrastructurally or despotically strong state, but a state trying to maximize power based on voluntarism and minimize resources the central state needs for keeping localities in line. Tentatively such a state could search for state strength by local self-government that would undergo sporadic state intrusion from above when national interests were at stake. Still, such a state would not be exactly weak, although it would be prepared to compromise with local forces because it would be a legitimate state and use its resources sparingly but rationally.

To open this analysis further, Ole Borre and Michael Goldsmith provide a useful definitions of the scope of government. It can refer either to the range of government activity or to the intensity with which government pursues a particular activity. The range extends when state policy covers more people or cases, while the degree increases when the policy incurs a larger share of public resources.[66] Modernization in Western democracies has led to enlargement of the scope of government in both senses.[67] The Mao-era state policy covered a wide range of people and affairs, but the use of central state resources was more sparing. Financing of local infrastructure and development was to a large part left to local budgets. Although resources mostly were public, a large part of them were not central state resources.[68] Obviously, the Chinese state was capable of extending the scope of government remarkably, but this development did not automatically mean extension of central government control at the same pace and to the same degree.

Some scholars have been critical of the inclination to equate state autonomy from society and use of coercion with regime strength.[69] State autonomy makes

65 Nathan 1986, p. 56, Tsou 1987, pp. 258, 273.

66 Borre and Goldsmith 1995, pp. 4, 10.

67 For example, the New Right makes this point. See the summary of their opinions in Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987, pp. 103–125.

68 Lü and Perry 1997, p. 10, Shue 1988, pp. 61–63, 143–145.

69 Chan 2002, p. 187.

the state vulnerable because it isolates the state from society. Although a state limited by society may appear weak, actually resiliency is its strength.[70] State strength does not derive from the insulation of the state from societal pressures. A strong state uses various channels and instruments to gauge and shape preferences in the society. Ability to understand social moods and needs generates social support that makes a state stronger.[71] A decisive factor in regime strength is legitimacy and popular consent, not authoritarian rule.[72]

In this light, socialist China appears puzzling. Its history demonstrates state ability to command massive-scale social change without considerable social resistance.[73] In this respect, the state appears extremely autonomous. At the same time, the socialist Chinese state has demonstrated outstanding resilience, ability to change, and a capability to deliver its citizens at least some of the things they want, whether it is social security, economic growth, or national dignity in its international relations. Although there has been considerable change in objects the Chinese government have delivered to citizens, it appears to me that the Chinese government has been able to generate both specific support arising from certain policy outputs and diffuse support for its authorities, regime and political community.[74] Genuine support is registered in the Mao era,[75] and even more dramatically since reforms. Surveys show evident correlation between state ability to deliver improving living standards and regime support.[76] Whether or not the state's ability to produce popular outputs comes from responsiveness to popular wants and needs, when it simultaneously shows the ability to take autonomous decisions, cannot be demonstrated here. Still, such a possibility is perplexing, to say the least.[77] Nevertheless, democratic centralism could provide one answer to this puzzle.

State capacity

Some scholars have criticized the models seeing the Chinese state very strong and its power very centralized for forgetting that state leaders have to make their

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70 McCormick 1990, pp. 27–28, 31.

71 Chan 2002, pp. 178–179.

72 White 1994 A, p. 84. See also Diamond et al. 1995, p. 29.

73 For example, collectivization of agriculture and taking over of private businesses by the state in the 1950s met no significant resistance, unlike in the Soviet Union.

74 The analytical differentiation between types of support comes from Easton 1979, pp. 157, 268, 273.

75 Unger 1989, p. 127.

76 Shen 2005, p. 41

77 According to Susan Pharr, this is how at least the Japanese state functions. See Pharr 1990, pp. 208–218. It is thus not impossible that the East Asian cultural context prefers this decision-making pattern.

decisions in a particular social context that itself limits available choices. Society and economy are not passive entities that the leadership can manipulate at will. Instead, cumulative actions of social and economic actors constrain the power of the state and sometimes leaders react to social change instead of initiating it.[78]

Instead of contending whether the Chinese state was strong or not, it would be more fruitful to scrutinize in what ways it was strong and in what way it was not. Here we come to state capacities. Capacity of the state tells how well states can implement official goals, especially if they are against the interests of powerful social groups[79] State capabilities can be uneven across policy areas and over time.[80] For example, Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell have sketched four different aspects in which the political performance of the state can be more or less successful. States can be successful in extracting resources, distributing goods and services, regulating behavior of its citizens, and in making citizens share official values and symbols.[81] Thus, there is no single indicator of state strength. Scholars using this framework have found China to have had uneven capacities and that there has not been steady progress towards a more capable state.[82] Even the state-initiated development programs have suffered from limited state capabilities.[83]

Even more nuanced development has taken place if we increase the number of state capacities under scrutiny. For example, Kent Weaver and Bert Rockham have compared state systems with ten different capabilities in mind. According to them, states differ in capabilities to set and maintain priorities, target resources, innovate, coordinate conflicting objectives, impose losses on social groups, represent diffuse interests, ensure effective implementation, ensure policy stability, maintain international commitments, and manage political cleavages.[84] State capacity depends on policy instruments available to state officials. Since policy instruments are dependent on each country's institutions, policy programs and public finances, they vary much already between Western democracies.[85] Apart from resources and instruments, state capacity is contingent upon socioeconomic and political environments. If the state commands situational advantages over

78 Nee and Matthews 1996, p. 406; Zhou 1996, p. 9.

79 Skocpol 1985, p. 9.

80 Skocpol 1985, p. 17; Weaver and Rockman 1993, pp. 6–7.

81 Almond and Powell 1980, pp. 125–133. Lynn White uses a somewhat different list of state capacities and subdivides them into extractive, legitimative, coercive, and steering capacities (White 1999 (1), p. 21).

82 Townsend 1980, pp. 428–431; Baum and Shevchenko 1999, pp. 352–353.

83 Townsend 1980, pp. 428–431.

84 Weaver and Rockman 1993, p. 6.

85 Skocpol 1985, p. 18.

social actors or organizational support form societal groups, its capacity is enhanced.[86] States are constrained also by ideologies concerning the legitimacy of certain kinds of government actions.[87]

Many Western scholars have emphasized the limits of state capacity in China.[88] For example, the vast size of the country combined with infrastructural limits has reduced state ability to monitor localities.[89] David Zweig remarks that although the Chinese state was usually powerful in the Mao era, the same structures that the state used to expand its control actually facilitated evasion. Although Chinese bureaucracy extended to localities, its monitoring mechanisms were weak enough to allow partial compliance. Ideology was used to increase state control over local cadres, but at the same time it weakened leadership because it led to factional struggles over definitions of the correct political line. Campaigns to force localities to comply with state demands were short in duration, leaving opportunities to side with local interests in the meantime.[90]

Some scholars even conclude that the strength of the Chinese state itself made imperative activities that weakened state control. According to them, the rigidities of formal state organization and regulations themselves made subversion necessary. People turned to evasion and informal interpersonal ties to overcome these rigidities. Naturally, such activities undermined effective state control.[91] There seems to be some truth in this observation, although I have elsewhere argued that harsh state demands themselves can indicate insufficient abilities for regular and routine state control.[92] A state might want to appear more formidable than it is to guarantee at least some degree of implementation when it expects widespread evasion.

Scholars have found that some reasons for ineffective state monitoring of policy implementation in China are built into state organizational structures. Enmeshing formal and informal power structures compromises the effectiveness of formal power. As David Zweig points out, when the Party fused formal organizations with local informal networks of social power, it was able to penetrate localities more effectively than before, but simultaneously this fusion made it possible for localities to enhance their own powers and evade central state control. Informal traditional social structures put strong pressures on formal leaders.[93]

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86 Skocpol 1985, pp. 19–20.

87 Weaver and Rockman 1993, p. 7; Chan 2002, p. 181.

88 Limits of state capacity accord with popular Chinese perceptions. See Li 2004, pp. 238–239.

89 Shue 1990, pp. 61–63; White 1999 (2), p. 612.

90 Zweig 1987, p. 130–133.

91 McCormick 1990, pp. 21, 61; Oi 1991, pp. 104–105.

92 Salmenkari 2004, pp. 237–238.

93 Zweig 1989, pp. 80–81, 86.

Likewise, as Barrett McCormick observes, bureaucrats maintained informal networks which limited state control over its own officials. In this situation, bureaucratic resistance limited the ability of the central state to implement its policies. The result was a continuing discrepancy between announced Party policies and reality.[94]

Furthermore, not only informal uses of power limited state capacities. The democratic centralist ideology encouraging local policy innovation did the same. As Tianjian Shi remarks, Chinese institutional design encouraging participation not at the decision-making stage but during policy implementation in itself undermines state capacity.[95] Although many traditional clientelist and familist networks are illegitimate in the democratic centralist context, it is even likely that the Party designed the mass line to accommodate some types of informal social power. If so, the democratic centralist system weakened bureaucratic control by encouraging local variation in implementation and by allowing some social pressures to shape local politics. Recognition of the inability of the state to control everything may have played a part here,[96] but according to its mass-line ideology the Party was also willing to exchange some central control for local receptivity and support. In other words, the Communist Party saw legitimacy and support, not just controls, as essential for the strength of the state. Thus, a common assumption among China scholars, here articulated by Lynn White, that the Chinese regime wants to strengthen its control and that all other results are failures,[97] is unfortunately far from safe.

The mix of state capacities has naturally varied during the decades of Communist Party rule in China. Western scholars have debated whether economic and social reforms since 1978 have decreased[98] or increased state capacities. Vivienne Shue sees that the reform era has strived toward more direct control over localities.[99] Although erosion of former personalistic control methods may have temporarily diminished the central state's control over local leaders, [100] the new leaderships' intention is to strengthen regular bureaucratic methods of state control, of which the current emphasis on law is one evidence. Vivienne Shue uses the growth of local state bureaucracies and the resources they command as an example of strengthening state power, even if direct state commands have given way to social manipulation, cooperation with social agents, and deliberate non-intru-

94 McCormick 1990, pp. 90–91.

95 Shi 1997, p. 274–275.

96 As is maintained by Lee 1991, pp. 160–161.

97 White 1999 (2), p. 617.

98 White 1999 (1), p. 21.

99 Shue 1988, pp. 119–121, 131.

100 Unger 1989, pp. 134–135.

sion to many formerly politically controlled areas.[101] Many political theorists hold that limitation of state power can improve the effectiveness of rule. All-powerful government seldom can carry out its policies as effectively as a legitimate government.[102] Recognizing this, the post-reform state has deliberately exchanged unified command for responsiveness. By retreating from micro-management and concentrating on macro-management, the central state now governs less, but more effectively.[103] Moreover, post-Mao China has recognized that sustainable governance requires consolidation of the social base for the regime, and building social support needs some responsiveness to citizen demands.[104] Hence, Carol Lee Hamrin and Suisheng Zhao argue that it depends on the viewpoint whether the post-reform Chinese state appears strong or weak. On the central level, the state seems strong, since it has maintained its monopoly on policy-making authority. Yet, on local levels the state appears much weaker because the central state needs to persuade, consult, and bargain with other lower-level actors over the implementation of its policies.[105] A similar duality arguably characterized Mao-era China, which was simultaneously hypercentralized and statist and politically fragmented and parcelized.[106] Or in Marc Blecher's words, the Maoist state was high in capacity, but not autonomous enough because it had combined society's participation in the state with state control over society. Instead, reformist China has lost capacity but gained autonomy.[107] Not surprisingly, Richard Baum and Alexei Shevchenko found that during economic reforms both central and local state have gains and losses in extractive, distributive, regulative and symbolic capacities compared to state capacities during the Mao era.[108]

Democratic centralism and state capacity

Democratic centralism is designed as a method to increase the state's ability to implement its policies. It is designed for leaders to keep all strings in their hands without alienating the society. Ideally, democratic centralism would make a state strong because of its emphasis on society-wide co-optation. Simultaneously, the democratic centralist organization model itself limits state capacity in many ways,

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101 Shue 1990, p. 66.

102 Zakaria 2003, pp. 103–104.

103 Baum and Shevchenko 1999, pp. 351–352.

104 Chen An 1999, p. 13.

105 Hamrin and Zhao 1995, p. xxv.

106 Shue 1988, p. 78.

107 Blecher 1991, p. 144.

108 Baum and Shevchenko 1999, pp. 352–353.

both in theory and in practice. When the theory encourages local initiative in implementation, the state capability of monitoring and enforcing policy implementation becomes compromised. In practice, democratic centralist information channels reduce central state capacity to receive adequate information and feedback from the grassroots. I will return to these themes below. Here I will concentrate on ways that democratic centralism might strengthen the state.

First is its voluntarist aspect. Voluntarism is a very traditional aspect of democracy. Democracies share state power in order to enhance the legitimacy of their policies and to give citizens moral responsibility to accept rules they or their elected representatives have participated in making. Democratic centralism and Western representative democracies alike use democracy to legitimize the government by granting the populace some rational choice either over policy implementation or personnel selection. They are meant to keep the government attuned to local needs and maximize voluntary following. Thus, they can minimize the need for coercion.

Democratic centralism expects that consensus building inside and outside of government helps effective implementation of policies. As Murray Scot Tanner puts it, a policy gains administrative weight from prolonged negotiation.[109] In the grassroots, consensus building may often mean persuasion rather than negotiation. Democratic centralist persuasion renders state aims transparent in order to make policy seem legitimate to commoners. Ideally, democratic centralist persuasion appeals to rationality, but related psychological effects strengthen the state too. When one is invited to discuss implementation of state policies, choices considered rational become limited. Instead of evaluating policy alternatives, discussion is channeled to deliberating over how to implement the particular policy. Presumably acceptance of the policy itself becomes more automatic. Furthermore, conformist tendencies of face-to-face democracy may strengthen the state's ability to demand obedience.

Second, granting people some power induces people to accept state defined rules of the game. When one accepts official channels of participation as legitimate, the threshold for engaging in other types of political action rises. A chance to choose between given alternatives diverts one's thoughts from other possibilities and issues not on the official agenda. I am not arguing that mere co-optation takes place when a Western voter or a Chinese participant in a factory meeting feels that the system responds even to someone like him. Not all power-sharing is symbolic. Yet, persons or groups invited to participate deliver cooperation in exchange for including some of their demands in the resulting policies. An illustrative example is the official All-China Women's Federation, able to promote the

109 Tanner 1999, p. 218.

feminist cause, but in a scope that takes state needs into account.[110] Inclusion in the state defined terms limits independence.

Third, the state maintains the right to decide which social groups to include in political processes. The state invites input from certain interests and social groups through corporatist institutions or functional representation in representative organs. The state has not only been selective of interests that have a state-legitimated right to representation, but has determined the relative strengths of interests. The ability to select the interests to be consulted and taken account increases state autonomy by reducing social pressure against above-chosen policy lines. As a result, social groups not having an independent democratic centralist channel to articulate their concerns have tended to receive less political attention and fewer resources. A huge social group lacking a corporatist organization is Chinese farmers.[111] Bruce Gilley correctly notes that inadequate representation of worker and peasant interests during the economic reforms has led to adoption of a national growth strategy burdening these strata.[112] Moreover, the same imbalance of interests continues in administration. Since industry has more ministries and thus, voice than agriculture, underinvestment in agriculture has continued for decades.[113] Democratic centralism thus means that the state accepts the need to negotiate with society, but only with those social interests and through such social organizations as it has legitimized.

Fourth, the democratic centralist hierarchy fragments opposition. With grassroots political units, the development of society- or sector-wide horizontal opposition is unlikely. According to Xueguang Zhou, due to the asymmetry between the strong Chinese state and an organizationally weak society, political demands emerge as responses to state policies. Thus, the state and state policy shifts, rather than social organizing, provides opportunities for collective action.[114] Even within administrative institutions, democratic centralist chains-of-command guarantee that the center sits tightly in the saddle. As Carol Lee Hamrin and Suisheng Zhao note, strict compartmentalization of administration provided the need for a strong center to coordinate. According to them, one reason for leaders to enforce this kind of system has been preserving their own authority as final arbiters.[115] Obviously, a democratic centralist state can be receptive but cannot be pressured.

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110 E.g. Howell 2000, pp. 358–360; Jacka 1990, 15–18; Wang 2000, pp. 68–70.

111 Unger and Chan 1995, p. 51.

112 Gilley 2004, p. 39.

113 Shirk 1992, pp. 70–71.

114 Zhou 1993, pp. 60–61, 70.

115 Hamrin and Zhao 1995, p. xxxiii.

Private sphere and democracy

Customary Western political theory equates social freedom with the existence of a private sphere legally protected from state intrusion. According to Vivienne Shue, this view disregards the fact that in the West market capitalism has actually intensified the state control over society, although modernization usually makes pretensions of a state power more bounded. She argues that during the economic reforms the Chinese state expanded the role of markets in order to remove former obstacles to state control and to overcome the former localist structure of politics and economy. By weakening or dissolving social constructs impeding or diffusing the reach of the state, it makes it more difficult for individuals to oppose inimical state policies. Still, state power is simultaneously presented in a more acceptable form.[116]

I would like to develop this theme even further. Liberalist tradition has seen limited government and a legitimate private sphere as essential parts of modern democracy. Yet, as Friedrich von Hayek has recognized, the two constitutive parts of liberal democratic tradition, namely democracy and liberty, are in tension.[117] Logically speaking the larger the public realm, the larger the field of politics. Democracy takes place in the public realm. Consequently, if the realm of the public is larger, so is the field that can fall under democratic authority. In other words, the more there are issues that fall under collective decision making, the more there can be democratic decisions. Moreover, democracy itself can lead to governmental regulation enveloping an increasingly wider scope of social activities. Many Western theorists maintain that there are pressures within democracy leading to increasing government intervention due to a democratic government's sensibility to popular demands.[118] As Jack Lively observes, it is by no means evident that democracy will lead to limited government.[119]

The private sphere has become better recognized and institutionalized during the reform era, but simultaneously the Chinese urbanites probably have fewer

116 Shue 1988, pp. 77, 119–121, 148–149.

117 Hayek 1960.

118 Lively 1975, p. 127–128; Hayek 1960. Apart from democratic pressures from the society, modernization itself tends to expand the political agenda. Jürgen Habermas argues that cognitive overburdening of democratic politics accompanies erosion of social integration, since law and politics are then meant to provide coordination in place of traditional values and norms. (Habermas 1996, pp. 318–321.) Although individualist values are not exclusively typical of modern democracies and modern individualist values are not the only possible basis for democracy, this development towards legally and politically integrated societies, and consequently the increasingly wide scope of state regulation, has had an evident connection with developments in modern democracies in the West.

119 Lively 1975, p. 59.

oppotunities for political influencing now than they had in the Mao era. Reforms have depoliticized many aspects of life and production. Earlier such questions as choosing crops for cultivation or distributing consumer goods were decided in common meetings in which all participants ideally had a say.[120] Now, when distribution mainly depends on personal purchasing power, individuals can privately decide these issues. However, private decisions offer smaller chances for political influencing. Obviously, growing personal freedom of choice does not automatically mean growing political power. It is very possible that what the Chinese have gained in personal freedom they have lost in possibilities for political influencing. It is thus logically disputable to demand increasing democracy through reducing the sphere of democratic political control, although it is totally consistent to demand that a democratic political system sets legal limits for the extent of state power in order to respect rights of individuals.

It seems to be a prevalent trend in the world that growing personal space no longer corresponds with a bigger political role. Stephen Macedo argues that modern polities have become less attractive arenas for political participation because commercialization and the mass scale have lessened the relative benefits of political and civic activity.[121] Western research literature has treated the consequences of Chinese economic liberalization in ambiguous ways. Some welcome a concentration of personal welfare as a healthy development towards individualistic and liberty-centered values.[122] Others blame the Chinese government for using economic growth to passivize people politically.[123] However, the outcome may be not intentional but an unavoidable correlation between capitalist values and depoliticization.

Simultaneously, reforms have eroded socialist communities such as work units. Growing impersonalization may actually have lead to lessening political influence by the common people. When the state draws back and leaves more space for the society, the closest political gatekeepers become less accessible. Formerly every workplace and village had both the nearest administrator and Party member at hand, but now commoners working in the private sector seldom have regular contacts with administrators. To create new forms of influencing, reformists improved the legal system and electoral competition, possibly increasing accounta-

120 Egalitarian solutions, such as distributing goods through lottery among have-nots (see, e.g., Chan et al. 1984, p. 219), prove that there was real popular pressure on distribution. Egalitarian solutions do not necessarily emerge from open democratic influencing. Even authoritarian decision-makers could want to reduce envy that could undermine communal harmony. In either case, egalitarian solutions answer popular pressures, whether articulated or social.

121 Macedo 2000, p. 63–64.

122 Dowd et al. 2000, p. 202.

123 E.g. Nathan 1998, p. 63.

bility.[124] Yet, it is not self-evident that these systems lead to increasing popular input, since when a political unit grows larger to involve more people, each particular individual's share of political power is likely to decrease. Victor Falkenheim opines that institutionalization of political participation may lead to political stabilization, but does not necessarily enhance the political efficacy of the average citizen.[125]

Furthermore, there is not a simple correlation between larger or smaller public spheres and a particular political system. Rather, each political system deems some spheres of life as public and others as private. In many modern Western democracies, the state has easy access to each individual's medical record, work history and school records, quite obviously spheres that premodern Western states did not have the capacity to control. Contrarily, religious beliefs and choices of atypical sexual lives are now private matters, unlike they were in many premodern Western states. Therefore, freedom of choice in China is not automatically either more or less than in a Western country, but can be more restrictive in one area and more relaxed in another.[126]

Besides, choices of what belongs in the private sphere are themselves political. If people are not subject to public power, they are often subjected to private power. The Chinese themselves appear to have realized that private power is now increasingly limiting their choices or even leverage for political influencing. An Chen cites workers in the 1980s saying: "How could you challenge the director when he was authorized to fire you or deduct a part of your wage or bonus."[127] Often public power provides some protection for the weak, say the poor from economic exploitation or wives from violent husbands. Among other things, the Chinese communists' effort to build efficient public power aimed at protecting the poor and women. Too often, the liberal division between public and private has unfortunately left such issues as inequalities arising from poverty, gender, or race in the sphere of the private.[128]

The theory of democratic centralism does not dictate the division of powers between private and public spheres. Often the demarcation is decided publicly in

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124 Some empirical studies do not support even the assumption that elections automatically increase accountability. Instead, some Chinese feel that Mao era campaigns were more efficient forms of popular supervision, especially in areas where elections were merely a formality (Li Lianjiang 2001).

125 Falkenheim 1983, p. 58. He predicted that institutionalization gives power to technocratical elites instead of citizens, which proves to have been quite accurate.

126 Salmenkari 1996, p. 307.

127 Chen An 1999, p. 48.

128 See, e.g., Mary Wollstonecraft's arguments of demarcation between public and private as the cause of the inequality of women in Held 1987, pp. 83–84.

democratic deliberation.[129] As a result, the Chinese have used democracy in ways that in Western eyes violate privacy. For example, regular democratic appraisal of each person's conduct has been puzzling to Western researchers,[130] to whom it has been difficult to grasp that democratic is the right word here even in the Western sense, if we mean by democracy a public and participatory decision-making process in which all participants have a say. As Chih-yu Shih observes, by consenting to a system of village contracts, dossiers, awards and public evaluations over villagers' performance and morals, villagers forgo their own rights to privacy in exchange for the right to supervise cadres and their households.[131] Since drawing the line of the proper sphere for politics is itself political, the Chinese state has defined the line between public and private differently at different times. For example, family religious rites have sometimes been a public matter in which the state has intervened, sometimes they have been regarded as a private matter.

Coercion or voluntarism

If assumptions of totalitarianism seems to fit somewhat the extent of political power in China, it is quite another question to assume that political power will be used in a coercive way just because of its extension. There is no theoretical contradiction in assuming that all-embracing power is used in a democratic way. What I am arguing here is that the totalitarian model lumps together the reach of the state and the coerciveness of state power all too easily.[132] The theory of democratic centralism differs from the theory of totalitarianism most clearly in its emphasis on voluntarism. If the totalitarian model expects repressive rule, the democratic centralist image presents a state which constantly negotiates with its

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129 An interesting example of such democratic demarcation dates back to the beginning of the 1990s, when in one Nanjing factory employees were summoned to a meeting to criticize the morals of two female workers who had engaged in prostitution. To the surprise of factory cadres, workers in the meeting opposed their punishment, because they thought that what these women do in their private time is no concern of the factory. (A story related by Jyrki Kallio in 1993.)

130 Børge Bakken sees only control in a process that in the Western political language could be called constant and open supervision from below combined with rotating leadership tasks (Bakken 1994, pp. 220–224).

131 Shih 1999, pp. 270–271.

132 Many other contrasts totalitarian theory makes are illusory as well. For example, placing order and representativeness on the reverse ends of one line, as Finer 1970, p. 46, does, is questionable, since Western democracies are often very capable in both dimensions and many dictatorial systems in neither. Sporadic use of coercive methods hardly counts for effective order. Actually the need for coercive methods may itself arise from the inability to maintain order through routine administrative regulation, as I argue in Salmenkari 2004, pp. 237–238.

subjects, social groups, and localities. A democratic centralist state guarantees voluntary compliance through consultation and persuasion.

As Andrew Walder asserts, totalitarianism expects only political control, although China utilizes positive incentives as well.[133] Although Walder emphasizes control through the negative consequences of possible transgressions,[134] empirical evidence collected by some other scholars supports the assumption that control in China is largely based on voluntarism. Victor Shaw, who has researched social control in Chinese workplaces, confirms that although many recognized it also as a form of control, the majority of workers identified their work unit as a source of support. Such control is patriarchal, associated with provisions of care and support by work unit leaders, who show interest in common workers and leave some control over job duties to workers themselves. Since controllers try to incorporate the substantive interests of controllees into corporate actions and goals, the workforce feels that reasonable complaints can be resolved with the help of their superiors. Because negative tools are not used for the compliant, control is non-repressive and is accompanied by rewards to the compliant. Because everyone is made aware of the rules and they are expected to correct their wrongdoing voluntarily, control is conciliatory and non-escalating. Thus, for the vast majority, relations between controllers and controllees appeared as if they were playing familiar social roles.[135] A common analogy for the corporate unit by the leaders[136] and the led[137] alike is that of big family.

The mass line type of leadership reduces distance and encourages a reciprocal relationship between leaders and led. Not surprisingly, Victor Shaw finds that the Chinese are controlled through inclusion. Creating an environment in which all workers are brought together with leadership reduces chances for organized resistance, lowers costs of control, and encourages those included to devote effort to official aims.[138] The democratic centralist communal and reciprocal ideal can thus increase control but simultaneously alleviate negative feelings towards this control. Yet, democratic centralist personal relations sometimes aggravate resentment among those treated unequally. Victor Shaw finds that respondents who found the work unit a means for control usually did so because they had discovered that power can be used selectively, abusively, or to block opportunities.[139]

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133 Walder 1988, pp. 5–6.

134 Walder 1986, pp. 129–143.

135 Shaw 1996, pp. 32, 221–224, 237–239.

136 Friedman et al. 1991, p. 269.

137 Shaw 1996, p. 224; Shi 2000 B, p. 550.

138 Shaw 1996, p. 146.

139 Shaw 1996, pp. 224–225.

Although the democratic centralist theory stresses voluntarism in policy implementation, this is only one side of the picture. Democratic centralism is also a method for social transformation under a revolutionary party. Major social change seldom happens in a fully non-compulsory way. The ideal of voluntarism among its supporters does not automatically imply that communists permitted freedom of choice for class enemies, for example. Deriving from the violent ideal of revolution, the Communists learned to bring cohesion among its potential supporters by mobilizing the majority against the minority.[140] The Party was ready to impose social change among its supporters as well. Although the Party often was ready to somewhat accommodate the pace of its activities to the receptivity of its traditional-minded peasant supporters, it usually did not give up its program for social change.[141] Thus, voluntarism by no means means that under democratic centralism people can freely choose how to develop society and whether to obey state policies.

Campaigns and the strength of the state

The totalitarian theory conflates sporadic state intrusion during political campaigns with the state's overall ability to penetrate society. Totalitarianism expects full discipline established through terror and through atomization of all possible social opposition. Campaigns and work teams sent to localities to execute central policies are sometimes used as examples of powerful state intrusion in socialist China.[142]

A government's need to resort to campaigns seems to indicate incomplete state penetration. It denotes that the government's control is far from total, making occasional or sporadic intrusions necessary to guarantee *some* degree of control over local policy execution.[143] Campaigns are unnecessary where routine administration can handle problems in a regular and orderly manner. Modern bureaucratic states seldom campaign. Western state-run campaigns are mainly directed towards the citizenry,[144] not administrators whom a Western state can regulate and discipline in other ways. A state that campaigns regularly for fulfilling tax quotas and for keeping its own administrators in line,[145] as China did during the

140 Solomon 1970, pp. 315, 322–323.

141 See, e.g., marriage reform after the revolution in Johnson 1983, ch. 9–10.

142 Unger 1989, p. 125.

143 Salmenkari 2004, pp. 237–238.

144 For example, the Finnish state campaigns for traffic safety and healthy diet.

145 For administrators resorting to campaigns in order to strengthen their grip on lower level administrative organs, see Unger 2002, pp. 22–23. For using campaigns to guarantee efficient taxation, see Oi 1991, p. 98.

Mao era, cannot be a very strong state. Yet, it could be a very intrusive state if it so chose. If the Chinese state failed to maintain continuous regulative control over localities, it was able to keep them in line by intruding somewhere all the time.

It may be that "uncertainty and fears generated by campaigns... cut through the self-protective resistance of lower levels"[146] but, since campaigns were sporadic and seldom long-lasting, in localities their effect could fade soon after the work team organizing the campaign had left.[147] If local cadres managed to delay implementation, villages could often avoid implementation, because campaign organizers were interested only in immediate results.[148] David Zweig observes how a cadre who did not agree with the campaign objectives first ignored the campaign propaganda, then started to "research" how to implement, next created an external structure in which the policy could be carried out, and only if the pressure still continued started implementation.[149] Moreover, campaign work teams mostly spread messages without clear operational content. Thus, they had only indirect effects on practical tasks, such as production.[150] Urging localities to study Mao Zedong's thoughts or to work hard to support the war effort in Korea could have some impact, but because of the nature of these messages state penetration was hardly increased by their distribution.[151]

Chinese history demonstrates that campaigns do not necessarily coincide with the strength of the central state. It is true that strong and united leadership launched some campaigns, such as campaigns for land reform in the early 1950s and the one-child policy in effect since 1979. However, many of the most coercive campaigns were initiated by a minority leadership faction wanting to bypass regular administration then under the control of a rival faction. David Zweig has demonstrated that radical collectivist agricultural policy was thus run: leftists disseminated the radical policy line through propaganda, campaigns, and coercive techniques because they could not gather enough consensus within the top leadership for their aims.[152]

Campaigns did not always strengthen state power but sometimes weakened it. The Cultural Revolution undermined state capacity by subverting bureaucracy and the state monopoly of violence. Campaigns, violence, and Mao Zedong's charis-

146 Unger 1989, p. 125.

147 Shue 1988, p. 139.

148 Zweig A 1997, p. 133.

149 Zweig 1989, p. 95.

150 Butler 1983, p. 135.

151 Of course, many campaigns combined ideological and concrete aims. See for example Chan et al. 1984, ch. 3, for the Social Education Campaign, in which a campaign to study Mao Zedong thought was successfully combined with rectification and production campaigns bringing concrete change to villages.

152 Zweig 1989, pp. 10, 38–39, 48–49.

matic rule eroded central authority and debilitated the ability to administer the country according to rules and routines.[153] Attacks on state and Party hierarchies left lower level administration without power to force localities to obey its orders since it could no longer use the authority of higher levels or the Party to support its own authority.[154] By attacking the political system, radical policy undermined state reach and strengthened local leaders. As long as village leaders fulfilled state-imposed production quotas and showed some policy compliance, they became relatively free to expand communal interests and their own power.[155] Monitoring of policy implementation became more difficult also because campaigns and purges alienated local leaders and taught them to hide their true motives under the guise of outward obedience.[156] Campaigns themselves became routinized and the capacity for successful campaigning deteriorated because the masses no longer showed genuine interest in them.[157]

Campaigns did not always bring anticipated results. As David Zweig remarks, mass mobilization encouraged formal implementation. Campaign style demanded that localities demonstrate mass support and adoption of new values quickly before attitudes really changed. For grassroots implementers, formalism brought official recognition without causing peasant hostility. Within the bureaucracy, formalism protected everyone by showing some results.[158] Further, leadership did not necessarily care if campaigns produced only formalistic results. Zweig claims that formalistic behavior was politically expedient for radical leaders who used the campaign to strengthen their own factional position. Hence, they were not always willing to scrutinize the reality as long as leftist policies were outwardly widely implemented.[159] Nor was the reach of campaigns always effective. Evidently, the intensity of campaigns varied from place to place and even between people or groups in a certain place.[160]

Not all campaign work teams increased pressures on the common people: some freed commoners of unpopular local leaders or stopped widely-opposed local policies.[161] Of course, this did not mean that state control itself weakened as a result. John Burns remarks that even when campaign work teams brought higher-level support and authority to help eradicating local misuses of power, they

153 McCormick 1990, p. 4; White 1999 (1), p. 19.

154 Chan et al. 1984, pp. 126–129.

155 Zweig 1989, p. 193–194.

156 Shue 1988, p. 138.

157 Starr 1979, p. 210.

158 Zweig 1989, pp. 92–96.

159 Zweig 1989, p. 95.

160 Chan et al. 1984, p. 167; Wolf 1984, p. 221.

161 For commoner's own comments on anti-corruption campaign teams, see Burns 1983, p. 151.

implemented state policy and made local evasion of state imperatives more difficult even for local interests.[162] Still, campaigns themselves could be popular, at least if they are purified from violent class struggle elements. Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li have found campaign nostalgia in the Chinese countryside. Nostalgics feel that in campaigns the state supported common people to supervise and criticize local cadres, making it very risky for cadres to misuse their power. Without state support commoners feel too weak to oppose the local establishment.[163] Obviously, people feel campaigns empowered them, at least to the extent that these campaigns coincided with their own interests.

The state was not the only one using campaigns for its own purposes. Commoners also pursued their interests and personal motives in campaigns. Campaigns criticizing certain leaders provided space to criticize unpopular economic policies.[164] Some used campaigns to confront their bosses or even replace them because they wanted to retaliate against their own unfair mistreatment or to gain powerful positions themselves.[165] Others used ideology to force leaders and propagandists themselves to work at least as hard and selflessly as they required ordinary peasants to do.[166] Campaigns could be manipulated by villagers who used them to deal with personal grudges against other community members.[167] Locally interest groups could sometimes link issues they prioritized to the campaign agenda.[168] State-organized campaigns even made possible otherwise unlikely collective action that enabled people to articulate their interests, even when their demands exceeded state given boundaries.[169] The masses themselves learned the effectiveness of mass criticism and used this tactic on their own behalf for publicly criticizing leaders in campaigns and demonstrations like the Tianan'men Square Incident in 1976.[170] When campaigns erupted into truly social movements, the leadership had no means to successfully negotiate with the movement, as the anarchistic and elite-endangering movement of the Cultural Revolution shows.[171]

The mass-line leadership is well suited to and is partly designed for campaigns. Although the mass line should be a constant way of leadership, apart from

162 Burns 1983, pp. 153, 155.

163 O'Brien and Li 1999.

164 Chan et al. 1984, p. 250.

165 Perry 2002, ch. 8; Shaw 1996, p. 211.

166 Chan et al. 1984, pp. 83–84.

167 Zhang 2004, pp. 35–36.

168 For example, the Hebei provincial Women's Federation used a campaign against Lin Biao and Confucius to declare some women's issues examples of feudal thought and thus campaign targets (Johnson 1983, pp. 201–202).

169 Zhou 1993, pp 58, 61–62.

170 Starr 1979, p. 201.

171 Dittmer 1994, p. 154.

routine management, the mass line aims at dramatic social change. From the point of view of democratic centralist theory, it is worthwhile to distinguish between democratic centralist and totalitarian campaigns. Instead of consisting of orders from the top only, the mass-line style campaigns should be sensible to feedback from the grassroots. Campaigns should evolve gradually and should respect local variation. The first step in a campaign is testing the policy in few model units and this feedback is used to design a campaign pattern with local receptivity in mind. Ideally campaign tactics should be persuasive, not coercive. History knows many well-tested and planned campaigns taking grassroots feedback seriously.[172] However, in order to fulfill above-set quotas, campaign work teams often had little interest in spending time in getting to know complex local conditions. Therefore, campaigns sometimes promoted policies that did not make sense to the local people.[173]

Democratic centralism and corporatism

If totalitarianism means that all social organizations are organized by or linked with the state, socialist China has actually tried to build up such a system. Although the theory of democratic centralism in itself is not hostile to voluntary association in civil society, it does not value horizontal linking and independent organization. Democratic centralism assumes that political initiatives need to enter the pyramidal administrative structure to be processed into policies. Therefore, the theory underlines contacts with the state. Consequently, many of the Chinese social units and political organizations have been linked to administration. Some mass organizations even formed their own pyramidal structures to feed governmental and Communist Party structures with information and initiatives on all levels of administration. Their ethos has been offering democratic centralist information about their own field or the social stratum they represent for decision makers. Instead of independent social organization, the purpose is to provide an alternative information channel for group-specific information.

Many Western scholars, trying to catch this state domination over the society in non-totalitarian terms, have turned to the corporatist theory. Unlike the totalitarian image of direct state penetration into the society, corporatism provides corporate units acting as intermediaries between the state and individuals. Corporatist units have independent status not reducible to the state. Under corporatism, the

172 Such campaigns include the Marriage Law propagation campaign in 1953 and agrarian reform in the late 1970s. See Johnson 1983, ch. 9–10, and Zweig A 1997, pp. 61–62, respectively.

173 Unger 1989, p. 118.

state licenses limited autonomy to subsidiary units.[174] To control interest representation, the state establishes corporatist systems for expressing societal interests through vertical functional institutions under the central control, but restricts horizontal linkages.[175] Corporatist representation structure has been largely set up on state initiative. Often corporate unit leaders are nominated by the state and membership is not voluntary.[176] Thus, corporatism means essentially interest-licensing by the state, and not interest representation arising from the society.[177]

The Western image of Chinese mass organizations is democratic centralist. Western researchers have conventionally emphasized that the state has established mass organizations for certain social groups, such as women, workers, or youth, to function as Leninist transmission belts. These transmission belts provided "a two-way conduit between the Party centre and the assigned constituencies: by top-down transmission, mobilization of workers and peasants for increased production on behalf of the nation's collective good; and by bottom-up transmission, articulation of grassroots rights and interests."[178] The Western research literature sees that in practice the mobilization aspect prevailed. Ray Yep, for example, argues that the strong state presence in intermediate organizations suffocates genuine communication.[179] Still, the Party established functional mass organizations to draw attention to group interests.[180] Especially in politically more relaxed periods, they can represent group interests or mediate between their constituent group and the state.[181] Peter Lee notes that corporatism synthesizes the images of powerful and powerless state. In corporatism, the powerful state structure is ideologically and institutionally constrained. These constraints make the state appear relatively powerless measured against its own economic objectives.[182]

Apart from mass organizations, like the trade union,[183] the corporatist organization model is evident in democratic parties,[184] specialist associations,[185] and

174 Lee 1991, pp. 154–155, 162–163.

175 Chan 1993, p. 36.

176 Chan and Unger 1995, p. 40.

177 Lee 1991, p. 155.

178 Chan and Unger 1995, p. 37. They even draw a mass-line analogy to the Leninist conception of transmission belt.

179 Yep 2000, p. 553–558.

180 E.g. Howell 2000, p. 356.

181 Chan, 1993, pp. 37, 44. For example, because of its dual role as a promoter of both state interests and workers' interests, the official trade union has mediated between workers and the state during strikes and social movements (Chan, 1993, p. 58; Lee 2000 A, pp. 50–51).

182 Lee 1991, pp. 154, 173.

183 Chan 1993; Lee 1991; Yang 1989.

184 Chan and Unger 1995, pp. 44–45.

185 Chan and Unger 1995, p. 40.

even in work units.[186] These corporatist organizations are usually created on a functional basis to represent a certain social group, but also to serve as a route for the state to reach that group. The democratic centralist ethos of such organizations is evident. For example, official business associations supervise member enterprises and their tax paying, educate entrepreneurs about official values and policies, but also protect members' rights and interests against local government's excessive demands. Associations assist businessmen to cope with authorities and reflect their views to the government.[187] Obviously, such organizations take seriously not only their democratic centralist role as an information channel, but also the role of persuasion and education.

Corporatism looks for organized consensus and cooperation instead of pluralist competition and conflict.[188] Although the Chinese state recognizes social interests, official discourse denies the existence of interest conflicts. Therefore, it sees no need for independent interest groups, but mandates that all interests must cooperate with the Party.[189] Moreover, state corporatism does not recognize differing interests within each corporate group, say between management and workers.[190] Simultaneously, the organization of interests in separate associations also hinders formation of a united stratum-wide interest.[191] Under this system, organizations or units are assumed to represent both corporate and state interests.[192] Although the corporate system does not recognize hierarchical conflict between the state and a social organization or unit, there can be tensions and contradictions between the two. In these situations a corporate unit sometimes sides with corporate interest, regardless of the risks involved.[193] To fulfill corporatist obligations and assert its own rights, the unit may even seek to frustrate the objectives of the state. For example, the corporatist interest can cause a factory to prioritize workers' welfare over state-demanded efficiency.[194]

Corporatism may suit Chinese cultural predispositions, since corporatist arrangements are typical of other East Asian countries as well.[195] Scholars using a corporatist model have generally recognized that institutional design for corporatism was laid down already in the 1950s, but most see that only social liberali-

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186 Yang 1989.

187 Odgaard 1992, p. 99–100; Yep 2000, p. 554.

188 Chan and Unger 1995, p. 32.

189 Bernstein 1999, pp. 202–203.

190 Chan 1993, p. 36.

191 Yep 2000, pp. 558–560.

192 Yang 1989, pp. 39, 55.

193 Chan 1993, pp. 36–37; Yang 1989, pp. 49, 55.

194 Lee 1991, p. 168–172.

195 Chan and Unger 1995; Gu 2000 B, pp. 78–79.

zation during the Deng era reforms left adequate space for corporatist representation.[196] Peter Lee, for example, argues that corporatism evolves from the state recognition of limitations of totalitarian design. Since socialist organization and feedback systems have proven inefficient due to underdevelopment, the state agrees to share the control over industrial production and its revenue with work units.[197] The theory of democratic centralism would assume the opposite. Democratic centralist organization probably was strongest when ideology backed participatory communities, whereas reformist politics has undermined corporatist units since it advocates smaller government and larger spheres of social and economic interaction. Although the state has established numerous new corporatist-type organizations to link it with new groups and interests created by reforms,[198] many new groups and interests have no corporatist representation. Before most individuals belonged automatically to some corporatist-like unit through their workplace and residence, but this is no longer true with private enterprises, independent farming, unemployment, and the rise of new housing areas. This failure to reach large parts of the citizenry, not development of more representative corporatist organizations,[199] undermines state corporatism.

The Cultural Revolution can demonstrate something about the inefficiencies of corporatist representation. It dismantled many corporatist organizations which resumed operation on the national level only in the late 1970s.[200] Although some scholars blame Mao Zedong for desiring to terminate the corporatist input function,[201] Maoists actually argued that revisionists had structured mass participation and organizations to serve bureaucratic interests instead of popular influencing.[202] The Cultural Revolutionary disillusionment towards official channels of interest representation suggests the inadequacy of corporatist representation. Radicals saw traditional mass organizations as unrepresentative and bureaucratic bastions of established interests. Workers were unhappy with the tendency of the official trade union to side with the state when workers' interests clashed with state targets.[203] However, Elizabeth Perry argues that the problem was less that corporatist representation had been inefficient, but that some groups were

196 E.g. Chan and Unger 1995, p. 29; Lee 1991, p. 154, 172–173.

197 Lee 1991, pp. 154–155, 159–161, 164, 172–173.

198 Chan and Unger 1995, p. 38; Yep 2000, p. 563.

199 As is expected by Chan and Unger 1995, p. 40.

200 For example, the All-China Women's Federation slowly revived its organization on the local and provincial levels in the early 1970s, but convened its first national conference since the 1960s only in 1978. See, e.g., Johnson 1983, pp. 181, 195–196, 210–212.

201 Chan and Unger 1995, pp. 37–38.

202 Townsend 1980, p. 412.

203 For the workers' movement and the issue of the representativeness of the official trade union during the Cultural Revolution, see, e.g., Chan 1993, pp. 33–34; Perry 2002, ch. 8.

demanding inclusion.[204] Obviously, corporatist design has two blind spots: it does not recognize that contradictions between grassroots and national interests cannot always be solved for mutual benefit, nor does it recognize the interests of those who are excluded from corporatist organization. Therefore, it is not surprising to discover that Chinese workers have at times protested the absence of independent unions or even organized autonomous unions.[205]

However, some critical voices have questioned the suitability of the term corporatism to the Chinese context because China lacks some important components of corporatism, like collective bargaining in labor issues.[206] David Yang claims that instead of only trying to manage interest articulation and aggregation as a corporatist state would do, China also tries to monopolize societal interest articulation.[207] Ray Yep has criticized the suitability of the corporatist model on the grounds that the organization of social interests in China is not sufficient to give social interests the sector-wide integration and discipline needed for true bargaining power through corporatist organizations.[208]

Although the corporatist design itself accords with democratic centralism, it seems corporatism is undermined by other democratic centralist practices. Democratic centralism encourages contacting, obviously also inside corporatist associations. Both Ole Odgaard and Ray Yep have observed that entrepreneur associations are useful for establishing good relationships with cadres on an individual basis. Such practice has actually undermined the possibility to use corporatist association for advancing corporate interest because it sets members on an unequal footing and encourages them to pursue exceptional treatment.[209] In addition, existence of other democratic centralist channels seems to hamper successful corporatism. Ray Yep remarks that for entrepreneurs corporatist associations are not the most central means for group interest aggregation or communication between state and society. Instead, the most successful managers participate in administration as representatives to the people's congresses or even as deputy mayors.[210]

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204 Perry 2002, ch. 8. She also found that permanent state workers with all benefits supported official corporatist trade unions.

205 Lee 2000 A, pp. 49, 55–57. See Perry 1992, pp. 156–158, for a concise presentation of autonomous worker unions in the 1989 protest movement. See also Perry 2002, p. 220, for strikers' attempt to bypass and exclude the official trade union, which had to compromise with state demands and did not sufficiently represent workers' demands.

206 Although it is evident that China has no corporatist system of the kind known in, for example, Europe I will use the term 'corporatism' here to refer to the special Chinese style of corporatism. In this study, I use the term in the sense it is now conventionally used in China studies, without further pondering the adequacy of the term itself.

207 Yang 2004, p. 6.

208 Yep 2000.

209 Odgaard 1992, pp. 100, 102; Yep 2000, pp. 557–558, 560.

210 Yep 2000, pp. 560, 564–565.

Although particularist relationships with decision makers or inclusion in decision making evidently undermine collective action, and even formation of collective interest, this is a problem only for the corporatist model, not for democratic centralism. Democratic centralism encourages multiple channels for influencing and even decrees that entrepreneurial input is channeled not only through corporatist associations, but also through functional representation in people's congresses.

However, China is known for considerable local and sectoral variation. Some other organizations seem to be developing truly corporatist collective bargaining and representation of group interest.[211] Yunqiu Zhang has found that in Qingdao, the official trade union now has taken worker representation as its task in order to balance simultaneous organizing by management. In Qingdao, enterprise trade unions now negotiate collective contracts with management regarding wages and working conditions and sit on tripartite enterprise mediation committees.[212] For Qingdao trade unions, democratic centralist methods and multiple representation channels have not proven to be any obstacle to collective identity and activities, perhaps because worker interest has no other credible representative there. For groups with more resources, such as entrepreneurs, sector-wide organization may be much less appealing.

The Qingdao trade union adheres closely to democratic centralist methods. It receives appeals from workers, assists workers in demanding that enterprises respect their legal rights, investigates work conditions and transmits workers' requests to the administration or higher-level trade union organs. It also makes proposals to the city government for improvement of workers' conditions, sits on city organs formulating new labor regulations, demands that firms set up workers' congresses, and has its leaders selected in the city Party committee and other policy-making bodies.[213] Evidently, the Qingdao trade union has simultaneously and successfully sought voice through various democratic centralist channels other than just corporatist organizations themselves. Yunqiu Zhang analyzes that close official ties have made possible efficient promotion of the interest of its constituency. Cooperation with the city government has been fruitful because both sides share concerns about social stability and economic growth.[214] Obviously, the democratic centralist ideal of harmonization of interests does not prevent societal corporatist arrangements. Instead, local government has realized that its own role in harmonizing interests becomes easier if it gives corporatist organizations an

211 Strictly speaking, Yunqiu Zhang himself interprets this as being a development from state corporatism towards a civil society role for the trade union. Yet, an appropriate term for the result is corporatism, here in the sense Ray Yep used the term above.

212 Zhang 1997, pp. 124, 132–134, 136.

213 Zhang 1997, pp. 136–137.

214 Zhang 1997, p. 137.

active role. As Yunqiu Zhang observes, by granting some autonomy for trade unions the state avoids direct involvement in mediation, which could make it a target for worker or management discontent as a result. By encouraging corporatist bargaining, government can present itself as a neutral representative of the all the people.[215] Apparently, authorities sometimes find that their democratic centralist role as impartial centralizer becomes easier when there are intermediary social organizations representing social interests. Therefore, there seems to be no contradiction between democratic centralism and civil society formation.

Democratic centralist civil society

As Lowell Dittmer concludes, the Mao-era society was compartmentalized into units with working intramural communication, but, in the absence of a society-wide public realm, units needed the center to bridge their communication with other units.[216] Obviously, democratic centralist hierarchical communication patterns mostly prevented horizontal civil society communication. Economic liberalization and the waning of the ideal of big government since the early 1980s has created a new wave of societal organization in China.[217] This wave has invited more forms of societal organization than was customary during the Mao era. The reform-era state has used associations to replace old direct forms of administrative control with social management.[218] For example, administrative coordination by industrial bureaus and ministries has been replaced with coordination within corporatist industrial associations.[219] Thus, the impetus for forming social organizations comes mainly from above and, hence, membership in these organizations is not always voluntary.[220]

Apart from managing society more effectively, the state expects associations to represent and accommodate social interests.[221] The cooperation is based on certain common interests shared by the state and members, such as mediating conflicts between the state and association members or between members. With economic associations the state also shares the aim of promoting economic development.[222] The state also encourages associations to use private resources for

215 Zhang 1997, p. 141.

216 Dittmer 1994, p. 153.

217 I have adopted the expression 'new wave' from Cecilia Milwertz, who uses it for the feminist movement only (Milwertz 2002, pp. 3–6).

218 Ding 2001, pp. 55–56.

219 Chan and Unger 1995, p. 43.

220 White 1994 B, pp. 213–214.

221 Ding 2001, p. 56; Saich 2000, p. 124.

222 White 1994 B, p. 208.

services the state is unable or unwilling to provide.[223] When the state creates associations as intermediaries for social regulation, it needs to provide some autonomy for their activities and some genuine voice for their membership's interest.[224] Further, interest differentiation resulting from economic and social reforms has increased the pressure for greater autonomy from the state.[225]

The state seeks to promote democratic-centralist-style communication when it fosters associations. As Gordon White summarizes, the state wants social organizations to provide a communication channel between the state and the organization's members, as well as to bring together otherwise uncoordinated economic actors to coordinate their policies. This would "facilitate the state's management of, and policy implementation within, a given sector."[226] Associations facilitate both horizontal and vertical integration by bringing together the state and enterprises on the one hand, and different enterprises and different state bureaucracies on the other.[227] In accordance with Leninist tradition, associations are assigned a dual function of facilitating state control over social groups and providing their members a means for interest representation. Although this dual function is assumed to be frictionless, in practice representing the interest of one often means sacrificing the interest of the other.[228]

In accordance with the typical democratic centralist arrangement, the official organization model for civil society seeks to establish vertical information channels between an association and a state organ. Thus, scholars have noted that the state-promoted organization model for societal association resembles state-led corporatist[229] or even vertical and compartmentalized administrative[230] organization. In addition, the Chinese state determines which organizations are legitimate.[231] It has mandated that, in order to be registered, social organizations must affiliate with a state or Party organ which is responsible for supervising the organization.[232] The state assigns a representational monopoly to an association, where it does not allow duplicate associations for the same social sector and area.[233] As Tony Saich notes, such a design limits horizontal linkages, favors

223 Frolic 1997, p. 60–61.
224 White 1994 B, p. 207, 214.
225 Ding 2001, p. 59.
226 White 1994 B, p. 207.
227 White 1994 B, p. 208.
228 Ding 2001, pp. 56–58.
229 Frolic 1997, p. 58; Ding 2001, pp. 52–53.
230 Saich 2000, p. 132.
231 Frolic 1997, p. 58.
232 See rules in Gu B 2000, pp. 90–91.
233 Ding 2001, p. 55.

groups with close government ties, discourages bottom-up initiatives, and prevents holders of different viewpoints from setting up different interest groups.[234] Obviously, not only the democratic centralist ideal of close state-society linkages but also the democratic centralist deliberative ideal of bringing different interests to the same table plays a part in such a design. Naturally, such a design discourages social pressuring and encourages balancing of differing interests.

However, the democratic centralist image of associations often diverges from practice. As Jonathan Unger has observed, associations seem to be organized on corporatist lines on paper. However, corporatist intention can be undermined on both ends: Some associations do not effectively reach the group they are supposed to represent and control, while others pay more attention to social demands by their constituency than to state initiatives.[235] As Tony Saich maintains, state capacity to control activities of social organizations is limited. Rhetoric and practice often diverge.[236] In practice, associations register under such supervisory organs as their leaders have personal connections with or under which they expect less state intervention.[237] Moreover, the state does not specify obligations for the supervisory organ. Factors like the function of the association, the nature of the supervisory organ, and administrative level have influence on the state ability to control each association.[238] As Yijiang Ding concludes, no single model can explain associational activities in China.[239]

Nevertheless, as Tony Saich puts it, although each association has negotiated with the state its own niche, ranging from close relationship with the state to evasion, the state has retained a great deal of its organizational power in social space.[240] Michael Frolic even argues that there are dual civil societies in China. Autonomous civil society is weak, while another, state-led civil society predominates. Since the state has the capacity to harness any concerted pressures for autonomy, civil society associations tend to become surrogates for the state rather than centers for citizen resistance to a repressive state. State-led civil society extends the reach of the state and helps the state to organize economy and society. It helps the state to govern and co-opt socially active elements.[241]

It is possible that apart from Leninist organizational ideals, some cultural factors play a part in shaping state-dependent civil society in China. In Japan as

234 Saich 2000, p. 132.

235 Unger 1996, p. 818.

236 Saich 2000, p. 125.

237 Ding 2001, p. 64, Wank 1995 A, p. 60.

238 Ding 2001, pp. 60–64; Unger 1996, p. 816.

239 Ding 2001, p. 74.

240 Saich 2000, p. 139.

241 Frolic 1997, pp. 56–58, 60, 67.

well NPOs are registered under a ministry responsible for the supervision of NPOs in its bailiwick. The state itself has organized many NPOs and staffs them with retired bureaucrats. Likewise, socially initiated NPOs often have appointed bureaucrats in their leadership in order to facilitate intercourse with the state. The state also promotes organizations whose cooperation it uses for maintenance of order and provision of public services for the assigned groups. These state-promoted associations often enjoy a monopoly for representing the group and channel state funding to the group, which often makes members dependent on the association in question.[242]

It seems that many Chinese associations have a democratic centralist ethos. Many social organizations are willing to compromise their autonomy in order to increase their influence. They try to find channels to or even become intermeshed with the state or Party organs.[243] Many associations see themselves as bridges between members and government.[244] Many state in their constitution that they help government in managing society.[245]

A democratic centralist ethos is evident also when an association augments existing channels of communication between a social group and the state. For example, some associations have chosen to pay more attention to representing those interests and groups among their members who have no established channels for influencing decision making.[246] On the other hand, official institutions can establish associations for increasing their own links to society. For instance, mass organizations may sponsor associations for finding new channels to communicate with and to represent more widely their assigned constituency.[247] That is, such mass organizations are trying to find means of better fulfilling their democratic centralist role of social representation.

Although many Western researchers would prefer more associational autonomy from the state,[248] some researchers have observed the benefits a social organization receives from affiliating with state organs or state-organized mass organizations. The state provides resources for associations it has recognized. These include subsidies, materials, office workers, and office space as well as connections with decision makers and access to ready-made country-wide net-

242 See, e.g., Pekkanen 2003, pp. 121–125; Reber 1999, pp. 345–347, Schwartz 2003 A, p. 11.

243 White 1994 B, p. 214.

244 Unger 1996, p. 812.

245 Ding 2001, p. 56.

246 Unger 1996, pp. 810–811.

247 Howell 2000, p. 362.

248 See for example the moralistic language in Sullivan 1990, hailing autonomous unions formed during the 1989 protest movement as "popular assault on political dependency" (p. 131).

works.[249] Links to the state through an association provide its members with a setting for pursuing particularistic gain, such as personal connections, privileged distributions, exceptions, and rules favorable to them.[250]

Close ties with the state can be beneficial for political influencing. Associations cooperate with the state in order to influence official institutions to change their practices or policies.[251] Tony Saich even believes that officially recognized associations have considerable impact on the policy-making process since close government links give them a more direct role in policy formulation than autonomy would. Officially recognized status means that they have no need to compete in social space with other organizations to be heard by the government.[252]

Moreover, Cecilia Milwertz emphasizes that strict state rules for registration actually provide legitimacy for registered associations allowing them to determine their own activities relatively autonomously. On their own behalf, associations may seek official links to assure state officials about the appropriateness of their activities in a social environment suspicious of autonomous organization. To legitimate their cause, social organizations often invite representatives of state institutions to their events.[253]

Cadres as gatekeepers

David Easton has used the term gatekeeper for those persons and organizations in a political system through which commoners gain access to the political system. Gatekeepers channel inputs, both demands and support, from the population to decision-making processes.[254] Under the Chinese mass-line politics local cadres serve as the principal gatekeepers. This differs from pluralist systems, in which a commoner's access to official decision making is mainly transmitted by intermediary organizations, such as interest groups and political parties. In the pluralist political setting citizens have several input channels to choose for political influencing. Ideally a Chinese has several available channels as well, although these channels usually are official or at least authorized by the state.

The obvious benefit of having direct contacts with official gatekeepers is the likelihood of one's views gaining an official hearing. Ease of access explains not

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249 Gu 2000 B, p. 100; Howell 2000, p. 362; White 1994 B, p. 206. For an exceptionally successful use of official connections, see the story of the Jinglun Family Center in Milwertz 2002, ch. 3.

250 Odgaard 1992 p. 100; White 1994 B, pp. 209; Yep 2000, pp. 557–558.

251 Milwertz 2002, p. 138.

252 Saich 2000, p. 139.

253 Milwertz 2002, pp. 130, 135.

254 Easton 1979, pp. 136–137.

only the benefits of the corporatist-like organization model but also Chinese intellectuals' tendency seek contacts with the state.[255] No doubt close relations to decision makers facilitates political influencing by opening channels for expressing one's views to those in power. Nevertheless, democratic centralism leaves it to those in power to decide how to apply information relayed to them through democratic centralist channels. Furthermore, this arrangement tames those choosing official ways for expression and makes them play by the Party-set rules.[256] As Geremie Barmé has remarked, in the 1990s intellectuals faced the dilemma that if one wants to influence, one needs contacts with the establishment, but contact maintenance require compromises.[257] Co-optation can bring influence within the system, but it surely demands tacit acceptance of many state-set rules and priorities.[258]

A system in which authorities themselves act as gatekeepers for popular demands and policy feedback can theoretically be totalitarian in character. However, although state domination of political input channels is one characteristic of totalitarianism, it is not a sufficient condition. A totalitarian state uses state control over input channels to suppress any initiatives from below other than expressions of support. Thus, the information flow from the top down is the only legitimate direction of communication. If there are genuine input channels for popular opinions and moods and if information flows in both directions between the populace and the leadership, then the totalitarian potentiality does not actualize.

The Chinese evidence in this respect is mixed. Democratic centralist channels have been used both for influencing and for control.[259] Moreover, the existence of meaningful input channels should not make us blind to frequent evidence of situations where input channels have been systematically blocked. As Victor Falkenheim observes, with ideologically motivated policies, the Party sometimes delegitimizes expression of popular sentiment.[260] False inputs leading to famine during the Great Leap Forward provide an appalling example of systematic misrepresentation that a distorted democratic centralist system can cause.

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255 E.g. Gu 2000 A, p. 166.

256 See, e.g., Gu 2000 A, p. 162–167. Although pursuing a political career usually requires self-conditioning everywhere, in China this requirement extends to far wider parts of the society than in the West, including not only politicians, but also intellectuals and journalists, or even every adult during the radical participatory periods.

257 Barmé 2000, p. 212.

258 See, e.g., Chan 1993, pp. 32–39, for the balancing of state and workers' interest by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions.

259 Walder 1986, ch. 3, sees the work unit as a means for control. For the work unit as a setting of influencing, see, e.g., Shi 1997.

260 Falkenheim 1983, p. 53.

A cadre can distort democratic centralist information flow in order to exert power over his subordinates. Commoners can become dependent on a cadre who has discretion in selecting the messages he chooses to relay. When alternative gatekeepers are not easily available, it makes sense for Chinese commoners to cultivate relations with their leaders. In Western studies of China this kind of influencing has been called clientelism. Jean Oi, a prominent scholar of this tradition, discovered how the Chinese peasants pursued their interest and influenced policy implementation through their personal relations with cadres, who in turn manipulated state-mandated production and tax reports for local benefit.[261] The situation becomes malicious if a cadre chooses to register only the opinions or interests of a certain group, say his own clan or faction members, leaving outsiders without adequate representation.

The situation in which local cadres act as gatekeepers can create another anomaly. If a gatekeeper receives benefits from relaying only one kind of information, corruption may occur. Studies of clientelism show that particularist cultivation of relations with gatekeepers does pay off. To reward their clients, cadres can control information flows in both directions for mutual benefit. For example, they could harm central policy implementation by warning their entrepreneur clients in advance about inspections and policy changes, while they could also feed the administration information beneficial to their clients during decision making involving licenses or contracts and thus disadvantage other firms on the market.[262]

Verticality of information flows

Apart from problems caused by ideological wishful thinking, there are systemic problems in democratic centralist information channels. Limited volume of processable information is one of these. Often it is not possible to portray the richness of lower-level opinions or the complexity of the practical situation within the limited space and time available in reports and meetings. Information flowing through the system loses details at all levels. Bill Brugger remarks how the volume of information has been greater than the Chinese information channels can cope with, with the result that each level screens out part of the information when passing information to the level below or above. This naturally distorts the message and dilutes control.[263]

Sometimes processing of information is beneficial for decision making. If the report writer is able to distill variety into its essentials, common problems and

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261 Oi 1991.

262 Wank B 1995, pp. 158–166,

263 Brugger 1976, p. 239.

widespread demands as well as workable alternatives may become all the more evident. Not all people are so analytical or unbiased that they can objectively represent all sides, though. Even without any subjective misrepresentation, those who report are likely to discriminate against minority situations and views. Views differing from the cadre's own could, either unconsciously or purposely, receive inadequate attention. Views hard to understand because of their complexity, originality or non-compatibility with the mainstream worldview will suffer as well. This, naturally, is a problem of any hierarchical bureaucratic information flow. This kind of bias can lead to problems well demonstrated by Tang Tsou. He explains the violent confrontation ending the 1989 protests in terms of differing information available to leaders and demonstrators about policies and popular sentiment. Information flowing both downwards about policy and upwards about the grassroots situation distorted facts so that mutual misunderstanding occurred.[264]

Evidently, the limited capacity of the communication system and the resulting information overload have been problems in the Chinese administration.[265] Peter Lee shows how the feedback system in China was too weak to process all information needed for state economic planning.[266] Even effective circulation of documents did not necessarily make grassroots implementers understand the national government's goals since they received more documents than they had time to familiarize themselves with.[267] Not only did channels have limited capacity, but information had to pass the multi-layered pyramid of personal relationships which filters messages to serve individual interests.[268] Moreover, the center's messages were often mixed, even contradictory, its ideological goals were often alien to local cadres, and the guidelines it gave were abstract or ambiguous enough for differing interpretations.[269] Many grassroots cadres became cautious in responding to often changing policies,[270] but sometimes a few abstract words in a national leaders' speech could cause local policy change.[271]

In the democratic centralist information chain, one unit operates at the same time as a communication channel for lower level demands and interests to the levels above and as the executor of the state policy. Hence, it is likely that such

264 Tsou 1991, pp. 282–287. For examples of how distortion in upward-flowing messages has influenced decisions, see Yan Jiaqi 1995, p. 13.

265 Butler 1983, p. 121; Oi 1991, p. 90–91.

266 Lee 1991, p. 174.

267 Nathan 1986, p. 75.

268 McCormick 1990, p. 61–62.

269 Nathan 1986, p. 41–42; Zweig 1989, pp. 75, 96, 195.

270 Nathan 1986, p. 41–42.

271 Unger 1989, p. 118.

channels are tuned mainly to messages concerning state interests.[272] If all agents and organs within these channels are responsible for efficient implementation, information channels are tempted to censor messages demonstrating the unpopularity or incompleteness of policy implementation, or at least treat them as technical problems in implementation. Likewise, they often do not pay attention to inputs that seem irrelevant for policy implementation.

A likely result of democratic centralist communication will be a statist approach to communication. This approach itself will reduce responsiveness to popular moods as soon as popular concerns do not deal with issues that the state deems important. Jürgen Habermas scrutinizes this problem from another angle. According to him, when communication takes place within functionally separated systems, fuctional systems tend to create their own autonomous language and understanding of society, which hinders their communication with their environment and makes them insensitive to the costs they generate to other systems and to the needs of the society as a whole. Such communication aims at fulfilling goals set by the system, without engaging in conversations over norms, values and interests.[273] Presumably the Chinese communication system has been heavily geared towards downward transmission of orders and has been less sensitive to upward flow of information, a situation often noted by Western scholars.[274] Quite likely, the imbalance between downward and upward flows of information is not caused by leaders' ideological charisma, political restrictions of freedom of expression, or any incorrect practices of individual administrators, but may be an inherent problem in democratic centralist systems. Therefore, unlike the 1978–1981 press discussion assumed, improvement of democratic centralist practice and more receptivity to popular opinion itself does not cure the problem. Only patching democratic centralism with effective horizontal communication systems, such as a lively political civil society, will accomplish this.

A democratic centralist system has obvious built-in flaws that make policy monitoring ineffective. Bureaucratic reasons for blocking information inside administrative hierarchies and departments create inherent problems for democratic centralist vertical information flow. Individual gatekeepers can and do filter and even suppress information, as they do in any bureaucracy. Because information flows in both directions through the same democratic centralist channel, this channel can be highly selective about the information concerning its own functioning.

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272 For example, Burns 1983, p. 153–155, tells how a work team sent to a village may have channeled villagers' demands in some issues coinciding with its tasks, but implemented the state policy assigned to it regardless of the policy being against local interests.

273 Habermas 1996, p. 343, 345.

274 Here I partly borrow wording from Lieberthal 1995, p. 65, 178. See also, e.g., Chan 1993; Yep 2000.

Because they trust the very same people who execute policies to pass information, democratic centralist channels often filter messages about execution of state policies. It is psychologically credible to suppose that a cadre would try to either block information harmful to himself or at least explain away mistakes he has made. As Tianjian Shi remarks, "there is no adequate means for supervising policy implementation, because the organization responsible for implementing policy is also responsible for sanctioning the mistakes of local bureaucrats."[275]

Multiple channels under a single center has proven an inefficient, although not always a useless, channel to reveal misdeeds by those working for this system. As Bruce Gilley remarks, "Without free newspapers or opposition parties, the control of wrongdoing becomes stalled by closed political networks."[276] Too often popular input about policy implementation, such as complaints, pass in a democratic centralist manner through exactly the same cadres or administrative organs who are under criticism. As a result, cadres or organs have been able block or reduce critical messages in order to protect themselves. Therefore, such Chinese supervision practices as letters and visits to administrative organs are not enough to monitor the effects of the governments' activities.[277]

Moreover, levels above can give incentives for the lower levels to censor information for reasons that are partly ideological, but possibly also systemic. In all organizations, higher levels set publicly known expectations for the kind of information they like to receive and reward lower-level actors for delivering such messages. Democratic centralist information channels can aggravate the tendency to feed superiors the kind of information they expect because the same system responsible for communication also rewards political achievements. Such channels are likely to be deficient for communicating the actual state of implementation. All administrative levels can consciously block messages about the unfeasibility or unpopularity of a policy that the center promotes. Western scholarship has demonstrated that for their own career considerations cadres have incentives to execute highly unpopular state demands possibly ruinous to local production in ideologically motivated campaigns in order to receive attention from higher-ups.[278] Presumably these unpopular or even harmful policies were reported as successes, regardless of facts.

Other cadres may block information available to their superiors to serve local interests.[279] This leads into ineffective monitoring of policy implementation by

275 Shi 1999, p. 396

276 Gilley 2004, p. 41.

277 Shirk 1992, pp. 62–63.

278 Zweig 1989, p. 131, Friedman et al. 1991.

279 Practical examples abound here. For example, local cadres have duped higher administrative levels by false information about successful birth control. County level administrators are

the state and leaves some space for localities to evade or twist state policies. Many Western scholars have marked that local leaders dominate information about local situations in official channels of communication and use false reporting to dilute state control.[280] Because the state relies on information it gets from local leaders, it is unable to monitor policy compliance. As a result, some authority leaks to localities.[281] Especially in the countryside the state often relies on a single channel of information since at the grassroots the same people tend to staff Party and administrative posts, and alternative hierarchies, such as mass organizations, democratic parties and professional organizations are either weak or non-existent. This may be one reason, along with long distances and political prioritization of city areas, for stronger state control in cities than in the countryside.[282] This may provide rural areas more leeway to interpret central state policies than cities have had.[283]

Western democratic states have promoted independent channels of information and mutually monitoring and checking political institutions as cures for bureaucratic distortion of information. The Western governments thus allow independent information channels to facilitate monitoring of local situations and receiving independent information about popular moods.[284] Amartya Sen, using socialist China as an negative example, remarks that countries having a free press have not had famines because political and civil rights give people the opportunity to draw attention forcefully to problems and demand appropriate public action.[285] In China, alternative channels are sometimes difficult to access or their information flow returns to the main channel at some point. For example, mass organizations or democratic parties provide alternative information channels, but they do not publicize their information but feed it to the Communist Party on some level of administration. Thus, the problems related to internal information flow cannot be totally overcome.

Even when there were nominally separate democratic centralist organizations, an ideologically sensitive system, such as the mass-line system explicitly was,

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hesitant to investigate the real situation because their own career and rewards depend on successful implementation of state policy (White 2000, p. 110). David Zweig even tells how during the Cultural Revolution a few villages succeeded in distributing land to independent tillers despite the contemporary emphasis on collective cultivation and, with the assistance of the commune, in fooling all higher-level inspectors (Zweig 1997 A, p. 137).

280 McCormick 1990, p. 91; Oi 1991, pp. 84–85.

281 Zweig 1989, pp. 2–3.

282 This stronger control is documented by Falkenheim 1978, pp. 30–31, and Wolf 1984.

283 For example, the state has been able to strictly control fertility in urban areas, while there has been more room for noncompliance in the countryside. See, e.g., White 2000, p. 105.

284 Shirk 1992, p. 62.

285 Sen 1997.

might tend to give extra powers to organizations having the authority of ideological interpretation compared to organizations handling practical input only. It is well known that in China the Communist Party and its party secretaries often overruled, even dominated, other organizations.

Multiple vertical information channels are themselves insufficient for curing all problems deriving from the verticality of democratic centralist information channels. All vertical bureaucratic systems are somewhat prone to insufficient exchange of information with other bureaucracies and outsiders in general. Bureaucratic boundaries tend to lead to insufficient coordination and overall planning.[286] Yet, democratic centralist emphasis on vertical channels and disregard for horizontal information flows may aggravate this problem. Constant inter-bureaucratic meetings,[287] personal and informal relations between personnel working in different bureaucracies,[288] circulation of documents,[289] even lack of functional specification of local government roles,[290] serve as horizontal channels. However, horizontal information flows are mainly official and efficient horizontal communication in civil society is largely missing from this picture.

Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg remark that since in China most official communication takes place within functional and territorial administrative units, compartmentalization of information follows.[291] Understandably, built-in informational rigidities stemming from vertical insularity of bureaucratic structures lead to policy coordination difficulties.[292] On the local level, economic development demanded more complex forms of interdependencies with other units than the local administrative system was capable of coordinating.[293] In addition, verticality of information channels led to information overload. Command economy suffered from planning authorities' inability to plan most products due to the number and variety of products, numerous administrative divisions and local units, and long chains of communication.[294] It should now be evident that the state decision to lessen its economic control and let markets play a role in determining economic rationality meant a recognition of the incapacity of vertical information flows and an attempt to find a more efficient coordination mechanism. Acceptance of markets as a form of horizontal communication did boost eco-

286 See, e.g., Halpern 1992, p. 127.

287 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, p. 152.

288 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, pp. 155–157.

289 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, p. 153; Wu 1995, pp. 26–27.

290 Blecher and Shue 1996, p. 29, Selden 1972, p. 222.

291 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, pp. 152–153.

292 Baum and Shevchenko 1999, pp. 336–337.

293 Butler 1983, pp. 136–137.

294 Lee 1991, p. 174.

nomic growth. Yet, similar inefficiencies and coordination problems are probably inherent to democratic centralist systems in general and the state is still reluctant to accept social and political horizontal communication.

Complex bureaucracies not only obstruct inter-bureaucracy exchange of information, but hierarchical units within one bureaucracy also have borders blocking some information. Especially the Chinese type of system, which discourages functional separation between rule-making and executive powers, is able to use power in ways non-transparent not only to the public but to administrative superiors as well. Nina Halpern remarks that each bureaucratic agency has an incentive to monopolize the information necessary for understanding its particular policy sphere, so that neither bureaucratic superiors nor other agencies can alter decisions it makes.[295] When no independent information is available, access to information becomes a form of power and control.[296] Since the center is relatively insulated from external impulses, specialized bureaucracies become important channels of knowledge about local situations and public opinion and can exert influence as such.[297] David Lampton has noted systematic bureaucratic distortion of information in order to advance the bureaucratic interest of one's own ministry.[298] Even local cadres learn to draw attention to their area when central policies could provide gain for the locality and to keep a low profile when the state could demand that the localities provide more than their usual share.[299]

Localism

Many Western scholars have found that in China implementation of central policies is often distorted or partial.[300] As Kristen Parris puts it, local collusion of governmental and popular interests can be used to thwart central policy and create opportunities against state policies when the center is constrained by weak infrastructure and organizational capacities.[301] Lynn White claims that in China the central government overstates what it can do, and local levels quietly undermine its power. Local leaders do not claim independent power, but simply take it. They speak respectfully about hierarchical relations, but their behavior

295 Halpern 1992, pp. 127–128.

296 Lieberthal 1995, p. 178.

297 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, p. 410.

298 Lampton 1992, p. 55–56.

299 Shue 1988, pp. 57–58.

300 O'Brien 1994 A, pp. 33–34, 48–59.

301 Parris 1993, p. 242.

often shows lack of such respect. The result is uninstitutionalized decentralization.[302]

Western research about policy implementation at the grassroots often finds that in practice the central state's limited ability to monitor local situations guaranteed some local leeway in implementation.[303] Higher administrative levels monitored quite closely model units, revenue generating areas, easily accessible areas and areas close to political centers. In addition, higher-ups intruded in poor or disaster-stricken units to improve economic performance there. But average performance and poor communication lines usually protected localities from close inspections.[304] Higher levels were too busy and not sufficiently familiar with local situations to monitor localities effectively. Inspections were rare and superficial. Sometimes county levels did not even want to investigate things too closely in order to preserve good working relations with the grassroots policy implementers and to avoid finding things that would not look good in their superiors' eyes.[305] When there was an inspection, local cadres mostly succeeded in misleading inspection teams since both the reporting and inspection systems depended on the local leader's cooperation.[306]

Monitoring was hampered by many problems in information flow. Long chains of command in administration complicate monitoring.[307] The chronically overloaded agenda kept administrators too busy to keep an eye on everything.[308] Furthermore, Steven Butler demonstrates that higher levels measured success of a policy by a single goal indicator, such as increase of grain yields. Grassroots cadres sometimes selected another method of bringing about these anticipated results. In this situation, sometimes local interest was sacrificed for state goals, sometimes the goal was produced by violating state regulations.[309] Moreover, some policies were not concrete enough or their results were not visible enough for routine supervision to disclose. Brief investigation could not reveal whether or not a village practiced officially promoted accounting or remuneration systems, for example.[310]

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302 White 1999 (1), p. 18; White 1999 (2), p. 671.

303 See, e.g., Oi 1991, p. 96; Zweig 1989, pp. 83–97.

304 Greenhalgh 1993, p. 220; Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, p. 351; Zweig 1989, pp. 83–84, 89, 96, 128.

305 Oi 1991, p. 96; Shue 1988, p. 109, 112; White 2000, pp. 110; Zweig 1989, pp. 83–87.

306 Oi 1991, pp. 91, 95.

307 Zweig 1997 A, p. 133.

308 Greenhalgh 1993, p. 220, Zweig 1989, pp. 83–84, 96.

309 Butler 1983, pp. 121, 126.

310 Zweig 1989, p. 91.

Economic excellence could give more lease for the locality. Economic success attracted central interest, but it also generated resources for independent local developmental programs.[311] Local cadres sought to accumulate resources for local economies in order to reduce central dominance and enhance their own power. Vivienne Shue claims that their ability to negotiate resources distributed from above to benefit local development and welfare caused dispersion of economic power downward. The result was a politically strong center, which economically had to compromise with local-level demands.[312]

Some Western theorists emphasize the extent of state incapacity. Lynn White even claims that the central state can control any specific, short-term situation it wants, but local powers erode its capacity to control long-term aims.[313] Vivienne Shue maintains that due to localism, the central state had problems in implementing any of its programs exactly as they were intended to be implemented.[314] James Townsend concludes that the degree of decentralization in China causes problems for the central capacity to collect data about local situations and about economic activities taking place outside central authority. Decentralization reduces central control of local development and can provide local leaders a certain independence from the central state.[315]

Models of the Chinese polity concentrating on the central level evaluate cases in which central directives are not implemented to the letter as failures of the state. The Western literature often emphasizes that in local policy making either the central state succeeds in imposing its preferred policy on local units or localities manage to evade or distort the policy. Even scholars opposing an elitist and centralist image of China, too often borrow this dichotomy. This dichotomy accords with the Chinese perception of lower-level initiatives as countermeasures against central policies.[316] Sometimes they surely are, but often the state has delegated a certain amount of legitimate authority to local levels. Yet, many China scholars ignore the fact that power can be officially delegated in China. Lynn White goes even so far as to claim that the powers of local government are not part of the state.[317] For those who, like White, want to question the totalitarian reach of the Chinese state, it is most important to define which cases in China actually count

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311 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, p. 351.

312 Shue 1988, pp. 143–145.

313 White 1999 (2), p. 632.

314 Shue 1988, p. 130.

315 Townsend 1980, p. 426.

316 There is a Chinese expression: "the center decides policy, whereas local authorities devise countermeasures" (*shang you zhengce, xia you duice*). This expression is often cited in research literature, see, e.g., Chen An 1999, p. 183; White 1999 (2), p. 612.

317 White 1999 (1), p. 19.

as problems of implementation and which only demonstrate that lower levels can legitimately initiate or modify policies. Otherwise challengers buy the totalitarian expectation of all legitimate power concentrated in the central state.

Most political systems permit exceptions to legitimately refrain from executing policies in certain situations. These exceptions are tolerated, for example, when the unified policy implementation would render more costs to the system than flexibility does. In traditional China, Confucian state ideology supposed that patriarchal benevolence (expressed in the Confucian conception *ren*) and the community's sense of justice (Confucian *yi*) should have an impact on implementation. Socialist cadres possibly regarded their role with somewhat similar norms. Even the socialist state allowed exemptions on grounds of humanity and justice. Jonathan Unger, himself accenting the penetrative abilities of the Chinese state, notes that there was an unwritten rule to guarantee a basic livelihood to poor areas, even if that meant bending some rules.[318]

The theory of democratic centralism suggests that much more than just accepting some exemptions is at play. According to this theory, the central state would leave much detail of implementation to lower levels and lower levels would obey the framework or intention of central policy. A local leader's task would be to modify a central policy for local conditions and to present it in a form acceptable to local people. Democratic centralism expects local initiative in implementation and allows negotiations between implementers and higher administrative levels. According to this theory, the socialist Chinese state is willing to compromise some capacity, but it expects to win by making its policies acceptable to ordinary people and applicable to varying local conditions. The theory expects that local administrators and even local people are sensitive to the state demands, but want to implement them in locally acceptable ways.

In fact, this kind of compromise seems to be a common result. For example, Susan Greenhalgh shows how village cadres actually enforced population policy, although not exactly the state-demanded one. Local cadres, sharing local values, understood villagers' concerns and shaped the unpalatable one-child policy into a birth reduction policy that locals could tolerate. The result is a growing local consensus on the legitimateness of this *de facto* policy among peasants.[319] Instead of taking such incomplete implementation as policy failure, we must recognize also the benefits of a less confrontational policy for state legitimacy. In addition, mini-

318 Unger 2002, p. 13.

319 Greenhalgh 1993, pp. 246–248. Disregarding some state regulations, rural cadres in Shaanxi permit most couples to have two children, including one son, and to marry and have their children earlier than the state campaigns allowed. At the same time, cadres enforce active population policy and require couples to have children only in wedlock, not to marry before the legal age, and either to pay fines or go through contraceptive surgery after the second child.

mizing opposition helps reduce the costs of implementation. Giving up some less central demands or demands likely to result in backlash, the state can maintain, or even increase, its control.[320] Instead of a winner, we should look for a compromise. As Vivienne Shue suggests, local powers do not necessarily indicate failure or weakness of state power, but rather may mean that power can be compromised and fettered by the forces of localism.[321] Instead of implementation problems or social resistance, it might sometimes be more proper to refer to instances of the society influencing the state.

Apart from the ideal of a more responsive and less coercive system, local leeway might be a product of a rational cost-benefit analysis of optimal resources for guaranteeing adequate, even if not universal, policy compliance in a situation where state resources are limited. The mass-line leadership could be based on this kind of economical perception. After all, the theory was formulated during the civil war period, when Communists had urgent use for their personnel in tasks other than supervision of their own areas. Although democratic centralism assumes local cadres take popular opinion into account when they decide about how to implement a policy, democratic centralism leaves no excuse for evasion of policy implementation.[322] It prioritizes central policy over local aspirations and needs.[323]. Understandably, John Burns found that local authorities primarily implemented Party policies, and only secondarily sought public support. They welcomed popular endorsement of Party policy, but overruled outcomes which, although popular, violated "the correct" Party policy.[324] Democratic centralism assumes an unbroken chain-of-command, not vertical segmentation[325] between different levels of administration. Still, Vivienne Shue is right to remark that

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320 A dramatic example of such a compromise is provided by Melvyn Goldstein. When the state sent a work team to Drepung monastery, one center of Tibetan independence activism in 1996, the work team demanded that monks must denounce the Dalai Lama. However, the monks resisted, some leaving the monastery, others convincing the work team of the centrality of the Dalai Lama to their religion. Seeing that insistence would cause a backlash and deprive the monastery of its non-political monks, the work team gave up this demand and in the end demanded only that all monks must renounce separatism and accept the Communist Party rule. In addition, the work team increased official control over recruitment and curricula, but also admitted so many previously unregistered monks that the former official limit for the number of monks was simultaneously raised. (Goldstein 1998, pp. 48–51.)

321 Shue 1988, p. 147.

322 Therefore, one cannot proceed from finding partial implementation of central policies and model units to proving that the theory of democratic centralism explains the finding.

323 Schram 1989, pp. 102–103.

324 Burns 1988, pp. 78–79, 82–83.

325 Vertical segmentation is a synonym for cellularity in Shue 1988, p. 52. Vivienne Shue assumes a degree of insulation between levels of government leaving localities space for policy manipulation and evasion.

localism means that some local values, expectations and demands condition administrative norms and decisions.[326]

This is not to argue that China does not have any implementation problems. All polities have. There are obvious examples of resistance to state objectives both by the people and lower-level administrators. This resistance is called tailism in the Chinese parlance. Tailism refers to situations in which local cadres prioritize local masses' immediate material interest or local popular pressures over overall national interest as defined by the central state. This conceptualization indicates that one reason behind localism could be a distorted understanding of democratic centralist theory. Of Western theories, the cellular[327] and clientelistic[328] models assume that localities have more autonomy than the theory of democratic centralism would admit. They deal with covert evasion instead of the legitimate mass line type of molding a state policy to local conditions. Outright evasion would undermine total power and democratic centralist power alike. Considering the regularity of Chinese news about local evasion, the reality in Chinese villages may be much closer to the cellular model than the theory of democratic centralism would approve. As R. J. Birrell notes, local cadres' performance and ability to resist peasant pressures have been less than satisfactory from the regime perspective, as is obvious from the sporadic need to send teams from outside to implement state policy in villages.[329] Nevertheless, the theory of democratic centralism expects more state control than the cellular or clientelistic models, but does not see state control as direct and intrusive as the totalitarian and cellular models alike would assume.

If evasion does not fit with the normative theory of democratic centralism, it still can result from practicing it. As Jane Mansbridge discovered, face-to-face democracies tend to be averse to open conflict. One common consequence is that those who disagree do not want to publicly register their opinion. They simply do not implement the common decision.[330] Likewise, in China, agreement in meetings did not mean that the decision would be implemented without deviations, not least because open opposition or bargaining was risky.[331] The Chinese press repeatedly exhorted people to express differing opinions in discussion prior to the decision in an attempt to assure that every concerned party will actually carry out the decision. Yet, from the existence of evasion, the existence of face-to-face democracy cannot be proved. Apart from a unitary democratic culture, an autocratic

326 Shue 1988, p. 112

327 Shue 1988.

328 Oi 1991.

329 Birrell 1969, p. 421.

330 Mansbridge 1983, pp. 143, 230, 262–263; Marshall 1984.

331 Shue 1988, pp. 141–142.

political culture can explain noncompliance. Under autocratic decision making, differing opinions will find their outlet not in discussion but in action.

Kate Zhou and Lynn White argue that in China spontaneous, unorganized, non-articulated, even apolitical, opposition can be effective in undermining state power.[332] Kate Zhou claims that apolitical activities, such as evasion, can have political results in China because they constrain choices available to the elite. When effects of individual micro-level actions aggregate, they begin to have systemic consequences.[333] Lynn White remarks that even unarticulated local politics constrain the state, and if parallel interests in localities grow strong, they can cause a major change in state policies.[334]

Romantic as this view is, it is worth examining it in the democratic centralist context. Apart from voiced opinions, democratic centralism is sensitive to influencing through practice. Democratic centralism understands local situations an as objective reality policy makers need to react to. Changes in this reality should make leaders to reconsider the policy. Therefore, it is totally in line with democratic centralism that the leadership revises policies when they meet unexpected challenges or massive policy evasion. However, democratic centralism would not interpret this as impotence of the state, but as its ability to adapt to situations and act accordingly. Naturally, the state has many possible reactions to problems of implementation: it can overlook evasion as long as it is small scale or the state decides not to spend its resources on correcting the situation; it can modify the policy or use force to implement the original policy. There are limits to local leeway and the central state appears to have the capacity to choose which grassroots initiatives it permits to evolve.

Not surprisingly, many scholars, criticizing the overly optimist picture Kate Zhou and some others have painted, have pointed out that to prove effective a spontaneous grassroots initiative must have had the backing of some central leaders,[335] or that despite the success of some spontaneous grassroots initiatives, the central state has been able simultaneously to put a stop to other attempts to undermine its regulations.[336] Even when the state has given in to some local pressures and modified the policy because of large scale local resistance, often this does not lead the state to give up its aims or even the content of the policy, but has only made its implementation more gradual or humane. For example, the state

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332 White 1999 (1), pp. 31, 38–43; Zhou 1996, pp. 4, 10.

333 Zhou 1996, p. 12, 14–15.

334 White 1999 (2), p. 614–615.

335 Bernstein 1999, pp. 205–207.

336 Zweig 1997 B, p. 153.

itself presented its new, more flexible, but more vigorously implemented, population policy as "opening a small hole to close a large hole."[337]

Local cadre as intermediator

Western literature often depicts local cadres as nodes between the state and their own locality. They had to balance pressures from the state and from local people.[338] They need to show that they serve both the state and the local interests. Due to tensions between demands from above and from below, they serve sometimes the state and sometimes their local constituencies, depending on how much political pressure higher levels mobilized behind a certain policy. [339] Furthermore, village leaders are locals, share local values, receive their pay out of local produce, need peasant cooperation, and are part of local informal networks.[340] They often try to defend local interests and perhaps even make state policies acceptable to their constituencies, sometimes by giving local people more leeway than the state had intended in order to guarantee compliance to more principal state aims.[341]

When there is no contradiction between cadre roles towards the state and the people, cadres often support popular demands. For example, as long as the state funded workers benefits, management often supported demands for better welfare benefits for workers.[342] Western research finds that some leaders tip the scale in the direction of the populace even against the state demands. Some cadres use official regulations encouraging mass participation to support their negligence of state demands. Other leaders covertly evade state demands. They allowed some private cultivation even when the state demanded full collectivization of land,[343] overlooked the one child policy,[344] and concealed the real size of production to reduce the amount of state extractions,[345] even if they outwardly complied with state policies. In extreme cases, they overtly put pressure on the state by threatening to resign, which would have endangered successful collective production.[346]

337 Johnson et al. 1998, pp. 472–473.

338 Alpermann 2001, p. 60; Birrell 1969, pp. 420–423; Chen 1986, p. 222; Yang 1989, p. 55.

339 Greenhalgh 1993, p. 220.

340 Shue 1988, pp. 67, 108; Zweig 1989, pp. 83–87.

341 Greenhalgh 1993 gives an illustrative example of local cadres simultaneously implementing and modifying a central policy.

342 Shi 1997, pp. 58–59. See also Walder 1987.

343 Zweig 1997 A, p. 136–137.

344 Greenhalgh 1993.

345 Burns 1983, p. 153; Oi 1991, pp. 116–121.

346 Burns 1983, pp. 152, 155; Shue 1988, p. 67.

Since grassroots-level cadres depend on their community economically, they have strong incentives to protect local economic interests even against state demands.[347] Not only is their own private income dependent on the communal economic success, but they must rely on the villagers' cooperation for meeting the above set production targets.[348] As Scott Rozelle points out, village leaders must answer demands from above, but also seek a certain independence from higher authorities to facilitate local development and serve fellow-villagers' demands for welfare improvements. After all, their career depended on the state but state demands could be filled only in cooperation with villagers, while their income depended on the profits of local enterprises.[349] Therefore, responsibility towards their superiors itself requires cadres to consider the economic development and welfare of their community.

Furthermore, being the level of implementation and direct mass contacts, the grassroots had some independence to use its own judgment. Cadres could use the alternative authority, derived from their electoral or deliberative mandate as representatives of mass opinions, to oppose some central policies. According to John Burns, local leaders solicited mass opinions especially when they disagreed on a policy or its implementation method.[350] Authorization from the masses through elections has often made village cadres feel that they must represent the masses.[351] Moreover, the state depends on grassroots cadres for the performance of state tasks and for its connection to villages, where the pool of able and experienced leaders remains small and administrative duties were poorly remunerated. As a result, grassroots leaders could resist policies more openly than any intermediate level because they are more directly related to production and they can always resign from their arduous tasks. Thus, they cannot be as easily disciplined as bureaucrats on the levels above.[352]

Cadres' economic self-interest is a plausible explanation for bending the rules to benefit the locality. In addition, cadres perhaps had ideological reasons for favoring local interests. Localism could represent a perverted form of the mass line. After thorough education in listening to the masses, cadres could understand the mass line to include even flexible adaptation of state initiatives. Democratic centralist analysis criticized cadres who evaded state demands for misunderstanding democracy and ignoring centralism, as if the reason for such deviation were courting popular opinion. Based on the press sources, it is not possible to

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347 Birrell 1969, p. 424; Oi 1991, p. 57; Walder 1987.

348 Birrell 1969, p. 423; Oi 1991, pp. 144–145.

349 Rozelle 1994, pp. 113–116, 121.

350 Burns 1988, pp. 79–80, 186–187.

351 Chen 1986, p. 257; Ding 2001, p. 86; Kelliher 1997, pp. 79–80.

352 Chan et al. 1984, p. 243; Shue 1988, pp. 107–140; Zweig 1989, pp. 10–11.

confirm what the local cadres' real motivation was. Nevertheless, Chinese literature contains evidence that Chinese readers found the image of a local cadre who bends central policies in order to care for the masses not only credible but also admirable.[353]

However, the mass-line leadership could provide another explanation for localism, apart from cadres' democratic or perhaps patriarchal attitudes. The mass line idealized non-coercive use of power, but in fact ruling sometimes needs coercion. In reality, many local leaders used coercion to implement state demands, despite the official image of persuasive government.[354] Alternatively, when elected village leaders have problems with villagers' compliance, unelected township officials use coercion and are able to implement policies because they have no personal relationships with villagers.[355] But there must be another type of leaders who, having too few legitimate coercive means at their disposal, turn to persuasion even at the cost of the state policy.

Social pressure within the locality could punish an unpopular cadre through non-cooperation, ostracizing, or spreading rumors.[356] It is legitimate for a community member to remonstrate and curse leaders (*ma*) in public.[357] People can also first turn to co-workers and neighbors with their complaints. When the problem becomes well known by a large number of people in the workplace or community, leaders often will try to solve it.[358] There are even formal ways of using social power. Chih-yu Shih found that the practice of rewarding model households actually gives much power to villagers who can make cadres uncertain about whether their household can achieve exemplary status.[359] Social power could thus be used to undermine cadre authority in the eyes of the community. Loss of public face was psychologically humiliating, but could also erode authority so much that the cadre lost his capacity to lead.[360] Not surprisingly, an important criterion in leadership selection and in leading was the leaders' ability to maintain good rela-

353 Shen Rong's cadre-hero Li Wanju used unauthorized methods to look after the people he led. This concern for the people's wellbeing made him capable of serving the state even better because it boosted economic growth. "The Secret of Crown Prince Village" is translated into English in Shen 1987, pp. 237–342.

354 Bernstein 1999, p. 209. The challenges that many local leaders were unable to cope with without resorting to coercion included, for example, the demand to increase production without material incentives to producers during collective agriculture (Blecher 1983, p. 77) or extracting taxes from private farmers after redistribution of land to households or carrying out the unpopular birth control policy (Kelliher 1997, pp. 71–72).

355 Ogden 2002, p. 212.

356 Birrell 1969, p. 423.

357 Falkenheim 1978, p. 25.

358 Shaw 1996, p. 197.

359 Shih 1999, p. 270.

360 See an example in Shi 1997, p. 82.

tions with villagers, despite tensions and cross-pressures within the village and the difficulty of balancing villagers' demands with demands from above.[361]

People expected their cadre to represent the communal interest within the possible limits and to relay they concerns to the administration.[362] Many think that local leaders should modify or ignore an unpopular policy, and many have evidence that their leaders even do so.[363] The research evidence suggests that local cadres implement policies selectively.[364] They delay policy implementation or resort to formal, but meaningless implementation of policy so that its intent is subverted.[365] Often local cadres implement some essential aspects of the policy, but try to choose those that were locally beneficial and preferably would incite as little local hostility as possible.[366] Feigned compliance could also mean implementation of central policy, but inventing a local policy that compensates for the losses such a central policy causes.[367] To create space for local maneuvers, local cadres utilize state regulations or policy fluctuations and appease higher ups with misinformation.[368] They conceal and misrepresent local conditions in their reports to levels above.[369] Thus, they maintain a facade of compliance, but in fact subvert state orders for local benefit.[370] Not only grassroots units, but all Chinese bureaucratic units can pursue strategies such as hoarding information, feigning compliance, cultivating patrons on higher levels, and expanding their mandate in order to reduce control from above and to seek a certain autonomy.[371]

Limits to localism

One should not romanticize local autonomy in China. Regardless of its limited capacities, the Chinese socialist state has not been impotent. Although local

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361 Blecher 1983, p. 68–69. Using Chinese parlance, leaders must "unite with the masses."

362 Yang 1989, pp. 49, 55.

363 Shi 1997, pp. 24–26. In Tianjian Shi's survey, one third answered that local leaders implement policies anyway, one fourth that they modify or ignore unpopular policies, and the rest did not know.

364 Zweig 1989, p. 91.

365 Kelliher 1997, pp. 81, 84; McCormick 1990, p. 148.

366 Zweig 1989, p. 91.

367 Yun-xiang Yan relates how in one village parents giving birth to a second child are fined according to central population policy regulations, but the village office simultaneously gave parents giving birth to a daughter as their first child an allowance that made payment of the fines affordable to them (Yan Yunxiang 1995, p. 228).

368 Greenhalgh 1993, pp. 247–248.

369 Shue 1988, p. 139.

370 Oi 1991, p. 116.

371 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, p. 389, 409.

interests had an impact on how policies were implemented, the central power was able to considerably constrain local choices.[372] As Vivienne Shue notes, local leaders could not evade the greater part of state extractions, but could make the difference on the margins.[373] When the state put its full authority behind a policy, a local cadre did not usually dare to refrain from implementation even when directives made no sense to local cadres or the people.[374] Yet, official pressures from above varied in intensity. A local cadre could maneuver implementation with his community interests in mind as soon as there was dissonance between different state levels or when the state did not monitor implementation too carefully.[375] When there was more space for local initiative, cadres had to take popular demands into account. Then, villagers compelled cadres to negotiate with them or even to turn a blind eye to villagers' resistance to state imperatives.[376]

Although an administrative unit could choose different strategies to cope with the state, the state was a powerful element in local politics. Because the state monopolized both economic inputs and political rewards, there were limits to the extent local cadres could serve local interests. Higher levels control personnel selection and can replace local leaders siding too much with the populace against the state demands.[377] According to Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg, the center controls provincial and local levels through appointments, propaganda, and distribution of resources. These powers guarantee the center a major role in local affairs, but not automatic dominance.[378] Since they are well aware of their unit's position at the bottom of a vertical hierarchy, local leaders usually have an ethos to listen to the Party and their bureaucratic higher-ups prior to their local constituencies.[379] No wonder, Western scholars studying evasion of state controls on the local level confirm that the state gets its way whenever it is willing to push its demands through.[380]

Although the use of local cadres at the grassroots sometimes causes local protectionism, their familiarity with local conditions and values are simultaneously

372 Zweig 1989, pp. 10–11.

373 Shue 1988, pp. 111–112.

374 Unger 1989, pp. 118, 122–123, 126.

375 Burns 1988, p. 187.

376 Zweig 1997 A, p. 133, 139. For example, village leaders suppressed sideline production when the state promoted collective grain cultivation, but had to meet villagers' demands for more income earning opportunities in sidelines and on private plots when state policies so allowed (Friedman et al. 1991, pp. 144, 261–262).

377 Alpermann 2001, p. 56; Shue 1988, p. 106; Yan 1996, p. 30.

378 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, pp. 348–349.

379 Yang 1989, p. 45.

380 Shue 1988, p. 76; Unger 2002, p. 21.

tools for state penetration.[381] As Vivienne Shue puts it, the fact that village leaders share community values and interests sometimes facilitated state policy implementation, sometimes protect local interests.[382] Democratic centralism is ready to compromise rigid unity of policy implementation in order to make policies more popular, easier to implement, or more suitable to local conditions. In this process local leaders serve the state even if they subvert some aspects of the policy. Examining implementation of the Chinese one-child policy, Susan Greenhalgh demonstrates how local cadres can modify policies because higher levels have to rely on their cooperation for policy implementation. Still, cadres do a good job in a difficult situation and actually enforce population policy, albeit a modified one.[383] Considering the drastic nature of the Chinese population policy, I would evaluate this result as a compromise or as a success for the state, not as a failure. After all, a state capable of implementing such a policy does not appear weak.

Lynn White argues that local distortions of policy implementation amount to new policies.[384] Still, it appears to me that the Chinese state mostly is able to make localities and people negotiate only about the alternatives it provides. Even if local implementers bend policies, they mostly have little means to offer real alternatives to the official policies. When collectivization was the central policy, localities collectivized, although there was variance in the speed and extent. Likewise, when the central state called for decollectivization, localities began to distribute lands to households. Very seldom can we find a totally different policy practiced, like totally privatized cultivation when the state promoted collectivization or collectivized agriculture now that private plots are the term of the day.[385] Still, localities and individual farmers have worked within the system to expand the alternatives available to them, like extending private plots during the collective agriculture or founding agricultural land groups[386] for mutual help when land is distributed to individual households. Instead of new policies, the range of local innovation perhaps suggests the might of state policies. As Vivienne Shue

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381 Chen Yung-fa shows how the Communists were capable of effective taxation because they could mobilize local activists familiar with the local situation to collect taxes (Chen 1986, ch. 7). See also Choate 1997, p. 5.

382 Shue 1988, pp. 67–70.

383 Greenhalgh 1993, pp. 247–248.

384 White 1999 (2), p. 612.

385 A very exceptional example of short duration is given by Zweig 1997 A, p. 137, relating how peasants used the administrative chaos of the Cultural Revolution to divide village land for independent farming.

386 Term from Judd 1994, p. 36.

remarks, villages have been able to deflect or reduce the impact of central demands on them, but this is essentially a defensive strategy.[387]

I would not stress state incapacities too much. Considering its infrastructural weaknesses, the Chinese state has been astonishingly effective in disseminating its policies and even values. Regardless of all infrastructural obstacles and localistic challenge, Chinese socialists have been able to create a modern state in which local decision making takes place within the scope set by the center. The limits for what local democracy or localist leaders can decide are set on the levels beyond local control. Although localism distorts policy implementation, the ability to disseminate localistic innovations appears to be quite limited. For a local policy to spread, it needs higher levels' support or willingness to tolerate the situation.[388] The Chinese system keeps the control over wider dissemination of each policy innovation on the administrative levels above the level deviating from the policy.

Even if some state incapacities may result from the inadequacies in vertical lines of communication, the democratic centralist model makes it likely that there are even more obstacles to communication in the other, horizontal, direction. Instead of vertical segmentation,[389] the democratic centralist system is likely to produce horizontal segmentation. Since the system is only interested in vertical lines of communication, horizontal links between the same level political actors remain underdeveloped. That is, the democratic centralist system incorporates links from, say, a province to the national and to the county levels and linkages within this particular province, but what is absent in this model are relationships between provinces or between one province and counties within another province. Some scholars claim that horizontal segmentation is actuality in China. Jonathan Unger argues that collective economy severed traditional interregional relations, without which villages have to face the state on their own. This kind of isolation, then, serves state intrusion.[390]

Lack of horizontal relationships would be especially pronounced on the grassroots level, where grassroots leaders' local background isolates them. As Chen Yung-fa notes, the local base of village leaders fragments resistance into individual localities which are deprived of horizontal ties with other localities resisting similar policies.[391] Vivienne Shue agrees that although the Mao-era system

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387 Shue 1988, pp. 45, 147. Also noted by Jonathan Unger (1989, p. 122) in his criticism of Shue.

388 See Zweig 1997 A, pp. 153–162, for examples of dissemination of locally initiated policies and practices ranging from farmer-initiated dismantling of collective agriculture to unauthorized migration.

389 Shue 1988, p. 52, assumes a degree of insulation between levels of government leaving localities some space for policy manipulation and evasion.

390 Unger 2002, p. 22.

391 Chen 1986, pp. 508–509.

relied on local leaders, it permitted a very localized sphere of influence to them before local cadres' networks came up against their superiors.[392] These superiors were professional non-local bureaucrats,[393] whose career depended solely on the implementation of state policies. Thus, employment of homegrown local leaders increases likeliness of finding locally acceptable ways of implementation and thus is likely to enhance popular receptivity to central policies, but simultaneously it localizes resistance and inhibits formation of horizontal cleavages. Further, democratic centralist emphasis on vertical information chains is likely to make higher-level administrators aware of local level discontent before horizontal information flows inform localities themselves about other localities sharing the same dissatisfactions, as Chih-yu Shih observes.[394] Simultaneously, local government insulates higher-level administrators from social pressures.

Hierarchical state

Instead of expecting that in socialist China all power would be concentrated in the center, it should be recognized that in China the central government delegated power to several levels of administration. Even during the Mao era, provinces, counties and villages had decisive powers on matters delegated to them. As Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg describe it, provincial, municipal, and local levels all manage activities on behalf of the center, but can also undertake their own activities.[395] Stuart Schram even observes that regardless of Mao Zedong's continuous emphasis on centralized control and the cohesion of the state as a whole, he saw too much centralization as harmful for development because it leaves no space for local initiative.[396] The theory of democratic centralism accommodates vertical chains of command within bureaucracies with local powers and horizontal local networks. It would not see all divergence from central policies to result from stonewalling, exhausting, distressing, boycotting, or sabotaging state policies, but would see some decentralization, local autonomy, and space for local innovation as intentional parts of the administrative structure.

Chinese commoners and grassroots leaders are well aware of differing jurisdictions between administrative levels or areas. They are able to anticipate results of participation in this setting and plan their activities accordingly. Jonathan Unger tells us how local cadres carefully appraised the level on which policies

392 Shue 1988, p. 114.

393 Selden 1972, pp.188–189; Unger 2002, pp. 17–20.

394 Shih 1999, p. 168.

395 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, p. 344.

396 Schram 1989, pp. 102–104.

originated. They scrupulously carried out central policies, but were ready to resist, even publicly, commune policies they saw harmful to their village.[397] According to Kevin O'Brien, rural people are able to estimate which administrative levels could prove sympathetic to their appeals and plan their activities accordingly.[398] Surveys reveal that people differentiate between different levels of government and show different levels of support for them.[399] The ability to distinguish horizontal boundaries of administrative units is utilized as well.[400]

Since any state can take measures to centralize or decentralize power, changes of the locus of powers between local and central governments does not automatically mean increasing or decreasing state powers. Instead, it means relocation of power to other state organs. Still, some Western scholars understand that delegating powers to provincial and local governments means decreasing state power.[401] Vivienne Shue criticizes such zero-sum conceptions of the relations between the central and local state. She concludes that often powers at all levels of government increase or decrease simultaneously.[402] States can even purposely diminish the scope of state control, for example, by liberalizing the economy from political regulation. Decentralization and liberalization do not need to weaken state control, although they leave legitimate space for actors outside of central government. David Goodman even acknowledges that although the central state has reduced its direct involvement in regional affairs during the reforms, the state controls some aspects of the economy even more strongly than before.[403] Likewise, Richard Baum and Alexei Shevchenko remark that after the reforms central-local relations entail much bilateral bargaining and compromise, but this structural change does not mean incapacity or loss of control by the central government, which continues to act as the foremost redistributor, regulator, and policy coordinator.[404]

Some scholars take legitimate provincial and local powers seriously. Kenneth Liebethal and Michel Oksenberg observe that neither models emphasizing central state dominance nor ones stressing local autonomy catch the whole process of policy making. Rather, the center and provinces are mutually interdependent since

397 Unger 1989, p. 123. See also Zweig 1989, p. 85.

398 O'Brien and Li 1995, p. 778.

399 Li 2004, p. 231–234; Shen 2005, 41.

400 I have demonstrated how underground artists held their exhibitions in localities having less control over artistic expression (Salmenkari 2004, p. 244). Likewise, Zhu 2004, p. 30, shows that the Chinese are well aware of the different mandates of government bureaus and know which ones could be sympathetic to their claims.

401 White 1999 (2), pp. 630, 670.

402 Shue 1988, p. 45.

403 Goodman 1994, p. 12.

404 Baum and Shevchenko 1999, pp. 337–338.

each has resources the other needs. This dependency makes bargaining between different administrative levels an essential part of decision making.[405] Susan Shirk describes the Chinese system as management-by-exception. This decision-making style means that most decisions are made on the lowest administrative level that can reach consensus. Higher levels usually ratify consensual decision even if the result is less than ideal, because the costs of dictating policy would most probably lead to implementation failure unless higher levels are willing to back a dictated policy with overwhelming authority. The benefits of encouraging consensual decision by lower levels are many: consensus building permits effective use of lower level information about local situations; it reduces the costs of intervention; it gives all local parties a voice in a situation; it encourages parties to compromise in finding an agreement; it binds the implementing bodies to the decision; and it reduces the central state burden in decision making.[406]

Gabriella Montinola, Qian Yingyi and Barry Weingast even go so far as to call the Chinese vertical division of power federalism. Their terms "Chinese style federalism" or "market-preserving federalism" indicate that China has a hierarchy of governments with a delineated scope of authority. Subnational governments have authority over local economy and their own budget resources.[407] They explicitly differentiate Chinese style federalism from the Western type having constitutional foundations and representative democracy on each level. Instead, the Chinese style federalism depends on the political relationships among levels of government.[408] Division of labor between the levels of government constrains the Chinese government in the absence of elections and separation of powers, but simultaneously reduces the pressures directed to the central government and limits its political liability.[409]

I myself shun using terms like federalism for China. Division of power itself does not indicate federalism. Although there is a division of labor between different administrative levels in China, sovereignty is not divided as federalism would require.[410] For example, the Chinese Constitution states explicitly that provincial government is the organ of state power on the provincial level.[411] It thus refers to provincial government as an instrument of centralized state power. As Allen Choate stresses, self-governing villages even lack the status of state organs or

405 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, p. 33, 135–139, 352, 405–406.

406 Shirk 1992, pp. 68–69, 76.

407 Montinola et al. 1995, p. 55. Minxin Pei also uses the term federalism in Pei 1995, p. 77.

408 Montinola et al. 1995, pp. 60–61.

409 Montinola et al. 1995, p. 79; Pei 1995, pp. 77–78.

410 I owe this useful differentiation to Sutherland 2003, p. 83.

411 Pu 1990, p. 211.

versial.[427] In addition, normative and ideological reasons are at play. Democratic centralist epistemology emphasizes testing, feedback collecting, popularizing, and respecting local diversity. It assumes that policies sometimes need to be implemented at a different pace and in a different manner in different localities.

The Chinese state has decentralized power for fiscal reasons as well. The central state has been unwilling to pay for many local services and economic development plans from the central budget. Instead, it has delegated both authority and responsibility over financing them to local levels.[428] Local self-reliance was a means to encourage and balance economic development.[429] Jean Oi even argues that the central state left local investment to local units to patch up its inefficient taxation. Thereby, localities had to finance national development which was very much in the central interest.[430]

Not all central statements were meant to be implemented to the letter because the center usually leaves it to lower levels to decide about implementation. The central government often provided only broad goals and an outline of implementation, and left details for lower levels to decide.[431] Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg argue that central decisions are only one step in the decision-making process in China. Often these central decisions only set forth goals, while later decisions within bureaucracies determine the actual forms of implementation. Thus, decisions about implementation can water down bold initiatives into modest programs or even non-decisions.[432] Decision making in China is typically incremental, experimental and decentralized.[433] Due to the importance the Chinese place on flexibility of implementation, implementation can be used to water down the decision makers' original intentions. This happens already when the bureaucracy defines rules for implementation of a policy or a law.[434] However, drafting

427 Kent 1993, p. 112; Zweig 1997 A, pp. 61, 79–80.

428 Chan 1998; Choate 1997, pp. 4–5.

429 Shue 1988, p. 63, 69.

430 Oi 1991, p. 130.

431 Goodman 1994, pp. 11–13. Even central laws may expect provincial laws to provide rules about implementation. For varying provincial and county rules concerning election law see, e.g., Jacobs 1991, p. 176, and for village elections see Chen Weixing 1999, p. 72, and Pastor and Tan 2000, p. 501. Sometimes ministerial guidelines are distributed to subordinate units in the form of reference materials, not as formal regulations, see Paine 1992, p. 192.

432 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, pp. 26–27.

433 Goodman 1994, p. 13.

434 Tanner 1999, pp. 129–130. Tanner plausibly sees the reason for the great power of the administration in shaping the implementation of law as the continuity of the Chinese tradition lacking an independent judiciary. A combination of vague laws and detailed administrative regulations for implementation is familiar also in Japan, where the judiciary is relatively independent of the executive branch of the government.

implementation rules for a controversial issue may require a new inter-agency campaign and which agency should do the drafting is often contested.[435]

It is possible that the democratic centralist process itself has led many Western scholars relying mainly on central documents to overvalue the influence of top-level decisions. After all, central political rhetoric often does not reflect reality in Chinese localities.[436] Perhaps the central state is prone to issue orders that overstate state capabilities and are radically worded exactly because it expects that localities adapt policies to local conditions. Central statements are probably meant to emphasize central aims and targets, instead of giving exact orders for execution. In fact, the number of central directives exceeded not only central capacity to monitor their implementation, but also local capacity to implement them. This situation left some latitude for provincial and local levels to choose which central directives to implement seriously.[437]

Democratic centralism assumes that the political system leaves some space for local initiative. Although the Chinese state does not limit central state power institutionally, it has strong normative reasons to leave legitimate space for local initiative. In addition, national leadership's decision to decentralize power must have been based on rational calculations. James Townsend evaluates that decentralization was expected to reduce bureaucratization, encourage diversification, and stimulate regional growth. It possibly even responded to pressures from local leaders.[438] David Goodman states that the central state permitted local variation in the implementation of national policy because it recognized its own limited ability to demand uniform implementation and because of its guerrilla tradition.[439] In addition, questions of legitimacy and popularity are at play. When the socialist state combines democracy and centralism, local leeway and central control, it tries to find a balance between two important elements of state power, namely legitimacy and state strength.

Moreover, in cost-benefit calculations Chinese communists seem to prefer low-cost alternatives, allowing some trade-offs with effective policy performance. As Jean Oi concludes, the state has always been able to exert its rule if it so desires, but it wanted to rule with positive and negative examples, not with terror. The state has been selective in direct intervention and intruded relatively little in local affairs as long as the unit met minimal demands and did not oppose the state or otherwise draw its attention. Still, it can intrude drastically when it wants.[440]

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435 Tanner 1999, pp. 225–226.

436 Goodman 1994, p. 13; McCormick 1990, pp. 90–91; Pye 1992, p. 237.

437 Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, pp. 344–345.

438 Townsend 1980, p. 426.

439 Goodman 1994, pp. 11–13.

440 Oi 1991, p. 229.

The state usually refrained from using too much pressure because coercive implementation could alienate local leaders and people and prove counterproductive.[441]

Lynn Paine shows that although the Chinese state has been able to produce structural change in a rather swift and uniform way, there remained much local interpretation and policy fluidity in details. Due to weak connections within the bureaucracy, central agencies need to delegate authority to grassroots institutions themselves. This means that each grassroots institution decided about the concrete form of policy implementation in its institution. Thus, the result depended on the person who interpreted the central policy. Subordinate levels shaped central policy by experimenting, interpreting, reconceptualizing and by undermining it. Yet, local units need central approval, which set boundaries for possible local innovation. The result was compromise between broad objectives formulated in the central government and local experiments on specific issues. When units are relatively weak, like the Ministry of Education and the educational institutions that Lynn Paine researched, there is continual formulation during implementation and mutual responsiveness.[442]

This operational space does not mean that provincial and local governments have authority to defy central laws and regulations. Marc Blecher and Vivienne Shue find that an intermediate-level government works on behalf of higher levels constraining what it can do. Still, it is able to reinterpret some higher-level policies to suit local needs or take actions that contravene the spirit of central policy but are not specifically forbidden. Regional bureaus uphold central plans, but also find ways to meet local needs, promote local development, and even rectify some imbalances attributable to central planning. Although local control over development was thus partial, there still was some scope for local initiative, especially in service provision and in local development programs that were produced with locally generated resources.[443] Even if local initiative has its centrally set limits, central power is likewise restrained by decentralization allowing flexible interpretation of central policies.[444]

The mass line provided ideological justification for creative interpretation of central plans. Sometimes local cadres used this space for subverting administrative orders. In the best tradition of inner-Party democratic centralism, a local cadre could, for example, both follow the order in one test area and continue the old system in another in order to demonstrate to higher levels that the policy should be changed since old practices are more workable.[445] Other cadres delib-

441 Shue 1988, pp. 67–68.

442 Paine 1992, pp. 192–198.

443 Blecher and Shue 1996, pp. 34, 89, 124–126, 207–208.

444 Townsend 1980, p. 424.

445 Oi 1991, pp. 115–116. Jean Oi calls this soft opposition with minimal obedience.

erately lengthened the period they "studied" (*yanjiu, yanjiu*) how to implement the policy in local conditions hoping that the policy would change before anything needed to be done.[446] Although village cadres had certain above-given constraints to meet, village leaders could selectively apply many other directives by evaluating them as not appropriate for local conditions.[447] Chih-yu Shih even contends that the possibility of using the normative call for the mass line undermined planned economy. As a result, professionalism and command structure faced continuous harassment by communal interests and independent initiatives.[448]

Local experimentation would be a likely result of democratic centralism.[449] Democratic centralist tradition uses experimentation to find the best way to implement the policy or even the most feasible policy. It is in keeping with the epistemology behind the mass-line leadership to try out policies in some localities before demanding universal implementation. In this way, basic problems of implementation are already solved and the policy can be implemented smoothly.[450] Improving policies through experimenting and trial and processing feedback from practice to make better and more complete policies and theories is the essence of democratic centralism. Tested models are useful to increase voluntarism. Proving to other local units that an experiment has been implemented successfully elsewhere could reduce resistance and hesitancy.

Actually, the central government often issues its decisions in the form of general statements and many important policies first have a tentative and experimental quality. The specific policy emerges only after the center collects feedback about concrete local experiences.[451] Therefore, as David Goodman puts it, in China policy implementation can precede policy formulation.[452] Experimentation is used to receive information about how local conditions affect policy implementation or to back the policy choice of a certain leadership faction.[453] Ministries promote experimentation also to find successful experiences to persuade other agencies to support reforms they initiated.[454]

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446 Zweig 1989, p. 95.

447 Rozelle 1994, p. 121.

448 Shih 1999, p. 155.

449 That is, local differences and experimentation do not necessarily indicate federalist power relations, as is assumed in Montinola et al. 1995, pp. 73–74. 77–78.

450 Gardner 1972, p. 227.

451 Dittmer 1974, p. 186; Townsend 1980, p. 423.

452 Goodman 1994, p. 14.

453 Goodman 1994, p. 13.

454 Paine 1992, pp. 199–201. Sometimes these experiments were tried out covertly until the general policy mood seemed right to publish them as successes to emulate. Zweig 1997 A, p. 62, gives one example.

Democratic centralism pays much attention to feedback. It urges policy makers to learn from experiences in the field and modify policies accordingly. Therefore, it is not surprising that local experimentation and initiatives can influence the national decision-making process, especially if they attract the attention of a central leader.[455] Local experimentation can become a model later disseminated nationally.[456] Likewise, central policy can be modified if feedback indicates problems in implementation. Susan Greenhalgh shows how local population-control situations had an effect on national policy through mutual influence and learning. Local resistance led to broadening some official rules, modifying some official implementation methods and raising the population target to be more realistic.[457] In short, local individuals and groups can affect policy and even bring about change in the system if they work the system to their own advantage.[458] Gradual modification could be a deliberate approach from the start. For example, Chinese economic reforms have proceeded in a piecemeal way allowing leaders to popularize models and policies based on experimentation.[459] When the leadership has been confident about the change needed but uncertain about the best strategy, it has often been willing to learn from the grassroots.

Local experimentation by no means indicates that the purpose is not to formulate a united national policy. Although democratic centralism encourages local initiative to respond to local conditions and to build popular support and administrative consensus behind a policy, local pluralism is not always the end product sought after. Quite often the aim of experimentation is to find a feasible model that can later be disseminated to the whole country as the unified central policy.[460] Even when local variation is expected, local experimentation takes place within a centrally encouraged framework and in one centrally defined direction.[461] Therefore, although the Chinese state obviously has capability problems if we measure state capability in terms of ability to implement its policies simultaneously and in the same manner all over the country, one must not lose sight of the fact that when it comes to its overall aims, the Chinese state seems extremely capable. It has the ability to cause drastic policy changes, such as several

455 Goodman 1994, pp. 13–14.

456 Paine 1992, p. 194–195.

457 Greenhalgh 1993, p. 250.

458 Parris 1993, p. 242.

459 Yueh 2003, pp. 3–6; Zweig 1997 A, ch. 2.

460 Such is the story of the introduction of the household responsibility system in agriculture. At first, the leadership invited mass-line type of experimentation and listened to popular opinions, but later the resulting policy line was universally implemented. (Zweig 1989, pp. 181–182.) Likewise, the 1979 election law establishing multi-candidate elections was first tested in some pilot counties before the 1980 elections. (Nathan 1986, pp. 203–204.)

461 For examples, see Paine 1992; Sun 1996.

land redistributions or tight population control, because it is able to make administrative units everywhere strive simultaneously in the same direction, although not at the same intensity and pace.

Community ideal

The totalitarian model assumes extreme atomization of society as a facilitator of totalitarian political control. It perceives that there are no social organizations and networks to protect individuals from state intrusion. However, many scholars have found such a model inadequate. According to scholars like Vivienne Shue, Jean Oi and Mayfair Yang, the Chinese were not deprived of all social protections, but dense social networks within their own villages and workplaces somewhat buffered state demands. Villages and workplaces were cellular[462] or corporate[463] units. These terms, cellular unit and corporate unit, emphasize a separate group identity and interest that separates group members from outsiders, the state included.[464] In ordinary language, these terms could very well be replaced with the term community. Since communal interests at times differ from state interests, a village or a workplace has to balance communal and state interests. Thus, protecting the communal interest sometimes leads to circumventing some tasks mandated by the state.[465]

Although it has discouraged sector-wide horizontal linking, the Chinese state has permitted horizontal relations within the community. In fact, socialist China strengthened communities politically[466], economically[467], and even demographically by limiting migration. There were both political and economic reasons for promoting communalism. Mark Selden argues that in Mao's vision, cooperatives and communes intermediary between the state and the family, gave decision-making power and the financial burden for running local services and communal matters to the community.[468] That is, the political ideal of local participation and self-management combined well with economic rationality. Indeed, the Mao-era

462 Shue 1988, pp. 50–52.

463 Yang 1989.

464 Oi 1991, p. 3; Yang 1989, p. 39.

465 Oi 1991, pp. 3, 57, and details in ch. 6; Shue 1988, pp. 137–145.

466 Although socialist China did not strengthen communities vis-à-vis the central state, it constructed grassroots administrative units so that they mostly accorded with village and workplace boundaries and mandated participatory decision-making in them. As R. J. Birrell observes, collectivization increased local interaction and incentives for local cooperation (Birrell 1969, p. 423).

467 Shue 1988, pp. 60–63.

468 Selden 1972, p. 249.

economic ideal was self-reliant, self-financing, self-managing, self-developing multi-functional units which did not burden the state treasury.[469] Xiaobo Lü and Elizabeth Perry even argue that work unit ownership, rather than state ownership, characterized China and the state was actually unable to control public units assets.[470] Considering the socialist ideal of collective ownership, rather than state ownership as it has been often misinterpreted both in the West and in socialist countries alike, there is nothing surprising in this finding. Western research has paid very little attention to services in villages and work units provided by the community, not by the central state. Villages, factories, or factory trade unions have managed communal facilities like schools, medical centers, shops, and collective factories for sideline production.[471] This large sector of non-state organized enterprise and social services fits poorly with the theory of totalitarianism.

Tradition can be one explanation for the strength of local communities. Vivienne Shue explains that socialist China left some traditional communal loyalties intact or even strengthened them. When the socialist state employed local leaders to carry out its reforms in villages, it was able to extend its reach to villages but simultaneously compromised its capacity in times when state demands diverged from local values and interests.[472] There may even be traditional reasons for preferring a combination of bureaucratic state hierarchy and communal, but state-constrained autonomy.[473] In imperial times, China had a massive bureaucracy, which however extended directly only to the county (*xian*) level. Among tens or hundreds of thousands of inhabitants living in each county, order was kept partly through autonomous local structures, such as clans, and partly through organizations mandated by the state, including communal units established for order-keeping, tax collection, and census (*baojia* and *lijia*). The familiarity of such an arrangement may have increased the appeal of mixed state-society units and localized social management as tools of state administration in the Chinese communists' own institutional designs. Local militia organizations and maintenance of order and census by village or neighborhood[474] resemble traditional power arrangements.

Tradition may have made the tendency of combining bureaucracy with a certain communal autonomy natural and desirable to the Chinese communists. Yet,

469 Choate 1997, pp. 4–5; Shue 1988, p. 60, 115.

470 Lü and Perry 1997, p. 10.

471 Dongping Han (2001) shows how local resources and the ability to use collective income to pay teachers helped in spreading education already during the Cultural Revolution.

472 Shue 1988, pp. 48–71.

473 See, e.g., Choate 1997, pp. 4–5.

474 See Choate 1998, pp. 16–28, for many other services neighborhood committees provide. One traditional task worth mentioning here is conflict mediation.

communist-initiated communities were essentially new structures.[475] Traditionalism in this design shows intentionality rather than incapacity in the face of traditional structures. Communal units had a certain autonomy, but the scope of autonomy was decided by the state. Communal units were linked to the state bureaucratic hierarchy. Not only was this bureaucratic hierarchy new, but affairs it delegated to grassroots units were also often new. For example, planned economy linked local units to the state in ways inconceivable in traditional times. Indeed, although the mass-line doctrine emphasizes local political participation, it simultaneously mandates administrative reporting about local conditions and thus strengthens state control over localities.[476] Further, unlike the traditional state, the socialist state was itself present in local units like villages and workplaces. As Bill Brugger puts it, Chinese communists did not attempt to eradicate, but wanted to politicize both formal and informal structures. In this way, they sought to involve more commoners in decision making and mobilize their energy for participation under the leadership of the Party.[477]

Instead of taking communalism as the socialist state's inability to penetrate traditional villages, we should take seriously the socialist ideal of collectivism. Socialist theory and the Paris Commune model idealize communal politics in units practicing direct democracy as a step in the process of withering away of the state and achieving communism. Furthermore, the Chinese communists built their power on community politics. Before they knew how to rule a state, they knew how to organize and mobilize a community. This communal image of politics and power structures had influence on state building not only during the civil war but also when communists constructed a national state. The Chinese communists even continued to build new natural communities. For example, workplace-centered multi-functional work units resulted from a conscious effort of community building.[478] The Chinese communists deliberately wanted to establish intermediate-level units below the central state, units for people to identify with and share immediate interests with.[479]

The democratic centralist ideal of political communication may have strengthened the appeal of communalism. Apart from corporatism, another form of social organization fitting well with the theory of democratic centralism is

475 Womack 1991 B, p. 330.

476 Birrell 1969, p. 425.

477 Brugger 1976, p. 269–270.

478 See, e.g., Lü and Perry 1997, pp. 9–12.

479 The Chinese leaders and political activists in the 1950s and 1960s idealized the community model. See, e.g., statements about "industrial commune" by Liu Shaoqi in Lee 1991, p. 162. In the 1950s, collectivization in agriculture created People's Communes which were supposed to be not only economically but also administratively meaningful communities. See, e.g., Gray 1990, pp. 307–311.

communalism. The mass line wants to bring political participation to people's daily working and living environment. It requires gatekeepers accessible to ordinary people in order to make the democratic centralist type of information flow between leaders and led possible. Communal politics provides a natural setting for popular participation and official information gathering. I am not saying that subsidiarity always functioned well in China: some simple and concrete decisions required a considerable amount of red tape. Nor was the popular role always decisive in deciding about workplace or village affairs. Still, the mass line seems to require communal structures.

Of course, community structure has roots other than ideology and early efforts at communal mobilization. Scholars have plausibly shown that Chinese familist enterprise structures, the necessity of self-reliance in Communist controlled base areas during the revolution, the Soviet model, the East Asian model, and paternalistic factory organizations during the early phase of industrialization all can explain how the Chinese Communists came to create the community type of workplace.[480]

Obviously, the totalitarian image misconstrues socialist states when it assumes that they aim at social atomization and uncompromised loyalty to the national political unit. For this reason, some Western conceptions of collectivism under socialism are mistaken. For example, Giovanni Sartori criticizes Marx for designing nationwide, even worldwide, self-government, because in big political units a person cannot participate in government intensively enough for it to count as true self-government.[481] However, this criticism takes the Western nation-state, not a communist community, as the basic level of polity.

Moreover, in China collective interest does not always refer to state interest, but often to communal interest. Indeed, the Party has utilized localities' identification with both their region and simultaneously with the nation.[482] In a similar way, it has utilized people's identification with their workplace or village and with their nation. Andrew Nathan finds that the Chinese see no conflict between personal and collective interests.[483] It is true that the Chinese state has at times appealed to nationalist feelings and demanded personal sacrifice for the collective good. Still, if we instead of the customary Western state-society dichotomy apply a model that adds a communal level between the state and an individual, the meaning of collective interest becomes more visible. If instead of more abstract national economic development one is asked to identify with communal economic development most probably benefiting oneself directly, say in terms of better

480 Lü and Perry 1997, pp. 12–13.

481 Sartori 1987, pp. 64–66.

482 Brugger 1976, p. 269; Goodman 1994, pp. 11–12.

483 Nathan 1986, 57–58.

income or social services, the harmony of personal and communal interests is often real. Instead of between an individual and the state, the conflict of interest in China often emerges between a community and the state, as prevalent localism indicates.

This Chinese experience should make us cautious about Western communitarians' optimism over harmonious extension of communal cooperation and identification to other communities. Communitarians sometimes assume that communal values could cover all communities extending from local community to global community,[484] but the Chinese experience shows that this is not an predestined outcome. It seems that identification with one community can create communal patriotism, especially when there is either vertical or horizontal competition over limited resources, such as harvest, land, or water sources. Parochialism can make community members protect their local interests against national interests,[485] or it can make community members to see other communities as their rivals, making them defend local interests even by force.[486]

Even if the totalitarian paradigm seems faulted in failing to see localistic and communalistic tendencies in China, more communality does not automatically mean that the Chinese had more freedom than totalitarianism expects. Many Western writers presume that localism protects people from direct state penetration, as if ordinary people have more freedom when local power thwarts central power. Quite often research equates localism with resisting the central state to serve local communities. Sometimes, cadres really engage in "cheating the state and coaxing the villagers" when they delay and alter implementation so that it benefits villagers as much as possible.[487] However, this is not the inevitable result of evasion of control. It is disputable that central policies are always more repressive or unpopular than local policies are. Political science recognizes that the state can also protect individuals against powerful social interests or local powerholders.[488] Evasion of central state initiatives need not be democratic in any sense. Local administrators' resistance to state policies does not necessarily increase the powers of society but can sometimes even decrease them. Evasion may take into account local concerns and initiatives, but it can also deprive commoners of central state protection against local exploitation and misrule. Evasion can take place for local leaders' personal interest, not for local and even less for popular interest. Due to localism, both local populism and local despotism have been a

484 Tam 1998, pp. 15, 28.

485 Shue 1988, Oi 1991.

486 Gao 1999, pp. 11–13; Perry 2002, pp. 291–293.

487 Yan Yunxiang 1995, p. 229.

488 Frolic 1997, pp. 57–58; O'Brien and Li 1995, p. 778.

reality in socialist China.[489] Sometimes local evasion led to clientelist[490] dependency on local leaders. Actually, Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li have found that in the eyes of common villagers the central state is not the most oppressive level of the government, but is an often-sought ally against local leaders.[491]

Local leaders' misuse of power is not the only possible repressive factor in communalism. It is easy to envision tight-knit localities with strong social pressures strangling individual initiative. Social power can be as efficient in putting a recalcitrant person in line as is administrative power. Moreover, social pressure does not erode the legitimacy of the political unit as much as coercion does. David Zweig shows how general envy could pressure local cadres to illegally redistribute successful community members' means of production,[492] while I have shown that social pressure can cause non-sanctioned and even illegal forms of control.[493] Sometimes social pressure is institutionalized. Village contracts, in order to preserve communal harmony, regulate even individual choices and even morals. They can impose communal punishments not necessarily connected with wrongdoing itself, such as denying some communal goods to the recalcitrant.[494] Social pressure within a communal setting puts checks on cadres and commoners alike. As Brantly Womack observes, in a permanent community, leadership choices are conditioned by the need to guarantee continued cooperation by subordinates, without which a leader is unable to fulfill his responsibilities towards the state. A leader constrained by group membership has strong incentives for paternalism.[495] Indeed, in a communal context shared values of justice between leaders and ordinary members can force leaders to listen and react to communal opinions. Paternalism can even empower people and open participatory channels for them.[496] Community relations can be as an asset in protest as well. Chinese public protests use communal identity and resources for mobilization and even choose communal leaders to lead their protests.[497]

Roots of repression

Finally, I will devote few thoughts to the common Western assumption that the Chinese political system limits freedoms or even engages in political repression.

489 E.g. Shue 1988, pp. 142–147; Zweig 1987, p. 131, 133–134.
490 Oi 1991, ch. 7.
491 O'Brien and Li 1995, p. 778.
492 Zweig1989, p. 186.
493 Salmenkari 2005, pp. 196–197.
494 Shih 1999, pp. 293–294.
495 Womack 1991 B, pp. 314, 325–327.
496 Unger and Chan 2004.
497 Cai 2002, pp. 334–336; Gilley 2004, p. 109; Lee 2000 B, pp. 218, 230, 235.

Albeit partly politically motivated, there seems to be some truth in these claims. Although the democratic centralist model gives us the impression of a highly voluntarist state, can this model be flawed somewhere so that it actually leads to repressive rule?

First we should allow the possibility that the democratic centralist image is truer than the standard Western image. If the Chinese generally do not think that the government has much impact on their lives,[498] this might be their true experience. Indeed, it seems that people tended to believe that state policies had benefited them. Even when they felt the state demands excessive, many had a belief in the ultimate justice of this state.[499] However, this majority impression does not mean that the Chinese state is not highly repressive of some people, such as to those organizing oppositional political activities. The images of repressive and voluntaristic state may be equally true. This contradiction can be explained with highly selective use of coercion.

Could there be any democratic centralist causes for repression? A part of repression perhaps lies in the communist movement's belief in guidance by its ideology even when real people or true social conditions did not fit to its idealistic image making it ready to use force for achieving its ideal society, as many political theorists used to claim.[500] Belief in ideological correctness was hardly a product of democratic centralism. Yet, democratic centralism and the mass line are designed for the use of an ideological party to promote social change in line with its ideological conviction. Still, they emphasize voluntarism and persuasion. Perhaps the combination of ideological supremacy and participatory voluntarism produced such confidence in its own political infallibility that the state leadership was ready for bold moves and unreceptive to a few realistic voices, as happened during the Great Leap Forward. Furthermore, perhaps mass voluntarism during ideological campaigns sometimes intensified repression, when emotional excitement inside the group itself incited violence, as happened during the land reform or the Cultural Revolution. Even if the fault were not in democratic centralism itself, it proved ineffective in checking these problems. Evidently, democratic centralist pyramidal power structures have not shown sufficient capacity to hold leaders accountable or to relay realistic information about social situations.

A voluntaristic image of the state could have another effect intensifying repression. Since the mass line recognizes only persuasion, not coercions among the people, it might cause the totalitarian effect making leaders interpret all different

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498 Nathan and Shi 1997, pp. 155–161. However, in the 1970s, most emigré respondents thought that government had had great impact on their lives and knew particular decrees affecting their opportunities (Nathan 1986, p. 170).

499 See quotations in Falkenheim 1983, p. 55; Unger 1989, p. 127.

500 Holden 1974, pp. 42, 44, 48.

opinions as enemy class activities and, thus repress them.[501] In other words, when use of coercion is sometimes necessary, the state could interpret all occasions of coercion to mean that those against whom coercion is used belong to the class enemy. Regardless of class theory, a voluntaristic image could cause misunderstanding of the nature of coercion. As John Wilson Lewis remarks, the mass-line doctrine never raises the issue of enforced obedience to the Party. It makes the Party believe that it acts in the interest of the masses and underestimate the degree of deterioration of popular morale and support.[502] Since there is no natural and legitimate place for coercion, possibly local levels would be reluctant to report the need for coercion to the central state, because higher administrative levels would interpret the need to use it as showing the incompetence of local leaders; or the central state, unable to see systemic needs for coercion in a modern polity, would interpret all reports of coercions as exceptions. If this truly happens, democratic centralist information channel would systematically block information about coercion and leave national leaders with the impression of voluntarism. Whichever of these two alternatives takes place, the central state could be encouraged to bold experimentation and policies because it believes their reception to be based on voluntarism.

Perhaps combining political and economic power within the same decision-making organs is to blame for repressiveness. Political control over economic rewards has given the Chinese state extra means to discipline citizens. When violations of state norms could invite economic sanctions, the political system can control individuals' behavior effectively.[503] At worst, disagreement with a local leader could invite economic reprisals. In addition, combining economic and political organizations into one bureaucracy maximizes local cadres' powers.[504] Absence of mutually checking powers, or even alternatives for pursuing one's own interests through different channels,[505] often means that the only power is enhanced.[506] However, the combination of political and economic control has also facilitated democracy and popular participation. Marc Blecher emphasizes that popular direct democracy in Chinese villages was meaningful to participants exactly because it concerned concrete and significant economic issues.[507]

501 For the general logic, see Talmon 1955, pp. 1–3.

502 Lewis 1966, pp. 96, 100.

503 Cadres who had been criticized could retaliate through distribution of economic rewards and even daily necessities. See, e.g., Walder 1986, pp. 97–100.

504 Zweig A 1997, p. 133.

505 Walder 1986, pp. 29, 59–67.

506 However, the amount of power is neither a standard nor zero-sum game. The other alternative is that no one holds effective power, perhaps exactly because all power is concentrated in a single center which as a result is incapacitated by information overload.

507 Blecher 1991, pp. 134, 137.

Democratic centralism can limit the private sphere, since face-to-face democracy can make the rule more intrusive than is common in Western liberal democracies. Western electoral democracies demand far less participation of a common citizen than the Chinese system does and consequently subjects him much less to political supervision. Participation in elections involves such a small share of power that it does not limit a right to publicly articulate one's views even when they clash with the official stand; more substantial participation, such as presence in the participatory decision-making arena, presumably morally ties the participant to the result.[508] In the West, generally only politicians and bureaucrats' public expression is limited by official or party stands, while in China party discipline and moral standards have involved not only Party members, but also commoners.[509] Likewise, in the West politicians and public officials may be subjected to moral supervision, but in China all community members are.[510] At the same time, it is not even self-evident that participation increases one's political influence. There is ample Chinese evidence that representation through smaller and more professional bodies has increased popular influence compared to more inclusive bodies.[511] Thus, participatory democracy, especially if manipulated, may make one feel more controlled than simply reacting to non-despotic power used outside of one's own control. Yet, there is not any definite amount of tolerable intrusion. Western communitarians, for example, are willing to give up some individual freedom for a richer social life and more authentic social identities. They are calling for more social control and mutual responsibilities to gain a society and government able to respond to citizen's needs and enhance their well-being.[512] Thus, the Chinese preference of more participation over more privacy is a completely rational choice.

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508 See an example in Friedman et al. pp. 236–237.

509 Townsend 1967, p. 75.

510 See Shih 1999, pp. 277–278, 294.

511 Ding 2001, p. 82; Oi and Rozelle 2000, p. 515; Tanner 1999, p. 74.

512 E.g. Selznick 2002, Tam 1998.