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## CHINESE POLITICAL REFORM AND THE QUESTION OF "DEPUTY QUALITY"

KEVIN J. O'BRIEN AND LIANJIANG LI\*

Deng Xiaoping's 1992 "Southern Tour" (*nanxun*) may have reinvigorated economic reform, but it left political reform in the same limbo it has languished in since Hu Yaobang's removal. Several years into what is proving to be a significant burst of finance, banking, tax, and ownership reforms, China's political institutions and regime structure stand alone, oddly anachronistic and essentially frozen where they were in the mid-1980s. As Deng nears his "meeting with Marx", authority relations, leadership incentives, and decision rules continue to operate more or less as they have for some time, and the government retains its familiar authoritarian and personalistic cast.<sup>1</sup>

The halting progress of political reform in Deng's last years can be attributed to a number of factors: most notably, an abiding fear of popular protest, immobilism arising from the ongoing succession struggle, a grab for wealth and spoils by current power holders (and their offspring), and, not the least, long-standing leadership vacillation and, in some cases, outright opposition. But, fear, uncertainty, greed, and insincerity are not the only obstacles blocking meaningful political restructuring. Political reforms rivaling those that have transformed the economy are also hindered by doubts about how to shape new political institutions and differing perceptions of what the goals and costs of political reform may be. Even committed reformers pause before the example of the Soviet collapse and East European upheaval, and many insiders foresee a future brimming with unpalatable tradeoffs and potential dangers.<sup>2</sup> No individual or leadership faction wishes to be responsible for setting in motion a sequence of events that leads to national disintegration or civil war; nor do more than a handful of the politically influential wish to witness (or contribute to) a fatal elite fracturing and self-destruction.

Yet, despite these compelling motives for further delay, many within leadership circles believe that some sort of political reform and opening to society must soon occur.<sup>3</sup> This is spurred if nothing else by a realization that if the impetus for change does not originate in Zhongnanhai, it may arrive much more unpredictably via societal forces which cannot be easily controlled. Policy makers in Beijing thus promote civil service reform, measures to curb official speculation and profiteering, and new village political structures, while many lower level-leaders frankly admit that they are unsure if the current institutional framework will survive for long. How is the last major Leninist regime to reform itself knowing that no other political reform program has succeeded? What strategies are China's leaders contemplating to carry out a phased and limited opening to

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<sup>1</sup> Recent discussions of Chinese political institutions include Susan L. Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1993; David Bachman, *Bureaucracy, Economy, and Leadership in China: The Institutional Origins of the Great Leap Forward*. New York: Cambridge University Press 1991; Lynn T. White III, *Policies of Chaos*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Interviews with a bureau-level ministry official, July 1992, and several people's congress deputies, standing committee members, and staff members, October 1991.

<sup>3</sup> For an argument that political change is likely to take the form of a political opening controlled by a reformist elite, see Andrew J. Nathan, "China's Path From Communism", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (April 1993), pp. 30-42. This view was also expressed by several officials interviewed in Beijing, Wuhan, Tianjin, and Harbin in 1991 and 1992. On the political reform program more generally, see John P. Burns, "China's Governance: Political Reform in a Turbulent Environment", *China Quarterly*, No. 119 (September 1989), pp. 481-518.

society that does not entail the consequences that have led one author to speak of the "Leninist extinction"?<sup>4</sup>

To approach these questions while we are still awaiting clear signs of what the post-Deng future will hold, we have chosen to consider reform proposals that have been circulating since the mid-1980s involving the composition of China's people's congresses. As in all other Leninist regimes, if significant political reform appears it will certainly touch popular assemblies, and ongoing debates reveal much about the changes in composition already underway as well as a host of more far-reaching reforms that may become viable policy options once the succession is settled.

By examining the question of who should serve in representative bodies, we aim to show that there are at least two competing visions of political reform that spring from different understandings of 1) what the goals of reform are, and 2) different assessments of how to evaluate organizational and legislative performance. We will see that some proposals imply that top priority should be attached to building effective, non-Party, bureaucratic actors that can elbow their way into already crowded policy deliberations, while others focus more on enhancing the representative profile of popular assemblies in order to make them more acceptable to an increasingly disgruntled and frustrated populace. Both strategies involve considerable change in a polity where the Party has long dominated organizational space and monopolized claims on representation, but realizing both aims together may prove challenging insofar as proposals that emphasize strengthening people's congresses organizationally involve altering and, quite possibly, further weakening their breadth of representation.

### Increasing Deputy Quality: Whom to Exclude?

Constructing people's congresses has always been an exercise in matching nominees and targets. Deputies (or candidates in more recent years) are selected according to reasonably strict quotas which specify that each congress should have a certain proportion of women, minorities, and non-Party figures, and, depending on district circumstances, additional softer targets for workers, peasants, intellectuals, democratic party members, and so on. Although quotas are not always met, for example, after the 1986-87 elections commentators spoke of the three "too manys" (namely cadres, men, and Party members)<sup>5</sup>, considerable effort is spent ensuring that congresses are composed of deputies who satisfy three criteria: representativeness (*daibiaoxing*), breadth (*guangfanxing*), and progressiveness (*xianjinxing*).

According to Duanmu Zheng, a long-time deputy and currently a Vice-President of the Supreme Court, these selection standards diminish people's congress effectiveness and are somewhat mysterious even to deputies themselves. Not legally provided for by any regulation or law, and implemented solely through red-headed Party documents transmitted to election committees, the "three *xing*" have been interpreted to mean that deputies should be 1) drawn from all "walks of life", 2) nominated predominantly by organizations, including the Party, satellite parties and mass organizations, such as the trade union and the women's federation, and 3) politically reliable and influential leaders in their profession--for example, model workers, famous

<sup>4</sup> Ken Jowitt, "The Leninist Extinction", in Daniel Chirot (Ed.), *The Crisis of Leninism and the Decline of the Left*. Seattle: University of Washington Press 1991, pp. 74-99.

<sup>5</sup> On the "three too manys", see Ji Yu, "Guanyu difang renda daibiao suzhi de diaocha yu yanjiu" (Investigation and Research on Local People's Congress Deputies' Quality), in Zhao Baoxu and Wu Zhilun (Eds.), *Minzhu Zhengzhi yu Difang Renda* (Democratic Politics and Local People's Congresses). Xi'an: Shaanxi Chubanshe 1990, pp. 244-45; Guan Hengxin, "Jianquan daibiao houxuanren de tichu jizhi, jinyibu wanshan woguo zhijie xuanju zhidu" (Improve Nomination Procedures for Candidates and Further Perfect the Direct Election System), *Zhengzhixue Yanjiu* (Studies in Political Science), No. 3 (1988), p. 31. This issue was also raised by several Hubei provincial deputies on 27 April 1991.

cooks, ranking officials, and distinguished scientists.<sup>6</sup>

In recent years, as people's congresses have gained new responsibilities in lawmaking, supervision, cadre selection, and representation, many analysts have argued that attention to the three *xing* fills legislatures with deputies of low "quality" (*suzhi*) who are politically passive and not up to their assigned tasks. In particular, reformers have criticized three types of representatives. First, they find fault with deputies (over 20% in several surveyed congresses) who feel that serving in people's congress is purely an honor, similar to other awards that most deputies have received.<sup>7</sup> Critics of "honorary deputies" typically question the qualifications of some model workers and peasants, as well as other less-motivated legislators who are unfamiliar with people's congress work, are "thankful" for the Party's trust, and unwilling to speak.<sup>8</sup> Nearly all advocates of enhancing "deputy quality" recommend shrinking the number of inactive, often poorly educated, "honorary deputies" greatly: a common, slightly tongue-in-cheek proposal involves awarding them titles such as that among European aristocracy, or routing them to people's political consultative committees rather than State power organs.<sup>9</sup>

As people's congresses become more active in reviewing legal drafts, voting down costly investments, and rejecting unpopular officials, the second group of deputies which receives widespread derision is the "arranged" (i.e., old and about-to-retire) cadres. Throughout the 1980s, the number of elderly officials eased into high-status, low-activity positions in people's congresses increased dramatically. By the end of the decade, in some county congresses 80% of standing committee members were "looked after" (*zhaogu*) cadres, many of whom could not attend meetings regularly or engage in between-session work.<sup>10</sup> These "old revolutionaries" bring high prestige and impeccable credentials to congresses, but often little else. Some are in poor health and lack energy to lead congresses effectively, and many regard serving in legislatures to be a reward, a

<sup>6</sup> Duanmu Zheng, "Lun tigao renmin daibiao de suzhi" (On Improving the Quality of People's Deputies), *Qunyan* (The People's Voice), No. 9 (September 1989), pp. 13-14; also Liu Xia, "Zhengzhi tizhi gaige yu renmin daibiao suzhi" (Political Institutional Reform and People's Deputy Quality), *Fazhi Jianshe* (Legal Construction), No. 5 (October 1987), p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> In 1987, in two Beijing districts "almost all the non-cadre deputies had won some sort of title", while in the Hangzhou Municipal People's Congress, 56% of the deputies had received a title. See Yu Keping and Wang Fuchun, "Beijingshi haidian qu, dongcheng qu renda daibiao suzhi wenti de chouyang fenxi" (Beijing City Haidian and Dongcheng Districts' Sampled Analysis of Issues in People's Deputy Quality), pp. 206-07, and Zhao Chenggen, "Hangzhoushi renda daibiao diaocha fenxi" (Investigation and Analysis of Hangzhou People's Deputies), pp. 239-40, both in Zhao and Wu, *op. cit.* On the proportion of deputies who feel membership is purely honorific, see Suzhou Daxue Zhengzhixi Ketu Zu, "Difang renda xianzhuang guji ji gaige de jiben silu" (An Assessment of the Current Situation and Fundamental Thinking on Reform of Local People's Congresses), p. 15; Wang Yukai, "Zhiyue difang renda zuoyong fahui de zhuyao zhang'ai jiqi gaige de duice" (Major Obstacles that Restrict Local People's Congresses from Playing Their Role and Countermeasures), p. 37; Ji Yu, p. 245, all in Zhao and Wu, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> Interviews with a leading member of the Institute of Political Science, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 28 March 1989, and with a prominent constitutional scholar, 16 May 1990; see also, She Xuxin and Xu Laiqin, "Guanyu zhijie xuanju zhong ruogan wenti de tantao" (Exploring Problems of Direct Elections), *Faxue Yanjiu* (Studies in Law), No. 1 (February 1987), p. 5. On feeling "thankful" for being selected, see Jiang Fukun, "Ying ba tigao renmin daibiao canzheng nengli fangzai shouwei" (We Should Improve Deputy Ability to Participate in Politics Before Everything Else), *Lilun Neican* (Internal Reference Materials on Theory), No. 9 (1987), p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> See Chang Mu, "NPC, CPPCC to See 'Major Reorganization'" in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service-Daily Report (China)* (FBIS-DR-CHI), No. 19 (1 February 1993), p. 20; Duanmu Zheng, *op. cit.*, p. 15. On inactive deputies, see Kevin J. O'Brien, "Agents and Remonstrators: Role Accumulation by Chinese People's Congress Deputies", *China Quarterly*, No. 138 (June 1994), in press.

<sup>10</sup> Yu Shi, "She xianji renda changweihui shi yixiang zhongyao gaige" (Establishing County-Level People's Congress Standing Committees is an Important Reform), *Neibu Wengao* (Internal Manuscripts), No. 23 (1988), p. 14. On increased numbers of "arranged" deputies, see also Duanmu Zheng, *op. cit.*, p. 15; Li Zuxing, "Renda biaojuexi ji qi gaige shexiang" (Ideas on People's Congress Voting Systems and Other Reforms), *Faxue* (Jurisprudence), No. 11 (November 1986), p. 6.

"second line" job that enables them to prolong and honorably finish their careers. These former administrators are also singularly obedient and typically unfamiliar with people's congress work, while more than a few are poor speakers who are accustomed to working hierarchically through strict "leadership relations" rather than collegially.<sup>11</sup>

Most advocates of reforming legislative composition also disparage a third group of deputies, namely leaders in their own fields who are politically apathetic. These might be overextended intellectuals committed to their research, or business people busy making money, or scientists who refuse to be drawn away from the laboratories. Deputies of this sort, whose numbers also increased throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, have enjoyed bright careers but are deemed unsuitable for people's congress membership because they lack "social activism" and the volunteer's mentality essential for part-time, unpaid legislative work--they find serving to be a "burden" and are unwilling to invest time and effort to study documents carefully or to meet constituents between sessions, and they are not sufficiently interested in politics to be effective representatives, overseers, or lawmakers.<sup>12</sup>

That people's congresses are packed with too many "honorary deputies", retired cadres, and apolitical experts is widely appreciated.<sup>13</sup> But who should replace these "unsuitable" deputies? How should "deputy quality" be improved? Two sets of alternatives, broadly conceived, have been circulating for several years and recent elections suggest that certain changes have begun.

### Increasing Deputy Quality: Emphasizing Education and Organization Building

One group of commentators recommends downplaying the three *xing* as traditionally understood and emphasizing "cultural level" (*wenhua shuiping*) (i.e., education) within each "circle". What they envision are congresses composed of deputies who have a "comparatively high" or a "definite level" of educational attainment in relation to their social peers. From township congresses to the NPC and for deputies from each circle, minimum qualifications would winnow out the patently unqualified, and congresses would become "galaxies of talent" stocked with enthusiastic and able, mostly young and middle-aged deputies.<sup>14</sup> Although targets would continue to exist, with positions reserved for minorities, women, and members of democratic parties, illiterates would generally be excluded. Selected representatives from newly-important strata would also be drawn in to give expression to an increasingly complex and differentiated society, highly motivated (but not too many) intellectuals and cadres would be selected, and election committees would choose nominees who have well-developed analytical powers and keen insight, who have the trust of their

<sup>11</sup> Duanmu Zheng, *op. cit.*, p. 15; Liu Xia, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-22; Wang Yukai, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36; Ji Yu, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-49; Jiang Fukun, *op. cit.*, p. 16; Gu Laixun, Cao Wenguang, Li Jianwei and Zhang Qian, "Jiaqiang renda changweihui jianshe fahui renda changweihui zuoyong" (Strengthen People's Congress Standing Committee Structure and Bring into Play Their Role), p. 171, in Zhao and Wu, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Liu Xia, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21; She and Xu, *op. cit.*, p. 5; Wu Daying interview, 28 March 1989; Wuhan deputy interviews, March 1991; Duanmu Zheng, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15; Peng Mingwu, "Lun renmin daibiao de suzhi goucheng" (On the Structure of People's Deputy's Quality), *Zhengzhi yu Falü* (Politics and Law), No. 1 (February 1988), p. 20. On legislative composition since 1954, see Kevin J. O'Brien, *Reform Without Liberalization: China's National People's Congress and the Politics of Institutional Change*. New York: Cambridge University Press 1990, pp. 61-65, 127-33.

<sup>13</sup> In addition to the sources cited above, a concise summary of these concerns is provided in Zheng Gongcheng, "Suggestions on Reforming the People's Congress Deputy System", *FBIS-DR-CHI*, No. 215 (7 November 1988), pp. 29-30, from *Qunyan* (The People's Voice), No. 9 (September 1988), p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> On "galaxies of talent", see Tan Jian, "Reform and Strengthen China's Political System", *Chinese Law and Government*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring 1987), p. 49. For proposals to lower the age of deputies, see Chen Xueru, "Tigao renmin daibiao suzhi wenti de tantao" (Exploring the Issue of Raising People's Deputy Quality), *Xiangtan Daxue Xuebao* (Journal of Xiangtan University), No. 3 (1990), p. 56.



constituents, and who can act as effective supervisors and lawmakers.<sup>15</sup>

Backers of maximizing quality within each sector typically advocate nominating and electing more economic and legal professionals, e.g., lawyers, urban planning and management experts, accountants, bankers, traders, and entrepreneurs, and they believe that some workers and peasants should continue to serve, albeit only those with the highest cultural quality available.<sup>16</sup> Their aim, first and foremost, is to increase the efficiency and capacity of the State and to strengthen people's congresses organizationally by enhancing the technical and political skills of all deputies (particularly standing committee members). They believe that this hinges on improving deputy training and educational attainments so that legislators can help shape China's developing market economy and stand up to powerful bureaucratic rivals they work with and supervise. They seek to build legislatures that, by virtue of their top-notch staff and their deputies' standing and technical expertise, cannot be ignored: congresses composed of intellectual and political heavyweights who have the talent, prestige, and inclination to enlarge legislative jurisdiction, accrue resources, and enhance organizational capacity. In the words of two scholars chiding passive and frequently out-of-touch deputies from one overrepresented group, "old revolutionaries have a place because of their long experience, but they should have at least average quality to be a deputy".<sup>17</sup>

Organization builders who adopt this perspective advocate the sophisticated use of quotas and attention to "all circles", but also wish to expand the number of categories "looked after" and to combine the three *xing* with heightened attention to education.<sup>18</sup> They believe that legislative composition is "limited" by the quality of the population, and that deputy profiles will gradually improve with the general population.<sup>19</sup> At this time, they feel that few congresses need to include deputies who cannot read legal documents or understand complex budget proposals and that the interests of the least educated can be upheld by others. Deputies, they argue, must be able to read newspapers and must have enough legal knowledge to vote intelligently and to determine if cadres are violating the law.<sup>20</sup> They suggest that enhancing deputy quality is reasonably important and feel that congresses should be a mosaic of the best educated and most highly trained from many circles.

Evidence from recent elections suggests that this view has won considerable leadership support. Post-election reports still provide breakdowns of how many deputies are drawn from each circle, but the number of legislators with little or no education is declining rapidly. In one submunicipal congress, for example, scribes were needed in 1980 but had disappeared by 1987.<sup>21</sup> In a county congress outside Tianjin, the number of illiterate and semi-illiterate deputies dropped

<sup>15</sup> See Fu Qingpei and Lu Shaohua, "Shilun renmin daibiao de suzhi" (On People's Deputy Quality), *Kexue Shehuizhuyi Cankao Ziliao* (Reference Materials on Scientific Socialism), Nos. 19-20 (1987), p. 40; Duanmu Zheng, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-16; Liu Xia, *op. cit.*, p. 21; interviews with three provincial, city, and district deputies, 15 April 1991, and with a provincial-level standing committee member, 19 October 1991. For suggested educational criteria for county deputies, see Zhang Jianguo, "Shixi renmin daibiao de suzhi" (Analysis of People's Deputy Quality), *Tianjin Shelian Xuekan* (Journal of the Tianjin Association of Social Scientists), No. 7 (1987), p. 28. On relaxed requirements for minority deputies, see Peng Mingwu, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> Chang Mu, *op. cit.*, p. 20; Duanmu Zheng, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Fu and Lu, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>18</sup> On maintaining "certain ratios" but avoiding "rigid prescriptions", see Xu Datong and Li Zhao, "Shilun xuanqu huafen de zuoyong" (Discussing the Role of Dividing up Electoral Districts), *Tianjin Shelian Xuekan* (Journal of the Tianjin Association of Social Scientists), No. 10 (1986), p. 22; also Ji Yu, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with vice-chairman of a provincial congress, 11 May 1991; see also Wu Zhilun and Ling Yan, "Guanyu tigao difang renda daibiao suzhi de jige wenti" (Several Issues Concerning Improving Deputy Quality), p. 181, in Zhao and Wu, *op. cit.*; Zhang Jianguo, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup> Duanmu Zheng, *op. cit.*, p. 14; Fu and Lu, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>21</sup> Duanmu Zheng, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

from 19% in 1980 to none by the late 1980s.<sup>22</sup> In the Changzhou City Congress illiterates also disappeared in the 1980s, and by the end of the decade, 30% of city deputies and 21% of district deputies had reached college level.<sup>23</sup> In the Hangzhou and Nanjing city people's congresses, the percentage of college-educated skyrocketed to 20% and 43%, respectively by the end of the 1980s, and in Baoji city the number of college-educated rose from 13% to 19% in the same period.<sup>24</sup>

Increased respect for education and efforts to include underrepresented professionals were even more evident at the national level. In the 1993 NPC elections, deputies from economic, legal, technical, and entrepreneurial circles entered the Congress in record numbers, and the cultural level of deputies continued to rise, with 69% college-educated deputies by 1993--up from 56% in 1988 and 45% in 1983.<sup>25</sup>

Maximizing the cultural quality and professional skills of deputies sector by sector is not, of course, the only way to reshape China's legislative composition or to increase the impact of people's congresses. More controversially, some commentators and deputies emphasize education even further and also highlight political experience and savvy. These critics of past selection criteria suggest that congresses should be comprised of individuals possessing extraordinary cultural and bureaucratic credentials irrespective of social strata and origin. They wish to staff congresses primarily with highly educated professionals and "practical scholars", many of whom have considerable government experience. They believe that deputy quality, narrowly defined, is of paramount importance and argue that "the majority of people with knowledge and ability to participate are administrative leadership cadres and that reducing their number will inevitably reduce deputy quality further".<sup>26</sup> They contend that intellectuals and cadres already participate in legislative sessions more than others and that deputies from these groups are best able to maneuver through the corridors of power and to comprehend the many technical issues surrounding lawmaking and supervision. They claim that Party deputies offer the most penetrating criticisms at legislative sessions and that urban deputies with professional backgrounds are most likely to vote against government proposals. In their view, speeches and suggestions made by less-educated deputies are often impractical and even laughable (i.e., poorly prepared and politically naive) and they suggest that congresses should be composed of highly trained and seasoned experts in administration who can truly manage the nation.<sup>27</sup>

Supporters of this approach to legislative development see an irresolvable conflict between representative "breadth" (as currently understood) and deputy quality, and have little sympathy for worker and peasant deputies who weigh down congresses and dilute the influence of people deemed more able. They ridicule quotas and the notion that all circles should be represented, and some call for the complete removal of labor models and neighborhood committee deputies, who contribute to a congresses' mass base (*qunzhong jichu*), but are unable to participate in many

<sup>22</sup> Zhang Jianguo, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> Suzhou Daxue Zhengzhixi Ketu Zu, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>24</sup> Bao Yu'e, Pang Shaotang and Sun Yezhong, "Guanyu Nanjing renmin daibiao dahui de diaocha" (Investigation of the Nanjing City People's Congress), p. 100, in Zhao and Wu, *op. cit.*; Zhao Chenggen, *op. cit.*, pp. 231-32; Ji Yu, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

<sup>25</sup> Zhang Sutang and Zhang Yinsu, "2977 to Attend 8th Congress", *FBIS-DR-CHI*, No. 33 (22 February 1993), p. 17; Chang Mu, *op. cit.*, p. 40. For the earlier statistics, see O'Brien, *Reform Without Liberalization*, p. 132.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted text appears in Wu and Ling, *op. cit.*, p. 178. See also Kong Lingwen and Yuan Xiangmei, "Guanyu quxian renda daibiao zhijie xuanju de diaocha" (Investigation of District and County People's Deputies' Direct Elections), pp. 270-71, in Zhao and Wu, *op. cit.* On placing deputy quality first, see Jiang Fukun, *op. cit.*, p. 17; interviews with a city and a provincial deputy, 15 April 1991.

<sup>27</sup> Interviews with a city and district deputy, 8 May 1990, a provincial deputy, 10 May 1990, and a leading constitutional scholar, 16 May 1990. A typical defense of increasing representation of intellectuals and political experts in congresses can be found in Chen Yanqing and Xu Anbiao, "Lishun renda waibu guanxi tigao renda neizai huoli" (Rationalizing People's Congresses External Relations and Heightening Their Internal Vitality), *Zhongguo Faxue* (Law of China), No. 6 (November 1990), pp. 11-12; also Chang Mu, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

aspects of work.<sup>28</sup> Unsurprisingly, these devotees of knowledge and government experience support redrawing election district lines and creating special, multimember districts so that cadre and intellectual deputies congregated in certain units can avoid "bumping cars" and can be elected in disproportionate numbers.<sup>29</sup>

This strategy of reform directly challenges the three *xing* and is currently a minority, officially frowned-upon position, often expressed in hushed tones and elliptical language. Though bearing some resemblance to perspectives that counsel maximizing cultural quality within each circle, its near-obsession with education and incorporating insiders threatens to disenfranchise most workers and peasants, and openly aims to purge the Party of its "peasant consciousness" (*nongmin yishi*) as well as its historic privileging of the urban working class. In this regard, attention to political expertise and knowledge reflects a strongly bureaucratic notion of how to acquire and wield power--a belief that organizations prosper through association with powerful, coopted individuals and by gaining proximity to existing centers of authority--and it also masks a reservoir of anti-democratic attitudes and a dubious commitment to political equality among some ostensible reformers. Similar attitudes toward the less educated (one is tempted to say the "unwashed") have, of course, been noted in many studies of the protest movement of 1989, and some Western scholars have attributed its failure (in part) to an inability to knit together a broad, multi-class, anti-regime coalition.<sup>30</sup>

Strictly limited inclusion is usually justified as a means to remove undereducated deputies so that congresses can get on with their work and become a stronger organizational force. Unsurprisingly, this view is most often associated with intellectual and younger cadre deputies, and with legislative staff members devoted to strengthening standing committees by bringing in prestigious officials who are powerful in other systems and surrounding them with politically savvy, non-cadres who have dazzling intellect, useful skills, and golden tongues. Those who focus on this form of organization building are by and large not impressed with the overall quality of the Chinese population (and are unwilling to wait for "gradual improvement")<sup>31</sup>, and they feel that ordinary Chinese only marginally help legislatures occupy institutional space and cannot participate effectively in many of the very technical tasks that people's congresses have been assigned. Theirs is an elitist, technocratic, bureaucratic, and ultimately authoritarian understanding of political reform and legislative development.<sup>32</sup> It is here that differing approaches to deputy quality reveal social fault lines that are likely to persist for some time and, perhaps, the first stirrings of a post-Communist (but not necessarily democratic), interest-based politics, i.e., social clusters pressing for better representation and seeking to turn the tables on groups that have

<sup>28</sup> Zhao Chenggen, *op. cit.*, p. 240; interview with a city deputy, 15 April 1991.

<sup>29</sup> Xu and Li, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-28.

<sup>30</sup> On the 1989 protests and elitism in Chinese "democratic thought", see Elizabeth J. Perry, "Intellectuals and Tiananmen: Historical Perspective on an Aborted Revolution", in Daniel Chirot, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-46; Andrew G. Walder and Gong Xiaoxia, "Workers in the Tiananmen Protests: The Politics of the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation", *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 29 (January 1993), p. 28; Daniel Kelliher, "Keeping Democracy Safe From the Masses", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (July 1993), pp. 379-96. A short but informative discussion of intellectuals' perception of the Party's peasant consciousness can be found in Perry Link, *Evening Chats in Beijing*. New York: Norton 1992, pp. 135-39.

<sup>31</sup> Wu and Ling, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-79, 181.

<sup>32</sup> A large literature on "technocracy" has developed in recent years. See Hong Yung Lee, *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1991; Li Cheng and Lynn White, "Elite Transformation and Modern Change in Mainland China and Taiwan: Empirical Data and the Theory of Technocracy", *China Quarterly*, No. 121 (March 1990), pp. 1-35; Cheng Li and David Bachman, "Localism, Elitism and Immobilism: Elite Formation and Social Change in Post-Mao China", *World Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (October 1989), pp. 64-94; Xiaowei Zang, "The Fourteenth Central Committee of the CCP: Technocracy or Political Technocracy?", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 33, No. 8 (August 1993), pp. 787-803; Xiaowei Zang, "Elite Formation and the Bureaucratic-Technocracy in Post-Mao China", *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (March 1991), pp. 114-23.



previously occupied privileged positions: groups that the new select regard to be undeserving, perhaps even inferior. It is while watching supercilious, coopted intellectuals denigrate less-educated workers and peasants, or young staff members ridicule "old revolutionaries", or entrepreneurs make fun of managers from State-owned factories, that the phrase "deputy quality" becomes condescending and even chilling: where in the name of bureaucratic necessity some ostensible "democratic reformers" show themselves to be more than willing to exclude others of different backgrounds.

### Increasing Deputy Quality: Emphasizing Social Diversity and Broad Representation

But all legislative reformers are not "elitists" by any means--certainly not elitists in the sense Chen Xitong suggested when condemning the "black hands" who allegedly masterminded the popular uprising of 1989.<sup>33</sup> For the second group of reformers under consideration, glorifying intellect and experience is unacceptable inasmuch as it promises to derail reform and to replace one form of statist domination and authoritarianism with another. Several scholars, deputies, and a people's congress liaison officer whom we interviewed argued that education and political experience are far less important selection criteria than the above organization-building perspectives suggest. They noted that cadres already have an established presence in government decision making and that "cooperative" intellectuals and technical experts are increasingly well represented through many channels, e.g., local and national political consultative conferences, government research and policy offices, and think tanks linked to policy makers at every level.

These defenders of traditionally well-represented groups (among others) feel that little-educated, often blunt peasants and workers understand their interests quite well: that, given an opportunity, deputies from humble origins can speak effectively (if not always elegantly) about excessive fees, unemployment, official corruption, and low agricultural prices, and that they need not possess outstanding cultural quality or detailed legal knowledge to represent themselves. They favor preserving greater social diversity within legislative chambers, and question whether officials or intellectuals can accurately reflect mass interests. They note that so-called low quality deputies proposed many important amendments to the constitution in the early 1990s while most cadres and scholars who served in congresses sat silent. They believe that the population's quality is sufficient for representative workers and peasants to take their place in congresses in reasonable numbers, and that deputies should be spokespersons for a range of social interests rather than an integrated coterie of highly educated intellectuals, professionals, and officials.<sup>34</sup>

Instead of demanding extraordinary levels of formal education and political experience, reformers who focus on the social and representative reach of congresses extol enthusiasm, bravery, and eagerness to participate. They feel that China needs open discussion of public affairs by people who lack a political voice more than it needs an entrenched, new bureaucratic actor, and that people's congresses should not (and will not) develop by edging closer to the State apparatus. Their view of the ideal deputy is nearer to an opposition MP grilling (and embarrassing) a British prime minister during question time than an American subcommittee chairman shepherding a thousand-page bill through Congress, the bureaucracy, and the executive.

This perspective differs from those presented above mainly in that it draws attention to the consequences of packing congresses with "too many" cadres and intellectuals. While its proponents agree that entrepreneurs and specialists and other new strata deserve representation, they argue

<sup>33</sup> See Chen Xitong, "Report on Checking the Turmoil and Quelling the Counter-Revolutionary Rebellion", *Beijing Review*, Vol. 32, No. 29 (17-23 July 1989), pp. I-XX. A balanced and informative discussion of "elitist democracy" is available in Harold Waterman, "Which Way to Go? Four Strategies for Democratization in Chinese Intellectual Circles", *China Information*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Summer 1990), pp. 19-23.

<sup>34</sup> An NPC General Office staff member expressed this view particularly strongly in an interview on 14 May 1991. Elements of the argument can also be found in Chen Xueru, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57; Ji Yu, *op. cit.*, pp. 245, 252; interview with provincial deputy, 27 April 1991.

that cadres and other Party members should not be allowed to dominate congresses or to use their status to speak for others, and that people's congresses should not become "second Party committees" or "cadre meetings" where officials pretend to supervise themselves. After noting that over 80% of county-level deputies are cadres, one analyst summed up this position with an epigram worthy of Mao or Deng: "too many officials and too few citizens multiplies distrust of people's congresses".<sup>35</sup> Legislatures, in this view, are not simply new bureaucracies whose influence and societal impact depend on the rank and clout of well-connected, well-trained deputies. They are representative assemblies which draw power and meaning from their popular base.

As might be expected, advocates of this strategy suggest that newly elected intellectuals and professionals (as well as their supporters) should be watched closely for self-interested attempts to marginalize or disenfranchise the less educated, and that all illiterates, for example, need not be summarily excluded--particularly from local congresses. In the plaintive words of an NPC General Office official: "Some intellectuals would just as soon have a people's congress composed entirely of intellectuals; but this is not acceptable. Much of China's population is still illiterate or barely literate. Don't they deserve a little representation, too?"<sup>36</sup>

Reformers who question the prevailing, near-dominant focus on bureaucratic organization building, and who doubt that increased entwinement with existing power is the optimal path to legislative development, are concerned that appropriate attention to elevating deputy quality can become a justification for removing entire strata of the population. While they generally agree that model workers and labor heroes should be reduced in number, they would prefer to see them replaced with capable, outspoken deputies from farms and factories who will speak up for underpaid workers, township and village enterprises, and displaced peasants. Toward this end, they defend reconstituted and flexible quotas and recommend paying attention to "suitable composition"<sup>37</sup>, i.e., preventing congresses from becoming havens for intellectuals and cadres.

Among those who reject bureaucratizing popular assemblies and professionalizing legislative composition, the major note of discord arises between "optimists" who are confident that meaningful changes can be made within the current institutional framework, and "pessimists" who believe that a comprehensive political reform must occur before attending to the relatively minor and derivative issue of staffing people's congresses. The pessimists, in our experience predominantly radical intellectuals, dissidents and Hong Kong deputies (though similar views are probably held by others who are too cautious to speak up), criticize the Party's monopoly of power and point to manipulation of elections, insufficient deputy immunities, Party stage-managing of sessions, and limited disclosure of legislative work, arguing that it is naive to expect deputies (whomever they might be) to influence decision making significantly or to stand up to officials. In the pessimists' view, low deputy quality is a symptom rather than a cause of legislative weakness, and undue attention to composition is premature so long as congresses are designed to represent the regime to the people. For pessimists, institutional reforms, including free, fair and fully contested elections, are the only way to locate good candidates, to increase deputy responsibility, and to heighten mass interest. In the absence of such reforms, they suggest, most candidates who serve in people's congresses will continue to feel beholden and indebted to the

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<sup>35</sup> The quoted text appears in Zhang Tianlun, "Dui qianghua renmin daibiao canzheng yizheng zuoyong de sikao" (Thoughts on Strengthening the Role of Deputies in Participating in and Discussing Politics), *Faxue* (Jurisprudence), No. 6 (1988), p. 5. For commentators who argue that congresses include too few workers and mass deputies and too many cadres, see Chen Xueru, *op. cit.*, p. 56, Yu and Wang, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-200; Ji Yu, *op. cit.*, pp. 244-45. Concern about "second party committees" is expressed in Ji Yu, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

<sup>36</sup> Interview, 14 May 1991.

<sup>37</sup> Ji Yu, *op. cit.*, p. 245; Interview with NPC General Office staff member, 14 May 1991.

Party, and few will find a way to become true people's representatives.<sup>38</sup>

This view, "pessimistic" only in that it confirms the need for wide-ranging reforms, highlights the importance of institutions, and shifts attention from questions concerning "who serves" to the formal and informal rules that constrain and enable deputy behavior. For the most structurally minded pessimists, institutions matter greatly indeed and deputy quality and citizenship participation can be virtually "read off" institutional arrangements. In the words of an NPC Standing Committee researcher who particularly dislikes the faintly condescending tone of some organization builders, "the view of some people that the democratic consciousness of ordinary Chinese is low is mistaken. . . the problem is enabling citizens to reach their aspirations through concrete institutions. Only if we link electoral institutions and citizen interests and aspirations will they show great interest".<sup>39</sup> Or, even more pointedly from a Hong Kong-based deputy, "step-by-step changes can't lead to a qualitative, systemic change. It's not the people, like so many say; it's the system".<sup>40</sup>

The optimists, on the other hand, are more hopeful that transforming legislative composition can be one of many simultaneous steps in a slow-building political reform offensive that opens the political system incrementally and appreciably.<sup>41</sup> They seem to believe that representatives, even in current circumstances, can cultivate a dual loyalty, i.e., they can act as both agents of the regime and as representatives and remonstrators on behalf of the whole people or a given social stratum. They believe that deputies, at the very least, can identify and struggle against the petty injustices of State socialism and that congresses' greatest impact is on "micro-issues" rather than the "macro-issues" that organization builders tend to emphasize.<sup>42</sup> They acknowledge that the current political system is unrepresentative and hierarchical, and they have no illusions that a few outspoken critics can transform a massive and entrenched bureaucracy from the inside. Somewhat reminiscent of Mikhail Gorbachev during the first days of *glasnost*, they believe what China needs are people who will point out big lies and speak small truths, and they see people's congresses as potential bully pulpits (Lenin's "talk shops", if you will) from which uncomfortable and obvious truths may emerge and enter the public discourse.

### Conclusion

In representative assemblies that are constructed as much as elected, legislative composition primarily reflects who a regime deems to be its ideal citizens. Serving in a Chinese people's

<sup>38</sup> Interview with a Hong Kong-based deputy, 6 November 1991, a city deputy, 17 October 1993; also, more generally on optimists and pessimists and "the difficulty of attracting people of high quality to a low status organization", see Wu and Ling, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-83. On mass reaction to partially contested elections, candidate recruitment, and continuing electoral imperfections, see Ge Shugang and Liu Jinxiu, "Cha'e xuanju de zhenhan" (The Shock of Contested Elections), *Qishi* (Seeking Truth), No. 2 (July 1988), pp. 36-39. Yan Jiaqi has argued that Beijing's deputies are very able, but since China lacks a "political responsibility system" (e.g., direct elections) they are not truly accountable to voters. See Zhang Weiguo, "Zhongguo de xiwang zai yu minzhu yu fazhi" (China's Hopes Lie in Democracy and Legality), *Shijie Jingji Daobao* (World Economic Herald), 3 April 1989, p. 11.

<sup>39</sup> Cai Dingjian, "Gaohao huanjie xuanju, tuijin minzhu jianshe" (Manage New Elections Well and Advance Democratic Construction), *Fazhi Ribao* (Legal Daily), 5 March 1990, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Interview, 6 November 1991.

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of the "socialist parliamentary approach", which bears considerable resemblance to the "optimistic" position discussed here, see Waterman, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-27.

<sup>42</sup> Attention to "macro-issues" was recommended by a vice-chairman of a provincial-level people's congress, 11 May 1991, a professor of Law and former adviser to the NPC, 8 May 1991, and by Lu Jiebiao and Liu Chuanchen, "Lun renmin daibiao de suzhi yu zhineng" (On the Quality and Functions of People's Congress Deputies), *Zhengzhi yu Falu* (Politics and Law), No. 3 (June 1990), pp. 20-21. For many examples of deputies' attention to local "micro-issues" (e.g., waste disposal, water pollution, road building, theft prevention, price gouging, fuel shortages) and a discussion of ways deputies overcome role conflict, see O'Brien, "Agents and Remonstrators: Role Accumulation by Chinese People's Congress Deputies", *op. cit.*

Congress confers prestige on an individual and acknowledges official recognition of his or her "circle", and the elevation of certain groups and underrepresentation of others reveals much about who the leadership trusts and who has been granted a right to assess the regime and its policies. Over the years, representatives of various social strata have circulated through congresses, with yesterday's revolutionary art workers and worker-peasant-soldiers replaced by today's intellectuals, scientists, lawyers, and entrepreneurs. As gatherings of the politically favored, people's congresses have always been designed to establish and communicate standards of morality and patriotism. Furthermore, these arenas have proven instructive as places to detect the blind spots of leaders who have few effective feedback mechanisms and much reason to be concerned that they are out of touch with the rapidly changing society they rule. In this sense, adjustments in legislative composition are a yardstick that displays the extent of openness prevailing in China at a given time: evolving membership tells us who the post-Mao leadership "sees" when they peer over the walls of Zhongnanhai and to whom they are willing to extend rights of political inclusion.

Currently, it is clear that education and professional skills related to lawmaking and supervision are ascending in the hierarchy of traits that deputies possess. Although quotas still exist and nearly mindless matching still occurs, deputies are increasingly recruited for their ability to engage in legislative work and their expected contribution to converting people's congresses into effective bureaucratic actors. Viewed from either of the organization-building perspectives outlined above, people's congresses are little different than any other government organ scrambling for expanded jurisdiction and increased capacity--they are organizations seeking a valued place in a crowded policy-making arena, they are seeking to become what might be called "embedded" in the political system.<sup>43</sup>

Toward this end, expanded rights of inclusion are extended to trusted, coopted members of certain social groups, but less so and more cautiously to others. Cadres, "practical" intellectuals, legal and economic experts, and successful business people are welcome and sought, provided they are politically reliable and adept at acting within bureaucratic settings. Excessive representation of certain non-elite strata, on the other hand, promises either 1) to leave congresses filled with undereducated "honorary deputies" and useless Party hacks, or, if more representative, outspoken mass deputies and unpredictable dissidents are selected, 2) to undermine leadership support for legislatures and return them to irrelevance. In the view of most organization builders, congresses should be dominated by cadres with "democratic consciousness" (*minzhu yishi*), responsible intellectuals, and talented, pro-regime representatives of sectors that are gaining new prominence. Deputies from these circles are attuned to existing political circumstances, are skilled at bureaucratic (rather than popular) articulation, and they offer the potential of checking unconstrained power.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, they may become the agents of opportunistic organizational development, while protecting their own group interests and perhaps contributing to regime stability and currently flimsy claims of accountability. These deputies are needed, now and for some time, according to organization builders, to help congresses occupy institutional space in an inhospitable, near-absolutist environment (where existing centers of power are entrenched and participation must be channeled to be effective) and because success as an organization at times takes precedence over success as a full-fledged representative assembly engaged in the rough-and-tumble of conflict-ridden politics.

Our latter group of reformers, however, questions this strategy of legislative development, essentially asking, "would this result in meaningful reform?" If legislatures win a presence in lawmaking and supervision, and a place at the table when decisions are made, but have been drained of much of their social diversity so that the NPC's Law Committee resembles the State Council's Legislative Affairs Bureau, what has been accomplished? Why must the end of largely

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<sup>43</sup> On the concept of "legislative embeddedness", see Kevin J. O'Brien, "Chinese People's Congresses and Legislative Embeddedness: Understanding Early Organizational Development", *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (April 1994), in press.

<sup>44</sup> This perspective was most clearly articulated by a chairman of a county people's congress standing committee, October 1993.



mythical, State socialist representation signal the beginnings of a new form of highly bureaucratized and restricted representation?

Reformers who stress social diversity and representative reach see an unresponsive regime with a tattered and shopworn legitimating myth and an increasingly confused and unnecessarily narrow representative focus. While they applaud the introduction of deputies from formerly underrepresented sectors, they perceive a large and growing fissure between State and society and growing divisions *within* society. They seem to suggest that if the regime is to survive and to navigate through the moral crisis that felled other Leninist regimes, it must find a popular constituency that does not hold it in contempt--and "cooperative" intellectuals and technical specialists, a smattering of atypical peasants and workers, and its own cadres are not sufficient. For the polity to be reconstituted on a sound basis, they imply that the Party must return to its roots and win back peasants whose incomes have stagnated since the mid-1980s and who have received less State investment under Deng than under Mao. They also suggest that the Party must appeal to the former socialist aristocracy--the industrial working class--which has largely been left behind by reform and which is now threatened by unemployment and declining real incomes. These reformers focus on widening representation across social strata and redrawing the compact between a shaken State and increasingly assertive social forces, and they see people's congresses as places to court broad support, to soften authoritarianism, and to provide a modicum of responsiveness.

Of course, real-world policy choices are rarely as stark as social scientific analysis might suggest. Legislatures are large and by their very nature diverse. In the future, people's congress composition may change in ways that reflect both approaches to reform, and many of the commentators, deputies, and staff members cited above are quite aware of this. Some deputies may become bureaucratic infighters who work within prevailing systemic constraints to carve out a place for their organization, while others become thorns in the side of established authorities by pushing inconvenient group or regional interests and demanding accountability. It is quite possible that legislative leadership and standing committees, for example, will be professionalized and bureaucratized while ordinary deputies drawn from a variety of strata will increasingly use plenary sessions to expose government errors, defend particular social interests, and call for social and political change.

Yet, whatever happens, a tension remains between bureaucratizing and popularizing people's congresses, between becoming, if you will, more of a legislature or more of a parliament. How deputy quality is understood and improved in coming years should tell us much about not only who counts in China, but also about the course, extent, and viability of China's much-delayed political reforms.