

PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRACY IN CHINA

*A habermasian analysis of political participation in post-Mao
urban China*

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Preface

This marks the end of a process that has been very long; indeed longer and more challenging than I had planned and expected. The blame for this is entirely my own: my project was very extensive and demanded a lot of work. To study China has proven to be a task of daunting proportions, demanding immense work even if you only aspire to get the most basic understanding of what goes on in this fascinating country.

I would not have been able to finish this process without the good and very qualified assistance of my supervisors, Olle Törnquist and Harald Bøckman. I am grateful to them for having guided me through the challenges, giving me helpful advices and hints that helped me understand where I wanted to go, but still leaving plenty of room for me to decide the form and content of my thesis.

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Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
HOC	Homeowner Committees
NPC	National People's Congress
PDC	Property development company
PMC	Property management company
RC	Residential Committee
RO	Representative Office
RSMRPM	Regulations of Shanghai Municipality on Residential Property Management
SO	Street Office
SOE	State Owned Enterprise
the Order	Urban New Residential Estate Management Records, Order no. 33 from the Ministry of Construction

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME AND SOME METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.1 Introduction to the theme

Since Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978, China has undergone profound changes, and its economic and political developments have been in the world's attention. One subject that has attracted much attention is the prospects for democracy in China. With the exception of research on village elections in *rural* China, the research in this field does however not pay much attention to the role of 'ordinary' people in the process of democratization. The focus is rather on various elite actors such as the intellectuals, the students, and the organizations that make up civil society¹.

However, there has been conducted research on the political participation of 'ordinary' Chinese (Burns 1988; Chen & Zhong 2002; Jacobs 1991; Shi 1997, 1999a; Tang & Parish 2000: Ch. 8), but this research has not made much effort to relate its findings to theories of democratization and analyze what political participation may tell us about the prospects for democracy in China. In this thesis, it is my ambition to unite the two fields of democratization and political participation. I will do so by analyzing political participation in *urban* China. This will be done through the use of a specific theory of how democracy may come about, namely Jürgen Habermas's theory on the emergence of public spheres and how this established democracy². The research question of this thesis will be: what are the prospects for a pressure for democracy emerging from below in contemporary China, as seen through the theory of Habermas?

¹ Previous research on the prospects for democracy in China have dealt with issues such as civil society (in the meaning of NGOs, and even GONGOs – governmental organized NGOs, see e.g. Brook & Frolic 1997; He 1997; Howell 1998), intellectuals (see e.g. Ding 2000; Goldman 1995, 1999; He 1996), students (see e.g. Calhoun 1994; Chan 2000?), national identity and nationalism (see e.g. Friedman 1995; He & Guo 2000; Zhao 2000), Chinese culture and the compatibility of Confucianism with Western democracy (see e.g. Hu 2000; Wang & Titunik 2000), how much Chinese citizens want democracy (see e.g. Dowd, et al. 2000), village elections (see e.g. Louie 2001; O'Brien & Li 2000), elite politics (see e.g. Fewsmith 2001; Pei 1998b), rule of law (See e.g. Pei 1998b), and comparison with Taiwan (See e.g. Dickson 1998; Tsang & Tien 1999).

² Habermas (1989, 2002). The theory was first published in Germany in 1962 with the title 'Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft'.

Through this theoretically based analysis of the political participation of ‘ordinary’ citizens and the extent to which this participation may be used to push for democracy, I hope to shed new light on the prospects for democracy in China, and potential problems and possibilities in a process of democracy.

Why do I find political participation in urban China interesting and worthy of a study? First, it is interesting to study China because it has been undergoing great changes over the last two decades, changes that have been especially staggering and wide-ranging the last couple of years. China therefore provides a good opportunity to study how economic development influences and potentially changes a society and how this in turn may influence the political framework of that country. Second, through assessing and analyzing political participation, I hope to be able to say something about the prospects for democracy in China. As will be seen in chapter 2, Habermas’s theory emphasizes the evolutionary character of democratization; through the use of the channels the bourgeois people have to the government, the politically interested citizens are able to push for gradually greater participation and eventually achieve democracy. The extent and quality of political participation will therefore be able to tell us a great deal about if and how China will move towards democracy. Third, I choose to look at the political participation of ‘ordinary’ citizens because I think this is a natural focus when discussing democracy and democratization. After all, the ‘normal’ citizens and their political participation is what democracy is all about.

As China is a big and very varied country, I need to limit the theme of political participation in two important ways. First of all I will look at political participation in *urban* China only, and exclude issues relating to rural China. In China, the citizenship of the urban population is markedly different from that of the rural population. In the 1950s, China introduced the *hukou* system, whereby a person was given either a rural or urban citizenship. Those living in the rural areas had to provide for themselves, while those living in the urban areas had housing, medical care, food etc. provided to them by the state (Cheng & Selden 1994: 644-645; Mackenzie 2002: 305-308; Solinger 1999: 221-223). Although the differences between a rural and an urban *hukou* have decreased since the mid-80s, there are still considerable differences (Mackenzie 2002: 308-317; Solinger 1999: 223-238). As a consequence, the situation in rural and urban areas is markedly different on many aspects, and it is therefore too extensive to go into the situation in

both rural and urban areas. The advantage of this is that by looking at political participation in the urban areas, I will compliment the research on political participation that has already been conducted on village elections (see e.g. Louie 2001; O'Brien & Li 2000), and thereby increase the understanding of the prospects for democracy in China. Also, I choose not to look at the issue of people with rural *hukou* going into the cities searching for jobs, the so called floating population, and the challenges this poses to political participation (see e.g. Solinger 1999, especially pp. 239-240).

Second, the thesis is limited in time to *post-Mao* China. As China has changed considerably since Deng came to power and started the reforms in the late 70s, this is a natural delimitation. The main focus of my thesis will be even a bit narrower, focusing on the period from the late 80's till today, a period when the economic reforms have gained pace.

1.2 The theoretical framework

As previously mentioned, my theoretical framework will be Jürgen Habermas's theory on the growth of the public sphere and the emergence of democracy. The theory is explicitly historically based, being deduced from the developments of 18th and 19th century Prussen, England, and France. It depicts how a vibrant public sphere evolved through the pressure of politically interested citizens, making the people of these countries the basis of political legitimacy and affording them a vital role in the making of policy, thereby establishing a democracy.

Using Jürgen Habermas's theory on democratization for analyzing the prospects for democracy is unorthodox, and I will therefore try to justify this choice. First, the fact that the theory is seldom used in analyzing democratization is a reason in itself in the sense that it may contribute to a widening and development of the field of theories on democratization. Second, Habermas's theory is quite substantial in the sense that it describes the processes that lead to democracy in a fairly detailed way. The theory is quite specific on how certain occurrences lead to a process of democratization, which makes it suitable for analyzing and assessing the changes taking place in China.

1.3 Definitions

Most of the terms I use in this thesis will be defined as they appear. However, the terms ‘political participation’ and ‘channels for political participation’ are so central to my thesis that I choose to define them already at this stage.

1.3.1 Political participation

As will be obvious from my introduction, the concept of political participation will be at the core of my thesis. It is therefore important to have a good understanding of the meaning of this term, and especially what it means in a Chinese context. A traditional definition of political participation can be found in Tøgeby (1997: 199):

‘Deltakelse i aktiviteter som har til formål eller resultat å øve innflytelse på de politiske myndigheters beslutninger, enten direkte ved å påvirke beslutningsprosessen på et gitt område eller indirekte ved å påvirke valget av politiske representanter’

Who is it then that constitute ‘the political authorities’ (‘de politiske myndigheter’)? The answer must be that this is everyone who exercises politics. We then need to define ‘politics’. A definition of politics may be that:

‘Politikk er den virksomheten innen et sosialt system (stater eller andre sosiale sammenslutninger og institusjoner) som innebærer at mål blir satt, prioriteringer ordnet, verdier fordelt og virkemidler valgt og anvendt.’ (Østerud 1997: 199)

We see from this definition that politics is the formulation of policies (‘prioriteringer ordnet, verdier fordelt og virkemidler [blir] valgt’), and the implementation of these (‘virkemidler [...] anvendt’). Consequently, every organ that formulates policies and/or implements them exerts political power. All efforts by citizens to influence such organs in their political decisions are therefore to be considered as political participation.

Since China is a socialist regime, many things that in a market state would not have been considered political are politicized. A socialist state provides its citizens with many services and commodities that in a market state would have been provided by private actors and therefore would have been an issue for the market. This has far-ranging consequences for political participation:

‘Conflicts that might have been seen as private sector matters, with the state not directly implicated, become, under state socialism, direct clashes with the state.’ (Scott 1989: 15)

This means that the domain of politics, and consequently political participation, is very wide in socialist countries like China. It is wide both in the sense that it includes a great number of decisions, but also in the sense that it includes decisions taken at a very low level of government. In fact, in China a great deal of decisions that after this definition must be considered political (and efforts to influence these decisions are thus political participation) are made at the level of the *danwei*³, an institution that is not considered a part of the state hierarchy but nonetheless is responsible for decisions and allocations that have a direct and extensive influence on people's lives.

1.3.2 Formal and informal channels for political participation

Partly as a result of this, partly as a result of Scott's (1985, 1989, 1990) finding that 'everyday forms of resistance' and 'the weapons of the weak' are important to give a full picture of the means ordinary people have for political participation, I find it necessary to include modes and channels of political participation that usually are not included in an analysis of political participation. Traditional views on political participation focus on the participation that takes place within organizations and institutions and are governed by formal rules: what may be termed formal channels (Fukui 2000: 2). Employing a wider understanding of political participation, I will also include political participation governed by 'informal rules and institutions', what may be termed informal channels (Fukui 2000: 3). These channels resemble those Scott talks about (1985, 1989, 1990). The channels I will study will include expressing sentiments through complaints, using *guanxi*⁴ in political participation, slow-downs at work, and persuading others to use their tools for political participation in a particular way, in addition to 'traditional' channels such as voting.

³ One example of this is housing, a service we in the West are used to being provided by the market, while in China it is allotted to you by the state, through its extended arm, the *danwei*. *Danwei* can be translated as workplace or work unit. More on the institution of *danwei* in footnote 40 below.

⁴ *Guanxi* is translated as 'relation', 'relationship' (as a noun) and 'relate to' (as a verb) (Gold, et al. 2002: 6), 'particularistic ties' (Jacobs 1979: 242, footnote 23) and 'connections' (Shi 1997: 69). More on the definition of *guanxi* in section 5.1.5 below.

1.4 Methodological issues

In this section I will first outline the research design of this thesis. I will then address methodological issues relating to my fieldwork, and the use of secondary sources.

1.4.1 The research design

Political participation is a field that is often studied quantitatively (see e.g. Lazarsfeld, et al. 1944), as is the case with the field of democracy and democratization (see e.g. Lipset, et al. 1993), although qualitative methods are also used from time to time. It could therefore appear natural to use quantitative methodology in this thesis. I will however argue that the advantages in applying a qualitative method when uniting the two fields of political participation and democracy are greater than the advantages of quantitative methods. First, by using a qualitative method we get a deeper understanding of *how* things work and *why* they are as they are. A qualitative study gives us better possibility for taking the context into consideration and this could lead to the discovery of important nuances and explanatory factors that would have been lost in a quantitative study. Second, in a quantitative study the selection of data is quite dependent on and restricted by the predictions that can be deduced from the theory. Especially when using a Eurocentric theory like Habermas's for analyzing a country like China this can lead us astray. This contextual approach constitutes a particular qualitative approach: the case study.⁵

The case study has been defined as 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context' where it is difficult to draw sharp boundaries between the phenomenon and its context (Yin 1994: 13). This description fits nicely to my thesis; it is a contextual investigation of two contemporary phenomena: 1) an empirical inquiry of political participation in urban China in general and what this tells us about the prospects for democracy in China, and 2) an empirical inquiry into political participation of homeowners in particular.

⁵ I will present some statistics in this thesis, but they will be interpreted with reference to their context rather than a causal model.

It is common to speak of different types of case studies according to the goal of the specific case study. Yin (1994: 4-8) divides case studies in three types: descriptive, exploratory and explanatory. My research of political participation in urban China and its implications for democracy is an explanatory case study of the prospects for democracy in China. Here I will analyze and explain political participation in urban China and its implications for democracy so as to get a better understanding of how this phenomenon works, why it works as it does and how the various parts of the phenomenon are related to each other. The subject of my study is China, and this case study therefore constitutes a single case study. The second phenomenon, the political participation of homeowners, is a more uncharted field and it is therefore more difficult to make an explanatory research on this phenomenon. This will therefore be a theoretically grounded descriptive study. Through the use of theory I will be able to go beyond strictly describing the situation of the HOCs, and also be able to discuss possible implications of my findings in the light of the theory, without making clear inferences about causality. I will research HOCs in several housing quarters, and this will therefore constitute a multiple case study.

In addition to the empirical ambition of analyzing the prospects for democracy in China, I also have ambitions regarding the widening of the scope of Habermas's theory of democratization. In his introduction, Habermas states that the cases he study can be seen 'as cases that can be interpreted as instances of a more general social development' (Habermas 2002: L), and it follows that the findings in his book can be generalized⁶. However, Habermas's thesis is very colored by the cases it was deduced from. We therefore need to remove some of the most context-specific features of the theory. Through this de-contextualization the scope of the theory is widened and the level of generality is raised. In this sense, my case study could be classified as a theory-developing case study: an attempt to rebuild a macro theory through the study of a case at the micro level (Andersen 1997: 90-92). As Habermas's theory is very colored by the European context from which it was developed, the theory does not necessarily have to be falsified if the empirical findings do not fit the theory. We may rather remove these context-

⁶ More on this in the beginning of section 2.2 below.

specific parts of the theory, thereby ‘saving’ the theory as a whole. As Burawoy (1991) points to, when empirical findings do not fit the theory, the theory can be rebuilt, not in the sense that its scope is limited or that the anomaly is redefined as ‘exception-barring’ but by rebuilding the theory so that it is able to explain also the deviant case at hand.⁷ This is very to the point of what we need to do when we de-contextualize Habermas's theory. King, et al. (1994: 21) also suggest a solution in a similar vein, arguing that

‘[...] after seeing the data, we may modify our theory in a way that makes it apply to a larger range of phenomena. Since such an alteration in our thesis exposes it more fully to falsification, modification in this direction should not lead to ad hoc explanations that merely appear to ‘save’ an inadequate theory by restricting its range to phenomena that have already been observed to be in accordance with it.’

It is, however, not given that all cases can be used to modify a particular theory. We need to have a reason to believe that a particular case is suitable for modifying the particular theory. One condition is that the case falls under the range of cases that the theory is intended to cover. If the theory is intended to have universal application, any case that does not fit the theory will entail that the theory has to be modified. As I will elaborate on in the start of section 2.2, Habermas considers his theory a universal theory. If we find that his theory does not fit a relevant case it therefore needs to be revised.

1.4.2 The fieldwork in Shanghai

My fieldwork in Shanghai was conducted in the course of two weeks in the middle of March 2003. Prior to the fieldwork, I had spent 6 weeks in Shanghai during November and December 2002, participating in a course on Chinese politics being arranged at Fudan University by the University of Bergen’s Institute for Comparative Politics. In the course of this first stay I met with several social scientists and was in this way able to get an understanding of the situation for urban governance in general and Homeowner committees (HOCs) in particular. In the period between my first stay in Shanghai and

⁷ According to Burawoy, the rebuilding of the theory should be done through the introduction of one or more auxiliary hypotheses, which in an ideal situation satisfies the following criteria: the auxiliary hypotheses should 1) ‘be consistent with most of the major premises of the theory [one] is seeking to reconstruct’, 2) ‘explain everything the old theory explained as well as the anomaly’, 3) ‘lead to new anticipations rather than merely succeed as a patching-up operation’. And 4) ‘[e]mpirical observations should corroborate at least some of these new anticipations as facts.’ (Burawoy 1991: endnote 8 to page 10, see page 304). In my thesis, the hypothesis will be formulated as we de-contextualize Habermas’s theory, and they will not take the form of clear-cut hypotheses, but rather as questions.

the fieldwork I prepared my questionnaire, based on the information I got while I was in Shanghai in 2002 and some literature that I had located in China and at home.

When I arrived in Shanghai for my fieldwork, most of the first week was spent trying to arrange interviews through the contacts I had established during my first stay. When this was not successful, I decided to actively seek out HOCs myself. Together with my interpreter⁸ I roamed the streets of Shanghai, stopping by random housing complexes and asking if an HOC was established in the complex. If the answer was yes, we asked for an interview with a member of the HOC, if the answer was no, we moved on. The first week was also spent refining my questionnaire based on new information that I found while in Shanghai. With the help of my interpreter I searched the Internet for regulations that would be relevant for my research. We did find relevant regulations, and when they were only available in Chinese, my interpreter and I cooperated on translating them.

Selecting the cases

Since no list over the Homeowner committees (HOCs) in Shanghai were available, I was not able to base my selection of HOCs on background information such as the level of education of the residents, price of apartments, how well the HOCs functioned, etc. However, as I expected that the performance of the HOCs could vary with the education level of the residents, the resourcefulness of the residents, the attitude of the local street office (SO) and residential committee (RC), etc., I wanted to ensure that the HOCs I studied were situated in different parts of the city, and in parts of the city that had different characteristics. Assuming that resourceful people generally buy more expensive housing, I decided to seek out HOCs in different parts of town that had different housing prices, so as to control for these variables as much as possible. I found information on how housing prices varied between different parts of town in Wu (2002b: 1589). Based on the figures he presented, I decided to research HOCs in Luwan (average price of RMB 260.000-274.600 pr. housing), Jing'An (191.900-260.000), Hongkou (175,900-191.900) and Yangpu (96.900-143.000) districts. To control my

⁸ It is worth noticing that my interpreter was not an official interpreter which was appointed to me. I got in touch with her through friends I had from my first visit to Shanghai. She was a student of English at the Fudan University, and had previous experience as an interpreter.

research sample, I asked my interviewees for the average price of the apartments in the complex. The answers I got indicated that I was indeed able to get a varied sample, with prices ranging from 3.850 RMB⁹/m² (interviewee # 3) to 7.300 RMB/m² (interviewee # 7). In this way I was able to ensure that the main background variables were controlled for, and that the HOCs I studied were representative to some extent.

Generalizing from the Shanghai-cases to China in general

I have now established that the cases I studied are diverse and in this sense gives us a varied and to some extent representative picture of the situation in Shanghai. The next question is whether it is possible to generalize¹⁰ from the cases I studied in Shanghai to China in general.

It is difficult to generalize from Shanghai to other cities in China because Shanghai is unique both in its political and economic characteristics. But because of these characteristics, I will argue that Shanghai constitutes a critical case¹¹ for the prospects of property owners pushing for further political participation when protecting their stakes vis-à-vis the state in China (Yin 1994: 38-39). There are two characteristics of Shanghai that make it suitable as a critical case in this respect. First, Shanghai is one of the most politically advanced and active cities in China, measured in number of civic associations (Pei 1998a, quoted in Zhang 2002: 480-482). In this sense, Beijing could be better suited as it is considered the politically most sophisticated city in China. I chose to study Shanghai over Beijing because of its second characteristic; a property market where a relatively high share of the housing is bought by individuals. In 1997, 79 % percent of commodity housing was sold to individuals in Shanghai, compared to 40 % in Beijing (Wu 2002c: 156).

The use of the critical case design has some implications for the conclusions we can draw from our findings in Shanghai. As the logic behind the critical case test is that the critical case is *the* case one expects will fit with the theoretical propositions, the implications of a *failure* will be that one must conclude that the result will be the same for

⁹ 1 RMB = approximately 0.8 NOK = approximately \$ 0.12.

¹⁰ This is also known as external validity (Yin 1994: 33).

¹¹ The logic of the critical case is that the particular case is of such a character that we can draw general conclusions from it: e.g. if it does not happen here, it will not happen any other places either (Patton 1987: 54-56).

all the other cases. On the other hand, if the theoretical propositions are confirmed, one is not able to generalize this to the other cases. The only way one can draw general implications in this situation is by studying other cases as well.

Conducting the fieldwork

In this section I will discuss the reliability¹² and validity¹³ of my fieldwork.

My fieldwork took the form of interviewing members of Homeowner committees (HOCs) and in some instances employees of property management companies (PMCs). All in all, I conducted 11 interviews. When conducting scientific interviews it is important to avoid that the interviewee misunderstands the question being posed. According to Foddy (1993: 39-46), there are four sources of misunderstandings in scientific interviews: 1) 'context-specific nuances of meaning', 2) the relative difficulty of the words used, 3) 'lack of clear empirical referents' and 4) 'related nuances of apparently similar words'.

To avoid these problems I constructed an interview guide prior to the fieldwork, where I formulated the questions I wanted to ask. When I conducted the interviews I did however not follow the interview guide strictly, varying the sequence of the questions and to some extent the wording. This gave the interview the character of a conversation, what Mikkelsen (1995: 102) labels a semi-structured interview. I had two reasons for using the semi-structured interview. First, this increased the possibility that the interviewees would give me information that I had not thought of as interesting. The second reason was that this made the interviewees feel more comfortable, making it more likely that they would give true answers to questions that might be considered controversial. The advantage of having an interview guide, even if it was not followed strictly, was that I was already aware of the problems relating to interviewing. Beside, I had the wording of the questions fresh in memory, and also in writing if I needed to consult them again.

¹² Reliability is defined by Yin (1994: 33) as being able to repeat the data collection and still getting the same results.

¹³ A more precise term is construct validity. This can be defined as 'establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied' (Yin 1994: 33).

I suspected that the issues I asked about could be perceived as sensitive, and therefore started the interviews with background questions in order to establish trust and make the interviewee comfortable (Mikkelsen 1995: 111). I also avoided sensitive and emotional wordings. Since most of my interviewees spoke Chinese only, a language I do not speak, I had to use an interpreter. All my efforts to make my interviews produce valid and reliable findings would be in vain if my interpreter committed the errors I had done my best to avoid. To ensure that she had the same sensitivity to the problems of conducting scientific research, I gave her two books (Foddy 1993; Robson 2002) on scientific interviews that she read prior to our interviews. In order to make her think through the wording of the questions prior to conducting the interviews she was also given my interview-guide prior to the interviews. In this way she was able to read through the questionnaire, think through the wording of the questions and give me feedback if she found that some of the wordings were inappropriate.

Another issue that may potentially weaken the validity of my findings when using an interpreter is that the interviewees do not trust the interpreter, believing she has contacts with the government or similar. I do however not think this was a problem with in my case. First of all the interpreter was a young student, and I find it very unlikely that any of my interviewees felt that she was in a position where she may endanger them or their position. Second, the one interview I conducted without an interpreter did not yield other findings than the ones I conducted with the help of my interpreter. Third, as noted earlier, my interpreter was not an official interpreter and the interviewees therefore did not have to fear that the information they gave could be used against them. An advantage of using an interpreter was that I could focus on taking notes from the interview. This may seem like a trivial point but it is nevertheless very important when reproducing the interviews, ensuring that the reproduction of the interview is coherent with what was actually said (Mikkelsen 1995: 113; Rubin & Rubin 1995: 124-128)¹⁴.

¹⁴ To use an recorder was not an alternative for two reasons. First of all because this was very likely to make the interviewees uncomfortable and less willing to answer frankly on potentially sensitive questions. Second, because we lacked the letter of introduction that is very important in China, we sometimes had to convince the interviewee to let us interview him. To then put a recorder on the table would probably make the interviewee less cooperative.

1.4.3 Secondary sources

In this section I will discuss issues of reliability and validity relating to the use of secondary sources.

In chapters 4 and 5, I rely on research carried out by other scholars. I found that there was an abundance of sources available on this field already, and considered it more fruitful to apply and assess these different investigations, than spending time conducting my own research. Given the limited time and financial resources available, my own research was doomed to be of a different quality than the research already conducted.

When relying on research conducted by others, one does however meet some problems: first, one's ability to control that the research has been conducted in a satisfactory way is more limited than if one conducted the research oneself, and the reliability of the data presented are therefore more uncertain. Second, one's ability to control the validity of the data is also more limited as one often does not know exactly how the researcher operationalized his study. In other words, it is hard to control if the operational measures are constructed in a way which ensures that they really address the issue the author is discussing. As a consequence of these two problems it is difficult to make the necessary methodological qualifications. I neutralize these problems in two ways. First of all, I constantly use more than one source, and I try to use sources that have applied different research strategies. By doing this, I am able to attain the first of the four types of triangulation¹⁵ that Yin points to (Yin 1994: 91-94); triangulation 'among different evaluators (investigator triangulation)'. To the extent that the sources I use, have applied different research strategies I am also able to attain the fourth type of triangulation; triangulation 'of methods (methodological triangulation)'. These triangulations increase the validity of my findings, and when findings in one source are supported by findings in another source, one may assume that the findings are reliable. My second way to neutralize the problems of relying on research conducted by other researchers is to make an assessment of the methodology of my key sources. This increases the validity and reliability further, which is necessary when the sources are decisive for my findings.

¹⁵ Triangulation means to use 'several different sources of information., following a corroboratory way' (Yin 1994: 92).

1.5 Outline of the thesis

As mentioned above, the theme of this thesis is political participation in urban China and what implications this may have for the prospects for democracy. I will use Habermas's theory of democratization to analyze this, and it is also my intention to de-contextualize this theory so that the level of generality of the theory is increased. After the above notes on definitions and methodological issues, I continue this thesis, in chapter 2, with an outline of Habermas's theory. Since Habermas's theory is unconventional in the field of democratization, the chapter starts with an introduction to Habermas's intellectual context in section 2.1. In this section his theory of democratization will be placed in the context of the Frankfurter School. Next, an outline of Habermas's theory of democratization follows in section 2.2. First, I will discuss why we may use Habermas's theory, which is so based on the developments in 18th and 19th century Prussen, England and France, to analyze China. I will then move on to outline Habermas's theory with a focus on the five aspects of his theory that I find most relevant. First, Habermas's concept of citizen and the bourgeois people, which is central to his theory, will be presented. Second, the establishment of autonomy, and the vital role played by constitutional and legal protection of the rights of the citizens played in this, will be outlined. Third, I will outline how arenas for the public sphere emerged. Fourth, how the bourgeois people became interested in politics and demanded to have a say in the formulation of politics will be outlined. Fifth, how the bourgeois people were able to gain the position as the basis for legitimacy will be outlined. Also, the theory is a normatively based theory where Habermas argues for a specific model of democracy; namely the deliberative democracy. As the kind of democracy Habermas is a supporter of clearly guides what he is looking for and how he interprets this, I will present his model of democracy in section 2.3, so that we can get a better understanding of Habermas's theory of democratization.

In chapter 3 I will point to some features of Habermas's theory that I will argue are very specific to the context from which the theory was developed. Following Burawoy (1991)¹⁶, I will argue that these context-specific features need to be removed so

¹⁶ See section 1.4.1 above for more on the research design.

that the level of generalization of Habermas's theory increases. This will be done through raising questions relating to the context-specific nature of Habermas's theory. These questions will then be answered in the remainder of the thesis, whereby the de-contextualization is achieved.

Chapter 4 will analyze the prospects for the business stratum in China being proponents for democracy in China, like the business stratum was in Habermas's theory. This will be done with reference to the first asset of 'the bourgeois people', having autonomy. I find that the business stratum in China is entangled with the authorities to such a large degree, and have so weak autonomy that it is very unlikely that they will be proponents for democracy.

In chapter 5 I will then move on to see where we may find other proponents for democracy in China. Following the mass-character of Habermas's theory, the political participation of ordinary Chinese urban citizens will be the next field of research. As will be evident from section 1.3.1 and 1.3.2 above, the channels for political participation researched in this thesis will include both conventional, formal channels and the informal channels that Scott (1985, 1989, 1990) classifies as 'weapons of the weak' and 'everyday forms of resistance'. In this section I will, in addition to autonomy, also consider the second asset in Habermas's theory; channels to the government. After outlining the channels, a thorough assessment of what prospects they give for a push for democracy emerging as it did in Habermas's theory follows. I find that the channels for political participation are under so strict restrictions that this is not likely. Also, the autonomy of the citizens is so weak that it is highly unlikely that they will be proponents for democracy.

Following this, chapter 6 will look at the effect the reforms have had on political participation in urban China. With the increased prevalence of the market, people now have a bigger and more clearly defined stake to protect vis-à-vis the government. Among the main changes instigated by the reforms is the emergence of private property. I will look at how this changes people's possibilities for political participation. This will be done through a research of one particular new avenue for political participation that has opened up: Homeowner committees (HOCs). In this analysis I will focus on the third

asset in Habermas's theory, having a stake to protect vis-à-vis the government, and I will research how this influences political participation.

Chapter 7 will give a summary of the findings of this thesis. I will assess what we have learned about the prospects for democracy in China, implications for Habermas's theory and how Habermas's theory has contributed to the field of democratization.

To summarize, the theme of this thesis is the prospects for democracy in China. The research question will be: what are the prospects for a pressure for democracy emerging from below in contemporary China, as seen through the theory of Habermas?

2. JÜRGEN HABERMAS'S THEORY OF DEMOCRATIZATION

In this chapter I will give an outline of Jürgen Habermas's theory of democracy and democratization. In order to get a clear understanding of his theory of democratization it is important to have some knowledge of the Frankfurter School, whose work Habermas is building on and inspired by. I therefore start with a brief presentation of this school of thought. Next, I will give a thorough presentation of Habermas's theory of democratization. Whereas most political scientists and philosophers emphasize the voting aspect of democracy, Jürgen Habermas emphasizes the deliberative aspects of democracy. As this has important implications for his theory on democratization, a short presentation of his model of democracy will be my last step.

2.1 The Frankfurter School: Habermas and his context

I find it natural to start with a short presentation of the Frankfurter School, which has had a major influence on the philosophy of Jürgen Habermas. As White (1995: 6) says when discussing the importance of the Frankfurter School for Habermas, 'One simply cannot understand Habermas's work as a whole without attending to this historical rootedness'.

The Frankfurter School is the name used for the school of thought that emerged from the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt in the 1930's. Prominent philosophers such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer were affiliated with the institute. At the core of their ideas was a critique of Western modernity which was based, although quite loosely, on Marxist thought, and psychoanalysis. The philosophers of the Frankfurter School raised a critique against Western modernism where they argued that the modern understanding of reason, progress, subjectivity and nature led to new forms of irrationality and repression (White 1995: 3). They argued, basically, that the Western project of modernization had failed, and not led to greater freedom and rationality, as it was intended, but rather to a new kind of repression based on the forces of monopoly capitalism.

Further, the ambition of the Frankfurter School was to establish an alternative to the ‘bourgeois’ social sciences. They were especially opposed to the positivist belief in the possibility of establishing a neutral description of social phenomena (Eriksen & Weigård 1999: 13). The Frankfurter School argued that one must consider the object of a social study not only as an object, but also as a subject with a potential for action. They therefore emphasized the importance of motivating people to try to do something about the problems they faced, and in this possibility they saw the means of overcoming the problems of Western modernization.

When the institute was reestablished in Germany after WWII, it continued its critique of Western modern societies. But many of the ‘old’ philosophers of the Frankfurter School, such as Adorno and Horkheimer, were now far less optimistic in their views of the possibilities to correct the problems of Western modernity. Their critique was so total that there did not seem to be anything left worth conserving from Western modernity. This was a pessimism not shared by Jürgen Habermas. He continued on the track laid out by the ‘early’ Frankfurter School, and his work has been characterized by a thorough critique of Western modernity, but still a critique based on the belief that there is hope, both because it is possible to deal with the problems, and also because there are some things worth conserving in Western modernity (White 1995: 5).

2.2 The development of the public sphere and the growth of political participation and democracy in Europe

In this section I will give an account of Habermas's theory of the development of the public sphere¹⁷ and how this influenced the growth of political participation. My account will be based on his book from 1962, ‘Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit:

¹⁷ In his earlier works (among them Habermas 2002, first published in Germany in 1962), Habermas uses a concept of the public sphere where he only acknowledges the existence of one public sphere. This concept has been met with strong criticism for being too static and unitary (see for example Fraser 1992). As a result, Habermas now acknowledges the existence of pluralities of public spheres, such as a regional, a national and an international public sphere (Eriksen & Weigård 1999: 244; Habermas 1992: 425-426). Since Habermas uses the word in the singular way in his outline of this theory (Habermas 2002), I find it most natural to stick to his original use in this chapter. In the rest of my thesis, I will use it in the later, plural way.

Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft'.¹⁸ In this book Habermas develops his theory of democratization and the public sphere.

Throughout the outline of Habermas's theory, its historical basis will be obvious. This may lead the reader to ask if this theory has any relevance to China at all. The answer to this question can be found in the ambiguity of Habermas's theory of democratization. First of all it is an empirically based theory where Habermas is trying to point out and explain the processes that led to the establishment of a public sphere and democracy in 18th and 19th century England, Preussen and France. In this sense, Habermas (2002: XLIX) states that he conceives of

'...the bourgeois public sphere as a category that is typical of an epoch. It cannot be abstracted from the unique developmental history of that 'civil society' (bürgerliche Gesellschaft) originating in the European Middle-Ages.'

This seems to indicate clearly that the theory Habermas develops is not intended for and not possible to use in another context than the one it was deduced from. However, Habermas (2002: L) states later in his introduction that

'The sociological investigation of historical trends proceeds on a level of generality at which unique processes and events can only be cited as examples – that is, as cases that can be interpreted as instances of a more general social development'

The reason for this apparent contradiction can be found in the nature of Habermas's project; it has both historical and sociological aspects. The Frankfurter School uses a cross-disciplinary approach. Following in this tradition, Habermas has (at least) two reasons for writing his book. He first of all wants to outline the growth¹⁹ of public sphere in Europe in historical terms. Second, he also wants to make a sociological contribution. Because of this interest, he outlines the history of the public sphere in Europe in such a way that it is transferable to other contexts. I therefore argue that Habermas's theory can be used in another context, but some of its features are specific to the context it was deduced from and therefore need to be removed (this will be the theme of chapter 3 below).

¹⁸ My references will be to the Norwegian translation of the book Habermas 2002, first published in Norwegian in 1971). There is also an English translation available with the title 'The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society'. (Habermas 1989).

¹⁹ In the second part of his book, which I do not discuss, he also outlines the decay of the public sphere.

Following this discussion, we may move on to outline Habermas's theory of democratization. I will start by defining one concept that is central in Habermas's theory; 'the bourgeois people'. By starting with this concept, I hope to avoid some of the confusions that may emerge from the distinct way Habermas uses it. I will then move on to give an account of the way the public sphere emerged according to Habermas. This outline will be divided into four parts. I will start by giving an account of private autonomy. In the second part I will give an outline of how the free press developed. In the third part I will show how the citizens developed a political interest in opposition to the state. Finally, I will give an account of how the public sphere gained its position as a basis for legitimizing decisions made by the parliament. This organization into four parts does not indicate a chronological development. The different processes were often parallel and influencing each other in a reciprocal way. I choose to organize it in this way for purely practical reasons and a hope that this will clarify the different processes that were going on in this period.

2.2.1 Habermas's concept of the bourgeois people

Before I move on to outline Habermas's theory, I find it useful to start by defining one concept that is central in Habermas's theory and therefore will be central to my thesis as well: 'the bourgeois people'.

This is a very central concept in Habermas's theory. The focus of his theory is to a large degree the bourgeois people and their relationship to the authorities. Within 'the people' Habermas identifies 'the bourgeois people' as the 'stratum' (a word he himself uses) that is 'the real carrier of the public'²⁰ (Habermas 2002: 22). This group, which his theory focuses on, is the people that are at the forefront of the push towards greater political participation. He calls this group the 'bourgeois people'. The bourgeois people, he remarks, is only a very small part of the whole common people (Habermas 2002: 35). The relationship between the people and the bourgeois people in Habermas's theory seems to be that the bourgeois people is the active group, the ones working to increase the degree of political participation in the society, while the people is the larger, more

²⁰ The wording of my quotations will be taken from the English translation of the book (Habermas 1989), but the reference given will still be to the Norwegian translation (Habermas 2002).

passive group. The people all have the potential and possibility of joining the bourgeois people and become proponents for political participation: as Habermas says, ‘all had to *be able* to participate in solving the common discussable issues’ (Habermas 2002: 35, original emphasis).

The bourgeois people, the core of the people, are understood by Habermas as the scholars, e.g. the senior public servants, doctors, priests, professors and army officers. This includes also the common people to the extent that they are ‘scholars’ (Habermas 2002: 21). But who are ‘the scholars’ in Habermas’s meaning then? They seem to be everyone who reads newspapers and pays attention to public affairs, including people involved in commercial activities and even potentially manual laborers. In other words, all those who are able to and interested in participating in the public debates. The point that the people not only have to be able to participate in the public debate, but also have to be interested in doing so to be counted among the bourgeois people, seems to be a major point for Habermas. It seems that the bourgeois people are not considered as bourgeois people because they come from a distinct layer of society but rather are defined on the basis that they are interested in participating in the public debate, and are capable of participating in such a way (i.e. with such insight) that they gain the recognition as fellow debater from the other bourgeois people.

As we see, Habermas’s definition of ‘the bourgeois people’ is quite different from what we normally associate with the word ‘bourgeoisie’, where the emphasis is often put on the class characteristics, and the bourgeois people is defined as the commercial class (Calhoun 2002).²¹ Habermas does indeed include the commercial class or ‘capitalists’ as he calls them, such as merchants, bankers, entrepreneurs and manufacturers, and his theory emphasizes the central role this class, together with other members of the bourgeois people, had in the push of democracy (Habermas 2002: 21). As there is no other term that better describes the role played by the bourgeois people I choose to employ this term, despite its ambiguity. It is important to keep in mind when reading this thesis that the term has a meaning that is much wider than the conventional

²¹ This confusion is in much caused by the dual meaning of the word Habermas uses in German: *Bürger*. As the translator of Habermas’s book notes, this has the meaning of both ‘middle class’ (bourgeois), and ‘civil’ and ‘civic’ (citizen) in German (Burger 1989: :xv). Although the translator finds the concept ‘the bourgeois people’ not entirely satisfying, it is used in the English translation.

meaning, which focuses on the commercial class. The primary property of the bourgeois people is that they are interested in and capable of participating in the public debate, and one must also keep in mind that all people may in principle be part of the bourgeois people.

The purpose of the remainder of this chapter will be to outline the processes that made the bourgeois people able to be proponents for democracy.

2.2.2 The constitutional and legal basis for private autonomy

According to Habermas himself, private autonomy is in many ways the basis for the citizens' participation in political life (Habermas 2002: 3, 73), and I therefore find it natural to start with the concept of private autonomy, and how this autonomy was established. The private autonomy came about in two processes; the constitutional protection of private (human) rights (Habermas 2002: 76-77) and the establishment of a legally regulated market economy removed from the state (Habermas 2002: 69).

The start of private autonomy can be situated to the point when constitutional protection of citizens' rights started. It was with the establishment of constitutionally protected rights that the necessary protection of the sphere, its institutions and instruments, and thereby the functions of autonomy, came about (Habermas 2002: 77). According to Habermas (2002: 76-77) three kinds of rights were established: First, the rights that constitute the sphere for public reasoning and the political functions of the citizens within this sphere (these rights are known as political freedoms in today's language). Second, the freedom of the individual (personal freedom and the sanctity of home). Third, rules regulating the relationship between individuals in the public sphere (protection of private property, etc.).

These rights in sum established predictability for the citizens. The citizens were ensured that the authorities will not suddenly and unexpectedly intervene to break down on behavior they for some random reason dislike. The authorities could only intervene through clearly defined procedures, towards clearly defined situations. The advantage of this, combined with a market-based economy, was that the citizens gained a power-base of their own whereas they earlier were almost totally dependent on the state.

The second process that helped establish private autonomy was the development of the civil law into a system of laws where the authorities no longer had a say, but

where private individuals were allowed to decide for themselves how to organize their relationships, thereby establishing a free market. The codification of civil law started in England and then spread to Prussen in 1794, France in 1804 and Austria in 1811. Up to this point civil law was tied to the authorities and was suffering from limitations placed upon it by the authorities and the guilds. Through the codification of civil law a truly free market, where the relationship between the citizens was a matter purely for the citizens themselves, was founded. The importance of civil law lies in its function for the free market. Only in a market from which the state has to a large extent withdrawn is it possible to talk of the market as increasing the private autonomy of the citizens. As Habermas says (2002: 69) in stressing the importance of the free market: it was ‘with the expansion and liberation of this sphere of the market, commodity owners gained private autonomy’. Habermas (2002: 69, 73) claims that it was only through the liberal, free market that the private sphere became truly emancipated from the government and was able to take its political role in the public sphere.

The degree of private autonomy that I have sketched in this section constitutes a big difference from the situation found in the middle ages. Even though one did have a formal separation of ‘public’ and ‘private’ at this time, it did not have any practical importance (Habermas 2002: 4-13). Property rights were not given to the individual; they were concentrated in the feudal lord. This same person, with his court, also constituted the authorities and thereby occupied the totality of the public space. As Habermas (2002: 7) formulates it, the authorities ‘represented their lordship not for, but ‘before’ the people’²².

2.2.3 The emergence of arenas for the public sphere

The first arena for public discussions emerged as what Habermas calls ‘the literary precursor of the public sphere operating in the political domain’ (Habermas 2002: 27). In this arena the discussion evolved around culture, and it functioned as a training field for public reasoning. This arena emerged when the cultural activities were removed from the court and made publicly available for all interested citizens. However, the publicity in

²² A small anecdote that can serve as an illustration of the lack of separation between the private and public sphere is that the word ‘*privat*’ was not present in the German language until the middle of the 16th century (Habermas 2002: 10).

this arena was in many ways only a continuation of the publicity of the court. Since the arena had only recently broken away from the court, members of the court, who possessed the knowledge and experience needed to discuss cultural themes, easily dominated it. In addition, members of the court were admired by the citizens and were therefore readily accepted as discussants. Through this communication with members of the court the scholarly middle-class was trained in the art of reasoning. This early arena found its institution in the coffee houses. Together with the court (which is breaking away from the personal sphere of the king) the public constituted the bridge between the old court-based public and the new civic public.

Gradually, 'the 'town' took over [the royal court's] cultural functions' and the court withdrew from daily life (Habermas 2002: 29). In England, the coffee houses developed into an arena that it was necessary for the literature to gain legitimacy from. Since the nobility, which fills important societal functions, were participants in the discussions in the coffee houses, the cultural discussions were soon broadened to include political and economic discussions as well (Habermas 2002: 30). In addition to contributing to a broadening of the public sphere through broadening the subject of discussion, the coffee houses helped to broaden the audience of the public sphere by bringing in the broader layers of the middle class, such as poor craftsmen. Similar developments were seen in France and Germany, but not to the same extent and not encompassing the same broad audience (Habermas 2002: 31-32). This process made the discussions available for all, and the discussion became a medium for acquiring knowledge of the culture and the society (Habermas 2002: 35-38). In the wake of the discussions in the coffee houses the so-called 'critical journals' emerged. These journals had the dual purpose of both being a forum for the discussion of culture, and contributing to the enlightenment of a public dominated by lay-men (Habermas 2002: 38-40).

Around 1750 the public had grown to such a size that the mentioned arenas were not able to maintain it. These arenas were not big enough and not available to a large enough audience to suit the needs of a large and active public. In this phase, the public started to use newspapers as their arenas, and the first daily newspapers emerged (Habermas 2002: 41, 19-23). In addition to filling the merchant's need for news, the newspapers filled another function; namely the authorities' need to let their decisions

and laws be known. In fact, they did this so well that the newspapers in many cases were taken over by the state. Later, when a public sphere of critical citizens had established itself (I will elaborate on how this came about in sections 2.2.4 and 2.2.5) the public sphere remodeled the press to use it for its needs as opposition to the authorities. The last part of the 18th century saw the emergence of magazines, which had basically the same functions as the newspapers.

2.2.4 The development of the politically interested bourgeois people

What I have written so far in section 2.2 has been on how the bourgeois people gained their autonomy and how arenas to use this autonomy were developed. In this section I will try to elaborate in greater detail how the bourgeois people became interested in the activities of the authorities and in trying to influence these activities.

Basically, the political interest of the bourgeois people was awoken because they felt that the activities and decisions of the authorities, especially the bureaucracy, affected their own activities, and they thereby became conscious of themselves as opponents to the authorities (Habermas 2002: 23, 52). Habermas (2002: 22) says that

‘[...] the public concern regarding the private sphere of civil society was no longer confined to the authorities, but was considered by the subjects as one that was properly theirs’.

Among the things eliciting this feeling was the fact that a number of decisions made both in the parliament and in the administration had profound impact on the activities of a privatized household in an increasingly commercialized society, such as a decision to increase taxes. The bourgeois people were able to deal with these challenges because they had an arena, the press, which they could use to protect their stake vis-à-vis the government (Habermas 2002: 23). The bourgeois people made up what Habermas (2002: 58) calls a ‘pre-parliamentary forum’. This means that they were interested in what was happening in the parliament, but they did not yet have the position to influence what was happening there. How they gained influence, will be the theme of my next section.

2.2.5 Gaining the position as the basis for legitimacy

We have seen in the preceding sections how the citizens as audience developed, were able to claim the public sphere that was originally constituted by the authorities and began to act as opponents to these authorities through public reasoning (Habermas 2002: 25). In this section I will try to explain how the public sphere was able to establish itself as the basis for the legitimacy of the decisions made by the authorities, more specifically decisions made by the parliament.

Some of the members of the existing authorities, the nobility and government officials, were among the participants in the public sphere (Habermas 2002: 27). Since these people held positions in the decision-making structures in addition to being participants in the new public sphere, they were in a special position where they acted as mediators between the existing power-holders and the new, emerging stratum of citizens with an influence on the politics of the state: the bourgeois people. They were influenced by the opinions of the merchants and they saw in them a possibility to make their own opinions prevail in the parliamentary disputes by claiming the support of 'the people'. The existing power-holders therefore began making appeals to the reasoning public to gain legitimacy for their positions (Habermas 2002: 53). This led to a process (spanning more than a century), where the parliament was transformed from an assembly of estates into a modern parliament based on the will of the people. This tendency was most clearly seen in England, but could also be seen in France where the revolution acted as a catalyst for these processes. In Germany, the parliament was not in function long enough for this system to be able to establish itself (Habermas 2002: 61-67). Influenced by John Locke and Montesquieu the public sphere soon learned to promote itself and its public meaning as the only legitimate source for the laws (Habermas 2002: 50).

In the beginning it was the minority in the parliament that found it expedient to appeal to the public sphere to gain support for their positions. However, as this proved to be a successful strategy giving more legitimacy to their standpoints it became interesting for the majority to make appeals to the public for support as well (Habermas 2002: 59). The result of this was that by the turn of the 19th century the parliamentary exclusivity to make decisions, and its impenetrability vis-à-vis the ordinary people was broken. Now decisions were made in discussion with the citizens in the public sphere,

which had become the officially sanctioned discussants of the parliamentary delegates (Habermas 2002: 61). Thereby the deliberative democracy Habermas talks of (see section 2.3) is established. The public meaning Habermas argues, is born from the best arguments, and this ensures that the laws and decisions are rational and sensible (2002: 51).

The result of these processes was that citizens are no longer only recipients of meaning and orders, but also senders of such meaning and orders (Habermas 2002: 24).

2.3 Habermas's model of democracy

Fundamental to all of Habermas's academic writing is a clear understanding of the deliberative democracy as the best form of democracy. This is true even when he does empirically based research, as he does in the book (Habermas 2002) which is the basis for this thesis. We can clearly see this in the end of the last section, where I pointed out that through the establishment of the citizens as the basis for legitimacy a deliberative democracy was born. I therefore find it useful to take a step backward now, and consider the normative understandings of democracy that underpins Habermas's thinking. This is the object of this section.

In his model of democracy Habermas is trying to unite the best of both the liberal²³ and the republic²⁴ traditions (Habermas 1996: 296). He wants to combine the

²³ In the liberal model of democracy, emphasis is placed on voting as the way of reaching decisions. The alternative which receives the most votes is the one chosen, and this procedure is what gives legitimacy to the decision. Politics is seen as a fight for resources, and the aggregation of votes is the process regulating this fight. Ahead of the voting procedure there should be a discussion, but the discussion only has as its goal to introduce the different arguments for the voters. This model has as its fundament that human rights are natural, given before the constitution of states. In the liberal democracy, a decision has legitimacy because of the procedures through which it is reached. This is problematic in a number of ways. One major problem is that it does not ensure a decision that is 'correct' in an ethical or moral meaning (Eriksen & Weigård 1999: 156). The decision-making process reaches its conclusion when the votes are counted and one alternative is then announced as 'winner' because it received the most votes. However, if the voters act as atomistic, independent individuals pursuing what suits their private interests best, one has no guarantee for the ethical or moral soundness of the decision. Another major problem is the risk for errors in the aggregation of preferences, leading one scholar to characterize the results of voting as 'arithmetic artifacts' (Elkin 1993: 31). For example, Condorcet's paradox states that voters often are not able to rank their preferences in a consistent way, thereby creating non-consistent rankings of preferences, which lead to rotating preferences. Another problem from a normative viewpoint is the fact that a decision reached through the plurality principle cannot claim to represent the interests of the people as such, only the interests of the (sometimes narrow) majority, thereby undermining the fundament for individual rights (Shapiro 1996: pp. 16, reference given in Eriksen & Weigård 1999: 156).

²⁴ The republican model has its origin in the small city-states of ancient Greece, and can in many ways be seen as the 'mother' of democracy. The prime feature of this model is the small scale and homogeneous character of the societies applying it. This enabled these societies to have a parliament based not on representation, but on every citizen being a member of parliament and participating directly in the decision-making. In this model, decisions are made through reaching consensus rather than through voting. This is to give decisions that are morally and ethically good. This model also has a number of problems related to it

ability to reach decisions that are morally and ethically sound from the republican model, with the ability to reach decisions from the liberal model. As Habermas considers the republican model as the model leading to the most attractive decisions, his efforts are in many ways focused on finding a way of transferring this procedure to a modern, complex society. In doing this, his hope is to create a model of democracy that ensures 'good' decisions while not being ridden by the deadlocks and impossible preconditions of the republican model.

Habermas begins by claiming that since we cannot know a priori what is morally and ethically the best solution to a problem, a process leading to a political decision must start with a deliberation where all concerned parties get the opportunity to make their view known, and where the aim is to reach a consensus (Eriksen & Weigård 1999: 18). At this stage, an important question arises: are the participants in the deliberation willing to change their opinions so that a consensus can be reached? Habermas's answer to this question is yes, and we can find the reason why he believes so in his discourse theory. This theory is to a large degree developed in his massive 'The theory of Communicative Action' (1984). Habermas' discourse theory claims that rational actors acting in a political environment have to give reason for their actions and justify their demands if they want to achieve their goal (Eriksen & Weigård 1999: 166).

This leads to a deliberation-process where different arguments are presented, and then thrown back and forth undergoing close scrutiny from the participants. In the end only the argument seen by the participants as the most convincing will survive. This rests on the premise that people are willing to listen to the better arguments and be persuaded by them. Those that do not have adequate reasons or justifications, for example because they mainly are motivated by personal interests will not be able to persuade others to

(Eriksen & Weigård 1999: 160-163). First of all, it conceives of politics as a process taking place in a highly integrated group (Habermas 1995). This leads to the model acknowledging human rights only for its citizens, not for inhabitants in general, thereby not giving human rights a definitive status. From a moral viewpoint this is obviously not acceptable as it may lead to systematic discrimination, lawlessness and exclusion of certain groups. Further, the citizens become so embedded in the state that this model lacks a separation between private and public spheres. One is not able to separate the citizens' role as private individuals meeting in the marketplace from their role as decision-makers meeting in the parliament. As a consequence one does not have the same need as in modern states to have a public sphere that is outside the control of those in power. Third, as the republican model has its origin in a small state, it is not able to come to grips with the complex structures of the modern society and the different kinds of procedures that are needed for such a society to function. For example, parties and also corporatist arrangements will be strangers to the republican model. Fourth, the republican model is dependent on a homogenous polity to work. If the citizens come from different cultures, and have differing understandings of what constitutes the good life, they will not be able to agree on a number of basic questions. This difference will come to the surface in many decision-making situations, and may then lead to a deadlock where one is not able to reach a decision.

support their cause. As an effect they will have to give their support to another alternative that they find persuading and have a chance of gaining the support of all. We see that a discourse has a transformative effect, with the power to change the positions of its participants, leading to the 'best' solution being chosen.

In his 'democratic principle', Habermas formulates a narrow criterion that decisions have to adhere to in order for them to be legitimate. It states that

'...only those principles may claim legitimacy that can meet with the assent (Zustimmung) of all citizens in a discursive process of legislation that in turn has been legally constituted.' (Habermas 1996: 110)

That this principle is adhered to is guaranteed by bringing the issue at hand through the relevant type(s) of discourse(s). Habermas has three different types of discourses (Eriksen & Weigård 1999: 217-219). The least fundamental discourse is the pragmatic discourse. This discourse concerns issues where merely empirical knowledge is sufficient to answer the question being discussed. If it is not possible to reach a consensus on the question at that stage, it is, Habermas claims, either because the question touches upon what constitutes the good life (questions of ethics in Habermas's vocabulary), or because it relates to questions of justice (questions of morality). The next step then is to make a procedural decision on which of these two levels one has to continue the discussion on, based on what kind of interests that are at stake (Habermas 1996: 165). If the decision is that the discussion should be continued on the level of ethics, one will try to reach a common understanding of society and what values it should be based on. This is done in an ethical discourse, where the participants have to take into consideration what the consequences will be for their society as a whole. If the decision is to continue the discussion on the moral level, the issue is what is just on a more general basis. In this discourse the goal is to reach an understanding of what is just with reference not only to the members of its own society (which to a large degree has a common value-base), but also to humanity as a whole. The agreements reached at this level will have the form of categorical imperatives.

There is however a possibility that an issue is so complex that one is not able to agree on which level the discussion is to be continued on. This will for example be the case where one is not able to neutralize social power relations in a way that enables a rational discourse (Habermas 1996: 165-166). Because it is often not acceptable in

politics not to reach an understanding, one needs to have procedures that ensure that an agreement is reached even in these circumstances. Through a process of bargaining where the participants use threats and promises, one will be able to achieve a compromise that balances the countering interests. However, as this process is not guided by the discourse-principles of a deliberation there is no guarantee for a solution that is ethically and morally good. This can in part be corrected by bringing the discourse principle in when establishing the procedures for this bargaining, which is done through a moral discourse (Habermas 1996: 166-167). All the concerned parties should be given an equal opportunity to exercise pressure and give promises, thereby ensuring that all affected interests are taken into account and have equal chances of prevailing.

The bargaining is often in need of an institutionalized base, and in the modern state this base is found in the parliament and in the courts (Habermas 1996: 167-168, 176-183; Eriksen & Weigård 1999: 226-229). Parliament is a good place for the institutionalizing of procedures. However, one cannot operate with only one procedure that is used in all cases where bargaining is necessary. According to Habermas, the kind of procedure chosen has to be based on the issue at stake, and agreement on the procedure is reached through a moral deliberation. One procedure that often will be preferred is the majority rule, whereby the alternative that receives the most votes is chosen. The courts have their own, law-based, deliberation. The purpose of this deliberation is judicial review, whereby it controls that the laws made are in concurrence with the constitution both in their content and in the procedure that produced them.

The last section indicates that parliament and the courts are the main places for deliberations. They are of course important places for deliberations, but they are in many ways not *the* most important. The public sphere has a very important role to play. This is where the problems are identified and interpreted, and it is through close interaction with this sphere that parliament works its way to a solution to the problems at hand. To clarify this, Habermas introduces the two concepts of 'weak publics' and 'strong publics'²⁵ (Baynes 1997: 216-217). The weak public is the informally organized public sphere consisting of, among other things, civil society and the media. In this weak public

²⁵ The very words 'weak' and 'strong publics' were not introduced by Habermas himself. They were introduced by Fraser (1992, see especially pp. 132-136), but has since been used by Habermas also (see e.g. Habermas 1996: 307).

all citizens are allowed to participate and make their views heard. The interested citizens participate in a deliberation process where problems are identified and one works towards reaching a common understanding on how to solve the problems. However, the weak public is not responsible for actually making a decision. This responsibility is with the strong public. The strong public consists of parliament and other formally organized political organizations. These institutions have as their task to focus public opinion and legalize the results of this (Scheuerman 1999: 156). In this process it is very important that strong publics are attentive to the concerns and meanings being articulated in the weak publics. Even though the strong publics too are grounded on discourse-principles, it is in the weak publics that the discourse-principle is most clearly seen and has the biggest transformative impact, leading to a consensus being reached. Further it is a point in its own that it is only in the weak public that the interests of all the citizens are being articulated.

2.4 Conclusion

At the start of this chapter I presented the Frankfurter School, which Habermas is a part of and which has influenced his thinking. The Frankfurter school's critique of the Western modernization-path can be seen in Habermas's emphasis on deliberative democracy, which is different from the 'Western' representative democracy. In section 2.2 I started with a discussion of the possibility of using Habermas's theory outside the historical cases from which it was developed. I then moved on to present Habermas's theory on the development of the public sphere and growth of political participation. One of the most important features of the public sphere is private autonomy. Private autonomy is established through two processes. The first is the constitutional protection of citizens' rights. Here three kinds of rights are established: political freedom, personal freedom and rules regulating the relationship between individuals in the public sphere. The second process establishing private autonomy is the development of a free market where the authorities do not have a say, and the relationship between the different actors is only regulated through civil law. Through the establishment of private autonomy the citizens gain a power base which they can use to protect their stake vis-à-vis the

government, and they are therefore not as dependent on the authorities any more. With the growth of a free market the citizens gain political interest, as they realize that the decisions made by the authorities have big influence on their own situation in general and economy in particular.

Parallel to the growth of private autonomy, arenas for deliberations in the public sphere emerged. At first the arenas were quite limited and only included the cultural elite. Gradually the public sphere grew and newspapers became an important arena for the public sphere, and the public sphere became generally more accessible. It is important to note how these arenas worked as a meeting place between members of the ruling elite and the ordinary citizens. Through this contact, the ordinary citizens were able to become the basis for legitimacy. Members of the ruling elite who frequented the coffee-houses and in other ways participated in the public sphere soon learned to use the support of the citizens to their advantage in political debates, and in this way ordinary citizens gradually became more important and gained greater influence on politics. Seen from the view of the citizens this was a good thing and an opportunity they actively tried to promote. All in all, the processes I sketched in this section (2.2) results in publicity having gone from being a function of the public meaning to being what creates the public meaning (Habermas 2002: 2).

In addition to the assets of the bourgeois people there was also a feature of the government that was vital to the emergence of democracy: some members of the government frequented the arenas of the public sphere, and this made them aware of the role the bourgeois people could play in helping their viewpoints prevail. It was because of this that the bourgeois people were able to become the basis for legitimacy, and thereby gain participation in politics and make the formulation of politics democratic.

In section 2.3, I presented Habermas's own model of democracy, the deliberative democracy. His main point is that as we can not know *a priori* what is correct, we need to have a process of deliberation to decide which solution is the right one. Through this process of deliberation, all parties will be convinced that one solution is preferable and one will therefore reach a decision that all can agree on. At the basis of this lies the thought that a process of deliberation will have a transformative effect on the opinions of the participants. According to Habermas, there are three types of discourses, depending on how fundamental the question at hand is. It is however possible that one

is not able to agree on what level the deliberation is to take place. This is therefore often decided in a process of bargaining, and this bargaining is in need of an institution. Two important institutions for this bargaining are the parliament and the courts, and Habermas thereby find two of the most important institutions in the representative democracy to be important and legitimate in a deliberative democracy.

My next chapter will, in line with Burawoy (1991)²⁶, start the de-contextualization by raising some questions that will help us widen the scope of Habermas's theory. In the following chapters I will proceed to analyze China in line with the de-contextualized version of Habermas's theory. My analysis in these chapters will answer the questions raised in chapter 3, and in this way de-contextualize Habermas's theory. In these chapters I choose not to look at the features of the government as this is a big issue in itself, and it would be beyond the scope of a master's thesis to include this as well.

²⁶ See section 1.4.1 above for more on this research design.

3. TAKING HABERMAS OUT OF EUROPE: WHAT MAY WE BRING WITH US?

In the previous chapter we established that there is an ambiguity between the ambitions of sociological generalization ('instances of a more general development') and outlining a historically unique process ('typical of an epoch') in Habermas's theory. In the outline of the theory we saw how colored the theory is from the cases it was deduced from. The following question can therefore be raised: what parts of the theory is a result of the context it was deduced from and needs to be removed, and what parts have universal applicability? In this chapter I will begin answering this question. I will point to the parts of the theory which I find reason to believe is context-specific. Following Burawoy (1991), I will formulate questions²⁷ that will be tools for determining which parts of Habermas's theory is context-specific. In the following chapters I will then answer these questions by analyzing China, thereby determining whether these features really are context-specific. In this way Habermas's theory will be de-contextualized. When removing the context-specific parts of the theory, what will remain will be a theory with a wide area of applicability, a theory that is generalizable to other contexts.

In his theory, Habermas's points to the importance of the constitutional and legal base for the establishment of private autonomy (see section 2.2.2 above). This is a point worth having in mind when analyzing emerging democracies; the autonomy the bourgeois people later used to push for democracy was only possible due to a strong constitutional protection of the private sphere and the bourgeois people's actions in the public sphere. However, not all emerging democracies are blessed with the same strong legal system as England, France and Prussen were when democracy emerged in these countries in the 18th and 19th centuries. Important questions arising from this section is therefore: what will the situation be in a country where the legal system is less well developed? What consequences will this have for the autonomy of the bourgeois people? Is a strong legal system necessary for private autonomy to emerge? If my analysis of China indicates that a weak legal system is part of the explanation why a push for

²⁷ These questions will have the same function as the auxiliary hypotheses that Burawoy (1991) speaks of. See section 1.4.1 above for more on this research design.

democracy has not emerged or is unlikely to emerge, it indicates that that this feature of Habermas's theory is not context-specific, but rather has universal validity.

In Habermas's theory, the coffee-houses, the newspapers and the magazines played a vital role (see section 2.2.3 above). The fact that it was exactly these institutions that formed the arena for the public sphere in Habermas's theory may be a context-specific feature of the theory. The general point in Habermas's theory seems to be not so much the existence of specific types of arenas as the actual existence of arenas and how these work. We should therefore be open for other arenas and channels that may function as a mean of communication between the authorities and the citizens. One condition does however apply to the arenas, given the transformative effects Habermas attributes to deliberation (see section 2.3 below): the arenas, or at least parts of them should be deliberatively based. As channels for political participation often are already established to some extent in emerging democracies, this constitutes an institutionalized arena through which the state communicates with and receives input from the citizens. It is therefore natural to study this channel further to research how it works and what potential it may have for being used in pushing for democracy the way the arenas for the public sphere were used in Habermas's theory. If my study of China indicates that other arenas than the ones Habermas studied have the same transformative effects as the arenas in the cases he studied, this indicates that the specific arenas that are used in his theory are context-specific. However, if the arenas I study in China do not have the transformative effect, we can not conclude that this feature of Habermas's theory is not context-specific. This is because the lacking transformative effects do not need to be due to characteristics of the arenas *per se*, but may rather be due to the context they operate within. Also, one can not exclude the theoretical possibility that other arenas than the ones Habermas points to and the ones I study may have the transformative effects, and the discovery of these arenas would lead us to conclude that this part of Habermas's theory is context-specific.

It is important to note that it was because their arenas gave them the opportunity to influence the *formulation* of policies that the bourgeois people were able to push for further political participation (see especially section 2.2.5 above). In the policy formulation stage, the goals and values of the society is formulated and made into policy.

The citizens had direct access to the power-holders at the central level and thereby had the possibility to influence all aspects of policy-formulation and politics. Participation at the policy formulation stage is clearly important because of the transformative effects it may have on political participation (Habermas 2002: 50-61). It is only at the policy-formulation level that decisions that will widen the space for participation, and maybe even open up new channels, can be made. The bourgeois people's possibility to address all kinds of questions was fundamental for their ability to push for further political participation and thereby democracy. They had direct contact with people in important positions in the central level and were able to use this contact to widen the space and channels for political participation. With reference to the three levels of the state which are normal to use in political studies, this can be illustrated like this:

	Policy formulation (and Implementation)
Central	A
Regional	B
Local	C

Figure 2.1: Levels of influence for the bourgeois people

As we can see, the influence of the bourgeois people was at the top of the hierarchy (A), and in this way they were also able to influence the situation both at lower levels of the hierarchy (hence the use of gray in these boxes) and in the implementation, which was carried out by a bureaucracy that followed the rules laid down by the political organs. In this way the bourgeois people were able to transform the whole political system. An important question emerging from this is: what will the consequences be if one is not able to influence such fundamental issues? If my analysis of China indicates

that a lacking influence on such fundamental issues is detrimental to the transformative effects of contact with the government, it indicates that this feature of Habermas's theory is not a context-specific feature, but rather has universal validity.

In Habermas's theory, he points out that the bourgeois people became interested in politics and demanded a say in the formulation of it because they had a stake to protect vis-à-vis the government (see section 2.2.4 above). This stake was related to the activities of a privatized household acting in an increasingly commercialized society. It seems that in a theory based on democracy being pushed forward by the 'ordinary' people, the people need to have a reason for pushing for democracy. Habermas's explanation that this reason can be found in having a stake to protect vis-à-vis the state, seems plausible. The questions a de-contextualization needs to answer on this account is therefore: may people who do not have a stake vis-à-vis the state be proponents for democracy? Will people who gain a stake be more interested in politics and gaining a greater say in the formulation of it? If my research of China indicates that people who have a stake vis-à-vis the government are more politically interested and pushes for a greater say in the formulation of politics, it indicates that this characteristic of Habermas's theory is not context-specific. If, on the other hand, I find that people who do not have a stake are politically interested and pushes for a greater say in the formulation of it, it indicates that this characteristic of Habermas's theory is context-specific. A finding that people who do not have a stake are not very interested in politics and gaining a greater say in the formulation of it, does however not give a basis to draw any conclusions on this matter.

Throughout the outline of Habermas's theory (in section 2.2 above) we have seen the extent to which Habermas makes great effort to explain the processes which led to democracy, while not emphasizing the class features of the bourgeois people. Rather, he points out that in principle all could become members of the bourgeois people: 'all had to *be able* to participate in solving the common discussable issues' (Habermas 2002: 35, original emphasis). It is therefore quite clear that the class features of the bourgeois people were not very important to Habermas. What was more important to him was what made the bourgeois people proponents for democracy. Based on the above outline of Habermas's theory and my efforts to de-contextualize this theory, I hypothesize that

the essence of Habermas's concept 'the bourgeois people' is having three assets that make them able to be proponents for democracy: first of all, they had a relatively large degree of autonomy. This made them less vulnerable to pressure from the authorities and rather enabled the bourgeois people to exert pressure on the authorities. Second, they had a channel to the government, which in the cases I studied had its arena in the coffee houses and the newspapers. Through these channels they were able to establish a dialogue with the government whereby they became an important arena for consulting on politics, making them a basis for legitimacy. The third asset was that they had a stake to protect vis-à-vis the government; they were interested in gaining this position as the basis for legitimacy so as to be able to protect their stake vis-à-vis the government. This was because the establishment of the free market had given them something to protect: their privately owned property. My hypothesis is strengthened if my analysis finds that people with these three assets, who are from strata that were not members of the bourgeois people in Habermas's theory, pushes for more political participation. Such a finding would indicate that who may constitute the bourgeois people is a context-specific feature. If we relate this to China we may ask: which groups may become proponents for democracy in China? In the following chapters I will try to answer the questions raised in this chapter.

4. THE DEMOCRATIC POTENTIAL OF THE BUSINESS STRATUM IN CHINA

In this and the following two chapters I will continue the de-contextualization of the concrete parts of Habermas's theory by seeking answers to the questions raised in chapter 3 above.

When analyzing the prospects for democracy in China, where may we look for groups that may be members of 'the bourgeois people'²⁸ and people proponents for democracy? As Habermas's theory is not very concrete on this, he says that all people in principle can become members of the bourgeois people; we need to look at what other theories of democratization say about the issue. Theories of democratization that are based on a wider selection of cases (Moore 1966; Rueschemeyer, et al. 1992) indicate that the business stratum may play a role in opening up the political system for popular influence in the initial stages of democratization²⁹. Also, through the economic reforms, a business stratum has emerged in China the later years. The emergence of this stratum has made the Chinese Communist Party (the CCP) formulate a new ideological foundation, 'The Three Represents', and I find it very interesting to research what the political implications of the emergence of this stratum may be.

I will do this by answering the following question: does the business stratum in today's urban China play the same role as the bourgeois people in Europe did some three centuries ago? Since it was their autonomy, established through the emergence of a free market, which made the bourgeois people able to be proponents for democracy, the focus in this chapter will be on the first asset the bourgeois people had in Habermas's theory: the degree of autonomy of the business stratum in China. I will start this chapter with an outline of the influence the CCP has in companies, and then move on to outline ties between the government and the business stratum. Next, the autonomy of the

²⁸ As I noted in section 2.2.1, Habermas's term 'the bourgeois people' has a wider meaning than the meaning of the capital class that we usually associate with the term. For Habermas it means all those people who are interested in and capable of participating in the public debate.

²⁹ Moore (1966) uses the term 'bourgeoisie' for what I here call 'the business strata'. As his understanding of the term 'bourgeoisie' is in line with what we normally associate with the word, see section 2.2.1, it has more or less the same meaning as my term 'the business strata'.

business stratum will be analyzed. Finally, I will discuss to what extent the business stratum is interested in increased participation in politics.

4.1 The degree of autonomy

China has gone through big changes since Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978. Among the most important of the reforms undertaken is the abolishment of a planned economy and the move towards a market economy. However, this move towards a market economy must be said to be very partial and very limited by the context in which it has taken place; a Chinese society still heavily influenced by communist and Maoist thinking. Considering this, one needs to ask if these traits may limit the political actions of the business stratum so that it does not act as the proponents for political participation one expects it to be. In this section I will therefore try to answer the following question: does the Chinese business stratum have sufficient autonomy from the government apparatus to be proponents for political participation?

Margaret M. Pearson has done research on the autonomy of the Chinese business stratum towards the state (Pearson 1997: ch. 4). However, her study has some limitations with regard to her research object. In the introduction of her book she defines the object of her research as the 'business elite'. She defines the business elite as highly educated, high-paid, having a high standard of living, being managers and sometimes owning property (Pearson 1997: 6-7). However, in the selection of her research-sample she seems to put one-sided emphasis on one of these features, namely being a manager. The other features of her definition seem to be more like characteristics of this group rather than defining features. She further narrows down the selection by not characterizing them as merely 'managers', but as 'PRC nationals working in managerial positions in the elite segment of the foreign sector' (Pearson 1997: 169). We can see that her research sample is selected through the usage of a definition that is quite narrow, much narrower than Habermas's definition of the 'bourgeois people' as I outlined it in 2.2.1. However, as her study is very to the point of what I am discussing here, I still find it very useful to pay attention to it in my essay. But due to the narrow definition she applies, I will supplement with findings from other academic research.

4.1.1 Influence from CCP in the companies

Based on interviews with 51 managers (as defined above), Pearson concludes that there is a significant degree of structural autonomy for this group (Pearson 1997: 99), meaning that they are not as closely linked with (and presumably not as closely controlled by) the party-state apparatus as Chinese working in State Owned Enterprises (SOEs). This conclusion is based on an analysis covering four determinants of autonomy: political autonomy, the personnel dossiers, job mobility and the welfare system. What regards political autonomy, she finds that although the Party has some presence in Joint Ventures (JVs), they do not have as immediate influence as in the SOEs. This is because they are not allowed to operate directly in the JVs and are not seen as having a legitimate influence on the running of the company. One important factor in this respect is the fact that the Party cell in the JVs does not have representation on the boards of directors. This makes the party more removed from the daily running of the company and they thereby lack means to exert influence on Chinese managers in JVs (Pearson 1997: 68-71). However, there are still some features of the system for personnel politics that limit the autonomy of Chinese working in JVs. The personnel managers are often party-members and political considerations can therefore be a potential part of a personnel-decision. Pearson also studied the situation in Representative Offices (ROs). Since these are not JVs, there is no Party influence in any parts of these companies, and Pearson therefore found that Chinese managers in ROs do not have even the above mentioned limit with regard to political considerations being a part of personnel-politics that managers in JVs have (Pearson 1997: 71-72).

The second aspect Pearson studies with regard to autonomy is personnel dossiers. She finds that Chinese managers in JVs are not exempt from the system of personnel dossiers. A personnel dossier is a file containing information about occupational status, family background and political distinctions of an employee. The file is an important factor in the social control, and for Chinese managers in JVs they are kept at the Chinese partner of the JV. Pearson finds that Chinese managers in JVs 'face a situation similar to, albeit less onerous than, that of state-sector managers' with regard to the personnel dossiers (1997: 74). An important factor here is the fact that the dossier is

physically held at a different place from where the Chinese managers are working, namely at the Chinese partner of the JV rather than in the JV itself.

Traditionally Chinese employees have very limited job mobility, making it very important to stand on good foot with the authorities within a business (who often are party-members, even sometimes acting openly on behalf of the Party). The third aspect Pearson considers is therefore if there is increased job mobility among Chinese managers in the foreign sector. She finds that there is indeed significantly greater mobility among Chinese in managerial positions in the foreign sector than in the state sector, a mobility she characterize as a 'surprising, and in some cases extreme, degree of job mobility' (Pearson 1997: 79). She notes that pools of middle-level managers are beginning to appear in some Chinese cities (Pearson 1997: 77-80).

The last aspect Pearson considers is whether Chinese working in the foreign sector has a safe social welfare system. She finds that in JVs the social welfare system is basically similar to that of the state companies, while in ROs and Wholly Foreign Owned Companies (WFOEs) there is considerable more uncertainty, and the managers here are dependent on less reliable sources (Pearson 1997: 81-86).

Relating Pearson's findings to Habermas's theory, we note that the business elite are relatively autonomous, but still under some restrictions from the Party-state. Since the Party-state is to some extent able to influence personnel issues, they are to some extent able to counter unwanted behavior and in this way are able to hinder the business elite from being proponents for democracy.

4.1.2 Corruption, *guanxi* and ties between the government and the business sector

As noted earlier, Pearson's study has a quite narrow focus, investigating managers only. If one expands the focus, what picture emerges then?

Since the reforms started, China has been marred by widespread corruption, both in the traditional sense of the term (bribery) and in more sophisticated meanings of the term (e.g. embezzlement). The phenomena are so widespread they have had big influence on the way the Chinese economy functions, and has lead Meisner (1996: ch. 11) to characterize China as having an economy based on 'bureaucratic capitalism'. This system is closely related to the move towards a free market whereby there has been

rampant possibilities for the bureaucrats to make personal gains. Their position has allowed them (and their families and friends) to be first in line when SOEs have been privatized, and has also given them other advantages in the market economy. For example, they are able to easily accumulate money that can be invested into businesses, and they also have the possibility to cut short many of the regulations burdening the working of businesses in the private sphere. In sum, the bureaucrats had big opportunities to become players in the private sector themselves, as well as being attractive partners and supporters of non-bureaucrats establishing as businessmen in the private sector (Meisner 1996: 324-329). They seized these opportunities, and in the process created a blurred difference between public and private (Meisner 1996: 332). Further contributing to the ‘bureaucratic capitalism’ was a cut in funding for many of the bureaucratic organs. They were told that they had to start doing business to make up for the decrease in money-flow (Meisner 1996: 334-336).

The sum of the processes outlined here created what Meisner term a ‘quasi-bourgeoisie’ consisting of bureaucrats and their connections (1996: 319, 328). All in all, Meisner concludes, ‘China’s new bourgeoisie emerge more as agents of the state than potential antagonists’ (1996: 339).

More recent research gives a more diverse picture of private business in China. Cheng (2001) divides Chinese entrepreneurs³⁰ into three parts. The first part is ‘self-made entrepreneurs’, what he calls the real private sector. They are often of peasant origin and poorly educated. Their fortunes are mostly made from Township Village Enterprises (TVEs). The second group is, in line with Meisner’s presentation, given the label ‘bureaucratic entrepreneurs’. The third group is what Cheng labels the ‘technical entrepreneurs’, which have emerged in the wake of the development in computers and the Internet. Many of these companies have a cooperative relationship with the government, for example the state often provides funding for the capital needed to start the business. To the extent that this is the case, managers and owners of these

³⁰ He defines ‘Chinese entrepreneurs’ as ‘a manager and/or owner of private property’ which he has gained managerial or ownership control over through capitalization of his own income or through his position in an enterprise (Cheng 2001: 222).

companies cannot be considered as a business stratum³¹, since the government in part owns the businesses.

From the research of Meisner and Chen it seems that the business stratum in contemporary China is very far from the autonomy that the bourgeois people in Habermas's theory had. This severely limits its ability to be proponents for democracy.

4.1.3 How autonomous is the business stratum, then?

If we are to sum up the picture emerging from this presentation, it would need to put a rather big emphasis on the role the government plays in today's Chinese business-sector. There is a sector in China consisting of what might be termed purely private businesses. This sector is characterized by the origin of their capital-base and the way they are managed (Guiheux's definition, 2002: 25), but even for them the border between private and public is porous. As we have seen, the government plays a very important direct role in the Chinese business-sector. Consequently, even purely private businesses have to relate to government owned and/or controlled companies in their daily running. The Chinese culture of *guanxi* also makes it important for the private businesses to maintain close ties with the government and the party, since this will make their company run smoother and thereby increase the profits of their owners.

The government also has a very big indirect role in the running of private businesses in China. To start up a business, you need several permits and licenses from different governmental organs. Since the Chinese legal culture (in the form of rule of law, and even in the form of rule by law) is weakly developed as of today, there is often a lack of clear rules regulating who should be assigned different permits and licenses. The awarding of these can often be random and based on the personal considerations of the person in charge of the allotment. It then becomes very important to have close personal connections (*guanxi*) with the right people for being awarded these permits and licenses (Pearson 1997: 111-112). The process of establishing such connections make the private and the public sector much closer tied together than what is the case in western societies, leading to what Guiheux (2002: 34) characterize as a '[porous] boundary between the

³¹ The business stratum is here understood as consisting of those who either owns or manages an enterprise that is not owned by the state as such.

public and the private'. This gives the government strong powers over the private business in China.

Adding to this is the efforts made by the CCP to bring private entrepreneurs into the Party. When president Jiang Zemin in his July 1st 2001 speech on 'The Three Representatives' declared that private entrepreneurs were now allowed, and even encouraged, to become members of the CCP, it was in recognition of the fact that private entrepreneurs are playing an increasingly important role in China. The Party therefore chose to try to bring them into the party, rather than risking that they would become a strong force opposing the CCP. The CCP hopes to co-opt this potentially powerful stratum of private entrepreneurs, making them loyal to the Party and thereby consolidating the CCP's power-base. If this strategy is successful (and it seems to be; as many as 20% of the private entrepreneurs are said to be Party members (Guiheux 2002: 24)), it will have important implications for the ability of the private entrepreneurs to play the role they should play according to Habermas's theory. Through this, the business stratum will have achieved the influence they yearn for, but not in the democratic way the bourgeois people did in Europe. This leads them not to be proponents for further political participation, but rather have a self-interest in maintaining the present system of government, since they are a part of it and feel that their business is having good and safe conditions in the present system.

Compared to the situation in Habermas's theory, the business stratum in China is very dependent on and closely connected to the state in running their business. This means that they are not autonomous in relation to the state, but rather have a common interest with it. This is very different from the situation of the business stratum and the bourgeois people in Habermas's theory, and severely limits the ability of the Chinese business stratum to act as proponents for democracy.

4.1.4 The political interest of the business stratum

Even if the autonomy of the Chinese business stratum should prove to be 'big enough' (despite all the indications to the contrary presented above), there is one more condition that needs to be fulfilled for them to be likely to play the role as proponents of political participation. According to Habermas's theory it is not only necessary to have a stake to

protect vis-à-vis the government, one must also want to articulate one's interest towards the government and feel that one may have something to gain from articulating this interest.

In her survey, Pearson (1997: Ch. 4) finds that most of her interviewees are not interested in trying to influence the government on political questions. This finding is supported by research conducted by Dickson (2003: 116-156). He states that 'entrepreneurs in China do not exhibit the kinds of basic beliefs or political activism that would make them likely to be agents of change' (2003: 140). According to Pearson (1997) the focus of the business stratum is more on the daily running of their companies, not on politics. She claims that there are several reasons for this. One is that their ideology doesn't support activism, another is that they find it futile to express suggestions for changes, and a third is that it may be dangerous for them, for example by jeopardizing their career. A fourth reason seems to be that they do not feel a need to express their views so as to change a general policy. If a policy is causing troubles for them, they use their connections with government officials to circumscribe the rule in that particular case, rather than trying to change the rule itself (Pearson 1997: 108). In fact, this practice is so important that Pearson claim that 'their [the businesses'] success depends on extensive involvement with local cadres' (1997: 111).

There are however exceptions. As mentioned earlier, quite a few entrepreneurs are members of the CCP, and in the later years there has been a significant increase in representatives to both central and local branches of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the National People's Congress (NPC) and the National Party Congress. It is not obvious that this should be interpreted as a sign that business people are becoming more interested in influencing political decisions. The reason may rather be that the Party has been successful in co-opting the emerging class of business people and aligning the interests of the business stratum with their own. This interpretation is also favored by Pearson (1997: 111). However, the reason for the increase may just as well be that many cadres have become businessmen. This does however not change the general impression that the business stratum in China does not want or have an interest in a change in the political system, further underscoring the point that they will not be proponents for democracy the way the bourgeois people are in Habermas's theory.

4.2 Conclusion: Where to go next?

In this chapter I have analyzed if the business stratum in contemporary China is or will be proponents for democracy, as the bourgeois people was in Habermas's theory. It is not likely that the business stratum will be proponents for political participation and democracy in China. The main reason for this is that the business stratum has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. They seem to feel that their needs are taken care of within the present system, and that their business is given favorable and safe conditions. This is in much due to their close connections with the ruling elites, and also because the business stratum in many cases has been co-opted by the government, thereby actually becoming a part of the ruling elite. One can say that the emergence of a business stratum in China has led to a consolidation of the regime, rather than an emerging democracy. But this does not mean that the emergence of a business stratum in China has not left its mark on the political regime. It seems that the emergence has led to a re-establishment of the regime.

Previously, the regime was explicitly and in practice a communist one, where the basic and main component in society was the proletariat (as in other communist-states, one did of course have a politically based elite). With the emergence of the business stratum, the regime was forced to re-define its basis, or it risked losing some of its control to the societal forces generated by the business stratum. At the 16th Party Congress of the CCP, an important amendment was made to the Party-constitution in recognition of this. According to the first paragraph of the General Programme of the Party-constitution, the CCP is no longer only 'the vanguard of the Chinese proletariat', but is also to 'represent [...] the advanced productive forces' (for the old text of the Party-constitution see Wang (2002a: 398), for the new text, see Constitution of Communist Party of China (2002)).

As I have found that the business stratum which were a part of the bourgeois people in Habermas's theory is unlikely to be proponents for democracy in China, can we conclude that the regime is on solid ground with no challengers to their power, and that the prospects for democracy in China are bleak? This would be to jump the conclusion; experience shows us that a push for political participation and democracy may come from other forces in society as well (for an overview, see e.g. Törnquist 2002).

The only conclusion we can draw from this is that the exact composition of the bourgeois people in Habermas's theory is context-specific. In a context different from 17th and 18th century Europe, those who were a part of the bourgeois people in the cases Habermas studied may not necessarily have the same autonomy and therefore will not play the same role as they did in Europe.

One therefore needs to leave the position of the bourgeois people open, and research who may play the role of proponents for political participation in today's China. Considering the mass-character of Habermas's theory, where everyone in principle can be an actor in the push for political participation, the following question can be formulated: where may we look for other groups that may push for democracy? In this chapter my focus has been on the first asset of the bourgeois people, autonomy. In researching who will be proponents for democracy I will introduce the second asset, having a channel to the government. Following the mass-character of Habermas's theory, I will analyze the role the 'ordinary' Chinese urbanite may play. In China there already are a number of arenas for contact between the local government and the citizens: channels for political participation such as expressing sentiments through complaints. It is therefore natural to research what possibilities this gives the active Chinese urbanite, the potential bourgeois people, for using these channels for pushing for democracy. I will therefore research this by analyzing the channels for political participation for 'ordinary' urban citizens in China (chapter 5). This analysis will tell us to what extent these channels may build a basis for a contact with the government which enables Chinese citizens to push for further political participation and democratization.

5. THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF 'ORDINARY' URBAN CHINESE

As I pointed out in the end of chapter 3, there is reason to believe that proponents for democracy need three assets: autonomy, a channel to the government, and a stake to protect vis-à-vis the government. In this chapter I will focus on the second asset, having a channel to the government. I will analyze the extent to which ordinary Chinese urbanites may use the available channels to push for democracy.

In Habermas's theory, the emphasis is on the coffee houses and newspapers as the citizens's channels to the government. As I pointed out in chapter 3, these arenas may not necessarily be the most important in a contemporary, emerging democracy. In China a wide array of channels for communicating with the government are available; the channels for political participation, and these will be analyzed to assess how ordinary Chinese may use them for pushing for democracy. This choice is influenced by Habermas's theory, which as we have seen in section 2.2, argues that public spheres and democracy develop as citizens use the channels that are available to them for communicating with the government in an 'undemocratic' society to push for democratization. Since the channels for political participation constitute an arena that gives the citizens a very direct contact with the authorities, it is a natural choice to operationalize 'channel to the government' as 'channels for political participation' and analyze them. The question to be answered in this chapter is: do the channels for political participation in urban China provide the citizens with a possibility to push for political participation?

The chapter will start with an outline of the available channels for political participation in urban China³², and the extent to which they are used (section 5.1). I will research how many channels there are, how widely they are used, how they function and how they may be used for pushing for further political participation and democratization. My outline of the channels for political participation in urban China

³² Unless otherwise noted, when I refer to political participation or any similar term, it is with the implicit qualification that I am talking about *urban* China.

will mainly be based on Shi Tianjian's works (1997; 1999a) on political participation in Beijing, supplemented with other sources when they are available and useful. Following my definition of political participation (see section 1.3.1), the channels for participation are somewhat different from what we usually think of as channels for political participation in the West, where the election-channel is very dominant. Many of the channels remind us of those identified by James Scotts as 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1985) and 'hidden forms of resistance' (Scott 1989, 1990).

The outlining of the participation will be quite thorough, but by nature it will have to be relatively short. The main part of this chapter will be an analysis of the channels for political participation and their use (section 5.2). I will analyze to what extent the channels give the citizens the autonomy to use the channels as a tool to influence the government and push for political participation, as it is done in Habermas's theory. The questions I want to answer in this analysis are: do the channels for political participation give ordinary citizens a real possibility for political participation? Is it possible to use these channels to push for further political participation and democratization, as in Habermas's theory on the development of the public spheres? To what extent do Chinese urbanites have the autonomy that, according to Habermas, is so important for them to be able to participate in politics and thereby use them to push for further participation?

5.1 The channels and the extent of the participation

Before I outline the channels for political participation, some methodological issues concerning the main source for my outline, Shi Tianjian's study of political participation in Beijing (1997) based on 757 surveys³³, will be discussed. The first question I will address is: how good is the quality of Shi's study, methodologically speaking?

³³ Shi's team was assigned 941 interviews, of which they were able to get answers in 757. This is a response rate of approximately 80%, which must be considered acceptable. According to Shi, most non-response was due to failure to locate respondents at the assigned addresses (only five refused to be interviewed) (Shi 1997: 29). It is difficult to say exactly why it was not possible to locate some of the respondents. Most likely there was no systematic tendencies in the failure of respondents to be at the assigned address. It can not be ruled out that this may be because the respondents had recently moved, lived in poor areas with poor marking of street addresses so that the interviewers was not able to find the household or that the respondents were at work when the interviewers arrived. If one or more of these possible explanations can explain large parts of the non-response, it indicates that the sample may be skewed, but only to a relatively small extent.

Unfortunately, the questionnaire Shi used is not included in his book, so I am not able to assess if the wording in the questionnaire may have influenced the answers he got. This is therefore a potential problem in his survey, a problem I am not able to eliminate. On the other hand I can not assume that the wording in the questionnaires is such that they influenced the answer. Rather, considering that Shi is a professor of political science and presumably well-trained in the methodological issues of the social sciences, I find it reasonable to assume that he is aware of the importance of the wording of questionnaires, and has done his best to avoid these problems. Also, the personnel used in conducting the survey were well trained, thereby decreasing the chance that errors were made at this stage.³⁴ Further, the quality of the survey can be observed in the use of Shi's study by other scientists, and the praise it has received in reviews.³⁵

The second question I will address is: can we make generalizations from Shi's study (to other parts of China)? There are two dimensions to making generalizations: space and time. I will start addressing the space-dimension of generalization. The core of this question is if and how Beijing and its inhabitants differ from what you will find in other cities in China³⁶. It is clear that Beijing, being the capital of China, is different from

³⁴ Shi used students of sociology and statistics from the People's University of China, which were given a week-long, intensive training in how to conduct interviews that is in accordance with the techniques used in the 'General Social Survey' published by the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan (Shi 1997: 26). Considering this, it seems safe to assume that the interviews were conducted in such a way that did not have detrimental effects on the results.

³⁵ E.g., Russell Dalton, a prominent political scientist who base his research on surveys and is one of the most recognized researchers on political participation, does not take any reservations in his use of Shi's study in one of his articles (2000: 931). Also, reviews of his book in scholarly journals does not point out methodological problems in his survey, but rather characterize the study as 'using sophisticated and vigorous social science methods' (Yang 1998: 737) and states that 'a political survey of the high quality evident in this book is a major accomplishment' (Manion 1998: 1140). Shi's study is also referred to in several articles, see e.g. Chen & Zhong (2002) and O'Brien (1999).

³⁶ This is known as external validity. Another aspect regarding generalization in space is whether it is possible to generalize from the sample to the population, whether Shi's sample is representative for the citizens of Beijing. In producing his sample, Shi used stratification. His strata are geographically based; the first phase of stratification is street offices, the second stage is neighborhood committees. However common it is to use stratification in producing a sample, it calls for great care and extensive knowledge of the characteristics of the population, and can seriously distort the findings if it is not correctly applied. In the stratification, Shi used a method called 'probabilities proportional to size' (PPS) (Shi 1997: 26). This means that large strata have higher probabilities of being selected than small ones. With this method, one is still able to calculate the possibility for each strata to be selected, but as the probabilities will be different for different strata, there is a real danger that the sample will be skewed in the sense that an overrepresentation of large street offices and neighborhood committees are likely. This is not a problem, however if the sample is weighted so that the errors of the selection process is corrected. I can not see that Shi has done this, and this may cause some problems for the ability to generalize from the sample to the population. However, this will only be the case if one can expect that there will be differences between large and small street offices, or between large and small neighborhood committees. The size of a street office or neighborhood committee in China is mostly random, and one can therefore assume that one will not have systematic errors in a stratification based on PPS. Within each neighborhood committee 5 family households were randomly selected. When the interviewer entered a household the person in the household that was to be interviewed was selected through a random procedure which the interviewer was unable to affect (see Shi 1997: 286-287 for

other cities in the country. Shi claims that in China one resource that is particularly important for political participation is access to information, especially on governmental affairs. Another important resource is access to higher authorities (Shi 1997: 20). With respect to these resources the residents of Beijing stand out in many ways; they have the widest access to information on governmental affairs in the country, they are the most politically sophisticated and outspoken, and they are less afraid of challenging the political authorities (Shi 1997: 28).

It is, however, possible to test whether there is a difference in the political participation between people living in Beijing and people in other Chinese cities. With regards to voting we do have national data from a survey conducted by Shi in 1990-91 (Shi 1999b). Also, in 1995 Chen Jie and Zhong Yang conducted a survey of political participation in Beijing (Chen & Zhong 2002). As elections and voting will be discussed in more detail in the next section, I will not discuss it further here. It suffices to say that there were actually a larger proportion of people in the national survey who said they voted than it was in the Beijing survey (Chen & Zhong 2002: 179, table 1). This indicates that the differences between Beijing and the rest of urban China is not nearly as large as one may expect.

I will now address the second dimension of generalization: time. Can we generalize from Shi's study to other periods in time, or was the period when the survey was conducted so special that it is difficult to assume that the same findings will be found at another point in time, for example today? The survey was conducted in December 1988 and January 1989. At this time, the post-Mao reforms had been active for some time, and there were some relaxations in the political climate, e.g. most political study-sessions were canceled and the press was allowed to air opinions that were not acceptable earlier (Shi 1997: 27). As is well known, the Tiananmen incident occurred only months after Shi ended his survey, and the political climate was severely worsened in the aftermath of this (Saich 2001: 67). Can we then assume that the numbers emerging from Shi's study are unusually high, and are only the result of an exceptional situation? As we will see later, most activities were found to be even more widespread in a survey

the details of this selection). These measures make sure that the person being interviewed is selected randomly and is not the one the interviewer finds most 'fit' to interview, whether this is to make his job as an interviewer simpler or to ensure support for his hypothesis.

conducted in Beijing in 1996 (Shi 1999a). It therefore seems that the picture emerging from Shi's survey in 1988-89 is quite normal for the post-Mao period, with the reservation that the picture probably was a bit different in the early eighties when the reforms had just been initiated.

All in all, Shi's study seems to be based on sound methodological principles. I have not been able to assess all aspects of the study as thoroughly as I would have liked, but I have not been able to point to any irregularities either. Considering this, and the apparent acceptance of the study by other researchers, I will use the study without any further qualifications. Even though it at first seems fair to assume that Shi's findings will be quite unique due to the locality, Beijing, and time, 1988/89, of the survey comparisons with findings from other surveys indicate that Shi's findings are quite representative for other parts of China and other points in time.

In the following I will outline the channels for political participation in urban China. First, the different types of elections available for Chinese urban citizens will be outlined. Second, the possibility to express sentiments through complaints will be considered. Third, I will look at spontaneous participation. Fourth, participatory acts where the initiative for the participation comes from the citizen himself will be outlined. Finally I will look at the use of *guanxi* in political participation.

5.1.1 Elections

Elections for County People's Congresses

In Western representative democracy, the national parliament is the focus point of both the public spheres and the political system. Within predefined intervals elections are held, with vigorous election campaigns in advance, underlining the importance of the institution to be elected. In China there is no election for the national parliament and accordingly no such nationwide election campaign. The only level where there is direct election for a representative congress is to the People's Congresses at the county level.

The first direct election was held in 1979 (Jacobs 1991: 174). Today, the elections are regulated by the Election Law of 1986.³⁷ The Election Law sets up a framework that bides well for the democratic quality of the elections. It gives all citizens the right to vote and to stand for election (art. 3), and according to art. 27 there is to be real competition for the seats. Further, art. 28 gives the voters the right to nominate candidates, either by nomination from political parties or people's organizations, or through the backing of ten voters (art. 26). Although these regulations bide well for the democratic potential of the elections, the fact is that they are not at all democratic. The nomination and most other aspects of the elections are controlled by the CCP (Chen & Zhong 2002: 183; Jacobs 1991: 183-185, McCormick 1996: 39-40). Further, the County People's Congresses have little real power, and the little power they do have is exercised by the Standing Committee, consisting of only a small fraction of the delegates (McCormick 1996: 38, 42). I will elaborate on these points in section 5.2.2. For now it suffices to ascertain that the elections are undemocratic and that the delegates exercise virtually no power³⁸.

Considering the limited choice people have in elections and the limited power of the institutions they elect, one can expect the level of participation to be relatively low. Further, after the first excitement of being allowed to vote in elections for the first time in 1979 has settled down, one can expect that the rate of participation will drop from the early elections as people discover that the elections do not matter. Tianjian Shi's study of political participation in Beijing found that in 1984 62.4 % of his respondents voted in the election for the local People's Congress. In 1988 the figure was 72.3 % (Shi 1997: 94). In a second survey, conducted by Shi in 1990-1991³⁹ on a nationwide basis, he finds that 61.6 % of the respondents voted (Shi 1999b: 1123). In a survey conducted by Chen & Zhong in Beijing in 1995 they found that 58.5 % of the respondents voted (Cheng & Zhong 2002: 179).

³⁷ According to art. 44 in the law, detailed regulations on the election of County People's Congresses can be given by the standing committees of the People's Congress of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government, an authority they often use (Jacobs 1991: 176). Consequently, there are relatively large differences in the election regulations between localities.

³⁸ This can be contrasted with the Village Elections, a rural system of elections to the Village Committees, which are seen as relatively democratic, and as great step towards more democracy in China (see e.g. Louie 2001; O'Brien & Li 2000).

³⁹ As this was shortly after the Tiananmen incident, one can expect to find low levels of participation due to the tightening of the political situation at the time.

We see that the numbers are indeed quite high considering the ‘semi-competitive’ nature of the elections. Indeed, most Western democratic countries have lower numbers of participation in elections for their parliaments. The trend is, however, that the participation at the elections in China is declining. The only exception is that there was an increase in participation the 1988-elections compared to 1984. This, however, may be due to methodological issues. The figure for the 1984-elections is from a survey conducted in 1988-1989, and the figure is therefore uncertain because people do not remember. We can therefore say that the numbers are at a generally declining trend, indicating that the voters are getting less interested in the elections, and increasingly feel that this is not a fruitful way for them to participate in politics.

Danwei elections

Elections of *danwei*⁴⁰ leaders are the other form of elections available to Chinese citizens. The elections of leaders of *danweis* emerged as a result of an initiative from below. In 1979 workers at the Foreign Language Printing House in Beijing organized elections to choose heads of the *danweis*. With the onset of economic reforms in China, the government decided to spread the elections, in order to ensure the legitimacy of the leaders. In addition, this was seen as a way to control corruption and clientelistic networks (Shi 1997: 40). Elections are allowed in every *danwei*, up to the level of bureau chief (*sijuji*) (Shi 1997: 41). However, it is not mandatory to hold elections for *danwei* leaders in China (Shi 1997: 96), and it does not appear that there are regulations as to how the elections are to be conducted. In 1988 the share of people in Shi’s survey who reported having voted in election for *danwei* leaders was 34.8 %, while the figure had shrunk to 16.1 % in 1996. One reason for this big decrease may be, as Shi (1999a: 157) himself points to, that fewer elections were held in 1996. If one looks at only those who had the possibility to vote in elections at the *danwei*, a different picture emerges. For this

⁴⁰ The *danwei* is the central unit for all Chinese urbanites, and the place within which most of their lives takes place. It refers mostly to the place where one worked or studied. The word *danwei* has been translated both as workplace (Sacih 2001: 199) and work unit (Christensen & Rai 1996: 205). The *danweis* provide lifelong employment (Christensen & Rai 1996: 97), as well as providing all-inclusive facilities, including housing, health-care, schools etc. (Christensen & Rai 1996: 205), health insurance and pensions, housing, loans, child care, meal services and certain consumer commodities (Walder 1986: 16). In addition, they approve requests for vacations, annual home leave, personal leave, etc. (Walder 1986: 22) and had the authority to deny the permission to marry (Christensen & Rai 1996: 205). Although the position and importance of the *danwei* has been weakened following the reforms, they still play a role.

group, the numbers are very stable, and they are considerably higher. In 1988, 84.3 % of those that had the possibility to vote did so, while the number was 84.6 % in 1996 (Shi 1999a: 158).

The high number compared to elections for county People's Congresses is not surprising. The *danwei* provides much of the welfare resources available in China, and are therefore very important institutions. One should therefore expect that people show big interest in using their chance to influence who will control these resources.

Residents Committee elections

The Residents Committees (RCs)⁴¹ was established in the immediate aftermath of the communist take-over in 1949, and formal regulations were issued in 1954 (Read 2000: 809-810). The RCs have a wide range of tasks, such as collecting fees, fire prevention, 'promote socialist spiritual civilization', mediation, 'assist in maintaining social order', and to communicate the citizens' opinions to the government (Read 2000: 808 footnote 6, 814). According to article 8 in the 'Law of the PRC governing organization of Resident Committees of Cities' (1989)⁴², the leaders of the RCs are to be democratically elected. However the implementation of this regulation has failed and the candidates for the RCs have been identified by the Street Office and the local Party Branch, making the elections undemocratic (Choate 1998: 14; Read 2000: 818-819; Yuan 2002: 12). Although the participation in the elections has been relatively high, the citizens do not show much enthusiasm (Choate 1998: 14), and the citizens do not feel that the RCs work for them (Peng 2001: 7).

However, in later years some cities (including Shanghai and Beijing) have made experiments with new processes for electing RCs (Read 2000: 818). These elections have been much more democratic. Although it is often representatives of the citizens that make the final election of the members of the RCs, the citizens have a larger say in the election (People's Daily 2002b). Among other things, the citizens are allowed to suggest candidates for the election, among which their representatives then choose (China Daily

⁴¹ According to Read (2000: 806, footnote 1) the RCs are sometimes called 'neighborhood committees' or 'street committees' in English. Following Read, I choose to employ the literal translation of the Chinese term: Residents Committee.

⁴² The text of the law can be found in Appendix 1 in Choate (1998).

2002). As consequences, the citizens' interest in the elections and the work of the RCs has increased substantially (Peng 2001: 8).

It is important to stress that these are only experiments, and that they are only implemented in relatively few RCs. Unfortunately there has been no further research on the democratic elections of the RCs, and I am therefore not able to present any numbers regarding how widespread the democratic elections are, who uses this possibility to participate, how important people find the elections, or how democratic they really are.

5.1.2 Express sentiments through complaints

One of the most important channels Chinese have for expressing their opinions and maintaining their interests is the possibility of expressing their sentiments through complaints about ad hoc issues or general policy. These complaints can have many different recipients; they can be directed to political parties and organizations, the media, deputies to the People's Congresses or the bureaucracy. The basis for this channel can be found in Mao's so called mass line, which stresses the importance of getting feedback from the people and adjusting policy accordingly (Shi 1997: 45).

If one looks at the numbers presented by Shi (1999a: 155, table 7.4)⁴³, one can see that it is very common to use this channel to articulate one's interests. The most common way was to contact the leaders of one's *danwei*. 51.2 % and 54.2 % of the respondents had done this in 1988 and 1996 respectively. Also, in a survey conducted by the Economic System Reform Institute of China in 1987 in 8 cities, including Shanghai and Beijing, they found that 42% of the total use of channels for 'expressing nonwork problems' was contacting the leader of one's work unit (Tang & Parish 2000: 195, table 8.2). It is not very surprising that these numbers are so high, considering that the *danwei* is an organization that has a very direct and daily influence on the lives of the Chinese. Also, this is a strategy that has good prospects of succeeding. All leaders of *danweis* are very focused on having success in their unit, and in order to achieve this they need their subordinates to be satisfied and willing to put in a good effort at work. This, combined

⁴³ Unless otherwise noted, the numbers I present will be from this table.

with the ethics of the mass line, makes the leaders of the *danweis* very sensitive to the needs of the people in their unit (Shi 1997: 48, 70).

Also, complaining through the bureaucratic hierarchy was widespread, with 43 % saying they had done this in 1988 and 47.5 % in 1996⁴⁴. Tang & Parish found that 21 % of the total use of channels for expressing non-work problems had been to contact government bureaus (2000: 195, table 8.2). Every organization in China has a supervising government agency. If one is not successful in influencing the leader of one's *danwei*, the next step is to complain to the organization responsible for supervising one's unit. If one is dissatisfied with general policies or wants to report power abuses by local bureaucrats, this is also the place to go (Shi 1997: 51). Every level of the Chinese government has a permanent office for dealing with complaints raised by the people, the so called complaint bureaus (Shi 1997: 60). This channel was used by 4 % in 1988 and 8.1 % in 1996. These organs can help a person if he is dissatisfied with a decision reached by the bureaucracy, or if he has been the victim of power abuse, and they can then help him in his conflict with this organization. Also, when there is a shortage of any commodities or services one can turn to the complaint bureau for help. Cadres at these bureaus have great discretion in deciding if and how they want to act, and can therefore potentially be of great help (Shi 1997: 60-61). Another channel used is to write letters to government officials. This works basically the same way as complaining to a supervising agency and was used by 12.5 % in 1988 and 15.3 % in 1996 (Shi 1997: 63-64).

Further, using political organizations to voice complaints is quite common. 15 % and 17.7 % report having done this in 1988 and 1996 respectively, while complaining through the trade unions was done by 18.9 % in 1988 and 24.4 % in 1996. By the term 'political organizations', Shi means the CCP, the other parties of China - the officially sanctioned so called 'democratic parties', and the youth organization of the CCP - the Communist Youth League (1997: 55). The primary function of both these political organizations and the trade unions is to control the masses and mobilize them to support the policies of the CCP (Shi 1997: 55, 58). As the CCP is the organization among these with by far the greatest powers at its disposal, it is fair to assume that most of the reported contact is with the CCP. The CCP has a paramount position in the

⁴⁴ In fact, this is a right protected by the Constitution, see art. 41.

Chinese system, and a CCP organization has the authority to overrule a bureaucratic organization at the same level. So if someone is having troubles, e.g. at one's *danwei*, it may be effective to contact the local branch of the CCP (Shi 1997: 57). Even though the trade unions are to be mere organs for mobilizing the people to support the CCP, the cadres of the trade unions tend to take the interests of the union's members as their leading star. Especially in the area of social security, the unions play an important role in promoting the interests of their members. More specifically, the unions often play an important role in helping people get a raise, or their fair part of a general raise (Shi 1997: 58-59). Similarly, in Tang & Parish' study, 13 % of the use of channels was through 'mass organizations' (2000: 195, table 8.2).

One quite important channel for filing complaints that has seen a relatively sharp increase from 1988 to 1996 is applications to deputies for People's Congresses, which increased from 8.6 % to 14.1 %. The local People's Congresses deal with local issues, and when citizens contact them, their main hope is to influence local policies, not national policies, but they sometimes also hope to bring 'bigger' issues to the deputies' attention and that they may use their channels to communicate a problem up towards the national authorities (Shi 1997: 59).

Tang & Parish found a somewhat higher number in 1987 than Shi did in 1988, as they found that 11 % of the total use of channels for expressing non-work problems had been to contact the local deputy to the local People's Congress. This difference may however be attributed to the fact that Tang & Parish only looked at channels for expressing non-work problems. As contacting the local deputy seldom will be a successful way of dealing with work-related problems, this factor will not sink considerably by only looking at non-work problems. Other channels, such as contacting a government bureau, will on the other hand sink, as contacting them may be a good way of dealing with work-related issues. Accordingly, the relative use of local representatives will be higher when only looking at non-work problems.

In the later years it seems to be increasingly common to contact deputies to the NPC. This is a result of the big problems with corruption in China today. As the problem with the corruption often lies within the local power structures, efforts to deal with the issue at the local level may be in vain. The only possibility a citizen then has is

to bring the issue to higher levels, and hope that a deputy to the NPC will raise his issue in one of the sessions. If this is done, there are good chances that the issue will be dealt with. When the NPC held its session in Beijing in November of 2002, thousands of people from all over the country flocked to town, hoping to get the attention of the deputies meeting there (Buckley 2002).

The last channel Shi (1997) points to where people may express their sentiments, is through writing a letter to the newspapers. Again, this is a channel that has seen increased use from 1988 to 1996, from 6.8 % to 8.3 %. This channel differs from the others in that it is the only institutionalized channel that reaches all the way up to the top of the hierarchy. Every major newspaper has a special department, a so-called 'Masses Work Office', responsible for checking and following up on letters from readers, and they put much emphasis on this subject (Shi 1997: 64-65). Routinely, the central authorities, including the top leadership of the Party, receive a summary of letters concerning national policies, suggestions to the government and problems in particular regions. This may also include letters that do not adhere to the official policy (Shi 1997: 65-66).

5.1.3 Spontaneous participation

With 'spontaneous participation' I refer to unorthodox and extraordinary means of participation that one resorts to as an ad hoc response to an issue or event. These acts often have an intense or violent character.

Event though the numbers are still quite low, the occurrence of strikes has increased dramatically from 1988 to 1996. In 1988, 0.9 % of the respondents reported having participated in strikes, while the figure had risen to 2.6 % by 1996. Another job-related way of exerting pressure on one's superiors is to work slower. These are effective ways to deal with troubles on the work-place, as the superiors are under heavy scrutiny from above and therefore are very focused on getting good results in their unit. A slow-down or strike at their work-place will deteriorate their results, and is therefore an effective way for the employees to exert pressure on their superiors (Shi 1997: 70).

The occurrence of demonstrations also saw a drastic increase in the years from 1988 to 1996, from 0.4 % to 1.4 %. This is in much a result of the economic reforms that gained pace during this period, which led to increased social unrest in China. One of

the main issues sparking demonstrations in today's China is lay-offs by SOEs, following the restructuring of old, ineffective SOEs. The figures given above are from the period prior to the first wave of lay-offs by SOEs, which started in 1997 (Liu 2002), and it is therefore reasonable to believe that the occurrence of demonstrations will be even higher today. Indeed, there was a wave of protests in old industrial bases in the spring of 2002 (Lee 2003: 82). Further, a survey conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and referred to by the Economist (2003a), gives an indication of the situation today. They found that 28 % of laid-off workers said they were willing to participate in a demonstration if one was arranged. Even if there is a long way to go from thought to action, this indicates that the numbers of demonstrations are increasing and reaching high numbers. Other issues that spark demonstrations in today's China include security (Economist 2003a) and corruption (Eckholm 2002).

5.1.4 Political participation with a high level of own initiative

In this section I will discuss political participation with high levels of own initiative. Even though the preceding section on spontaneous participation is also characterized by participation with a high level of own initiative, this section is somewhat different in that the initiative for the instigation itself comes from the citizen, rather than he or she e.g. joining in on a demonstration someone else has staged. I will here discuss efforts to influence others in connection with political participation, and bringing cases to court.

Most of the participation with a high level of own initiative is in connection with elections, either for the *danwei* or the County People's Congress. For each of these types of elections, Shi (1999a: 155) registers three kinds of activities; to persuade others to boycott the elections, persuade others how to vote, or persuade others to go to campaign meetings. The most striking feature in the material Shi presents is the difference in the changes in the frequency reported for these activities in *danwei*-elections and elections for County People's Congresses respectively. Activities related to elections for deputies to County People's Congresses have gone drastically up⁴⁵, while the same

⁴⁵ The share of people who report persuading others to boycott unfair elections has increased from 3.7 % in 1988 to 6.8 % in 1996, the share of people who report to have persuaded others how to vote has increased from 4.7 % to 8.0 %, while the share of people who report persuading others to go to campaign-meetings increased from 8.9 % to 13.0 %.

activities for *danwei*-elections has gone equally drastically down⁴⁶. As I pointed out earlier, in section 5.1.1, it is not mandatory to arrange elections for *danwei* leaders, and one reason for the decrease in activities related to *danwei* elections may be that there were fewer elections arranged in 1996 than in 1988⁴⁷. The share of people, who engaged in activities among those who worked in *danweis* where elections were arranged, actually showed an increase from 1988 to 1996, and is considerably higher than the corresponding numbers for the elections to County People's Congresses⁴⁸.

In addition to elections, the workers use two other ways to influence how their *danwei* is run. They may whip up public opinion in the *danwei* against the leaders, and they may organize a group of people to fight against the leaders. Both of these activities have seen a decrease from 1988 to 1996. Whipping up public opinion has decreased from 5.1 % to 1.7 %, while organizing people to fight the leaders has decreased from 7.6 % to 3.0 %. Whipping up public opinion does not have as its goal to change the decision made by a leader of the *danwei*, but rather to have revenge over a decision that was to one's disadvantage. At the most extreme, the intention may be to get the person fired (Shi 1997: 81). The means used are spreading rumors about the leader and making jokes about his or her personality. The result is that the legitimacy of the leader is eroded and it becomes more and more difficult for him or her to lead the *danwei* (Shi 1997: 83).

The practice of organizing groups against the leaders has its origin in the Cultural Revolution (Shi 1997: 77-79). Since the organizers face severe sanctions from the leaders, it is important to be well organized, and they therefore spend some time gathering evidence against the person they are accusing. When enough evidence is gathered, they may demand that the leader openly confesses to his mistakes, demand that he resigns, or ask higher authorities to deal with the issue. When a group is well

⁴⁶ The share of people who report persuading others to boycott unfair elections has decreased from 4.6 % in 1988 to 2.9 % in 1996, the share of people who report to have persuaded others how to vote has decreased from 5.7 % to 3.5 %, while the share of people who report persuading others to go to campaign-meetings decreased from 7.7 % to 5.4 %.

⁴⁷ The percentage of people who said they had the opportunity to vote in elections for *danwei*-leaders sank from 42.1 % in 1988 to 19.6 % in 1996.

⁴⁸ 18.2 % mobilized others to participate in campaign meetings in 1988, while the figure was 28.1 % in 1996. 11.0 % mobilizes others to boycott unfair elections in 1988, 15.1 % in 1996. However, fewer people participated in campaign meetings in 1996 than in 1988, with 56.1 % and 55.0 % respectively (Shi 1999a: 158)

organized and are able to prove their accusations, they have good chances of achieving their goals (Shi 1997: 80).

The category that saw the biggest increase in Shi's surveys was the share of people who had brought a case to court. Naturally, the numbers are quite low, but from 1988 to 1996 there was nearly a four-fold increase, from 1.2 % to 4.5 %. This is a form of participation that is most often used in dealing with corrupt officials, and serves as a 'last resort' when all other means have failed (Shi 1997: 83-84). One obvious reason for this may then be the increased corruption, and the increased focus on the issue, in the period. Another reason that most likely also contributed is increased emphasis on 'rule of law' during that period.

5.1.5 *Guanxi* as a political asset

As I will show in this section, *guanxi* has two functions when it comes to political participation. First of all it is a channel for participation in it self. Second it is a measure to make the use of channels more effective, and even sometimes possible.

Before I describe the functions of *guanxi* in political participation, I will start with an effort to explain what *guanxi* is. The literal translation is 'relation', 'relationship' (as a noun) and 'relate to' (as a verb) (Gold, et al. 2002: 6). According to one researcher, a more accurate translation is 'particularistic ties' (Jacobs 1979: 242, footnote 23). It has also been translated as 'connection' (Shi 1997: 69). In the literature, an outright definition of *guanxi* is seldom given, due to the complexity of the issue (Kipnis 2002: 21 lists a number of the problems one face when defining *guanxi*). The term is usually translated, and its more precise content is outlined by referring to the practices that constitute *guanxi* and by contrasting it to other practices, such as the Western practices of relations (Kipnis 2002). To delve into this big discussion is however not necessary for the purpose of this discussion. Here it would be more useful to present a clear definition, as this gives a more precise and immediate feeling of what *guanxi* is all about. One definition is:

In ordinary usage, it [guanxi] refers to a person's nexus of private and particularistic social relationships that have the potential to serve, but do not necessarily exist solely for, instrumental purposes' (Lin 2002: 59)

Bian (1994: 974-975) divides *guanxi* into three types; A contact person; referring to a person you have a strong connection with. It can also refer to a person you have a direct relationship with, but a bit weaker connection than with a contact person; a person you know and have a direct contact with. Or, it can be an indirect relationship, a person with whom you share a status group or have a common relative. Jacobs (1979: 243-256) gives a more detailed presentation of what may constitute a basis for *guanxi* between two people. His typology of bases for *guanxi* includes locality, kinship, working or having worked in the same company, being or having been classmates, sworn brotherhood, sharing the same surname, being or having been in a teacher-student relationship, having done business together, working or having worked in the bureaucracy, and friendship⁴⁹.

The *guanxi* is closer and thereby more valuable, if the basis for the *guanxi* is strong. But according to Jacobs there is one more variable that determines how valuable a *guanxi* is: *gangqing*. He translates this term as 'affect' (Jacobs 1979: 242). The strength of *gangqing* depends on social interaction (going to banquets, giving gifts, etc.), and utilizing and helping the *guanxi*.⁵⁰ When the *guanxi* is used, it is called *la guanxi* (Christensen & Rai 1996: 245).

The first function, as a channel, can be observed in the *danwei*. The importance of *guanxi* here lies in the fact that the resources that are to be distributed within the *danwei* are limited. When a leader chooses if and what resources a person is to be given, he will do so from considerations of who may be of help for him in his work, or who he has personal connections with (Shi 1997: 69). *Guanxi* then becomes a political asset, making it easier to obtain welfare goods and advantages. 15.5 % of the respondents report having used *guanxi* as a channel for political participation in 1988, while the number was 16.6 % in 1996. 4.6 % of the respondents in 1988 reported having given gifts in exchange for help, while the number had increased to 8.0 % in 1996. Tang & Parish

⁴⁹ Jacobs' article is based on fieldwork he conducted in Taiwan in 1971-73. For the purpose of this presentation of the term *guanxi* it does not present any problems to use this research in a thesis on mainland China. However, the last of Jacobs' bases for *guanxi*, working or having worked in the bureaucracy, is most likely attributable to the special governing situation the Guomindang faced when they occupied Taiwan. When staffing the bureaucracy with non-natives who had no *guanxi* with their Taiwanese co-workers, this *guanxi* was established to overcome the problem with lacking *guanxi* (Jacobs 1979: 252).

⁵⁰ Gold, et al. (2002: 4) mention *gangqing* as one of four 'building blocks of Chinese sociality' that *guanxi* is closely linked to. The other three are *renqing* (human feelings), *mianzi* (face) and *bao* (reciprocity).

found that the use of ‘personal connection[s]’ accounted for 3 % of the use of channels. Since they do not give a clear definition of what they mean by ‘personal connections’ or how they have operationalized it, it is difficult to know why there is such a big difference between their finding and that of Shi.

Second, one can say that much of the participation outlined above have elements of *guanxi* in it, in the sense that *guanxi* works as an asset, supplementing the use of other channels. E.g., when a citizen contacts the leaders of his *danwei*, the success of his approach is in much determined by the *guanxi* he has with them (Shi 1997: 48-49).

5.1.6 Conclusion

Chinese urban citizens have many channels for political participation, and they use these channels frequently. This is quite surprising, and not in line with the picture one usually has of China. There are in fact many possibilities for political participation in urban China, not a limited range of possibilities as one would expect. However, worth noticing regarding the channels for political participation compared to Western democracies, is the close connection between the citizens and the power-holders, as e.g. seen in the use of *guanxi* and the frequency of contacting deputies to the People’s Congresses. Also worth noticing is the informal character of the channels for political participation. I will elaborate on these, and some other, points in the following section.

5.2 Problems and prospects of conventional political participation

As I have shown in section 5.1, there are a plethora of channels and possibilities for political participation in urban China, and they are widely used. Contrary to what one could expect, channels for political participation in China do indeed seem to be well developed. My intention in this section is to analyze the possible trajectories of political participation, and the implications of the channels for democratization in the light of Habermas’s theory of the development of the public spheres. I will do so by addressing some issues emerging from Habermas's theory: the success of the bourgeois people in the theory of Habermas was dependent on a degree of autonomy that enabled them to

use the channels for participation to challenge the existing power structures. How dependent are Chinese urbanites on the existing power structures in their use of the channels for political participation? In Habermas's theory, the protection of the citizens' legal rights is important. Also, according to the discourse theory of Habermas, which is a part of his theory on the development of the public spheres (Habermas 2002: 51), it is important that norms do not limit political participation. To what extent is the political participation protected by law, or limited by norms and expectations? An important feature of the political participation of the bourgeois people was that it extended to all aspects and levels of politics, and because of this the bourgeois people was able to change both practical and normative features of the system for political participation. Does political participation in China extend to all aspects of politics in China?

Hopefully, my analysis will help us get a clearer understanding of what possibilities Chinese citizens really have for influencing politics, and this in turn may open avenues for research on how this field may develop as the reforms deepen and their effects spread throughout the society.

5.2.1 Norms as limits: 'The Four Cardinal Principles' and 'The Three Represents'

In his theory, Habermas emphasize the importance of legally protected political rights for the emergence of political participation (Habermas 2002: 76-77). I will in this section look at the legal setting for political participation. However, considering China's weak tradition for rule of law, I find it necessary to go beyond the legal setting and also look at norms as limits to the political rights of Chinese citizens. The question I seek to answer is: to what extent is political participation in urban China protected by law, or limited by norms and expectations? The first part of the question will be answered quite shortly with reference to the rights the Chinese constitution assigns to Chinese citizens. The second part of the question will be treated more thoroughly with an analysis of norms that set the limits to political participation.

The Chinese constitution defines a large number of rights for Chinese citizens. Among the political rights stipulated in the Constitution one finds all the rights one can expect to find in a democratic constitution; equality before the law (Constitution of the People's Republic of China, article 33), the right to vote (article 34), freedom of speech,

assembly and demonstration (article 35), as well as some additional rights such as freedom of correspondence and the right to make suggestions to the state (articles 40-41). In the constitution one can also find the principle of sovereignty of the people (article 2). As the Chinese constitution also stipulate the right to a large number of welfare benefits (articles 42-47) the list of rights is in fact more extensive than what you find in most liberal-democratic constitutions. However, the constitution has a different legal standing from what we are used to in the West. The constitution is not the basic law of China, but rather one among many other laws, and can be violated by ordinary laws and in fact even administrative decisions (Lin 2001). It is therefore necessary to look at how the rights stipulated in the constitution are limited in practice.

'The Four Cardinal Principles'

In the perspective of political participation, 'The Four Cardinal Principles'⁵¹ are the most notable limits to the political rights of the Chinese citizens, whereby the CCP defined the limits for acceptable opinions and behavior (Saich 2001: 58). 'The Four Cardinal Principles' were outlined in a speech by president Deng Xiaoping in 1980, and later made a part of the 1957-Constitution through an amendment. When the current Constitution was written in 1982, they were made a part of the Constitution, as well as being mentioned in the preamble. They are also taken into the Constitution of the CCP, where they are said to be 'the foundation on which to build our country' (tenth section of the 'General Program' of the constitution)⁵².

The first principle states that one 'must keep to the socialist road' (Deng 1984: 174-176). The text in the Constitution reads:

'The socialist system is the basic system of the People's Republic of China. Disruption of the socialist state by any organization or individual is prohibited.' (Article 1, second part)

The principle, as laid out by Deng (1984: 174-176), does not only include active work against the socialist system. It also includes a ban against criticizing socialism or claiming that it is inferior to capitalism. The meaning of the principle must of course

⁵¹ 'The Four Cardinal Principles' are often referred to as 'the four basic principles' in the literature (see for example Nathan 1985: 33). I choose to apply the wording used in the official translation of the text (see Deng 1984: 167ff).

⁵² In addition, there are regulations in the 1997 Criminal Law relating to the violation of 'The Four Cardinal Principles', see articles 105 and 278.

now be qualified to some extent as China now acknowledges many features of capitalism, such as private property (see article 11 and 13 in the Constitution). This ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ makes it very unclear and almost impossible to define what it involves to ‘keep to the socialist road’. Still, it is a fact of the matter that there is a limit, and this limit can be used to crack down on what the authorities consider deviant practices. That this limit is vague makes it powerful as a tool to suppress unwanted political acts, as the power to define the limits lie with the CCP, in part through the very politically influenced court-system (Saich 2001: 123-124; Wang 2002a: 140).

The second of ‘The Four Cardinal Principles’ states that everyone ‘must uphold the dictatorship of the proletariat’ (Deng 1984: 176-177). The text in the Constitution reads:

‘The People’s Republic of China is a socialist state under the people’s democratic dictatorship led by the working class and based on the alliance of workers and peasants.’ (Article 1, first part)

This ‘socialist democracy’ is enjoyed by ‘the workers, peasants, intellectuals and other working people’ (Deng 1984: 176). Everyone opposed to this democracy are to be fought against, and it is legitimate to ‘exercise dictatorship’ over them.

The third of ‘The Four Cardinal Principles’ states that everyone ‘must uphold the leadership of the Communist Party’ (Deng 1984: 177-179). This principle is considered as the most important of ‘The Four Cardinal Principles’ (Lin 2000: 23; Nathan 1985: 36). This principle can not explicitly be found in any articles in the Constitution, but it is stated in the preamble (see first sentence of the quotation from the Constitution given under the fourth principle below) and is therefore a fundamental constitutional principle with binding effect, according to Lin (2000: 23-25). The clearest expression of the leadership of the CCP can be found in the first sentence of the general program of the Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party (2002):

‘The Communist Party of China is the vanguard both of the Chinese working class and of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation. It is the core of leadership for the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics’

The CCP is to be the guarantor of a successful socialist democracy, ensuring that a ‘bourgeois democracy’ of the Western type is not put in its place. One very concrete consequence of this principle is that it is impossible for any party to challenge the CCP.

If another party was to gain power in China, it would be unconstitutional, even if this was by victory in an election (Lin 2000: 24).

The fourth principle states that everyone ‘must uphold Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought’ (Deng 1984: 179-180). This principle, which had ‘Deng Xiaoping Theory’ added to it through an amendment in 1999, can be found in the preamble to the Constitution:

‘Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Chinese people of all nationalities will continue to adhere to the people’s democratic dictatorship [...].’

The people who ‘think otherwise’ must be opposed (Deng 1984: 179), and censorship will be applied to anyone who departs from this principle on serious questions.

We see that ‘the Four Cardinal Principles’ are a centrally given nationwide structural limit to political participation and its influence goes all the way down to the local level. In what way then, do these principles influence the possibilities for political participation at the local level?

The first and fourth principles ‘Cardinal Principles’ have at least two consequences that are interesting in the eyes of Habermas’s discourse theory. One is that the range of debatable issues is limited. The other is that within the issues that are debatable, strict criteria to judge whether an argument is acceptable or not are established. This leads to some issues being removed from the public debate altogether, while for the remaining issues there are limits to what one may say and which arguments are legitimate. When certain arguments are systematically removed from the public debate in this way, it constitutes a breach of Habermas’s basic sentence of discourse ethics (Eriksen & Weigård 1999: 102). This limit on the acceptable arguments means that not all aspects of a case are considered, and decisions are therefore reached on an incomplete basis. This failure to take all relevant arguments and counter-arguments into consideration means that a decision is not based on the reality, but on an ideological version of it. One fails ‘to seek truth from facts’, as Mao made the standard and Deng also emphasized (Deng 1984: 141-144, 151-166). One can of course argue that there will be a debate within the ruling elite, and that this will fulfill the considerations behind the

discourse theory. But even this debate will be under the limits of ‘The Four Cardinal Principles’ and the problems will therefore endure.

In a country like China was some years ago, these limitations did not have big consequences for the representation of the interests of the people. Up till the point when market reforms led to increased privatization in the early 90’s⁵³, China was rather homogenous, with little difference of interest among the people. Given that the leaders had the interest of the people as the leading star for their decisions, as they at least claimed to have, and thereby exercised socialist democracy, one could say that the interests of the Chinese people was taken care of by the rulers⁵⁴. However, with the establishment of an economic system where the market plays a big role, bigger differences of interests among different strata of Chinese people are created. One can already see the beginning of this. At one end of the scale, one has a rich upper class; while at the other end one has the hundreds of millions in ‘the floating population’ of rural dwellers going into towns and cities to find work. The previously clear class-composition of China is now becoming blurred and disintegrates into several new classes (Hjellum 2000). It is quite clear that when it comes to questions such as the progress of the economic reforms, the different groups have widely different interests.

As the limits laid down in these two principles deprive certain groups and individuals in society of their ability to attend to their interests, they not only lead to an unacceptable limitation of the arguments that may be used in the public spheres, but also limit some people’s rights as citizens. The CCP do however acknowledge that there now are different interests in the society, and that the lacking representation of them may be problematic to the Party’s ability to rule. To consolidate its power-basis and widen its perspective, the CCP formulated ‘The Three Represents’ to ensure that these interests are kept within the Party, thereby neutralizing a possible challenge to its authority.

The second cardinal principle serves to split the society in two categories; those who are a part of the ruling classes and those who are not. This has at least two

⁵³ See Delman (2002: table 1 p. 84) for an outline of the stages of market reforms in China, indicating that private ownership did not emerge until 1993.

⁵⁴ Considering such catastrophes as the Cultural Revolution, interpreted by some to be the result of a power-struggle among the top leaders of the CCP (Wang 2002a: 26), there is of course plenty of reason to doubt this. But for the simplicity of the argument, let us assume that they have the interests of the people in mind when making decisions.

consequences. The first is that the arguments presented are judged not only by their merit, but also by who presents them. Those who are not members of the ruling class are not as worthy, and their arguments are not to be taken as seriously. This is obviously an unsound criterion to judge an argument by. The second and most extreme consequence is that this principle may serve to legitimate the suppression of certain groups. In the first years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, many people were classified as enemies of the people and heavily suppressed. Today, this is seldom the case, but it does happen. Now, the main function of this principle is to legitimate ad-hoc sanctions of those who break the first and fourth principles. The principle serves to aggravate the severity of the crime by defining it as a crime against the state and the people.

The third cardinal principle may at first seem rather innocent, but there lies great power in it. This principle gives the CCP the right and legitimacy to define the more precise contents of the other principles, and what constitutes a breach of them. If an opinion that goes contrary to the beliefs of the Party or constitutes a challenge to its power is uttered in the public spheres, it can be suppressed with reference to 'The Four Cardinal Principles' (Saich 2001: 58). Since the CCP has the exclusive authority to define the limits of these principles, accountability is very difficult and almost non-existent. There are of course some examples where the Party has been held accountable to the people, but this only happens when the Party itself allows it, and is often the result of an internal power-struggle. This was for example the situation in the happenings surrounding the outbreak of SARS last year, when the government eventually disclosed some details over how the issue had been handled⁵⁵.

The use of 'The Four Cardinal Principles' to suppress unwanted political opinions and activities can be seen in the way they were used to suppress unwanted candidates at the local elections at Hunan Teachers' College in 1980 (Baum 1994: 109-110), criticize a screenplay in 1981 (Baum 1994: 127), and to weaken the legitimacy of the student protesters at the Tiananmen Incident in June 1989 (Baum 1994: 293-294).

⁵⁵ After initially trying to downplay the spread of SARS, the government decided to change its tactic and be more open about the disease and how they were dealing with it. The most noticeable effort was the sacking of several high level officials, mostly in the less important state apparatus though. Even here one can find traces of power-struggle, as one was careful to sack the same number of people having the support of Hu and Jiang respectively (Eckholm 2003; Economist 2003b).

In addition to being powerful tools in the running of everyday politics and for sanctioning any challenges to the Party's power, 'The Four Cardinal Principles' have the effect of leading to self-censorship. To avoid coming in conflict with the authorities, Chinese people are careful of their utterances in the public spheres (Nathan 1990: 121).

However, Chinese society has changed since president Deng Xiaoping gave his speech in 1980. In the tradition of 'seeking truth from the facts', the CCP has formulated a new theory that, as we will see in the following, mitigates the impact of 'the Four Cardinal Principles' to a certain extent.

'The Three Represents'

On the first of July 2001, in a gathering celebrating the 80th anniversary of the CCP, president Jiang Zemin held a speech where he outlined a new theory⁵⁶ on the role and foundation of the CCP, known as 'The Three Represents' (Jiang 2001). In this theory, he stated that, in following the tradition of the CCP to adjust to the circumstances, the CCP is to

'[...] represent the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people in China' ⁵⁷

In specifying who the Party is to represent through 'The Three Represents' Jiang said that it is now necessary to widen the definition of 'worker' to also include

'[...] entrepreneurs and technical personnel employed by scientific and technical enterprises of the non-public sector, managerial and technical staff employed by foreign-funded enterprises, the self-employed, private entrepreneurs, employees in intermediaries and freelance professionals.' ⁵⁸

In a further widening of the social basis for the CCP, Jiang said that candidates for membership of the Party was to be judged by

'[...] whether he or she works wholeheartedly for the implementation of the Party's line and program and meets the requirements for the Party membership.' ⁵⁹

⁵⁶ 'Thought' in the official terminology.

⁵⁷ Jiang's speech is available from a Xinhua based web-site entirely devoted to the study of his theory of 'The Three Represents', see <http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/news.xinhuanet.com/english/report/study/>. This particular quotation can be found in the second part of his speech, see <http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/news.xinhuanet.com/english/20010726/433647.htm>

⁵⁸ This particular quotation is from the fifth part of the speech on the web-site, see <http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/news.xinhuanet.com/english/20010726/433650.htm>

⁵⁹ This quotation is from the end of the fifth part, see above footnote for URL.

He goes on to say that

‘[...] it is not advisable to judge a person’s political integrity simply by whether one owns property and how much property he or she owns. But rather, we should judge him or her mainly by his or her political awareness, moral integrity and performance [...], and by his or her actual contribution to the cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics.’⁶⁰

This theory differs from ‘The Four Cardinal Principles’ on many important accounts. First of all it has a very different understanding of what the basis for ‘socialism’ is. As we have seen, the second of ‘The Four Cardinal Principles’ states that it is the workers and the peasants who are to be the ruling classes who exert the people’s dictatorship. In his speech, Jiang widens the social basis for the CCP by allowing other strata to become members of the Party, and take part in the ruling of the country. These are strata that were earlier seen as enemies of the revolution, who were seen as irrelevant and certainly not to be given any political influence.

Second, this widening of the basis for the CCP means that the Party has to behave differently in the making of its policies. It is no longer a class-based party, based on the working class, but a ‘catch all’-party, trying to accommodate all the different strata of reform-China. That the CCP considers itself a ‘catch all’-party can clearly be seen in an amendment that was made to the first sentence of the general program of the Party-constitution at the 16th Party Congress in 2002; the sentence previously stated that the CCP was the ‘vanguard of the working class’, but it now states that it is ‘the vanguard both of the Chinese working class and of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation’. That the Party now has a ‘catch all’-character rather than a working class-character will most likely have some influence on how it works and the formation of opinions within the Party. The inclusion of these strata and the formulation of ‘The Three Represents’ indicates a slight change in the ideology of the Party and more opinions are therefore now tolerated.

Third, as a consequence of allowing these strata in, and stressing the contribution of them to the development of ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’, Jiang gives great legitimacy to them. Consequently, this also gives legitimacy to the ideas and ideology of these strata, thereby altering the political climate in China. Ideas and opinions that are

⁶⁰ This quotation is from the beginning of the sixth part, see <http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/news.xinhuanet.com/english/20010726/433651.htm>

more capitalistic, such as private initiative and private control of the means of production, are now acceptable. This considerably widens the limits imposed by ‘The Four Cardinal Principles’ on political participation, by making such views and standpoints legitimate as arguments in political discussions and issues.

It may indeed seem that ‘The Three Represents’ have widened the meaning of ‘socialism’ to such an extent that the word has almost lost its original meaning. The Party, however, ardently claims that it is sticking to socialism. The widened definition of socialism, according to a high ranking Party cadre in an official interview with *Xinhua*⁶¹, has only come about because the recent developments have given them a better understanding of what socialism really is (People’s Daily 2002a). Further, it is clear that ‘The Four Cardinal Principles’ are still relevant. We can see this, first, because Jiang is doing his best to stick to socialism by saying that new members are to be judged by their ‘political awareness’ and ‘contribution to the cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics’. Given the weight Deng and his thought still has in the CCP, it is reasonable to assume that the keyword ‘political awareness’ has an unstated reference to ‘The Four Cardinal Principles’. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that ‘The Three Represents’ is said to be ‘a continuation of [...] Deng Xiaoping Theory’ (section 6 of the general program of the Constitution of the CCP).

A second indication of the continued relevance of ‘The Four Cardinal Principles’ is the fact that the articles of the Constitution of the CCP and the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China that I quoted from above are still valid. This means that ‘The Four Cardinal Principles’ still have binding effect and have to be taken into account in the formulation of policies.

A third factor, and one that seriously weakens the transformative effects ‘The Three Represents’ have on ‘The Four Cardinal Principles’, is the reason the CCP had for introducing ‘The Three Represents’. ‘The Three Represents’ are, as Jiang himself states, a result of the party’s tradition of ‘seeking truth from the facts’; they are in much a formalization and legitimation of a development that has already happened. Many members of the CCP, including many prominent members, were ‘entrepreneurs’ already prior to the formulation of ‘The Three Represents’. Some therefore interpret ‘The Three

⁶¹ The official Chinese news agency.

Represents' as a desperate measure of the CCP to save face, and legitimacy, by legitimating some of the previous deviant practices that are so widespread in their own organization (Yueh 2003: 2). Rather than cracking down on this practice, they found it easier to legitimate it. There is therefore some reason for doubt as to the commitment of the CCP to 'The Three Represents', and consequently to what extent they will widen the limits imposed by 'The Four Cardinal Principles'.

Also, it is important to notice that 'The Four Cardinal Principles' are not rendered obsolete by 'The Three Represents'. In his speech, Jiang emphasized that 'All comrades must [...] stick to "The Four Cardinal Principles"'.⁶² Even with 'The Three Represents' in place, arguments are to be judged according to these criteria. Still, as 'the Three Represents' makes arguments related to the activities of the 'new' groups legitimate and acceptable in the public spheres it is fair to say that they actually have the effect of widening the definition of what is acceptable within the limits of 'The Four Cardinal Principles', especially the second principle, with its emphasis on the central role of 'the proletariat'. As these activities are quite different from what one normally think of as socialist, this would mean a considerable widening of the public spheres in China and increased opportunities for political participation.

One 'Cardinal Principle' that is left unchanged in Jiang's speech is the third, which states that the CCP is the leader of the nation. Not surprisingly, the Party chooses to stick to this expression of Leninist centralism, whereby they still have the authority to rule without challenges to their power.

Even if 'The Four Cardinal Principles' are still relevant, it is important to note that the interpretation of their role has changed: In his work report to the 14th congress of the CCP, president Jiang Zemin stated that the purpose of 'The Four Cardinal Principles' was 'to liberate and develop the productive forces to an even greater extent' (Baum 1994: 363). As Baum says, this 'left the door open to possible future challenges to these principles (Baum 1994: 363).

I think it is too early to say exactly how the balance between 'The Four Cardinal Principles' and 'The Three Represents' will be. It has only been two years since Jiang

⁶² This quotation is from the seventh part of the speech, see <http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/news.xinhuanet.com/english/20010726/433652.htm>

made his speech and it is too early to judge on the results of it. It is however clear that the interpretation and understanding of the role of 'The Four Cardinal Principles' has changed. How 'The Three Represents' is practiced will be decisive. If the conservatives gain the upper hand in the Party, we will probably see a backlash to a more purely socialistic practice, while if the reforms are allowed to gain further pace this may turn out to be the first in a series of steps towards political liberalization.

Conclusion

'The Four Cardinal Principles' emphasizes the importance of sticking to socialism, the primacy of the proletariat, the leadership of the CCP and the importance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought. After the introduction of 'The Three Represents' many of these principles have been somewhat mitigated and the category of acceptable opinions and behavior has widened somewhat.

Still, 'The Four Cardinal Principles', even when mitigated by 'The Three Represents', breeds normative expectations to behavior and opinion, and thereby puts clear normative limits on the use of channels for political participation. The normative expectations limits the room for maneuver and the autonomy of Chinese urban citizens, and it is therefore difficult for them to use the channels for political participation to push for democratization, as in the theory of Habermas, since this involves challenging the authorities. This indicates that the channels for political participation in urban China are not well suited to push for democracy.

5.2.2 Weak formalization of channels for participation and the importance of *guanxi*

According to the theory of Habermas autonomy is very important, and legal protection and a predictable framework is the main ingredients in the citizen's autonomy. The question I will seek to answer in this section is: how dependent are the citizens on the existing power structures in their use of the channels for political participation? This will depend on the legal standing of the channels, and I will therefore look at the degree of formalization of the channels when answering this question.

The degree of formalization

The formal channels for political participation in China are relatively few. Only elections for the local People's Congress can be said to be a formal channel for participation after the definition I gave in section 1.3.2, as they are regulated by law. The elections of RCs are de facto formalized, but as I showed in 5.1.1, the rules are mostly violated, and they can therefore not be considered a formal channel for political participation. Elections for *danweis* are also to a certain extent formalized, although with less formal backing than the elections for County People's Congresses. They are not supported by a law, but by an order from the government (Shi 1997: 40). This makes it more unclear how the elections are to be conducted and the quality of the elections may therefore vary greatly from one *danwei* to another. Further, as I noted in section 5.1.1 it is not mandatory to hold elections in *danweis*. This has led to the number of elections in *danweis* decreasing from 1993 to 1996 (Shi 1999a: 157). It is very random if and how this channel for participation works, and the citizens can not trust it to be a channel where they can express their sentiments and find outlet for their grievances.

The possibilities to express sentiments through complaints also lie in a middle position with regard to formalization. Some of the possibilities to express sentiments are formalized, such as the right to file complaints through the bureaucratic hierarchy, which is protected in the Constitution (art. 41) and regulated in 'Regulations on Administrative Reconsiderations' (1990). However, the most common channel for expressing sentiments was to complain within the *danwei* (Shi 1999a: 153, table 7.4), and this channel is not formalized as the *danwei* is not considered an 'administrative organ' in the meaning of the 'Regulations on Administrative Reconsiderations' article 1. The channels I described as channels with high levels of own initiative must also be said to be informal. Although these channels are not very widely used, they are important because of their direct dealing with the relevant issue. The other channels, spontaneous participation and *guanxi* must also be categorized as informal channels.

However, even the channel for participation that is apparently most formalized, elections for deputies to County People's Congresses, suffer from features that weaken the degree of formalization. The elections are formalized in the sense that they are regulated in a law, the Election Law. This law sets down procedures on how candidates

are to be nominated, how the elections are to be conducted etc. However, in the way these regulations are practiced lays a great deal, actually dominant part, of undemocratic features, severely limiting the degree of formalization. The main feature is the big influence the CCP exerts on the elections. This influence is not stipulated in the law, and it severely limits the influence the voters are to have according to the law. The nomination process is controlled by the local Party-branch through a process of ‘consulting’ (Jacobs 1991: 183-185, McCormick 1996: 40). Since the right to nominate is very liberal, the number of nominees is very big, often as many as several hundred. It is therefore necessary to reduce the number of names to be put on the ballot, a process guided by the local Party-branch through the process of ‘consulting’. How dominant the local Party-branch is in this process, varies from place to place and seems to be very dependent on the attitudes of the people in charge, as is evident in the different ways the nomination process was handled in the four localities Jacobs refers to (1991: 183-185). It does however seem that the local Party-branch plays a decisive role and is able to control who ends up on the ballot. This means that the candidates that are allowed to stand are members, or sympathizers, of the CCP, thereby removing any democratic potential in these elections (Chen & Zhong 2002: 183; Jacobs 1991: 185; McCormick 1996: 39).

The main reason the CCP gives for exerting such strong influence is the principle that all groups and minorities in society are to be represented, thereby making the results more democratic. They often abuse their position to ensure that the candidates have the ‘right’ political attitudes (Chen & Zhong 2002: 183; Jacobs 1991: 185; McCormick 1996: 39). Here we see an example of the influence ‘The Four Cardinal Principles’ have in Chinese politics. One of the most important qualities a candidate must have if he is to be accepted is that he does not challenge the supremacy of the Party. This is a lesson the CCP has learned after the appearance of non-Marxist candidates in the first multi-candidate elections in 1980 (Chen & Zhong 2002: 183, Nathan 1985: 193-223). As the nomination process is so tightly controlled by the CCP, it does not matter much that the voters have a real choice at the elections. The candidates on the ballot tend to have what the local branch of the CCP define as the right attitude, and therefore have relatively homogenous opinions. Accordingly, voters have very limited possibilities to influence the policy-making through their choice of candidate. As a result, most of the candidates

elected are from the CCP and very few of them are opposed to any policies of the CCP (Chen & Zhong 2002: 183).

In the campaigning one can see another example of the influence ‘The Four Cardinal Principles’ have. The CCP has instructed the election committees to ensure that the candidates do not challenge the Party in the election campaign (Chen & Zhong 2002: 182-183). These limits have detrimental effects on the possibilities of a real debate. According to Habermas, the parliaments are to be the focal point of the public debate, a debate that helps the society choose good solutions and move forward. When this is not the case, the debate is circumscribed and there is great risk that relevant arguments and solutions are not taken into consideration (Eriksen & Weigård 1999: 18; Habermas 1996: 167-168, 176-183). Further, it is unusual to do much campaigning at all (Jacobs 1991: 186-187; McCormick 1996: 40-41). This has big consequences for the influence of the voters. When they do not know much about the candidates, they do not know what kind of policies the candidates will work for. As a consequence they are not able to further their views by voting for a candidate who shares their views, thereby removing any meaningful participation.

In addition to actually having a relatively low level of formalization, the elections for County People’s Congresses are elections for organs with little power. They do not have the authority to pass laws or regulations for their county. The authorities they have are quite small; supervising the implementation of policies, electing members for organs such as the Standing Committee of their congress (article 8 in the Organic law of the Local People's Congresses and Local People's Governments), and removing the chief procurator, the president of the congress and members of the Standing Committee from their offices (article 10 in the Organic law). The most far-reaching authority is the right ‘to alter or annul inappropriate resolutions of the standing committees’ (article 8, section 10). In addition, most of the power the Congresses have is exercised by their Standing Committee, with the deputies having small possibilities to influence decisions. The deputies are not normally allowed to speak in the plenum sessions of the Congress, where nearly all the time is used for the work reports of the Standing Committee (McCormick 1996: 38, 42).

The County People's Congresses have previously found it rather difficult to exercise even the small power they do have (Cho 2002: 725). However, the role of the Congresses has changed in the later years, with the local Congresses being able to play an increasingly important role in supervising the implementation of policies (Cho 2002). Through first using a low-conflict strategy, the local People's Congresses were able to increase their influence. In this strategy they first ensured they had the support of the local CCP-branch, as this is necessary to be able to put power behind their demands (Cho 2002: 726-729). They further pursued a strategy of cooperating with the government organs they were supervising. As these organs are superior to the local People's Congresses in resources and political position, a confrontation strategy would not be successful. The most effective way of supervising was therefore to persuade rather than force the government organs to follow the recommendations of the local People's Congress (Cho 2002: 729-731). After having success with this tactic, they were able to pursue a strategy more focused on confrontation, setting up a system for supervision using new measures that were specially adjusted to the capacity of the local People's Congresses (Cho 2002: 732). Still, it remains for the local People's Congresses to be able to play an active, independent role in policy-making, and for the deputies to be able to have a personal influence on how their congress conducts its work.

From this, we clearly see that an apparently high degree of formalization may in fact be severely limited. This is done through the circumvention of procedures and rights laid down in the laws, and it can therefore be said to illustrate how one prominent feature of the Chinese society is present also in political participation; the lack of a rule of law.⁶³ We see that if it is deemed necessary and expedient, it is not considered problematic to ignore the laws and choose a more suitable solution. Considering the fact that the other channels are even less formal and many of them are totally informal, an important question arises: from the viewpoint of Habermas's theory, what implications

⁶³ Rule of law in China is a highly debated subject. Even though there are differences as to what extent China lacks a rule of law, there is not much dispute that rule of law is weakly developed in China (Dowdle 1999: 287). According to Peernboom (1999), the lack of a rule of law can be attributed to the following issues: whether the law has superiority over the CCP (321-325), the instrumental use of law by the CCP to achieve its policy goals (325-328), limited autonomy for the courts and limited powers to interpret laws, regulations and administrative regulations (326-327, 339-340), lack of transparency and vagueness in the system of laws (334, 336), the weak development of the juridical profession (334-335), ignorance of laws both by government agencies, business, individuals and even the courts (340-342). For other presentations of the situation for rule of law in China, see e.g. Lubman (1999), Potter (2001) and Turner et. al. (2000).

does the weak formalization of channels, following the weak rule of law, have for political participation in China?

According to Habermas (2002: 76-77), the protection of the citizens' political rights is very important. As we noted in section 2.2.2, this is important for two reasons. First, because it establishes predictability for the citizens. Second, the legal protection of citizens' political rights gives them autonomy vis-à-vis the state and thereby gives them a power-base they can use to protect their stake vis-à-vis the government. When the channels for political participation are as informal as they are in China, it means that the citizens have a very weak and precarious power base. They can therefore not rely solely on them for promoting their interests. As a consequence, other resources are also important for the citizens to be able to promote their interests. The primary resource in this respect is *guanxi*. As Lubman says: 'A striking characteristic of Chinese legal culture has been the primacy of interpersonal relations over legal relationships' (1999: 303).

The importance of guanxi

As I pointed out in section 4.1.5, *guanxi* has two functions in political participation, both as a channel in itself, and as a lubricant and catalyst of other channels. In Shi's studies 15.5 % and 16.6 % reported using *guanxi* as a channel for political participation in 1988 and 1996 respectively (Shi 1999a: 155, table 7.4). *Guanxi* as a channel can primarily be observed in the *danwei*, where it can be used to e.g. influence the distribution of the resources the *danwei* controls. One example of this is distribution of jobs. In Bian's study, 42.3 % reported that they used *guanxi* to get their first job, and 52.1 % reported that they used it in changing work (1994: 984). For example, Bian writes about Mr. Zhao who was given a job because a friend of his deceased father worked as a company staffer at his father's former employer (1994: 978-979). An example of the importance of *guanxi* as a lubricant and catalyst of other channels for political participation can be found in the possibility citizens have to lodge complaints. The chances of success increases greatly if the complaint is supported by the use of *guanxi*. Contrary, the chances of success decreases greatly if the accused in the complaint has good *guanxi* with the person or bureau handling the complaint.

The use of *guanxi* in political participation does however have some important consequences for the relationship between citizens and the local decision-makers. One

consequence is that it builds close connections between the citizens and the local decision-makers. This can especially be seen in the *danwei*, which is such a small and intimate entity. Here you can clearly see the exchanges of favors that so characterize the use of *guanxi*. As I have showed in the above, the leaders of the *danweis* control many resources that the citizens crave, and *guanxi* is often one criterion for distributing these resources. Trying to maximize their share of the available resources, the citizens try to foster their *guanxi* with the leaders of the *danwei*. This exchange of *guanxi* is conducted repeatedly and frequently over longer periods of time, leading to the establishment of bonds and factions that are so close and important that they can be characterized as a patron-client relationship⁶⁴ (Baum & Shevchenko 1999: 352-360; Shue 1994: 70-71; Walder 1986).

From this, it is clear that the citizens taking part in the patron-client-like exchanges of *guanxi* are not left unchanged by this. They gain a common interest with the local decision-makers in how the *danwei* is run, and that the current power structures remain in place. They are co-opted into the establishment and their power structures; their loyalty is bought, and instead of becoming opponents to the local decision-makers, they get a common interest with them. Herein lays a big difference from the behavior of the bourgeois people in Habermas's theory. Although they too were closely connected with the decision-makers, they were able to transform the mode of contact, making it more participatory and balanced. This may be explained by the fact that the contact between state and society was relatively new in their time. This was the first time there was a two-way communication between the state and society.

Previously, the state, in the suit of the court, had been on their high pedestal giving their orders and directions to the society. New modes of contact were now established, and the state, quite unprepared for this situation, was not able to keep the contact within the existing power-structures, as is seen e.g. in the importance of coffee-shops for contact between the nobility and the bourgeois intellectuals (Habermas 2002: 27). This gave the initiative over to society, which was able to establish new channels and

⁶⁴ Walder (1986: ch. 1, 170-186) argues that the term 'patron-client relationship' is not entirely suitable for describing the totality of the situation in the *danwei*, preferring rather to apply the term 'communist neo-traditionalism'. But for the sake of simplicity, I choose to employ the term 'patron-client relationship' as this is a term that *prima facie* gives a better idea of what the concept is all about.

structures that they had the ability to use, giving them, and later wider layers of the people, greater participation in the affairs of the state. In China, which even in the reform-era has a highly state-dominated economy and a state-monopoly of political power, the society does not have many resources for themselves and is easy to co-opt by a relatively strong local state. As one leader of a Shijiazhuang-based *danwei* said in 1993:

Now the government advocates we 'stop enterprises from running a small society' – enterprises should externalize the many services within the danwei organization they run and leave it to society to provide them. But there is no society yet, how can I stop running my own?' (quoted in Dittmer & Lü 2000: 193)

What about all those that are left out from the patron-client-like arrangements? One should expect that they would try to work against these arrangements. However, the nature of *guanxi* means that it is the most resourceful persons that are able to use it as a channel for political participation.⁶⁵ They are in this way able to tend for their interests in a particularistic way that only suits their own personal interests and does not work to promote the interests of their fellow citizens or even to widen the space others have for participation. On the other hand; because they go into a symbiotic relationship with the local government, where both parties fulfill their needs, the local government does not need to include other citizens in the arrangement. This has as a consequence that other are left out, and are not able to use their channels for political participation in a satisfactory way. In addition, the party-state has proved to be very adept at co-opting new societal forces that may have an interest in, and be in the position to make demands for political participation (Baum & Shevchenko 1999: 358-360). All in all, this means that at the local level, society is not strong enough to be able to raise demands against the power of the state, as they do not have many resources and are therefore easily co-opted by a resourceful local government.

Conclusion

Most channels for political participation in urban China are weakly formalized. They lack regulation by law, and the procedures for their use are therefore unclear. Some channels appear to be formal, since they are regulated in law, but on closer examination even these prove to be informal because they are manipulated by individuals with positions in

⁶⁵ See Bian (1994: 987-991) for an analysis on how the use of *guanxi* is determined by the resources one commands.

the party-state system. The channels are therefore weak and uncertain tools for the citizens to promote their interests. As a consequence, Chinese urban citizens are very dependent on the existing power-structures and power-holders in their use of the channels for political participation. As a consequence, *guanxi* is an important channel for political participation. The use of *guanxi* means that the citizens gain common interests with the power-holders and become co-opted, creating a totally different state-society relationship than that seen in the theory of Habermas. Since the Chinese citizens are very dependent on the existing power-structures, and are co-opted by them through the use of *guanxi*, their autonomy is very weak, and their possibilities to push for further political participation are therefore severely limited.

5.2.3 One-track participation in a two-track system

In the theory of Habermas, the citizens have direct access to the power-holders at the central level and thereby have the possibility to influence all aspects of policy-formulation and politics. The channels are all-encompassing in terms of both levels and aspects. Their possibility to address all kinds of questions was fundamental to their ability to push for further political participation and thereby democracy. In this and the following section, I will address the question: does political participation in urban China extend to all aspects and levels of politics in China?

All the channels and possibilities for political participation I have outlined in section 5.1 have in common that they only give influence in matters regarding the state and in the state-organized system. However, in China the state is not the only system making political decisions. In addition to the state-track there is also the party-track. The party-track is in many ways parallel to the state-track, with institutions mirroring the state-institutions to a certain extent. For example, the CCP has, like the state, congresses at various levels, with standing committees that have the daily command when the congresses are not in session (Wang 2002a: 89). But there is one very important difference between the two tracks; the Party track has primacy over the state track. The Party is the apex of power and has exclusive authority to control the state organs (Wang 2002a: 69). They also have different tasks. The state has no authority to *formulate policies*; all formulation of policies is done by the Party. The role of the state is solely to *implement*

policies formulated by the Party (Saich 2001: 107). As the preamble to the Party constitution states:

Acting on the principle that the Party commands the overall situation and coordinates the efforts of all quarters, the Party must play the role as the core of leadership among all other organizations at the corresponding levels.

The Party has two main means through which it is able to control the state track and ensure that it complies with Party decisions. First of all the Party has the authority to appoint a number of high positions in the state track, known as the *nomenclature*. This power is estimated to have covered eight million positions in the late 1980's. In addition, the Party intervenes routinely in other appointments (Lieberthal 1995: 209-213). It is also common that top Party-members themselves occupy top positions within the state track. Second, every government body has a party committee organizing the CCP members in the organization. Here they discuss party-policies and give directions to their members on how they are to implement them in their work in the organization (Lieberthal 1995: 213-214).

We now see that there is a Party-track running parallel with the state track; a track that is more powerful than the state track, and is responsible for formulating policies. What consequence does this have for political participation? To assess this, we need to consider what possibilities normal Chinese citizens have for participation in the Party track. In assessing this, we need to separate between two groups; those who are members of the party and those who are not. Although the CCP is the largest political party in the World, with 63 million members (Saich 2001: 93), this only make up approximately 5 % of all Chinese. The 95 % who are not members of the Party, have of course absolutely no influence in the Party and the decisions they make.

Even for the members of the Party, most do not have any influence. They only meet at Party-meetings where they are informed on new policies and the decisions made at various levels of the Party, and are expected by the Party to behave disciplined and follow the decisions made (article 3 of the Party constitution). Only those who have high positions in the Party have real influence on the decisions being made, and this influence is limited to the level in the organization where they have a role, and below this level. There have been efforts at introducing a greater degree of democracy in the Party, removing power from the top and diffusing it down towards ordinary members (White

1993: 83). In the period from the early 80's up till the Tiananmen incident, this was relatively successful and the Party was slowly reforming. However, following the Tiananmen incident there was a backlash whereby the conservatives in the Party gained more power, and they were able to stop the reforms. Today, the Party is run in pretty much the same way as it was when Deng came to power in 1978, with centralized decision making, putting almost all of the Party's powers in the hands of an all-powerful elite (see White 1993: ch. 6, especially pages 184-185).

As we now have established that there is one important political track where ordinary Chinese citizens have no influence, it is time to ask; what consequences does this have for the effects of political participation in urban China?

First, given the focus in Habermas's theory on influence in the policy-formulation stage, I will argue that this is a serious limit to the possibilities people have to influence important political decisions. It is of course important to be able to influence the implementation of policies, as this has direct influence on the lives of the citizens. But it is also very important to be able to influence the formulation of policies. First of all because they do of course form the basis for the implementation stage and in this way limit and guide the implementation of the policy. But, as I have noted earlier, the rule of law does not have a very strong standing in China. With this more 'relaxed' attitude to how rules and policies are to be implemented, there is considerably more leeway in the implementation stage in China than is the case in societies with a stronger legalistic tradition, where the policies is implemented by, in the words of Weber, a 'legal-rational bureaucracy'. Laws in China are wide and vaguely formulated, leaving much to be decided in the process of implementation (Chen 2002: 11). In addition, outside the area of laws, Dittmer & Lü claim that leaders of *danweis* have great discretion in resource allocation (2000: 197). This means that the limiting of political participation to the implementation stage exclusively may not be such a limit to political participation after all, as there is plenty of room for maneuver in the implementation stage and accordingly room for political participation.

However, the importance of the policies lies not so much in their formal and legal position as in the normative expectations they foster. In a society like China, with its focus on what constitutes correct thinking and correct behavior, the policies have a strong normative power in regulating the behavior of the citizens, and to an even greater

extent the behavior of bureaucrats and cadres.⁶⁶ Considering these normative effects of the policies, it is important that the citizens are able to influence their formulation, in accordance with the theory of Habermas.

Second, to be able to influence the policy formulation is important *per se*. In the policy formulation stage, the goals and values of the society is formulated and made into policy. The formulation of policies concerns what Habermas calls questions of what constitutes the good life, and questions of justice (Eriksen & Weigård 1999: 217-219). Obviously, these are important issues, issues that affect the citizens to such an extent that it is important for them to be able to influence these decisions. Third, participation at the policy formulation stage is also important because of the transformative effects it may have on political participation (Habermas 2002: 50-61). It is only at the policy-formulation level that decisions that will widen the space for participation and maybe even to open up new channels can be made. At the local, implementation-based level, pushes for political participation can only go so far. When the Chinese citizenry is denied access to the policy-formulation level, they are not able to make the small pushes that eventually will lead to substantially increased political participation. The situation with the bourgeois people in Habermas's theory was very different from this situation. They had direct contact with people in important positions at the central level and were able to use this contact to widen the space and channels for political participation. Accordingly, the influence the citizens may have on their lives is limited when they are only able to influence the formulation of policies.

One advantage with participation at the implementation stage is that the citizens are very close to the decision-makers. Implementation is the last stage in the chain of policy-making, and especially in China, where much of the implementation is done through the *danwei*, there are close connections between the persons responsible for the implementation and the citizens. This makes it easier for them to exert influence on the implementation, and thereby their own situation, as they are so close to the decision-makers. However, this is not only a positive thing, as this fosters co-optation of society

⁶⁶ The importance of normative expectations and socialization in China, can be seen in the importance Chinese legal thinking ascribe to 'rules of propriety and morality', *li* in Chinese (Li 1970: 69). The emphasis is not so much on forcing citizens to abide by the rules, as it is to internalize the norms of the law through socialization (Li 1970: 75). This was previously done through extensive campaigns and study groups, that all Chinese had to take part in (Li 1970: 81).

and the exclusion of less resourceful citizens, due to the low level of formalization. Further, these close connections do not need to be removed if channels for participation are opened at higher levels also. Actually, it is possible that this will be positive for the participation we see today, as these new channels may change the basis for the game taking place, especially in the *danweis*, today. With the advent of new channels for political participation, the citizens may be less dependent on their leaders in the *danwei* and they may therefore not be 'forced' into patron-client relationships, or be able to break out of already existing patron-client relationships. It is of course very uncertain whether this will happen, but it is one possible road.

Conclusion

In Chinese politics there are two tracks of politics: the party-track, which is responsible for policy formulation, and the state-track, which is responsible for the implementation of policies. The former has dominance over the latter. Chinese citizens only have influence in the less important of these two tracks, the state-track. They are thereby only able to influence the implementation of policies and have no influence on policy formulation, even if they are members of the CCP. This is a severe limit to political participation *per se*, but more important for our analysis is it that this limits the chances the citizens have for an expansion of political participation and thereby democratization the way they are supposed to be able to according to the theory of Habermas.

5.2.4 Fragmented participation

There is one more aspect limiting the scope for political participation in China: cellularization⁶⁷. Cellularization has the effect of limiting political participation to certain small geographical entities, increasing the distance from the citizens to the power-holders at the central level, and thereby increases the difference between the situation in China and in Habermas's theory. As I will show in the following, Chinese society has previously been highly cellularized. However, this has changed in the later years with the

⁶⁷ This is a term I adopt from Shue (1994). She does not give an explicit definition of the term, but as will be clear from the following it refers to the clustering of Chinese citizens into small organizations, the *danweis*, which took care of basically all their needs and constituted a mini-society within the state, and the *danwei* was an important part of the identity of its members. The citizens did not need to go beyond their *danwei* to get their needs satisfied. It was indeed not encouraged to go outside the *danwei*, and to make bonds across *danweis* was actually opposed to a great extent (Saich 2001: 198-199).

deepening and extension of reforms. I will start out with a discussion of how Chinese society was highly cellularized in the pre-reform era, and how this influenced political participation. Then, I will discuss the present situation and assess if and how the reforms and the efforts to change the *danwei*-system has resulted in a decrease in cellularization, and how this has influenced the present political participation.

As noted in section 5.2.3, the political participation takes place in the implementation stage, and due to the organization of the Chinese state it is therefore very locally based. This can also be seen in the fact that the channels for participation I outlined in section 5.1, all are locally based. At the local level, the *danwei* is still the primary and by far most important entity, although its role has changed. First of all, the *danwei* used to be responsible for the provision of a great number of services and commodities⁶⁸, and was therefore responsible for making a great number of decisions regarding people's lives. The importance of the *danwei* was further strengthened by the relative lack of alternative providers of services and commodities (Walder 1986: 16-17).

Second, the *danwei* was also important because of the political roles it played in people's lives. The propaganda unit of the *danwei* conducted political study sessions whereby the workers were informed of the official Party line, new laws and policies, and new directives in their *danwei* (Lum 2000: 62; Walder 1986: 90). The CCP had branches in every *danwei* and thru their monitoring of workers opinions and attitudes they were important for mitigating opposition and co-opting potentially important citizens (Walder 1986: 19). As being a party member gave you certain material benefits and improved the chances for career-mobility (Walder 1986: 89), the CCP-branch had a relatively easy job in recruiting new members.

In the *danweis* there were also security departments, which were a part of the state structure (Walder 1986: 92). They were responsible for monitoring the workers behavior and had the authority to enact punishments if necessary (Walder 1986: 93). The importance of this organization was that they were able to render it impossible for citizens to organize resistance or coordinate action. Furthermore they were able to control and absorb all activities of the workers (Walder 1986: 95). All in all, the *danwei*

⁶⁸ See footnote 40 above for more details on this.

played such an important role in citizen's lives, that they were the main part of the citizen's political identity (Walder 1989: 26). Third, the importance of the *danwei* is also manifest in that most channels for political participation goes through it, and these channels are the ones most used by the citizens.

All in all every citizen was put under heavy control from his colleagues and superiors, pressure to conform to the official norms, great dependence of his *danwei* for promotions and supply of necessary commodities and services. As a result the citizens were deeply entrenched in their *danwei*. This led to what Shue (1994) labels 'cellularization', whereby the Chinese society consisted of a great number of cells where the citizens had very little contact across the cells, and were not able to form alliances or interest groups spanning several cells. The political participation of the citizens was under severe limits imposed by their cell. As Christensen & Rai (1996: 14) says

'The social organization of the work place (work unit, danwei) as a society en miniature, e.g. as described in Walder (1986), imposes severe limitations on the creation of links across the formal structures of state organization, let alone the formulation of an aggregated political interest outside state control.'

As a consequence, the citizens had very small, almost no, possibility for real political participation outside their cell. Again, as the situation was with the problem of one-track participation in a two-track system, this means that Chinese citizens were not able to address fundamental issues in their society, issues that are at a higher level than the cell within which they were able to truly participate in the political processes and decisions.

From the viewpoint of Habermas's theory on the development of public spheres, this has severe consequences for the citizen's possibility to push for democratization. As their political participation is at the local level only, they are not able to address fundamental questions and therefore have small chances to instigate changes in political participation. The limits for their participation in the *danwei* are set from above, and they lack channels to challenge these limits. Also they are in a weak position in the *danwei*, with limited resources, and are therefore not able to use even these channels properly. The picture I have presented in this and the above section can be illustrated like this:

	Policy formulation (Party)	Implementation (State)
Central		
Regional		
Local		

Figure 5.1: Places for political participation in urban China

As we saw in figure 2.1 the focus in Habermas's theory was on the influence in *A*, and the bourgeois people concurrently were able to influence *B* and *C* as well. *D-F* did not even exist as political organs, since there was no two-track system like in contemporary China.⁶⁹ We here clearly see how different the situation in contemporary China is from the situation when democracy emerged in the cases Habermas studied. While the influence in these cases was at the most important level of politics, the influence in contemporary China is at the local level and in the least important track, making it very difficult to use their influence to instigate the transformative processes we saw in Habermas's theory. Further, my figure illustrates a cellularization that is more pronounced than what Shue (1994) points to: As she does not consider the separation between policy formulation and implementation in China, she only accounts for the cellularization of urban citizens within the lowest level.

The present situation is however somewhat different from that depicted above. Since the start of reforms, there have been constant changes in the situation surrounding the *danweis* (Dittmer & Lü 2000: 187). The changes can be grouped in two. First; the *danweis* no longer play such an important role in monitoring, controlling and conforming

⁶⁹ Sections *D-F* were the domain of the bureaucracy in the cases Habermas studied.

the lives of its subjects (Lü & Perry 1997: 9). The Party committee and its secretary are no longer nearly as relevant as they used to be (Chan 1997: 100-101). The local Party-branch no longer has an office of security affairs, this is now a part of the management of the *danwei* (You 1998: 77). And since they are focused on economic and managerial issues, they do not have time to conduct this work as thorough as the Party once did (You 1998: 83-84). In addition, the whole Party-organization has been trimmed or is in the process of being trimmed, further limiting the ability of the party-state to control its citizens (You 1998: 78-82). Also, the *danweis* lost all its public security functions in 1995 (You 1998: 77), further attenuating its control over the citizens. There has also been a decrease in the political functions of the *danwei*; there are no longer political study sessions, and political mobilization has decreased (You 1998: 90-95). Further, the censorship in the *danwei* has been relaxed and people are now able to speak out without having to fear for their careers or even security (Davis 2000b: 3; Dittmer & Lü 2000: 187-188; Madsen 2000: 314). Previously, the *danweis* had control of the dossiers of its subjects. These were very important and e.g. had to be transferred if one wanted to change jobs. After the reforms, the dossiers are not as important since they are no longer needed for employment in the private or quasi-private sector, and even some SOEs do not demand to have the dossier transferred (Dittmer & Lü 2000: 188-189; Pearson 1997: 68-80). Lastly, with the reforms there was a normative change from 'socialist man' as the ideal to 'economic man'. This has had the effect of lessening social control (Chan 1997: 100). However, this does not mean that urban citizens can live a life free from constraints. There are still structural constraints and one is also under the constraint of peer pressure and social norms (Francis 1996: 851-854; Madsen 2000: 315).

The second change since 1984 is related to the *danwei's* importance in providing commodities to its subjects. With the reforms, more avenues for consumption of commodities were opened, compared to the previous situation where the *danwei* was the only source for most commodities. As the book 'The Consumer Revolution in Urban China', edited by Deborah S. Davis (2000a), shows, there has been a drastic increase in the possibilities for consumption outside the *danwei*. Davis herself says that '[...] it does not seem an exaggeration to claim that there was a revolution in consumption' (2000b: 2), which had the effect of '[...] [breaking] the monopolies that had previously cast urban consumers in the role of supplicants to the state' (2000b: 2-3). They had greater

freedom in fetching food, buying toys and leisure activities for their children, buying their own housing, and arranging lavish family rituals and celebrations (Davis 2000b: 6-12). On the other hand, this does not mean that the *danweis* and non-*danwei* firms do not still provide a great deal of services and commodities to their employees. In fact Dittmer & Lü (2000: 189) claim that the welfare functions of *danweis* actually may have intensified since the reforms started. In a study of high-tech companies (non-*danweis*) in Haidian district in Beijing, Francis found that these companies, rather than the market, were the primary provider of services and commodities for the employees (1996: 845). Although there was considerable variation between the companies, they provided housing, medical care, social security, lunch and recreational activities to their employees (Francis 1996: 845-849). There was however a difference from the *danweis* in that the companies bought these services and commodities from external companies rather than producing them themselves. She also found that these benefits were deliberately designed so that they made the employees dependent on the company and thereby was locked to it (Francis 1996: 851-854).

The findings of Davis, et al. (2000a) seem to be incoherent with those of Francis (1996). However, the difference is in what they focus on; while Francis focuses on how the institutional features of the *danwei* can be found within companies even in the era of reforms, Davis, et al. show that *outside* the *danwei* there is now a plethora of avenues for consumption and self-realization. This has created previously unthinkable spaces for a life outside the *danwei*. Davis (2000b) points to three far-reaching consequences of this. First of all ‘the monopolies that had previously cast urban consumers in the role of supplicants to the state’, were broken. This created greater autonomy to ‘everyday sociability’ (Davis 2000b: 2-3). Second, a separation between work and home was created. This expanded the realm of the personal and the individual (Davis 2000b: 8). Thirdly, the site for consumption was separated from the site for production (Davis 2000b: 11). This made it possible for the urbanites to ignore the intervention of state agents in their daily routines, and altered socialization (Davis 2000b: 11-14).

In sum, these two changes have increased the space for urbanites and greatly decreased the degree of cellularization in urban China. The reduced role of the *danwei* means that some of the channels for political participation become less important or are

even removed. To the extent that these channels are not replaced by new channels, this is negative because it removes the only channels for political participation that had the prospect of having any real influence on the daily lives of Chinese citizens. However, it may be positive if new channels emerge instead, especially if these channels are able to overcome some of the problems riding the present channels and are able to address political issues higher up in the hierarchy. This will be the theme of my next chapter.

Conclusion

Before the reforms, the *danwei* was the main and dominant locale for political participation in urban China. The participation took place within this highly cellularized institution and there were limited, almost no possibilities for participation outside the cell. The political participation was delimited both horizontally and vertically. The citizens had no channels for political participation either at levels above the *danwei* (vertically), in the Party-track or other institutions at the same level as their *danwei* (horizontally). In fact, the participation of Chinese urbanites only addresses issues that are the domain of the bureaucracy in other countries. This is in line with the large domain of politics in socialist countries, that Scott (1989) points to (see section 1.3.1). This severely limited Chinese citizens' chances to influence fundamental issues, as they were decided at higher levels. The consequence of this for democratization is that the transformative effects of political participation seen in Habermas's theory are stopped. Concurrently, the channels for political participation in urban China are not well suited for a push for democracy. Even within the *danwei* the political participation was under severe limits. Through the study sessions and security departments, the citizens were held under strict social and political control. This made challenges to the authority and power of the CCP impossible.

In the recent years, there have been changes in the *danwei*-system, which was the fundament for the cellularization. Now the possibilities for horizontal contact are much greater. The citizens are no longer confined to and controlled by the *danwei*. They now have a sphere of life outside their *danwei*. With the emergence of a market economy, the urbanites now have greater liberty to buy the commodities and services they desire. Also, with the increased economic focus of the *danwei* and the decreased importance of dossiers, the social and political control has been relaxed. There are two important

implication of this. The first implication is that a good relationship to the leaders of the *danwei* is not as important as earlier to ensure that they get the commodities and services they desire and need. The second implication is that the citizens are freer to think, speak and act as they like, without having to take the control mechanisms of the *danwei* into consideration. This raises an important question: What consequences does this have for political participation? This question is difficult to answer, but as the consumer revolution makes the previously strong social and political control less effective and viable, it seems fair to assume that there will be some changes. This will be the theme for my next chapter.

5.3 Conclusion: Where to go next?

After a discussion of the methodology in Shi's study (1997), this chapter showed that there are a relatively high number of channels for political participation available for urban Chinese citizens. The channels are as diverse as elections, filing complaints, striking and using *guanxi*. The citizens show a great interest for participation, with high numbers saying they have used the different channels. The levels of use of the different channels do of course vary greatly, in much according to the extent of own initiative necessary for the use of the channels.

However, despite the wide and increasing use of these channels there are also some serious problems related to them. The channels are troubled by weak formalization. This makes them a precarious instrument for the citizens, and makes the use of *guanxi* attractive. The CCP takes advantage of the weak formalization, manipulating the channels to suit their interests and consolidate their power base. This, in combination with the local nature of the channels, results in the participation being deeply entrenched in the existing power structures, making it very difficult for the citizens to challenge the power holders and widen their scope of participation like they did in Habermas's theory. The active citizens are rather co-opted into the existing system. This makes the politically active citizen lose his interest in challenging the system as he himself has an interest in maintaining it. Further, the political participation is severely limited by the fact that participation is not allowed in the very important Party-

track. As all decisions on policies are made in the Party-track, this severely limits the value of political participation in urban China and weakens the transformative effects that political participation has in Habermas's theory. Also, the political participation takes place within the limits of 'The Four Cardinal Principles' and 'The Three Represents', which constrains both the possible means and goals of the participation. All in all, the situation for political participation in China is not very good, despite the plethora of channels available. As these channels do not give any real influence, they serve only to give an impression of participation and to a certain extent to satisfy people's need to feel that they are able to have an influence on their own lives.

As I have pointed out throughout the conclusions in this chapter, the limits on the channels for political participation in urban China has consequences for the prospect of these channels being used to push for democracy, as was done in Habermas's theory. The lacking autonomy of Chinese urban citizens mean that they are at a much less equal footing with the government than the case was with the bourgeois people in Habermas's theory. It was exactly because the bourgeois people had the necessary autonomy that they were able to pressure the authorities to give them even greater political participation and thereby achieve democracy in Habermas's theory. The Chinese urbanites on the other hand have small possibilities for exerting pressure on any level of the Chinese government, even the leaders of the *danwei*. They do not have any channels at all that they can use to influence policy-formulation and change the orders coming from above, a resource that was decisive in Habermas's theory. Their room for maneuver vis-à-vis the government is further limited by the normative limitations the citizens are under. This makes it difficult for them to challenge the authorities as they must always keep within the limits of acceptable behavior. All in all, these limits mean that the transformative effects of political participation as seen in Habermas's theory is weakened and almost nullified, and the channels for political participation are therefore not well suited for a push for democracy.

However, two interesting trends in political participation can be observed in this chapter. First of all, it is worth noticing that if one compares Shi's two surveys, in 1988 and 1996 respectively, one can see a general trend of increasing participation, especially in activities related to complaints. This is interesting as the first survey was conducted shortly before the Tiananmen incident, a period when the political climate was at its

most favorable, while the second survey was conducted when the political repercussions of the Tiananmen incident still was felt in the political climate, and one therefore should expect the opposite result. There are two, I believe supplementary, explanations for this increase. The first is that the continued economic reforms have had detrimental effects on the lives of many Chinese, giving them more to complain about. The other explanation is that new groups with interests that are not easily accommodated within the present system have emerged. As their interests are not taken care of in the status quo, they feel a need to protect their stake vis-à-vis the government and use the available channels for political participation to try to do this.

The second trend is the decrease in use of channels that are based on the *danwei*. This can most clearly be seen in the decline of the proportion that voted in elections for leaders of the *danweis*. The decrease has two main explanations: First of all, it can be explained by the fact that fewer people work within *danweis*. Second, it can be explained by the decreased importance of the *danwei*, as I pointed to in the end of section 4.2.4. It commands relatively fewer resources and it is therefore less interesting to exert influence within this entity. Either way indicates that the *danwei* is much less important today than it was only a few years ago. This, and the changed role of the *danwei* in society, implies a very important change in Chinese urban life, a change that will have important repercussion both for urban citizens, the society, the state and state-society relations.

This raises several interesting question on how the changes will affect political participation in urban China: What are the consequences of these changes for political participation in urban china? Do new channels for political participation emerge? If so, are these channels ‘better’ than the old ones? Are they more effective? Are they more democratic in the sense that they give the citizens a more real chance to participate?

As this chapter has shown us that even though ordinary Chinese citizens have a channel to the government, their lack of autonomy does not enable them to challenge the authorities so as to push for democracy. We therefore again need to narrow our focus to search for groups that may be able to push for democracy. The focus is narrowed through the introduction of the third asset, having a stake to protect vis-à-vis the government. This is the theme of my next chapter.

6. NEW FORMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE REFORM ERA: A CASE STUDY OF HOMEOWNER COMMITTEES

As I pointed out in the end of chapter 3, one of the assets of the proponents for democracy in the theory of Habermas is having a stake to protect vis-à-vis the government. This was what made the bourgeois people such an ardent proponent of democracy in the cases Habermas studied. In this chapter I will analyze if having a stake to protect may lead citizens to want to and be able to have a more effective participation. After the efforts in chapters 4 and 5, where may we now look to find citizens with a stake to protect vis-à-vis the government? Habermas's theory may guide us in this. Habermas himself points out that that one of the reasons the citizens become interested in the government and demand that they serve their interests is that they are property owners (2002: 52). I therefore have reason to expect that one will find more vigorous and successful political participation surrounding the field of private property, and in this chapter I will therefore analyze the situation of homeowners in urban China. Since the reforms started, a number of Chinese urbanites have been able to buy their own property. In studying how this has influenced political participation, I choose to look at a concrete organization that will be a natural channel for homeowners to use to protect this stake vis-à-vis the government: Homeowner committees (HOCs).

The subject of private property and homeownership is a suitable field for several other reasons as well. First, there has been much turbulence over housing in urban China, as there are several actors that have interests that are not compatible with that of the homeowners, and do their best to further their own interests⁷⁰. As a consequence, the homeowners are likely to feel a strong need to protect their interests, and are therefore likely to be eager in using the available political channels to protect their interests. Second, in the *rural* parts of China, the granting of property rights over the means of production to farmers have led the farmers to become more conscious of the

⁷⁰ See e.g. Murphy (2003, especially the section titled 'A Home Revolt at Ground Level'), Ye (2003) and Jia (2002).

role the local authorities play and how decisions made by the local authorities influence their own situation (Walder 1994, especially page 14). It is therefore interesting to research if we can see the same effects in the urban parts of China. The questions I will seek to answer in this chapter are: How interested are the homeowners in tending for their interests through the HOC? How useful are the HOCs for tending for protecting the stake of the homeowners vis-à-vis the government? Are the HOCs able to overcome the limitations that marred the channels I outlined in the previous chapter?

6.1 Setting the scene

Before analyzing the political participation of homeowners in China, I find it useful to discuss the situation regarding private property and the housing markets in China. I will start with an outline of the housing markets in China and the background for the HOCs. Then, in sections 6.2 and 6.3, I will analyze the importance of HOCs for political participation in urban China.

6.1.1 The housing market in contemporary urban China

Until the beginning of the reforms in the housing market, housing was provided by the state, primarily through the *danwei*, as a welfare benefit (Ho & Kwong 2002: 230; Wang & Murie 1999: 1475). The reforms started in earnest in 1980, when rents were raised and parts of the housing stock were privatized in selected cities. The results were however not as intended. Even in the cities that were a part of the experiment there was little change in the allocation of housing, and the *danwei* remained the main supplier (Ho & Kwong 2002: 231). In 1988 housing reform became a national policy and large-scale housing reform was introduced. Housing provided by the *danweis* was privatized and financing was provided to prospective buyers. At this stage, people were allowed to buy the housing they already lived in, or buy newly built housing through their *danwei*. In both instances the residents benefited from artificially low prices (Ho & Kwong 2002: 231). However, the *danwei* still played a central role in housing, as they still held the property rights to the housing (Ho & Kwong 2002: 231-232; Tomba 2004: 16). In 1998, the reform went one step further, and it was decided that the state was no longer to

provide housing. Now, Chinese urbanites were given a monthly cash allowance that is to partially cover their housing expense, either related to renting or buying their own housing (Ho & Kwong 2002: 232). At this stage, elements of a free market were introduced to the housing sector (Ho & Kwong 2002: 232). As a result, the 2000 census showed that 74 % of all urban households now own their own housing. Of these, only 12 % had bought their housing in the market, while 40 % had bought their housing from their *danwei* and 10 % had bought the housing at subsidized price, while 36 % had built their housing themselves (Wang 2002b: 132-133). This indicates the persistent importance of *danwei*-affiliation in the Chinese housing market (Tomba 2004: 14-18).

As we now have established that the housing sector today to a certain degree is a free market, we will look into how big the involvement of the government remains in the present situation, and how this leads to a politization of the issue of housing. Normally, in a property market that is liberated and where housing is commoditized, the only influence of the government is through their planning-authority. In contemporary China however, the local government not only have authority through their role as planner but also through several other roles. First, various levels of the local government have established a number of companies that are directly involved in the property market (Wang & Murie 1999: 1480; Wu 2002a: 1085). There have been instances where these companies, through their connections with branches of the government, were able to use public bureaus, such as the police, in disputes with residents (Han 2000: 2106). Second, various levels of the local government form an alliance with developers, publicly owned as well as privately owned, based on their common interests. In these alliances, the interests of the businesses are well taken care of (Han & Wang 2003: 104; Zhang 2002: 494-495, 497). Community groups, on the other hand, are never a part of the alliances, and this makes them the weakest group in the game of property development (Zhang 2002: 495). All in all, as one article states, '[it] is easy to identify the dominant role played by the public sector in [property development]' (Han & Wang 2003: 108).

Another dimension of the alliance stems from the fact that property rights are what Zhu (2002) calls 'ambiguously-delineated'; the central state is the actual owner of the land in the legal sense, while the right to use the land is with another entity of the state, typically a *danwei* (Zhu 2002: 43-44). When a new housing project is being developed, the central state seldom plays a role; it rather is the local government and the

relevant *danwei* that are the actors who transfer the use-right of the land to the developer. Since the *danwei* does not legally own the property under its control and therefore is not able to capitalize on it, it is very keen on leasing it out (Zhu 2002: 50). To be able to do this, it needs the co-operation of the local government, who has been given the authority to transfer land-use rights (Wang & Murie 1999: 1477) and also is important because of its planning authority. In the process of negotiating the transfer of land-use rights, the local authorities and the *danwei* have a common interest in keeping the negotiation behind closed doors, since this will leave the central government out from the process and thereby increase the share of the proceeds they receive (Zhu 2002: 52). The result of these processes of negotiations is that a very close alliance is formed between the developer, the *danwei* and the local government.

6.1.2 The Homeowner Committees

Background

This leads us to the issue that is interesting for this thesis; the weak position of the homeowners. As a result of the situation outlined above there are many issues, particularly relating to property management, which are solved in ways seen as unsatisfactory by many residents. When protecting their interests, homeowners meet an array of troubles. Even though the services related to real estate are mostly provided by what appears to be private companies, due to the bureaucratic-capitalism outlined above, many companies are either owned by or have close connections to the government⁷¹. The consequence of all this is that it is difficult for homeowners to protect their interests related to real estate⁷². Since owning their own home is important for Chinese urbanites, protecting their property rights is a major concern, making them eager to join organizations that may help protect their interests (Tomba 2004: 23-24).

The coalition between developers, *danweis* and the local government creates a situation where the position of the developer vis-à-vis the homeowners is very strong. If

⁷¹ See the section 'Corruption, guanxi and ties between the government and the business sector' in section 4.1, and section 6.1.1 above.

⁷² For reports on such problems, see e.g. Jia (2002), Murphy (2003, especially the section titled 'A Home Revolt at Ground Level) and Ye (2003).

there is something wrong with the building when it is delivered to the apartment owners, e.g. the apartments are smaller than specified in the contract; it is very difficult for the homeowners to deal with the problem, as the developer has close ties and strong support from the local government (see e.g. Han 2000: 2106; Jia 2002, Murphy 2003 (especially the section titled ‘A Home Revolt at Ground Level’) and Ye 2003). The developers are thereby able to ignore rules and regulations they are supposed to follow, often at the cost of those who have bought the apartments. In the daily running of the complex, the homeowners may also encounter problems. The property management companies (PMC) have interests that often are incompatible with the interests of the homeowners, and the homeowners may meet resistance from both the PMC and local government when addressing this and other problems⁷³.

An order issued by the Construction Ministry in 1994, ‘Methods for Managing New Urban Residential Neighborhoods’ (hereafter ‘Order’), established the institution of Homeowner Committees (HOCs)⁷⁴ in new-built housing complexes in China (Read 2003: 42-43; Wang & Murie 1999: 1491)⁷⁵. Officially, the HOCs were established ‘[i]n order to improve the management of new residential areas, and improve the management and to create a clear and clean, polite, secure and convenient living environment’ (art. 1). There is however indications that the government acted in response to already established HOCs (Read 2003: 43). This is supported by a statement made by one of my interviewees, # 5 (she has written a master’s thesis on HOCs), who said that there have been HOCs in Shanghai since 1990. The order states that homeowners in all new neighborhoods are to set up their own committees to tend for the interests of the residents in the neighborhood. Members of these committees are to represent the residents, and to be elected by the residents themselves. As of November 2000, approximately 180 HOCs had been formed in Beijing (Read 2003: 45). I do not

⁷³ The PMC is responsible for the daily running of the housing complex. This includes responsibility for maintenance, gatekeeping, cleaning, etc. In the housing complexes I visited, the PMC employed 1-3 fulltime workers depending on the size of the complex.

⁷⁴ What I here call Homeowner Committees has several names in chinese; *wuye guanli weiyuanhui*, *zhuqubai xiaoqu guanli weiyuanhui*, *yezhu weiyuanhui* (Read 2003: 31, footnote 1).

⁷⁵ The Order does not give a definition of what constitutes ‘new housing’, but according to Read (2003: 39-40) ‘new housing’ is characterized by having been built following the reforms of the housing market, by not being administered by *danweis* and by providing sanitation, security, maintenance etc. They are also administered by special organs, ‘New Neighborhood Offices’.

have more recent numbers for Beijing, or numbers for Shanghai. However, Interviewee # 4 reports that in the area of her Street Office (SO), covering 50.000 people, there are 200 HOCs. This shows that the number obviously is much larger in present-day Shanghai than in Beijing of late 2000.

6.2 An autonomous organization able to represent the interests of homeowners?

In this section I will discuss to what degree the HOCs are able to protect the interests of the homeowners. I will first look at the influence the homeowners have on the formation of HOCs. Next, I will look at to what extent the HOCs are able to represent the interests of the homeowners.

The formation of the HOCs is often done after the initiative of the homeowners themselves. According to art. 6 of the Order, the HOCs are to be set up by the residents themselves. The local regulations for HOCs in Shanghai (Regulations of Shanghai Municipality on Residential Property Management, hereafter RSMRPM) states that the HOC is to be elected by the homeowners themselves, and consist of members chosen among the homeowners (art. 7). None of the HOC-members I interviewed said that the initiative to elect an HOC came from any other than the homeowners themselves, and in two instances, the HOC-members outlined the process through which the homeowners established the HOC (# 7 and 8). However, contrary to the Shanghai regulations, two interviewees (# 7 and 11) told that the first HOC in their complex was appointed by the property development company (PDC).

In the case of # 7, the residents were not satisfied with the work of the first HOC, and reported to the authorities that they wanted to establish a new HOC. This was approved, but the local Residential Committee (RC) tried to influence the composition of the new HOC at the meeting where the new committee was elected. The residents were able to counter these efforts, and the efforts to influence the composition were therefore not successful. Interviewee # 11 also reported that they did not have any difficulties getting the HOC established. At the election of this HOC, representatives of the local governments were present (from the SO and the district's Estate Bureau), and also a representative from the PMC. None of these did however try to influence the

composition of the HOC; their role was only to ensure that the election was democratic. Interviewee # 8 reported of a similar presence of representatives for government branches to ensure a democratic election. In one instance, the candidates to the election of HOC were selected by the PMC, who was also present at the meeting where the HOC was elected, as were representatives from the PDC and the district's Estate Bureau (interviewee # 3). Only one of my interviewees reported that the charter of the HOC was not written by the HOC itself (# 9) but by the government. In three other cases (#6, 7, and 10) the interviewees said that the HOC wrote the charter themselves.

The situation in the HOCs I studied seem to be somewhat different on these accounts from those Read (2003) studied. He reports that homeowners encountered several difficulties in organizing their HOCs, such as efforts to influence the formation and election of the HOCs (pp. 43-45). Also, interviewee # 5, who has written a master's thesis on HOCs at the University of Shanghai, reported that the establishment of HOCs often was under heavy influence from the local authorities. She also claimed that the local regulations put several restrictions on who could be members of the HOCs, e.g. that 50 % had to be members of the CCP, something the regulation for HOCs in Shanghai certainly does not indicate.

The differences between my findings and those of Read and interviewee # 5 may be explained by two factors. First, both Read (2003) and interviewee # 5 studied HOCs that were extreme. Read focused on the HOCs that were particularly active, in part selected on the basis of newspaper reports (Read 2003: 34), while interviewee # 5 focused on problems related to the HOCs. In the case of Read (2003), the focus on particularly active HOCs means that they were established in complexes that were fraught with problems. This means that the stakes were higher for all actors involved, and it is therefore more likely that the establishment of an HOC will meet resistance. In the case of interviewee # 5, the focus on the problems of the HOCs means that she only got part of the picture. A second explanation may be that the climate for HOCs in Shanghai is particularly advantageous. If one compares the excerpts from the regulations for HOCs in Beijing that Read outline in his article (2003: 44-45) with the corresponding regulations in Shanghai (RSMRPM), it is clear that it is much easier to establish an HOC that is able to genuinely tend for the interests of the homeowners in Shanghai.

The Order (articles 7, 8 and 15) and the RSMRPM (articles 12, 20 (sections 7 and 8) and 38) give the HOCs considerable powers, and both regulations indicate that no other actors may interfere with these powers. My research indicates that the HOCs are able to use their power in an unobstructed manner, and are indeed able to tend for the interests of the homeowners vis-à-vis the state. The most illustrating example of the power of the HOCs is that two interviewees (# 2 and 11) reported that their HOC had chosen the PMC itself, something which previously was unthinkable for residents. Interviewee # 11 told that they were very dissatisfied with the previous PMC and fired it. He reported of no problems in this process. Only in one instance did the interviewees express a wish to fire their PMC without being able to (# 9). They were not satisfied with the work of the PMC, but were not able to fire it because the property development company (PDC), which owns their PMC, owed them 1 million RMB and they feared that if they fired the PMC, it would be difficult to get the money the PDC owed them.

Following this outline of the formation and functioning of the HOCs, the following question springs to mind: What are the consequences of this for Chinese politics and society? This is an important question, especially considering that the emergence of organizations like the HOCs is something distinctly new in China. One important point worth noticing is the major role played by the regulations in the field of HOCs. As I have showed earlier (see section 5.2.2), the laws are often ignored or used by the authorities to further their own interests, leading to a situation that is markedly different from that which Habermas claims is necessary for a democracy to emerge. The role and position of the HOCs are clearly defined in the relevant regulations. The Order issued by the Ministry of Construction is relatively clear and gives the HOCs considerable powers. In the case of Shanghai, the local regulations for HOCs are even more favorable, being very detailed in the outline of the role the HOC is to play. This can also be said of the other laws that I referred to in section 5.2.2, but what is remarkable in comparison is that the regulations of HOCs are actually followed and the HOCs are able to exercise their intended role. We can however see efforts at evading the regulations even here: In my material, there are reports of efforts at influencing the composition and work of the HOCs from local authorities (see interviewee # 7). The difference compared to the situation I outlined in section 5.2.2, is that the HOCs are

able to resist these efforts at interference, and are indeed able to truly tend for the interests of their residents vis-à-vis the state. In this sense, the stable legal framework that Habermas points to as important for democratization is established in the case of HOCs.

Even if this is only in a very limited area, it indicates two developments that are very positive for the prospects for democracy in China. First of all, it indicates that the situation for rule of law in China may be improving. In addition to the fact that the regulations are respected, it is worth noticing that most of the people I interviewed were eager to point out that their HOC was elected in accordance with the regulations, and I got the impression that they held a generally high level of respect for the regulations. Second, by being able to resist pressure from the very powerful organizations in the local community, the HOCs show that it now is possible to have a relatively high degree of autonomy, indeed a level of autonomy that makes it possible to act in direct conflict with the wishes of the established power structures. Third, the HOCs are a radical new development in the sense that they constitute the first arena for political participation that is outside the domain of the CCP, the Resident's Committees (RCs), the Street Offices (SOs), and the *danweis* that previously was so in control of Chinese urban society. This autonomy is given in the legal foundation of the HOCs (the Order art. 7, 8 and, 15; RSMRPM art. 12, 20 (section 7 and 8), and 38), and the HOCs have proven to be able to resist the efforts at intervention that has come despite these clear rules. In this way the HOCs become an arena where the residents for the first time are able to participate in politics without being controlled by the power structures. As Tomba (2004: 25) says: 'They [the housing communities] are becoming an autonomous space where collective interests are being formulated that are no longer connected to the workplace'.

This constitutes a new step in the de-cellularization of urban Chinese society. Not only do Chinese urbanites now have a space outside the government's structures, the power structures have limited ability to intervene in this space, and the urbanites are able to act with limited or even no checks. In this sense of having autonomy vis-à-vis the power structures that control society, the HOCs are a parallel to the coffee houses and newspapers in Habermas's theory, and the parallel becomes even more pronounced when one considers that the arena that the HOCs constitute are removed from, but not

isolated from the authorities; the HOCs interact with the local authorities, but are able to do so in a relatively autonomous way.

Another new feature, one that contrasts markedly with the cellularization that characterized China earlier, is the way the HOCs transcend their complexes and have contact with and arrange activities in cooperation with other HOCs or other community organizations (interviewees # 1, 7, 8, 11). Also, there has been established a federation of HOCs in Beijing (Read 2003: 51)⁷⁶. Further indication of the ability of homeowners to meet and organize across their complexes, is the existence of ‘homeowner clubs’ on the internet (Tomba 2004: 22)⁷⁷. I do not yet have any clear indications on what the implications of this may be. One implication may be that they ‘raise over’ the local power holders and are able to gain a safer base for their autonomy. A possible implication of federations of HOCs may be that they will be able to influence decisions at higher levels of the hierarchy, and in this way become a more potent pressure groups. These are however only speculations, and further research is needed on these issues.

6.2.1 Conclusion

During my research in Shanghai I found that the HOCs I studied were formed as a result of the initiative of the residents themselves, and their composition was the result of the decisions of the residents (through their representatives) not the needs and wishes of other actors. According to the regulations for HOCs, the committees are to have considerable powers. I found that the HOCs were able to exercise these powers without much intervention from other actors.

The implications of this are that the HOCs have a high level of autonomy, relative to what we have seen in urban China earlier. Through this autonomy, they have been able to tend for the interests of the residents vis-à-vis the state. In addition to the obvious advantage that the interests of the residents are better tended for, this opens up space for political participation that for the first time is outside the control of the CCP, the RCs, the SOs and the *danweis*.

⁷⁶ Their web page is at <http://house.focus.com.cn/yzlm/> (in Chinese).

⁷⁷ *Yesbu julebu* in Chinese. One such club is hosted by the portal <http://www.sina.com> (in Chinese).

6.3 The iron law of oligarchy?⁷⁸

According to Habermas, when people own property they will become interested in politics and demand a greater say in the formulation of politics. In this chapter I will research if this is the case even in China, where as I have shown in the preceding chapter, politics and political participation is very dominated by the CCP. The questions I will answer in this section are: Are the homeowners really interested in tending for their interests through their HOC? Are the activities of the committee reliant on some particularly active members of the HOCs? How/through what means are the homeowners able to follow and take part in the activities of the HOC?

None of the HOCs I studied reported that they did not inform the residents of their activities. Six of them explicitly told that they did provide the residents with information of their activities. The information provided to the residents included annual reports of the work of the HOC, and reports of recent activities. Five of the HOCs put up information on notice boards. Another common way of disseminating information, which was used by most of the HOCs that also used notice boards, was to disseminate the information via the representatives. In one case the HOC even published a newspaper for the housing complex (Interviewee # 11). In another case, the PMC was used to spread information to the residents (Interviewee # 9). It is quite remarkable that this particular HOC used the PMC to spread information to the resident, as this was the HOC that expressed most dissatisfaction with its PMC among those in my sample, and even wanted to fire it but was not able to do so, as I outlined above.

The HOCs are obliged to listen to complaints and suggestions from the residents (RSMRPM article 12, section 5) and to facilitate this, most HOCs had an established system of getting inputs from their residents. When asked how the residents could reach the HOC if they have issues they want to address, most interviewees answered that this was done through the PMC. This is quite natural, since the PMC is responsible for the maintenance of the complex and therefore were able to deal with most issues that the

⁷⁸ 'Iron law of the oligarchy' is a term coined by sociologist Robert Michels to describe the tendency in all organizations, even the egalitarian minded socialist parties of the early 19th century which he studied, to produce an elite that in much controls their organizations (Michels 1911, English translation in 1915 with the title 'Political Parties: a Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracies').

residents had. If the PMC did not deal with the issues, the residents then applied to the HOC. Some HOCs had a system where one or more HOC-members sat at a given place at a given time, ranging from once a month (# 1), weekly (# 2) to daily (# 7). Mostly, this was in the office of the PMC. One HOC reported also having a box where the residents could put suggestions (# 7). Two interviewees also pointed to the small scale of the complex and that all knew each other, and said that they would get to know of the troubles that emerge (#3 and # 8).

How interested the residents are in the work of their HOC seem to vary. One interviewee said that some residents are interested in the work of the HOC, while others are not (#10). However, she said that there had been a clear increase in how interested the residents are in the situation in the complex after the apartments were privatized in 1992. A clear indication of the interest the residents have in the work of the HOC can also be seen in # 7, where the interviewee reported that each day 2-3 persons came by their HOC-office. Although the issues included such prosaic tasks as telephone applications, they also include more important tasks such as the maintenance fee and the signboards put up by the shopkeepers in the complex. Only one interviewee reports that the residents are not interested in the work of the HOC (# 9). As this HOC is by far the least well-functioning HOC in my sample, this is understandable. Information to and input from the residents go through the PMC, despite the fact that the HOC is dissatisfied with the PMC and is in a dispute with it over money. This, together with the fact that the HOC apparently has not been able to do much to improve the situation in this complex, explains why the residents are not interested in the work of this HOC.

Among the members of the committees, the interest for the work of the HOC is naturally even bigger than among the 'ordinary' residents. All interviewees that commented on the interest of the members of the HOC reported that all members were very interested in the work of the HOC. All also reported that the chairman, often a retiree, did more work than the other members but this was explained by the fact that he had more time available, being a retiree. From my sample, it seems that the chairman does not dominate the work of the committee and the interviewees gave the impression of lively discussion in the meetings. Read finds indications of the iron law of oligarchy in his research, finding that there was a big difference in how engaged the members of the

HOCs were, and that the HOCs were very dependent on an ‘activist’ that pushed the work of the HOC forward (2003: 49-51). In the cases I have studied, the difference does not seem to be as pronounced as in the cases Read studied. This may be due to the fact that Read focused on the most active HOCs, and an ‘activist’ is probably needed to raise the activity level of the HOC to the levels seen in these HOCs. This does however not mean that the HOCs I studied were not active. Most of them could show good results in improving the situation in their complexes.

It seems that Habermas’s claim that owning private property leads to increased interest in the affairs of the state and a will to participate in politics are correct even for contemporary urban China. The implications of this are many. First of all it indicates that the homeowners in China *may* be a force that will push for a greater say in politics. Considering the weak protection of private property in China, it is not at all unlikely that they feel the need for a better protection of their interests. Second, and potentially more importantly, are the general implications we may draw from this finding: If the developments we have seen in the situation and position of homeowners indicates that new spaces for political participation are emerging at the local level through concessions to interest-groups, it is likely that China’s political system will open up as Chinese society becomes more diversified and the citizens learn to protect their stake vis-à-vis the government. Considering the remaining power of the local governments, it does however remain to be seen how far this process may go. It is also a question of how far governmental organs at different levels are willing to let this process go.

6.3.1 Conclusion

In my sample, there was good communication between the HOCs and their residents. Most of the HOCs had institutionalized ways of getting input from the residents, and the residents were eager to address the HOCs when they had some issues. The interest the residents show for the work of the HOCs does of course vary, but on general they seem to be quite interested.

Within the committees, there was mostly one person who did more work than others (typically a retiree), but my interviewees mostly reported that the other members of the HOC were also very interested in the work of the committee.

My findings on these accounts indicate that Habermas's claim that owning private property makes one more inclined to be interested in and participate in politics holds true even for China. This indicates that homeowners may potentially be a force pushing for a greater say in politics if they feel that their position is threatened. Furthermore, the fact that the central authorities have chosen to establish HOCs in response to the issues facing homeowners may have far-reaching implications for the development of Chinese politics. If this tactic will be used also in other situations where interests groups emerge, one will see a gradual opening up of the Chinese political system.

6.4 Conclusion

Even after a partially free market for housing was instigated in 1998, the local governments have maintained an influence in the Chinese housing market. In addition to the traditional role of planning authority, the Chinese local governments influence the situation and position of Chinese homeowners through their alliance with the homeowners, giving the developers and the PMCs an upper hand. This seriously weakens the position of the homeowners and means that they may meet resistance from local governments when trying to deal with their problems. This is the background for the establishment and functioning of HOCs in contemporary urban China.

Considering the possibilities that Chinese urbanites have for real participation in politics, be it at the local or national level, the story might have ended here. As we saw in chapters 4 and 5, political participation in China is limited by the lacking autonomy and limited channels available. I have however found that through the homeowner committees (HOCs), urban homeowners are able to have real influence on political issues, even if this of course is only within the limited field of issues relating to private property. The regulations of HOCs give the committees real and unobstructed authority, and they have proven adept at exercising this authority for the best of their residents, withstanding efforts from local governments at influencing the composition of HOCs and thereby potentially co-opt the committee. Not surprisingly, the residents are quite interested in using the HOCs to promote their interests. In this chapter I have found that, in line with Habermas's theory, people that own private property are very interested

in protecting their stake vis-à-vis the government (relating to their property), and in doing so influence politics and gain a greater say in the formulation of politics.

Further and more comprehensive research is needed on this subject before we can draw safe conclusions on the situation and implications of HOCs. Some questions that have not been researched in this thesis but would be interesting to research include: How was the institution of HOCs established; was it initiated by the government or did it emerge as a result of pressure from below? What are the consequences of the establishment of federations of HOCs and internet sites where homeowners can discuss their problems and organize to solve them?

The issue of HOCs certainly is a very limited issue, but the implications may be far-reaching if the establishment of HOCs is indicative for how other emerging groups with clear stakes will be treated. I will elaborate on this in chapter 7, summarizing and concluding this thesis.

7. CONCLUSION

The theme of this thesis has been the prospects for a push for democracy emerging ‘from below’ in China, through the use of available channels for political participation for ‘ordinary’ urban Chinese. Considering the literature already written on prospects for democracy in China, I expected that such a perspective would give important new insights on the prospects for democracy in China and the process that may lead to the establishment of a democracy in China.

For analyzing the prospects for democracy in China I chose to use Jürgen Habermas’s theory on the development of public spheres and the growth of democracy. This is a theory that seldom, if ever, is used for analyzing democratization and my motivation for using it was that I expected it would offer new insights to this field. Habermas deduced his theory from the developments in England, France and Prussia in the 18th and 19th century. After arguing that Habermas theory was intended to have universal validity despite its context-specific features, I outlined the relevant parts of Habermas's theory in chapter 2.

As some parts of Habermas’s theory were colored by the context from which they were developed it was necessary to remove these parts so that the applicability of the theory is widened, a process I called to de-contextualize the theory. I started this process in chapter 3, by raising questions that would help us de-contextualize Habermas’s theory. Through answering these questions in the remainder of the thesis, we would find out what parts of Habermas’s theory is context-specific.

My fourth chapter analyzed if the business stratum would play the role as proponents for democracy in contemporary China, like they did in the cases Habermas studied. This chapter focused on the first of the three assets I pointed to in the end of chapter 3 as essential for proponents for democracy: having autonomy in relation to the state. My finding was that the members of the business stratum in China are very closely connected to the government. The business stratum in contemporary urban China is connected to the government in two ways. First, because the government themselves have established a number of companies and in this way are involved in business. Second, because close ties to the government are needed to be a successful businessman.

These potential forces for greater political participation thereby have a common interest with the government as they help their business. I also found that even if the business stratum in China had been autonomous and had been able to use this autonomy to push for democracy, they are not interested in doing so. The conclusion to this chapter was that the business stratum in China is unlikely to be proponents for democracy and we therefore need to look elsewhere for possible proponents for democracy in China.

Since Habermas's theory is very open and all people in principle can be proponents for democracy, I chose to move on to analyze political participation in general in chapter 5. My focus in this chapter was on the second asset of the bourgeois people, namely having a channel to the government. Since the channels for political participation must be said to be arenas where there is a very direct contact between the government and the citizens, I found it natural to operationalize 'channel to the government' as channels for political participation. In this chapter four limits to the political participation of urban Chinese and their ability to use the channels for political participation to push for democracy were identified. First, their political rights are under considerable normative expectations. They are not allowed to freely express their opinions, but must keep within limits defined by the authorities. This means that they are not allowed to challenge the authorities or the dominant ideology of China, which is based on Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. Second, the channels are troubled by weak formalization, whereby the rules are not always adhered to but are rather applied in the way that suits the CCP best. Third, the channels do not extend to the most important track of decision-making in the Chinese political system, the Party-apparatus. The consequence of this is that the Chinese people are not able to influence the formulation of the politics, only the implementation of them. The scope of the participation is further limited by the fourth factor: the fragmented character of the political participation. The channels for political participation are mostly limited to the *danwei* and the Chinese urbanites therefore have small possibilities to influence politics at higher levels, or form alliances with people outside their *danwei*. The consequence of these limits, according to the theory of Habermas, is that the Chinese urbanites have very limited or almost no ability to push for democracy if these limits stay in place. The conclusion of this chapter was that it is unlikely that the channels for political participation in China may be used to push for democracy.

There are however indications that the situation is changing, and that the limits related to the cellularization of Chinese society are decreasing. In recent years the market economy has been developing, and people now have far more opportunities for leading a life that is less restricted to and by their *danwei*. One development that is particularly interesting with respect to Habermas's theory is the emergence of private housing and new committees, Homeowner committees (HOCs), to tend for the interests of the residents. I analyzed these committees in chapter 6, where I focused on the second of the three assets I pointed to in the end of chapter 3 as essential for proponents for democracy: having a stake to tend for vis-à-vis the state. I found that these committees represent a step forward in the sense that they have a relatively high level of autonomy and are able to and willing to work for the best of the residents. It seems that the HOCs have been able to 'break free' from the limits to political participation and be an institution for genuine political participation. The conclusion of this chapter was that the emergence of HOCs is positive and indicates a trend that may lead to more freedom and participation and possibly better prospects for democracy.

However, the emergence of these relatively autonomous committees does not herald an increase in the prospects for democracy in itself. What can we say about the prospects for democracy in China on more general terms? From the findings in chapter five regarding the many and severe limits to political participation in China, the prospects for democratization emerging in the way Habermas's theory describes are bleak. The signs of weakened cellularization are however very important for the prospects for democracy in China, since many of the limits to political participation are related to the high level of cellularization of Chinese society. The de-cellularization may lead to the establishment of new arenas for political participation and discourse that are not troubled by the limits seen in the 'traditional' channels for participation (as seen in the situation of the HOCs). This gives Chinese urbanites a better opportunity for genuine political participation and the possibility to use this opening up to push for democracy if they so desire. As the de-cellularization also means that the existing power-structures lose some of their means of control it may also weaken these structures. This means that the autonomy of Chinese urbanites vis-à-vis the state will increase, making it easier to instigate the small pushes towards a more open and free society that eventually

lead to democracy in Habermas's theory. Even if homeowners are a relatively small group and not all of them have HOCs in their complexes this chapter has illustrated that interest groups may be awarded hitherto unknown levels of participation, and the implications of further developments in this direction are big.

An apparently strong counter-argument against this claim is the situation for the business stratum, which as I outlined in chapter 4 is not able (nor willing) to challenge the authorities despite having a stake to protect vis-à-vis the government. In that chapter we saw how the business stratum is dominated by and co-opted by the Party-state, and in this way is not able to play the role the bourgeois people played in the European societies that are the basis for Habermas's theory. I will however argue that the situation for the business stratum in China is somewhat special, compared to other possible interest groups that may emerge in China. First, the Chinese economy was very state-dominated in the pre-reform era, and the privately based business stratum therefore had a tough job gaining a position in the economy. Second, the Party-state kept a relatively strong control over the economy, through maintaining a rigid system of permits that only the Party-state could give. This had two implications. First, there was a tendency towards demanding payment for these permits, breeding corruption and close connections between the Party-state and the emerging business stratum. Second, people in the party-state used their position to embezzle previously state-owned assets and in this way gave the business stratum a distinctly red characteristic. All in all, the business stratum had to have a very strong connection with the authorities, and was therefore not able to have the necessary autonomy. Other interests emerging in China will not necessarily have this close connection to the Party-state, as we have seen in the case of homeowners, and may be able to exercise meaningful political participation and push for more political participation.

It does however seem like the authorities have a great will and ability to stop or co-opt all groups that may challenge their authority. So far, the Chinese party-state has proven very adept at co-opting forces in society that may challenge them. If the future will show a more democratic China depends to a large degree on the extent to which the party-state will still be successful at co-opting emerging forces in society. However, as the interests diverge more and more and the citizenry become increasingly heterogeneous, the party-state has to transform itself to be able to co-opt these forces.

Indeed, the party-state itself will be transformed by this co-optation, maybe leading to increased participation the way Habermas's theory describes. We have already seen the sketch of this transformation as the CCP formulated 'The Three Represents', and in the forming of HOCs.

Several interesting questions for further research emerge from my findings: to what extent is there a de-cellularization taking place in contemporary urban China? What is the character of this de-cellularization? Are the limits on the arenas for contact with the government lessened? Does the de-cellularization lead to the establishment of new arenas for political participation and political discourse? Are these new arenas less troubled by the limits that impeded the 'traditional' channels from being used to push for more participation? To what extent are Chinese urbanites interested in challenging the authority of the party-state? My study of HOCs has given indicative answers to these questions, but further research will be needed if we are to be able to understand more clearly the direction Chinese urban society is moving in. Also, some questions relating to the government-structures emerge from this thesis: how does the de-cellularization affect the government-structure? Does the government really lose power, or is the power only redefined and relocated? Are new power-structures emerging? Is the government able to and willing to co-opt all forces in society that may potentially challenge their authority?

7.1 Theoretical developments

In addition to analyzing the prospects for democracy in China, this thesis has had as its stated intention to develop Habermas's theory by removing the features that are context-specific, so that it becomes possible to use it in contexts outside Europe.

In chapter 3 I raised the question 'Is a strong legal system necessary for private autonomy to emerge?' I have found that one of the explanations why the autonomy of Chinese citizens is so weak is that their channels for political participation suffer from weak formalization (see section 5.2.2). This indicates that a relatively strong and healthy legal system is necessary for a development towards democracy. The situation in China can therefore be taken as an indication that this part of Habermas's theory is not

conditioned on the context from which his theory was developed, but has universal validity.

In this thesis I have looked at other arenas for contact between the state and the bourgeois people than those Habermas talked about in his theory. The channels for political participation did not function very well in China and I found them to be of little use in pushing for democratization. I will however argue that it is not very likely that it is the character of the channel *per se* that causes this; many of the channels I studied are deliberative and thereby have the qualities that are so central to the transformative effects of the arenas in Habermas's theory. It seems from my findings that it is rather structural impediments that intervene and makes it difficult to use the channels to push for democracy in China. We are not able to determine if these channels may function as arenas for a push for democracy. The issue of whether other arenas than the ones Habermas outlines may be used for pushing for democracy is therefore not clarified.

In chapter 3 I also raised the question if people who have a stake to protect vis-à-vis the government, but are not a part of the 'bourgeois people' in Habermas's theory, may be proponents of democracy as the bourgeois people were in Habermas's theory. My findings indicate that this is the case. I have researched homeowners, and found that they are indeed interested in and able to tend for their interests vis-à-vis the state. Homeowners as a group were not mentioned by Habermas, so this indicates that other groups than the ones Habermas explicitly points to may be a part of the bourgeois people if they have a stake to protect vis-à-vis the government.

Further, as I have pointed out, Habermas's point is exactly that people who own private property will be more interested in tending for their interests. Since I found that property owners are more politically interested, this indicates that this point is not context-specific but has universal validity. Also, it is because their position on the other two assets (autonomy and channel to the government) that were important for the bourgeois people in Habermas's theory are better relative to other people in China that the homeowners are able gain more genuine participation from the institution of HOCs. This underscores the universal value of the three assets I pointed to as the essence of Habermas's theory (see end of chapter 3 above). It may appear that the situation for the business strata in China indicates that having a stake to protect does not lead to pushes for more political participation, meaning that this feature of Habermas's theory is

context-specific. I will however argue that the situation for the bourgeois people rather underscores this point: as the business stratum is so connected to the government, they do not have a stake to protect *vis-à-vis* the government. It is therefore in line with Habermas's theory that they do not push for more political participation.

Lastly, in chapter 3 I also asked what the consequences will be if one is not able to influence fundamental issues. It seems that one of the reasons why Chinese citizens have not been able to use their channels to push for further participation has been that they have not had any influence at the levels that may instigate such a change. This indicates that Habermas's point on the importance of being able to influence fundamental issues is universally valid.

In the end of chapter 3, I hypothesized that the bourgeois people needs three assets in order to be able to be proponents for democracy: autonomy, a channel to the government, and a stake to protect *vis-à-vis* the government. Chapters 4 and 5 showed that lacking one or more of these assets meant that one is not able to be a proponent for democracy. In this sense, the hypothesis survived a possible invalidation. In chapter 6 I showed that a better situation on these three assets was positive for the possibility for meaningful participation and being able to push for more political participation. In this sense, my hypothesis has been strengthened. My main theoretical finding in this thesis is therefore that there is reason to believe that potential proponents for democracy need to have three assets: autonomy, an arena for communication with the government, and a stake to protect *vis-à-vis* the government

To summarize this thesis, it has found that the prospects for democracy in China are slim. Due to the weak development of the constitutional and legal system, the cellularization of Chinese urban society and the normative limits Chinese urbanites are under, the space for potential proponents for democracy to emerge is very little. The changes China is undergoing at the time being are indeed positive, with an opening up of spaces as has been seen in the situation for the HOCs. This indicates that a bottom-up process pushing for more participation may be in the beginning and that the government is willing to let this process have consequences for the political participation. Due to the tight grip the government, and the CCP in particular, still has, and the lacking political

freedoms, this will however be a very long process, probably with a few setbacks, and it is therefore unlikely that democracy will emerge in the foreseeable future.

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