

## Call for Papers

The 16<sup>th</sup> Chinese Internet Research Conference

Leiden, 22-23 May 2018

<http://www.politicseastasia.com/research/cfp-circ16/>

### Proposed Panel: **Digitalizing Political Representation in China: Concepts, Mechanisms and Implications**

It is argued that Western democracies are currently experiencing a crisis of established forms of political representation.<sup>1</sup> In authoritarian China, conventional forms of political representation have been long criticized for their lack of representative power.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, the dysfunctional nature of conventional representation has been further exposed and scrutinized by the public due to the rise of the new information and communication technologies (ICTs). Thus the ICTs seem to contribute to further deepening of representative crisis in China. However, on the other hand, the ICTs are also seen as a potential solution to the crisis of representation for it offers an unprecedented opportunity for direct interaction, political self-expression and new representative claim-making.<sup>3</sup>

This panel is devoted to shifting patterns of political representation in the age of new digital technologies in China. Today this topic remains highly underexplored. We find that most of the research on political representation in China mainly traces shifting dynamics of formal congressional representation in the offline environment<sup>4</sup> and pays little attention to the growing impact of the ICTs on representation in practice. On the other hand, there is a vast body of literature on internet political participation and communication<sup>5</sup> that reveals even

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<sup>1</sup> Wang Hui, "The Crisis of Representiveness and Post-Party Politics", *Modern China*, Vol. 40 (2) 2014, 214-239. Simon Tormey, *The End of Representative Politics*, Cambridge, Malden (Polity Press), 2015. Stephen Coleman, "The Lonely Citizen: Indirect Representation in the Age of Networks", *Political Communication*, 22: 2, 2005, 197-214. Michael Saward, "The Representative Claim", *Contemporary Political Theory*, 5, 2006, 302.

<sup>2</sup> Wang Zhongyuan, "Playing by the rules: how local authorities engineer victory in direct congressional elections in China", *Journal of Contemporary China*, June 22, 2017: 1-16. Patricia M. Thornton, "The Cultural Revolution as the Crisis of Representation", *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 227, September 2016, 697-717.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Coleman and Jay G. Blumler (eds.), *The Internet and Democratic Citizenship. Theory, Practice and Policy*, Cambridge et al. (Cambridge University Press) 2009. Darren G. Lilleker and Karolina Koc Michalska, "Online Political Communication Strategies: MEPs, E-Representation, and Self-Representation", *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*, 2012, 190-207. See Liu Yu and Yang Qinghua, "A framing analysis of Chinese Independent Candidates' strategic use of microblogging for online campaign and political expression", in: Peter Marolt and David Kurt Herold (eds.), *China Online – Locating society in online spaces*, London et al. (Routledge) 2015, 69-87.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Melanie Manion, *Information for Autocrats: Representation in Chinese Local Congress*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press), 2015. Wang Zhongyuan, "Playing by the rules: how local authorities engineer victory in direct congressional elections in China", *Journal of Contemporary China*, 22 June 2017, 1-16. Tomoki Kamo, Hiroki Takeuchi, "Representation and Local People's Congresses in China: A Case Study of the Yangzhou Municipal People's Congress", *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol 18, No. 1, 2013, 41-60.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Jacques deLisle, Avery Goldstein and Guobin Yang (eds.), *The Internet, Social Media, And A Changing China*, Philadelphia (University of Pennsylvania Press), 2016. Johan Lagerkvist, *After The Internet, Before Democracy: Competing Norms in Chinese Media and Society*, Bern et al. (Peter Lang), 2010.

tinest nuances of current trends in the Chinese cyberspace. However, this stream of research leaves the topic of political e-representation in the Chinese context virtually unaddressed.

For this panel, we adopt a broader conception of political representation that goes beyond the traditional view of elected congressional representation. We adopt the view that in the Chinese context representation has a dual character encompassing both bottom-up and top-down, formal and informal patterns. “Top-down” refers to formal nominations by party and state authorities, delegates to the People’s Congresses and Political Consultative Conferences, leading officials, etc. “Bottom-up”, on the other hand, refers to the formal and informal elections such as local People’s Congresses, village leaders, social associations, homeowner committees.<sup>6</sup> Besides, there are also informal representatives who are tacitly accepted by the masses since they represent the interests of certain groups of people or specific ideas and sentiments within a community. These patterns can be conceptualized as symbolic representation.<sup>7</sup> Symbolic representatives can be leading figures which champion the interests of people without being formally elected, e.g. in cases of petitioning, NGOs, mass organizations, the media, including the internet, social movements, clans and lineages, temple associations, etc. Furthermore, representatives can equally claim to represent the interests of *somebody* (a group of people) or *something* (ideas, the nation, traditions, interests, etc.). E-representation (also digital or virtual representation) can be conceptualized as “the potential offered by new media for a greater interactivity between the political and public spheres”.<sup>8</sup> In the Chinese context, e-representation can be understood as a heterogeneous concept that consists of formal and informal, electoral and non-electoral types of representation in the cyberspace.<sup>9</sup>

This panel aims to bring together theoretical and empirical papers with the main focus on how the new ICTs are being used by representatives (formal and informal) and represented (the public); how the use of ICTs has been reshaping the relationship between the representatives and represented; and which new patterns of political representation have been evolving in the online environment in China.

### **Submission:**

Abstracts of no more than 300 words should be sent before **26 January 2018** to Anna Shpakovskaya at [anna.shpakovskaya@uni-due.de](mailto:anna.shpakovskaya@uni-due.de)

Full versions of the accepted papers are to be submitted by **1 May 2018**. Papers should not exceed **8,000** words, including notes and references.

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Heberer, “Reflections on the Concept of Representation and Its Application to China”, *Working Papers on East Asian Studies*, Institute of East Asian Studies, No. 110, Duisburg (University Duisburg-Essen) 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Yves Sintomer, “The Meanings of Political Representation: Uses and Misuses of a Notion”, *Raisons politiques*, 2013 (No. 50).

<sup>8</sup> Darren G.Lilleker and Karolina Koc Michalska, “Online Political Communication Strategies: MEPs, E-Representation, and Self-Representation”, *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*, 2012, 190-207.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Heberer and Anna Shpakovskaya, “The Digital Turn in Political Representation in China”, *Working Papers on East Asian Studies*, Institute of East Asian Studies, No. 119, Duisburg (University Duisburg-Essen) 2017.