Searching for the Deliberative Democracy Elements in the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference A case study of the local People’s Political Consultative Conference in Ningbo, China

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# Abstract

Democratisation is an issue that has been discussed a lot both within and outside China. The Chinese government has generated its own explanation of a socialist democracy that features with the people’s democracy and the ‘deliberative democracy’ as they claimed. Deliberative democracy was newly introduced to China around 2003, and in recent years, there is a tendency to adopt it in one of the Chinese government institutions called the People’s Political Consultative Conference (PPCC).

Therefore, this thesis will study the deliberative democracy theory and its potential practice in the local PPCC institution. It will be a local level study of the Ningbo municipal PPCC and it is focused on its institutional and procedural stipulations and the actual practice. A qualitative case study with a methodological triangulation approach will be adopted for the thesis. The methods used are the in-depth interview, participant observation and documents analysis. The study is from the angle of the PPCC institution and people who are working inside it, rather than the wider range of the whole society. It will not represent the public opinion on this deliberative democracy practice.

The research question is: despite the one-party authoritarian nature of the Chinese political regime, to what extent does the local PPCC practice reflect any deliberative democracy element? The result of the study shows that the institutional and procedural stipulations may not reflect so many elements of the deliberative democracy theory, mostly because of the democratic authenticity of the institution and its elite-orientated member-selection processes. However, the case studies demonstrate that the actual practice of the PPCC measures up to the deliberation part of the theory and with a potential tendency towards more democratic transition.

**Key Words:** People’s Political Consultative Conference (PPCC), Deliberative Democracy, Empowered Inclusion, Collective Decision Making.

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# Introduction

Democratisation is always a highlighted issue in an authoritarian regime, why choosing democratisation and how to do it are the two chronical questions in China. With the rapid economic growth in the past few decades, a vast middle class population has emerged in China. This has brought a more complex governing situation for the government to handle the demand of transparency, democracy, efficiency and other needs of the society (Li & Zhang, 2008). Hence, there is a rising pressure on the government to have a political transformation to adopt new governance mechanisms and institutional reforms. So far, the transformation process is slow but has a suspicion of development of democratic elements within the system.

 In the past, the discussion about a potential democratisation process in China was divided into two major camps, one emphasised the development of a general electoral democracy and the other one focused on the expansion of the so called intra-party democracy (党内民主) (Guo, 2014). The latter one has gained its recognition by the government and has put forward the idea of indirect democracy system (间接民主) with some democratic voting mechanisms built internally in the government. And the democratic voting system was limited in the experiments on a grassroots and local level of governance (Xu, 2003). The intra-party democracy represents the Chinese communist party’s strong suspicion and reluctance towards the general electoral democracy and makes it look for alternative democracy theories which fit the Chinese society’s characteristics. Hence, deliberative democracy was caught by the eyes of the Chinese government.

Although the Chinese political system is a one-party system, the intra-party democracy is not only within the communist party, it also includes an inter-party feature which involves other political parties. Indeed, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) dominates almost every aspect of political affairs. However, in this one-party system, there exist various non-communist parties and to some extent that these parties can influence on the policy decision-making. And those non-communist parties, mainly work within the political institution called the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (PPCC)[[1]](#footnote-1) which offers a political cooperation and consultation platform. This special political institution is claimed by the government that it carries the feature of deliberative democracy. However, the question about applying the deliberative democracy theory to any institution of the Chinese political system is doubtful, as according to He Baogang, there might be deliberation under authoritarian rule, but not a democratic one (He, 2014). So, the intention of this thesis is to explore this issue to see if it is purely authoritarian or has some democratic elements exist.

Throughout this intra-party democratisation process, the system of multi-party cooperation and consultation under the leadership of the CCP has been put forward as an important part of the intra-party democracy process since 2005 (Guo, 2014). The PPCC has become a core institution to provide opportunities for the non-communist parties with active participation in the policy deliberation and decision making-process (Ma, 2015). But the perplexity is that no one can explain the PPCC’s role in the Chinese political system explicitly. It is not like the parliamentary system in some western countries because it does not have a legislative power. It is neither a government agency since it has no administrative power. One might regard it as a high-level think tank judging by its policy advisory role for the government. However, most staffs who work in the PPCC are government officials or public servants, it is not purely a non-governmental organisation (Jia, 2014).

Nevertheless, the PPCC is mostly deemed as an institution with a self-proclaimed feature of deliberative democracy. One of the critics is that the PPCC is merely a bigger ‘rubber stamp’ than the legislative institution called people’s congress (PC) due to its exclusiveness of membership that the members of the PPCC have been examined and somehow even directly appointed by the CCP. It is sort of an ‘elite organisation’ consist of various social groups (or constituencies) and controlled by the CCP (Yuan , 2012, s. 77). However, this does not provide enough evidence of how much control of the CCP has towards those ‘elites’ from the social groups. And this does not preclude my intention to study the PPCC as an independent institution.

Given these reasons, the intra-party democratic process does not change the dominant political power of the CCP and the authoritarian nature of the Chinese political regime. Under this shadow, the term of deliberative democracy seems not suitable enough to explain the nature of the PPCC institution. But according to Dryzek, it is not necessary to exclusively connect deliberation to the institutional structure of liberal democracy (Dryzek, 2000, p. 3). Additionally, some scholars argue that because China does not have a regime level democratic political system, the deliberation in China has the authoritarian nature, but does not rule out the possibility of a local level deliberative democracy practice (He & Warren, 2011). Thereby, it is still hypothetically possible to use deliberative democracy theory to examine the PPCC institution and its practice by focusing on more deliberation process rather than democratic authenticity.

Despite of this ambiguous nature of the CPPCC, there is a sign of change in the recent political reform proposal in the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 2013, with several reform procedures followed up. For example, the CCP has set up a regular research project to study how to develop and improve the PPCC system (Fang & Guo, 2017). The aim is to match with the political ideology as the President Xi stated:

‘under the Chinese socialism system, everything could be negotiated, it is necessary to demand collective negotiation for collective issues, to look for the aspiration of the whole society and find the common measure for the majority interest, to fulfil the true nature of people’s democracy’ (Fang & Guo, 2017)

It is also suggested that the PPCC could and should become an important part for construction of rule of law in the future political reform in China (Ma, 2015). Hence, it seems that the PPCC gradually starts to gain more political status in the government and shift to a more substantial role. But it is not for sure if the reality demonstrates the same. This has left the question partly will be examined by this thesis paper.

Therefore, this thesis will take the deliberative democratic perspective to look at the PPCC. It will focus on a local level study by analysing the cases of the PPCC practices in one of the Chinese city called Ningbo. It is a subnational-level study with exploratory nature. The focal point is to try to discover the trace of the deliberative democratic element in the PPCC system, to examine the discrepancy between deliberative democracy concept and the Chinese government discourse, as well as to evaluate the practice of the local PPCC system. The aim is to generate an in-depth knowledge of how the PPCC function in the local government and the possible deliberative democracy elements. The research objective is to see if the PPCC has the deliberative elements and it may also offer a basis for the hypothesis of potential reform and future democratisation process in China.

The outline of this thesis will set out with a brief explanation of the background of the PPCC institution，its functioning mechanisms and its role in the Chinese political system. Next is the methodological part which will describe the research design and what approach has been adopted in this study. Then followed by the literature review and theoretical framework parts to offer a knowledge basis for the further study of this research topic. In the analysis part, it will go through all the data that have been collected and then present the result in the conclusion part.

# Research Question

This thesis studies the procedures of local Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conferences in the political decision making process and how it functions in practice, to look for the deliberate democratic element in the democratisation progress of China.

The research question will be one general question and two individual sub-questions:

*Despite the one-party authoritarian nature of the Chinese political regime, to what extent does the local PPCC practice reflect any deliberative democracy element?*

1. *To what extent the local PPCC institutional and formal procedural stipulations reflect the deliberative democracy concept?*
2. *How do different actual practices of the local PPCC measure up to the deliberative democracy theory?*

Each of the sub-questions has a different perspective on this issue, the first question is more descriptive about the PPCC institution itself as a template to contrast with and the second question serves as a checking process to test what the PPCC actual practice looks like.

To answer the question, the primary focus is on the deliberative communication and interaction between the PPCC and the government, as well as within the PPCC institution. It aims at exploring the general relationship between the local PPCC institution and government. It is also partly pertaining to how the PPCC participants can independently translate the preferences and interests of the people into the policy proposals without interference from the communist party or the local government. Sub-question one will take the perspective of the local PPCC organisation staffs to see how they think of the institution’s deliberative democracy feature and their experiences of this institution. Meanwhile, the sub-question two will focus on the view from the PPCC participants (mostly PPCC committee members who had made policy proposals before), to see what perspective do they have on this institution and the experiences they had. To be more specific, I will take the interview of the PPCC staffs as a source for understanding the institutional stipulation and procedures. Meanwhile, the interview of the participants who have proposed policy papers before, as the subject of studying the PPCC actual practice. Therefore, this thesis will study several cases of meetings and the policy proposals that proposed by the local PPCC in the city called Ningbo, and try to grasp an insightful understanding of how this institution works and operates in the reality, then to generate the possible explanations for the research question.

# Background

## People’s Political Consultative Conference and ‘Deliberative Democracy’

The origin of the PPCC can be traced back to the ruling period of the national party in China, and its purpose was to create a democratic negotiation platform between the national party and the minority parties, as well as other political groups from the society (CPPCC Policy Paper A, 2011). It was an attempt of balancing the power of the ruling party, and it also provided the recognition and legitimacy for the ruling party. Once the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seized power of the whole country, all the members of the PPCC reached consensus with the CCP and agreed to stay in this system. In the first PPCC meeting in 1949, the CCP was granted the governing power, prior to its announcement of the establishment of new Chinese government. (CPPCC Policy Paper A, 2011).

However, much of the PPCC’s function had been stagnating and set aside after the establishment of the new China, because the CCP has gradually built up its domination over the country and become the sole ruler of China. The PPCC’s political status has been up and down, and it has never achieved any significant influence in the decision-making process. Yet, several major political reforms in China have pushed the PPCC development into a new direction. In 1993, the first meeting of the eighth National People’s Congress, there was an amendment to the constitution, which added that the multi-party and political consultation system under the communist-party leadership will exist and further developed in the long-term (Li C. , 2017). This has provided the constitutional legal right for the PPCC. In 1994, the PPCC charter was amended in accordance with the Chinese constitution by adding PPCC as the major institution of multi-party and political consultation system (Li C. , 2017). Hence, it created a momentum for the PPCC’s increasing sense of presence in the Chinese political arena.

The current role of the PPCC is an institution with quasi-state authority in the Chinese political system. It serves as a parallel system to the People’s Congress (PC) at different levels of government. They are often in a juxtaposition when looking at the Chinese political system, but they do not share the equal political powers. Comparing these two institutions, the PC holds the legislative power and it is placed above the PPCC. All the major political decisions must be approved by the PC at different levels of the government. Moreover, the PC has the power to nominate and appoint government officials, as well as deposition power. However, the PC is very much controlled by the communist party, its supervisory power to the government and its accountability to the outside forces is increasingly limited in recent years (Almén, 2013). On the other hand, the PPCC does not share these political power as a PC does, rather, it has the role as commenting political decisions of the government and proposing policy recommendations. This policy advisory role has become a significant development task in the Chinese political development after the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Bian, 2014). The in-depth study of the PPCC institution stipulation and procedures will be presented in the analysis part.

# Research Design and Data Collection

## Methodological Approach

This thesis is designed to explore the potential elements of deliberative democracy in the PPCC, the study is more descriptive and investigative to look at how this institution operates. It is designed to evaluate the quality of the PPCC function in practice and to define the characteristics of it, rather than the general effect of the PPCC on the policy-making process. So, a qualitative case study approach with a combination of ethnographic methods of interview, participant observation and document analysis, is adopted for the research. A methodological triangulation approach can offer a better insight to the research issue and provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Why qualitative approach? Qualitative methods are based on the analysis and decoding of collecting materials and other resources that are linked to the research questions. Comparing with quantitative methods, it does not digitalize the research with statistics and indexes. Qualitative methods allow a more in-depth analysis and provide more details in the research (Marsh & Stoker, 1995). In this research, the data collection is not easily quantifiable to evaluate the quality of deliberative democracy in the PPCC practice. Even it is possible to generate a large reservoir of cases of the PPCC practice by focusing on those policy proposals and meetings, it is still difficult to find a general quantitative measurement for each case. The emphasis of qualitative methods is not on making predictions about behaviour and the outcome, but rather on seeking to capture the uniqueness of human experiences. (Devine, 1995, p. 141). The experiences of the PPCC participants are subjective to their own feelings and understandings about deliberative democracy, as well as the PPCC institution. Each individual case has its unique context, and it can also involve additional actors and informal procedures that are not on the official records. The “Qualitative methods explore the subjective experiences and the meanings they attached to those experiences” (Devine, 1995, p. 138). Nevertheless, democracy in China is a sensitive topic, there are many obstacles for accessing to the valuable data. Also, I have a limited time to collect data. Hence, it is more desirable to take a qualitative approach.

Why case studies? “Case study is an intensive study of a single unit for understanding a larger class of (similar) units” (Gerring, 2004, p. 342). The unit studied in this research is the local PPCC institution. And the unit is comprised of the individual cases of the PPCC procedures in practice. Since the aim is to generate an inference of the practice of the whole institution about how these procedures reflect the deliberate democratic theory, the covariational analysis of the unit is mostly synchronically with the spatial variation of the unit. Different cases of the PPCC practice within a certain period are subject to the observation and analysis.

Participant observation method patches up the interview method in this research, offers a chance of systematic description of the events, behaviours, and non-verbal expressions of the participants. It also captures the interaction and communication among participants, and grasps the details of the event that the informant maybe unwilling or unable to share in an interview (Barbara, 2005). In this thesis, it would be conducive to participate in some PPCC meetings and observe the events. This can provide more holistic and direct understanding of how things work in the institution. Government officials and participants of those meetings may not be able to speak freely when interviewing them. However, it should also be aware that access to the meeting is not easy and I may not be able to choose the small-scale office meeting with a substantial meaning to the research, rather some meetings that are relatively open. And my subjective view may cause me to overlook some important phenomenon, events, and interactions during the meeting. This may decrease the validity and representativeness of the observation results. So far, I could observe one meeting and one forum that involved some of the local PPCC chairmen, officials and delegates, as well as some of the representatives from various government agencies.

## Case and Interviewee Selection

“Qualitative researchers usually start their research by selecting cases where the outcome of interest occurs (these cases are often called “positive” cases). The goal is to find an explanation for particular outcomes” (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006, p. 239). The outcome of the PPCC institution to the policy-making process is difficult to assess. The effect remains in each individual case. Due to the accessibility problem of data and lack of reliable studies of this institution outside China, and studies within China may be influenced by the government, for example the government-funded and examined research project from the government institutions[[2]](#footnote-2). Therefore, based on my previous knowledge of the PPCC proposals, I will select both successfully and unsuccessfully implemented policy proposals, to have a more comprehensive view of the local PPCC deliberation process. The policy proposals will be selected from the archived local PPCC file and through introduction by the PPCC informants.

In general, the working mechanism inside the Chinese government is not easily revealed to the public, there are many informal procedures such as a small meeting in the office which can create strong influence on a policy-decision making. There is also an unknow network system that linked different informal procedures together. “By using previous collected contextualised knowledge about each case, it can constitute homogeneous populations and less likely to exclude key variables or miss-specify the interrelations among included variables” (Mahoney, Qualitative Methodology and Comparative Politics , 2007). Hence, I will select the potential case which is available to acquire important data and has more general information about it. For example, selected policy proposal case should be able to find interviewee who is the sponsor of this proposal or at least the participant involved in it. And they should agree with my usage of their words and knowledge in this research whether anonymously or not. The case should also be able to find the documents which provide background knowledge of the policy proposal. Moreover, there is not a scope of limitation of the case selection, but a time range limitation is imposed to minimise the research time-spending and increase concentration on the development of PPCC in a certain period. The deliberative democracy theory came to China was around 2002 and recognised by the government white paper in 2007 (The State Council Information Office, 2007). Therefore, I will select cases from 2007 till now and pick them from the government policy proposal archives.

The selection of interviewees is all from the PPCC side. They are either officials or public servants from the PPCC that had involved in the policy proposal and deliberation process. And they are representative to the PPCC institution since they are working there. However, this will have the bias for the analysis result, because other participants in the process are not included in the analysis. For example, the participants from local government side such as specific executive department officials, local communist party leaders etc. The interviewees from the local PPCC institution can only reflect the opinions and experiences from the PPCC institution side. Nevertheless, there is no citizen or public figures selected for interview, because the limited possibility to collect data in a massive scale. So, the interview result can not represent the public opinion of how deliberative democracy practiced in the PPCC. However, as mentioned before, this thesis is focused on the PPCC institution side only. And the participant observation method is adopted to compensate this bias by actually part-take in a deliberation process.

After selection of potential cases in the study, it will be random selection of all these available cases and it should cover both the policy proposals that are approved by the local government and the ones which were not. This can improve the representativeness of the study and minimise the manipulation of external factors.

## Data Collection

Regarding the data collection, the document used for analysis primarily focuses on the official documents from the Ningbo local government. It consists of mostly published documents with some unpublished ones. Then, some secondary sources such as previous studies which are relevant to this research topic, are also in consideration. The source of government will be provided mostly by informants from the local government. I could access the local PPCC archive office, hence, some meeting logs, policy papers and manuals of the PPCC working procedures have been collected through this way.

The use of official documents used as first hand sources are mostly documents from working manuals, internal study publications for the cadres, and internal compilation of the previous policy proposals. The alternative use of documents would be meeting logs from different deliberation meetings and forums during the policy proposal process. It would be conducive to the entire research and adding validity of the interview results by cross-reference the information provided by the interviewee and from meeting logs. However, accessibility is a problem and most meeting logs are not electronic version but hand written. So, it is difficult to gather valuable information from it. ;

Major observations are through interview and participant observation approaches. Concerning the interview process, the first issue is the structure of the interviews. A semi-structured, face-to-face, one-on-one interview is preferred in this research, because it is not easy to arrange an interview with government officials and the PPCC participants. Time is limited for an open-structured interview. It is more desirable and feasible to have a clear goal of what important information is expected from the interviews. Designed questions in relation to the deliberative democratic values will be asked to make sure that the whole interview process will not go off the track. Yet, some deviations are also necessary for the interviewees to talk freely about their unique and subjective experiences. Hence, during the interview, an open question will be asked to the interviewees pertaining to the topic of deliberative democracy and its relationship with the PPCC institution. Besides, it is important to minimise the interference of the interviewer during the interview process, such as questions with strong value preferences, disruption to the interviewees’ talk, etc. Therefore, questions will be asked in a more obscure way to avoid invoking direct confrontation with the interviewees. For example, asking questions of how free you are during the PPCC procedures, rather than do you have freedom. In addition, it is face to face, one to one interview with government officials and the PPCC members. In a quite hierarchical society, it is necessary to avoid provocations with some dressing-style and behaviours.

Second problem is about reliability or representativeness issue. “The informant selection relies on a small number of informants and try to embrace a heterogeneity of experiences and accounts within the constraints of money and time, seek for diversity” (Devine, 1995). The informants are very much predetermined by the case selection. The interviewee selection is based on the case that selected for the analysis. People whoever directly or indirectly involved in a case with the PPCC practice will be the potential population for interviewee-selection. However, the population is limited only targeting at people from the local PPCC, not from the government or public society. And since talking to the people from the PPCC is not ease, the population is hidden, I will choose a non-probability sampling technique called snow sampling. I will try to find the subjects by the connection of the first subject that I have studied in the local PPCC. For instance, the PPCC member who proposed a policy recommendation may introduce me to the PPCC officials who handed this proposal.

The third problem is the validity of the data. In the process of decoding interview result, researcher’s subjective opinions, knowledge background and personal experience may influence on the interpretation of the data. For example, the language barrier between interviewer and interviewee can cause some troubles. However, since I am a Chinese native speaker and the interview will be all in Chinese, so there will not be so much obstacles. Regardless of this problem, I will still try to reconfirm the interpretation result with interviewees after the interview has been conducted, to make sure I understand their words correctly.

The fieldwork starts by meeting the previous-acquaintance informant who works in the local government institution, and by discussion of this thesis intention, some preliminary works have been done such as getting background knowledge of the institution. The informant provided many useful documents and papers from the government related to the PPCC institution. Then almost all the interviewees were introduced by the informant. This helps a lot for collecting interview data. Through this informant, I have also gained access to some meetings in the PPCC as a public observer. This offers me another opportunity to collect more data.

## Limitations and Delimitations

This thesis is a sub-national level study with a focus on one local PPCC. So, the outcome of inference cannot be generalised and applied directly to the national level or other local PPCC institutions. The study only explores potential elements of deliberative democracy in an explorative way rather than defining the nature of the PPCC institution and challenge the definition of Chinese authoritarian political regime. Due to the limited scope and time, the study only concentrates on the one important working procedure of the PPCC. So, result may not cover the whole institution that some important procedures and interactions are dismissed, for example the democratic supervision procedure which lets the PPCC supervise the government in different aspects. Besides, the cases selected for the study are new from less than 10 years. Hence, it cannot generate an inference to the past of the institution. Nevertheless, ostensibly to say, the PPCC is still under the strong control of the CPC. Therefore, the validity of the study result can be undermined, because it is difficult to tell how much independence the PPCC enjoys as an institution in the Chinese political system. If it has low or even no independence at all, then the deliberative effect can not only be fully attributed to this institution. And it may have the suspicion of manipulation of the deliberate result from the CPC. Also, the study does not differentiate those six policy sponsors. I treat them as equally influential but in fact they are not the same, for example, those PPCC special committees receive more resources and attention from the government side. It needs further investigation regarding this issue. Another problem is that I am a Chinese, I cannot rule out my subjective understanding will influence the result of the study.

# Literature Review

## Previous Studies About Deliberative Democracy in China

There are many different thoughts and understandings about deliberative democracy in China, some focus on the democratic institutional setting, while others may concentrate more on deliberation features in the process rather than democratic ones. The deliberative democracy theory is new to China and it is still trying to fit into the political narratives of the Chinese government. At the beginning, it emphasised primarily on the feature of consultation and communication that partly related to the deliberation process and has historical basis of the Chinese political system. According to Ma’s argument, the consultative democracy practice in China is a sign of an on-going systematic development of the rule of law in China. Furthermore, Ma argues that the rule of law system framework is shaped by a system of socialist democratic politics and democracy is the core value that shapes this systems framework of rule of law. In addition, this consultative democracy practice has a Chinese feature of emphasizing the dominating power of the CCP while the PPCC serves as a legal resource for citizen political participation (Ma, 2015). Ma’s understanding of the Chinese characteristic democracy is an old cliché promulgated by the CCP just like most studies that have been done about the PPCC. It does not provide any useful perspective to clarify how the PPCC can function in policy decision making, rather it is trying to explain the constitutional meaning and how it can be conducive to build a rule of law system.

In contrast to Ma’s thoughts, Tsang argues that the consultative political framework in China is featured with consultative Leninism and has not so much to do with promoting democracy. According to Tsang it is rather a case of obscuring, and by these kinds of reforms pre-emptively give some recognition to the public demands for democratization. It demonstrates the CCP’s obsessiveness of staying in supremacy power. The consultative framework is a governance approach by which the CCP can enhance its capacity to respond to and elicit a changing public opinion (Tsang, 2009). However, he does acknowledge that there are certain democratic elements existing in the Chinese practice of political consultation, but they are an unexpected outcome of the consultation political framework.

Baogang He and Mark Warren have a different understanding of the nature of the Chinese consultative political framework. They regard deliberation as a mode of communication, involving persuasion based influence. And this differs from democracy, which is based upon the distribution of decision making power to individuals in forms of votes and rights (He & Warren, 2011). The political system can be categorized into several different types depending on the different kinds of mode of communication and distribution of powers of decision. If the regime is using an instrumental communication mode, the deliberation type can be either aggregated democracy or command authoritarianism (He & Warren, 2011). Given this, the difference between deliberate democracy and deliberate authoritarianism is about how political decision power is dispersed into the hands of individuals. He and Warren also provide an approach to study how deliberate practice can be tested in theory by examining the individual political resources and domains of participation. They draw the conclusion that deliberate practice in China is certainly not a democratisation process. This is because in the authoritarian political system, deliberation can only have some potential elements of democratic practice and exist at the local level instead of regime level. All the forms of deliberation are controlled and structured by the government to produce legitimacy and good governance, similar as what Tsang argues. But there is a slight difference between He and Warren and Tsung about the deliberate authoritarianism system. He and Warren argues that the government really does have an active participation of the other actors while maintaining its power position. Through the practice of authoritarian deliberation, Chinese government can achieve a more efficient governance approach alongside with the political stability and its legitimacy to rule (He & Warren, Authoritarian Deliberation: The Deliberative Turn in Chinese Political Development, 2011).

However, authoritarian political system does not always imply an undermined quality of deliberation. In a case study of local legislative public hearing meeting, through the discourse power analysis, Zhang Shannuo argues that participants can reason with data, facts, knowledge, and their occupation specialities and practice observation, to support their arguments. They can break the hegemonic discourse restraint and express their opinions freely and effectively when the government provides a more open, relaxed platform (Zhang S. , 2014).

From a cultural perspective to think about deliberation, the Chinese political system maybe lacks democratic authenticity, but the deliberation process does exist to an extent. Deliberation is culturally and historically embedded in the Chinese socio-political environment. It has the trace of the Confucian moral code and institutionalisation process throughout the history (He, 2014). The Confucian thinking emphasises that to persuade people, morality is the first way. Morality is higher than reasoning and the might is the last option. The moral codes include the head of publicity and the subjugation of self-interest to public-mindedness. There is a difference between private and public interest. Public discussion is a way to produce legitimacy. During the discussion, private interest should be aligned with the collective interest with a fair consideration of the interest of others and there should also be an overall solution to mitigate the conflicts of interest (He, 2014). However, this perspective may treat the culture as a static concept and overlook the potential innovation and development. For sure, the Chinese culture has deliberation basis, but there is also transformation and development influenced by the democratic thoughts from the Western-culture. And traditional Confucian moral codes will also face the challenge in the market-oriented new socio-economic and political environment.

## Previous Studies About Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference

Many scholars consider the PPCC as a sub-institution in the political system with limited independence and analyse its relationship with other institutions. As Yan Xiaojun argues, the nature of the PPCC is an inclusive institution with a consultative capacities and absorbing process to include various sections of the population into the political system, to pre-empt the imperative demand of social and political change (Yan, 2011). It helps to consolidate a social base, strengthen the control over society for the communist regime and improve the quality of public services to build a good governance (Yan, 2011). The PPCC seems to become an instrument of the communist party to maintain its authoritarian regime. This is partly true, but it does not capture the changing tendency of the PPCC role and the increasing demand for a more substantial role of the PPCC in the governance process. Some argues that, the PPCC is a major tunnel to carry out the deliberative democracy, and by doing so, it contributes legitimacy of public decision-making and legislative activity to this institution in such authoritarian, non-competitive political party system in China (Yang & Niu, 2015). Indeed, the PPCC is a controlled institution, but it also has a strong discourse power within the political system that the government cannot ignore for no reason. Despite the conditionality, the PPCC institution channels the voice of elites and indirectly includes the public opinion of the mass population to the policy advisory process (Yu, 2015, p. 445).

The national-level statistical analysis of the PPCC proposals from 2008 to 2012 shows the average proposal adoption rate in these years is over 80% and there is a policy-domain orientation difference among various proposal sponsors. The jointly initiated proposals are more equity focused while individually initiated proposals consider more about efficiency (Yu, 2015, p. 444). Moreover, that three-fourths of proposals have been supported by the empirical evidence and professional knowledge and majority of the delegates have a professional manner towards their proposals rather than taking it as a formality (Yu, 2015, p. 445). The question here is that does local PPCC reflect the similar phenomenon and the result as at the national level, since the Chinese political system is discursive in a way that local level government has some variations in the institutional setting and administrative practice.

Another commonly concerned problem about the PPCC is its exclusiveness and elite politics feature. There are many local elites such as wealthy prominent entrepreneurs in the PPCC institution as delegates from the society. This has almost turned the PPCC into a ‘rich people club’ (Chen, 2015, p. 623). One statistic study of political participation of entrepreneurs in Liuzhou, Guangxi China shows that entrepreneurs with older age, larger scale and longer history have higher chance to join the PC or CPPCC, regardless of their gender, education and Hukou registration background (Zhao, Lu, & He, 2008, p. 310). Therefore, constituency of the PPCC is important to its institutional legitimacy and democratic functions.

# Theoretical Framework

## The Deliberative Democracy Concept

Deliberative democracy is a term that belongs to the family of many kinds of democracy theories. It represents the rethink about the authenticity of democracy and highlight the substantively democratic control with competent citizens, rather than a symbolic one (Dryzek, 2000). Scholars have different opinions about what deliberative democracy ought to be. Deliberative democracy model construction involves various pre-conditions. There exist two major approaches, one is from the deliberation practice perspective to think about deliberation procedure, content and effect, another one accentuates the democratic authenticity and institutional building. The democratic concept is abstractive, Cohen argues that it involves two sides, one is the definition of who to participate, namely the selection of participants to a decision-making process. Another one is dealing with the empowerment process to the decision of the citizens, in other words, how a collective decision is made. The former type of democracy is aggregate and the latter one is deliberative (Cohen, 1998). A collective decision should be made in a setting of binding-collective decision making with equal consideration and active response to the participants’ interest. This setting also gives a free public reasoning condition (Cohen, 1998). There are three core values of the precondition, freedom, equality and rationality. According to Elster, deliberative democracy is a decision-making process via free and equal discussion among the citizens. It is a collective decision-making process in which the participants should involve the stakeholders of the decision or their representatives. And the decision should be discussed and debated among participants. The arguments should be reflexive to the participants with proper rationality and moral base (Elster, 1998).

The process of deliberation distinguishes from other kinds of communication that during interactions, deliberators can change their judgements, preferences and views. These interactions involve persuasion instead of coercion, manipulation, or deception (Dryzek, 2000). Fearson thinks that public deliberation is a sub-set of public discussions, deliberation weighs carefully on the reasons while the discussion is less inclined to be seriously on reasoning (Fearson, 1998). He argues that the reason for public discussion before decision-making is because, it allows individual express personal preferences and overcome the limited rationality of individual choice when lack of information. By discussion, individual can receive more information about opinions of others and reflexively rethink of alternatives (Fearson, 1998). And discussion can let individuals justify the argument of their demand, then finalise a collective-legitimate decision which applies to all (Fearson, 1998). In the deliberation process, reasoning can also let a participant to think of the legitimacy of this demand and induce a new preference (Cohen, 1998).

## PPCC ‘Deliberative Democracy’ and Alternative Approaches

Deliberative democracy theory came to China in 2002, and the first research forum of the PPCC research committee was organised in 2006. In the same year, the government has issued a report which proposed that electoral democracy and deliberative (or consultative) democracy are both forms of the socialist democracy concept (Zhang J. , 2016). The Chinese characterised ‘deliberative democracy’ is not a theory which personally tailored for the Chinese unique institution of PPCC. It is rather a theory that adopted to fit the narrative of the Chinese communist party. The problem of using deliberative democracy theory to study Chinese political system is because of the authoritarian nature of its political regime. However, one can still focus more on the deliberative part rather than democracy.

One perspective to look at deliberative politics in China is a more pragmatic way, which emphasise how to increase the deliberative capacity. It focuses on the interdependence and interaction of different actors within a larger deliberative system. Tang suggests three interrelated aspects of deliberative capacity building; social capacity, institutional capacity and participatory capacity (Tang, 2014). The social capacity means a more discursive deliberate practice in the public sphere by using new media technology. The actors in this public sphere are the individuals of the society. So, building social capacity involves the empowerment of the individual competence in political participation, provision of information and rights to protect them from coercive political force (Tang, 2014). The institutional capacity building stresses an adequate institutional responsiveness to the discursive outcome from the public sphere. It also requires the transparency of institutions. Finally, from the capacity building aspect, the participatory capacity concerns the interaction between two aspects which mentioned above and it will lead to the improvement of overall participatory capacity in a deliberative system and further empowerment of individual capacity of the political decision-making (Tang, 2014). Tang’s idea concerns more about mutual benefiting and enhancing interaction among different participation domains. As Warren argues, the practice of deliberation in China suggests that the conditions for governance-driven democratization is broader than deficits in electoral democracy. Attention to governance is driven by a development agenda, combined with the tendencies of development to produce multiple actors with credible capacities for opposition. The hope to generate legitimacy, policy by policy, in ways that will replace the now-bankrupt socialist ideology (Warren, 2009, p. 8).

Deliberative democracy in the Western-democratic political environment emphasises the discourse and communication in the deliberation. The implicit precondition is a democratic political system with powerful civil society, open political environment and a political culture stressing public participation. In contrast, the deepest obstruction to the deliberative democracy in China is the missing precondition (Zhang S. , 2014, p. 216). The government has strong control over many aspects of political activities. The social actors from grass-root will often be manipulated and filtered out in the deliberation processes. The political culture in China makes many people still think of a parental-government which is responsible to actively provide services and demand to the society. Given this, citizens are less likely to participate in the political activities. This is also the reason why the Chinese government cares more about governance quality rather than democratisation.

In this context, the PPCC institution is also inevitably facing the question of democratic functions and legitimacy due to its exclusive membership to the public. The Ningbo local government paper shows that the grass-root PC is the main subject in the deliberative democracy development and is responsible to communicate with the mass population (Ningbo City Communist Committee, 2016). Most of the PPCC activities are in small scale and it often de-linked with the public. Some may regard this small circle as mini-public. But in the deliberation practice, the mini-public should function as a supplement to the macro public with condition of random selection and self-selection of participants (Chu, 2014). The advantage of mini-public is that participants have more inter-subjective consistency that subjective inclination and expression of preference are close. This shared-bound can minimise the distortion of the deliberation outcome from external forces and overcome the limited rationality and the cost of information gathering (Chu, 2014). The PPCC is often organise the deliberation in a small scale and it invites the participants from various constituencies from the society that relevant to the deliberation theme. The problem is that it has a strong leadership in the deliberation process.

The mini-public in general opposes the involvement of leadership and elites. It fears the coercive force and power imbalance in the deliberation. However, leadership can also provide credibility of deliberation and strong political influence in the final implementation, as well as the support of funding, venue, information, expertise etc. Without a moderator and facilitator to maintain the legitimacy and order, it will be chaotic and difficult to reach consensus with the only morality of the participants (Chu, 2014). In the Chinese context, even the elites of the society have very limited political power compared with the government. I think the leadership of the PPCC institution can give the participants more space and influence in the deliberation. The institutional setting also grants the PPCC with discourse and supervision power that it is more than a vehicle of deliberation (Zhang J. , 2016). In this context, deliberation through the PPCC institution has larger effect to the policy and legislative decision making.

An alternative perspective to look at deliberation in China as a governance-driven democratisation with the features of empowered participation, focused deliberation and attentiveness to the stakeholders of the decision-making (Warren, Governance-Driven Democratization, 2009, p. 3). Warren listed four characteristics of this approach, first one is the response to democracy deficits. Second is the elite-driven tendency. Third is the evolution de-linked from electoral democracy. Fourth is a dynamic system to bring the constituencies based on the issue-affected head rather than pre-defined and relatively static territorial constituencies” (Warren, Governance-Driven Democratization, 2009, p. 6). Electoral democracy cannot accurately reflect the preferences of the citizens, and it is aggregated but lack of information that demands of constituencies often cannot be reflected in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, electoral democracy cannot provide the legitimacy for the specific policy issue and throughout the policy development process (Warren, 2009). Moreover, Elite-driven deliberation guarantees participants to have more information and enforcement capabilities. The governance-driven constituencies are more dynamic, overlapping, issue-focused (Warren, 2009). Li Changjian, argues that in a pluralised society, the pre-condition for deliberative democracy is to accept the reality of diversified interests and accept that different social actors and groups have discrepancy and divergence on preferences and interests. The deliberation should involve citizens, parties, interest groups and special deliberation organisations etc. (Li C. , 2012).

# Analytical Framework

After the previous section, I found some difficulties to link the deliberative democratic theory with the PPCC practice, mostly due to the unequivocal democratic-properties of this institution. Therefore, I will mostly focus on the democratic practice during the deliberation process rather than the whole PPCC institutional setting. The empowerment of public participation in China is generally unknown. In addition, the study is mostly focusing on the policy proposals that have already gone through the PPCC procedures. So, I will take some ideas from Warren’s problem-based approach of democratic theory and analyse the PPCC from three aspects: Empowered Inclusion, Collective agenda and will formation, Collective decision-making. Each of them represents a necessary function of political system to work democratically. The reason for selecting this problem-based approach is because it goes beyond the traditional democracy model building and offers a more dynamic way of thinking to how democracy could be linked with the governance. And it is more suitable to analyse the Chinese unique political environment and its policy-decision making process (Warren, 2017).

Empowered inclusion emphasise more than just inclusion. Political equality is the core democratic value for this empowered inclusion. “those who have claimed to inclusion should have equal rights to vote, speak, organise as well as equal protections that enable individuals to use these empowerments” (Warren, 2017, p. 44).

First indicator of empowered inclusion is the ***Inclusiveness*** of the PPCC procedures. I will check who were included in the deliberation processes at different stages of the PPCC policy proposal process and how they were selected for. The ideal model is that all the policy effected people should be included in the deliberation process or though representation mechanisms. However, in the PPCC case, representation is indirect through different constituencies and non-communist parties or special organisations, and its delegates are not randomly selected from the public. So, the participants inclusion will concentrate primarily on the issue-based deliberation processes, to check if the relevant PPCC delegates from non-communist parties, constituencies, special organisations and PPCC organisations were included in the deliberation.

***Equal participation*** is the second indicator. Since the PPCC membership is in not directly open to the public. The equal participation does not involve the ordinary citizens. The participation is concerning the policy sponsors during the deliberation process, not the PPCC institution itself. Therefore, the equal participation is regarding the PPCC delegates and various policy proposal sponsors, to see if those delegates have equal rights to participate or decline to join a certain deliberation process.

The third indicator is ***Equal political rights.*** This involves the rights of the participants of the deliberation that they have the political freedom to organise themselves into a meeting and discussion of policy issues, speak their own opinions, express their interests, values and preferences, and with protection from any threat. They should be able to access the public sphere without interference from the authority. The equal political rights can apply to individuals and individuals who represent a group, organisation or political party.

Collective agenda and will formationare about communicatively formulating the empowered interests, values, perspectives and preferences of individuals or groups of individuals into collective agendas and wills (Warren, 2017, p. 44). It is about choosing deliberative topic, deliberative forms and communication types by the empowered participants and it aims at reaching a consensus on the issue and concerning the collective interest.

***Political influence*** has two dimensions, first one is the equal political influence in the topic selection of deliberation. Whether participants are individuals or groups should have an equal influence on the selection of deliberation theme and topic. The second dimension is pertaining to the influence during the deliberation. There should be no hierarchy structure of power among all the participants that they can equally impact on the deliberation process. Ideally to say, each of the participant should have an equal power status. However, in the Chinese case, political power status is inevitable, the issue is to check if participants have played the identity card in the deliberation process. During the deliberation, all participants should have an equal influence on the policy decision-making. There should be no manipulative or coercive power that can swing the direction of the deliberation and dominate the whole process.

***Equal discourse power*** the equal discourse power is an extension of the political influence. It concerns specifically about the discourse power that may differentiate between the government authority and the PPCC participants. Authoritarian government will not just use institutional power to control the society, it will also use the hegemonic discourse to influence on and restrain the public thoughts and communication (Femia, 1987). The policy sponsors can be influenced by the government-organised pre-meetings, inspection activities, study trips etc. They will get a basic understanding of government attitude, expectation and preference and it will create the hegemonic discourse power to the government side. Also, government employees and cadres tend to speak more formal political language which the participants from the non-governmental background will not have. This undermines the capability of them to express themselves effectively during the deliberation process.

***Access information*** refers to the issue that participants should understand the reasons that justify collective judgements (Warren, 2017). Firstly, the information collection is important for participants to construct their interest, values, perspectives and preferences prior to deliberation. I will check if there is any mechanism for participants to access information before deliberation and the quality of information is also important. Secondly, it is significant for the participants to receive necessary information during the deliberation process to avoid deception and coercion from the others. For example, they should be able to require the government to provide data information to a certain policy issue.

***Autonomy*** in the process of producing collective judgements, self-rule requires that individuals know how their preferences relate to collective judgments (Warren, 2017). The participants should be a free entity with autonomous wills, preferences, interests and judgments. The highest autonomy emphasises the independence of the participants that they should not be subordinated or affiliated to other political actors. However, in the PPCC case, this is too idealistic. None of the political actors can be purely independent in this authoritarian regime, they are all under the umbrella, but only relatively autonomous to each other in the specific deliberation case. So, I will focus on the autonomy of the participants during the deliberation to the extent that whether they can represent themselves and assertively keep their arguments during the deliberation without the influence of other external power.

***Reciprocity*** requires the participants to be able to reflect on each other’s expression of interests, values and preferences to reconstruct their interests, values and preferences. And under this condition, they can rethink their own arguments in a deliberation process with non-coercion and non-manipulation. The communication leads to a reciprocity way of interaction and a thinking of collective interest rather than unilaterally expressing personal interests.

***Transparency*** is about the openness of the deliberation process, for example the meeting should be open to the public to avoid a closed-door decision making by elite circles. This is a response to the criticism of the PPCC elite-driven approach lack of legitimacy. I will check if those deliberation process if transparent and open for the external supervision from the public.

Collective decision-makingfunction relates to the collective empowerment, that collective judgements can impose binding decisions upon participants (Warren, 2017). It is about the execution of deliberation result.

Therefore, the first indication for this function is the ***Execution capability.*** Since policy proposal implementation is normally assigned to the relevant government units and departments to carry out. Thus, I will check the how these proposals assigned to those government units and their capability to implement. This can avoid the suspicion that many political activities in China are just designed to go through the procedures without any substantial meaning. Even though the policy can be eventually implemented, but it does not mean deliberation process has an influence on it. The decision could be made through the other channels or decided already from the top government officials.

For the second indicator, ***Deliberation result*** is about whether the participants of deliberation can reach a consensus on the policy issue and can make policy-decision collectively. The outcome of the deliberation can be reflected in the actual policy that provides common goods, institutional reform, etc. The final implementation of the policy proposal should be substantial and I will check it through the feedback from the deliberation participants regarding the policy implementation and the report of the policy result from other sources. However, the deliberation outcome does not necessarily to be positive all the time. Deliberation can also lead the participants to discover that the policy proposal is not viable to implement and all of them can unanimously agree upon it. So, I will also take the unimplemented but has good feedback from the policy sponsor as good deliberation result.

## Measurement for Indicators

After all, each indicator will be measured on a scale from none information, weak, moderate to strong, judging by the significance level that each case can demonstrate. I will use these indicators to evaluate the deliberation process of the PPCC at different stages of policy procedure range from policy initiation till policy implementation. About measuring tools, for the three policy proposal cases, I will firstly ask each interviewee to give a brief evaluation to each indicator based on their subjective understanding. Then, I will ask some questions about the criteria for measuring each indicator, to see if the interviewee has given the evaluation based on these criteria. After that, I will cross-reference all the cases and make the final measurement for each indicator. For the meeting observation cases, I will use the previously formulated measurement tool from policy proposal cases as a benchmark. Take the transparency indicator as an example, the interviewee will give a value to the transparency if its none, weak, moderate, or strong. Then, I will ask them questions such as, does the meeting open to the public access, is the information and discussion open to the public, is the meeting documented and published to the outside of the institution, etc. The overall assessment is based on the collected information and then compared with other cases.

# Analysis of PPCC Institutional Setting

## Membership Selection

The nature, status and function of any political institution can be shaped and defined by its membership recruitment (Yan, 2011, p. 59). Regarding the constituency issue, the CPC theoretically has an electoral system to nominate and select its members. Indeed, no one can guarantee this procedure will be fully implemented in practice, but the Chinese Communist party does have all its members from a more grassroots level of the society (Interview 1, 2017). On the contrary, the PPCC has a closed and rigorous selection procedure which is inexplicit about how its committee members are selected. There is no election and voting mechanism exist at PPCC level. And all its members should be approved by the United Front Department (统战部) and the Organisation Department （组织部） of the government (The CPPCC Institution, 2017). In general, the potential candidates of the PPCC are coming from different categories of local elites or social leaders, namely, non-communist intellectuals, (private) business owners, ethnic minorities, religious clerics, returned overseas Chinese and their families (including people from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau), surrendered former Kuomintang military officers and whoever associated with people who fled to Taiwan, members of eight “democratic” parties[[3]](#footnote-3) and non-party affiliated prominent person (Yan, 2011). But it should be aware that government officials and communist party members are also potential candidates for the PPCC committee.

Moreover, some of the social elite members are specifically nominated from different constituencies (界别), also called sectors within the society, such as cultural, health, education, etc. For instance, a prominent doctor who has well-achieved career and good prestige will be nominated as the PPCC member from the health sector. Sometimes it can also be a request from the one who wants to represent their sector. Another major source of the PPCC member is from wealthy local entrepreneurs who have contributed to the local economy.

Nevertheless, the other eight non-communist political parties hold fixed positions of the PPCC membership. Each of them have several membership seats on the committee and they also have group representations. The constituency of those non-communist parties is unclear, but it is exclusive and the member selection is also targeting at elites to a certain extent that normally through the recommendation of incumbent members of the party.

Unlike the CPC membership selection process, the PPCC has the requirements of knowledgeable, talented and influential of its members (Yan, 2011). It requires the members should have adequate knowledge and ability to participate in the policy deliberation and have certain extent of social influence in the sectors which they represent (Interview 1, 2017). This can also be considered as a meritocracy system of member selection and it fits the elite-orientation of the PPCC.

## Functions and Four Major Features

In summary, the government claim that the PPCC system offers a regular, unimpeded channel for different social groups and local elites (or interest groups) to express their preferences and opinions, it has integrated the different interests and incorporated various power from the society to promote the social development, with less internal conflict among different political parties and interest groups (Fang & Guo, 2017). It also aims to bring other non-communist parties and civil societies into the collaborative political system (CPPCC Charter, 2004). Thus, the PPCC seems like a solidarity approach created by the CCP to maintain its legitimacy to rule over China. But it also shows why it is considered as a ‘deliberative democracy’ approach by the Chinese government, due to its inclusiveness and pluralistic trait of political participation from various levels of the society, mostly elites.

Accordingly, the PPCC has been transformed into a political negotiation and deliberation platform which is branded as the main part of the practice of ‘deliberative democracy’ with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, to understand the PPCC, one should look at how the PPCC is linked with the Chinese deliberative democracy theory. There are four basic approaches or features of the deliberative democracy concept in the Chinese practice according to the Chinese government. They are political consultation, political participation, democratic supervision, and political cooperation.

Political consultation**（政治协商）** is essentially about the deliberation procedure between the communist party and the other democratic parties, as well as public figures with non-party affiliation from the society, over the major political reforms, social and economic development policies in the decision-making process (Zhuang, 2006). There are two basic forms of political consultation in practice. First one is the negotiation and deliberation between the communist party and the other political actors of the society through small-scale meetings and special forums. The second one is by using the PPCC platform to induce and empower those political actors to participation in the political activities and deliberate policy with them, for example the PPCC plenary meeting, standing committee meetings, and theme-based forums, etc. (Zhuang, 2006). In the PPCC operational process, it contains the negotiation and consultation of different levels of governmental policies, constitutional and legal amendment recommendations, appointment of government officials from local cadres to country leaders. It also includes brief of major policy documents, giving advice about political situations, as well as advice about problems which require other political parties’ involvement (CPPCC Policy Paper B, 1995). Namely this institutional arrangement is about the ruling-communist party to share the political opinions with other participating parties and consider of other actors’ interests and ideas.

Political Participation**（参政议政）**refers to a more active role of non-communist party actors in the political arena. On the one hand, members of democratic parties and public figures with non-party affiliation should actively investigate about the political, economic and culture issues in the society that are highly related to the people’s interest and have caught the most attention to (Zhuang, 2006). They should reflect the public opinion and negotiate with the communist party and relevant government organs, through the forms of investigating report, policy proposal and political advice, etc. On the other hand, they are also welcome to participate in the public administration procedures, government policy and law making and implementation process (Zhuang, 2006). Therefore, the political participation feature is similar like political consultation. However, the subtle difference is that political consultation emphasises the government is led by the communist party, and as a listener who should be willing to take advices from other political actors in order to increase its governance quality. But it is not mandatory for the government to listen to them. Nevertheless, political participatory focuses more on how to let other political actors more actively participate in the different levels of political activities. But it is still an adviser role since the decision-making power is held by the people’s congress which mostly consists of the communist party members. Additionally, the Chinese communist party retains a strong leadership in every aspect with some direct or indirect influence on the other political actors. This makes it difficult to evaluate the actual impact of the other political actors to the policy-making process.

Democratic Supervision**（民主协商）** is another feature of the Chinese deliberative democracy. It means that for other non-communist party political actors, they should play the role as supervisors with a ‘soft power’ which involves more civil participation and less governmental affiliation. The supervision areas include the enforcement of law and constitutional rights, formulation and implementation of government policy, and corruption activities of government officials, etc. (Zhuang, 2006). Democratic supervision is also an approach for other political actors to check if their policy proposals or suggestions have been recognised and implemented. The way of how to carry out this democratic supervision function is similar as the two other features of Chinese deliberative democracy. It is mostly about doing investigations and inspections in different areas and present the result in the form of a report and the policy proposal to the government. But it also involves the cooperation between the government and other political actors. The party committee and certain government organisations will organise the other political participators to provide consultation and invite them to joint-inspections (Hubei Provincial PPCC, 2012). Again, this democratic supervision feature is highly under the control of the communist party. Its autonomous level is uncertain that gives the doubt of how much democratic space it has in the reality.

Political Cooperation**（合作共事）** is not a feature that relates to the cooperation between the communist party and other political actors in the policy-making arena. It is more of a solidarity approach that communist party allows the non-communist party members to participate in the government administration process (Zhuang, 2006). In another word, individuals who are not members of the communist party can still work in different levels and positions in the government and share equal political power and rights as the communist party members. This feature of political cooperation has granted the PPCC members have the equal political rights when exercise their duties.

## Different Procedures of the PPCC and Institutional Setting

From the previous section, one can see that the political function or role of the PPCC is very ambiguous because of the overlapping features. Those four features seem like sharing something similar with each other, but they are not the same. Likely to see the functions and procedures of the PPCC are also intertwined with each other. However, the main procedure that can be identified is the policy proposal procedure which has traceable functions and impacts on the policy decision-making. It is a procedure which starts with the policy initiations from five major policy proposal bodies within the institution, namely, regular PPCC members, non-communist parties, PPCC special committees, special organisations, constituencies (Sectors of society) and the PPCC institution itself. The special organisations include Worker Union, All-China Youth Federation, Communist Youth League, and Women’s Federation (Party Committee Office( 甬党办）, 2017). The deliberation happens throughout the whole procedure, from policy initiation, policy proposal formation, policy proposing, policy implementation, implementation supervision to feedback of results (The CPPCC Institution, 2017).

Firstly, there will be deliberative discussions of these initiations via the formal theme-based meetings with multiple participants or small-scaled informal meetings (such as PPCC members visit an office in a department of local government) that organised by the PPCC. Moreover, the PPCC special committees will have meetings and discussions that are designated with specific social, economic and political issues in the society. It is more well-organised than individual PPCC members and have more resources at disposal. The PPCC institution will sponsor and organise the investigation and survey activities in respect to the content of the policy initiation, to provide and collect useful information before the final consolidation of a policy proposal. The special committee has easier access to information, especially from the government, for example a request of statistics of local environmental protection budget. Nevertheless, all these deliberation, meeting and investigation activities can also be organised by other policy sponsor bodies, such as special organisations or even individual PPCC members. The deliberation during this period aims at providing sufficient information about policy issues, functions and working conditions of relevant government organs, public opinions and demands from the society, etc. (Party Committee Office( 甬党办）, 2017).

Secondly, after the deliberation and investigation, during the plenary session time, the policy initiations will be presented in a form of a policy proposal and submitted to the policy proposal committee for further selection. The policy proposal committee will sort the proposals in different categorise in accord with issue areas. It will also filter out the unqualified proposals which have overlapping propositions, no substantial meaning, anti-communist regime or anti-government. During the process, the deliberation will happen between policy proposal committees, Local CPC and related government units, such as a special supervision office of policy proposal in the government. They will jointly examine the policy proposals. If a proposal has been rejected, they should also inform the proposal sponsor (Party Committee Office( 甬党办）, 2017). Thirdly, before the end of the plenary session, the policy proposals will also be forwarded to the various government units, organs and departments for initial opinions of implementation. They can reject the proposals with adequate reasons. And they must file the objection within a certain period to the proposal sponsor. Then, there will a deliberation to see if necessary changes or withdraw of the proposal is needed (Party Committee Office( 甬党办）, 2017). For example, if a proposal which may involve coordination of multiple administrative departments has not specified the related departments, it will be asked to revise. After this stage, the responsibility, time-limitation, and the prospect of implementation result will be decided unequivocally.

In the end of the annual plenary session, after all the procedures have been done, the policy proposals will be summarised and formally presented in the final session. It will select one plenary-session proposal and several key proposals. The former one will be appraised by meetings of expertise, chairmen of the PPCC, etc. Then it will be discussed and voted in the plenary session. The key proposals will also go through the appraisal of expertise and chairmen of PPCC committee. But it will also take the selected opinions from the city CPC general office and municipal general office. The implementation of these two kinds of proposals will be supervised by both party and government high-rank officials (Party Committee Office( 甬党办）, 2017).

Figure . CPPCC Policy Proposal Mechanism[[4]](#footnote-4)



The jointly proposals from various constituencies, special organisations, and non-communist parties will be self-nominated and appraised by the chairmen meeting of the PPCC, to select important proposals. Once selected, the proposals will be reviewed by the high-rank officials from the city CPC committee. Implementation of those proposals will be supervised by both the PPCC general office and the city CPC general office (The CPPCC Institution, 2017).

Figure . CPPCC Policy Implementation Mechanism[[5]](#footnote-5)



During the policy implementation phase, the relevant government units should be held responsible to organise deliberation activities. They should actively communicate with the policy sponsors, discuss about the policy proposals and precisely grasp the true thoughts and desire of the sponsors (policy proposal actors)[[6]](#footnote-6). The PPCC institution should also provide channels for policy sponsors to communicate with the government units (The CPPCC Institution, 2017). The policy sponsors can give feedback to the implementation results, whether they are satisfied or not. There will be deliberation meetings for the implementation government units to explain the reasons why it has not reached the expected result. Both parties will communicate with each other and try to settle with a commonly acceptable answer to the implementation result (Party Committee Office( 甬党办）, 2017). In addition to this, the PPCC special committees will take the proposals within their special focus-domains and organise inspection, research, supervision activities regarding the policy implementation process and present the report to the PPCC members and other related parties (The CPPCC Institution, 2017).

Figure . CPPCC Institutional Setting[[7]](#footnote-7)



The special committees are the very important PPCC organs that serves as a bridge between government and various policy sponsors. It also works as a liaison organisation to communicate with the PPCC delegates. Each of the special committee oversees certain social-political areas and responsible to provide information for the PPCC delegates and organise policy research, deliberation, and formulation activities. It is also a major source of policy proposals and it is working behind many policy proposals. The special committee members consist of administration staffs and the selected PPCC committee members from different constituencies. The administration staffs normally are full-time government staffs (cadres) and some PPCC committee members will take part-time positions like vice committee director. The special committee members are selected from the PPCC committee members based on their specialties and knowledge. For example, a PPCC member who is a teacher from the educational constituency will be selected for the Education, Culture, Health and Sports Committee. Sometimes they will also invite the expertise to the committee with respect to the policy proposal issue.

## Discrepancy Between Local and Central Government

In the Chinese political system, the relationship between central and local governments is complex. The local governments shared a certain extent of autonomy. They are not rigorously abiding to the central regulation, for example the institutional stipulation and administration practice may vary between central and local, also among local governments (Saich, 2011). Ningbo is one of the municipalities that has independent planning status and some local legislative autonomy. Given these, the institutional setting of the Ningbo PPCC will have nuance difference comparing to other cities and central government. It is more based on local conditions of the city. The Ningbo PPCC institution has the uniqueness of the study and its own innovation. For example, the biweekly deliberation forum of the PPCC at national level is reduced to a monthly deliberative forum in the Ningbo local PPCC. This deliberation forum is theme-based and it picks the narrow-scope agenda which is important and paid attention to by the public. This forum aims at an in-depth deliberation towards a special issue. The forum consists of officials from various government units, the members of the PPCC committee from different the constituencies and expertise. And the participant selection will be based on the requirements of the theme. It is moderated by the PPCC chairmen and organised mostly by the PPCC special committees (The CPPCC, 2014).

This special forum is influential in the policy proposal formulation process, because during this theme-based forum, policy sponsors can participate in the deliberation and access necessary information about the policy issue from the government side. They can present the draft proposals, initial ideas and thoughts. During the deliberation, they can share opinions with each other and get a more comprehensive understanding of the role of government units in the policy issue area. By doing so, they can formulate more viable and targeted policy proposals that reflect the public demands and opinions. The quality of this forum is unclear and the interpretation of institutional stipulation varies among different local PPCC committees.

# Analysis of Cases

## Case 1: Proposal of Employment of People with Disabilities

 The background of this policy proposal was that people with disability in Ningbo had difficulties with finding jobs, especially talented people. According to both the national and provincial regulations, government institutions, social organisations, state-owned enterprises, government funded organisations, and so on, should hire people with disabilities in proportion around 1.5 percent of their total employee number. In 2014, the population of people with disabilities in Ningbo were roughly 366,000 and 47,400 of them were capable and intended to be employed. However, only 12,900 of them were hired by the proportion regulation. The rest of them found jobs by other channels or self-employment. Among them, only 155 were hired by the government institutions and funded organisations with the proportion rate of 0.45%, much lower than the rule of 1.5% ( Social, Legal, Ethnic and Religion Committee, 2016).

Originally, the policy was initiated by the municipal Federation of Disabled Persons. One of the PPCC special committee, which oversees this aspect of the social issue had collected the idea through an informal liaison with the Federation of Disabled Persons. Later, it was proposed in the PPCC annual plenary session in 2014 and had been selected as one of the key-proposal in that year. There was no sign of citizens’ involvement in the initiation process, however, the municipal Federation of Disabled Persons had been collecting the public opinion through interviewing families with disabled persons long before the policy initiation. They had also received petition from those families regarding this issue. (Interview 6, 2017). Therefore, an investigation and research activity had been launched by the PPCC special committee. They found that a foreign chain supermarket called Auchan hired much more people with disabilities than any of the government organisations or agencies (Interview 6, 2017).

A deliberative forum had been organised by the Federation of Disabled Persons and the PPCC special committee, themed with the discussion of employing the people with disabilities. The forum invited various issue-related government agencies and high-rank government officials. The policy proposal was also forwarded to one of the vice-mayor of the Ningbo municipality and assigned him as the responsible supervisor of the policy implementation. During the deliberation forum, one of the government agencies which was required to hire some people in the local water supply company had some doubt on implementation. They claimed that the agency is not in charge of the water company, it is under the other agency’s administration. Therefore, it is inconvenient to coordinate the work. This is a purely bureaucratic answer. According to the interviewee, the words had passed on to the vice-mayor and he directly criticised the agency said: “If they don’t want the communist party leadership anymore, then leave the case alone” (Interview 6, 2017). This exhibits a certain level of power leverage and coercion from the party official.

The deliberation process finally reached a consensus after the vice-mayor’s direction. The implementation was dispatched to different government agencies, including the Federation of Disabled Persons. Thus, in this case, it was initiated by the federation and the federation was partly involved in implementation.

Throughout the whole deliberation process, the significance of inclusiveness is weakly demonstrated, as well as the equal participation because it was not open to the public and they have pre-selected participants for the deliberation process. Both equal political rights and political influence of participants are weakly indicated as mentioned above that the vice-mayor has a strong voice that can alter the whole deliberation result suddenly. Similarly, there is no equal discourse power and autonomy of all the participants. The government agencies are directed by the vice-mayor and the PPCC special committee was related to the Federation of Disabled Persons at the early stage. In respect to the access information, none of the participants had a problem with this since they are all government agencies and PPCC committee officials with the power to gather information. Reciprocity in the deliberation process is moderately demonstrated due to the bureaucratic behaviours of the government agencies.

Finally, the execution capability is strong and there is a successful result of the deliberation. After the policy have been implemented, the government has started to hire more people with disabilities whoever can work and have adequate skills to certain job positions. Ironically, this policy has also created a trend that many government organisations actively come to the Federation of Disabled Persons to look for “better” talented people. However, this policy still has helped many disabled people with finding jobs.

## Case 2: Proposal of Local Highway Toll Reduction and Exemption

The proposal was about a local road reconstruction and its adhering impact on the local economy. The town is one of the high-poverty rate areas in Ningbo. The local economy is relying on the tourism and very few manufacturing factories. The road under reconstruction is the provincial road and it is free for everyone. The highway nearby is designed to alleviate the traffic pressure of the city rather than access to the small town, and it has a high toll for passing. Therefore, the local economy would inevitably be affected when the provincial road is closed. The idea of the proposal was to use government funds to subsidise cars which passing the highway and going to the small town (Ningbo PPCC Literature & History Committee, 2017).

The proposal was initiated by one of the PPCC special committee directors and sponsored in the name of one PPCC special committee as a collective proposal. The deliberation process was not open, but mostly informal, small-scale and face to face meetings in the office of the government officials. The initial idea was collected indirectly during a dinner meeting with the township chief. Most of the policy ideas are gathered through the grassroots level government officials when they heard the discussion of social, economic and political issues from citizens. Normally, the will of citizens participate in political activities is low (Interview 4, 2017). Thus, the inclusiveness is moderate in this case, all the relevant parties have been included in the internal process but not the public.

According to the interview, the participation in the deliberation process is equal in a way that participants can freely decide when and where to hold the meeting. And they could organise the investigation activities, discuss about the policy issue freely without any obstacle or threat (Interview 4, 2017). However, it is worth to mention that most of them are either government officials or PPCC officials. Hence, they all have strong equal participation and political rights due to their identity.

During the deliberation process, there was no hierarchical structure of power detected. Both sides shared equal political influence on the policy decision making. At the beginning, the municipal Transportation Bureau was very reluctant to give discounts to the highway toll. In their feedback report, they have argued that it was unprecedented to give discounts and it would make this case as precedent for other similar situation in the future (Interview 4, 2017). And the local district[[8]](#footnote-8)claimed that it would be a financial burden to the tight local budget and there was an administration problem to carry out the proposal that partly of the road is under the administration of the other district ( Ningbo Municipal Transportation Committee, 2017). This manifested strong bureaucratism from the government side and the PPCC policy sponsor was not satisfied with the feedback and he insisted on more investigation into the possibility of this proposal and requires more detailed information about the reason of why it is unimplementable. Further deliberation process was carried out. The municipal Transportation Bureau provided a full list of highway toll price-charging mechanism and some other statistics about the traffic flow of the highway ( Ningbo Municipal Transportation Committee, 2017). After reviewing all the information, the dispute still was not solved, and the sponsor required a deliberative meeting with the highway company for additional information and explanation. During the deliberation process, the highway company explained that the nearest entrance is several kilometres away from the town. The entrance fee is 5 RMB[[9]](#footnote-9) and the highway toll from the entrance to the town would be less than 10 RMB. If the company imposes a discount with half price, it would still be 5 RMB. It is pointless to make such change. Total exemption of highway toll is decided by the provincial government, the municipal government does not have the legislation and jurisdiction rights. Given these, the policy sponsor had changed his mind and both sides had reached a consensus on the issue. Then the case was dropped and closed (Interview 4, 2017).

Judging by the previous illustration from the interviewee, it demonstrates that the political influence is strongly significance that all the participants had an adequate influence. And there was no discourse power that forcibly controls the deliberation. They could all speak truthfully to their own judgement and preference. Nevertheless, there is also high autonomy of the participants. In respect of access information, the sponsor is a PPCC official, so there was no problem with gathering information. And the reciprocity exhibited by the final consensus decision on the case. The deliberation process was all internal and not disclosed to the public, so there is weak transparency. Although the proposal was not put into implementation, it is still an evidence of good deliberation result.

## Case 3: Proposal of Third-Party Arbitration Organization of Medical Dispute

The proposal was collectively sponsored by the Ningbo Democratic Progressive Party Committee. It is about establishing a third-party arbitration organisation to mediate and reconcile the medical disputes. At that time, any medical accident or negligence issue was appraised and examined by an institution under the administration of the local municipal health bureau. It was a semi-governmental institution and it was suspected by the public that it will cover up the medical incidents due to its affiliation with both government and hospitals. There were several disputes upgraded into violent conflicts in China that led to the revenge of patients and their family members, and resulted in attacking or even killing the doctors. Hence, it was urgent to set up a third-party, independent and trust-worthy institution to conduct the appraisal and investigation of this kind of disputes. It should not be constrained and manipulated by the government agencies (Zhao X. , Suggestions Regarding the Establishment of Third-Party Professional Medical Dispute Mediation Instititon(关于成立医疗纠纷专业调解机构的建议), 2007). The policy proposal was named as one of the key proposals in 2007. Since then, the head of the municipal Health Bureau came to the policy sponsor and presented a draft regulation of the Ningbo medical dispute disposition with interim procedures in it. They consulted the policy sponsor for comments and opinions, and held a forum to deliberate this draft paper (Zhao X. , 2016).

I interviewed two of the participants of this proposal. Regarding the inclusiveness, it was not clear if the citizens were involved at the policy initiation stage. The policy was discovered by Zhao Xiaojuan (Vice Chairman of the Democratic Progressive Party) from one of the party member’s reports. There were organised research and investigation activities to visit ordinary people and survey the public opinion. During the deliberation forum. It only included government officials, PPCC officials and delegates. Participation was equal to the selected participants whoever relevant to the topic. Selection mechanism was decided by the head of a PPCC special committee who moderated the deliberation forum. The PPCC delegates could express their intention to join the meeting during the research and investigation activities. Since the deliberation was focused on legislative reform, it was also inclined to select delegates from legal constituency (Interview 8, 2017). The PPCC delegates and policy sponsor could freely discuss about the issue through formal or informal meetings. Sometimes they can meet up in the canteen and talk about it (Interview 7, 2017). Thus, the inclusiveness is weak to the public and strong internal. Furthermore, the case demonstrates strong equal participation and equal political rights.

During the deliberation process, the participants shared equal political influence on the policy decision-making. The deliberation topic was pre-determined by the PPCC delegates and health bureau of the municipal government. Participants had equally and independently shared their opinions about this policy issue and they invited the professor from the law school of the local university to explicitly explain the content of the draft regulation paper. There was no hindrance to the access of information. All the participants expressed their opinions about the draft paper and their opinions were acknowledged by others. They had shared their thoughts, worked cooperatively, and made some minor changes to the detail of the paper with consensus (Interview 7, 2017). Therefore, the political influence was strong and discourse power was strongly equal. And the case also demonstrates the strong significance of autonomy and reciprocity. However, the whole deliberation was kept in closed-door to the public. It is mostly working between the PPCC delegates and government agencies. No citizens had been able to access the information about the deliberation until the proposal was proposed and implemented (Interview 7, 2017). Hence, the transparency is weak in this case.

The policy implementation was very successful. Multiple government agencies assigned to the implementation task and worked jointly. In March 2008, the Ningbo municipal medical dispute mediation committee and Ningbo Medical Dispute Claims and Settlement Centre were established. Until 2014, there were over 4740 medical dispute cases were accepted and 4099 had been settled. The success rate is about 90.75% (Zhao X. , 2016). This local legislation was first initiated in China, and after that, similar legislation has been promoted all over the country (Interview 7, 2017). Thus, the execution capability was strong and judging by the successful establishment of this new institution, the deliberation result is also strong.

## Case 4: Monthly Based Deliberative Forum

The Monthly Based Deliberative Forum occurred on 20th July 2017 in the meeting room of the Ningbo PPCC institution. The theme of the meeting is about optimising the operation and administration of large-public sports fields and stadiums. The participants are the PPCC chairman and all vice-chairmen, secretary-general and vice secretary-generals, major heads of the PPCC special committees, major heads of municipal government agencies, PPCC delegates from various constituencies.

The selection of the participants is issue-related. No public figures like citizens were invited, but there are few seats open to the public. Therefore, I could join as an ordinary citizen to observe. The participants from the government side covers all the relevant bureaus and agencies that are important to the topic. The PPCC delegates are from education, sport and culture constituency, mostly, for example, the secretary of Ningbo gymnastic association and vice-head of the Ningbo Nottingham University. The inclusiveness is very limited to the public access but strong in choosing the PPCC delegates and government agencies. It is unclear about the selection mechanism. Regarding the equal participation mechanism, for the selected PPCC delegates, it is equal and free. There is no binding rule for them to participate, but for the government agencies, it is mandatory. Nevertheless, other PPCC delegates and officials can join as an observer if they are interested in the topic. The equal political rights issue is unclear outside the meeting in this case. However, before the meeting start and after-meeting mingle session, the participants were seemingly able to talk to each other freely and exchanged opinions about the meeting. Hence, I take it as moderate significance (The PPCC Conference Proceedings, 2017)

During the deliberation process, it is moderated by the PPCC chairman. At the beginning of the deliberation, the head of the Municipal Sports Bureau gave a proximately 15minutes report on the topic and current situation on the issue of discussion. Then each delegate spoke for about 5 minutes to make their statements. However, not everyone was given this chance. The explanation was that delegates should apply for speaking right prior to the forum. Some have exceeded the time-limit but no one interrupted them. Then, during the free discussion part, only one delegate raised the issue of using the health insurance money to compensate and fund individuals for sports activities.[[10]](#footnote-10) The suggestion was quickly ruled out by the head of the Fiscal Bureau. He explained that there is a central government policy forbid using health insurance money for other purposes than health care (Meeting Observation 1, 2017).

In addition, there is a hierarchical structure of power, but it did not affect the deliberation evidently. Given this, the political influence is quite equal. And there is no sign of unbalanced discourse power, the application for speaking right is more of a concern of meeting order. It also may be because the speaking delegates were well prepared with information and materials. They were previously organised into research groups by the PPCC and have been able to access information to prepare for the meeting. Reciprocity is not so obvious, only one time during the discussion part. All the PPCC delegates are quite autonomous that they can speak for themselves and express their opinion. They can speak with their background knowledge and the personal experience in relation to the topic. Throughout the whole forum, it was recorded and telecasted on the local TV channel and open to the public (Meeting Observation 1, 2017). So, it has a strong transparency. There is no execution capability and deliberation result can be observed in this case.

## Case 5: Key-Proposal Supervision Meeting

The key-proposal supervision meeting is a mechanism established in the PPCC to supervise the implementation of policy proposals and communicate with the implementing government agencies. It mostly consists of PPCC officials from various special committees and some delegates from different constituencies in relation to the discussed policy proposals. It is an internal meeting that theoretically I was not allowed to participate and observe. Somehow, I got the chance to sit in the back right before the meeting start and no one had paid attention to my presence. The participation was not equal and open to everyone, only selected PPCC delegates were allowed. It is unclear about the equal political rights of the participants, however, most of them are PPCC and government officials. Thus, this provides them with a higher level of political rights and distinguished them from the ordinary citizens (Meeting Observation 2, 2017).

During the deliberation process, the representative of various government agencies gave a brief report regarding the policy implementation progress. And then, representatives of PPCC special committees posed some questions in relation to the report and commented on the progress. The PPCC representatives also gave an appraisal of the implementation progress. Some of them were not satisfied and they had discussed on the time schedule of the future deliberation meeting, forum and topic with the government agencies. The deliberation process was free, equal, efficient and open-minded. The participants can reflect on each other’s opinion and respond in a respective manner (Meeting Observation 2, 2017).

Therefore, the inclusiveness and equal participation were weakly demonstrated in this case, and there is a strong significance of equal political rights, but it is only limited to the government and the PPCC officials. The political influence of the participants is strong and they shared equal discourse power. All of them had no problem with accessing important information and they are autonomous relatively to each other. Reciprocity is demonstrated during the deliberation process strongly. The process is closed-door meeting, no transparency at all. In the end, the meeting does not involve an execution capability and substantial deliberation result.

## Overall Analysis

The overall inclusiveness in all cases are moderate and when it comes to the key-proposal supervision meeting, it demonstrates a weak inclusiveness to the public. This phenomenon maybe because the policy issue is getting closer to the core where decision-power lies at. The decision-making process is still not open to the public and citizens are not directly accessible to the power. Similarly, to see, the equal participation is also not very strong in the key-proposal supervision meeting case. The equal political rights for the participants, are generally strong in three out of five cases.

The political influence, equal discourse power, access information, autonomy, and reciprocity are generally strong throughout the cases. It maybe because Chinese government is normally very strong in its administration and collective decision making. It could be potentially linked to the reason of communist party’s strong control over its government institution. However, the transparency is weak almost in all cases, only the deliberative forum shows a strong transparency with moderate empowered inclusion. The implication of this phenomenon could be that the PPCC institution is still reluctant to fully open the participation to the public at different stages of deliberation. But it is willing to open the access to the information of forums to raise the awareness of the public. In addition, we can see the collective decision making is strong in all the three policy proposal cases but not the two meetings. All the three cases have moderate inclusiveness and weak transparency. It shows that the decision-making process is still quite internally handled.

Figure . Cases Analysis Results



# Conclusion

## Summarise of Results

This thesis offers an insight of the local PPCC in China about its institutional stipulation, working procedures and actual practice. By doing the interview and participant observation, I could understand the research question from the view of the PPCC delegates and officials, and have an in-depth knowledge of what they think, feel, and experience about deliberative democracy and the PPCC institution.

From the analysis result, we can see that the empowered inclusion function of the local PPCC institution is relatively low in the actual practice and it is disconnected with the public, At least, not a direct connection can be discovered in this study. I think this is partly due to the authoritarian regime nature of the Chinese political system. And it confirmed the criticism towards elite politics of this institution. During the deliberation process, participants can enjoy quite a high level of empowerment. It is not like what the PPCC institution used to be as a vase institution. It starts to gain substantial influence on the political decision making. As we can see that it achieved very well in the collective agenda and will formation function. It has very strong information access ability due to its semi-governmental institution role. It is very weak in transparency which is a feature of the whole Chinese political system. However, it needs to be mentioned that the local PPCC is developing new technological innovation such as using online platform for delegates to make proposals (Interview 5, 2017). They are also planning to open the whole deliberation process to the public after the platform has been completed. Also, the deliberative forum shows a tendency of opening the accessibility to the public and it is still under experiment.

In addition, the PPCC’s role in the Chinese government is still unclear. Comparing with the People’s Congress, it does not have the legislative power similarly like the house of commons in the United Kingdom. It also does not have any substantial administrative power, although it is part of the government institution. It is neither a high-level think tank or policy advisory group, despite its consultation and advisory role in the political system. Almost all the staffs who work in the PPCC institution are government officials with ranks and titles. So, it is not purely a non-governmental organisation. In fact, it sounds more like an authoritarian regime using deliberative mechanisms in its governance strategy, to achieve legitimacy and efficacy in its administration, and mostly to serve for a solidarity purpose to unify the country under the banner of the communist party. However, maybe because of this ambiguity role, the deliberation result showed in the analysis is significant successful in terms of collective agenda and will formation, and collective decision-making. This requires further study of the PPCC actual influence of the policy deliberation result. It is not sure if the proposal is just a channel for the government agencies to make their work go through some formal procedures and reach to the higher office.

Given these, to answer the research question, firstly the institutional and formal procedural stipulation of the PPCC reflect no significant democratic feature. There may be a tendency change but it is not so obviously discovered in this thesis. Secondly, in the actual practice, the PPCC delegates and official expressed an inclination of accepting more of democratic approach in their work and the quality of deliberation is beyond the expectation. The PPCC is not a highly submissive and marginalised institution in the Chinese political system. The progress of recent years’ reform and adaptation of deliberative democracy theory is promising to see more future change.

## Problems and Future Suggestions

The contribution of this thesis is mostly the subjective views and understandings from the Ningbo local PPCC officials and staffs. The PPCC institution seems to be more open and democratic than the CCP in the Chinese political system. A future comparative study of these two institutions is desirable and necessary. During the interview process, I met some problem with speaking to the interview subjects that I feel they were not purely open to the question. Besides, although the case selection is random and based on my prior knowledge about the policy proposals, I have only selected three policy proposal cases and two meetings. Because of this, the study result is not representative enough to generate a strong inference about this institution. Moreover, the interview only included the PPCC side, not the government side. So, the result can be biased. Therefore, larger scaled study could be conducive to the future research.

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Appendix

## Field Work and Interviews

At the beginning of this thesis study, I was introduced by someone to a PPCC informant in the local Ningbo PPCC. I started to get informaiton and background knowledge about this insitution through him. I was not intended to do an in-depth interview and participant observation study at that moment. However, I after gainning more knowledge of this topic, I decided to do the interview. So, after I was able to travel back to China from Sweden. I started communicate with the informant and he helped me finding interviewees and arranging meeting with them. The almost all of the interview was conducted in the office room, face to face and one on one. Some of the interviewees showed very keen interest to talk to me and express their opinions abou the PPCC institution while the others are not reluctant but less active during the interview session. I have consulted them about the interview recording, annoymity and the consesus of allowing me to use the interview in my thesis. Mostly of them requires annoymity and no recording, but none of them forbide me to use the interview materials. However, they do mentioned about misinterpretation problem and I tried to ask them if they want me to explain my understanding of their words in the final part of the interview session. But none of them said yes. So, I deemed this as a trust to me. And for the consistency reason of the thesis, I will refer to all the interviewees annonymously. The meeting observation was introduced by another informant. I was allowed to access one deliberative forum and one supervison meeting. It went vey smooth and no obstacles had been observed. The forum and meeting shedule is not ease access for the public. And the place in the local municiple building which located at a place I call it fortress. Becaue it has a moat surrouding the whole area, only with 6 bridges to access. You need register yourself at the watch box and there are unarmed paramilitary guards. However, it may sounds scary and strictly forbide the public access, there is one gate is open for people who wants to go to the Governemtn Certificate Centre. And supprisingly to me, many services were outsourced to private companies, for example, they have pretty guide girls sitting in the lobby of every build to provide information for visitors. Also, during the meeting seesion, there are waitress serving tea to all the participants, including me. The expression of observation is profound that I acquired a sense of things worked in the Chinese local government.

## List of Interviews

Interview 1. (2017, 02 05). Anonynous PPCC Official, A (General Information about the local CPPCC. (Y. Kong, Interviewer)

Interview 2. (2017, 04 06). Anonynous PPCC Official, B ( Information Regarding the CPPCC Working Procedures and Mechanisms). (Y. Kong, Interviewer)

Interview 3. (2017, 07 10). Anonymous PPCC Official, C (Some Questions Regarding the CPPCC Functions ). (K. Yueze, Interviewer)

Interview 4. (2017, 07 20). Anonymous Head of Local PPCC Special Committee, A ( Questions About the Policy Proposal 2). (Y. Kong , Interviewer)

Interview 5. (2017, 07 25). Anonymous Head of Local PPCC Special Committee, B (Questions about Policy Proposal Process). (Y. Kong, Interviewer)

Interview 6. (2017, July 23). Annonyous Head of local PPCC Special Committee, C (Regarding Policy proposal 1). (Y. Kong, Interviewer)

Interview 7. (2017, July 20). Annoymous Vice-Secretary of PPCC Regarding Policy Proposal 3. (Y. Kong, Interviewer)

Interview 8. (2017, August 1). Anonymous PPCC Official D Regarding Policy Proposal 3. (Y. Kong, Interviewer)

## List of Meetings

Meeting Observation 1. (2017, July 20). Monthly Deliberative Forum. (Y. Kong , Interviewer)

Meeting Observation 2. (2017, August 2). Key-Proposal Supervision Meeting. (Y. Kong, Interviewer)

1. The Abbreviation PPCC normally represent the national level institution, local level should be PPCC. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Need to mention here that this does not rule out the existence of independent non-governmental related studies or research [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The eight “democratic parties” are: Revolutionary Committee of the Kuomintang, China Democratic League, China Democratic National Construction Association, China Association for Promoting Democracy, Peasants and Workers Democratic Party, Zhigong Party, Jiusan Society, Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Figure Extracted from the PPCC Working Procedure for Cadres- Drew by myself [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Figure Extracted from the PPCC Working Procedure for Cadres- Drew by myself [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The sponsors refer to the actors of policy proposing from six bodies listed in the figure 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Figure Extracted from the PPCC Working Procedure for Cadres- Drew by myself [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The township is subordinate to the district and there are four major districts under the administration of the municipal government. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Chinese Currency [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Each of a Chinese person with job can have health insurance account that money is saved in the account. It can only be used when the person needs health care. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)