

SEVENTH EAST ASIA CONGRESS

6-8 December 2009

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



SESSION FOUR

"Democracy, Free Markets and Sectarian
Conflict in East Asia"

by

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Authoritarian Deliberation: The Deliberative Turn in Chinese Political Development

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Abstract

Authoritarian rule in China is now permeated by a wide variety of deliberative practices. These practices combine authoritarian concentrations of power with deliberative influence, producing the apparent anomaly of *authoritarian deliberation*. Although deliberation is usually associated with democracy, they are distinct phenomena. *Democracy* involves the inclusion of individuals in matters that affect them through distributions of empowerments such as votes and rights. *Deliberation* is a mode of communication involving persuasion-based influence. Combinations of non-inclusive power and deliberative influence—authoritarian deliberation—are readily identifiable in China, probably reflecting failures of command and control under the conditions of complexity and pluralism produced by market-oriented development. The concept of authoritarian deliberation frames two possible trajectories of political development in China. (1) The increasing use of deliberative practices stabilizes and strengthens authoritarian rule, or (2) deliberative practices serve as a leading edge of democratization, an unprecedented trajectory of regime democratization as a consequence of progressively institutionalized deliberation. .

Over the last two decades, authoritarian regimes in Asia have increasingly experimented with controlled forms of political participation (Rodan and Jayasuriya 2007). China is a particularly important case: though it remains an authoritarian country led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), its government is now permeated with a wide variety of participatory and deliberative practices (Diamond and Myers 2004; Mohanty, et. al. 2007; Nathan 2003; Ogden 2000; Zhao 2003). Two decades ago, leaders introduced elections in a number of villages. Other innovations have followed, including approval and recall voting at the local level, new deliberative venues, deliberative polls, public hearings, citizen rights to sue the state, initiatives to make government information public, and acceptance of some kinds of autonomous civil society organizations. While very uneven in scope and effectiveness, many of these innovations appear to have genuinely *deliberative* elements—that is, they involve the kinds of talk-based politics that generate persuasive influence, from which political leaders take guidance, and upon which they rely for the legitimacy of their decisions (Lieb and He 2006; Lin 2003; He 2006a, 2006b; Ogden 2002). Some innovations go further, combining deliberation with empowerments such as votes for officials, and decision-making forums, but typically limited in scope and focused on particular problems of governance. Curiously, these practices are appearing within an authoritarian regime led by a party with no apparent interest in regime-level democratization. We refer to this paradoxical phenomenon as *authoritarian deliberation*.

Although we focus on the Chinese case, our analysis should be understood as a contribution to comparative democratic theory (Dallmayr 2004). Our primary aim is not to provide new empirical knowledge of China, but rather to develop the concept of authoritarian deliberation from within democratic theory in a way that is responsive to a subset of normative potentials for democracy within Chinese political development.

Our first claim is oriented by democratic theory, and developed in the first section. We argue that *authoritarian deliberation* is theoretically possible. *Democracy*, as we conceive it, involves the inclusion

of individuals in matters that affect them, usually through broad distributions of empowerments such as votes, voice, and related rights. *Deliberation* is mode of communication involving argument and reasoning of the kind that generates persuasion-based influence (Habermas 1987, 1996). There are important structural and institutional relations between democratic empowerment and deliberative influence: democratic empowerment ensures that actors are only able to resolve conflicts by means of arguments and votes. However, it is possible for deliberative influence to affect political decision-making in the absence of democratic empowerments, assuming that (authoritarian) elites have other kinds of incentives, such as functional needs for cooperation. That is, the linkages between democracy and deliberation are contingent rather than necessary, leaving open the theoretical possibility of authoritarian deliberation as a style of decision-making.

Our second claim is takes its point of departure from the literature on hybrid regimes. We identify the paradoxical and distinctive features of the Chinese case as *deliberative authoritarianism*—a regime style that makes common use of authoritarian deliberation. The literature has focused extensively on incomplete democratic transitions, especially those involving regime change from authoritarian to electoral democracy, while retaining many of the elements of authoritarian rule, including weak rights and uncertain freedoms, weak rule of law, on-going patronage relationships, weak civilian control of the military, and corruption (Karl 1995, 72–86; Diamond 2002, 21–35; Collier and Levitsky 1997, 441). Viewed in these terms, the Chinese case is distinctive: to date, there has been no regime-level democratization. China is not an “incomplete,” “pseudo,” or “illiberal” democracy in this sense (Zakaria 2003). The regime exhibits, rather, a resilient form of authoritarianism that, as Nathan argues, draws its strength from reforms that increase “the adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and coherence of state organization.” The causes include an increasingly norm-bound succession process, an increasing use of merit-based considerations in top leadership selection, an increasing functional differentiation and specialization of state organizations, and new participatory institutions that enhance the CCP’s legitimacy

(Nathan 2003, 6-7). We agree. We characterize these developments as a *deliberative authoritarianism* in contrast to the *electoral authoritarianism* of many “incomplete” democracies (see Diamond 2002). Owing to the contributions of deliberative processes, deliberative authoritarianism differs as well from bureaucratic or plural authoritarianism, and is poorly captured by the more conventional notions of “consultative Leninism,” or “democratic centralism.” (Angle 2005)

We develop the concepts of *authoritarian deliberation* and *deliberative authoritarianism* as they apply to the Chinese case in the next two sections. In the second section, we ask: Why would an authoritarian regime resort to deliberative politics? Our initial take is functional: problems of governance in complex, multi-actor, high-information, high-resistance environments may provide elites with incentives to rely on deliberation in the absence of democratic empowerments, thus producing a systemic (though contingent) relationship between authoritarianism and deliberation. In the Chinese case these environments are largely the result of rapid market-oriented economic development, which in turn have increased the size of the middle class, pluralized sources of tax revenue, created new demands for development-related administrative systems, generated extreme inequalities and environmental problems, produced internal migrations, and reduced the overall capacities of the state to engage in command and control government (Nathan 2003; Gilley 2004; Tsai 2007, chap. 8). Deliberative authoritarianism involves popular participation in deliberative venues that are mobilized from the top down, and which are valued by elites for their contributions to maintaining authoritarian rule. By implication, deliberation must be sufficiently robust—particularly in lending legitimacy to elite decisions—to serve an authority-maintaining function. These functionally-driven deliberative developments are not unique to China: governments in the developed democracies have been innovating with new forms of governance over the last few decades in response to many of the same kinds of pressures (Rodan and Jayasuriya 2007; Cain, et. al. 2003; Fung 2006; Warren 2009). What distinguishes China is that governance-level participation is developing in the absence of regime-level democratization, combined with a high degree of

experimentalism with consultation, deliberation, and limited forms of democracy. These experiments are occurring mostly, although not exclusively, within local government and within functional areas of administration (see also Frug 1990; Bellone and Goerl 1992). As we argue in the fourth section, these developments are different in kind from the mobilized forms of participation common in the former Soviet Union as well as in Maoist China.

We develop our third claim in the final two sections. We speculate that *authoritarian deliberation* is contingently dynamic. We illustrate the claim by stylizing two possible (but not exhaustive) trajectories of political development. One possibility is that deliberative mechanisms will transform authoritarianism in ways that are compatible with complex, de-centered, multi-actor market societies. Although the challenges are significantly greater in China due to geographic size and vast population, we believe this scenario to be the most likely in the short-term. A second possibility, however, is highlighted by two instabilities indicated by the notion of authoritarian deliberation itself. To the extent that the CCP can pursue a development agenda only by including actors with the potentials for obstruction, it will be driven toward inclusive, rule-oriented modes of conflict management, eroding its authoritarian qualities. And to the extent that the regime increasingly relies on deliberative influence for its legitimacy, it may also find that it is locked into incremental advances in democratic empowerments, since they provide a means of broadening and regularizing deliberative influence. Under this scenario, the theoretical instabilities within the concept of authoritarian deliberation would correspond to a distinctive logic of democratic transition: democracy would be driven by functional problems of governance and led by deliberation, in contrast to regime change following the more familiar “liberal” model of autonomous social forces propel regime-level democratization—the pattern most evident in the democratic transitions of the last three decades. We conclude by identifying several possible mechanisms of such a transition.

The Concept of Authoritarian Deliberation

Because we usually understand deliberation as an element of democracy, authoritarian deliberation is not part of our arsenal of concepts within democratic theory. The concept is, however, theoretically possible and—as we suggest below—empirically existent. The theoretical possibility follows from a distinction between *democracy* and *deliberation*. *Democracy*, as we conceive it, involves the inclusion of individuals in matters that potentially affect them, realized through distributions of empowerments such votes, voice, and related rights. *Deliberation* is mode of communication involving argument and reasoning of the kind that generates persuasion-based influence

Under most circumstances democracy and deliberation are structurally related. On the one hand, deliberation needs protection from coercion, economic dependency, and traditional authority if it is to function as a means of resolving conflict and making decisions. Democratic institutions provide these protections by limiting and distributing power in ways that provide the inducements and spaces for persuasion, argument, opinion, and demonstration. These spaces allow for the formation of preferences, enable legitimate bargains and, sometimes, are able to produce consensus. On the other hand, because democracy implies inclusion of those potentially affected by collective decisions, decisions made without inclusions, no matter how deliberative, are likely to be experienced as illegitimate impositions by those who are excluded from deliberation. Deliberative legitimacy cannot motivate those who are not included (directly or through representation) in the relevant discussions, negotiations, bargains, or consensual agreements. Though highly imperfect, established democracies have a high density of institutions that generate deliberative approaches to politics, such as political-oriented media, courts, legislatures, advocacy groups, ad hoc committees and panels, and universities. Relative to other kinds of regimes, they are more likely to have institutionalized deliberative influence in politics. Whatever their other differences, all theories of deliberative democracy presuppose this close and symbiotic relationship between democratic institutions and deliberation (Bohman 1998; Chambers 2003; Cohen 1996; Dryzek

2000; Elster 1998; Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Habermas 1996; Sunstein 2002; Warren 2002, 2006; Young 2000).

It is because of this clear and theoretically robust connection between democracy and deliberation that democratic theorists have typically not focused on the more difficult problem of identifying and theorizing deliberative influence under authoritarian circumstances—with the exception that increasing attention is being paid to deliberation within (nominally authoritarian) bureaucracies and corporations within the established democracies (Dryzek 2009; Richardson 2003; Lindblom 2001; Dahl 1989). Authoritarian systems such as China have seemed—for good reasons—unpromising terrain for deliberative approaches to politics (cf. Lieb and He 2006). Countries with authoritarian regimes are, on average, unfriendly to deliberative approaches to conflict, evidenced not only in the closed nature of decision-making itself, but also in limits on spaces of public discourse and its agents—the press, publishing houses, the internet, advocacy groups, and universities. The ideal means of authoritarian rule is command, not deliberation. The ideal outcome is—in Max Weber’s terms—legitimate domination, in which the conduct of the ruled “occurs as if the ruled had made the content of the command the maxim of their conduct for its very own sake” (Weber 1978, 946). When authoritarian rule is legitimate, the ruled accept commands because they originate in an authoritative source such as traditions, leaders, or because the ruled accept the reasons provided by rulers.

Yet democratic empowerments are contingently rather than necessarily linked to deliberative politics. Theoretically, deliberation can occur under authoritarian conditions when rulers decide to use it as a means to form preferences and policies, but do so without institutionalized distributions of democratic powers to those affected. To identify the theoretical possibility of deliberative politics under authoritarian conditions, then, *deliberation* should identify persuasive influence under a wide variety of non-ideal settings. In contrast, *democracy* should identify empowerments that function to include those

affected by decisions in making those decisions, whether or not they appear in familiar institutional forms.

When successful, deliberation generates what Parson calls *influence*, which he conceives as a “generalized symbolic medium of interchange in the same general class as money and power. It consists in the capacity to bring about desired decisions on the part of the other social units without directly offering them a valued quid pro quo as an inducement or threatening them with deleterious consequences. Influence must operate through persuasion, however, in that its object must be convinced that to decide as the influencer suggests is to act in the interest of a collective system with which both are solidary” (1971, 14). Following Parsons, we understand deliberation broadly, as any act of communication that motivates others through persuasion “without a quid pro quo”—that is, in ways that are not reducible to threats, economic incentives, or sanctions based on tradition or religion. Persuasion in this sense can include bargains and negotiations, assuming these depend upon the commitments of parties to fair procedures and their outcomes—that is, to rules that can themselves be justified by reference to claims to fairness or other normative validity claims (Habermas 1996; see also Habermas 1987, Rawls 1993). We also understand styles of deliberation broadly, as any kind of communication intended to persuade without resort to coercion (Young 2000). While for other purposes more precise conceptions of deliberation are necessary, our purposes here are less exacting: we are interested in distinguishing the political communication conducted through command (with its implied threats or quid pro quos) from persuasive influence. Commands convey information, but the motivation for obeying the command is *extrinsic* to the communication. Deliberation, in contrast, generates motivations that are *intrinsic* to the communication: the addressee is *persuaded* by the claims put to them by a given communicative act.

While democracy favors persuasive influence over other “generalized media of interchange,” its root meaning is *rule of the people*. Democracy, as we use the term here, is about *empowerment* of those potentially affected by collective decisions in ways that provide opportunities to affect collective

decisions. The standard means of empowerment include the rights and opportunities to vote for political representatives in competitive elections, and sometimes to vote directly for policies, as in referendums and town meetings. In addition, democratic means of empowerment include representative oversight and accountability bodies, the rights to speak, to write, and to be heard, rights to information relevant to public matters, rights to associate for the purposes of representation, petition, and protest, as well as due process rights against the state and other powerful bodies (see Dahl 1998). Following Tilly (2004, 13-14, 35) democratization means an increase in binding, efficacious consultation of citizens with respect to governmental personal, resources, and policy, and an increase in the protection of citizens from arbitrary action by governmental agents. Such empowerments can, of course, be highly institutionalized as part of competitive electoral systems. But if we consider democratic empowerments generically, it is also clear that they can exist in non-electoral contexts. For example, freedom of information legislation in virtually all the developed democracies requires administrative agencies to respond to citizen requests for information, which may then underwrite a dynamic of citizen opposition and agency responsiveness of a kind that circumvents electoral democracy within nominally undemocratic parts of the political system (Cain, et. al. 2003).

In making the distinction between deliberative influence and decision-making, then, we follow Habermas (1996) rather than Thompson (2008) and Cohen (1996), who views deliberation as itself a kind of decision-making. For our purposes here, it is important that decision-making reflects the power to make a binding collective decision. Within democracies, of course, deliberation often leads to a decision. But the decision itself is (typically) a consequence of voting—a procedure that assigns each member of the decision-making unit a piece of binding decision-making power, whether or not the member has successfully persuaded others of the merits of the decision. However important deliberation may be to the legitimacy of a vote-based decision, the decision is the consequences of voting, not deliberation. In cases

of consensus, voting still stands as a distinctive part of the process—the moment in which the work of deliberation is transformed into a collectively binding decision.

For our purposes here, the importance of the distinction between deliberative influence and decision-making is that it enables us to describe contexts within which deliberation is followed *not* by voting, but rather by the decision of a political authority—a party official or committee, or a bureaucrat, for example. The descriptive point is backed by a theoretical intuition: that the acceptability of a decision—whether the result of a vote or the decision of a political authority—will depend, in part, on the extent to which the decision is responsive to the influence generated by deliberation.

If deliberation and democracy are distinct in theory—the one a kind of communication, the other a distribution of empowerments—they have often been distinct in practice as well. Historically, deliberation has appeared in numerous nondemocratic contexts, as in the many instances in which palace courts and religious institutions sought to legitimize their political rule through consultative and deliberative means, just as early legislative institutions with narrow representative bases engaged in deliberation (Urbini 2006). Indeed, deliberation within representative institutions has often been thought to trade off against democracy: the more accountable representatives are to constituents, the less room they have for deliberative judgments, a trade-off that is evident in majoritarian, strong-party legislatures (Schmitt, 1988; Manin 2002; Elster 1998; Steiner, et. al. 2004). Likewise, today's democracies have many spaces of deliberative decision-making that are not democratic because they exclude those affected. Closed jury sessions, hearings, Supreme Court decisions, expert panels, many deliberative public forums, and the like all fit into this category (see Dryzek, et. al. 2003). These non-democratic deliberations may be entirely justified by other reasons—just not by democratic ones, at least as we use the term here. And democracy, famously, can be non-deliberative, as it is with any inclusive decision-making mechanism that simply aggregates the preferences of those who are included, as in a voting-based majoritarianism.

These observations can be ideal-typed: If deliberation is a phenomenon different in kind of than democracy, then (in theory) it might combine with non-democratic (authoritarian) distributions of power. We illustrate the ideal types in Table 1, where the terms “authoritarian” and “democratic” refer to the dispersion of means of empowerment (dispersion, by implication, provides more opportunities for the affected to exercise power), while “command” and “deliberation” are two modes of formulating and communicating collective actions. [Table 1 about here] The combinations produce three familiar types: traditional (command) authoritarianism, majoritarian democracy (which, as an ideal type, implements the aggregated preferences of the majority), and deliberative democracy. The unfamiliar possibility, “deliberative authoritarianism”—rule via authoritarian deliberation—is an ideal type of regime that combines concentrated power—that is, power not distributed to those affected by collective decisions—with deliberative decision-making. Note that for authoritarian deliberation to exist, deliberative influence must also exist, in the sense that it could be shown (in principle) that elite decisions respond to persuasive influence. This point is important for distinguishing authoritarian *deliberation* from *consultation*. Consultation is pervasive in most kinds of regimes—including authoritarian regimes—but does not in itself meet the threshold of influence.

Though both democratic and authoritarian deliberation make use of persuasive influence, the domain and scope within which authoritarian deliberation exists will typically be limited by the strategic choices of elites. In a democracy, citizens have the powers necessary to introduce deliberative claims into any issue area, and any level of government. In an authoritarian regime, elites control the domain and scope of deliberation, and limit citizens’ capacities to put issues onto the political agenda. Thus, as we will suggest below, elites in China typically constrain deliberation to specific issues and favor deliberative methods primarily in local levels, often in response to specific problems of governance. The limits on deliberation have less to do with its “authenticity”—that is, its influence-generating qualities—than with its reach. Moreover, although the regime retains control over the domains and agendas, within specific

domains of governance citizens have limited kinds of democratic empowerments that range from the negative powers of protest and obstruction to the positive powers of some kinds of voice (in organized deliberative forums), some limited rights (e.g., property rights), some kinds of accountability (e.g., the right to vote on the performance of village officials), some voting (e.g., village elections, intra-party elections), and some direct voting for policies. These two dimensions—empowerments and domain—are represented in Table 2. [Table 2 about here]. The constraint on *domain* distinguishes *regime-level* participation from *governance-level* participation, which the CCP increasingly is encouraging. Generally speaking, the CCP is distributing certain domain-constrained political resources for individuals, any of which can function as empowerments. These vary in several dimensions: (1) with respect to geographical scope, they are more local than national; (2) with respect to participation in policy formation, they favor issues related to municipal governance and economic performance; (3) with respect to representation, they channel demand into party-controlled forms. These limited governance-focused empowerments do not add up to regime democratization. But they do contribute to the overall pattern of authoritarian deliberation by empowering domain and scope-limited forms of voice, and do produce functioning pockets of democracy constrained by geographical scope, policy, and modes of representation. The conjunction of these resources with domain constraints maps the spaces of authoritarian deliberation now emerging in China.¹

Table 2 also indicates a regime strategy: it appears to be the case that the CCP hopes to channel the baseline political resources—obstruction and protest—into functionally-specified arenas, typically within the administrative and judicial domains of government, as well as issue-specified discourse in civil society (the shaded cells), while seeking to avoid regime level democratization. In short, Table 2 specifies modes of participation that have deliberative—and sometimes democratic—dimensions, but which occur in the absence of independent political organizations, autonomous public spheres, independent oversight and separations of powers, open-agenda meetings, and—most obviously—multiparty elections.

These theoretical distinctions help to identify apparently contradictory developments in the Chinese case. On the one hand, we agree with Pei's (2006) observation that democratic change has stalled in China. On the other hand, when we look below the regime level where we would normally expect democratization, we find significant changes in governance, producing a regime that combines authoritarian control of agendas with just enough democratization to enable controlled deliberation (He 2007, chap. 13). Indeed, what distinguishes China from the established democracies is not the emergence of governance-level democracy: these developments are rapidly evolving in the established democracies (Fung 2006; Warren 2009). What distinguishes China is that these modes of participation are evolving in the *absence* of regime-level democratization.² Likewise, the form of deliberative authoritarianism we identify here does not necessarily represent a process of political liberalization. The Freedom House index for political and civic liberties shows that China's record has remained almost unchanged over the last decade. The changes that have occurred within China have been governance-centric rather than liberty-centric as evidenced by the fact that deliberative politics are primarily found within the domain of policy initiatives and reforms driven by development imperatives.

Why Would an Authoritarian Regime Use Deliberative Mechanisms?

Why would elites in an authoritarian regime ever resort to devising and encouraging new deliberative practices and constrained, low-level democracy? We should not rule out normative motivations, of course: the post-Maoist, neo-Confucian culture of China imposes moral responsibilities on elites that are not trivial. But even where such motivations exist, they would need to align with the strategic interests of powerful elites and with established institutions for such practices to evolve. From a strategic perspective, Table 2 identifies the CCP's gamble: that opening the participatory venues at the governance level will channel political demand into authoritarian deliberation and administrative democracy, while containing popular obstruction as well as demand for regime-level democratization.

Behind this gamble is a functionalist story, one that, in its broad outlines, is common to developing contexts.³ The strategic conditions for deliberative experimentation were probably the result of decisions in the late 1970s to justify the continuing rule of the CCP as necessary for economic development, in the face of disintegrating ideological justifications. Opening China to market-oriented development introduced two conditions under which deliberation could become necessary to maintain its rule: (1) increasing complexity of governance, and, (2) increasing numbers of veto players as a consequence of pluralized control over economic resources. So while deliberation and deliberative influence may be most reliably generated under democratic conditions, elites should have incentives to generate deliberative influence even *without* the incentives provided by democratic empowerments. As Hirschman has noted, relative to multiparty systems, one-party systems may even increase voice incentives, since limited options for exit options are more likely to increase internal pressures for voice (1970, 83-5). There are “*a great many ways in which customers, voters, and party members can impress their unhappiness on a firm or a party and make their managers highly uncomfortable; only a few of these ways, and not necessarily the most important ones, will result in a loss of sales or votes, rather than in, say, a loss of sleep by the managers*” (1970, 73-4).

While there is no necessary relationship between the legitimacy needs of authoritarian elites and deliberation (as the history of authoritarian regimes amply illustrates), there may be contingent relationships under conditions that limit the effectiveness of command authoritarianism. For example, the relationship between legitimacy and deliberation is sometimes evident in international diplomacy and, increasingly, within global civil society. In global relations, for example, power is not distributed democratically. But there is often a plurality of powers that limit the capacities of powerful states and other actors to impose their wills without incurring high costs. In many cases, the perceptions of costs are sufficient to motivate deliberation, despite the absence of democratic mechanisms of inclusion (see Dryzek 2006; Buchanan and Keohane, 2006; Linklater, 1998). By analogy, under authoritarian

circumstances at the domestic level, states are rarely powerful enough to control all means of opposition. When they do (as in North Korea), they pay a high economic penalty, which subsequently limits a regime's power simply through resource constraint. In contrast, owing to its rapid economic development, sources of power in China are rapidly pluralizing. Under these conditions, deliberation may function as a less costly means of maintaining order than the command alternatives. Some of these incentives are negative, and follow from the dispersion of veto players that accompanies development, as well as from controlled distribution of political powers, such as village elections. In these circumstances, development-oriented elites will have incentives to deliberate: to gather information, to form policies, to bring conflicting public and private parties to the table, and to forge coalitions sufficient to governing a domain of policy. A second category of incentives, however, is more positive. Development-oriented elites need not just compliance, but the *willing* compliance of multiple actors. Thus if deliberation generates legitimacy, even in the absence of democratically dispersed empowerments, then elites will have incentives to pursue deliberation. If these conditions exist, then we might expect to see the emergence of what might be called "governance-driven deliberation"—that is, the use and encouragement of deliberative mechanisms by elites for the purposes of expanding the governance capacities of the state.

In China, these functional pressures are not hypothetical. In order to maintain its legitimacy based on development, the CCP must provide basic living standards and social services for a population of 1.3 billion, which requires a minimum annual economic growth of greater than eight percent. Internally, it manages 74 million party members, a number which—if it were a country—would be the 17th largest in the world. It faces myriad political, social, and economic problems, ranging from daily peasant and labor actions to collecting taxes from the newly wealthy, environmental issues, security problems, and corruption. These functional demands do not immediately explain authoritarian deliberative responses. But they do suggest a series of hypotheses as to why political elites might adopt deliberative mechanisms.

First, and perhaps most importantly, deliberative mechanisms can *co-opt dissent and maintain social order*. Following Hirschman's (1970) typology of exit, voice, and loyalty, the CCP faces functional limits in two of the three means of controlling dissent. Currently, the CCP controls high profile political dissent with an *exit* strategy, allowing dissidents to immigrate to the US and other countries to minimize their domestic impact. Internally, the CCP buys the *loyalty* of party members with senior positions, privileges and grants. But simply owing to their numbers, neither strategy can be applied to the hundreds of millions of ordinary Chinese, who are quite capable of collective forms of dissent. Suppression is always possible and often used selectively against internal dissidents. But like all overtly coercive tactics, overuse produces diminishing returns. In the case of China, suppression risks undermining the increasing openness that supports its development agenda, as well as generating international attention that may also have economic consequences. *Voice* is the remaining option for controlling dissent and maintaining order. CCP officials are discovering, often through trial and error, that regular and frequent deliberative meetings can reduce dissent, social conflict and complaints, while saving money, personnel, and time (see, e.g., Zhejiang Province 2005).

Second, deliberative mechanisms can *generate information about society and policy*, and thus help to avoid mistakes in governing. Authoritarian regimes face a dilemma with regard to information. Under conditions of rapid development, authoritarian techniques are often at odds with the information resources necessary to govern—information simply about operational and administrative matters, but also about the preferences of citizens and other actors. Command-based techniques, however, limit communication and expression, while increasing the incentives for subordinates to hoard and leverage information. Controlled deliberation is one response to this dilemma.

Third, deliberation can function to *provide forums for and exchanges with business in a marketizing economy*. In China, market-style economic development is dramatically increasing the number and independence of business stakeholders with veto powers not only over new investments, but

also over their tax payments, which can make up the bulk of revenues for many locales (Dickson 2003; Gilley 2004). Pressures for deliberation can and do come from an increasingly strong business sector. Consultations among public and private interests are increasingly institutionalized—a process reminiscent, perhaps, of the early history of parliaments in England and Europe in which the middle classes bargained with monarchs for liberty and political voice in exchange for their tax revenues (Bates 1991).

Fourth, open deliberative processes can protect officials from charges of corruption by increasing *credible transparency*. In a context in which local government revenues increasingly depend upon business, almost all officials are usually regarded as corrupt, not only in public opinion, but also often by superiors. Officials may learn to use transparent and inclusive deliberative decision-making to avoid or reduce accusations that their decisions have been bought by developers and other business elites (He 2006a).

Fifth, in cases where decisions are difficult and inflict losses, deliberative processes enable leaders to *deflect responsibility onto processes* and thus avoid blame. In China, elites are recognizing that “I decide” implies “I take responsibility.” But “we decide” implies that citizens are also responsible, thus providing (legitimate) political cover for officials who have to make tough decisions. In Wengling City, to take one example, it is now common for local officials to begin a decision-making processes by asking a governmental organization to establish a deliberative meeting or forum (Ethan and He, 2006). The government then passes the results of the meeting to local legislative institutions, which then replicate the results in legislation.

Finally, summarizing the preceding points, deliberative processes can generate *legitimacy* with a context when ideological sources are fading for the CCP, particularly when development-oriented policies create winners and losers. Legitimacy is a political resource which even authoritarian regimes must accumulate to reduce the costs of conflict and enforcement.

The Development of Authoritarian Deliberation in China

That there are functional reasons why an authoritarian regime pursuing a development agenda might use deliberative mechanisms does not mean, of course, that it will do so. But we do find evidence in the Chinese case to indicate that authoritarian deliberation is entrenched within its system of government. We do not, however, have sufficient evidence to generalize about its occurrence relative to other forms of rule—particularly authoritarian command (which remains dominant). Thus our use of evidence in this section is indicative: we illustrate the theoretical case by surveying its empirical referents.

Although the term “deliberation” is relatively new to China, many of its features have resonance with elements of Chinese political culture (Rosenberg 2006). Some are traditional, building on Confucian practices of consultation and common discussion (Bell and Chaibong 2003). Though elitist, the Confucian tradition took seriously elite duties to deliberate conflicts, as well as certain duties to procedure. These traditions are alive today, expressed in the high value intellectuals and many leaders place on policy-making through combinations of reasoned deliberation, scientific evidence, and experimentation-based policy cycles (Heilmann 2008,10). Centuries ago Confucian scholars established public forums in which they deliberated national affairs (Chen 2006). In modern China, the *Ziyiju* (Bureau of Consultation and Deliberation) played a significant role in deliberating and advocating constitutional reform before the 1911 Revolution in China. During Mao’s time, elites were indoctrinated into the “mass line”—a method of leadership that emphasized learning from the people through direct engagement with their conditions and struggles. The mass line method lacked infrastructures of procedures and rights, and for the most part failed to achieve deliberation of high quality, but nonetheless emphasized popular inclusiveness and equality. The current system remains justified by the Confucian notion of *minben* (people-centric) rule. According to this ideal, elites express the voice of and serve the people. No doubt these ideals help to explain why deliberative democracy has now become a topic in academic and policy circles within China,

as well as indicating continuity between inherited political culture and the CCP current policy of recognizing and rewarding party officials who develop new deliberative processes.

The contemporary wave of deliberative practices dates to the late 1980s, concurrent with the introduction of village elections and other participatory practices (Nathan 2003; Shi 1997) and administrative reforms (Yang 2004). In 1987 the former General Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang outlined a “social consultative dialogue system” as one major initiative in political reform in the Thirteenth Party Congress, which were to have been followed by a comprehensive scheme of popular consultation to be implemented in a number of areas across China (Chen Ronghua 1988). These experiments were derailed by the events of Tiananmen Square in 1989. Nevertheless, they survived as ideational precursors of institutionalized deliberative practices. In 1991, for instance, former President Jiang Zemin stressed that China needs to develop both electoral and “consultative democracy,” identifying the National People's Congress as the proper location of former, and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) as the site of the latter (Zhou 2007). In 2005 Li Junru, Vice President of the Central Party School, openly advocated deliberative democracy—as did the Central Party School's official journal *Study Times*, which published an editorial endorsing a deliberative polling experiment in Zeguo, Wenling (Study Times 2005). In 2006, deliberative democracy was endorsed as a way of reforming the CPPCC in the *People's Daily* (2006, 1), the official document of the Central Party Committee. The official document of the 2007 Seventeenth Party Congress specified that all major national policies must be discussed through the CPPCC, a body which engages in often lengthy deliberations, but lacks either the power of decision or veto. And in 2007, CPPCC established the *Theoretical Research Institute*, a national research network association devoted to the study of deliberative democracy.⁴ More generally, deliberative venues have become widespread, though they are widely variable in level, scale, design, and frequency. They exhibit a variety of forms such as elite debates in different levels of People's Congress, lay citizen discussions via the internet, formal discussions in the public sphere and informal debate in

non-governmental domains. They can be held monthly, bimonthly, or even quarterly in streets, villages, townships and cities.

In rural areas, deliberative politics has emerged with the introduction of empowerments such as village elections, village representative assemblies, independent deputy elections for local Peoples' Congresses, and similar institutions. Beginning in the 1990s, many villages developed meetings in which officials deliberate village affairs with citizens, an innovation probably encouraged by imperatives of election, re-election, and approval voting (Tan 2006). Electoral empowerments are often buttressed by protests, obstruction, and "rightful resistance" movements that have generated pressures for elites to consult with the people (O'Brien and Li 2006). In 2004, the total number of meetings with deliberative elements at village level was estimated to be 453,000, a number considerably higher than the governments estimated number of protests (74,000) for the same year (He 2007). That said, the extent and effectiveness of local democratic institutions is uneven (Tsai 2007, chap. 7). According to the 2005 National Survey, 298 (10 per cent) respondents confirmed that decisions on schools and roads over the last three years were decided by all villagers' meeting attended by each household, 616 (20.7 percent) by village representative meetings, 744 (25 per cent) by villager leaders; and 1,318 (44.3 percent) were not sure. The same survey also found that the 547 (18.8 per cent) of respondents reported that the decision on village land contracts was made by all villagers' meeting; 524 (18 percent) by village representatives; 650 (22.3 percent) by village leaders; and 1,192 (40.9 per cent) were not sure. The same survey found that 28.3 percent reported that their villages held two village representative meetings in 2004 (while 59.3 percent were unsure) (He 2007, 96-7). Such findings indicate that penetration of deliberative devices is at least broad enough for demonstration effects, and probably broad enough to begin to alter the incentives of the 3.2 million village officials in the 734,700 villages in China (He 2007; Diamond and Myers 2004; Mohanty, et. al. 2007).

Whereas deliberative venues in rural locales are often extensions of village democracy, urban deliberative and participatory institutions are more likely to emerge as consequences of administrative rationalization and accountability (Yang 2004). Some of these accountability measures generate deliberative approaches to conflict. Local leaders are increasingly using devices such as consultative meetings and public hearings designed to elicit people's support for local projects. Observations from Hangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing, and other urban areas suggest that deliberative practices are becoming more widespread, with more than a hundred deliberative forums being held in each district per year.⁵ More than 359 public hearings on administrative punishment were held in Shanghai alone between 1996 and 2000 (Zhu 2004, 2).

While broad data are not available, some cases in rural areas exhibit an impressive density of deliberative devices. From 1996 to 2000 within Wenling City, a municipality with almost a million residents, more than 1,190 of these deliberative and consultative meetings were held at the village level, 190 at the township level, and 150 in governmental organizations, schools, and business sectors. Wenling has by increments developed a form of democracy that combines an empowered citizenry with deliberation (Mo and Chen 2005; Wenling Department of Propaganda 2003, 98). As case in point is Zeguo township in Wenling, where in 2005 officials introduced deliberative polling, using the device to set priorities for the township's budget. Deliberative polling uses random sampling in order to constitute small (typically a few hundred) bodies of ordinary citizens that are descriptively representative of the population. These bodies engage in facilitated processes of learning and deliberation about an issue, typically over a period of one or two days, and can produce results that represent considered public opinion (Fishkin 1995). Officials in Wenling altered the device by elevating the polls outcomes from their common exemplary or advisory status to an empowered status, by committing in advance of the process to abide by the outcomes (Fishkin et. al, 2006). In 2006, ten out of twelve projects chosen through

deliberative polling were implemented. The device has also evolved: in the most recent uses (February 2008 and 2009), the government opened every detail of the city's budget to participants.

The practice of holding public hearings has also developed within the area of law. In 1996, the first national law on administrative punishment introduced an article stipulating that a public hearing must be held before any punishment is given. The well-known article 23 of the Law on Price passed by China's National People's Congress in December 1997 specified that the price of public goods must be decided through public hearings. At least eleven provinces developed regulations to implement this provision with ten referring to the idea of transparency and openness, and nine to the idea of democracy (Peng et al 2004, 49). More than 1000 public hearings on prices were held across China between 1998 and 2001 (Hangzhou Municipal Office of Legislative Affairs 2007a). The Legislation Law, passed in 2000 by the National People's Congress, requires public hearings to be an integral part of decision-making process for new legislation (Wang 2003). More than 39 public hearings on new legislation were held at the provincial level between 1999 and 2004 (Chen and He 2006, 445), including, for example, a national public hearing on income taxes. In Hangzhou, the government has developed a web-based public hearing process for comment on the various drafts of laws or regulations (Hangzhou Municipal Office of Legislative Affairs 2007b).

A deliberative innovation in the policy area of industrial relations can be found in the *collective consultation on salary*. In the 1990s, Jiansu Province introduced a system in which workers are entitled to certain rights to discuss and bargain their salaries and welfare with factory managers (People.Com 2001; see also Unger and Chan 2004). In 2001 the Ministry of Labor and Social Security issued an official regulation on how to carry out collective bargaining "in a Chinese way": disputes over wages should be subject to full consultation and discussion (Gu 2001, 2). Consistent with the directive, in 2007 Premier Wen Jiabao endorsed and called for the spread of, a form of the collective consultation meeting on workers' wages developed in Wenling City.

Finally, there are some emerging practices that include elements of democracy and/or deliberation, but which are quite limited in scope. They are nonetheless worth mention because they help to fill out the broader picture of a polity permeated by a diversity of highly uneven deliberative practices. Intra-party elections with secret ballots were held in Ya'An in 2002. There has also been a trend toward publicly-visible deliberation in the National Legislature, as was evident in the deliberations over the Draft New Labor Contract Law in 2006-07. In addition, there have been experiments with participatory budgeting with varying degrees of participation as well as consultation—ranging from a highly constrained process in Wuxi to more inclusive and consultative processes in Xinhe and Huinan from 2004 to 2008. There also instances of deliberation among government bodies, as in the case in which a committee of Municipal Peoples' Congress now examines the budget submitted by Shenzhen City. Instances of rights-based representation are beginning to induce deliberation as well. In 1999, for example, the official trade union in Yiwu City began to actively represent workers, producing effective rights, which in turn led to broader forums on workers' rights. And in 2006, the government funded the Poverty Reduction Foundation, which invites international NGOs to not only to invest, but to engage recipients' ideas for poverty reduction.

We can make some sense of this high diversity of deliberative, consultative, and participatory practices by sorting them according to the characteristics relevant to identifying authoritarian deliberation. Table 3 distinguishes practices by level (local versus national), the extent of participation, the likelihood that deliberation exists, and (in bold) the extent of democratic empowerment. [Table 3 about here] Most practices combine a high degree of government control of the agenda with either consultation or deliberation. Participation is likely to be encouraged in the more local venues rather than in higher-level venues, though deliberation is increasingly a characteristic of higher-level bodies. Some of the local practices combine with limited empowerments—rights to vote, rights to initiate meeting and organize

agendas, rights to equal concern, and rights to express one's voice—to produce highly robust instances of deliberative influence (He 2006a).

The overall pattern is one of *authoritarian deliberation*: that is, a high density of talk-based politics within the context of government-defined agendas and formal government control of outcomes. Most power remains in the hands of unelected elites, operating within the structures of one-party domination, and without the kinds of empowerments and protections necessary for democratic inclusion (Nathan 2003). Party officials still decide whether or not to introduce deliberative meetings, determine the agenda, as well as the extent to which to what degree the people's opinion will be taken into account. They seek to avoid spillover onto non-approved topics, holding deliberations to specific topics. Although there are divisions of power among layers of government and between agencies, there are no effective separations of powers within governments and no independent oversight bodies—though in some areas the judicial system operates with increasing autonomy (Peerenboom 2002). The Chinese state still maintains a Leninist political structure. Democracy, Premier Wen Jiabao recently said, is “one hundred years away”—possible only when China becomes a “mature socialist system” (MacDonald 2007; cf. Gilley 2004).

Deliberative Influence under Authoritarian Conditions: What Distinguishes China?

Even with these kinds of indicative evidence, the concept of authoritarian deliberation brings with it a problem of identification that we do not face when identifying instances of command authoritarianism, deliberative democracy, or majoritarian democracy. These latter forms of rule can be identified by outcomes: in authoritarian systems, commands result in policies, and in democracies preferences and reasons are expressed in policy outcomes. But because authoritarian deliberation implies that deliberation is exerting an influence that is autonomous of the (authoritarian) power to make the decision, it will be unclear in any given case whether the decisions reflect deliberative influence or authoritarian power.

The methodological problem reflects a problem of normative significance: authoritarian and totalitarian regimes have, historically, mobilized participation to provide legitimacy for command-based decisions. There are numerous examples, from Franco's corporatist authoritarianism to Cuba today. The most obvious comparison, however, is with the former Soviet Union prior to *Glasnost*, which can be broadly characterized as a form of dictatorship with a high level of institutionalized participation, as well as the involvement of officially recognized groups in the initial stages of decision-making (Hough and Fainsold 1979, 145; Hough 1997, 142-143.). Stalin, like many dictators, used professional groups as information "transmission belts," primarily to convey information about decisions. Some genuine consultation with groups appeared Khrushchev, who introduced consultation with key technocratic elites (Skilling 1971), while under Brezhnev, numerous councils were created to draw the citizens into public life (Hough 1976:6-7). There is some evidence to suggest that these limited forms of participation, although fabricated, sometimes allowed for deliberation. Although citizens viewed their influence in "high politics" as negligible, in "matters of daily concern, such as the allocation of housing, or work conditions, and sometimes technical- production questions," formal participatory venues "could also lead to fairly lively exchanges" (Unger 1981, 117; see also DiFranceisco and Gitelman 1994).

But contemporary Chinese case seems to differ from Soviet-style participation with respect to deliberative influence. Methodologically, of course, the extent to which venues actually generate influence is a matter for careful comparative ethnography. Such research remains in development in the established democracies (e.g., Steiner, et. al., 2004), and hardly exists elsewhere. At first glance, many of the new Chinese processes appear to be consultative, not unlike Soviet participatory mechanisms, and the system has been termed a "consultative authoritarianism" in the recent past (Harding 1987). As we noted above, "consultation" is fully compatible with command authoritarianism, exemplified quite clearly by the Soviet case. As Hough notes, even when Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev used consultative procedures, they "were ruthless in overriding society's preferences on important matters" (1997, 143)..

The indicative evidence, however, suggests that “consultative” and deliberative venues in contemporary China often and sometimes even reliably generate deliberative influence. First, there are also indications in official terminology. In the recent past, for example, participatory activities were called “political study”, and they were ideologically oriented and politically compulsory. Deliberative forums now often called *kentai* (heart-to-heart talks), or other names with democratic connotations. There are also indications of deliberative intent within the increasing amount of process-oriented regulation. Many Provincial (e.g., Fujian) and Municipal (e.g., Wenling) governments not only require local elites to hold regular public hearings, but also prescribe procedures aimed at encouraging deliberation. The increasingly refined use of deliberative polling in Wenling City we mentioned above provides one such example.

Second, while the Soviet regime and China under Mao secured participation through threat of sanction (Unger 1981, 112), the Chinese regime no longer does so. Chinese citizens have the rights of exit, which, following Hirschman (1970), should induce organizations to provide opportunities for voice as well as to respond. In China, officials often use deliberative forums to reduce the number of the “rightful resistance” demonstrations, petitions, and other actions, which means they must not only listen to citizens’ grievances, but also produce results. We can deduce some amount of autonomous deliberative influence just because participants can choose to exit in favor of the politics of obstruction. The sham or “show” consultations that were common in the Soviet Union are less likely when citizens can choose not to participate.

Third, at the village level, the Chinese cases differ from the Soviet cases in the extent to which they are supported by elections, approval voting, and certain actionable land rights. The effectiveness of these rights is very uneven (Tsai 2007). But where they are effective, they induce officials to construct credible deliberative forums.

A closer comparison, perhaps not surprisingly given regional affinities of political culture, can be found in the authoritarian and post-authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia (particularly Singapore). In

these regimes, there exists a substantial regard to the benefits of public consultations about government policy, the need for a movement towards transparent public administration, initiatives towards increased bureaucratic accountability, and an increasing openness to various forms of NGO participation within state-sponsored institutions (Rodan and Jayasuriya 2007). What distinguishes China from these cases, however, is its communist tradition, the incremental empowerments such as village elections, and the new experiments with relatively large-scale deliberative mechanisms, such as deliberative polling in Wengling City.

Despite the need for more ethnographic and quantitative evidence, existing observations combined with the structural logic of inducement suggest that in China today deliberative influence is operating in conjunction with the powers of authoritarian command. This is the phenomenon that distinguishes the evolving deliberative authoritarianism of China from participation and consultation under the Soviet regime, as well as the populist consultations that occurred under the Maoist mass line.

The Developmental Logic of Authoritarian Deliberation I: Deliberative Authoritarianism

Our argument is that the apparently puzzling combination of authoritarian rule and deliberative influence—authoritarian deliberation—is conceptually possible and empirically existent in the Chinese case. But the concept also highlights two important structural instabilities: (a) deliberative influence tends to undermine the power of authoritarian command, and (b) deliberation is more effective as a legitimacy-generating resource for elites when it flows from democratic empowerments. These contradictory tendencies are currently bridged in China through internal differentiation between scope and domain limited democracy, deliberative venues within authoritarian institutions, and the authoritarian leadership of the CCP. The instabilities identified by the concept of authoritarian deliberation are important, however, because they frame two possibilities of normative interest from the perspective of deliberative democratic theory that are consistent with Chinese political development, though non-exhaustive of the Chinese case.⁶ We stylize these possibilities as *deliberative authoritarianism* and *deliberation-led*

democratization. In the short term we expect deliberative authoritarianism to prevail, though deliberation-led democratization is a longer-term possibility.

The first possibility, deliberative authoritarianism, implies that deliberative influence can stabilize authoritarian rule, which in turn is increasingly bounded in such a way that it is compatible with processes that generate deliberative influence (see Nathan 2003; Tucher 2008). Under this scenario, authoritarian political resources are used to mobilize deliberative mechanisms. Deliberative influence is limited in scope and agenda, and detached from political movements and independent political organizations. Deliberative experiments are localized and well-managed so as to prevent them from expanding beyond particular policy areas, levels of government, or regions. Following this logic, at least as far as it goes, if deliberation is successful at demobilizing opposition and generating administrative capacity, then it will enable the CCP to avoid regime-level democratization. Under this scenario, authoritarian rule undergoes important transformations, but these fall short of regime-level democratization. While state power is still ubiquitous, the way in which the power is exercised is modified in ways that both enable and require authoritarian deliberation. More specifically, we might expect the following, all of which can be currently observed in China.

Coercion is targeted but limited. Under deliberative authoritarianism, the use of coercion continues to be tamed and regulated. Coercive force is carefully and selectively used to eliminate organized political dissidents, while governance-related forms of conflict are channeled into deliberative problem-solving venues.

Power is regularized through rights and deliberation. The CCP continues to incrementally grant rights to citizens including rights to own property, to consent to transfers, to consent of public projects with individual impacts; rights to elect local committees and officials, and to manage local funds; and certain welfare rights. Limited rights of private association are institutionalized. Importantly, China will

continue to incrementally but systematically establish a judicial system that institutionalizes the rule of law and allows these rights to have an autonomous effects (Peerenboom 2002; Zhao 2003; Pan 2003).

The CCP gives up some power as a political investment its future. The CCP calculates that giving over some powers to local and administrative processes will generate specific policy- or problem-related solutions to problems, thus forming a piecemeal but resilient basis for its continued legitimacy. These local and segmented sites of legitimacy shore up the global legitimacy of the party in the face of weaknesses of the official ideology, which in turn increase the political capacities of the CCP.

Under this scenario, then, the functional effectiveness of authoritarian deliberation substitutes for regime-level democratization. The current nascent form of deliberative authoritarianism in China would evolve into a more consistent and developed type of rule, under which cruder exercises of power are replaced with more limited, subtle, and effective forms. Political legitimacy would be generated by deliberative means, locale by locale, and policy by policy. The CCP continues to encourage local officials to develop participatory and deliberative institutions to curb rampant corruption, reduce coercion, and promote reason-based persuasion. It invites ordinary citizens, experts and think tanks to participate in the decision-making process. But ultimate control over agendas as well as outcomes remains with the Party and beyond the reach of democratic processes. Of course, this softening, regularizing, and civilizing of power remains contingent on the wisdom of the CCP elites and local leaders, who must be sufficiently enlightened as to be motivated by the legitimating effects of deliberation. Where these conditions hold, however, it is theoretically possible for deliberative political processes to become an important ingredient in the reproduction of authoritarian rule—a possibility that remains under-explored in the transitions literature.

The Developmental Logic of Authoritarian Deliberation II: Deliberation-led Democratization

Democratic transitions from England in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, to Spain in the 1970s have mostly been society-led, often conjoined with market-driven development. These trajectories

were “liberal” in the sense that autonomous social forces propelled democratization. The democratic transitions of the late 1970s and 80s tended to be driven by regime-level changes from authoritarian to multi-party electoral rule, and accompanied by constitutional changes that institutionalized legislative power and judicial independence, as well as the rights that secured social freedom and autonomy. The Polish Solidarity model of democratic transition, for instance, was characteristic of a strong opposition from civil society which forced the government to come to the negotiating table.

In contrast, an increasing number of Chinese intellectuals and local officials see deliberative institutions developed within authoritarian institutions as a way of democratizing China. This development has had the effect of layering new institutions over old ones for the purpose of enhancing their effectiveness, while also transforming their character in democratic directions (see Ogden 2002, 257; Thelen 2003). If this trajectory were to materialize, it would be unique: we know of no examples of regime democratization as a consequence of progressively institutionalized deliberation.

We can nonetheless theorize the possibility. As we argued above, although democracy and deliberation are distinct phenomena, they are structurally related. Democratic empowerments such as distributions of votes, rights of association, and free speech provide the space within which persuasion, argument, opinion, and demonstration can form preferences, enable negotiated bargains, and produce consensus. Democracy enables deliberation. But can deliberation enable democracy? In theory, yes: If authoritarian elites increasingly depend upon deliberation as a source of legitimacy for their decisions, it is also possible for the democratic empowerments to grow incrementally, driven in part by the fact that deliberation only provides legitimacy if it has the space and inclusiveness to generate influence (Dryzek 2009). Under this scenario, deliberation would serve as a leading edge of democratization, possibly through the following mechanisms.

Deliberative legitimacy tends toward inclusion of all affected. When other sources of legitimacy fail—ideology, traditional deference, or economic benefits—deliberation provides a means of generating

legitimacy. However, deliberation generates legitimacy that is “usable” by the state when (a) those whose cooperation the state requires have been included in the deliberations, either directly or through representation mechanisms, and (b) participants believe they have had influence. Because the tactics of obstruction (both rights-based and protest-based) and exit are widely available in China, elites have incentives to expand empowerments to those affected by policies.

Experiences of consultative and deliberative engagement change citizen expectations. Closely related, democratic institutions are easier for regimes to initiate than to retract. Once voice and rights are granted by the state, they become part of the culture of expectations, and transforming supplicants into citizens (Kelly 2006; cf. O’Donnell & Schmitter 1986). The party secretary of Wenling City, for example, reported that he regularly receives complaints from peasants when local officials make decisions without first holding deliberative meetings. Leaders in Zeguo are now repeating deliberative polling in part because they worry that not to do so would violate expectations created by the experiments. They are now working on a regularized annual procedure for budgeting through deliberative polls.⁷

Deliberation tends towards institutionalized decision-making procedures. When deliberation is regularized, it tends toward institutionalization. Trends toward institutionalization can be driven by citizen expectations. They can also be driven by elite desires to retain control of political demand—to channel it into scope- and domain-specific venues—will also tend toward institutionalization. This kind of tendency is visible in the government’s concern with creating a non-arbitrary, constitutionally-regulated judicial system, the existence of which is a condition of democratization. China seems to be changing, gradually, from an instrumental “rule by law” to a normative “rule of law” which binds not only citizens, but also government officials (Peerenboom 2002; Lui 1998). The institutionalization of decision-making procedures is also visible more directly: in 2004, for example, the government of Fujian Province issued requirements that each village hold at least four public meetings a year. Its 26 articles detail procedures for selecting participants and conducting the meetings, the role of chairperson, note-taking, and linking

with village decision-making processes (Sandua.com 2006). As early as 2002, Wenling City ruled that townships must hold four democratic roundtables each year. In 2004, the City further specified the procedures of these meetings, with the apparent aim of deepening their democratic credentials.⁸ In July 2008 the State Council issued a national regulation requiring all county and city level governments to hold open public hearings when making major social policies. Importantly, the regulation specified procedures, apparently intending to secure legal, “scientific,” and democratic legitimacy for the hearings.

The logic of deliberative inclusion leads to voting. Political elites in China often emphasize the relationship between deliberation and consensual decision-making, consistent with authoritarian deliberation. However, when interests conflict even after deliberation, elites may find it difficult to claim that their preferred decisions are the result of “consensus,” eroding the legitimacy of command authoritarianism. It is increasingly common for leaders to respond to contentious deliberation by holding votes in a public meeting, by submitting decisions to the community through referendums, or by deferring to voting by the deputies of local people’s congresses. More generally, the notion that deliberation and voting should function together within political processes is now more common in China: of the 27 projects awarded national prizes for local political innovations with deliberative elements between 2000 and 2005, ten involved various kinds of elections (China Innovation 2006).

While these processes can be described CCP strategies to co-opt opposition and expand capacity, each strategy can also result in lasting transformations in the form of rule. As Tilly (2004, 7) notes, “trajectories of regimes within a two-dimensional space defined by (a) degree of governmental capacity and (b) extend of protected consultation significantly affect both their prospects for democracy and the character of their democracy if it arrives.”

Conclusion

Our argument should not be taken as a prediction that should China democratize, it will be governance-driven and deliberation-led. Instead, our argument is both more modest and speculative: by

conceptualizing authoritarian deliberation and exemplifying its existence in China, we are also identifying a trajectory of possible democratization that is conceptually possible and normatively significant. While our theoretical speculations do align with observed developments in China, our aims are primarily theoretical. The key distinction, between democratic empowerments and deliberative influence, allows us to frame democratizing tendencies within non-democratic institutional contexts by focusing on the legitimacy-producing capacities of deliberation. In so doing, we are pushing the democratic imagination beyond familiar democratic institutions and toward the transformative practices out of which democratic innovations arise. It is in non-ideal cases such as China that democratization is likely to give the biggest payoff in human well-being—which is why normative democratic theory must be able to meet them halfway. Last but not least, we hope to expand the domain of comparative political theory by setting western concepts into conversation with non-western concepts and contexts (Dallmayr 2004; Rosenberg 2006; He 2006b).

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Table 1: Deliberative authoritarianism

Distribution of powers of decision	Mode of communication	
	Command	Deliberation
More concentrated, inegalitarian	Command authoritarianism	Deliberative authoritarianism
More dispersed, egalitarian	Majoritarian democracy	Deliberative democracy

Table 2: Regime strategies by domain and individual-level resources

Individual political resources		Domains of Participation	
	Regime-level participation (Legislative and executive)	Governance-level participation	
		Administrative and judicial	Civil society and economy
Obstruction, protest			Protests, mass mobilization, consumer actions, labor actions
Voice	Autonomous public sphere	Surveys, admin and legislative hearings, deliberative forums	Bounded petitions, media, internet
Rights	Independent political organizations	Some judicial rights	Property rights, some associative rights
Accountability	Independent oversight bodies, elections, separation of powers	Citizen evaluation forums, village elections, local approval voting	Party approved NGO and media watchdogs
Voting for policies	Initiatives, open-agenda town meetings	Empowered deliberative forums, councils, and committees	
Voting for representatives in competitive elections	Multiparty elections		

Table 3: Kinds and locations deliberative politics in China

Extent of participation	Domain	Degree of Deliberation		
		Limited	Consultation	Reasoning
More concentrated, inegalitarian	More local	Intra-party elections Elite-driven participatory budgeting	Participant-limited public hearings Consultations on wages Trade union representation of workers	Local Peoples' Congress deliberations on and oversight of municipal budgets
	More national	Standard (closed) law and policy making	Public hearing on individual tax income held by National People's Congress	High-level deliberation on the New Labor Contract Law
More dispersed, egalitarian	More local	Village elections Independent deputy elections in local People's Congresses	Participatory budgeting NGO-led participatory poverty reduction Township and county elections with consultative features Rights-driven public consultation	Issue-limited debate in press and internet Electoral-driven deliberative village meetings Empowered deliberative polling
	More national	No cases	No cases	Issue-limited debate in the press and internet

Endnotes

¹ Although China has institutionalized village elections without multiparty competition, the system is not an “electoral authoritarianism” (Diamond 2002), not just because elections are largely constrained, but also because the meaning of local township elections is largely consultative (He and Thøgersen 2009).

² The idea of deliberative democracy appeals to some Chinese leaders and intellectuals because it provides an alternative to multiparty democracy. Lin Shangli (2003), an influential scholar and former Dean of International Studies at Fudan University, argues that the deliberative and consultative style of democracy is more desirable in the Chinese context than the adversarial institutions of western liberal democracy.

³ Functionalist stories are not, of course, causal but rather hypothetical—hypothesis framing. They are valuable *as theory* because they relate causal hypotheses to normatively significant consequences.

⁴ To date, about ten English books on deliberative democracy have been translated into Chinese, with many more in the works. The *Theoretical Research Institute*’s new journal, *Zhongguo Zhengxie*, has become a leading forum for the discussion of deliberative democracy in China. International and national conferences on the topic are increasingly common.

⁵ He Baogang, observations in Hangzhou and Shanghai in 2003 and 2005.

⁶ It is certainly possible, for example, for China to evolve into clientist or crony-style capitalist state based on the successive cooptation of stakeholders into the governing structures of the CCP—a scenario that would follow from the current pattern of transference of state assets into private hands, combined with the CCP’s encouragement of wealthy stakeholders to join the party (Oi 1991).

⁷ Interviews with He Baogang, February 20, 2008.

⁸ Interview by He Baogang with Wenling local officials in 2005.

Authoritarian Deliberation: The Deliberative Turn in Chinese Political Development

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Why the Topic?

- The surprising emergence of deliberative politics in China
- There are few studies on deliberative institutions in non-liberal societies
- Comparative democratic theory can help to identify democratic possibilities in a country that contains one-half of the world's population still living under authoritarian regimes

Main Arguments

identify four interrelated concepts and illustrate them with the Chinese case:

- Governance-driven deliberation
- Authoritarian deliberation
- Deliberative authoritarianism
- Deliberation-led democratization

Why use the term “deliberation”?

Distinction between consultation and deliberation

- While deliberation continues Confucian and socialist consultative tradition, it is different from consultation, mobilization & cooptation
- The terms “paternalistic consultation” and “consultative Leninism” do not capture the phenomenon
- *Deliberation* is a mode of communication involving persuasion-based influence
- It is governance by discussion: communicative arguments and reasons brought to bear on collective problems and conflicts; participants and local leaders exchange their opinions, make counter-arguments, and change their preferences.
- Legal requirement to hold public hearings, and a set of well-defined procedures

Why the CCP is turning to deliberation

- Broad political, economic, and social problems: legitimacy crisis, unemployment, local safety and security
- Increasing labor dispute, strike, sporadic protests, and “rightful resistance”
- New rights demands by villagers and homeowners
- State attempts to rationalize conflicts by granting some rights and providing venues for orderly participation

Deliberation as a Response to Problems of Governance

- A stabilizer to maintain local order
- A solution to problems arising from tensions between market forces and communities
- A new art of ruling that generates administrative order through consultation
- More compliance, effective implementation of policy
- Hence “governance-driven deliberation”

Chinese Terms for Deliberative Institutions

- , ()
- A citizen building mechanism (and)

Kinds of Deliberative Institutions in China today

- Consultative and deliberative meetings
- Citizen evaluation meetings
- Residential or village representative assemblies
- Policy dialogues, citizens' juries, deliberative opinion polls, dialogical networks, and some forms of public inquiries

	Consultative Meeting (Consensus Conference)	Evaluation Meeting (Citizen Assessment)	Urban and Village Representative Assembly
Aims	Consult with people	Evaluate and rank local cadres and their performance	Discuss urban or village development, or community-related issues
Persons	Representative and/or voluntary	Proportionally representative	Elected representatives, committee members
Number of Persons	20-300	60-200 (number varies if a survey is carried out)	15-30
Methods	Discussion without vote	Discussion, filling evaluation forms, voting	Discussion, consultation, deliberation, and voting
Frequency	Multiple	One or two, once a year	Varies from 1-20 or more
Length of time	2 hours	2-3 hours	2-3 hours (or longer)
Interests at stake	High	Middle	Middle or high
Effectiveness	Middle	High	High
Monitoring	Low	High	Middle
Mobilization	Middle or low	Middle or high	Middle or high
Authenticity	Middle or high	Middle	Low or Middle
Scope of control	Wide	Middle	Narrow or Middle
Deliberation	Varies	Low	Middle or high

Summary

- Widespread in Beijing, Zhejiang, Shanghai, Fujian, Shangdong
- Impressive number: 2000 deliberative forums in one city (Wenling in last five years)
- From village and street to city and to National
- New regulation in 2008: All county and city must hold public hearings for major social policy

Variations

- Local & regional differences
- Some are formalism (50%?), some are substantial (20-40%?)
- Some legitimize government policies, or merely co-opt the population, still the other empower citizens (the rights to equal concern, to be heard, to initiate a meeting, or to set an agenda)

Authoritarian deliberation in China

- A unique combination of authoritarianism and deliberation with internal contradictions
- Deliberation takes place under one-party which constraints the development of democratic deliberation.
- Authoritarianism needs deliberative techniques or mechanism to provide reason-based legitimacy and stabilize authoritarian rule.

The Contradictory Logic of Authoritarian Deliberation 1: Deliberative Authoritarianism

- consultative authoritarianism (Hamrin & Harding), resilience of authoritarianism (Nathan) , electoral authoritarianism (Diamond)
- Now a new form of authoritarianism (civilize and soften authoritarian power, giving up cruder forms of power in favor of more subtle and effective forms under conditions of complexity, new grounds of legitimacy)
- Strengthening & Rescuing authoritarianism

The Contradictory Logic of Authoritarian Deliberation 2: Deliberation-led Democratization

- Deliberative legitimacy tends toward inclusion of all affected
- Experiences of deliberative influence changes citizen expectations in democratic directions
- Because deliberation does not necessarily lead to consensus, voting becomes more important
- Even controlled deliberation tends toward institutionalized political decision-making procedures

Conclusion

- In the short term we expect deliberative authoritarianism to prevail, though deliberation-led democratization is one longer-term possibility.