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The Continued Search for Deliberative Democracy in China
- A Case Study of Deliberative Polling in Zeguo Township

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ABSTRACT

This is a case study of deliberative polling in Zeguo, Zhejiang province, China. Through interviews with local leaders, local People's Congress deputies and others involved in the deliberations, two aspects of deliberative polling are studied: the institutional framework of the Chinese Deliberative Poll and the actors' perception of democracy. Hence, the aim of this study is two-fold. First, it sets out to examine to what extent fundamental principles of deliberative democracy, political equality and deliberation, are reflected in the institutional framework and the processes guiding the Deliberative Poll. To answer this question an analytical framework is constructed based on theory of deliberative democracy, against which the procedures and institutional framework is tested. Second, to contextualize deliberative polling, this thesis asks what view on democracy is reflected in the dialogue with actors involved. This helps further explain the structure of the Deliberative Poll, i.e. why the government has chosen some design choices over others. Parallel, the design-choices help explain how the actors perceive democracy. Hence, this relationship is mutually reinforcing. This study has found that principles of deliberative democracy are weakly reflected in the institutional framework of the Deliberative Poll. Furthermore, although far-reaching conclusions about the actors' outlook on democracy cannot be drawn based on this study; the results from interviews with actors involved indicate an instrumental view on democracy.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

*D*espite far-reaching economic reforms, the possibility of democratization in China is viewed with caution, and if regarding liberal democracy as the only viable political system, “democratization” in China is highly unlikely to be seen in the near future. In fact, the political leadership has made it clear that they have no aspiration to copy a Western model of democracy (Hu Jintao’s report to the 18th Party Congress, 2012). Nonetheless, the political system has, similar to the economy, begun to transform. These reforms are at least partly driven by the urgent need to bolster legitimacy due to the increased gaps between rich and poor, worsened social conditions and increased unemployment brought on by the move to market economy (Fewsmith 2003; 2004; 2007; 2009). However, all reforms in China, especially those deemed as politically sensitive, are carried out with great caution and are closely monitored by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). New policies are often first tested on a local level before implemented on a national scale (He and Thøgersen, 2010: 678). This way the costs of a “bad” policy are kept low. In addition, local policies are more easily reversed than national ones. Thus, to understand the political development in China, one should study local reforms.

A town experiment that has gathered much attention lately, both nationally and internationally, is deliberative polling in Zeguo Township, Zhejiang province. This experiment is modeled in accordance with the research program called Deliberative Poll created by James Fishkin. Deliberative polling is a form of opinion poll designed to realize principles of deliberative democracy. Although deliberative polling have been carried out in numerous Western countries, including the US, the UK, Canada, Australia and Denmark, the Chinese Deliberative Poll (DP) is unique because it is the first known case of government-initiated deliberation (Fishkin et al., 2006: 230-231). The first DP took place in 2005. The local government initiated and carried out the experiment, with the assistance of James Fishkin, Baogang He and Alice Siu. The research team closely monitored the process and the results were later used to test assumptions made by normative theorist. Overall, the first Chinese DP was considered a success and the results of the deliberation were taken into account in the final policy-making process (Fishkin et al., 2006).

Deliberative polling has been conducted in Zeguo for almost a decade and according to observations made by He and Thøgersen (2010), these experiments have gradually evolved and become more sophisticated over time. It should also be noted that a local policy was passed in January 2013, stating that public consultation must be an integral part of the budgeting process. This is an important step in the process of institutionalizing deliberative polling, and securing its survival through changes of government. Given the success of the experiments in Zeguo there is no reason to believe that this is a passing phenomenon – quite the contrary. In fact, the CCP have shown support to and encouraged deliberative polling (He and Thøgersen, 2010: 676-678, 687), which indicates that there is a possibility for permanent deliberative features to be incorporated into the Chinese governance model. The report from the 18th Party Congress includes a reference to the experiments in Zeguo. According to the report, the CCP hopes that the conduct of scientific, democratic and law-based policymaking will continue (Hu Jintao's report to the 18th Party Congress, 2012).

The increased use of deliberative and consultative practices has sparked what could be called “*a search for deliberative democracy in China*”. Findings of Fishkin, He and Siu (2006; 2010) has evoked the interest of the academia and made the experiments in Zeguo famous worldwide. Thus, much research has already been conducted on the Chinese DP (He 2006a; He, 2006b; Fishkin, 2009; He and Thøgersen, 2010; Fishkin et al., 2010). Given the previous research on the deliberative forums, I will clarify why there is a need to further research the case, and how this particular study contributes to the field of research.

First, this study should be viewed as a continuation of the research initiated by Fishkin, He and Siu (2006; 2010). So far, only one in-depth study has been published in English, of deliberative polling in Zeguo. Based on the results retrieved from the 2005 DP, Fishkin and his colleagues assert that a number of democratic principals can in fact be realized using the polling technique, regardless of the broader political context. Not only did the poll satisfy the requirement of participation and deliberation, but also achieved a high degree of equality and inclusion (Fishkin et.al 2006; Fishkin, 2009; Fishkin et al., 2010). He and Thøgersen (2010) have conducted the most recent study published in English that includes the case of deliberative polling in Zeguo. Their research reveals that many improvements have been made to the DP, simultaneously acknowledging that the procedures could be further perfected (He and Thøgersen, 2010:681). However, their research only covers the deliberations held

between 2005 and 2009. Hence, more information is needed about the current conduct of deliberative polling in Zeguo. The question is would an in-depth study yield the same results almost a decade later? And in particular, does the Chinese DP continue to satisfy democratic principles? Or has the local government taken a more pragmatic stance to the deliberations, at the expense of democracy, when the assistance from Fishkin, He and Siu decreased and they started operating more autonomously?

Second, deliberative democracy is currently in the spotlight of Chinese politics. Thus, to improve our knowledge of the political development in China, a better understanding of local experiments is key. The increased use of deliberative and consultative practices, including the Chinese DP, is described as “grass-root democratization”. Thus, we have to explore what is meant with deliberative democracy in this context.

1.1 Research Problem

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the democratic quality of the Chinese DP and explore how the actors involved view democracy.

During the last decades, deliberative and consultative practices have gained impetus in China. This is partly a consequence of the pressure from the central leadership on lower levels of government to increase citizen involvement in public affairs (He, 2006b: 175-177). However, in the absence of directives on how public consultation and deliberations should be conducted the structure and impact of these meetings vary. Local deliberations are generally either open to all citizens, and mainly attract those with a keen interest in the topic, or limited to certain elite groups. Therefore, the results from the deliberations do not reflect the policy preferences of the masses. Hence, these deliberations are neither representative nor inclusive (Fishkin, 2009). Other problems for deliberative institutions in China is that they often lack in deliberation (He, 2006a: 140), and the discussions are easily manipulated to project a false sense of consensus in order to gather support for a predefined policy (Fishkin et al., 2010: 2-3).

The model offered by Fishkin and his colleagues is designed to counter these deficiencies by carefully detailing the conditions for the deliberation. Thus, compared to other deliberative institutions in China deliberative polling in Zeguo is perhaps the most advanced in its kind, and could in fact be a pioneer for local democratization. With that said, the Chinese DP is

among the most significant local-level political changes in China, assumed that the local government has continued to follow the path laid out by Fishkin and others.

The legitimacy of democracy, for deliberative democracy, rests on two fundamental principles: *political equality* and *deliberation* (Fishkin, 2009: 1). Furthermore, these main building blocks are linked to other democratic core values. First, to achieve political equality the following three core values must be satisfied: *equal opportunity to participate*, *inclusion* and *representativeness*. Second, the deliberation should be guided by the principles of *openness*, *transparency*, *freedom* and *influence*. If the procedures guiding the DP are derived from deliberative democracy and thus embrace the principles of the same, it would indicate that we are witnessing real political change taking place in China. It could also be interpreted as a first sign of local democratization. However, in the absence of processes supported by these principles, discussing grass-root democratization would be premature. Local governments could still successfully be exploring new governance practices, but it should not be confused with local democratization.

To contextualize deliberative polling this study sets out to explore how the actors involved view democracy. To answer this question the actors are asked questions related to their perception of deliberative polling and democracy. This helps further explain the structure of the DP, i.e. why the government has chosen some design choices over others. Parallel, the design-choices help explain how the actors perceive democracy. Hence, this relationship is mutually reinforcing.

1.2 Research Questions

The overarching question of this study is: *To what extent are the fundamental principles of deliberative democracy, political equality and deliberation, reflected in the institutional framework and the processes guiding the Chinese Deliberative Poll?*

To support the overarching purpose, this study asks: *What view on democracy is reflected in the dialogue with the actors?*

1.3 Delimitations

Although this study touches on the issue of political reforms in China, given that deliberative polling part of this development, my research is only focused on local politics. With that said, all predictions made regarding the future prospects of political change are purely based on the

finding of the case at hand. Thus, this study makes no attempts to further analyze or explain the overall political development in China. This is the first delimitation of this study.

The second delimitation is that this study only concentrates on the deliberative polling in Zeguo, which rules out all other forms of local-level deliberations. Also, this study is only concerned with participatory budgeting, in this thesis commonly referred to as deliberative polling or deliberative forums, taking place on a year-to-year basis. Several deliberations take place in Zeguo throughout the year. However, these deliberations are outside the scope of my research, as they lack the same scientific character as the DP.

The third limitation is concerned with the time-horizon. Despite the fact that deliberative polling first started in 2005, I will mainly focus on the development from the year of 2010 and onward. This delimitation is done simply because previous studies have been published on the development of the DP until 2009. This material will be presented in the background history section to cast light on past achievement and the historical development of these experiments. However, when answering the research question, only the current state of the DP is taken into consideration. I.e. any past failures or achievements that are not reflected in the current framework will not be taken into account when analyzing the democratic quality of the DP.

Finally, this study aims at evaluating the democratic quality of deliberative polling. Thus, the legitimacy of the final decision rests on the fairness of the procedures and nothing else. Therefore, no consideration will be made as to whether or not these decisions find general support in society. Also, when measuring the level of equality no attention will be paid to participants' perception of equality. This is the fourth and final delimitation.

1.4 Methodology

The present study is based on qualitative research involving a single case. A qualitative approach is superior to a quantitative given that this thesis aims at researching the institutional framework of the Chinese DP, and how the actors involved perceive democracy. The purpose is to understand a phenomenon, rather than exploring correlation between variables or producing results that can be generalized to a wider population (Backman, 2008). Furthermore, this is a descriptive study. Hence, this thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of deliberative polling in China, which provides a basis for future study.

It should be noted that these experiments have been researched using a quantitative approach in the past (Fishkin et.al 2006; Fishkin, 2009; Fishkin et al., 2010). However, at present, this is neither feasible nor desirable. For each deliberation participants are asked to fill out pre- and post-deliberation surveys. These surveys were used to analyze the 2005 DP. However, the statistics produced after 2006 are unreliable as the data sets are incomplete. Thus, a quantitative approach is not applicable. Furthermore, such a study would answer a fundamentally different question than the one posed in this study. I argue that testing assumptions made by deliberative theorists is premature given that lack of information concerning the current state of the Chinese DP. If the processes guiding the deliberations find no support in normative theory, then any result concerning the effects of deliberative democracy, based on the finding from such a research, would be futile. Hence, more information is needed before proceeding with theory testing.

The method used for the purpose of this research is the case-study approach. This approach is ideal as the purpose of the study is to gain in-depth knowledge about a phenomenon in its real-life context (Yin, 2007: 76). It only involves one single case, which has been selected based on its unique character. The uniqueness of the case can be described in two ways. First, it distinguishes from other DP's by occurring in an authoritarian state without the institutional framework characteristic for liberal democracy. Moreover, although deliberative practices have become frequently used throughout the world, this is the first known case of government-initiated deliberation where the outcome of the deliberations is clearly reflected in government policies (Fishkin et al., 2006: 230-231). Hence, if the findings are anchored on normative theory, this would indicate that there is a real opportunity for democracy to develop in China, at least locally.

Furthermore, this research is neither purely inductive nor deductive; it is rather a combination of the two. A combined approach is called abductive and is applicable when the purpose is to gain knowledge of the structures and patterns of a specific situation. It differs from induction and deduction, in that it does neither attempt to test theory nor does it create new theory. Instead, existing theory is used to interpret a phenomenon (Danemark et al., 2003: 186). This research was first initiated as a response to an empirical problem. Thus, the purpose of this study is not to test theory, although theory of deliberative democracy is used to understand *what* the Chinese DP is a reflection of. For this purpose, an analytical framework, based on

core values of deliberative democracy, will be used to evaluate the democratic quality of the DP.

Finally, there is often a trade-off between internal and external validity (Collier & Mahoney, 1996: 69). The validity of a study is concerned with the relationship between theory and empirics, and asks if the research is measuring what it is set out to measure (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2009: 94-95). Internal validity is interested in the construction of a study, e.g. how the empirical framework is applied to empirics, while external validity is related to the generality of the study (Svenning, 2000: 60). The scope of this study is limited. Therefore, it does not attempt to produce general results about how the actors view democracy, let alone how Chinese people in general regard democracy. This study only asks what view of the democracy is reflected in the dialogue with the actors. Hence, internal validity is of higher priority than external validity.

1.4.1 Fieldwork

Field research has been an essential part of the process of learning more about the deliberative polling in Zeguo. In fact, in terms of data-collection, this research would have been difficult, if not impossible, to conduct without being physically present. Detailed information about the conduct of the DP's cannot be found in official documents. Neither would such documents necessarily answer the question of *why* certain modifications have been done to the institutional framework, or how the actors involved view democracy. These questions can only be answered by interviewing local leaders and others involved in the process. Simultaneously, as the majority of the documents relevant to this study are unofficial, accessing them would have been impossible without first establishing good contacts with the local government. Simultaneously, a huge part of the information needed for this study is not documented. Furthermore, interviewing those involved in the process yielded information about the actual conduct, which is not necessarily the same as the stated conduct.

I will now continue by briefly discussing the challenges involved in conducting research in China and how it has affected this particular research. The main obstacle when doing fieldwork in China is that it can be hard to gain access to "sensitive" information. In such situations the researcher can, for example, be denied access to certain documents or be faced with refusals from potential respondents. Parallel, the interviewer should be cautious about the fact that some people, depending on the nature of the questions, might be hesitant to answer truthfully, or give a full account of a certain event, if they feel that they run a risk of

retaliation. Furthermore, for a non-Chinese speaker, such as myself, it can prove to be even more difficult to establish contacts and gain access to information. As expected, the language barrier also requires the presence of an interpreter during the interviews. These were my main concerns throughout this process.

Political reforms are generally regarded as sensitive issues in China. Thus, any kind of research related to the topic is bound to be somewhat challenging. However, the level of caution depends largely on the attitude of the Beijing leadership towards the reforms tested. Consequently, information becomes easier to access if the government has given its recognition to the reform-work. The fact that the Beijing leadership has not only recognized but also encouraged the deliberative forums in Zeguo has facilitated my research. Most of the people that I have interviewed have been open and willing to answer my questions. The only times that I met hesitation was when interviewing deputies from the local People's Congress. This hesitation could be related to the sometimes quite complicated relationship between the Congress and the government.

The People's Congress is the legislative body in China. However, the CCP has kept the powers of People's Congress restricted, to ensure that the Communist party does not lose political control. Thus, the People's Congress is often mocked for being a rubberstamp, with the task of approving pre-decided policies. During the last years, a number of reforms have been carried out to strengthen the powers of the Congress (Almén, 2005: 1-3). However, despite efforts to strengthen the congress it is still not an independent judiciary.

Finally, regardless of the nature of the research personal contacts are key when conducting research in China. These contacts can be extended and thus it is important to get in contact with people who are willing to include you in their personal network and provide you with additional contacts. This research has been reliant on the good will of others, and an initial contact with Lang Youxing, a scholar at Zhejiang University, has enabled much of my research. For instance, Lang provided me with a research assistant and helped me establish contact with the deputy vice mayor of Zeguo, Liang Yunbo.

1.4.2 Data Collection and Sample Selection

The primary data collection method used for this research is interviews and the study of documents related to the deliberative forums. By using multiple sources of information the

credibility and validity of the results increases. This method is called methodological triangulation (Denzin, 2006). Even though my general impression is that the respondents were open and sincere, I could detect a tendency to leave out information that I later discovered through documents or by interviewing someone else. Consequently, I tried to verify all information by interviewing people with different tasks in the deliberation. By discussing the deliberation with different actors, a more comprehensive picture was attained. Studying documents served two purposes. First, the documents helped me prepare for the interviews. The information was helpful in order to identify and formulate questions. Second, the material was used to verify the data collected through interviews. The documents included budget adjustment, agendas, project descriptions and a local regulation¹. The local government in Zeguo provided me with the material and a group of five students from Zhejiang University helped translate the documents.

The interviews were semi-structured and thus allow for the interviewees to freely reflect on the topics. Hence, the interview sometimes took unexpected turns and I discovered new aspects of the case that I had not yet considered. For example, one respondent expressed concern over a lack of transparency in the implementation process (int. 6). Up to this point I had only focused on factors immediately connected to the deliberation, and neglected to consider what happens after the budget is approved. A snowballing technique was used to identify appropriate interviewees.

It first started with my contact at Zhejiang University who got me in contact with Liang Yunbo, who in turn introduced me to appropriate respondents. These people then occasionally referred me to others that they thought might possess valuable insight for my research. To gain a comprehensive picture of the conduct of the deliberations the goal was to interview people with different tasks in the deliberation, including state officials, moderators and local People's Congress deputies. Randomly sampling respondents was therefore never an option. Interview guides were used for all interviews.

¹ Task Division for the Democratic Deliberation Concerning the 2008 Finance Budget; 2013 Implementation Plan for the Deliberation, Primary Selection of Key Projects; 2009 Execution Plan for Deliberation Democracy, Public Finance Budget; 2010 Execution Plan for Deliberation Democracy, Public Finance Budget; The Working Schedule for the Deliberation, Finance budgeting, 2011; The Execution Plan of Deliberation Democracy, Participatory Budgeting; Financial Budget Adjustment Report, Zeguo Township, 2010 (Draft); Budget for Major Projects 2012; Budget Instructions 2009; Budget Instructions of 2010; Budget Instructions of 2011; Think Tank Regulation (draft); Working procedures for Think Tank (draft)

1.4.3 Interviewing

During my stay in China I was stationed in Hangzhou, the provincial city of Zhejiang. From there I travelled to Zeguo on two separate occasions to conduct interviews. My first visit to Zeguo took place between the 11th and 14th of March. I met with Liang Yunbo in Hangzhou prior to my stay in Zeguo to get an introduction to deliberative polling and establish contacts with him. Liang is in charge of the deliberative poll and has been involved in the process since the very beginning. Thus, Liang was my main source of information and I interviewed him on several occasions. Some of the interviews were informal and took place over dinner while others were carefully structured. On other occasions, I confronted Liang with new information that I had stumbled across, while he shared details with me that he considered important for my study. For example, when interviewing moderators, I learned that government officials are present during the small-group discussions. After the interviews, I asked Liang about this, and he confirmed.

During my first visit to Zeguo, Liang arranged a visit to a local junior high school where I interview five teachers that had moderated the small group discussions. These interviews were key to gathering more information about the how small group discussions are prepared, conducted and so forth. I also visited the local party school where I interviewed the plenary session moderator and a professor with insight on deliberative practices in China. And finally I met with two Local People's Congress deputies. These interviews were important, since the local People's Congress has become increasingly involved in deliberative polling during the past years.

All interviews took place at a location familiar to the respondents, to make them feel relaxed. For some of them, this was the first time they were being interviewed and perhaps even their first encounter with a foreigner. The teachers were interviewed at the school, while the plenary session moderator and the professor were interviewed in their respective offices. The interviews with local People's Congress deputies differed from the usual conduct. These interviews were conducted in the town hall. In retrospect, I feel it was a mistake to agree to interview them in government premises, because it seemed that they were a bit intimidated by the whole situation. This became evident when one of the deputies kept repeating that he does not want to criticize the government, when I asked him questions such as: *How could the Chinese DP further improve?* Or *“Do you believe that deliberative polling in Zeguo is part of*

a local democratization process?”. The interview setting most likely affected the responses I received.

Furthermore, the government officials initially expected that I would conduct group interviews, and thought that they could be present during the interviews. Therefore, I had to clarify that I intended to interview each person separately, and that others would not be allowed in the room during the course of the interview. These requirements were made with consideration to research ethics. The time used for each interview depended on how talkative the respondent turned out to be. On average, one hour was spent on each interview, except the interviews with Liang that could last up to two hours.

I visited Zeguo again in April. The main purpose of my second visit was to interview local People’s Congress deputies. During April 8th and 9th I met with four deputies and one participant from the 2011 DP. Note that I only requested to meet representatives from the local People’s Congress but the local officials set up this meeting without first consulting me. I suspect that the government wanted me to meet this particular participant since he had appeared in local and national media sharing his experiences from the 2011 poll. Furthermore, I was hoping to interview more deputies, but the government officials had problems finding people available for interviews.

Learning from past mistakes, all interviews were conducted outside of government premises. Even though the set up of the interview was carefully planned, I had to rephrase some questions to get relevant answers because the deputies avoided addressing certain issues. This could of course be related to the language barrier, but not likely. The reluctance to answer often appeared when faced with certain types of questions, e.g. how deliberative polling could be further improved or if they thought that Zeguo had developed democracy. Only two out of four openly criticized the government for failing to address some issues. Regardless, all four provided me with useful information.

Before leaving Zeguo I interviewed with former Party Secretary, Jiang Zhaohua. Jiang is the initiator of deliberative polling in Zeguo and was awarded for his work in 2007 when he was promoted to mayor of Wenling. My interest in interviewing Jiang, despite the fact that he is no longer involved in Zeguo affairs, was to better understand why deliberative polling was launched in Zeguo, and why they chose to structure the DP the way they did. The interview

was very informative. For instance, Jiang clarified why he believes that all participants should be randomly selected for the deliberation and why the surveys are important.

I conducted the interviews with assistance from my research assistant, Li Zhu. I was assigned this particular research assistant for two reasons. First, Li is an English literature student with excellent English and second, he originally comes from Zeguo, so he also speaks the local dialect. Even though many scholars that do research in China are fluent in Mandarin, they are often dependent on translators when conducting interviews in villages because the spoken dialect differs across the country. In addition to translating, Li also helped me plan my visits to Zeguo. Liang established the first contact with the respondents, and Li handled all other communications.

I met with Li twice to discuss my research and expectations, before we went to Zeguo. During our meetings, we agreed on how to conduct the interviews, and I instructed him on how to handle different situations that could arise. For example, I told him that he should consult me before asking any follow-up questions. Also, if he wanted to comment on the answers, he should make a clear distinction between his own interpretation and the actual response. These instructions were given to ensure that I stayed in control of the process despite the language-barrier. Li translated the interview guides ahead of the interviews. Still, during the interviews I posed the questions in English, before he continued in the local language, to avoid any confusion regarding our roles. Having a translator present during interviews can be limiting. The main problem is to gain the trust of the interviewee despite the fact that somebody else is speaking on your behalf. In my case, I did not consider this to be a problem as Li did an excellent job creating a relaxed atmosphere, and it was a clear advantage working with someone familiar with local conditions.

Special consideration has to be paid to the integrity of the interview subjects when researching a politically sensitive topic in China. It is generally held that tape recorders should be used during interviews, (Kvale, 1997: 148). However, there are scholars such as Irene Rubin who argue that recording the interviews will make interview subjects more hesitant to reveal information (Rubin & Rubin, 1995: 126). Therefore, I did not record any of the interviews except one with the deputy vice mayor. This interview was essential to the study and dealt with practical details. Thus, the nature of the conversation was not particularly sensitive. He was of course asked about this in advance, and he agreed. Instead of recording I

took notes during the interviews. This task became easier to manage as I had time in between the translations.

To ensure anonymity, no names are revealed. Instead respondents are given a number. What role the interviewee has in the deliberation is important, which is why this, and how many deliberations the person has participated in, is the only information revealed. The only time real identities are exposed is when citing the deputy vice mayor of Zeguo and the mayor of Wenling on matters in which their positions are important vis-à-vis the issue. Thus, a certain degree of transparency is sacrificed to maintain integrity.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

Chapter two contains a general description of political reforms in China, including the past development of the deliberative polling in Zeguo. This chapter helps understand the contextual setting in which deliberative polling is conducted. Furthermore, it serves as a case description as well as an overview of the previous research on the deliberative poll. Chapter three provides the theoretical framework for the study. Here I present competing accounts of deliberative democracy offered by normative theorists. The central concepts introduced in chapter three are used in chapter four to construct the analytical framework. Chapter five and six contains analyses of the empirical finding from my field study in Zeguo. Chapter five provides an analysis of the current institutional framework of the Chinese DP. In chapter six, I analyze what view of democracy is reflected in the dialogues with actors involved in deliberative polling. I present my conclusions in the following, and final chapter (seven).

CHAPTER 2

Political Reforms in China

This chapter sets out to explore the general development of consultative and deliberative practices in China; the development of deliberative polling in Zeguo in particular. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the political context in which the experiments are taking place, to create a better understanding of the possibilities and limitations involved in experimenting with alternative governance practices in China. Furthermore, it provides background information on deliberative polling in Zeguo, including detailed information about the general conduct of the DP and the structural improvements made between 2006 and 2009. This information is useful as it helps understand why deliberative polling was first launched in Zeguo and how the experiment has evolved over time.

2.1 The Introduction of Public Consultation in China

The opening up of the economy has brought great prosperity to the country and improved the general image of China abroad. The transition has however been associated with high costs in terms of social control and stability (He, 2006b: 177). The Beijing leadership continues to struggle with chronic unemployment, increased inequalities among people and high levels of corruption (Fewsmith 2003; 2004; 2007; 2009). Industrialization has led to huge concentrations of industries to certain areas – mainly to the costal cities in the East. This has led to regional disparities and a divide between the urban cities and the countryside (Li, 2010: 9).

These factors have contributed to the increased occurrence of “mass incidents”; if comparing 1993 to 2010 the number has skyrocketed from 8,700 to 180,000. This is a strong indication of the dissatisfaction amongst the citizens (Fewsmith, 2012: 3). Furthermore, social protests have become daily events in China (He, 2006b: 176). In light of the recent developments, the central government has acknowledged the need of social management, which is why e.g. government spending on social insurances has increased by several hundred percent during recent years (Fewsmith, 2012: 1). Increased government spending has been paired with other measures, including prohibiting unofficial national associations and investigating corruption allegations made against government officials. Parallel, semi-competitive village elections as

well as public hearings, consultative and deliberative forums have been introduced (He, 2006b: 177).

In 1979, constitutional amendments were made, allowing for independent candidates to participate in elections to the local People's Congress. These elections can, at best, be described as semi-competitive. Competitive elections have also been tested on a village level. The outcome of these experiments has varied, and the village elections are commonly viewed as a test of different candidates' popularity. Hence, these elections lack real political impact. Although the National People's Congress initially welcomed local elections, a warning was later issued against directing any kind of direct elections (He and Thøgersen, 2010: 684).

The popularity of public hearings, participatory and deliberative practices have increased. Compared to competitive elections these are viewed as a milder form of democracy. Deliberative and consultative practices do not interfere with the nomenclature system and does not pose any serious threat against the power monopoly of the CCP (He, 2006b: 178). It could also be argued that these kinds of governance practices are better suited for China, as the country has a history of public consultation. Chen Shenyong (2006) claims that public forums for debate and deliberation have been a part of Chinese society for centuries. According to him, Confucian scholars were the first to introduce such practices, and mass consultations were even encouraged during the reign of Mao (Shenyong, 2006a: 161-171).

Public consultations and deliberations are associated with many benefits. He (2006b: 177) lists solving community related problems, improving policymaking and cutting costs related to time and personnel as tangible results from deliberative practices. Parallel, the number of people's petitions and complaints has been reduced (He, 2006b: 177). There are several incentives for local leaders to implement new governance practices. Some do it because they have an interest to achieve consensual decisions to create legitimacy for decisions and prevent conflicts, or settle preexisting conflicts. Others use it as a tool to manage and monitor public opinion. It could also serve as a method for local politicians to advance their career, given that Beijing annually awards one city for best local governance. Thus, a lot of prestige follows from inventing new innovative governance practices. This has created competition between Chinese cities and serves as an additional incentive to improve governance (He, 2006b: 176-179).

Furthermore, studies reveal that people have less trust in local governments vis-à-vis the central leadership. The tension between local cadres and the public is actually the most common source of conflicts and mass incidents (Fewsmith, 2007: 16-17). Hence, the use of consultative practices also helps ease the relationship between the two. In addition, some leaders started with public hearings to avoid low marks in citizen evaluation meetings. Finally, public consultation can be a result of pressure from the business community (He, 2006b: 176-179).

According to He (2006b: 183), the three most important forms of local deliberations are 1) Consultative and deliberative meetings; 2) Citizen evaluation meetings; and 3) Residential or Village Representative Assemblies. The first category entails different types of meetings held to discuss issues related to public interest. The aim of the discussion is to reach consensus, although this is not always the case. The selection of participants depends on the topic of the meeting; the participants can represent certain interest groups or be selected by the local authorities, and sometimes, these gatherings are open to everyone. Characteristic for this type of meeting is that the local party secretary or the local People's Congress sets the agenda and chairs the meeting (He, 2006b: 183-190).

I have previously touched on the topic of the Citizen Evaluation Meetings. In brief, the purpose of these meeting is to evaluate the performance of local cadres. This is a part of the responsibility management systems where superior officers evaluate the performance of lower ranked cadres. The procedure usually follows the same pattern: first leaders give their reports on the activities of the cadres and afterwards the citizens are asked to comment on the reports. In the end of the meeting those present are asked to fill out an evaluation form, which is also called a vote of confidence. It should however be noted that the Citizen Evaluation System has met some resistance from local leaders. Some are hesitant to use the system since it is humiliating for those cadres that receive lower marks than their colleagues (ibid.).

The Residential or Village Representative Assembly is a forum for village representatives to gather around issues related to their local community. These assemblies consist of 10-30 villagers. The Residential and Village Representative Assembly deal with different types of issues. While the Village Representative Assembly decides over collective land, village enterprises, village resource distribution, personnel and budgeting the Residential

Representative Assembly is in charge of security, population control and other daily affairs (ibid.).

2.2 Deliberative Polling in Zeguo: a Historical Narrative

This subchapter sets out to describe the initial structure of the DP and the findings from the 2005 poll. After introducing the first DP, I proceed by detailing the structural adjustments made to the DP from 2006 until 2009. The chapter ends with a discussion of plausible explanations to why local leaders first decided to pursue deliberative polling.

2.2.1 Start of Deliberative Polling in Zeguo: the 2005 DP

Zeguo Township has jurisdiction over 97 villages and a land area of 63.12 square kilometers. It is a rapidly developing Township and home to booming industries specializing in shoe, water pump, air compressor and building material manufacture. The total population of Zeguo is 239 200 inhabitants, including a floating population of 120 000 people. Zhejiang province is well known for innovative governance practices. This is partly explained by the rapid economic development in the region (Fishkin et al., 2006: 232-233).

He and Thøgersen (2010: 678) describe deliberative polling in Zeguo as an attempt by the government to “*develop a democratic and scientific decision-making model in which the voice of the people and the deliberation of local deputies are combined*”. Jiang Zhaohua initiated collaboration with Fishkin and others after participated at a conference on deliberative democracy. Jiang had previous experience with deliberative practices, and had been pursuing *Kentans*² during his time as party secretary of Wenqiao Township. Deliberative polling was adopted to improve the Kentans. Jiang hoped that giving the Kentan a more scientific character would help overcome some of the inherit problems with inequalities, lack of representation and unclear results (He and Thøgersen, 2010: 679).

These problems are not unique for deliberative practices in China. In fact, the main concern for mass consultation in general, is how to combine political equality and deliberation. Public consultation tends to yield uninformed opinions, as most people do not have enough knowledge about different policy choices. Consulting policy elites harvests more carefully thought out solutions, but the results fails to reflect public opinion (Fishkin, 2009). Fishkin claims that his polling technique offers a solution to this dilemma. By selecting the participants through random sampling, all citizens are given equal opportunity to participate

² Kentan is the Chinese term public consultation and deliberation

in the deliberation, and those selected are representative for the public at large (Fishkin et al., 2010: 1).

Furthermore, measures are taken to strengthen the deliberative component. Moderators are present during the small-group deliberations to ensure that all participants are given equal opportunity to express their preferences. This includes structuring the dialogue in speaking turns and limiting the amount of time for each speaker. All moderators receive training and careful instructions from Fishkin and his colleagues to prevent domination of the few. To create a sense of physical equality state officials are banned from the small-group discussions. The plenary sessions that follow the small-group discussions offer the participants opportunity to pose questions to experts and government. To create a structured dialogue, all groups are asked to prepare questions for the officials in advance (He, 2006a: 139 – 141).

Fishkin and his colleagues helped the local government design balanced briefing materials and questionnaires. The briefing material was sent to the participants in advance to help them prepare for the deliberation. All participants were obliged to fill out a pre- and post deliberation survey containing questions relating to their policy preferences. These questionnaires were consulted in the final decision-making process. The post-deliberation surveys were used to identify the policy preferences of the participants, after they had the chance to reflect on different policy options (He and Thøgersen, 2010: 679). The local leadership made a commitment ahead of the deliberation to abide by the results of the DP, i.e. the projects that received the highest ranking in the post-deliberation surveys would be prioritized in the adjusted budget (Fishkin et al., 2010: 3).

The surveys also provided Fishkin and his colleagues with the data necessary to measure the effects of the deliberation. By comparing the results pre- and post-deliberation, the research-team was able to draw conclusions about the nature of the preference transformation process associated with deliberative democracy. According to their findings, the deliberation brought about changes in policy attitudes; favored learning; fostered more public-spirited citizens and; demonstrated that there is a correlation between increased learning and policy change. Furthermore, contrary to claims made by critics, the deliberation did not display signs of domination of the few or group polarization (Fishkin et al., 2010).

2.2.2 Procedural Amendments 2006 - 2009

The deliberations conducted between 2005 and 2009 all follow the same pattern. However, some amendments have been made to the procedures throughout the years. During the 2005 DP upcoming infrastructure projects were discussed. From the total population, 275 citizens were selected for the deliberation, by random sampling. However, due to the fact that participants were selected using a household list, women were heavily underrepresented. The second deliberation that was conducted in March 2006, dealt with budgeting. Participants were handed a draft of the preliminary budget and asked to discuss which projects to prioritize. To further improve the DP, several procedural adjustments were made. To counter the problem of uneven gender distribution, all 237 participants were selected from an electoral list. Consequently, this time around 41,8 percent of the participants were female. To better prepare the participants for the deliberation, they were all invited to visit the project sites. Finally, experts were present on the day of the deliberation to assist the participants with technical know-how. During the deliberation, concerns regarding environmental issues were raised. This is why the local government decided to assign one officer the responsibility of environmental affairs. Moreover, one million RMB was allocated to cleaning up the city (He and Thøgersen, 2010: 679 – 680).

The third deliberation took place in February 2008, with a total of 197 participants. The 2008 poll extended the responsibilities of the participants. In the previous deliberation only parts of the budget were up for discussion, while the entire Township budget was on the agenda this time. To prepare for the deliberation all participants were handed a 48-page draft detailing budget expenditures. 63 deputies from the local People's Congress were present during the day to observe the discussions, and later ten participants were invited to witness the deputies' make the final decisions. As a result of the deliberation, the government together with the local People's Congress decided to increase the budget from 20,000 to 100,000 RMB in order to raise the pension for rural senior citizens. In addition, 400,000 RMB was reallocated to subsidize infrastructure construction projects in less developed villages. Common among all three deliberations, is the fact that environmental problems were identified as the key issue. Thus, the funding for environmental projects increased by 8,89 percent (He and Thøgersen, 2010: 680).

The fourth deliberation was held in February 2009. Budgeting was once again on the agenda, but this time the discussions were focused around key projects. Previous experience showed

that one day was not enough to go through the whole budget. Ten migrant workers were invited to participate in the deliberation, but instead of mixing with the other participants they formed a group of their own. This time the local People's Congress convened only two days after the deliberation to discuss the results. Holding a meeting shortly after deliberation was an attempt to further strengthen the link between the local People's Congress and the deliberation (He and Thøgersen, 2010: 680 – 681).

2.2.3 Incentives and Motives to Initiate Deliberative Polling

The study of He and Thøgersen (2010) reveals that the experiments have become more sophisticated and ambitious over time. The question is what motivated leaders like Jiang to initiate deliberative polling in the first place? He and Thøgersen provide some plausible explanations to this question. According to them, the main reason to adopt deliberative polling was to facilitate the process of prioritizing among capital construction projects. From this perspective highly tactical and self-seeking interests motivated the experiments. Jiang was concerned about having to face accusations of misappropriating money; and if he managed to gather support for certain projects it would reduce resistance during the implementation phase. Simultaneously, if construction projects would require vacating homes, the deliberations would help legitimize the evacuation (He and Thøgersen, 2010: 684 – 687).

Jiang was cautious about the political hazards related to experimenting with alternative forms of governance. To reduce the immediate risks, the experiment was carefully designed to fit with the CCP strategy of “science, democracy and legality”. He also made sure that the local People's Congress – the instance through which all major political decision should pass according to the constitution – would be responsible for all final decisions (ibid.).

Wenling leaders met resistance from the department of propaganda in Zhejiang during the launch of the DP. They opposed the idea of drawing parallels between kentan and deliberative democracy. However, already in 2005 leading politicians started to proclaim their support for the experiments. Li Junru, Vice President of the Central Party School, expressed his support for deliberative democracy in 2005. In 2008 Xi Jinping visited Zhenjiang province. During his visit Jinping attended a debriefing on deliberative polling, a gesture that carried significant symbolic meaning – signaling that the central leaders had noted and approved the experiments (ibid.).

CHAPTER 3

Deliberative Democracy

This chapter provides the theoretical framework for this thesis. The previous chapter shows that deliberative and consultative practices have gained impetus in China. In this context, deliberative polling in Zeguo is brought up as a good example of grass-root democratization. This study sets out to evaluate the democratic quality of the Chinese DP. The answer to this question is found in normative theory. I begin this chapter with a brief historical overview of the origins and development of deliberative democracy, and continue with a description of deliberative democracy. The following subchapter deals with ideal proceduralism, which will help clarify what deliberative is and how it can be practiced. This chapter ends with a discussion of how equality should be understood in a deliberative context.

The idea of deliberative democracy originates from Athens – the cradle of democracy. Deliberative democracy, as it was interpreted two thousand years ago, was a form of direct democracy. Although, the contemporary version of deliberative democracy differs from that of ancient Greece, the core idea remains the same: active citizen participation in political decision-making. In recent history, John Stuart Mill is the first advocate of “governance through discussion”. Mill argues that human imperfections make for flawed decisions (Elster, 1998: 1-10). These imperfections are reflected in the thoughts of people and therefore all ideas should be brought up for discussion and the scrutiny of others. The solutions that spire from a dialogue are better grounded than they would be otherwise. According to Mill political participation should be considered as schooling in democracy (Premfors & Roth, 2004: 10). Mill formulates the first documented defense for what can be interpreted as deliberative democracy and his logic is captured in modern theories. Although deliberative democracy has a long-standing history the term ‘deliberative democracy’ was rarely used before 1990 (Dryzek, 2000: 2).

Deliberative democracy has experienced a strong revival during the last two decades, mainly as a response to liberal democracy. In the West, it has become increasingly common to turn to deliberative practices to cope with changed conditions for state-governance brought on by globalization, increased pressure on the welfare state and the emergence of a new political culture (Sørensen & Torfing, 2005: 195-196). The erosion of the nation-state, as Rhodes

(1997) describes it, demands new methods to boost the democratic side of liberal democracy. In addition, representative democracy is widely criticized for instabilities in the electoral system and for producing ambiguous results. These factors combined have caused democratic theorists to demand that deliberation arrangements are incorporated into the liberal democratic model (Knight & Johnson, 1994; Cohen, 1996; Bohman, 1997).

More radical deliberative democrats such as John Dryzek (2000: 4) reject the idea of deliberative democracy merely being a supplement to liberal democracy, suggesting that the former is a viable alternative to the latter. Dryzek argues that deliberative and liberal democracy has started to converge at the expense of deliberative democracy, and if threatening the two distinct forms of democracy as the same, there is a risk of getting blindsided to the potential for deliberative democracy outside the boundaries of a liberal democratic state (Dryzek, 2000). In the context of exploring the potential of local democratization in China, it is necessary to firmly distinguish deliberative democracy from its liberal counterpart and instead focus on the authenticity of the deliberative process.

The renewed interest in deliberative theory and in particular – deliberative practices – has given rise to extensive academic work trying to explain the essence of deliberative democracy; how deliberative democracy is best understood and practiced. Mutz (2008: 525) goes as far as claiming that there are as many theories on deliberative democracy as there are theorists. Although being an exaggeration, there is some truth to the statement. There is a complexity to the theory that makes it hard to test empirically, which is partly a consequence of the lack of consistency between definitions (Thompson, 2008: 498). If taking it to the extreme, accepting all definitions of deliberative democracy would result in any discussion qualifying as a deliberation (Thompson, 2008: 502). Thus, I will begin by giving a broad account of competing theories and later on, in the analytical framework, specify which democratic principles I have identified as most valuable for assessing the merits of a deliberative institution.

3.1 The Core of Deliberative Democracy

Deliberative democracy emphasizes the importance of *active* citizen involvement in political decision-making (De Vries et al., 2010). It is composed of two distinct parts: first, the idea of collective decision-making, which should be regarded as the democratic core and second; the deliberative side that aims at decision-making through discussion (Elster, 1998: 1-10). At the

heart of deliberative democracy is what Thompson (2008: 2) calls the reason-giving requirement: “*participants of a deliberation are expected to justify their policy preferences by giving reason to their claims and respond to claims made by others*”. Or as suggested by Cohen (1997: 74) “*all subject to a deliberation are required to state their reason for advancing, supporting or criticizing proposals*”. The reflective aspect is crucial since preferences can change throughout the deliberative process (Dryzek, 2000: 1). Furthermore, deliberative democrats tend to reject any notion of democracy that treats politics purely as interests and/or preference aggregation (Thompson, 2008: 498).

According to deliberative democrats, such as Dryzek (2000), all subject to a collective decision should be given the opportunity to participate in the deliberation. This prerequisite only stipulates that those concerned should be given the *opportunity* to participate, which means that people reserve the right to decline (Dryzek, 2000: 2). The main problem for deliberative democracy is that of participation, as it is virtually impossible for all those concerned by a decision to participate in the deliberation. Cohen (1997) solves this dilemma by suggesting that if the number of participants has to be limited, e.g. due to practical constraints, those selected for the deliberation should be representative for the entire population.

Deliberative democracy is often criticized for failing to include the masses (Fishkin, 2010). Early philosophers such as Aristotle and Madison argues that the exclusion of the many is desirable, and there are still those who claim that deliberation should be left to the elite, since lay citizens do not necessarily possess the “right” capabilities to participate in a deliberation (Bohman, 1997: 324). There has however been a general movement towards a more inclusive view of deliberative democracy (Dryzek, 2000; Fishkin, 2010; Rosenberg, 2006).

3.2 Ideal Proceduralism

For deliberative democracy, ideal proceduralism has for long been the standard criterion for evaluating the legitimacy of decision-making. According to Cohen (1997: 73) the outcome of the deliberation is legitimate if the process meets the standards of a good deliberation. Thus, ideal proceduralism is concerned with the quality of the deliberative process (Stokes, 2006: 55). When relying on procedural arrangements a distinction has to be made between “good” and “bad” conditions. Therefore, normative theorists such as Habermas (1990), Cohen (1997)

and Rawls (1997) have attempted to identify criteria that capture the main principles of deliberative democracy and thus make for a good deliberation.

The popularity of ideal proceduralism is partly explained by the fact that it provides participants equal stand in the decision-making process. Ideal proceduralism consists of a formal and substantive account. The formal account describes the main principles of while the deliberative democracy substantive account exemplifies an ideal process. Hence, the formal dimension answers the question of *what* deliberative democracy is and the substantive dimension explains *how* it should be practiced (Cohen, 1997: 72).

I will first begin by describing the formal account, which consists of *five* main features. First, deliberative democracy is an ***ongoing and independent institution***. Second, participants agree on coordinating their activities within the framework of the deliberation, according to ***shared norms***. Hence, the legitimacy of democracy rests on a deliberation among equals. Third, deliberative democracy is a ***pluralistic association***, i.e. the participants do not necessarily share the same preferences, convictions or ideals nor do they consider it to be mandatory for others, or themselves, to have a certain set of preference, conviction or ideals. They are nonetheless committed to the resolution that spire from the deliberation. Fourth, deliberative democracy requires a ***clear connection between the deliberation and outcome***. Finally, participants acknowledge one another as having the ***cognitive capacities*** necessary for deliberation (Cohen, 1997: 72 – 73).

The substantive account consists of *four* different features. The first condition touches the issue of ***freedom***. Freedom is achieved when the participants feel a commitment towards the process of the deliberation and the results that follow, and nothing else. Participants must feel confident that they can act according to the decisions reached during the deliberation. Thus, the results of the deliberation must be binding. Second, participants must ***give reason*** for advancing, supporting or criticizing proposals. And third, participants in a deliberation must be ***substantially and formally equal***. Formal equality means that participants should not be singled out for preferential treatment. Each participant should be given equal opportunity to place issues on the agenda and have his or her opinions valued equally during the deliberation. Participants are substantially equal when their chances for active participation are not determined by social status, wealth or gender. Lastly, the deliberation ends in ***consensual decisions***. Cohen accepts voting as a final decision-making tool if the participants

fail to reach an agreement. He argues the preferences of participants have been tested during the course of deliberation, why post-deliberation voting yields different results than those obtained if voting prior to a deliberation (Cohen, 1997: 73 – 75).

3.3 Deliberative Democracy and Equality

In the search for ideal conditions two principles stand out – participation and equality (Stokes, 2006: 55). I have previously discussed the issue of participation and I will now move on to the topic of equality.

Deliberative democrats place a strong emphasis on equality, but disagree on what kind of equality deliberative democracy demands (Knight and Johnson, 1997: 280). While some argue that a minimum threshold that guarantees equality of access and social recognition is enough (Rousseau 1967; Rawls, 1993); most deliberative democrats nowadays agree that the procedures guiding the deliberation must be designed to reduce the influence of socially and economically dominant groups (Cohen, 1989; Habermas, 1985).

Knight and Johnson (1997: 280) interpret political equality, for deliberative democracy, as “*equal opportunity of access to political influence*”. By emphasizing *opportunity* they implicitly reject the idea of equality in outcome. Furthermore, Knight and Johnson formulate a defense for both procedural and substantive equality. While the procedural requirement is concerned with equal access to the decision-making process the substantial side demands equal influence during the process of deliberation. The procedural arrangements should guarantee all those subject to the decision access to the deliberation, both at the stage of agenda-setting and at the final decision-making phase. Simultaneously, the processes guiding the deliberation should be designed to counter domination of socially influential groups, and ensure that some participants are not given unfair advantages (Knight and Johnson, 1997).

Bohman (1997) accuses the procedural account for having an incomplete conception of political equality based on equal opportunity. Equal opportunity, according to him, does not guarantee active participation. Citizens without public capabilities are powerless in a deliberation and will not receive recognition from others. Bohman himself takes on a purely capability-based approach to political equality, which he combines with a demand for “effective freedom”, defined as the capability to live as one chooses. For Bohman (1997: 321), the legitimacy of decisions requires that “*citizens are equal and that their reasons must*

be given equal consideration". The strength of the definition offered by Bohman lies in its emphasis on equal consideration of preferences. Formal equality only stipulates that participants must be treated as equals during the deliberation. However, if the preferences of people are valued differently, they remain unequal.

Marion Young (2000) makes a distinction between internal and external exclusion, which is, according to her, the two most common methods of exercising domination. External exclusion is easier to detect and takes place when people are intentionally excluded from the decision-making process, while internal exclusion a subtler way of exercising power over someone else. Internal exclusion means that some people are not given the same amount of speaking time and when they do speak their opinions are not taken seriously (Young, 2000: 52 – 57).

CHAPTER 4

Analytical Framework

Previous chapters have provided a description of deliberative democracy and information about deliberative polling in Zeguo. The purpose of this study is to research to what extent the fundamental principles of deliberative democracy, political equality and deliberation, are reflected in the institutional framework and the processes guiding the Chinese DP. To answer the question this chapter set out to construct an analytical model, against which the procedures and institutional framework is compared. Thus, this chapter should be regarded as an operationalization of the previous theory section.

As the previous chapter reveals deliberative democracy is not a cohesive theory that offers clear-cut solutions to practitioners. Those who wish to put theory into practice must themselves figure out which design choices best correspond to core values of deliberative democracy. This also affects the evaluation of deliberative institutions, as the criteria against which the procedures are tested tend to be either too broad or unclear. Normative theory clearly states that 1) a deliberation should be reflective; 2) participants should be treated as equals and have equal influence; 4) participation should be voluntary and; 5) that there must be a clear connection between the outcome of the deliberation and the final policy. However, when moving from theory to practice there is a lot of room for interpretations.

Thus, before laying out the analytical framework I will clarify how it is structured, which factors I have considered in the process and what I have based my decisions on. Deliberative polling in Zeguo is based on the polling technique developed by James Fishkin. This particular technique has been carefully designed to realize core values of deliberative democracy, and involves methods that are similar to those used by other practitioners. Therefore, some of the indicators found in the analytical framework are based on the initial design of the DP. For example, in the section “Access to information”, I ask whether the participants receive training before the deliberation and under the topic “physical equality” I use the absence of authority figures as an indicator for the level of significance. These are both examples of what should be considered when designing deliberative institutions, although normative theory does not necessarily prescribe it. Also, I have included universal democratic values that apply to all democratic practices, such as transparency, even though

theorists do not explicitly bring it up. Of course, in some sections I derive indicators directly from normative theory. It should also be noted that I do not intend to use all four substantive requirements described in the previous chapter. For example, one of the requirements for a good process is that participants give reasons for advancing or opposing proposals. This requirement is related to the interaction between participants, which is difficult to comment on if the deliberation is not observed in real-time.

Finally, I would like to comment on the design of the analytical framework and how it will be used. The model is divided into two main building blocks: political equality and deliberation. Each building block includes a number of principles characteristic for deliberative democracy. These principles are in turn broken down to specific indicators that measure the level of democratic significance for the institutional framework of the DP. The level of democratic significance is measured by using a three-dimensional scale ranging from no democratic significance to low democratic significance and high democratic significance. There are fifteen indicators in total. A summary of all indicators is found in the end of this chapter. In the final evaluation, the results for each indicator will be taken into account. In the analysis I will discuss each individual indicator, comment on the general pattern and the possible implications of the results retrieved.

4.1 Political Equality

Political equality is one of the two most fundamental values for deliberative democracy. I concluded in the previous chapter that political equality could be interpreted as a procedural or a substantial requirement. Both approaches are included in the analytical framework. However, I will analyze the procedural requirement in the first building block and the substantial requirement in the second. This is mainly done out of practical reason. The procedural requirement is, as I will demonstrate, closely related to the selection of participants, while the substantive requirement is connected to the deliberative process. Furthermore, although representativeness and inclusiveness are two independent principles they will be analyzed under the heading “political equality” as these two values are linked to the selection process.

4.1.1 Equal Opportunity to Participate

Knight and Johnson (1997) define political equality as “equal opportunity of access to political influence”. Giving each citizen equal opportunity to be selected for the deliberation satisfies this requirement. There are essentially two different methods of selecting participant,

if ruling out self-selection. First, participants can be selected based on different criteria such as level of education, previous experience or social status. This is typical for elite deliberations. When selecting participants based on qualifications the probability that the outcome meets the standard of rationality and thoughtfulness increases. However, elite deliberations do not endorse political equality, as it is based on the implicit assumption that lay-citizens lack the capacity to participate in public affairs. The second method of selection is random sampling. By randomly selecting participants from the Township population each citizen is given equal opportunity to participate in the deliberation. In the end, all citizens will not get the chance to express their preferences, but at least they have the same opportunity to access political influence as their fellow citizens.

Hence, *equal opportunity to participate* in the DP is the first indicator for the level of democratic significance. A system where participants are selected purely based on merits carries no democratic significance. If combining a merit based selection mechanism with random sampling the level of democratic significance increases, but it is still low as it rewards some citizens with greater chance of being selected for the deliberation than others. To achieve high level of democratic significance all participants should be selected through random sampling.

4.1.2 Representativeness

Random sampling also ensures representativeness. Cohen (1997) states that all those subject to the deliberation must be included; and if the number of participants has to be limited, those selected must be representative for the entire population. This is important as the legitimacy of public policy rests on its ability to reflect public opinion. The policy preferences of the masses are difficult to capture unless representatives of different social groups are present during the deliberation. Given that public affairs are on the agenda for the DP in Zeguo each segment of the Township population has to be represented during the deliberation.

Hence, *representativeness* is the second indicator used to measure the level of democratic significance. There is a lack of democratic significance if the participants are not representative for the Township population. The level of significance increases if a part of the sample is representative for the entire population. However, to reach a high level of democratic significance the whole sample must be representative of the Township population.

4.1.3 Inclusiveness

Although political equality and representativeness can be achieved through random sampling, the issue of inclusiveness is harder to settle. A deliberation is inclusive if all relevant stakeholders are included in the decision-making process. When the topic of discussion is public policy, the whole Township is concerned. However, it is unreasonable to expect that the entire Township population of 120 000 inhabitants could meet and have meaningful discussions. Deliberative democracy is often criticized for the lack of inclusion, and rightly so. However, deliberations can be more or less inclusive. The number of participants should be kept at a level that fosters meaningful conversations. Still, a deliberation can be held with an unlimited number of participants, as long as the participants are given opportunity to deliberate in smaller groups ahead of the large-scale deliberation. This demands a strong institutional capacity and can be quite costly.

To get around the problem of low inclusiveness, representatives for all those concerned by the deliberation should be included in the process. This means that there are no grounds for excluding segments of the Township population. In this study, the Township population is interpreted as the permanent population.

Hence, *inclusiveness* is the third indicator for the level of democratic significance. There is a lack of significance if affected parties are excluded from the deliberation. The level of significance increases when all affected parties are included, but the level of significance is kept low if some segments are overrepresented. To reach a high level of significance all parties affected by the deliberation should be included in the process.

4.2 Deliberation

Deliberation is different from other types of discussions and bargaining (Cohen, 1997). In this section I will outline the main features of a deliberation, which will be used to measure the quality of the same. For this purpose I have identified three democratic principles that are used to determine the success of a deliberation: openness/transparency, freedom and influence.

4.2.1 Openness/Transparency

4.2.1.1 Access to Information

Policy making in a democratic setting should be guided by openness at all stages of the process. In a deliberation, the quality of the discussions is dependent on the participants' level

of knowledge regarding the topics. It is virtually impossible to have meaningful discussions about different policy options without sufficient information. Active participation and the participant's possibility to make meaningful contributions to the decision-making process are therefore directly related to the access to relevant and accurate information.

Hence, *access to information* is the fourth indicator of the level of democratic significance. If information is not shared with the participants in advance there is no democratic significance. The level of democratic significance increases if participants are given information about topic ahead of the deliberation; however, a high level of democratic significance requires that participant receive information in good time ahead of the deliberation, for them to have time to familiarize with the material.

4.2.1.2 Understanding the Information

Providing access to information is the first step of preparing the participant for the deliberation. The next step is to make sure that participants understand the material that they receive. If the participants do not feel that they have enough knowledge about a certain issue they might feel hesitant to express their opinions during the discussions and even if they speak, others might not take their argumentation seriously knowing that the participant lacks sufficient knowledge. Another immediate risk is that participants might have difficulty discriminating between different policy options if they lack balanced information. Such a scenario would ultimately favor policies that participants have prior knowledge of, regardless if the option at hand is the most favorable one.

Hence, *understanding the information* is the fifth indicator used to measure the level of democratic significance. The procedure lacks in democratic significance if the material is not explained to the participants ahead of the deliberation. The level of democratic significance increases if the content of the deliberation is accounted for in advance, however, a high level of democratic significance can only be reached if independent experts provide the explanations. This is the best way to ensure that the participants receive balanced and accurate information about each project.

4.2.1.3 Feedback

Openness also requires that participants have opportunity to pose questions to policy-makers and have their concerns addressed. Increased interaction between the government and citizens serves two purposes. First, the opportunity to pose questions helps participants improve their

knowledge about different policy options, and better understand why leaders have chosen to prioritize certain projects over others. Second, the government becomes more aware of the wants and needs of people.

Hence, *feedback* is the sixth indicator for the level of democratic significance. For this indicator there are only two measures of significance: no significance and high significance. If participants are not given opportunity to pose questions and receive explanations by the political leadership the procedure is not democratically significant. A high level of democratic significance is achieved if participants are given opportunity to pose question to the political leadership and have their concerns addressed.

4.2.1.4 Results of Deliberation

For the purpose of this study, a transparent process is interpreted as publicly sharing the results from the deliberation with the participants as well as the rest of the Township population. It is difficult to determine the connection between the deliberation and the final budget decisions if the government refuses to share the results of the deliberation publicly. Furthermore, increased transparency in the budgeting process strengthens the line of accountability between the government and citizens.

Hence, *sharing the result of the deliberation* is the eight indicator for the level of democratic significance. A non-disclosure of results indicates that there is no level of democratic significance. The level of significance increases if the results are published. However, to reach a high level of significance an impartial actor should be responsible for publishing the results, in order to ensure that the results have not been manipulated.

4.2.1.5 Execution

Policy-making should be transparent at all stages of the process, including the implementation phase. The actual decision-making process reveals the intentions of the government while the end-of-the-year report shows if the government has followed through with their plans. If the government fails in execution the deliberation loses power and the question of how well the deliberation is reflected in the budget becomes meaningless. It could of course be the case that the failure to implement certain projects is linked to unexpected events that the government cannot be held responsible for. Regardless, the government should publish end-of-the-year reports of past spending together with detailed explanations of any deviations from the initial budget.

Hence, *execution* is the ninth indicator for the level of democratic significance. There is no significance if the government fails to publish end-of-the-year reports of past spending. The significance increases if the government shares the report with the local People's Congress, as the Congress is expected to monitor the government on the behalf of the people. A high level of democratic significance is reached if the government publishes end-of-the-year reports of past spending.

4.2.2 Freedom

4.2.2.1 Autonomy

According to Dryzek (2000: 2) all subject to a collective decision should be given the opportunity to participate in the deliberation. This prerequisite only stipulates that those concerned should be given the *opportunity* to participate, which means that people reserve the right to decline.

Hence, *autonomy* is the seventh indicator of the level of democratic significance. The deliberation is not democratically significant if the participants are obliged to participate. The level of significance increases if participants can decline if stating a valid reason. High level of democratic significance is achieved if participants reserve opportunity to decline regardless of reason for doing so.

4.2.3 Influence

4.2.3.1 Freedom from Domination

Iris Marion Young (2000: 52 – 57) makes a distinction between two common methods of exercising domination; internal and external exclusion. I will not address the issues of external exclusion in this section, since it is related to the selection of participants. Internal exclusion it is perhaps best measured by counting speaking-time during the deliberation; or as Fishkin and others did for the 2005 DP by measuring if the deliberation caused the participants to move closer to the initial standpoint of privileged group members (Fishkin et al., 2010).

Given that this study is concerned with procedural arrangements rather than the effects of the deliberation, the focal point is whether or not this problem is considered when detailing the conditions for the deliberation. The most efficient way of countering this problem is by structuring the dialogue in speaking turns and keeping close track of time. If the moderators

fail to perform, there is an immediate risk that participants with more knowledge and experience in public speaking will dominate the small-group discussions and thus, the thoughts put forward in the plenary-session will not reflect the opinions of the group at large.

Hence, *freedom from domination* is the tenth indicator for the level of democratic significance. The procedures lack in democratic significance if the moderators remain passive during the deliberation and instead let participants take charge of the process. The level of significance increases if the moderators structure the deliberation so that all participants have the same opportunity to express their preferences. However, a high level of significance demands that moderators structure the deliberation so that all participants have the same opportunity to express their preferences *and* equal amount of time to do so.

4.2.3.2 Training of Moderators

The moderators play a crucial part in the process of creating a sense of equality among a socially and economically diverse group of people. The moderators themselves are accustomed to function in a highly hierarchical society where policy-making is left to the elites. They might therefore be inclined to allow privileged group members “hijack” the discussion. Thus, it is important that the moderators receive training and detailed instructions of how to structure the deliberations and handle different situations that might emerge throughout the process.

Hence, *training of moderators* is the eleventh indicator of the level of democratic significance. The procedures lacks in significance if the moderators do not receive training or instructions ahead of the deliberation. The level of significance increases if the moderators receive instructions for conducting the deliberation. A high level of significance demands that the moderators receive proper training and instructions ahead of the deliberation.

4.2.3.3 Physical Equality

In China, most people lack experience in political participation and for some the DP is the first time that they are being asked to publicly discuss their policy preferences. As existing power structures exclude the masses from political decision-making, citizens are likely to feel alienated from politics and inferior to government officials. Therefore, the presence of authority figures during the small-group discussions might intimidate participants, which in turn reflects negatively on the discussions. In order to create a relaxed atmosphere and

encourage fruitful discussions state officials should be banned from the small group discussions.

Hence, *physical equality* is the twelfth indicator of the level of democratic significance. For this indicator there are only two measures of significance: no significance and high significance. There is no significance if the small-group discussions are conducted in the presence of government officials. Banning state officials from the small-group discussions implies a high level of significance.

4.2.3.4 Outcome of the Deliberation Reflected in Final Budget

The results of the deliberation should be binding, or at least reflected in the final decision (Cohen, 1997). If the connection between the outcome of the deliberation and the final policy is weak, the deliberative institution loses power, and the incentives for citizens to participate in similar activities in the future decreases.

When dealing with a small-scale deliberation with only a few items on the agenda discovering the policy preferences of each participant is a fairly straightforward process. For a large-scale deliberation, as the one in Zeguo that involves several hundred participants, this process is a more complicated. The most efficient method to ensure that the preferences of each participant are taken into account in the final decision-making process is to analyze the post-deliberation surveys. Without consulting the surveys there is no way of knowing how the participants rank the different projects.

Hence, *outcome of the deliberation reflected in the final budget* is the thirteenth indicator of the level of democratic significance. There is no significance if the results of the deliberation are *not* reflected in the final budget. The level of significance increases if at least the issues brought up during the plenary sessions are reflected in the budget. A high level of significance demands that the results from the surveys are reflected in the final budget.

4.2.3.5 Influence over Agenda

Those participating in a deliberation should be given equal opportunity to place issues on the agenda (Cohen, 1997; Knight and Johnson, 1997).

Agenda setting is a way of controlling the discussions; those who set the agenda have the opportunity to decide the topics and order of discussions. It entails a selection process and

while some issues will make it to the agenda others might be left out. Issues can be left out because of practical reasons such as time-constraints, but it can also be a way of exercising power. Involving participants in the agenda-setting process is a way of sharing power and influence with those concerned by the deliberation. It also prohibits state officials from turning topics into non-issues.

Hence, *influence over the agenda* is the fourteenth indicator of the level of democratic significance. For this indicator there are only two levels of significance: no significance and high significance. There is a lack of significance if participants do *not* have the opportunity to place issues on the agenda. A high level of significance is achieved if participants have the opportunity to place issues on the agenda.

4.2.3.6 Equal Influence in Decision-Making Process

For Bohman, the legitimacy of decisions requires that “*citizens are equal and that their reasons must be given equal consideration*”. Cohen (1997) and Knight and Johnson (1997) agree that the opinions of participants must be valued equally during the deliberation. Equal consideration of preferences require that those in charge of the final decision-making, if the deliberative institution does not have decision-making power, are aware of the opinions of each participant and does not discriminate between different participants. Equal influence in the decision-making process requires that all opinions put forward in the deliberation, regardless of the social status of the participant, is valued the same. Again, this places a great deal of importance on the post-deliberation surveys. When making the final decisions each survey response should be valued equally and the data retrieved from the surveys should guide the decision-making process.

Hence, *equal influence in the decision-making process* is the fifteenth indicator of the level of democratic significance. For this indicator there are only two measures of significance: no significance and high significance. There is a lack of significance if the preferences of elite groups are valued higher than that those of others. A high level of significance is achieved if the preference of each participant is valued equally.

Table 1. Political Equality

1. Political equality			
Level of democratic significance	No democratic significance	Low level of democratic significance	High level of democratic significance
1.1 Method of selection	Self selection/elite deliberation	Mixed method	Random sampling
<i>1.1.3 Equal opportunity to participate</i>	Participants are <i>not</i> given equal opportunity to be selected for the deliberation	Some segments of the society have greater opportunity to be selected for the deliberation	Participants are given equal opportunity to be selected for the deliberation
<i>1.1.2 Representativeness</i>	Participants are <i>not</i> representative for entire population	Participants are partly representative for entire population	Participants representative for entire population
<i>1.1.1 Inclusiveness</i>	Affected parties are excluded from the deliberation	All parties affected by the deliberation are included, but some segments are overrepresented	All parties affected by the deliberation are included in the process

Table 2. Deliberation/ Institutional Design

2. Deliberation/Institutional Design			
Level of democratic significance	No democratic significance	Low level of democratic significance	High level of democratic significance
2.1 Openness/Transparency			
<i>2.1.1 Access to information</i>	Participants do <i>not</i> receive informed about topics of discussion prior to deliberation	Participants receive information about topics of discussion prior to deliberation	Participants receive information about topics of discussion prior to deliberation <i>and</i> are given sufficient time to familiarize with the material
<i>2.1.2 Understanding the information</i>	The content of the deliberation is <i>not</i> explained in detail to participants prior to deliberation	The content of the deliberation is explained in detail to participants prior to deliberation	The content of the deliberation is explained in detail to participants prior to deliberation by experts
<i>2.1.3 Feedback</i>	Participants are given opportunity to pose questions to local leaders and receive responses by the same		Participants are not given opportunity to pose questions to local leaders or receive responses
<i>2.1.4 Results of deliberation</i>	Results of deliberation are <i>not</i> disclosed	Results of deliberation are disclosed by the local	Results of deliberation are disclosed by impartial

		government	actors
<i>2.1.5 Execution</i>	End-of-the-year report of past spending is <i>not</i> made public	End-of-the-year report of past spending is shared with the LPC	End-of-the-year report of past spending is made public
2.2 Freedom			
<i>2.2.1 Autonomy</i>	Citizens selected for the deliberation are obliged to participate	Citizens selected for the deliberation have to opportunity to decline if that they can state a valid reason	Citizens selected for the deliberation have the opportunity to decline, without further explanations
2.3 Influence			
<i>2.3.1 Freedom from domination</i>	Moderators remain passive during the deliberation and let participants take charge of the process	Moderators structure the deliberation so that all participants have the same opportunity to express their preferences, <i>but</i> does not limit speaking time	Moderators structure the deliberation so that all participants have equal opportunity to express their preferences <i>and</i> the same amount of time to do so
<i>2.3.2 Training of moderators</i>	Moderators do <i>not</i> receive training <i>nor</i> instructions ahead of the deliberation	Moderators receive instructions <i>but</i> no training ahead of the deliberation	Moderators receive training <i>and</i> careful instructions ahead of the deliberation
<i>2.3.3 Physical equality</i>	Small-group discussions are conducted in the presence of government officials		Government officials are banned from the small group discussions
<i>2.3.4 Outcome of the deliberation reflected in final budget</i>	The results of the deliberation is <i>not</i> reflected in the final budget	The results from the plenary meetings is reflected in the final budget	The results from the surveys is reflected in the final budget
<i>2.3.5 Influence over agenda</i>	Participants do <i>not</i> have opportunity to place issues on the agenda		Participants have opportunity to place issues on the agenda
<i>2.3.6 Equal influence in decision-making process</i>	Preferences of elite groups are valued higher than those of others		Preference of all participant are valued equally

CHAPTER 5

Democratic Quality

The analysis of the empirical findings is divided into two parts. This chapter sets out to analyze to what extent democratic principles are reflected in the institutional framework of the DP. The analytical framework presented in the previous chapter will be used for this purpose. A summary of the analysis is found in the end of this chapter. The following chapter provides an analysis of what view on democracy is reflected in the dialogue with the actors involved in the Chinese DP.

5.1 Political Equality

5.1.1 Equal Opportunity to Participate, Representativeness and Inclusiveness

The method of selecting participants has changed several times throughout the years. During the first two years all participants were randomly selected for the DP. This changed in 2009 when the government decided to pursue elite deliberation. Random sampling was not completely abandoned. However, only half were selected using this method and the other half were selected from a special database, containing the names of elite citizens. By changing the selection procedure the government was hoping to improve the quality of the deliberation. The government had noticed that people from poor backgrounds were less active in the discussions, and that their input did not add value to the conversation. However, after trying elite deliberation for two years the government realized that this does not serve their purpose well. They found that elites are more inclined to pursue their own agendas, and less considerate of the general welfare of the Township population (int. 1).

Thus, in 2011 the selection process was once again modified. According to the latest regulation: one-third of the participants are selected by random sampling; one-third are selected amongst the participants from the previous year and the final third from the elite database. With one-third selected from the Township population all citizens have opportunity to be selected for the deliberation. Selecting participants from the elite database ensures that all industries are represented. Liang believes that self-interest is kept under control, as long as elites are not in majority. The argument for selecting one-third of the participants from the previous DP is that financial budgeting is a continuous process – the current budget is connected to last year's budget and so on. Also, budgeting is quite professional and can be

hard to comprehend for those who lack experience. Given more experience, people will be able to make better contributions (ibid.).

Additionally, one hundred local People's Congress deputies, a few migrant workers and approximately ten reporters as well as higher authority attend the DP each year. There is no exact number of how many migrant workers participate each year, but those who are selected participate on the same terms as the rest. To qualify for the deliberation, the migrant workers must have lived in Zeguo for at least three years (ibid.). One of the deputies from the local People's Congress, with insight into the selection process, claims that the database from which the migrant workers are selected only contain the names of business managers (int. 7).

Liang believes that the new selection mechanism provides better and more representative opinions. During one of our discussions, Liang argued that the new selection mechanism suits Zeguo better because the gap is huge between those that are competent and those who lack competence. His view stands in stark contrast to that offered by Jiang. Jiang believes that educational background or social status does not affect citizen's abilities to express their preferences.

With the new selection system in place, citizens do not have equal opportunity to be selected for the deliberation. Elite citizens are much more likely to be selected for the deliberation than others. The deliberation includes a larger portion of elite citizens, at the expense of other groups. Elite citizens make for one third of the participants. However, in reality the portion is even larger. The new selection system was first employed in 2012. Under the new system, another third of the participants are selected among the participants from the previous year. In 2012, one third was selected from the 2011 deliberation, which was an elite deliberation. Thus, a more accurate estimate is that half of the participants in 2012 belonged to elite groups. When looking at the migrant population, all other groups are excluded from the deliberation except business managers. In sum, privileged groups have greater access to political influence.

The sample selected for the deliberation has become less representative, although all segments of society are still represented in the deliberation. Despite the attempt in 2006 to increase the portion of female participants (He and Thøgersen, 2010), women remain underrepresented. The exact portion of female participants is hard to establish, since the

government claims that they do not keep record of each year's participants (int. 1). When consulting moderators, some claim that only one-fifth (int. 6) are female, while others believe that the ratio is one-third female and two-thirds male participants (int. 4). One deputy from the local People's Congress state that approximately 70 percent are men and the remaining 30 percent are women (int. 9). It is likely that the number of female participants further decreased when the new selection mechanism was adopted. One third of the participants are selected from an elite database, and it could be assumed that the number of women in leading positions is quite low in China. Consequently, even if the preferences of all participants are given equal consideration in the final decision-making process, the preferences of elites will prevail – simply because they have a stronger representation.

It is obvious that the government favors the inclusion of elite citizens, and is more concerned with getting “good” results, than results that are representative for the Township population. This leads one to think that the government is mostly concerned with satisfying the wants and needs of elite citizens. Another conclusion is that the government does not trust that the masses are capable of participating in public affairs.

This indicates a low level of democratic significance.

5.2 Deliberation/Institutional Design

5.2.1 Openness/Transparency

5.2.1.1 Access to Information

Every year, the budget proposal is compiled into a booklet that is sent to the participants ten days prior to the deliberation (int. 1), which ought to give the participants enough time to familiarize with the material. In addition to the written material, participants are each year taken to visit the project sites (int. 1).

This indicates a high level of democratic significance.

5.2.1.2 Understanding the Information

Village governments provide training for the participants. During training, the material is explained in detail to those selected for the deliberation. Furthermore, participants are asked to observe their surroundings and discuss the projects with their fellow villagers; this helps them come up with issues to raise for the deliberation (int. 7). Despite this, all respondents' express concern over the low level of knowledge among the participants. Moderators in

particular, had noted significant knowledge-gaps between the participants. One moderator mentions that illiterates have a hard time learning the material and difficulty responding to the surveys (int. 4). Respondent 6 states that only one third is actively participating in the discussions.

There are three plausible explanations to why large portions of the participants remain inactive during the deliberation: 1) Participants lack motivation to learn the material, and are therefore not susceptible to the information; 2) The explanations are too complicated to comprehend; and 3) There is not enough time for the participants to familiarize with the material. I already concluded in the previous section that ten days should be enough time to study the budget proposal, which is why I rule out the third option. Regarding the first explanation, it is impossible to draw any conclusions about the motivations of participants based on the data available. However, there is reason to believe that the budget proposals are too technical. This was mentioned during several interviews, including one with Liang. For example, one local People's Congress deputy insists that everyone would benefit from simpler project descriptions, because they are hard for people to understand, himself included (int. 8).

Regardless of which, this indicator only asks if the material is explained to the participants prior to the deliberation – and this requirement is satisfied. However, the *level of democratic significance remains low* since the task of providing participants with training is left to the village government instead of independent experts. The level of democratic significance will increase when the government proceeds with their plans to establish an independent think tank³ (int. 1).

5.2.1.3 Feedback

In the past, the conduct of the plenary meeting was unsatisfactory. The main problem was that only a dozen out of several hundred participants got the opportunity to raise their concerns during the meeting, because there were no limitations for how much time could be spent on one issue. Thus, some participants could go on for more than ten minutes, before handing

³ In the end of 2012 a local Think Tank Regulation was passed. The government has decided to establish an independent think tank responsible for providing technical assistance to the government and participants (int. 1). Liang hopes that this will help both parties become better prepared for the deliberation, which will further improve decision-making. The think tank will take over responsibility for training participants.

over the microphone to the next speaker. Parallel, there were no restrictions to the number of questions that one participant could pose. Consequently, the same person could ask up to five questions. In the absence of rules and discipline, participants could even start a new discussion, before the question of the previous speaker was answered. In sum, there was no dialogue between participants and a lack of efficiency (int. 16).

The procedures were perfected after 2007. First, a three-minute-limit for each speech has been introduced. This rule concerns both regular participants and state officials. Second, participants are only allowed to ask one question at a time. And third, when someone raises an issue, those with opposing views are given opportunity to respond. This way, a dialogue is created between those in favor and those against a project (int. 16).

The questions for the plenary session are prepared during the small-group discussion. Participants decide, within the group, which three questions that have been raised during the group discussion, should be brought up during the plenary-session. Each group fills out three notes, including the question and the name of the participant that is responsible for presenting the question. During the plenary meeting, the questions are drawn from a box containing all thirty notes. This ensures that each group has equal opportunity to get their questions answered. There is usually time to discuss all thirty questions, and sometimes there is even time left for open discussions. Participants that made valuable suggestions during the small group discussions are usually those posing the questions. Most speakers are men from thirty to fifty years of age, but recently the percentage of young female speakers has increased (int. 16).

Hence, the plenary sessions provide the government and citizens a platform to meet and discuss different policy options. The Town leadership, including the mayor and deputy vice mayor, are present during the plenary meeting to answer questions from the public. The plenary sessions are well structured, and provide all groups opportunity to raise their concerns.

This indicates a high level of democratic significance.

5.2.1.4 Results of Deliberation

The results from the deliberation are sent to the participants and published online (int. 1). However, the government is responsible for sharing the results, which involves certain risks.

Some interview subjects expressed concern for falsified results (int. 15). According to them, government officials sometimes tamper with results to make them fit their own agenda. Thus, to minimize the risk of ending up with inaccurate results, an impartial actor should be in charge of this process.

This indicates a low level of democratic significance.

5.2.1.5 Execution

End-of-the-year reports of government spending are not made public. Two respondents bring this up as a key concern (int. 11 & 16). Respondent 7 mentions that it is impossible for the public to control if the government has implemented the budget in full. Interviewee 12 suggests that publishing implementation reports would increase transparency. The government should also clarify why some projects are not carried out. This is the only way for the deliberation to have real effect. The rate of implementation has increased, but there are still projects that are dropped each year. Deputies from the local People's Congress have raised the issue of execution with the government (int. 11).

The fact that the implementation reports are not published, undermines the deliberation. Under these conditions, people do not have the possibility to monitor the government or hold them accountable for their actions. Furthermore, it is difficult to establish if there is a clear connection between the deliberation and the final outcome. The government could as well be making decisions based on what has been said during the deliberation, but in the end, not follow through with their plans. Such a scenario would not only invalidate the process but also undermine the relations between the government and the citizens.

According to Liang, the government writes reports every year, but do not publishing them because they believe that people would not understand the content. The end-of-the-year report is shared with the presidium of the local People's Congress, and citizens have the opportunity to make inquiries to the deputies concerning the status of different projects (int. 1). However, based on what was said during the interviews it seems like the implementation reports do not reach all deputies.

Furthermore, despite the fact that the local People's Congress has been strengthened during the past years⁴, it is still not an independent institution. Sharing information with the local People's Congress is better than not sharing information at all, but it does not replace publishing reports in its relevance.

This indicates a low level of democratic significance.

5.2.2 Freedom

5.2.2.1 Autonomy

Citizens selected for the deliberation are not obliged to participate. If they do not wish to participate they can either decline, without further explanations, or send someone else in their place. People rarely decline, but it is quite common that women and elderly people ask the head of the household to take their spot (int. 1). Hence, the deliberation is guided by autonomy.

This indicated a high level of democratic significance.

5.2.3 Influence

5.2.3.1 Freedom from Domination

The moderators have different approaches to the conduct of the deliberation. The dividing line is mainly between those that have received training and those that have not. Respondent 3 explains that he arranges the tables into a square and then structures the dialogue in speaking turns, to ensure that all participants are given opportunity to speak. Those that are reluctant to speak are given a new chance later on in the discussions. Participants get five minutes each to argue their case (int. 3). Interviewee 5 has a similar approach to the deliberation, although he does not limit speaking-time. He simply reminds the participants that they should consider the

⁴ The responsibility of deliberative polling has been moved from the government to the local People's Congress. Starting 2013, the government is in charge of the content of the deliberation, while the local People's Congress is responsible for execution (int. 1 & 11). According to respondent 10, deliberative polling has improved communication between the government and the local People's Congress, and strengthen the power of the Congress. Throughout this process, the local People's Congress has gained more and more influence over local budgeting (int. 10). Now, the local People's Congress has a better chance at supervising the government (int. 9). Interviewee 8 agrees, but thinks that the supervisory role of the local People's Congress should be further strengthened.

time. The others let discussions flow freely (int. 2, 4 & 6). Respondent 6 mentioned that he felt forced to structure the discussions in 2012, as most participants remained silent during the deliberation. The reason for their passivity was that the participants had poor knowledge and could not relate to the topic. The group was assigned to discuss urban planning, although all participants came from the rural parts (int. 6).

Hence, only some of the moderators take measures to prevent domination of the few. Therefore, some participants remain passive throughout the deliberation, which is a problem that was brought up during several interviews. Furthermore, active participants are likely to influence which questions are put forward to the plenary meeting. Subsequently, the government fails to collect information on the preferences of all group members.

This indicator is difficult to analyze in the absence of common procedures. The level of democratic significance is high in one case, low in another, and lacking in the remaining three. The most logical conclusion is to treat this as a case of *low level of democratic significance*, as the results lend some support to both extremes.

5.2.3.2 Training of Moderators

Liang claims to be responsible for training the moderators. Yet, moderators have not received training since 2005. Two out of five moderators received training from Fishkin and He in 2005 (int. 3 & 5). The rest explain that they are handed the budget proposals in advance and asked to study the material at home (int. 2, 4 & 6). What is especially disturbing is that the budget proposal is not even discussed with the moderators, although they are supposedly the ones responsible for the deliberation. The moderators are schoolteachers, which leads to believe that most of them, if not all, lack experience in budgeting. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that they too have problems understanding the information.

When asking the moderators what type of instructions they receive, one moderator mentioned greeting participants properly and making them feel welcome (int. 2). The same moderator says that they are told to get participants back on track if they get off topic. Another moderator refers to official guidelines, in which moderators are advised to stay neutral during the deliberation (int. 4). Hence, moderators receive some instructions, but the instructions are inadequate.

The lack of training and poor instructions indicates that the government is not concerned with providing training to the moderators on how to counter domination of the few.

This indicates a low level of democratic significance.

5.2.3.3 Physical Equality

Since 2009, government officials attend the small group discussions as observers. The cadres are assigned to the groups based on their area of expertise (int. 1). The mayor and deputy vice mayor circulate between the group-discussions to observe what is being said (int. 2). Furthermore, one cadre is present during the whole session to keep record of the discussions⁵.

According to one of the moderators, the presence of state-officials has reduced the workload of moderators. Generally speaking, officials have better knowledge of the topics discussed, and can provide detailed explanations to the issues raised during the deliberation (int. 5). Also, cadres help steer the discussions. Until 2009, two moderators headed each group. This changed when the government started sending cadres to attend the deliberations (int. 4). This information also reveals that government officials do not simply observe the discussion, as Liang claims. It is not desirable that government officials take an active role in the discussions, partly because they might influence which questions are presented during the plenary meeting, and which are left out. And more so, it contradicts the idea of citizen deliberation.

It is positive that the cadres assist with technical advice. However, there is a downside; the presence of authority figures has a negative impact on the feeling of physical equality. In this context, social and political structures should be considered. In China, political participation has historically been an elite exercise, which is why ordinary citizen is likely to feel unequal to a government official. It could be assumed that participants feel intimidated by the presence of authority figures, and become reluctant to speak their mind. Liang argues that being present during the discussions offer a unique opportunity to learn what citizens think. However, if the participants feel inadequate, or for other reasons do not dare to voice their opinions, the government ends up with less information than they would have otherwise.

⁵ Each participant is given a number when signing in, and to facilitate recording moderators ask participants to repeat their number before they speak (int. 4). Later on, state-officials consult these records to help identify which issues participants think are most important (int.1)

It could also be questioned why the government insists on sending cadres to the small-group discussions. Records are being kept of the discussions, important questions are brought to the plenary meeting and the participants fill out questionnaires in the end of the deliberation. With this in mind, the argument of “receiving first-hand information” seems inadequate.

This indicates a lack of democratic significance.

5.2.3.4 Outcome of the Deliberation Reflected in the Final Budget

It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine if there is a clear connection between the outcome of the deliberation and the final budget. In 2005 and 2006, the government adjusted the budget based on the results retrieved from the surveys. It is impossible to identify the preferences of all participants without consulting the surveys (int. 15).

The surveys for the first three years were, according to Liang, too complicated. The participants expressed frustration over the surveys, mainly because they did not understand the purpose of the surveys, and had a hard time completing the forms properly. The surveys have been redesigned to increase the response rate.⁶ It was mandatory for all participants to fill out the pre- and post-deliberation surveys during the first two years. In 2008, the government decided that this should be optional (int. 1). These decisions are reflected in the response rate. For all deliberations after the year of 2006, less than half of the participants were bothered to respond to the surveys.

The general impression is that the current government does not pay much attention to the surveys. They certainly do not make any serious attempts to increase the low survey response rate. There is reason to believe that the government has stopped consulting the surveys, and even if they do consult the surveys, the answers found in the surveys are useless, since the majority of participants neglected to respond. Yet, the government, and others that I have interviewed, e.g. respondent 16 and 13, claims that the outcome of the deliberation is reflected in the adjusted budget. Considering this, the only logical conclusion is that the government picks up on topics raised during the plenary meeting, and adjusts the budget accordingly. It is also possible that the deputies' raise some questions brought up during the small-group

⁶ In 2009, the local government took over the responsibility of designing the surveys, and since then the surveys have been simplified. E.g. questions related to the participant's knowledge level have been cut (int. 1).

discussion, when the local People's Congress convenes. Government officials could also consult the records from the group discussions. Nonetheless, without access to the surveys the outcome of the deliberation can be subject to manipulation.

This indicates a low level of democratic significance.

5.2.3.5 Influence over Agenda

The Town leadership sets the agenda for the deliberation, and the citizens cannot influence the content (int. 1). This is a way for the government to stay in control of the process. They decide what will be discussed and what will not.

This indicates a lack of democratic significance.

5.2.3.6 Equal Influence in Decision-Making Process

I return to the issue of surveys once again. Jiang compares the surveys to voting; each person is given opportunity to express their opinions, and each opinion is valued equally. In the past, when the data set was complete and the surveys were consulted in the decision-making process, all participants had equal influence. Currently, in the absence of reliable data, there is nothing that guarantees the participants equal influence in the decision-making process.

According to Liang, it does not matter if some participants neglect to respond to the surveys, as long as those who do respond have valuable opinions. Parallel, in 2012 a decision was made to withdraw assistance for illiterate participants (int. 1). This sends a clear signal that the leadership does not think that their opinions are important; otherwise they would have continued to offer this service. These factors combined reveal that the leadership discriminates between opinions. The preferences of elite members are valued higher than those of others.

This indicates a lack of democratic significance.

Table 3. Analysis of Political Equality

1. Political equality			
Level of democratic significance	No democratic significance	Low level of democratic significance	High level of democratic significance
1.1 Method of selection	Self selection/elite deliberation	Mixed method	Random sampling
<i>1.1.3 Equal opportunity to participate</i>	Participants are <i>not</i> given equal opportunity to be selected for the deliberation	Some segments of the society have greater opportunity to be selected for the deliberation	Participants have equal opportunity to be selected for the deliberation
<i>1.1.2 Representativeness</i>	Participants are <i>not</i> representative for entire population	Participants are partly representative for entire population	Participants are representative for entire population
<i>1.1.1 Inclusiveness</i>	Affected parties are excluded from the deliberation	All parties affected by the deliberation are included, but some segments are overrepresented	All parties affected by the deliberation are included in the process

Table 4. Analysis of Deliberation/Institutional Design

2. Deliberation/Institutional Design			
Level of democratic significance	No democratic significance	Low level of democratic significance	High level of democratic significance
2.1 Openness/Transparency			
<i>2.1.1 Access to information</i>	Participants do <i>not</i> receive informed about topics of discussion prior to deliberation	Participants receive information about topics of discussion prior to deliberation	Participants receive information about topics of discussion prior to deliberation and are given sufficient time to familiarize with the material
<i>2.1.2 Understanding the information</i>	The content of the deliberation is <i>not</i> explained to participants prior to deliberation	The content of the deliberation is explained to participants prior to deliberation	The content of the deliberation is explained to participants prior to deliberation by experts
<i>2.1.3 Feedback</i>	Participants are <i>not</i> given opportunity to pose questions to local leaders and receive responses by the same		Participants are given opportunity to pose questions to local leaders or receive responses
<i>2.1.4 Results of deliberation</i>	Results of deliberation are <i>not</i> disclosed	Results of deliberation are disclosed by the local government	Results of deliberation are disclosed by impartial actors
<i>2.1.5 Execution</i>	End-of-the-year report of past spending is <i>not</i> made public	End-of-the-year report of past spending is shared with the LPC	End-of-the-year report of past spending is made public

2.2 Freedom			
<i>2.2.1 Autonomy</i>	Citizens selected for the deliberation are obliged to participate	Citizens selected for the deliberation have to opportunity to decline if that they can state a valid reason	Citizens selected for the deliberation have the opportunity to decline, without further explanations
2.3 Influence			
<i>2.3.1 Freedom from domination</i>	Moderators remain passive during the deliberation and let participants take charge of the process	Moderators structure the deliberation so that all participants have equal opportunity to express their preferences, <i>but</i> does not limit speaking time	Moderators structure the deliberation so that all participants have equal opportunity to express their preferences <i>and</i> the same amount of time to do so
<i>2.3.2 Training of moderators</i>	Moderators do <i>not</i> receive training <i>nor</i> instructions ahead of the deliberation	Moderators receive instructions <i>but</i> no training ahead of the deliberation	Moderators receive training <i>and</i> instructions ahead of the deliberation
<i>2.3.3 Physical equality</i>	Small-group discussions are conducted in the presence of government officials		Government officials are banned from small group discussions
<i>2.3.4 Outcome of the deliberation reflected in final budget</i>	The results of the deliberation is <i>not</i> reflected in the final budget	The results from the plenary meetings is reflected in the final budget	The results from the surveys is reflected in the final budget
<i>2.3.5 Influence over agenda</i>	Participants do <i>not</i> have opportunity to place issues on the agenda		Participants have opportunity to place issues on the agenda
<i>2.3.6 Equal influence in decision-making process</i>	Preferences of elite groups are valued higher than those of others		Preference of all participant are valued equally

CHAPTER 6

View on Democracy

This chapter contains an analysis of what view on democracy is reflected in the dialogue with the actors involved in the Chinese DP. Thus, this chapter sets out to explore how the actors' view democracy, and what the perceived benefits are with conducting deliberative polling. This information will help contextualize deliberative polling and further explain why the political leadership has chosen to change the design of the DP.

When discussing the development in Zeguo with local leaders, they speak of it in terms of local democratization (int. 1 & 15). During my first two encounters with Liang, he spoke very passionately about democracy in Zeguo, and how people desire democracy. Local leaders frequently use the term “democracy”, while deputies from the local People’s Congress are more hesitant to call Zeguo a democracy: respondent 6 says that Zeguo has democracy to some extent; interviewee 10 believes that Zeguo is advancing towards democracy; respondent 8 argues that Zeguo has only reached an early stage of deliberative democracy; interviewee 9 underlines that Zeguo is pushed forward as a democracy; respondent 12 says that Zeguo is nowhere near democracy yet; and finally interviewee 7 and 11 states that public administration is currently done in a more democratic manner. According to respondent 8, more power has to be transferred to the deliberation. However, people lack awareness of democracy, and must first be cultivated (int. 8, 12 & 15). Parallel, the capacity of the participants has to be strengthened. With more education, their ability to contribute to discussions will improve, and thusly, they gain more power (int. 8).

Democracy is not something that is commonly associated with China, but it seems like it has become popular among the political leadership to strive towards democratization, as long as a distinction is made between “Chinese democracy” and “Western democracy”. Several respondents clarified that China is not attempting to copy a Western model of democracy (int. 1, 8, 10, 15). Their statements are in line with the latest official party directives. The report from the 18th Party Congress clearly states that China is striving towards local democratization, albeit not a Western form of democracy (Hu Jintao’s report to the 18th Party Congress, 2012). Hence, democracy is on the agenda, but what characterizes Chinese democracy?

Jiang describes Chinese democracy as following: *“For us, deliberative democracy is about improving governance. It is also about solving conflicts between the government and citizens, and avoiding bad decisions. This approach allows us to cultivate people, and teach them orderly participation in political affairs”*. Liang offers a similar account of the government’s intentions to pursue local democratization. According to Liang, the reason for the government to pursue deliberative polling is two-fold. First, it is demand driven; the public desires democracy and wants to be involved in public affairs. Second, deliberative polling facilitates government administration. The deliberation helps settle land disputes, and mitigate conflicts spurring from increased social and economic inequalities (int. 1). Liang underlines that the government has a genuine interest to consult the public to improve governance in Zeguo – deliberative polling is not used as rubber-stamp (int. 1). When faced with the question why they started with the experiments in the first place, to pursue democracy or to improve governance, Liang answered the latter.

Jiang believes that the power belongs to the people, which is why it is necessary to transfer some of the administrative power back to society. That is, according to him, the only way to achieve stability. By including citizens in the decision-making process, the government makes sure that the final policy reflects the common will. If the government fails to satisfy the needs of people, conflicts will arise. In the past, government officials made all the decisions, and consequently, public policy reflected the self-interest of the officials rather than the preferences of the citizens. Jiang declares that economic development changed the conditions for local governance in Zeguo. When non-state actors gained more wealth and influence, the government was forced to consider their interest (int. 15).

One respondent, with good insight into the development of deliberative practices in China, claims that the government first intended to spread propaganda. It was only later that the government discovered the benefits with deliberation, and how it could contribute to local democratization. When faced with this revelation, the government started to make real efforts to integrate deliberation into decision-making. For him, the most apparent reason to conduct deliberations is to reduce conflicts. In Zeguo, deliberative polling was adopted to overcome problems linked to prioritizing between construction projects. Involving citizens in the decision-making process makes the government and the citizens mutually responsible for the decisions. This of course, reduces resistance at the implementation phase (int. 16).

Hence, the Chinese version of democracy involves improving governance and creating stability, and deliberative polling was adopted to pursue these aims. Although the government had no intentions to establish democracy, when they realized that democratic practices would help them achieve their goals, they decided to pursue local democratization. The statements made during interviews with local leaders reflect an instrumental view on democracy. The aim is not to establish democracy, for the sake of realizing fundamental democratic values such as equality or freedom; instead democracy is used as a tool to pursue other goals. The government is prepared to realize democratic principles, if they believe that this supports their cause, but the same principles are easily sacrificed if they get in the way of achieving more important aims. The development of the Chinese DP lends support to this conclusion.

The government started with an institutional framework designed to improve decision-making, while fulfilling democratic principles. After some time, the government felt that the institutional design introduced by Fishkin and his colleagues was not efficient enough. Thus, they began making changes. According to Liang, the main problem was that poor quality of the discussions, and the solution to the problem was to include a larger portion of elite citizens. Liang, and the rest of the Town leadership, were aware that this meant sacrificing democratic principles, but they were prepared to do so if it meant improving the outcome of the deliberation. The government has, as Liang himself says, a practical take on democracy.

Other statements made during the interviews indicate a similar view on democracy. The majority of the moderators suggested that the government should limit the deliberation, and only include well-educated people that enjoy public speaking (int. 6, 2, 4). Furthermore, respondent 10 argues that including elite groups has improved the quality of the deliberation. Respondent 14 & 16 agrees that the new selections system is better. This demonstrates that efficiency is valued higher than equality. Parallel, those who reject the idea of Zeguo being a democracy show signs to have a more intrinsic view on democracy. Hence, both views are included; although the instrumental view is more dominant.

Simultaneously, while the government has transferred some of the decision-making power to the citizens, and the local People's Congress, they make sure that they stay in control of the entire process – from start to finish. According to official directives, all major decisions must be passed through the local People's Congress; meanwhile the government dictates how

decisions are made in the congress⁷. The government decides what should be discussed during the deliberation, and now government officials help structure the small-group discussions. This shows that the government agrees to deliver democracy to the people, as long as they remain in charge.

From a cynical point of view, deliberative polling, together with other forms of deliberative and consultative practices, could be used as an excuse to stall the development of genuine democracy. The citizens are lead to believe that they are a part of a democratic process when in reality; there is no way of knowing if the deliberation has any real impact on public policy. Even if the deliberation has some effect, the policies created post-deliberation do not reflect the preferences of the masses – which is how the legitimacy of public policy is determined. In Zeguo, one third of the participants are still selected by random sampling. Yet, it could be questioned how well farmers preform in a group where the majority of the participants have university degrees and/or economic muscles, especially when the order of discussion is not structured.

Liang and Jiang both claim that it is impossible to stop with deliberative polling because they have created a demand for democracy. This is probably partly true, but it is not the whole truth. Thanks to these experiments, Zeguo has become known worldwide. Liang pointed out, during one of our discussions, that they do not conduct deliberative polling to attract publicity. Despite what Liang says publicity is another strong incentive to continue with this practice. The government has de facto received a lot of credit for their aspirations, including recognition from higher authority. Respondent 12 says that deliberative polling has made Zeguo know in China and improved the image of the Township. The assumption that the local leadership in fact wants to attract publicity was further strengthened when respondent 13 mentioned that reporters are present during the small group discussions to take pictures.

⁷ In Zeguo, the local People's Congress does not vote on the budget. Instead they discuss the projects and return to the government with their conclusions (int. 10). According to Liang, anonymous voting is too risky. They tried anonymous voting in 2008, but only six deputies voted for the budget, and therefore they had to arrange a new meeting. The government fears that the local People's Congress will not be able to reach a decision if anonymous voting is adopted.

There could be a connection between the amount of publicity that Zeguo has received, and the decision to continue to select one third of the participants by random sampling, and other third from previous deliberations. The scientific character of deliberative polling in Zeguo, and the involvement of the masses, is what sets Zeguo apart from other Townships. For example, the government in Xinhe is also conducting participatory budgeting, but they only include deputies from the local People's Congress.

Liang mentioned during one interview that deliberative democracy is a safer option than liberal democracy, because liberal democracy leads to anarchy. Jiang agrees to some extent. According to him, the mainstream culture in China does not favor electoral democracy, which is why it is better to resolve problems with deliberations. The Beijing leadership seems to reason in similar terms, as they allow, and encourage, deliberative practices. A reasonable conclusion that can be drawn from this is that deliberative democracy is preferred because it does not interfere with the nomenclature system. Thus, it does not threaten the rule of the CCP.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusions

This study began with two questions: “To what extent are the fundamental principles of deliberative democracy, political equality and deliberation, reflected in the institutional framework and the processes guiding the Chinese Deliberative Poll?” and “What view on democracy is reflected in the dialogue with the actors?”. To measure the democratic quality of the Chinese DP, an analytical framework was constructed; based on theory of deliberative democracy. This framework is a suggestion for how democratic significance can be measured. Conclusions of the democratic quality of the DP and the actors’ perception of democracy have been drawn, based on data retrieved from interviews with the actors involved in the DP.

The analysis shows that only three out of twelve indicators show a high level of democratic significance, while six indicators display a low level of significance and the remaining four indicators reveal a lack of democratic significance. The most apparent problem for the DP, from a democratic perspective, is the selection of participants. With the new selection mechanism in place, deliberative polling in Zeguo has changed character, and resembles elite deliberation. The low survey response rate, combined with the lack of interest from the government’s side towards the surveys, is also troubling. Without the surveys, it is impossible to discover the preferences of all participants. Another key concern is the lack of transparency in the implementation phase. Not to mention the disregard to important details, such as providing training to moderators and physical equality during the deliberation. On the positive side, the government has continued to conduct deliberative polling; the plenary meetings are well structured; and participants are prepared ahead of the deliberation – albeit the budget proposal should be simplified.

The changes done to the selection procedure reveals that the government is more concerned with meeting the demands of elite groups, rather than creating policies that reflect the policy preferences of the masses. This study found that the fundamental principles of deliberative, political equality and deliberation are only weakly reflected in the institutional framework and processes guiding the deliberative forums. Thus, it is premature to discuss local democratization in China; at least not based on the findings of this study.

Based on the limited scope of this study it is impossible to draw far-reaching conclusions about what view the actors involved have on democracy, let alone how Chinese people in general regard democracy. However, the answers given during the interviews reflect an instrumental view on democracy. I am aware that it is difficult to discover what people truly believe purely based on their words. Yet, the actions of the local leadership, i.e. the decision to restructure the DP, lend support to this conclusion. In conclusion, it seems that deliberative polling is used as a tool to improve governance, increase efficiency and create stability. Parallel, democratic principles are easily sacrificed, if they get in the way of achieving these goals.

This thesis shows that significant changes have been done to the structure of the Chinese DP since the study of He and Thøgersen (2010) was published. Also, in comparison, this study offers a more detailed account of the processes guiding the Chinese DP. The findings of this study demonstrate that the current DP is a deviation from, rather than a continuation of, the first DP, introduced by Fishkin and his colleagues. It could be questioned if the deliberative forums in Zeguo could be labeled as “deliberative polling”, considering the current selection mechanism and how the surveys are treated.

This study has evaluated the quality of the DP, and the findings show that the democratic significance is low. Although a policy does not follow from a democratic procedure it can still be legitimate if it reflects public opinion. In the future, it would be interesting to study, whether or not the decisions made during the deliberation find general support in society. Furthermore, the results from this study indicate that the Chinese DP suffers from inequality. Hence, a study of the participants’ perception of equality would contribute to our knowledge of how procedural arrangements affect the feeling of equality. It would be especially interesting to study the aspect of psychological equality: What effect does the presence of authority figures have on the quality of the discussions? And finally, this thesis has touched on the issue of the actors’ perception of democracy. The dialogues with the actors reflect an instrumental view on democracy, but because of the limitations of this particular study the results cannot be generalized. Hence, a more systematic and comprehensive study of the actors’ view on democracy would further improve our understanding of deliberative practices in China.

Appendix – List of interviews

Interview 1: Deputy Vice Mayor of Zeguo

Interview 2: Moderator in 2012 and 2013

Interview 3: Moderator in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009

Interview 4: Moderator in 2008, 2009 and 2011

Interview 5: Moderator in 2005, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2011 and 2012

Interview 6: Moderator in 2011 and 2012

Interview 7: Director of Village Committee

Interview 8: Local People's Congress deputy since 2012

Interview 9: Leading Manager of Local People's Congress

Interview 10: Local People's Congress deputy since 2006

Interview 11: Local People's Congress deputy since 2002

Interview 12: Local People's Congress deputy since 2011, participated in four DP

Interview 13: Participant in the 2011 DP

Interview 14: Researcher, Party School, Wenling City

Interview 15: Mayor of Wenling City

Interview 16: Director of Party School, Wenling. Plenary meeting moderator since 2007

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