

Deliberative Governance as an Instrumental Mechanism: A Study of Different Types of Environmental Deliberations

Lang Youxing, and Ge Junliang*

Zhejiang University

Abstract: Deliberative governance of environmental issues indicates that environmental governance has undergone a transformation from relying on government authority for solutions to reaching consensus among participants. This can be regarded as an important strategy for the structural transformation of China's environmental governance. In this paper, the practices of environmental deliberation in China are classified into four types by the attributes of environmental issues and the relationships of participants as: response-, autonomy-, consultation-, and supervision-based. On the basis of the government's interests and motives to engage in environmental deliberations, we analyze its practice orientations from five perspectives: scope of issues, functions, participants, procedures, and methods. Then we point out that environmental deliberations have both public and instrumental governance motives, but the governance motive, which aims for governance effectiveness and social control, is more conspicuous. We further conclude that the value pursuit of deliberative democracy for public reasons is to some extent replaced by an instrumental deliberative motive that intends to address specific environmental issues, standardize public participation orderliness, safeguard social harmony and stability, strengthen organizational functions, provide consultation on environmental policies, and promote the implementation of those policies.

Keywords: deliberative governance, environmental governance, types of deliberation, instrumental mechanisms

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* Lang Youxing, School of Public Affairs, Zhejiang University; Ge Junliang, School of Public Affairs, Zhejiang University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Lang Youxing, School of Public Affairs, Zhejiang University, Zhejiang. E-mail: ylang2002@hotmail.com

Research Questions

In the report delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), a key proposition was mentioned, that the principal contradiction facing Chinese society has evolved in the new era. It shows that through 40 years of development since reform and opening up, the social demands of the Chinese people have gradually risen to a higher level of pursuing quality of life and ensuring harmony between human and nature, and a healthy ecosystem has already become a cornerstone for a better life.

It should be pointed out that the Chinese government has already put ecological and environmental governance as an important issue on its agenda. On the one hand, the government has strengthened environmental regulations by revising the Law of the People's Republic of China on Prevention and Control of Water Pollution, Environmental Protection Law of the People's Republic of China, and the Law of the People's Republic of China on Prevention and Control of Atmospheric Pollution and released measures for pollution prevention and control such as Air Pollution Prevention and Control Action Plan, Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Water Pollution, and Soil Pollution Prevention and Control Action Plan. Efforts have also been made to supervise environmental protections and evaluate the implementation of the target-oriented responsibility system to ensure that both local CPC committees and governments are held accountable and their primary responsibilities for environmental protections have been clarified. On the other hand, importance has been attached to public participation. In the revised Environmental Protection Law, an entire chapter is dedicated to specifying "information disclosure and public engagement" to vest the public with the rights to obtain environmental information, to report or take legal actions. The *Measures for Public Participation in Environmental Protection* goes into further details about the scope, principles, ways and safeguarding methods of public participation. The status of public participation in environmental protections, however, are still not positive enough. From petitions in the form of letters or visits to authorities to judicial disputes, from mild protests by "taking a walk" to strong environmental protests not through government channels, such phenomena demonstrate the value of public participation in environmental issues, but in reality they also reveal the difficulties for public participation. In particular, there are tensions between increased public awareness of environmental protections and environmental authoritarianism, between expert rationality and the public's logic, and between the interests of diversified participants and public environmental interests. To ease the tensions and to satisfy the pressing needs for high-quality public ecological products, ecological and cultural systems must be improved to help modernize corresponding governance systems and capabilities. The report at the 19th CPC National Congress elaborates on developing socialist consultative democracy and points out a key orientation for structural transformation of China's environmental governance—deliberative governance.

The academic, complicated and uncertain features of environmental issues lead to the inevitability that solutions must depend on scientific and technological factors to be scientifically constructive. In the meantime, the opinions of different participants are affected by a variety of social, political and cultural factors. Social activists often propose their explanations and analysis frameworks on certain environmental issues based on their knowledge structure and interests. Therefore, such issues are socially constructive as well. They represent a social and political process for knowledge production, which makes it possible to embed deliberative democracy into environmental governance structures as a type of resource. Then what are the specific practices of environmental deliberation in China at the current stage? What are the practice orientations behind them? What are the motives of the government for applying a deliberation mechanism to environmental governance systems?

Literature Review

The academic world has not reached a consensus on the definition of deliberative governance. Some scholars define it from a macro level as “any governance based on deliberative democracy can be regarded as deliberative governance as a whole” (Wei & Wang, 2016). To be specific, scholars view deliberative governance by mechanism, paradigm, or process.^① Through our literature review, we found that studies on deliberative governance have been carried out mainly from the following three levels.

Theoretical interpretation of its values and features from a macro level. Previous studies hold that deliberative governance features true democracy, good public rationality and legitimate policy output, reflecting the value proposition of being “people-oriented, inclusive, harmonious, equal in rights, and fair and just” (Wang, 2015). Other studies focus on the Chinese connotation of deliberation, using discourse conversion of governance as the logical starting point and regarding deliberative governance in contemporary China as the application and adjustment of theories and practices of Western governance. Such research results are closely related to the need for theories and practices of socialism with Chinese characteristics that is guided by Marxist understanding of the state and rooted in the time-honored political and cultural traditions of China (Wang & Wei, 2016).

Discussions on the logic of domestic deliberative governance from the meso level. Domestic and overseas deliberative governance are not fully consistent in terms of political context, theoretical nature, and generation conditions. Western deliberative democracy intends to resolve the severability between dialogue politics and instrumental politics through institutionalized

^① The mechanism school represented by Wang Puqu emphasizes the establishment of deliberative procedures in a political mechanism under the goal of the public interests of participants. The paradigm school represented by Zhang Min highlights the application of value concepts and techniques of deliberative democracy to local public affairs governance. The process school represented by Chen Liang stresses sharing and understanding of discourse structures among various participants during talks or deliberation processes.

discourse carriers while domestic deliberative democracy sees a development that is under the influence of traditional thought and culture, current political systems and Western political theories. Such a development is a process to show the consistency of the deliberative democracy theory through practices. It is also a process that shows the adaptation of the deliberative democracy mode to current governing patterns (Wu, 2011). Previous studies explore the evolutionary logic of domestic deliberative governance at the primary level and delve into the important role of specific factors or mechanisms in the evolution and institutionalization of deliberation, either from historical institutionalism's point of view, or by taking the macro context of changes in the institutionalization of primary governance systems, or with an approach of typology.

Analysis on the mechanisms of deliberative governance through primary level practice and experience from the micro level. China's primary level society is the major field for exploratory or pioneering deliberative governance practices. Therefore, a large number of studies focus on this field to analyze the developments, constructional pathways and optimizing strategies of deliberative governance at the primary level. There are other studies that concentrate on the application of deliberative governance to specific public affairs, such as governance of mass incidents, site selection for "Not in My Backyard" (NIMBY) facilities, water resources development and utilization, law enforcement in urban management, shanty area renovation, and governance of housing demolition and resident relocation.

As modern society now organizes in response to risks, the operating logic of traditional politics must be changed. For conventional representative democracy, there was some possibility that the ecology could be damaged due to the application of the quorum principle to complicated environmental issues. As a matter of fact, there were indeed many such cases of failure in environmental governance by democratic countries. The academic world then began to think which approach is more appropriate for settling environmental disputes, resulting in two different theoretical responses—ecological authoritarianism and democracy. It should be pointed out that a democratic system exerts diversified influences on environmental protections and it can strengthen environmental governance through effective institutional designs including accountability mechanisms, information disclosures, environmental organizations' activities, international cooperation, and institutional development (Gallagher & Thacker, 2008). In this case, ecological democracy is not only a key pathway for ecological progress, but also a logical starting point for deliberative environmental governance featuring diversity, inclusiveness and social learning.

Since the 1990s, environmental politics has seen a concept transition toward deliberation, and the political and academic worlds have gradually become aware of the key role of deliberative democracy in resolving environmental issues. They think that deliberative democracy has a certain instinctive green pursuit and is especially suitable for collective decision-making for long-term and general interests, such as environmental protection

and sustainable development (Baber & Bartlett, 2005). Currently, studies on deliberative environmental governance mainly focus on the following aspects.

Definition of Concept and Logic

Essentially, a deliberative environmental democracy mechanism means that government, enterprises and civil society conduct deliberation and negotiation on environmental issues that involve major interests and reach consensus on allocation of power and accountability of environmental and legal responsibilities (Zhou & Teng, 2014). Some scholars, based on the theory of communicative action, hold that deliberative environmental governance develops from humans' interactions with the environment, the formation of an environmental consensus, rationality of environmental interactions, the overcoming of action inertia, and the definition of the relationship between social construction of environmental propositions and relevant laws. Therefore, the practice is characterized by guidance from ecological interests, process deliberation, power counterbalance and equal participation (Qin & Tang, 2017).

Conformability Between Deliberative Democracy and Environmental Governance

Robyn Eckersley (1996) believes that deliberation is essentially characterized by unrestrained interactions, inclusiveness and social learning. She pointed out that a deliberation mode weighs general interests over individual, organizational or existing interests, thus internalizing non-profit environmental activities into a virtue and a critical position toward scientific and normative factors also helps the mass reevaluation of the assumptions, interests and world outlook of technological bureaucrats, administrative officials, politicians and entrepreneurs. From the participants' level, deliberation is aimed at not making an individual or group assume avoidable risks if their consent is not obtained on the premise of freedom and provision of information and it expands the scope of participants to cover anyone subject to potential risks so that the probability of externalizing ecological costs to a third party is minimal. Ecological conservation development that is advocated by the government also has its social connotation, which means to build a diversified society that accommodates itself to ecology through the participation of society at the primary level (Wang, 2013). Ecological conservation provides a carrier and driving force for the development of deliberative democracy, which in return provides the requirements for participants and the institutional foundation for the development of the former with basic thinking and mechanism designs (Zhang & Fan, 2018).

Analysis on Functions

First, the function of supporting public participation. The theory of deliberative democracy offers theoretical support and practice forms to public participation in decision-making on environmental issues (Ma, 2006). It can incorporate the different interest appeals of participants

and resolve structural difficulties in knowledge, interest, and communications (Zhang, 2016). It can also address the issue of “absence of negotiators” resulting from highly divided mastery of knowledge and information differentiation (Du, 2016) and promote the rational return of participation order (Ren, 2014). As pointed out by Graham Smith (2003, p. 62), “Theoretically, democratic deliberation improves information flow by actively engaging numerous voices, including those individuals and groups with direct experience of the effects of environmental change. Too often, decision makers in liberal democracies are far removed from the impact of their decisions, and the experiences, knowledge and perspectives of those whose practices are more attuned to the changes in ecosystems are not articulated.” Second, the function of evaluating environmental risks. As environmental deliberation is established on communication over risks, the direction it shows could be more long-term-based, inclusive, and risk-avoiding (Eckersley, 1996). Third, the function of internalizing ecological value. Smith holds that enlarging thinking is a prerequisite for cultivating ecology-favored citizens in a pluralistic society. He also thinks that deliberation tries to carry out education through dialogues, transform political perspectives through rational discussions rather than simply summing-up individual appeals. As a result, unethical and selfish preferences can be partly corrected or removed.

Analysis on Limits

Previous studies reveal many issues that might arise during deliberations for ecological governance, including mismatches between deliberation procedures and outcomes, lack of inclusiveness in expanding the number of participants for deliberation, uncertainty in the direction of value conversion, and low efficiency in large-scale deliberations (Tong & Guo, 2018). Putting deliberation procedures into perspective, Robert Goodin (1992) believes that, “To advocate democracy is to advocate procedures, to advocate environmentalism is to advocate substantive outcomes.” This opinion displays the possibility of a conflict between democratic procedures and environmental values. Scholars with different opinions pointed out that due to neutrality and fairness of procedures, deliberation only provides ecological participants more opportunities to voice their needs and participate in decision-making. Inclusiveness of deliberative politics cannot automatically give rise to public decisions that have ecological rationality (Lovbrand & Khan, 2009), and the final outcome could be a “satisfactory decision” to parties concerned after mutual compromise rather than the “optimum decision.” Putting deliberative participants into perspective, the expansion of the participating scope may gather a group of citizens with poor interpersonal skills so that their decisions may bring harm to the ecology. That means some of the participants may lack the ability of “common reasoning.” Therefore, Mike Mills and King Fraser (1996) pointed out the limits of deliberation in solving environmental risks. They recognized the fact that in certain circumstances, preference can be changed through face-to-face communication but they held an uncertain attitude toward how

much and for how long it can be changed and conflicts of preferences among different public groups may still arise.

Substantial theoretical achievements have been made in academic studies on deliberative environmental governance. As a whole, the studies feature in three characteristics. First, in terms of research approach and perspective, more emphasis has been laid on local and primary society; investigation has been conducted on hot topics under environmental deliberation in recent years such as water environment governance and NIMBY project site selection; attempts have been made to analyze the internal mechanism; second, in terms of research contents, elaboration has been made on concepts, logic, reasonableness and the limits of deliberative environmental governance; third, in terms of research methodology, normative studies have been dominant which emphasize deriving constructional thinking and schemes from existing theoretical models, but empirical studies based on data collection have been absent, leading to insufficient concern of many studies about environmental deliberation practices, i.e., causing the separation of theories from practices. Therefore, we will attempt to categorize current environmental deliberation practices in China from a typology perspective and analyze the practice orientations of deliberative environmental governance from the aspects of issues, functions, participants, procedures and methods. We hold that current practices feature a more obvious instrumental orientation based on effective governance and social control while normative value orientations of deliberative democracy are relatively inadequate.

Typological Analysis of China's Environmental Deliberation Practice

Typology is one of the most important methodologies applied in comparative political studies and there are two ways typology can be applied. One is to classify by tags, which means to categorize the types in an inductive way based on basic features. For instance, Opinions of the Communist Party of China on Strengthening the Development of Socialist Consultative Democracy classifies by participants of deliberation. Division tags in previous studies mainly cover channels, contents, process, logic, field, issues, type of interactions between government and society, relationships among participants, and power structures. The second type is to classify through a matrix formed using two or more variables. A 2×2 matrix is commonly used. By using a tag approach and the findings of previous studies for reference, we classified deliberative environmental governance into response-, autonomy-, consultation-, and supervision-based according to the attributes of environmental issues and the relationships among participants^① (See details in Table 1).

^① "Attributes of environmental issues" are categorized by individual, collective and public nature based on the scope of the group concerned. "Roles of deliberation participants" are classified by the functions of the participants into: appealer, co-governor, decision-making consultant and supervisor.

Table 1 Four Types of Environmental Deliberation

| Types of environmental deliberation | Attributes of environmental issues | Purposes of environmental deliberation | Forms of public participation | Institutional platforms for environmental deliberation |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| Response-based | Environmental interests and appeals of individuals or groups | To unblock the channels for voicing appeals and reconcile conflicts of different environmental interests | People lodge appeals in a bottom-up way and wait for the government's response | Liaison office of National People's Congress (NPC) members, and democratic consultation council in sub-districts |
| Autonomy-based | Public environmental affairs concerning urban and rural communities | To settle conflicts within communities and improve autonomy of urban residents or villagers | Collective actions within a certain area | Community roundtable meeting on environmental issues, deliberative democracy mechanism for village affairs, and online community deliberation |
| Consultation-based | Formulation of public environmental policies | To enhance scientific, democratic and legitimate levels of environmental decisions | The government plays a key role and collects public opinions through top-down channels | Regular deliberation mechanism of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), roundtable meeting for project approval, citizen jury for environmental administrative law enforcement, or a deliberative approach by "asking politics on TV shows" |
| Supervision-based | Implementation of public environmental policies | To supervise environmental governance by the government and the implementation of corresponding decisions | Combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches, and emphasis on the roles played by social organizations and the media | Special inquiry meetings held by a local People's Congress and public supervision teams for environmental protection. |

Response-based

This type of deliberation mainly involves individual and fragmented environmental issues for which the public files an appeal and submits environmental information through a bottom-up channel. It has two different practice orientations. One orientation lays emphasis on an institutionalized platform for government and public interactions so that interested parties can lodge individual or group appeals for their environmental interests and receive responses from government authorities. The typical forms include liaison offices of NPC members and democratic consultation councils in sub-districts. For example, the Ruoheng town government of Wenling city implemented a responsibility system for river cleaning in 2012. The Linping subdistrict of Yuhang district, Hangzhou city issued a policy to ban greenhouse turtle breeding in 2013. The two actions were outcomes from face-to-face deliberations and coordination between representatives of the local People's Congress or resident councils and residents of the area where the environmental issue was negotiated through a response-based deliberation platform and timely reports of relevant situations to government authorities.

The other orientation pays more attention to the resolution of a public crisis. In this case,

deliberation becomes an emergency tool that is temporarily used for a specific issue by the organizer or initiator of the deliberation activity. The paramount purpose is to appease a protest against an environmental issue and the pressure from public opinion. This type of deliberation is often applied for site selection of NIMBY projects and facilities, such as the dialogue held with local residents regarding the environmental impact of the paraxylene (PX) project in Xiamen city. Though a response-based environmental deliberation for such a purpose can ease negative public emotions in the short term, in the long run its lack of procedures and rational guidance will impede sound operation of the deliberation mechanisms and jeopardize the effectiveness of outcomes.

Autonomy-based

Communities are the basic and vital level for primary governance. They represent the cornerstones of both the social and environmental governance systems. Autonomy-based environmental deliberation focuses on collective environmental issues and emphasizes activating the self-organizing and governing abilities of society through a deliberation mechanism to mediate internal disagreements on environmental interests in urban and rural communities. The mechanism is established at the primary level with relatively clear demarcations of scope and participant relationships. Moreover, residents usually have strong political efficacy and a willingness to participate, which also makes it easier to generate an endogenous order of deliberative governance.

This type of deliberation can be realized through two approaches. One approach is to add democratic consultation to the existing mechanisms of village (residence) affairs administration to activate the deliberation role of primary autonomous organizations. The representative case is the round-table meetings held by communities in Jiangsu province for environmental issues, as well as a closed cycle of democratic consultation mechanisms developed at Xiaogucheng village, Yuhang district, Hangzhou city featuring “Issues raised by the residents and reviewed by the grid management system, schemes discussed by the parties concerned, decisions made by representatives, processes supervised by designated persons, and results evaluated by the residents.” In this way, many issues concerning improvements in the living environment were properly handled, such as sewage interception and pipeline reconnection, or site selection for public toilets. The other approach is to add new social forces to the governing entities, for instance, the resumption of gentry governance in villages. A gentry council elected by the local residents possesses the neutral and fair characteristics of “an ideal observer” and can give full play to ethical negotiations and regulation of deliberative democracy (Guo & Qin, 2018). For example, the gentry council of Chunhui Community of Deqing county, Zhejiang province discussed garbage sorting and then developed and submitted an initiative titled “On Issues and Suggestions about Household Garbage Sorting” to the local government authority.

Consultation-based

Decision-making consultation is an important institutional innovation for China's deliberative democracy. Consultation-based environmental deliberation represents a way to supplement government's public decision-making on environmental issues. This type differs from the aforementioned two types in that it embeds deliberative democracy into the government's operation and formulation of public policies, emphasizes the incorporation of opinions and suggestions from unofficial sources, endeavors to resolve differences between the bureaucracy and the social system and enhances the scientific, democratic, and legitimate levels of decision-making regarding environmental issues. Among others, the approach most commonly applied is deliberation under the framework of the CPPCC system. It was pointed out in the report at the 19th CPC National Congress, "The CPPCC, as a distinctively Chinese political institution, is a major channel for socialist consultative democracy, and its committees are specialist consultative bodies." Centering on the formulation and implementation of environmental laws, regulations and policies as well as specific issues concerning control over air, water, and rural non-point source pollution, CPPCC committees pool the wisdom of various political parties and people from different sectors through diversified and normalized deliberation platforms, such as meeting of standing committees on specific topics, consultative meetings between counterparts on proposal handling, or "Livelihood Consultation Forums." They reflect social conditions and public opinions, put forward valuable suggestions, and prepare investigations, research reports and, after the deliberations, meeting minutes to use as important references for the Party Committee and the government to aid in improving environmental decision-making. In addition, local governments launch institutional innovations by organizing roundtable meetings for project approvals and public juries for administrative penalties for environmental protection failures. They promote public participation in the government's administration through TV programs such as *Our Roundtable*, and *Dialogue on Water Conservation* by inviting representatives from all walks of life to publicly take part in consultations for environmental decision-making.

Supervision-based

In the face of government failures in environmental governance, public participation becomes a supervisory force with the lowest cost and the most effective engagement. For supervision-based environmental deliberation, it is the general public, non-governmental organizations for environmental protection, and other entities related to governance that inquire into, question about, and comment on the performance of government's environmental protection functions and decision-making as well as enterprises' control of pollution to regulate the operation of public power and make up for insufficiencies in the government's supervision capacity. This type of deliberation is mainly carried out through two approaches.

Special inquiry meetings held by a local People's Congress. Such meetings are convened by a local People's Congress for special inquiries into certain key works. Compared with other types of supervision, this approach features more interactions and pertinence. Discussions are mostly concentrated on hot issues or suggestions. The Q&A way reflects exactly a deliberative dialogue between a supervisor and the supervised so that the supervisor can express doubts and investigate details in depth while the supervised have the opportunity to explain their reasons, measures and commitments. In this way, mutual understandings can be enhanced, and a local government can be assisted in identifying significant problems and weak links in its environmental governance. Ultimately, both effectiveness and pertinence of supervision can be enhanced. One example is a special inquiry meeting on comprehensive urban and rural environment renovation held by the Standing Committee of Wenling Municipal People's Congress in 2017. The meeting was attended by representatives from the comprehensive administrative law enforcement bureau, the environmental protection bureau, and the housing development bureau of the city, and relevant town and subdistrict administration authorities.

Public supervision teams for environmental protection. China's public participation in environmental protection is often carried out without an organizational form. If public participation can be mobilized, organized and incorporated by non-governmental organizations for environmental protection, then insufficiency due to individual participation can be overcome, irrational behaviors avoided, and appropriate actions developed. The typical instance comes from the public supervision team for environmental protection jointly established by the bureau and the association for environmental protection in Jiaxing city. The team can participate in supervising government's environmental protection work, and conduct law enforcement activities in a "ordering" manner, which means it can randomly check corporate measures for environmental protections and discharges of pollutants, inquire and discuss with the enterprises concerned regarding problems identified on the spot, offer suggestions for rectification, and participate in the acceptance processes that decide whether an enterprise in question can be removed from the blacklist.

Why Can Deliberation Become an Instrumental Mechanism?

Previous studies on deliberative democracy or governance elaborate the necessity and importance of implementing deliberative democracy from the perspectives of value and function, but they are unable to explain why distorted deliberation forms such as superficial, controlled, induced, speculative, and game-type deliberation still emerge in the context of theoretical advantages and driving forces from a higher level (Xu, Chen & Feng, 2013). The reason lies in the fact that most of these studies did not pay attention to the interests and motives behind the deliberation activities of the government as a key participant. Regarding the environmental governance field, the government's interests mainly cover two aspects. One

is the public interest, which is to satisfy the desire of the public to participate in environmental protection, to respond to the public's appeals for their interests, and to expand the extent of their participation. The other is the government's own special interests, including its consideration to address specific environmental issues, avoid malpractice by officials, strengthen social control and improve governmental functions and roles. This paper presents an in-depth analysis of the practice orientations of the four types of environmental deliberations; response-, autonomy-, consultation-, and supervision-based from the aspects of scope of issues, functions, participants, procedures, and methods. We note that deliberation in China mostly acts as an instrumental mechanism guided by governance effectiveness, emphasizing the efficiency of democracy and orderliness of participation. We also state that the value pursuit of deliberative democracy for public reasons is to some extent replaced by the motives of instrumental deliberation, such as solving specific environmental issues, standardizing public participation, safeguarding social harmony and stability, strengthening organizational functions, providing consultation and promoting the implementation of environmental policies.

Scope of Issues

The effectiveness of a deliberation is closely related to the negotiability of the issue. The issue for deliberation must be suitable and negotiable and can give play to the advantages of deliberation. If this is not the case it could result in misplacement or abuse of deliberative democracy (Han, 2018). Not all disputable issues are fit for a deliberation mechanism. For instance, for a conflict due to different judgment criteria, legal ruling could be more appropriate. If deliberation is conducted for such an issue, it would not only lack efficiency, but also weaken and dissolve the responsibility of government departments. So, what kinds of environmental issues are negotiable? What kinds of fields should be prioritized for solving environmental issues with deliberative democracy? As current practice is concerned, issues for environmental deliberation are chosen based on the following features.

From the deliberation level, environmental deliberation is mainly applied to local and primary societies, and are seldom conducted at the state level. This is mainly due to constraints from deliberation costs. First, the cost of time which includes the time spent on preliminary preparations and the actual deliberations. In 2012, Japan conducted a nationwide deliberative poll on the revision of its middle and long-term energy and environmental policies. It spent more than a year conducting research and discussions and preparing the alternative scheme. The actual revision process also took nearly half a year. Second, the cost of materials, which includes leasing and arrangements for the meeting venue, printing documents, hiring experts, training participants, subsidies for working staff, guarantees of supplies, and a certain amount of economic compensation for participants. Third, the cost of labor, which mainly refers to expenses for organizing and participating in the deliberations. A working staff is needed for organizing deliberation activities. They should be familiar with the procedures and skilled in

the processes. Therefore, necessary training must be provided. Moreover, since a deliberation activity can seldom reach a consensus after just one meeting, many rounds of meetings are often needed. Coordination of schedules also poses a difficult situation for the organizer. Giovanni Sartori (1998) stressed, "All group or collective decisions have internal costs. i.e. costs for the decision-makers themselves, generally called decision-making costs..." Sartori added that the number of decision-makers was in direct proportion to decision-making costs. With an expansion in the scope of deliberation and the increase in the number of participants, the cost of deliberation rises accordingly. As a result, a large-scale and continuous deliberation activity would hardly be realizable. Thus, the cost of deliberation becomes an important factor affecting upward expansion of deliberative governance. Fundamentally, how much a deliberation activity could cost depends on the complexity and degree of uncertainty in the society. Bohman once regarded social complexity as one of the main roots of political skepticism toward the concept of deliberative democracy. For China, a country with a vast territory and a large population, social complexity could be more significant. With huge differences in economic and social development levels, resources, and environments of the various regions, appeals for environmental issues vary considerably and a sizeable cost is often incurred for reaching a consensus.

In terms of deliberation contents there are sharp conflicts between different environmental interests and disagreements in each party's standpoint. In addition, off-the-peg solutions are not available. For instance, almost every issue under the category of autonomy-based environmental deliberations concern people's immediate interests in public life, such as household garbage sorting, river cleaning, and improvements in landscaping. Most of these are closely related to the livelihood of the people involved. Without timely deliberation, relevant tasks cannot be performed or advanced smoothly. Also, environmental issues are easily accessible. They should be very specific and should not be incomprehensible because of professional or technical requirements so that ordinary people can understand critical environmental information through information disclosure or education on environmental protection to ensure the depth of communications, interactions, and quality of deliberation outcomes. For instance, the "Livelihood Consultation Forum" held by the Zhejiang Provincial People's Political Consultative Conference focused on the supervision of hazardous waste disposal, urban and rural household garbage sorting, and environment-friendly development of courier and food delivery services. Finally, most of the issues correspond to key tasks of the Party Committee and the government for environmental governance. For autonomy-based environmental deliberations, one of the sources for the issues deliberated at Xiaogucheng Village was key tasks assigned by the Party Committee or the government of a higher level. For instance, in 2018, one of the tasks of the village was assigned by Yuhang district to carry out comprehensive environmental renovation in the whole area. It is more the case for consultation- and supervision-based environmental deliberation because the main task of a local People's Political Consultative Conference is to

“centers its work on the central task and works to serve the overall interests” For instance, the local People’s Political Consultative Conferences at various levels of Zhejiang province offered comments and suggestions through a diversified deliberation platform to key environmental decision-makers of the provincial Party Committee and government, covering projects for creating clean and landscaped environments near highways, railways, rivers and mountains, projects for sewage, flood and water logging controls as well as water supply and conservation guarantees, and projects for building a beautiful Zhejiang and making a better life.

Functions

In terms of functions, the actual process of environmental deliberations sets store by the efficiency of democracy and the orderliness of participation, reflecting the tensions between the normative value of deliberative democracy and the instrumental pursuit of local government’s environmental governance. As a leading entity for environmental deliberations, a local government which is constantly driven by practical problems or governance crises, intends to adjust the existing mode of environmental management through a deliberation mechanism to adapt itself to the needs of governing a pluralistic society. Response-based environmental deliberations mainly deal with individual or group feedback on environmental issues. In addition to using deliberations as an emergency instrument to resolve environmental protests, local governments often endeavor to establish an institutionalized platform to take potential environmental risks into consideration for quick resolution. Although such an action does not match the normative deliberative democracy theory, it is in line with the need to reconstruct the channels that link the members of society to a public system during the transition period of governance. “It helps build the individual’s reliance on, belongingness to and identification with a public system” (Zhang, 2015). Consultation-based environmental deliberation is an approach through which the government delegates the opening of the decision-making process to the public with the goal of making environmental decision-making scientific and democratic. To make scientific decisions, it invites experts, scholars and other elites to provide professional advice or feasibility studies. To realize democracy, it emphasizes the collection and integration of participants’ opinions. Supervision-based environmental deliberation is like the extension of response- and consultation-based environmental deliberation. Its emphasis is to supervise the process of reaching a consensus through deliberation, to identify the problems that affect the implementation of the government’s environmental policies, and ultimately to create solutions through negotiations. Response-, consultation-, and supervision-based environmental deliberations all belong to the category of dialogue and communication between the public and a local government. Deliberation plays a role in collecting public opinions and communicating information between social needs and government responses to address information asymmetry and bounded rationality when the government formulates and implements an environmental policy. Specifically, it can respond to public appeals, resolve environmental risks, safeguard

social stability, provide policy consultations, and strengthen policy implementation.

Although autonomy-based environmental deliberation partly requires the completion of the government's governance tasks, it is closely related to the real connotation of democracy. Urban and rural communities are the major fields for practicing primary deliberative democracy. The full release of the democratic decision-making function will significantly relieve a local government's governance pressure. The success of autonomy-based environmental deliberation depends on two factors: One is that the local government is willing to play the neutral role of institutional designer and supervisor on the premise that risks are manageable and controllable; the other is that an opinion leader with a strong voice and mobilization ability is present in the primary society and how to handle the environmental issue is beyond the capability of primary cadres. Take Yuhang district of Hangzhou city, Zhejiang province as an example. As one of the first batch of districts for experimenting with community governance and service innovations, it explored the possibility of standardizing and improving a deliberation mechanism. The district also prepared a document titled "Standards for Democratic Deliberations in Urban and Rural Communities" to specify participants, contents, applicable circumstances, procedures, requirements, organizational readiness, and results applications. In an empirical study conducted by the author on a community in the district, the key role played by an opinion leader in environmental deliberation was manifest. The leading character of the case study was a housewife who had been devoted to environmental protection for over a decade. She once led the establishment of a community volunteer team for environmental protection. Since she had always followed the practice of garbage sorting herself and had been acquainted with many people in the community, under her initiation, the household garbage sorting work of the community was promoted through online and offline deliberations.

Choice of Participants

The deliberative democracy theory attaches great importance to real democracy as well as direct participation and equal interactions for citizens. If the issue involves a deeper and wider scope of interests, then there would be more stakeholders that have strong desires to participate in the deliberation. But the downside is that sometimes the opinions held by the representatives do not represent real public opinions. Previous studies show that the characters of the representatives and their political partiality will affect deliberative decision-making. Therefore, the determination of participants' qualifications decides not only whether different groups are equally entitled to participate, but also the legitimacy of the deliberation process and its results.

Experience indicates that environmental deliberation platforms that are developed under existing systems or frameworks such as NPC or CPPCC belong to the category of elite deliberations with higher professional requirements because participants include NPC or CPPCC members, experts, scholars, officials from local governments, and some voluntary representatives from the public. For instance, the Zhejiang Provincial People's

Political Consultative Conference held a deliberation meeting on special law enforcement actions for cracking down on illegal production and operations to rectify problems with road transportation, marine fisheries, and fire safety issues. The participants included 17 CPPCC members at the provincial, municipal and county levels as well as directors from 13 government departments, such as the Provincial Department of Public Security, the Bureau of Ocean and Fisheries, and the Maritime Safety Administration of Zhejiang province. Due to the professional level of deliberation procedures and technical requirements for decision-making, deliberation organizers preferred individuals or organizations that were familiar with the procedures. In this case, deliberative democracy could become an instrument allowing the government to manipulate the process for demonstrating the legitimacy of a decision thus turning it into another form of “elitism” (Yang & Li, 2017). To avoid this and to realize the balance between representativeness and extensiveness of deliberation and feasibility, a mixed member proportional (MMP) system was used experimentally in some areas. It “combines and balances the representative mechanisms for election and selection, elites and resident groups, agencies and delegating modes” (Tan, 2018). For example, the participants of the Sub-district Democratic Consultation Council of Yuhang district as well as the Xiaogucheng village’s deliberation team are made up of “fixed, voluntary, and invited representatives.”^①

Local governments applying the strong logic of “representative systems” to the selection of participants in environmental deliberations. Just as Lin Xuefei et al pointed out, “For current institutional designs or governance practices, there is a list of different circles of community representatives, ranging from NPC or CPPCC members to village representatives or residential building chiefs. Local administrative officials are used to selecting participants from such a list or arranging several voluntary citizen seats on this basis” (Lin & Shao, 2017). Certainly, this kind of representative system is continuously improving in practice as well. With more types and a wider scope of representatives, they can be chosen more fairly and comprehensively. This tendency reflects the attention of China’s deliberative governance to group equality and a preference for social order. Different from Western deliberative democracy which stresses individual equality, deliberative democracy in China’s political context emphasizes group equality, especially solidarity and cooperation among different social classes and sectors and express the core appeals of different groups in a rational way through elite representatives of those groups. Government officials can establish institutionalized links with the elite representatives through deliberation activities and most of these elite representatives have

① Representatives of democratic deliberation in Yuhang subdistrict are selected by place, age, gender and occupation. A certain proportion is assigned respectively to representatives of enterprises within the area, floating Party members, representatives of non-native population, or members of CPC, NPC and CPPCC at the district level or above, as well as representatives from other parties and female representatives. Fixed representatives of Xiaogucheng village include members of village party branches and committees, village supervisory committees, retired cadres, CPC members, gentry, village group leaders, and village representatives. Voluntary representatives are those who are stakeholders in the issue and devoted to village development. Invited representatives are officials from functional departments of the district or town government, concerned professionals, and legal consultants.

political titles such as member of CPC, NPC or CPPCC and rich experience in participating in political affairs within the system. It is easy for them to gain trust from the government and maintain good order in their environmental deliberation activities.

Procedure Design

The establishment of procedures is one of the core values of developing a deliberative democracy system. Deliberation procedures refer to methods, processes and rules to be followed during a deliberation activity. In fact, they are fundamental norms to ensure controllability and operability of deliberation. The deliberation practice of Wenling city of Zhejiang province for over a decade shows that scientific, rational, and legitimate deliberation procedures are essential for ensuring effectiveness, orderliness and sustainability of a deliberative democracy mechanism. Through analysis of current environmental deliberation practices, the approach adopted by local governments for deliberation procedure designs can be encapsulated in three main categories.

The first type is to adopt a well-established deliberation form, procedure or technique. Throughout the process of putting deliberative democracy theory into practice, a series of applicable deliberation techniques and methods are developed, including citizen conferences, citizen juries, deliberative polling, scenario workshops, and open-space meetings. In most cases, such techniques and methods can exhibit the normative value of democracy due to scientific and prudent designs in their procedures. With support from international organizations, experts, and scholars, some deliberation techniques are well applied in primary practice in China. Among the successful cases, the “democratic talkfest” adopted in Wenling city is one of the well-known ways. Environmental round-table meetings in communities of Jiangsu province receive technical support from Nanjing University and project funding from the World Bank to promote coordination and balance for community-wide environmental interests. With the help of university scholars within Zhejiang province and the EU-China Environmental Governance Program, Jiaxing city adopted jury systems to deliberate on penalties for environmental administrative enforcement cases.

The second type is to realize embedded development by drawing on existing institutional resources. According to Tan Huosheng (2013), embedded development is to “embed new heterogeneous elements into the original social-political structure to activate and transform various functions and gradually update the entire structure through constant improvements and expansion.” The central idea is to integrate a deliberative mechanism within the existing governance system, adapt it to the political, economic, cultural, and social structures in a specific area and provide resource support for initial development and constant progress in the deliberation process. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, top government officials have, in political statements about socialist deliberative democracy, proposed to “expand the consultation channels of the organs of state power, committees of the Chinese People’s Political

Consultative Conference, political parties, and community-level and social organizations.” This provides adequate legitimacy and organizational resources for extensive and multi-level institutionalized development of deliberative democracy. For the local People’s Congress and CPPCC, this is a good opportunity to break through structural constraints and enhance their political roles. Organizational transformation can be used to invigorate or reconstruct public-oriented deliberation platforms or carriers, such as liaison offices of NPC members, special inquiry meetings, and “Livelihood Consultation Forums,” to activate the previously shelved power of the NPC or CPPCC members in proposing, inquiring and questioning, and to strengthen the effectiveness of the performance of their duties during the adjournment of the congress or conference.

The third type is to strengthen standardization of deliberation procedures. Standardization refers to an activity to set out terms and conditions that can be used extensively or repeatedly for existing or potential problems to achieve the optimum order within a certain scope (GB/T20000.1-2014). Standardization is a typological way of thinking, focusing on transforming domestic and foreign theories and practices into operational, measurable, reproducible, and revisable governance standards and operating specifications. In practice, Anji county of Zhejiang province released the *Standard for Consultation Work of the People’s Political Consultative Conference*, marking the first of its kind in China. The contents cover the entire process from implementation, operation, management, and evaluation of such consultation work. This measure adds to the efforts mentioned above, such as the closed cycle of democratic consultation in Xiaogucheng village, and the *Standard for Democratic Consultation Work in Urban and Rural Communities in Yuhang District*. In a sense, standardization has become an important governance approach and basic standard for realizing scientific, highly efficient and fine-grained environmental deliberations. Its value not only lies in specifying the procedures and processes, quantifying the indexes, enhancing operability and orderliness of deliberations, reflecting and evaluating better deliberation performance, but also in documenting well-established deliberation experiences in a standardized way to reach a wider scope and gradually be assimilated into social culture and people’s daily habits.

These three types of procedure designs are necessary for promoting environmental deliberation although the first two types may be subject to competition for rare resources. Local governments are more inclined to adopt the “embedded” approach because such structural and functional embedding can minimize resistance against its application. Endogenous development momentum for environmental deliberation can thus be aroused through a two-way empowerment. Organizations within the system, such as NPC or CPPCC, can be strengthened to intervene in the government’s environmental agenda development and policy formulation. Their second choice would be a standardized deliberation procedure although this may be too procedural and be insufficient in terms of the role played by the general public so that insightful opinions or suggestions may not be easily obtained and misunderstandings or distrust may

be deepened among the participants. The practice of applying the deliberation technique is always exploratory and experimental. The most important reason is due to the tension between the focus on standardization during the application of a deliberation technique and the local government's emphasis on efficiency during environmental governance. This leads to difficulty in spreading the experience and sustainable applications of the technique could face quite a challenge. In addition, to make deliberative democracy really become a normalized operating mechanism in local environmental governance, the efforts of political officials, especially of a locally higher level, is crucial. Local political leaders are activists in local governance. They process received information and conduct institutional adjustments or policy innovations to address environmental challenges by drawing on core powers and resources within the system. Sustainability of a mechanism, however, is subject to changes in local political leaders. Different leaders may have a different focus and level of attention to issues concerning environmental governance. Their attention and interest toward a deliberative governance mechanism can affect primary practice to a large extent. The fact that some environmental deliberation cannot generate immediate institutional benefits will also influence subsequent practice efficiency, degrees of popularization, and transformations and implementations of deliberation outcomes.

Choice of methods

The above analysis shows hindrance and technical difficulties in the practice of environmental deliberation, including the scale of face-to-face deliberations, costs, and public rationality dilemmas possibly arising from strong representativeness. Therefore, it is necessary to innovate deliberation concepts and techniques, and break through limitations due to time, space, number of participants, technical barriers and the narrow-mindedness of traditional deliberation methods to enhance the effects of environmental deliberations.

With the wide use of the mobile Internet, technical empowerment has spawned modern groups of "e-citizens." Interconnecting network communities, such as the online public forums *Weibo*, QQ and WeChat groups, have already become emerging carriers for deliberations. The coexistence of a variety of participants in the same online field provides a channel for fast linkage and resource integration. Online deliberation is more characteristic of a panoramic view with low interaction costs, convenient and real-time participation, transparent information disclosures, and smooth and efficient communication. It can transcend the limits of time, space, and scale and address the situation of insufficient participation of young and middle-aged people in public affairs so that individuals of different classes can show their presence and voice their opinions online. Values emphasized by previous deliberations can be amplified on the mobile Internet. Even if the deliberation does not reach a result, the habit to deliberate online will gradually take shape in the participants and transform into online deliberation motives to boost the consciousness of citizenship and maturity of public participation.

But online deliberation has its limits as well. Problems like majority silence or information

overloading may arise. Also, for network communications, it is not face-to-face. It is fully virtual and in written form. This may cause ineffective transmission of the contents and feelings during the interactions. “Introverts prefer online communication for its convenience in participation at home. Communicating online also does not require instant response but what the participants miss is subtle expressions during a face-to-face deliberation” (Delborne et al., 2011). The problems exposed by both traditional and online deliberations give rise to the emergence of online to offline deliberations, which is preliminarily applied in autonomy-, consultation-, and supervision-based deliberation respectively. The aforementioned community in Yuhang district held several rounds of deliberation meetings in the form of WeChat group discussions to set out the scheme for household garbage sorting. Special inquiry meetings held by the Standing Committee of the People’s Congress of Wenling city and the “Livelihood Consultation Forum” organized by the Zhejiang Provincial Political Consultative Conference both achieved synchronous online to offline deliberations through live streaming. It should be pointed out that online deliberations cannot be carried out effectively without an organizer that is capable of mobilizing and skilled in deliberation techniques. Such organizers include the local People’s Congress or Political Consultative Conference which are vested with institutional authority, and leading people within the community who have gained high prestige and strong appeal. Of course, for autonomy-based environmental deliberations, some basic conditions are also required, such as relatively homogenous villagers (residents) and a stable village (community) culture. What remains a conundrum yet to be solved is how to ensure that all the parties involved will be present online and active in discussing and voting.

Conclusion

Local governments conduct environmental deliberation for both public and instrumental governance motives. The public motive is mainly to satisfy the public’s needs to participate in environmental governance and enhance the government’s response to public appeals. The instrumental motive is to meet the government’s needs to solve specific environmental issues, prevent and reduce environmental risks, and ensure public participation and order. Instrumental orientation is more obvious in terms of governance effectiveness and social control from the following dimensions, choice of issues centering on key tasks of environmental governance by the Party Committee and the government, functions emphasizing democratic efficiency and participation, choice of participants following the logic of an MMP system, deliberation procedures preferring embedment and standardization, and the mode of synchronous online to offline deliberations. Value pursuit of deliberative democracy for public reasons is to some extent replaced by instrumental deliberation motives of local governments for solving specific environmental issues, standardizing public participation, safeguarding social harmony and stability, strengthening organizational functions, providing environmental policy consultation

and promoting the implementation of these policies. Such instrumental orientations are similar to the notion of “authoritarian deliberation” proposed by He Baogang, that local governments are the key promoters and organizers for environmental deliberation practices. They strengthen government’s social control ability through managing the whole process of environmental deliberation. The general public and social organizations mostly participate in deliberation activities under a standard framework developed by the government. A key direction for the development of China’s deliberative governance in the future should be to break through the current situation where focus is laid on resolving difficult issues in governance, and put more emphasis on reflecting and realizing the intrinsic value of deliberative democracy, including realness, fairness and justice, to give play to its functions of public moral education and publicity, and to avoid formalistic deliberation.

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