Authoritarian Deliberation in China

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Abstract: Authoritarian rule in China increasingly involves a wide variety of deliberative practices. These practices combine authoritarian command with deliberative influence, producing the apparent anomaly of authoritarian deliberation. Although deliberation and democracy are usually found together, they are distinct phenomena. Democracy involves the inclusion of individuals in matters that affect them through distributions of empowerments like votes and rights. Deliberation is the kind of communication that involves persuasion-based influence. Combinations of command-based power and deliberative influence – like authoritarian deliberation – are now pervading Chinese politics, likely a consequence of the failures of command authoritarianism 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. One possibility is that the increasing use of deliberative practices stabilizes and strengthens authoritarian rule. An alternative possibility is that deliberative practices serve as a leading edge of democratization.

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Over the last several decades, authoritarian regimes in Asia have increasingly experimented with public consultation, political participation, and even deliberation within controlled venues.[1] China is a particularly important example: though it remains an authoritarian regime, governments, mostly at the local level, have employed a wide variety of participatory practices that include consultation and deliberation.[2] In the 1980s, leaders began to introduce direct elections at the village level. Other innovations have followed, including approval and recall voting at the local level, participatory budgeting, deliberative forums, 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. Although very uneven, 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,

doi:10.1162/DAED_ a_00454

and upon which they rely for the legitimacy of their decisions.[3] Curiously, these practices are appearing within an authoritarian state led by a party with no apparent interest in regime-level democratization. We call this paradoxical phenomenon *authoritarian deliberation*.

We make three broad claims. The first is oriented toward democratic theory. We argue that authoritarian deliberation is theoretically possible: it combines authoritarian distributions of the power of decision with deliberative influence.

Our second claim characterizes China's regime type as *deliberative authoritarianism*: a regime style that makes common use of authoritarian deliberation. But why would an authoritarian regime resort to deliberative practices? Our broad hypothesis is functional: problems of governance in complex, multi-actor, high-information, and high-resistance environments give elites incentives to rely on popular input and even popular deliberation, especially when they believe they can use these instruments to provide the kinds of proximate and specific responsiveness that co-opt popular organizing and substitute for democratic empowerments. These arrangements can produce a unique relationship between authoritarianism and deliberation. Such functionally driven deliberative developments can be found in several nations other than China: governments in developed democracies have been innovating with new forms of participatory and deliberative governance over the last few decades in response to many of the same kinds of pressures.[4] What distinguishes China is that governance-driven deliberative politics is developing in the absence of regime-level democratization.[5]

Our third broad claim is that the contradictory features of authoritarian deliberation identify the dynamic qualities of Chinese political development that most interest democratic theorists. We illustrate these dynamics by stylizing two possible trajectories of political development. One possibility is that deliberative mechanisms could provide stability for authoritarianism in ways that would make it compatible with complex, decentered, multi-actor market societies. Another possibility, less likely at the moment but possible in the future, is that if the regime were increasingly to rely on deliberative influence for its legitimacy, it might find itself locked into incremental advances in democratic empowerments. Under this scenario, democratization would be driven by problems of governance and led by the current experiments in deliberation, as opposed to regime change following the more familiar "liberal" model in which independent social forces propel regime-level democratization – the pattern most frequent in the democratic transitions of the last several decades.

In 2012, Xi Jinping assumed office as president of the People's Republic of China and general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCP). Xi's leadership has reversed much of the liberalization of the past several decades. Under Xi, the CCP has increased authoritarian controls and Party discipline and has heightened pressure on dissidents, universities, and public spaces. Chinese foreign policy is increasingly aggressive. Xi has also sought to reassert civilian control over the People's Liberation Army. He has embarked on a strong anticorruption campaign, probably motivated by concerns that corruption is a kind of "slow political suicide" of the regime itself, and certainly aimed at more control over quasiautonomous political power centers. Xi is using increasingly authoritarian controls to modernize the financial sector, to continue to reform state-owned enterprises, and, more generally, to modernize the economy so that it continues to perform well. These developments are not entirely surprising: the legitimacy

of the CCP depends heavily on economic performance, which in turn depends on removing roadblocks to growth – including entrenched and often corrupt interests – as well as developing the institutions of a modern market economy. The general pattern remains that of regime-level authoritarianism with no apparent signs of regime-level democratization.

Yet although the CCP under Xi has increasingly cracked down on "foreign ideas" in politics – liberal democracy and multiparty democracy in particular – one such idea has gained influence. The CCP continues to develop and deepen what they call *xie shang min zhu*, varyingly translated as "consultative democracy" or "deliberative democracy." Except when referring directly to CCP documents, here we will use the term *deliberative democracy*, in keeping with the meaning of *xie shang*, which combines *xie* (doing things together, cooperation, and harmonization) with *shang* (talk, dialogue, consultation, and discussion). So democracy (*min zhu*) is modified by *xie shang*: discussing issues in the spirit of doing things together.

In November 2013, the Party Central Committee held its Third Plenum of the Eighteenth National Congress, in which deliberative democracy was given official encouragement in the form of a directive to lower levels of government – as is often the CCP's style of rule. The mention of deliberative democracy (officially, "socialist consultative democracy") in the Third Plenum document was no accident, as it was followed by documents from the Central Committee on February 9, 2015, with directions for "Strengthening Socialist Consultative Democracy," and on June 25, 2015, outlining the role of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Meeting in furthering deliberative democracy. Six ideas were especially prominent in these directives: 1) consultative democracy is an ordered way of absorbing wisdom and strength from the Chinese people to improve governance and public policy, as has always been emphasized by the CCP's Mass Line; 2) democracy is a way of ensuring that expertise is included in public policies; 3) consultative democracy is a key resource for developing legitimacy for Party leadership; 4) consultative democracy is a way of ensuring social harmony by providing places for the people's problems and demands to be heard and channeled into the political system; 5) the long-term goal is to develop not just consultative democracy in a few places, but rather a "multi-institutional" and "complete system of consultative democracy"; and 6) the ultimate goal of developing consultative democracy is to ensure *min zhu*: "the people are the masters."

These central directives are both a response to governance challenges and an incorporation of considerable political inventiveness, particularly at the local level. Local governments in China face an increasing number of petitions and social conflicts, as well as challenges from complex issues. The Beijing government, for example, now receives more than one thousand petititons each day! To manage the social conflicts these petitions represent, local governments have been introducing the ideas and practices of deliberative democracy, such as citizens' juries. From 2014 to 2016, Baogang He took several trips to Beijing, Xiamen, Hangzhou, Shanghai, Guangdong, Zhejiang, Hebei, and Henan to investigate the recent trends in deliberative politics over the last few years. Interestingly, He found that the CCP's program of "socialist consultative democracy" appears to be proceeding, even as authoritarian controls are increasing.

First, several organizations specifically designed for public deliberation have been set up. An empowered Deliberative Poll on local budgeting was held in Wenling in 2005. The process was so popular that it is now institutionalized; and studies suggest that it not only represents a high-quality de-

liberative process, but is also quite democratic, owing to representation through its near-random selection process.[6] A similar Deliberative Poll was held in the Puxi District of Shanghai in 2015.[7] The Haicang District of Xiamen established a center for public deliberation that organizes and executes all local deliberative forums. Aitu County in Jinling Province set up the "People's Arbitration Center" through which citizens can call for a public hearing. This center oversaw a much-discussed live telecast of the public debate between villagers and local leaders on the issue of compensation.

Second, some procedures that empower citizens to participate in deliberative processes remain in place or have been further improved. In theory and often in practice, citizens have entitlements such as access to information and rights to agenda-setting. For example, petitioners can call for public hearings in Changshan, Hunan Province, or Haining, Zhejiang Province. In the Ronggui neighborhood government of the Shuide District in Guangdong Province, all social policies must be proposed and discussed through a citizen committee before being submitted to the Party Committee for further consideration. In 2013, Yanjin County in Yunnan Province introduced a new budgeting process in which both randomly selected citizens and elected representatives are able to make new proposals about the budget, with majority rule used to decide the result. One procedure introduced in Haining in Zhejiang Province in 2014, required the immediate release of the results of votes cast by citizen jurists on the spot. Moreover, citizen jurists can vote on whether a governmental organization has done an adequate job or whether the petitioners in a dispute have legitimate reasons for their petitions. Haining has established a pool of one hundred jurists comprising forty ordinary citizens, twenty locally elected people's deputies, nine lawyers, nine mediators, and six social workers, including citizens from other professional bodies like social psychology. The city guarantees that petitioners have the right to choose juries from this pool to consider petitions. It has also developed a new practice of moving public deliberation from official offices to the site of the dispute to help jurists better understand the issues.

Third, the topics discussed are increasingly substantive. Ten years ago, the issues put up for public deliberation were comparatively insubstantial, such as tourist development or developing cultural signage for a city. When Baogang He proposed a public forum, like citizens' juries, to deal with the petition issue in 2005 in one Beijing workshop, it was immediately dismissed as "too idealistic": the petition issue was viewed by officials as sensitive and complicated, so much so that it fell into the zone of national security concerns. Over the last few years, however, important issues like land appropriation, building demolition, and compensation have been hotly debated in public forums. There are other indications that local governments are beginning to use deliberative forums to manage increasing numbers of petitions from citizens. Local governments in Huizhou, Changsha, Huzhou, and Aitu have started to organize citizens' juries to examine petition claims. Huizhou successfully organized a modified version of Deliberative Polling to solve the "married-out" women's petitions for equal distribution of village wealth.[8] Haining has developed and improved a set of concrete procedures of citizens' juries to deal with a series of the petition claims in 2014. Citizens' juries introduced in Aitu County in Jilin Province between 2011 and 2015 have substantively reduced the number of petitioners. This causal effect is also indicated by public deliberation in Wenling and Huizhou. But there is not yet consensus on this issue, with some arguing that public deliberation may increase the number of petitioners.

The Chinese Legal Database (Peking University Law Database, *Beida Fabao*) provides another source of evidence. Documents between 2001 and 2016 show a rapid increase in the numbers of provisions on public hearings in municipalities, provincial capitals, and major cities up through 2010, after which the numbers plateau, though at a relatively high level (Table 1). These documents vary from informing the citizens' right to hold public hearings, to organizing, improving, and establishing procedures for public hearings, issuing public announcements on public hearings, and reporting the results.

Experiments with public deliberation in China appear to be increasingly genuine, substantive, inclusive, and often impressive. But their contributions to regime democratization remain an open question. The CCP continues to control these processes. Political elites typically define permissible spaces by issue, scope, and level of jurisdiction. Questions of representative inclusion, especially through elections, but even within deliberative forums that seek descriptive representation, are often submerged. That is, the pattern does not appear to be one of increasingly democratic deliberation, but rather one in which an increasingly authoritarian regime is also making greater use of deliberative mechanisms. Our challenge here is to make sense of this seemingly paradoxical development.

The combination of authoritarian control and deliberative mechanisms is not as paradoxical as it might seem once we sort out our terms of analysis. Among other things, democracy involves the inclusion of individuals in matters that potentially affect them, realized through equal distributions of empowerments in votes, the opportunity for voice, and related rights. Deliberation is a mode of communication involving argument and reasoning that generate persuasion-based influence. In many ways, "deliberation" requires "democracy." Good deliberation requires protection from coercion, economic dependency, and traditional authority if deliberative influence is to function as a means of resolving conflict and legitimizing collective decisions. Democratic institutions usually provide these protections by limiting and distributing power in ways that provide both the spaces and the incentives for persuasion, argument, expressions of opinion, and demonstration. These protected spaces enable the formation of preferences, enable legitimate bargains, and, sometimes, produce consensus. Because democracy implies inclusion, collective decisions without it – no matter how deliberative – are likely to be experienced by the excluded as illegitimate impositions. Although highly imperfect, established democracies have, in addition to their elected representative bodies, a high density of institutions that generate relatively deliberative approaches to politics, such as politically oriented media, law courts, advocacy groups, ad hoc committees and panels, and universities with long-standing traditions of academic freedom. Whatever their other differences, all theories of deliberative democracy presuppose a close and symbiotic relationship between democratic institutions and deliberation.[9]

The clear and robust connection between democracy and deliberation has led democratic theorists to ignore the difficult problem of identifying deliberative influence under authoritarian circumstances. To be sure, authoritarian regimes are, on average, unfriendly to deliberative approaches to conflict. Decision-making is closed and strict limits are placed on spaces of public discourse, such as the press, publishing houses, the Internet, advocacy groups, and universities. Authoritarian rulers typically command; they do not invite the people to deliberate.

Yet democracy is contingently, rather than necessarily, linked to deliberative

Table 1
The Number of Official Documents on Public Hearings in Selected Years, 2001 – 2016

Year	2001	2005	2006	2008	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of Documents	193	945	1,282	1,389	1,833	1,645	1,533	1,426	1,457	1,523	1,476

Source: Data compiled using Peking University Law Database, *Beida Fabao*.

devices and mechanisms. In theory, deliberation can occur under authoritarian conditions when rulers decide to use it as a means to acquire information by which to form policies and to gain approval from those affected without giving up powers of decision. To identify the theoretical possibility of deliberative politics under authoritarian conditions, we define deliberation as a persuasive influence generated by the give and take of reasons. Here we follow the sociologist Talcott Parsons's conception of influence as "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."[10] Thus, 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 or coercion, economic incentives, or sanctions based on tradition or religion, nor, we would add, the result of deceit or manipulation. Persuasion, in this sense, can include bargains and negotiations, assuming that the procedures can be justified by reference to claims to fairness or other normative validity claims.[11] In contrast, commands are backed by implied threats, quid pro quos, or the authority of position or tradition. 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 addressees are persuaded by the claims put to them.

Democracy, in many ways, favors persuasive influence over other ways of getting things done, but its root meaning is rule by the people. Democracy empowers those potentially affected by collective decisions so they can influence those decisions. The standard means of empowerment include the rights and opportunities to vote for political representatives in competitive elections and, on occasion, to vote directly for policies, as in the case of referenda or town meetings. In addition, democratic means of empowerment include representative oversight and accountability bodies; the rights to speak, write, and be heard; rights to information about public matters; rights to associate for the purposes of representation, petition, and protest; and due process rights against the state and other powerful bodies.[12]

Such empowerments can, of course, be highly institutionalized as part of competitive electoral systems. But democratic empowerments can also appear more generically in nonelectoral contexts. For example, freedom of information legislation in virtually all the developed democracies enables citizens to monitor public bureaucracies within the appointed parts of the political system.

Although both democratic and authoritarian regimes make use of persuasive influence, in a democracy, citizens usually have

the powers necessary to introduce deliberative claims into almost any issue at any level of government. In authoritarian regimes, political elites decide the subject and place of deliberative processes. In China, elites constrain public deliberation to the problems of governance they choose; they seek to avoid spillover into nonapproved arenas and topics. Despite regime control over the domains and agendas of public deliberation, Chinese citizens have limited kinds of democratic empowerments within specific domains of governance, ranging from the negative powers of protest and obstruction to the positive powers of some kinds of voice (in organized deliberative forums), citizen rights (like property rights), accountability (like the right to vote on the performance of village officials), and voting (like village elections, intraparty elections, and some direct voting for policies). In China, public deliberations 1) are usually more local than national; 2) favor issues related to municipal governance and economic performance; and 3) channel demand into Party-controlled forms of representation. These limited governance-focused empowerments do not add up to regime democratization. Rather, they contribute to an overall pattern of authoritarian deliberation by empowering some domain-limited and scope-limited forms of voice. They also produce functioning pockets of democracy constrained by geographical scope, policy, and modes of representation.[13] The conjunction of these resources with domain constraints maps the spaces of authoritarian deliberation that have been emerging in China.

China lacks, of course, the major institutions of electoral democracy, such as independent political organizations, autonomous public spheres, independent oversight and separations of powers, open-agenda meetings, and, most notably, multiparty elections. Although divisions of power among layers of government and between agencies exist, there is no effective separation of power within governments and no independent oversight bodies (except where the judicial system operates with increasing autonomy).[14] Under President Xi, discussion of "constitutional" or "liberal" democracy is forbidden. The Chinese state still maintains a Leninist political structure. Democracy, Premier Wen Jiabao remarked about ten years ago, is "one hundred years away" – possible only when China becomes a "mature socialist system."[15]

Thus, although we agree with political scientist Minxin Pei's observation that democratic change has stalled in China and is now likely reversed at the regime level, 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.[16] While many established democracies are seeing the emergence of governance-level deliberative bodies – China is not unique in this respect[17] – what distinguishes China is that these modes of participation are evolving in the absence of regime-level democratization.

Why would elites in an authoritarian regime decide to devise and encourage new deliberative practices and institute any low-level democracy, even a highly constrained version? We should not rule out normative motivations embedded in political culture. The post-Maoist, neo-Confucian culture of China imposes moral responsibilities on elites that are not trivial.[18] But even where such motivations exist, they would need to correspond with the strategic interests of powerful elites and with established institutions in order for such practices to evolve. From a strategic perspective, the CCP is gambling that opening some constrained participatory spaces will channel political demand into venues the Party can

control, containing popular protest and demands for regime-level democratization.

Behind this gamble is a functionalist story, which, in its broad outlines, is common to developing contexts. 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 three conditions under which deliberation could become necessary to maintain CCP rule: 1) increasing complexity of governance; 2) increasing numbers of veto players as a consequence of pluralized control over economic resources; and 3) changing popular expectations, especially within the growing middle class, driven by increasing levels of education and contact with the West. So although popular deliberative influence may be most reliably generated under democratic conditions, elites may have incentives to generate deliberative influence even without the incentives provided by democratic empowerments. As economist Albert Hirschman famously noted, the limited options for *exit* under one party rule are more likely to increase internal pressures for *voice*.[19]

These functional demands do not entirely explain authoritarian deliberative responses. But they do suggest a series of hypotheses as to why authoritarian regimes might adopt deliberative mechanisms.

First, and arguably most important, deliberative mechanisms can co-opt dissent and maintain social order. In the context of Hirschman's typology of *exit*, *voice*, and *loyalty*, the CCP faces functional limits with two of the three possible means of controlling dissent. Currently, the CCP controls much high-profile political dissent with an exit strategy, allowing dissidents to emigrate to the United States and other countries to minimize their domestic impact. Internally, the CCP purchases the loyalty of Party members with senior positions and privileges. But simply owing to their numbers, neither the exit nor the loyalty strategy can be applied to the hundreds of millions of ordinary Chinese citizens who are quite capable of collective forms of dissent. Suppression is always possible and is used selectively against those dissidents who have politically mobilized potential or capacity but, as with all overtly coercive tactics, overuse produces diminishing returns. In the case of China, suppression risks undermining the growing openness that supports its development agenda, as well as drawing international attention that may also have economic consequences. Thus, voice is the remaining option for controlling dissent and maintaining order.

Second, deliberative mechanisms can produce information about society and policy, thus helping to avoid mistakes in governance. Authoritarian regimes face a dilemma with regard to information: Under conditions of rapid development, authoritarian methods are often at odds with the information resources necessary to govern. Elites need information not only about operational and administrative matters, but also about the preferences of citizens and other actors. Command-based methods, however, limit communication and expression, while increasing the incentives for subordinates to acquire and leverage information. Controlled deliberation is one response to this dilemma.

Third, deliberation can provide forums for business in a marketizing economy. In China, market-style economic development is greatly increasing the number and independence of business stakeholders with independent economic control over not only new investment, but also tax payments, which can make up the bulk of revenues for many local governments.[20] Pressures for deliberation thus often come from an increasingly strong business sector. Consultations among public and private inter-

ests have become increasingly institutionalized – a process reminiscent of the origins of many legislative assemblies in England and Europe, in which the middle classes bargained with their monarchs for liberty and political voice in exchange for their tax revenues.[21]

Fourth, public deliberative processes can protect officials from charges of corruption by increasing credible transparency. When local government revenues depend on business, officials are usually regarded as corrupt, and not only by the public, but often by their superiors as well. Officials can learn to use transparent and inclusive deliberative decision-making to avoid or at least reduce accusations that their decisions have been bought by developers and other business elites.[22]

Fifth, in situations in which decisions are difficult and inflict losses, deliberative processes enable leaders to shift responsibility onto the process and thus avoid blame. In China, the elites are recognizing that "I decide" implies "I take responsibility." But "we decide" implies that the citizens are also responsible, thus providing (legitimate) political cover for officials who have to make tough decisions.

In summary, deliberative processes can generate legitimacy when ideological sources of legitimacy are declining for the CCP, and development-oriented policies are creating winners and losers. Legitimacy is a political resource that even authoritarian regimes must accumulate to reduce the costs of conflict and enforcement.

Our argument so far has been that the apparently puzzling combination of authoritarian rule and deliberative devices and mechanisms is conceptually possible and empirically extant in the Chinese case. Yet the Chinese case also highlights two very different possible developmental trajectories of deliberative authoritarianism: 1) deliberative politics effectively strengthen the rule of the CCP, producing a new form of authoritarianism and 2) deliberative influence tends to undermine the power of authoritarian command, thus serving as a vector of democratization. These two tendencies are currently bridged by limiting the scope and domain of both deliberation and democracy so they can coexist with regime-level authoritarianism. In the short term, we expect deliberative authoritarianism to prevail. But deliberation-led democratization could be a longer-term possibility.

With the first possibility – deliberative authoritarianism – deliberative influence will increasingly function to stabilize authoritarian rule.[23] Under this scenario, authoritarian political resources are used to mobilize deliberative mechanisms. Deliberative influence is constricted in scope and agenda, and removed from political movements and independent political organizations. Deliberative experiments are localized and skillfully managed so as to prevent them from expanding beyond particular policy areas, levels of government, or regions. By this logic, if deliberation is successful at demobilizing opposition and generating administrative capacity, it could enable the CCP to avoid regime-level democratization. Authoritarian rule would undergo some important transformations, but these would fall far short of regime-level democratization. The current nascent form of deliberative authoritarianism in China would develop into a more consistent and sophisticated type of rule, under which cruder exercises of power would be gradually replaced with more limited, subtle, and effective forms. Political legitimacy would be produced by means of deliberative consultations, locale by locale and policy by policy, as a complement to the kind of performance legitimacy that depends on continuing economic development.

With the second possibility, contemplated by an increasing number of Chinese intellectuals and local officials, deliberative

institutions developing within authoritarian ones will gradually democratize the regime. New institutions would overlay old ones for the intended purpose of enhancing their effectiveness but, at the same time, would also transform their character in democratic directions.[24] 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. It is, nevertheless, a possibility. Although democracy and deliberation are distinct phenomena, they are, as we have pointed out, structurally related. Democratic empowerments – such as the rights of voting, 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? Possibly. Deliberation provides legitimacy only if it has the space and inclusiveness to generate actual influence.[25] Under this scenario, four mechanisms could result in transformations in the form of rule.

First, deliberative legitimacy tends toward the inclusion of all the people affected by it. When other sources of legitimacy fail – ideology, traditional deference, or economic benefits – deliberation provides an alternative means of generating legitimacy. However, this legitimacy is "usable" by the state only when 1) those whose cooperation the state requires are included in the deliberations, either directly or through representation mechanisms, and 2) the participants believe they have had influence. As the methods 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 so as to enable more engaged, less disruptive interactions with citizens.

Second, experiences of consultative and deliberative engagement tend to change citizen expectations. So too, democratic institutions are easier for regimes to initiate than to retract. Once the state grants the people voice and rights, they become part of the culture of expectations and transform supplicants into citizens.

Third, deliberation tends toward institutionalized decision-making procedures. The more deliberation is regularized, the greater the pressures for it not to be discontinued. Trends toward institutionalization can be driven by elite desires to retain control of political demand by channeling it into scope-specific and domain-specific venues. But they can also be driven by citizen expectations that, once established, elites will find difficult to reverse.

Fourth and finally, the logic of deliberative inclusion eventually leads to voting. Political elites in China often refer to the relationship between deliberation and consensual decision-making. This relationship is consistent with authoritarian deliberation. Yet when interests conflict, even after deliberation, elites may find it difficult to claim that their preferred decisions are the result of "consensus," thus eroding the legitimacy of command authoritarianism. It is increasingly common for leaders in China to respond to deliberation that results in the clarification of conflict by holding votes in a public meeting, by submitting decisions to the community via referenda, or by deferring to voting by the deputies of local people's congresses.

Our argument should not be viewed as a prediction that if China democratizes, it will be governance-driven and deliberation-led. Our argument is both more modest and speculative: by conceptualizing authoritarian deliberation and exemplifying its existence in China, we identify a potential trajectory of democratization that is conceptually possible and normatively significant. By distinguishing between democratic empowerments and deliberative in-

fluence, we can focus on the legitimacy-producing capacities of deliberation. In so doing, we hope to push the democratic imagination beyond familiar institutions and toward the transformative practices out of which democratic innovations arise, wherever they might develop.

ENDNOTES

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Authors' Note: This essay updates and builds on the arguments in Baogang He and Mark E. Warren, "Authoritarian Deliberation: The Deliberative Turn in Chinese Political Development," *Perspectives on Politics* 9 (2) (2011): 269 – 289.

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