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Agents and Remonstrators: Role Accumulation by Chinese People's Congress Deputies*

Kevin J. O'Brien

In the past, the loyalty most Chinese people's congress deputies felt toward the state completely overwhelmed their sense of responsibility to constituents. Deputies in the Maoist era faced simple and clear expectations to represent the regime to the people and often devastating sanctions if they did not. Ambiguities were few and deputies had limited opportunities to define their own role or to expand their constituency focus. More recently, however, evolving expectations, rapid societal change and institutional reforms have transformed the duties of "people's representatives" and have created deputy identities that are increasingly multi-layered and fraught with contradictions. Deputies now have unprecedented opportunities to improvise on conventional scripts and some have taken on new roles: roles that clash with their traditional responsibilities, and that appear very difficult to reconcile.

On the one hand, people's congress deputies are still expected to explain government policy to their constituents – to act as a link (*niudai*) from the leadership to the citizenry. Serving as regime agents, they represent state authority, explain the pattern of state extraction and justify allocations. They continue to dampen criticisms, sift "incorrect" views and deflect impractical or illegal demands. Their responsibilities centre on diffusing societal pressures and providing a rationale for policy. In a very real sense they remind citizens of the predominant control function of the Chinese state and work to ensure domination and diminish resistance in the name of stability and economic development. They are entrusted with developing a hegemony of discussion and transmitting the "central spirit." In this sub-role, deputies tend to view people's congresses as organizations assigned tasks from above and to deny conflicts of interest both within society and between state and society.

On the other hand, deputies are also expected to be advocates: they are charged with reflecting mass opinion and bringing regional and group demands to the attention of decision-makers. They receive constituent letters and visits, write proposals, and attend meetings with local and national leaders that highlight injustices and mistakes and convey requests to improve government performance.¹ They are expected to "help

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people with the greatest problems they face in daily life,” to participate in inspections that root out waste and mismanagement, and to confront officials with problems they identify. Deputies who are women, workers, peasants, cadres, intellectuals, soldiers and ethnic minorities are explicitly charged with “looking after” the interests of the groups they embody and represent.

Serving as a bridge (*qiaoliang*) from the leadership to the citizenry is a complex role infused with conflict and potentially a source of considerable strain. Do Chinese people’s congress deputies feel they face irreconcilable expectations and do they experience difficulty in meeting role demands? What can be learned about the relationship between conflicting sub-roles, strategies to lessen role strain and role accumulation by exploring how Chinese legislators view and carry out their responsibilities?

Role Conflict and People’s Congress Deputies

Social psychologists and sociologists have long known that modern life provides a breeding ground for role conflict. Following Parsons and Merton, many studies have shown that contradictory cues often make it impossible for individuals to satisfy all social expectations. Research on young, working mothers and adult students, in particular, has identified structural, no-win situations and enormous cross-pressures to meet anti-theetical and superhuman demands.²

Role theorists disagree, however, about the consequences of role conflict on individuals who experience it. Some argue that role strain, that is, stress associated with expected roles, inevitably appears and that this can only be addressed by choosing among roles, compartmentalizing obligations, compromising or withdrawing.³ Others (currently a minority view) see numerous adaptive strategies and positive consequences associated with role accumulation, role inflation and role diversity. Sieber and

1. In one recent year the National People’s Congress alone responded to more than 80,000 letters from the public and received thousands of personal visits. They also handled 105 “unjust, false and wrong cases” and 131 instances of illegal activities. Wu Naitao, “NPC: the supreme power of the people,” *Beijing Review*, 3–9 September 1990, p. 21; I received similar figures from interviewee no. 4.

2. Early discussions of role conflict can be found in Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (New York: The Free Press, 1951), and Robert K. Merton, “The role-set: problems in sociological theory,” *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 8 (1957), pp. 106–120. Useful reviews of the evolution of role theory and empirical findings include B. J. Biddle, “Recent developments in role theory,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 12 (1986), pp. 67–92; Jerold Heiss, “Social roles,” in Morris Rosenberg and Ralph H. Turner (eds.), *Social Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), pp. 94–129; Sheldon Stryker and Anne Statham, “Symbolic interaction and role theory,” in Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson (eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology*, Vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1985) (3rd ed.), pp. 311–373; Bruce J. Biddle, *Role Theory: Expectations, Identities, and Behaviors* (New York: Academic Press, 1979).

3. For the original statement of this position, see William J. Goode, “A theory of role strain,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 25 (August 1960), pp. 483–496; See also Biddle, *Role Theory: Expectations, Identities, and Behaviors*, p. 197; Stryker and Statham, “Symbolic interaction and role theory,” pp. 336–39.

Thoits argue that people sometimes prefer to play multiple roles and that benefits of role accumulation tend to outweigh stresses. A sense of excitement or of having a challenging job, along with additional privileges, status and ego gratification may enrich one's life and enhance self-esteem, thus compensating for perceived strain. Miles finds less strain than expected in "boundary-spanners" and shows that these individuals possess resources to reduce strain and overload. Marks further suggests that people may become bored with a too simple role set and that commitment to a congeries of stimulating and interesting roles may expand time and energy available for social activities.⁴ Multiple, partially conflicting roles may, therefore, increase rather than decrease personal gratification and contribute to a sense of efficacy and competence.

But what are the circumstances under which role conflict fails to produce role strain? When are individuals able to cope with contradictory demands? This article explores the relationship between role conflict and role strain for Chinese people's congress deputies. It investigates the content and origins of a developing sub-role ("the remonstrator"), the relationship between new and old roles, and the reasons why strain is not as great as it might first appear. It shows that many deputies believe that inescapable conflicts can be managed and that impressive structural constraints can be denied or finessed.

The Interviews and Methodology

This article is largely based on interviews with 39 individuals – legislative leaders, deputies, researchers and staff in Wuhan, Tianjin, Beijing and Harbin during 1989, 1990 and 1991. It also draws on leadership speeches, Chinese scholarly sources, handbooks prepared by standing committees for lower congresses, and a field study carried out in ten provinces in 1987.⁵

My interviews were semi-structured. Each informant was asked a number of related questions, though follow-up queries varied and evolved with the progress of the research. The pool of interviewees included an over-sampling of intellectuals and urbanites and an under-sampling of model workers and peasants, to whom access was limited. The group was not ideally balanced, demographically or geographically, though the sample was constructed to avoid neglecting any representative type. Interviews were arranged through host units, friends, congresses and

4. Sam D. Sieber, "Toward a theory of role accumulation," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 39 (August 1974), pp. 567–578. Peggy A. Thoits, "Multiple identities and psychological well-being: a reformulation and test of the social isolation hypothesis," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 48 (April 1983), pp. 174–187. Robert H. Miles, "Role-set configuration as a predictor of role conflict and ambiguity in complex organizations," *Sociometry*, Vol. 40 (1977), pp. 21–34. Stephen R. Marks, "Multiple roles and role strain: some notes on human energy, time, and commitment," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 42 (December 1977), pp. 921–936.

5. Zhao Baoxu and Wu Zhilun (eds.), *Minzhu zhengzhi yu difang renda* (*Democratic Politics and Local People's Congresses*) (Xi'an: Shaanxi chubanshe, 1990).

government offices. A majority of deputies were receptive, even eager to share their experiences; several were instructed by superiors to talk to me. Many of the interviews were conducted at a tense juncture in Sino-American relations, during the congressional debates in spring 1990 and spring 1991 over extension of China's most-favoured nation trade status. Group dynamics affected responses inasmuch as several interviews involved as many as four deputies simultaneously. It was not possible to tape record responses, though often an assistant compiled a second set of notes, and in every instance I translated and transcribed answers immediately after a session.

The overriding objective was to see what deputies saw.⁶ Questions focused on perceptions, attitudes and behaviour rather than Western notions of representation or artificial Marxist categories. Deputies were encouraged to elaborate career goals and emotional incentives, and to explain choices (or lack of need to make a choice) in their own terms. Particular attention was paid to role portrayals that indicated an ability to diminish dissonance by redefining one's own role. Similar to Searing,⁷ I found pressures to conform imposed by social encounters and institutional constraints, yet also evidence that deputies had personal standpoints and preferences that enabled them to transcend informal pressures and formal demands to reshape their own roles.

Many interviewees explained that they could navigate between opposing expectations and adopt different sub-roles with different role partners or with the same role partner at different times. Few acknowledged unbearable tensions or excessive pressures to choose one sub-role over another or to compartmentalize obligations; nor did many feel compelled to withdraw. More saw role accumulation and role blending as a path to privileges, personal empowerment and self-realization than as a force that tightened an institutional straitjacket. They argued that more, but often weaker, demands provided opportunities for role improvisation and that piling on conflicting expectations paradoxically increased flexibility to choose which of still weak role demands they would meet.

These deputies demonstrated that a variety of roles could be "tethered" to an institutional position and that payoffs accrued to those who explored the bounds of role interpretation. Many skilful accumulators willingly juggled conflicting imperatives and played reasoned roles with detachment and distance.⁸ Coping strategies to reduce potential strain and accrue benefits were many, varied and seemingly effective.

6. The classic example of this approach is Richard F. Fenno, Jr., *Home Style* (Boston: Little Brown, 1978). For an illuminating treatment of structural, motivational and interactional approaches to politicians' roles, see Donald D. Searing, "Roles, rules, and rationality in the new institutionalism," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 85 (December 1991), pp. 1239–260.

7. Searing, "Roles, rules and rationality," pp. 1246–48.

8. The image of "tethering" is borrowed from *ibid.* p. 1253. The notion of reasoned roles is developed in Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, "Roles and reasons in foreign policy decision making," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 16 (July 1986), p. 283.

A Brief Introduction to People's Congresses

Before further discussion of deputy roles, a few words on the structure of the Chinese legislative system and deputy selection procedures are warranted. People's congresses were formed in the early 1950s, disbanded for most of the Cultural Revolution, and re-established between 1978 and 1980. Approximately four million deputies currently serve in a five-level system that includes the National People's Congress, 30 provincial-level congresses, hundreds at municipal level, nearly three thousand at county level and tens of thousands at township level.⁹ Most congresses convene once each year, for a period of several days to several weeks, though committees meet more often. Primary constitutional duties of people's congresses include lawmaking (at the provincial level and above), oversight, and personnel appointment and removal.

Deputies are chosen in direct, popular elections up to the county level, and indirectly by lower-level congresses after that. Under current law, all elections are contested, with 20–50 per cent more candidates than positions for indirect elections and 50–100 per cent more for direct elections.¹⁰ Some deputies serve in single member districts; most serve in multi-member districts. Districts are usually established to coincide with work units, but sometimes residential status is used. Political inequality is considerable and institutionalized. At the county level and above, a given number of rural dwellers receive from one-quarter to one-eighth the representation of urbanites. Moreover, different-sized urban units and a preference for educated deputies ensures that the number of voters who elect a single sub-municipal deputy can range from under 100 to several thousand.¹¹

At each level quotas exist for women, minorities, workers, peasants, intellectuals, soldiers and various political parties, though pressure to meet precise targets declined in the 1980s. Party-dominated election committees closely control nominations and local organization departments conduct political examination of candidates. In recent years, party

9. According to an NPC publication, the number of deputies nation-wide was reduced from about six million to four million in the late 1980s. Wang Zimu, "Wanshan xianqu xuanju de ruogan wenti tansuo" ("Exploring certain issues in perfecting district and county elections"), in Quanguo Renda Changweihui Bangongting Yanjiu Shi (ed.), *Lun woguo renmin daibiao dahui zhidu jianshe* (*On Construction of our Country's People's Congress System*) (Beijing: Zhongguo minzhu fazhi chubanshe, 1990), pp. 179–180. To this point, township congresses are essentially yearly meetings without permanent staff or an institutional leadership core. With one exception, deputies to township congresses were not included in this study.

10. Recent case studies and my interviews suggest that electoral units generally adhere to the prescribed ratio of candidates to positions, though they also commonly cull preliminary nominees (in a tightly-controlled process) to precisely the minimum number of final candidates required by law. See Bruce J. Jacobs, "Elections in China," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 25 (January 1991), pp. 171–200. For provincial reports on the extent of NPC electoral competition, 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), p. 127, n. 21.

11. Useful sources on districting include Xu Datong and Li Zhao, "Shilun xuanqu huafen de zuoyong" ("Discussion of the role of dividing up electoral districts"), *Tianjin Shehian Xuekan*, No. 10 (1986), pp. 20–28; Xu Chongde, *Renmin daibiao bibe* (*Essentials for People's Deputies*) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1987); Jacobs, "Elections in China," pp. 171–200; Wang Zimu, "Wanshan xianqu xuanju de ruogan wenti tansuo," pp. 183–193.

and other organizational candidates have decreased and mass nominations have increased, but above the county level most candidates are still nominated by the Communist Party or organizations such as the women's federation, the trade union, or satellite parties. Short biographies of candidates are provided to voters and election committees increasingly sponsor assembly hall question-and-answer sessions or arrange for voters to meet candidates personally.¹² In most units at most times, however, open campaigning has been forbidden.

Surveys and interviews suggest that approximately 60–80 per cent of all deputies are Communist Party members.¹³ The greatest manipulation of selection procedures, however, is undertaken to ensure election of sufficient satellite party members and non-party deputies. In the late 1980s in particular, commentators became distressed when the proportion of women, non-Communist Party members and non-cadres fell below target.¹⁴ To this day, it is better to view congresses as constructed rather than elected. Deputies are chosen to create a mosaic of society and for their breadth (*guangfanxing*), progressiveness (*xianjinxing*) and representativeness (*daibiaoxing*).¹⁵

Deputy terms range from three to five years and turnover at each election can exceed one-half. Incumbents receive subsidies and travel

12. On nominating procedures, see Jiang Fukun, "Gaige he wanshan minzhu xuanju zhidu" ("Reform and improve the democratic electoral system"), *Lilun neican*, No. 9 (1989), pp. 10–11; Jiang Fukun, "Yingdang quxiao dui renmin daibiao de zhengzhi shencha" ("We should abolish political examination of people's deputies"), *Lilun neican*, No. 8 (1986), p. 9; Wang Zimu, "Wanshan xianqu xuanju de ruogan wenti tansuo," pp. 184–190; Xu Zhifu, "Renda daibiao zai minzhu zhengzhi jianshe zhong de zuoyong" ("The role of people's congress deputies in democratic political construction"), in Zhao Baoxu and Wu Zhilun, *Minzhu zhengzhi yu difang renda*, p. 195; Wu Naitao, "Local elections: a nation goes to ballot," *Beijing Review*, 25–31 March 1991, pp. 26–27; Jacobs, "Elections in China," pp. 178–193.

13. Yu Keping and Wang Fuchun, "Beijingshi Haidian qu, Dongchengqu renda daibiao suzhi wenti de chouyang fenxi" ("Beijing's Haidian and Dongcheng districts sampled analysis of issues in people's deputy quality"), p. 206; Bao Yu'e, Pang Shaotang and Sun Yezhong, "Guanyu Nanjingshi renmin daibiao dahui de diaocha" ("Investigation of the Nanjing city people's congress"), p. 109; Xu Datong and Wu Chunhua, "Guanyu Tianjin quxianji renda daibiao qingkuang de diaocha yanjiu baogao" ("Research report on district and county level people's congresses in Tianjin"), p. 218; Ji Yu, "Guanyu difang renda daibiao suzhi de diaocha yu yanjiu" ("Investigation and research on local people's congress deputies' quality"), pp. 244–45. All the above are chapters in Zhao Baoxu and Wu Zhilun, *Minzhu zhengzhi yu difang renda*. Similar figures were also reported in interviews 18 and 24.

14. Interview 24; Ji Yu, "Guanyu difang renda daibiao suzhi de diaocha yu yanjiu," pp. 244–45; "Bufen jiceng fulian tichu yaoqiu he jianyi, xianxiang renda huanjie xuanju yao zhongshi funi" ("Grassroots branches of the women's federation raises demands and proposals, county and township people's congress elections must pay attention to women"), *Renmin ribao*, 16 February 1990, p. 3.

15. On criteria for deputy selection, see Kevin J. O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, "Chinese political reform and the question of 'deputy quality'," *China Information*, Vol. 8 (winter 1993–94), pp. 20–31; Peng Zhen, *Lun xin shiqi de shehuizhuyi minzhu yu fazhi jianshe* (*On Socialist Democracy and Legal Development in the New Period*) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1989), p. 236; Fu Qingpei and Lu Shaohua, "Shilun renmin daibiao de suzhi," ("On people's deputy quality"), *Kexue shehuizhuyi cankao ziliao*, Nos. 19–20 (1987), pp. 37–40; Xu Datong and Li Zhao, "Shilun xuanqu huafen de zuoyong," pp. 20–28; 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*, No. 9 (1987), pp. 16–17.

opportunities associated with their position and continue to draw a salary from their original work unit. For virtually all non-leadership deputies, serving in a congress is part-time work that reaches a peak around yearly plenary sessions and during inspections conducted one to three times each year. Most congresses and many deputies have set up ways to maintain contact with constituents. Some particularly civic-minded deputies spend as much as one-quarter of their working hours meeting constituents and importuning bureaucrats, but this is extraordinary (Ints. 6, 8, 31).

Deputy Sub-roles: Inactives, Agents and Remonstrators

The preferred constituency orientation of people's congress deputies is made clear in relevant laws, in handbooks compiled for deputies, and by deputies themselves. They are expected to assist in implementing the constitution and laws and to help the government explain policies to the citizenry, while at the same time reflecting (*fanying*) constituent opinions and demands to responsible authorities.¹⁶

Of course, not all deputies meet these expectations. Some neither explain nor reflect. Deputies I will call "inactives" essentially have no role perception. Weak electoral sanctions and limited leadership cues allow a substantial number of deputies to treat their position as an honorary post devoid of responsibilities. Beyond appearing at plenary sessions (and often not even that!) these deputies avoid all meaningful mobilization and representative duties. Inactives have "big offices and empty desks," are "thankful for the state's trust" and are responsible for the reputation of people's congresses as gathering places for "political ornaments" who only "raise hands, clap hands, and shake hands."¹⁷ According to recent estimates, over one-tenth of deputies never speak at plenary sessions or in small group meetings, about 30 per cent fail to participate in organized inspections (Ints. 3, 27), only about one-half believe that being a deputy involves "representing the people in exercising power to manage the country," and as many as two-thirds never submit a motion.¹⁸

16. For a typical list of expectations, see Xu Chongde, *Renmin daibiao bibe*, pp. 33–34.

17. These characterizations are recounted in Gao Xiufeng, "Kan Tongliaoshi renda changweihui ruhe shuli ziji de quanwei" ("Viewing how the Tongliaoshi people's congress standing committee has established its authority"), *Zhongguo fazhibao*, 9 October 1986, p. 1; Wu Jialin, "Zhengzhi tizhi gaige chutan" ("An exploration of political structural reform"), *Ningxia shehui kexue*, No. 5 (1986), p. 6; Zhang Zonghou, "Quanli zhi yuelun" ("On the system of power"), *Faxue*, No. 10 (1986), p. 2; Suzhou Daxue Zhengzhixi Ketu Zu, "Difang renda xianzhuang guji ji gaige de jiben silu" ("An assessment of the current situation and fundamental thinking behind local people's congress reform"), in Zhao Baoxu and Wu Zhilun, *Minzhu zhengzhi yu difang renda*, p. 7.

18. On the proportion of deputies that speak during plenary sessions, see Wuhan Shi Renda Changweihui Yanjiushi, "Nuli jianshe you quanwei de difang guojia quanli jiguan" ("Work hard to establish a local power organ with authority"), in *ibid.* pp. 134–35. On representing, see Suzhou, "Difang renda xianzhuang guji ji gaige de jiben silu," pp. 14–15. On submitting motions, consult Xu Zhifu, "Renda daibiao zai minzhu zhengzhi jianshe zhong de zuoyong," pp. 188–190; Wuhan Shi, p. 115. All these are in Zhao Baoxu and Wu Zhilun, *Minzhu zhengzhi yu difang renda*.

Inactive deputies dodge inspections pleading lack of time or illness and show little inclination to discover or communicate constituent demands. They may be entertainers uninterested in politics, overextended officials assigned to a congress for several weeks a year, retired state cadres who feel “chopped down,” model workers who participate in dozens of honorary forums, or intellectuals strongly committed to their own research and teaching. Forcibly retired cadres, in particular, may not adjust well to reflecting problems and demands after a career issuing orders and writing memos. They may be demoralized and unwilling to reflect or explain, “holding that going down infrequently is better than going down frequently, and not going down at all is best.”¹⁹ Some non-leadership deputies may be willing to play an active role but fail to do so because they lack personal relationships, political abilities, or courage to stand up for either citizens or officials. Others do not want to endanger their chance to be selected to higher congresses. These and other honorary deputies offer little more than a yearly presence to listen to speeches, affirm party policies, and pass laws they knew nothing about a week before. Some believe that reflecting means little more than wearing colourful native clothes to a plenary session and that explaining policy means parroting leadership speeches and memorizing *People’s Daily* editorials.

Ability to shirk duties is a reminder that people’s congress work is essentially voluntary and that expectations, though conflicting, are far from overwhelming. Deputies are engaged to the extent they choose to be and neither legislative leaders nor constituents demand inordinate responsiveness. There are few costs for evading responsibilities and little punishment (electoral or leadership discipline) for opting to be inactive.

Among active deputies the dominant sub-role I found was the regime agent. In this posture, deputies serve as leadership proxies and “transmit the spirit, regulations and decisions” of higher levels. Devoted agents deem themselves “helpers” (*zhushou*) of the government who convene meetings with constituents to “communicate the government’s intentions to the masses” (Int. 14). These deputies engage in activities such as explaining why unpopular policies (such as increasing urban grain prices, the one-child policy) are in the nation’s long-term interests. They supervise legal implementation and propaganda work and stand at the forefront when local governments suggest increasing educational taxes, or struggle to convince soon-to-be-displaced peasants of the benefits of the Three Gorges Dam project (Ints. 17, 37).

In their agent sub-role, deputies are particularly responsible for sectors from which they come. They work to make people of similar background “understand the national interest” (Int. 15). Intellectual deputies urge professors to understand why their salaries cannot be two or three times

19. Liang Yukai, Liu Yuelun and Li Zhaoxin, “Guanyu jinyibu gaishan xian renda changweihui de zhineng zuoyong he zuzhi jianshe de yanjiu baogao” (“Research report on further improving the functions, role and organizational construction of county people’s congress standing committees”), in *ibid.* p. 156.

that of manual workers (Int. 37). Minority deputies explain why fairness requires that Moslems use meat ration coupons like other Chinese (Int. 36). Guangdong deputies explain why authorities decided to build a nuclear power plant in Guangdong (Int. 7).

Despite pieties about the importance of reflecting views and “carrying two loads,” (Int. 17) the agent role is the most unambiguous expectation deputies face (Int. 23). Party and legislative leaders never fail to mention deputies’ responsibility to bring the regime and its policies to the people, and in the words of one deputy “the regime and congress leaders prefer deputies who are obedient and who will do everything they say” (Int. 39). Moreover, most readings of the constitution place explaining above reflecting. According to a member of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee Research Office, when conflicts arise deputies should help execute decisions that conflict with their district’s interests. Partial interests are subordinate to the whole and maintaining close relations with constituents does not imply that deputies are directly responsible to their districts or should reflect all constituent views.²⁰

Unsurprisingly, few deputies evade the agent role entirely. There is little to be gained and much to be lost – particularly for individuals long accustomed to reaping official praise and benefits from serving the state. Many legislative leaders, model workers, satellite party members and youthful non-party high fliers who owe their status, subsidies, access to a car and excellent housing to the Party appear particularly eager to serve as regime agents.

It is true that some deputies are selective agents, absenting themselves for example when asked to justify armed suppression of the 1989 protest movement, but most undertake considerable “education and persuasion work” (Ints. 7, 32, 35). When constituents raise “irrational” or “impractical” demands, numerous interviewees said they patiently explain a policy’s rationale, government interests and budget limits. On issues ranging from why a city receives an inadequate construction budget to why standing sewage in a low-lying area cannot be cleaned up, they adopt the perspective of the whole and “take into account what can be done” (Int. 31). They appease grumblers by justifying the government’s failure to reduce cadre corruption and crime or to build a new grain store. When they meet illegal demands or anti-Party attitudes, these deputies are expected to uphold the law and oppose them – and by and large they do so (Ints. 29, 30, 31).

Deputies as agents educate and are amenable to being educated. Congress standing committees often assemble deputies several days or weeks before a controversial policy is announced, provide a rationale for the policy and urge deputies to accept it. So steeled, deputies confront

20. Du Xichuan, “Renda daibiao ying daibiao shei de liyi?” (“Whose interests should people’s deputies represent?”), *Faxue zazhi*, No. 1 (1989), pp. 19–20; See also Zhang Youyu, “Lun renmin daibiao dahui daibiao de renwu, zhiquan he huodong fangshi wenti” (“On the tasks, powers, functions, and activities of people’s congress deputies”), *Faxue yanjiu*, No. 2 (1985), pp. 2–8. Zhang is a prominent legal scholar and vice-chairman of the NPC Standing Committee.

constituents. At times an iterative process ensues. In the words of a sub-municipal congress vice-chairman: "When people's views are not in accord with policy, sometimes deputies don't understand the whole situation and reflect inappropriate views to the congress; as soon as they recognize the real situation however, they begin publicity work with voters to help them understand why they should go along with the larger interest" (Int. 24).

Agents work on behalf of the state to explain the government's difficulties to the masses, and must often explain why circumstances to resolve even a reasonable request are not "ripe" (*chengshu*) (Int. 14). Sometimes a problem is reflected while a suggested solution is deflected. Residents in one north-eastern city who were concerned with petty thievery wanted police stationed in front of every apartment building. Sympathetic deputies referred the problem to the police while attempting to convince constituents that the solution was impractical (Int. 10). Or on an issue such as the placement of urban refuse dumps and public latrines, concerned deputies explained why only people who lived within a prescribed distance were eligible for compensation or relocation and deflected self-serving efforts by more distant residents to extract government funds (Int. 32).

Acting as agents, deputies take part in inspections primarily to "understand the situation and report it to the leadership" rather than to "say what side you are on" or advocate change (Int. 30). Most of the time they inspect issues in society (hygiene in restaurants, management of markets, control of karaoke bars and so on) rather than government bureaus. Deputies *qua* agents accept prohibitions against using their prestige and position to compel bureaucratic action and perform the regime support activities long highlighted by Western students of socialist legislatures.²¹

Does the agent role overwhelm and foreclose all other sub-roles? It appears not. My interviews suggest that some deputies adopt a second role – one that can exist within structural constraints and despite official ambivalence, and one that resonates with China's past. Some long-term regime agents and newly-elected deputies play a role reminiscent of imperial remonstrators. Remonstrators are not petitioners in the common Western sense because their authority does not derive from the breadth of their support or their adherence to defined procedures; nor are they traditional, high-status censors who can bypass official channels and directly impeach those in authority. Instead, they are quasi-insiders who seek attention and transmit information that may help rectify administration. Like upright officials in imperial China, they assert a right to recognize injustices and mistakes, and to confront leaders. They bring group or particularistic problems identified through their regular work,

21. James R. Townsend, *Political Participation in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); O'Brien, *Reform Without Liberalization*, pp. 84–87, 172–75; Alex Pravda, "Election in Communist Party states," in Stephen White and Daniel Nelson (eds.), *Communist Politics – A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), pp. 27–54.

work-related travel, inspections, document review and private life to the attention of officials and request a response.²² They possess information, rather than a mandate, and the leadership has no obligation to respond if the information is judged incorrect or the solution is deemed too costly. Deputies who choose this role are in some sense legitimate complainers who open doors, point to regulations and appeal to fairness. They help the government police itself and provide surveillance from outside the normal hierarchy of administrative responsibility. They make reasonable not necessarily popular requests, and their suggestions are backed with the remonstrator's personal prestige rather than the weight of public opinion. Their proposals are accepted because they are deemed "correct" more than because they reflect constituent preferences.

Deputies who adopt the remonstrator sub-role acknowledge that they have neither power nor resources and can only offer advice and criticize. They speak of "urging" and "making suggestions" and inducing mayors and governors to "attach importance to an issue" (Int. 20). They seek to rearrange priorities and to add items to the agenda of district, municipal and provincial governments and are least given to windy statements about "the people as masters of the country" and the formal powers of people's congresses. They believe that the constitutional powers of people's congresses are the concern of legislative leaders and that their tasks centre on "helping" constituents. Representative successes include winning the right to determine eight of twelve annual "good things" to be accomplished by a municipal government (Int. 24).

Most remonstrators continue to fulfil their responsibilities as regime agents. According to one deputy, "there is no essential conflict between deputies reflecting opinions and engaging in educational work. Often both sides are partly wrong" (Int. 37). Remonstrators listen to problems and suggest solutions, examine the letters they receive, "but only after investigation decide whether to reflect an opinion or not" (Int. 35). They scale their requests with one eye on state capabilities and the other on local or group needs. They remain attuned to the political environment and their activities prudently decline when ideological work is stressed. At all times they sidestep controversy and respect "forbidden zones." For two deputies who raised the issue, ensuring social stability in the early 1990s referred to reducing home burglaries, not addressing the frustrations that led to the eruption of student protests in 1989 (Ints. 6, 9).

Acting as remonstrators, deputies choose problems that people expect to be resolved and that they can influence: one sub-municipal deputy said, "what can we in this district do about solving inflation or increasing professor's salaries? Nothing. But as for punishing price-swindling vegetable sellers, cleaning up the rubbish dump and improving local roads, that I can address" (Int. 10). Remonstrators are more likely to urge a local government to compel a factory to pay its workers during a time of

22. In *Political Reform in Post-Mao China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 149, Barrett McCormick has noted that deputies infrequently raise universalistic demands and instead focus on what would be considered casework in liberal democratic legislatures.

market sluggishness than to address the general decline of state-owned enterprises (Int. 6). They are at their best on particularistic demands: helping a private entrepreneur resist tax shakedowns and demands for gifts from local officials (Int. 37); helping an ailing widow resolve a dispute with a dishonest businessman.²³

Topics they address arise from a number of sources. Several deputies highlighted redressing grievances raised in letters and visits. Given the inaccessibility of Chinese bureaucrats and ineffectiveness of direct approaches, willingness to importune bureaucrats can produce buckets of mail and queues around the block. Once deputies or congresses become well-known for attention to letters and visits, they often become lightning rods for people throughout the region, many of whom believe they have the ear of local authorities. One deputy who scolded a coal bureau chief on television over inadequate coal gas supplies and induced a mayor to support her is now regularly approached by individuals who think she is the mayor's personal friend. That she is not is unimportant. A local telephone bureau installed 400 switches in a housing development at their own expense rather than defy her; she might be well-connected and she certainly had a reputation for standing up to authorities (Int. 35).

Based on their own observations or at the request of constituents, remonstrators work to halt hotel construction next to a hazardous materials warehouse, to improve substandard housing and poor medical care, to increase the number of public lavatories, to improve barber shop and restaurant hygiene, and to spur local governments to build pedestrian overpasses and tunnels. They get involved in matters such as guaranteeing sufficient water pressure on higher floors of apartment buildings, installing gas lines in old buildings, relocating bus stops to reduce traffic congestion, cleaning up pollution and appealing against unjust court decisions. They write to city grain bureau chiefs when rice supplies are insufficient and protest against local land use charges imposed on state-run universities (Int. 10). They implore district heads to urge electricity bureaus to upgrade transmission lines so they can take higher voltage.²⁴ They watch trials, write notes to the head of the people's congress and courts, and request that cases be reconsidered (Int. 23). They step in when a mayor and his bureau chiefs seek credit for adding housing space while ignoring supplementary services, such as schools, day care, sewage disposal and market availability. In one Tianjin district, deputies banded together and engineered a statute that required schools and services to be provided for each new apartment block; in another district, as of late 1991 deputies were still encouraging the new mayor to enact similar provisions (Ints. 22, 24, 35).

Some remonstrators go beyond the economic, environmental and social needs of their geographic constituency to focus on the interests of occupational, gender or ethnic groups. A humanities professor pursued

23. Examples of extraordinary diligence in voicing mass complaints are reported in Huang Wei, "The goals of a people's deputy," *Beijing Review*, 25–31 March 1991, pp. 31–32.

24. *Ibid.* p. 31.

cultural relics protection (Int. 6); a religious leader worked to expel army regiments from temples occupied during the Cultural Revolution (Int. 30); a forester called for improved fire-fighting and worked to help people who lost their possessions in a devastating fire (Int. 13); a school teacher paid attention to building libraries and science exhibition halls (Int. 22); a woman found it “convenient” to look into day-care availability and maternity leave provisions (Int. 12). Or deputies focus on issues of interest to two or three groups they represent. Administrators at a minority institute pressed for increased attention to minority education and lower college entrance requirements for minority students (Int. 30); ethnic minority businessmen paid attention to increasing non-pork meat supply and establishing Moslem hotels near train stations (Int. 30, speaking of other deputies); university foresters worked to improve educational facilities in remote logging camps (Ints. 10, 13). These remonstrators sought favourable policies, exemptions and subsidies across electoral districts and viewed their constituents to be all group members in a congress’s domain. They took advantage of weak electoral links to address whatever problems and functional areas drew their interest.

Deputies who adopt the remonstrator sub-role use their inspection cards to open closed doors, gather information and generate proposals, criticisms and opinions. Although inspections typically end with only a report, deputies often remind malfeasants they will return if a problem is not addressed. Active remonstrators may compose as many as 20 motions each year and never leave home without a notebook for writing down opinions and complaints. They present their motions at plenary sessions (and other periodic gatherings) and their proposals are collected by congress liaison offices and transmitted to government departments (Int. 27).

While remonstrators have considerable moral and investigative powers, they have to rely on others to act on their criticisms. Interpellations, for example, must be approved by the legislative leadership, which always checks with the affected unit or government office. Congress standing committees serve as critical gatekeepers and deputies usually reflect opinions within their congress and to higher congresses before approaching government officials (Ints. 12, 31, 37). Investigating problems alone, bypassing intermediate links and contacting officials personally do occur but are frowned upon.²⁵ Appropriate behaviour entails first gaining the attention and support of a congress standing committee, which is typically the conduit for transmitting complaints and requests. Congress leaders listen to deputy opinions but reserve the right to decide whether a construction bureau should be urged to build a television tower or library first, and they expect deputies to accept their timetables and justifications (Int. 23).

25. Not replacing the government and judiciary is a recurring theme in the collected speeches of former NPCSC chairman, Peng Zhen, *Lun xin shiqi de shehui zhuyi minzhu yu fazhi jianshe*, *passim*. See also, Zhang Youyu, “Lun renmin daibiao dahui daibiao de renwu, zhiquan he huodong fangshi wenti,” pp. 5–6.

Once a request reaches the relevant decision-makers, deputies are also treated like remonstrators. Information on government blunders is often withheld and must be prised out. Responsiveness to motions (beyond a simple acknowledgement) is not required; many motions are never dealt with properly and “are ignored like stones sinking in the ocean.”²⁶ Congress leaders may bury a motion and those transmitted sometimes languish with bureaus until the week before the next plenary session and often are handled perfunctorily. Inspection reports are often ignored. People’s congress decisions are sometimes annulled by government bureaus or pressures are mounted to reverse reprimands or cover up embarrassing disclosures. Even if a unit agrees to improve, congresses and individual deputies have limited enforcement powers to ensure that a decision is carried out.

Though government officials attend meetings to hear deputies’ views, deputies are always susceptible to charges of interference or meddling in decisions beyond their powers. According to one deputy, “I have one mouth; the ideogram for official (*guan*) has two mouths (*kou*). They can always talk us down. If they want to turn down a request they can come up with many reasons and nothing can be done” (Int. 38). When individual deputies try to resolve problems alone they can be charged with violating collective decision-making and subverting normal procedures. Those who pursue constituent or group interests too vigorously can be accused of ignoring the interests of the whole, divisiveness, and strong-arming officials. Overly eager deputies are regularly reminded of state interests and retaliation can occur.

But these sorts of confrontations are infrequent. Most deputies who adopt the remonstrator role accept limitations and still find opportunities to use their personal prestige, access and legal immunity to promote projects and grant favours. They intercede with bureaucrats when egregious errors occur and work to mediate relations within residential and work units and between citizens and an often clumsy state. As one deputy said: “Deputies do not simply amplify people’s views like a microphone; nor are we simply government spokesmen. We work hand in glove with both sides” (Int. 36). Remonstrators have internalized a sophisticated understanding of conflicting state expectations and weak but growing citizen demands and they know how much space is available to reflect particular and more general complaints given a continuing responsibility to serve as regime agents.

Blending Roles

Unsurprisingly, the greatest potential for deputy influence arises where sub-roles meet. Deputies stand on the surest footing when they remon-

26. Jiao Shiyong, “Shilun difang renda quanli jizhi gongneng de gaishan” (“Discussing improving local people’s congress power system functions”), in Zhao Baoxu and Wu Zhilun, *Minzhu zhengzhi yu difang renda*, p. 316.

strate, in the name of constituents, to ensure policy implementation: such as to stop water pollution by a chemical factory, to improve hazardous waste storage, to criticize restaurants which fail to implement food hygiene laws, to inspect implementation of the compulsory education law in remote rural areas, to end illegal reassignment of farm land. Here deputies blend roles and point out violations of state policy that also harm constituent interests.

One north-eastern deputy, for example, derailed a development plan by linking demands to protect traditional hunting grounds with executing the environmental protection law (Int. 13). But he was on much weaker ground when he argued that hunters had a right to own rifles in opposition to a provincial gun control measure. Or deputies in a central city struggled to persuade municipal authorities to clean up drinking water drawn from a polluted lake. Finally, after being ignored for many years, they arranged a chemical test on their own that demonstrated the lake water was not up to state standards; embarrassed local officials agreed to invest 52 million *yuan* (US\$10 million) to upgrade a water purification plant and pressured a nearby steel plant to stop violating anti-pollution regulations (Ints. 8, 29, 30).

Remonstrators clearly need more than a just cause and popular support. They also need a plausible argument that remonstrating serves state interests. With such a case, they can take a central call to “clean up government” (*lianzheng*) and expand activities beyond improving the demeanour of clerks in state-run grain stores (Int. 23) to include rebuking cadres for allocating new housing to relatives (Ints. 20, 22). By blending roles, deputies can ride the two horses of reflecting and explaining and exploit divergences between what officials say and what implementers do, and between different levels of government. They can appeal to regulations and cloak their appeals in the soothing language of executing state policy.

Continuing to serve as an agent provides political protection for even the most dedicated remonstrators. Remonstrators/agents are most successful in the capacity of mediators, pointing to both state and society’s interests. They explain to foresters why the state cannot allow all forestry districts to have agricultural banks that provide low-cost loans, but coax local industrial banks to set up agricultural windows. They explain to hunters why they cannot continue to own rifles, but convince a governor to order local authorities to pay compensation rather than simply confiscate the firearms (Int. 13).

Although discovering common ground and operating at the intersection of roles confers legitimacy and enhances effectiveness, one should pause before ascribing a proto-democratic implication to the growth of remonstrating and the blending of deputy roles. As with the earlier dynastic censors, it is best to avoid extravagant claims of democratic restraint or equally extravagant claims that the system facilitates despotism.²⁷ Re-

27. This warning is drawn from Charles O. Hucker, *The Censorial System of Ming China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), pp. 4, 287.

monstrators are loyal to the state and indeed regard themselves to be an essential component of the existing power structure. Like *qingyi* petitioners during the second half of the 19th century, their counsel and efforts to widen the exercise of political initiative does not imply direct confrontation with state power, sprouts of liberalism, or rejection of the idea of centralized harmonious government.²⁸

From my interviews, I found minimal evidence that deputies either materially bolster or undermine regime authoritarianism. Remonstrators regard themselves to be guardians who harmonize contradictions and co-ordinate conflicting demands. They work within systemic constraints and encourage benevolent rule rather than institutionalized and responsive government. Their legal and institutional protection from reprisals and punishment is conditional and ultimately flimsy. Their successes mediate relations within the ruling establishment and within society more than they redistribute power between state and society.

Origins of Deputy Remonstrating

Although remonstrating has a long history in China, interviewees suggest that it is largely a new sub-role for people's congress deputies – a product of institutional reforms, deputy turnover, societal change and altered expectations. Direct and contested elections, as well as increased congress resources and visibility, have raised accountability or at least awareness of deputies as potential conduits. Relaxed quotas and several rounds of elections have led to some improvement in “deputy quality” and a larger proportion of deputies with ties to geographic regions and under-represented social or occupational groups. Economic reform has created a more complex and combustible society brimming with frustrations and inequities. In an increasingly differentiated and decentralized system, irrational policies and irregular implementation exact a higher cost and state favours bring enormous benefits. Disgruntled citizens (and deputies), dismayed by official corruption, favouritism and inefficiency, are increasingly outspoken (or sullen and restless) and legislative leaders at every level feel pressure to correct injustices, diffuse opposition and prevent social explosions.

Most importantly, regime expectations have subtly changed. Spasms of tightened control (*shou*) have not fully reversed the political loosening (*fang*) evident since Mao's death. Even state leaders now call for attention to partial interests and deputies are permitted to choose when and how to act as agents. Front-line, legislative leaders, in particular, understand that pure agents are hardly credible (other than as symbols of state power) and that many are objects of scorn.

28. On Qing dynasty *qingyi*, see Mary Backus Rankin, “‘Public opinion’ and political power: *qingyi* in late nineteenth century China,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 41 (May 1982), p. 476. On post-Mao remonstrators and their orientation to the state, see Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 24–26.

None of these factors compel deputies to become remonstrators: at most they offer the option. Deputies must select this role, and those that do, like dynastic officials or retired generals who appeal to avoid violently suppressing protesting citizens, choose a respectful, ritually correct and morally powerful approach to the state that can only be ignored at some risk.²⁹ When remonstrators seek legitimacy by adopting this traditional avenue of access to state authority, however, they also open themselves to criticism. Official commentators and legislative leaders frequently scold deputies who are obsessed with local, niggling concerns and who engage in patrimonial, “feudal” behaviour. Heads of people’s congresses often discourage discussions of local complaints and redirect congress agendas toward society’s “macro problems” rather than specific problems that “should be handled by government bureaus” (Ints. 21, 23). Deputies who improperly interfere with court cases and procuratorial decisions receive perhaps the most vigorous censure.³⁰

Yet, regime leaders allow remonstrating for fairly obvious reasons. Channelling social demands through non-official but reliable individuals can help identify intense antipathy and defuse frustrations. In the words of one deputy, taking occasional action against incompetent or corrupt bureaucrats “stabilizes people’s feelings” (Int. 35). On the coal gas shortage cited above, the mayor of Tianjin scolded the Public Service bureau chief with the words, “I don’t want to hear your numbers or your excuses about the quality of the coal, I want you to think about what the old ladies who turn on their stoves and don’t find any gas feel about the government” (Int. 35).

Allowing remonstrating also creates a climate of responsiveness without ceding power – government leaders continue to choose when and how to respond. Although the selfless and humble posture of remonstrators can generate embarrassment and pressure on policy-makers unwilling to listen, remonstrators usually sift demands and take into account government capabilities; then, legislative leaders further cull the list of recommendations. By the time a problem reaches a responsible official several agents of the regime have deemed it significant and amenable to solution. By the time it reaches television or newspapers the decision to resolve the problem has usually been made and resources have been allocated.

Motivations of Remonstrators

Deputies are best thought of as remonstrators rather than representatives owing to their continuing responsibilities as agents, their limited

29. In a related argument, Andrew Nathan, *China’s Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 183, discusses the “moderate remonstrative tradition of Chinese democracy” and explains that the failure of the leadership to acknowledge students’ petitions following Hu Yaobang’s death violated ritual and demonstrated arrogance.

30. Zhang Youyu, “Lun renmin daibiao dahui daibiao de renwu, zhiquan he huodong fangshi wenti,” pp. 5–6.

linkage to constituents, and the absence of institutional guarantees of representation. Remonstrators are volunteers. As one deputy put it: "To do this work well you must be interested in it. It's all volunteer work. And you must be willing to make sacrifices like arranging your schedule and working nights and weekends" (Int. 31). Remonstrators generally have a strong civic awareness and willingly accept public responsibilities. They are the public-spirited, good-government promoters found in every society and are typically reported to have a "high sense of responsibility." Many of these civic boosters have boundless energy and participate in committees and organizations of every sort. They could easily choose to be inactive or to be simple regime agents but for essentially personal motivations they do not. Falling into this group appears to have more to do with individual characteristics than with electoral sanctions or leadership demands.

I identified five personal motivations for remonstrating. First, a number of deputies spoke of obligation, pride and a "desire to make a difference" in a chosen area. A prime example was a professor and devotee of Chinese history who deplored antique smuggling and who worked his way to the provincial cultural department with a proposal to enact a law on cultural relic protection. After a number of meetings and a public scolding by the provincial culture head, the responsible officials drew up specific measures. The remonstrator treasured the newspaper cuttings reporting his success and proudly noted that the culture chief had visited his home to hear his ideas (Int. 6). Several interviewees, like this professor, "feared neither heaven nor earth" and said they felt obliged to use their position to address problems within their compass.

Secondly, successful remonstrating can produce respect in the community and even notoriety. Accounts of the successes and tragic failures of courageous and unselfish remonstrators (such as Qu Yuan) have long had an honoured place in popular culture and continue to be transmitted via novels, legends and drama. Even in this century, Lu Xun deemed remonstrating part of the "backbone of the nation." On a smaller scale, some modern day deputy-remonstrators have gained considerable fame by confronting officials and other malfeasants, and stories of their successes are often eagerly recounted for years after they occur (Int. 35).

Thirdly, remonstrating frees deputies from their normal job and may enhance their autonomy and status. Active and successful remonstrators who throw themselves into appeals and community projects cannot be easily reprimanded by superiors for evading their regular work, and their political status, subsidies, travel opportunities and connections place them partly outside their unit's command structure.

Fourthly, remonstrating brings deputies into policy-making and implementation to an extent few pure agents achieve. Remonstrating involves actively ferreting out information and confronting the high-and-mighty. It often generates preferential access to documents and local leaders and satisfies a desire by politically-inclined deputies to discuss

social problems and speak out in a way that many agents avoid and few ordinary citizens would ever dare (Int. 22).³¹

Lastly, remonstrators develop valuable connections and contacts that can often be transformed into material resources and other tangible benefits.³² Remonstrators have the ability to provide favours with state resources. They can help deflect an exaction or bring a windfall. Each of their successes creates obligations that they can call in at a later date. Given limited state demands and constituents who expect little of them, deputies have much to gain from getting a constituent's son out of labour reform, obtaining a new apartment for a family, improving the supply of vegetables, or tempering an extortion plot. Respect and resources flow to adept intermediaries.

For all these reasons, some deputies conclude that the benefits of remonstrating outweigh the costs in time, energy and political risk. By using an appropriate form and exploiting opportunities provided by mild and ambiguous cues, remonstrators can reduce potential psychological strain and enhance manoeuvring room. They can increase personal satisfaction and sometimes their material wealth.

Weak but conflicting expectations are ideal for sub-role accumulation. The expectations of the state and constituents can both be tempered by reference to the other. Remonstrators can plausibly assert the impossibility of satisfying state and constituents while having the ability to do both. When little is expected, conflicting demands free rather than constrain. The regime rewards its best agents but fails to punish and even rewards some inactives and artful remonstrators. Constituents mock the ineffectiveness of most deputies, but understand their dual role and are "thankful" (Int. 35) when a deputy takes up their cause. Limited sanctions and ambiguous demands increase opportunities for role bargaining. Ample latitude exists for agents/remonstrators to define their own role and to justify their actions, and to win plaudits from both sides.

Role Strain and Conclusions

Structurally, multiple and clashing expectations produce role conflict, but deputies recreate and redefine their roles to alleviate role strain. Despite conflict, most deputies who add the remonstrator sub-role to the agent sub-role do not appear to feel excessive stress or the impossibility of fulfilling both roles, but rather perceive their special dual obligation to be a challenge that only a capable and subtle individual can meet.

31. A journalist from a Hong Kong publication who had interviewed many deputies also told me that deputies at higher levels value their position because it enhances their local status and confers a right to attend conferences and make speeches in their home provinces and cities.

32. Deputies are often criticized for acting as if they are "special citizens" and using their position and legal immunity for private gain. See Zhang Youyu, "Lun renmin daibiao dahui daibiao de renwu, zhiquan he huodong fangshi wenti," p. 2.

In the past, structural features guaranteed that deputies confronted a single relatively unambiguous expectation, that is, to be a regime agent. Their only meaningful relationship was with legislative leaders and other government actors and their constituency focus was limited and unimportant. For some deputies this has now changed. New expectations, altered composition and limited institutional reforms have reduced sanctions against deviance and have offered meaningful benefits to those who carve out a new role. In a time of rapid social and economic change, increasingly ambiguous expectations have encouraged role emergence and flexibility in meeting still weak role demands. Scripts for behaviour are fluid and individual parts allow considerable improvisation. Deputies perceive the costs of occasionally disappointing role partners to be manageable. With incomplete or insufficient expectations to guide behaviour, both from constituents and officials, deputies have gradually expanded their freedom to engage in considerable role bargaining and role blending. Active remonstrators appear to find role overload a greater problem than role strain and complain most vocally about the time and effort they must commit without additional compensation (Ints. 5, 8, 29–31).

My analysis provides further evidence that individuals can modify structures in which they are located and that role accumulation can take into account both the demands of a position and a person's character and preferences. It confirms that roles enable as well as constrain and that it is almost always mistaken to view individuals as over-socialized and without meaningful choices.³³ The interviews suggest that significant psychological and material benefits accrue from role enlargement, accumulation and diversity. A wider role repertoire, particularly when self-constructed, appears to allow individuals to make choices that enrich their own role, and enables them to finesse conflicts that are more apparent to the observer than to the participant.

Conflicting demands and structural features create role conflict. And, of course, people in situations similar to young, working mothers or adult students may feel debilitating role strain. This is beyond denial. But in the study of individual responses to role conflict distinctions must also be made. For every harried, working woman there is also a retiree who suffers from achingly dull expectations and too few sub-roles. While enjoying a quiet, uncluttered retirement may appeal to some pensioners, a frenetic pace and a panoply of overlapping and partially contradictory roles are more satisfying and rewarding for others. The presence of role conflict is not the decisive factor: the extent, unambiguity, and intensity of conflicting demands (and an individual's inability to cope) are what turn possibly manageable conflicts into felt strain.

33. See Hollis and Smith, "Roles and reason in foreign policy decision making," pp. 275–76; Stryker and Statham, "Symbolic interaction and role theory," pp. 337–349.

Appendix: Interview List

The following list includes citation number, interviewee position, and interview date for 39 open-ended interviews conducted in five cities (Wuhan, Tianjin, Beijing, Harbin and Hong Kong). All respondents were guaranteed anonymity.

1. NPC deputy and Law Committee member – March 1989
2. Senior political scientist – March 1989
3. Senior NPC Legislative Affairs Commission member – April 1989
4. Senior NPC General Office member – April 1989
5. City and district deputy – May 1990
6. Provincial deputy – May 1990
7. Law school professor – May 1990
8. City deputy and standing committee member – May 1990
9. District deputy – April 1991
10. District deputy – April 1991
11. City deputy – April 1991
12. District deputy – April 1991
13. Provincial deputy – April 1991
14. NPC, provincial and city deputy, county standing committee member – April 1991
15. Provincial deputy – April 1991
16. NPC, provincial, county and township deputy – April 1991
17. Chairman city standing committee and provincial deputy – April 1991
18. Chief, Secretariat division, provincial General Office – April 1991
19. Section chief, Secretariat Division, provincial congress – April 1991
20. City congress deputy and standing committee member (provincial-level city) – May 1991
21. Law professor, committee adviser, and former NPC deputy – May 1991
22. District deputy (provincial-level city) – May 1991
23. Vice-chairman, city congress standing committee (provincial-level city) – May 1991
24. Vice-chairman, district congress standing committee (provincial-level city) – May 1991
25. Director General Office, city congress standing committee (provincial-level city) – May 1991
26. Head of Secretariat, city congress standing committee (provincial-level city) – May 1991
27. Senior NPC General Office member – May 1991
28. Political science professor – May 1991
29. NPC deputy and former city deputy – May 1991
30. Provincial deputy – May 1991
31. District deputy – May 1991
32. Chairman, district congress (provincial-level city) – October 1991
33. Vice-chairman, district congress (provincial-level city) – October 1991

34. District congress standing committee member (provincial-level city) – October 1991
35. District and city deputy (provincial-level city) – October 1991
36. City congress deputy and standing committee member (provincial-level city) – October 1991
37. District congress deputy and standing committee member (provincial-level city) – October 1991
38. City congress deputy (provincial-level city) – October 1991
39. Provincial deputy and resident of Hong Kong – October 1991