Chinese participatory instruments innovation in blended space

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Abstract:

The fast growing of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) not only accelerates the transformation of China's economic, but also changes China's political ecology. Internet as the most representative instrument from ICT has already been widely used in political sphere. The traditional top-down one direction participation mode is no longer capable for the era of this information nonlinear propagation. In the context of worldwide democratic innovation, Chinese government also has expanded the space of political participation within the help of the Internet.

The political participatory space can be divided with 'invented space' and 'invited space'; all forms of political participation in different political systems are either as an invited or invented space (Kersting, 2012). Before the popularized of the Internet, China's political participation mostly come from 'invited space' that government mobilize citizens to engage in the political issues, citizens are passively invited to the decision making process. The Internet has broken the one direction information communication mode; citizens have more possibilities to create their 'invented space' to engage in politics actively. It is also because of this reason, most of the governments currently introduce hybrid participation which includes online and offline participatory instruments and combines 'invented' and 'invited' participation space instead of only adopting single form of participation. Based on Kersting's hybrid and blended democracy mode, participation is combined online and offline spaces and divided into four spheres, which includes direct democracy, representative democracy, demonstrative participation and deliberative participation. For the purpose of trying to find out how dose Internet influence China's political participation, what's the difference between the online innovated participatory instruments and the offline instruments, and how does this hybrid participation mode change China's political ecology. Elect Pro is an E-voting instrument and has been applied in many local level elections constantly, as the instrument of implementing the representative democracy it provides the electronic facility to the election process, but cannot change the status of China's election. Local government deliberative websites open new channels to the public to communicate with government and conduct consultation discussion. Weibo as one of the most powerful social media in China has become the biggest demonstrative participation space. Participatory budgeting program has brought the attempts of direct democracy to some of the pilot Chinese cities. These innovated instruments combined online and offline spaces and play effects in promoting the process of democratization in China. Based on the secondary data, the paper tries to draw the picture of the utilization distribution of these four types of instruments and concludes the development features of these innovated participatory instruments in China.

Key words: innovated participatory instrument, blended participation spaces, administration reform

The new forms of political trend

After the Cold War, the democratic process swept the global and many countries chosen to become democracies, but this democratization-honeymoon didn't last long since series of practical problems soon arrived one after another (Kersting, 2012). The decline of electoral turnouts, low levels of social trust in politicians and political institutions and decline in membership of traditional mobilizing organizations are all leading to the disconnection between citizens and decision-makers. The essence of democracy seems to gradually fade away, that political decisions are made only in the names of all the citizens (Barber 1984; Offe and Preuss 1991; Phillips 1995). Theorists start to think whether the democracy comes to the 'End of History' (Fukuyama, 1992). Many signs have shown that the democracy may not able to fully adapt to the modern circumstances, the new issues such as globalization, shifting balance of centralization and decentralization, the threat of terrorism, the rising power of communication technology, and accelerating pace of social diversity are all emerged and challenged the dominate status of democracy (Newton, 2012). Since 1990s, the world politics has experienced drastic changes. The global political structure presented a diversified trend, besides the communist and socialist countries in Eastern Europe, South East Asia and some Latin American and African regions, traditional authoritarian rulers and military dictatorship also existed (Berg-Schlosser and Kersting, 2003). On the other side of the world, some new powers were rising, non-democratic countries such as China was also looking for a revival road by optimizing its political system constantly. The world political structure shows a pluralism tendency. The traditional political order in the balance of all kinds of original forces seems hardly to open a new turn for democracies, public ownership has gradually replaced by the privatization, public sectors is losing their priorities. This can be described as the democratic malaise which resulted by two layers of factors: the top down outputs that brought by the low performance of the political leaders and institutions and the inputs provided by the invalid voters and citizens (Newton, 2006; Keele 2007). Thus, the new unelected institutionalized power, such as media or digital political instruments are rapidly growing and expanding their influence both in private and public sectors.

Democratic and administration innovation

The escalating globalization and technology innovation continually throw challenges to the modern politics. Many of the countries have started political reform and administration reform since 1990s (Kersting, 2012). No matter in which form of reforms increasing the partici-

pation is the common method that used by most of the governments (Kersting, 2004). In this context, increasing participation is not an emotional decision but along with a consistent theme within contemporary democratic theories (Smith, 2009). This idea has been embodied in participatory democracy theory (Pateman 1970), difference democracy (Young 1990), cosmopolitan democracy (Held 1995), direct democracy (Saward 1998) and deliberative democracy (Bohman 1998). Post-materialist theorists also argue that the new world pattern brings new political values, in which these values are associated with the rising of political awareness and more requirements of the citizen participation (Inglehart, 1997). There are some other voices which treat the participation as an instrument that can bring citizens into the center of the politics, and it's the most prominent feature is the instrumental value (Parry 1972). Combing the different theories and opinions can conclude that participation is a proper way to against the arbitrary power, to help individuals to achieve their self-recognition, to help government to form public sentiment oriented policy and to contribute to the legitimacy development. Therefore, most of the states and governments may introduce new forms of participation when facing the democratic crisis and improve their administration capability. The related attempts include the citizens' juries and deliberative opinion polls as the institutional realization with the principle of deliberative democracy (Fishkin 1997; Smith and Wales 2000). Citizen's initiative and referendum can be seen as the expression of political equality and responsive rule in the direct democracy context (Budge 1996; Saward 1998). The global digital era has greatly change the ecosystem of politics, both democratic and non-democratic states are facing crisis of losing citizens' participation, it's reason not only because of the political apathy, but also has connection to the cynicism that caused by the explosion of information (Kersting, 2012b).The growth of ubiquity of online and offline communication technologies opens up spaces for citizen participation in democratic processes (Kersting 2017). Different kinds of ICT-based participation instruments emerged in an endless stream and constantly changed the traditional political such as online voting; social media, E-conference and even the online opinion polls. Governments are looking for a balance between implementing these innovations as well as maintaining the stable of the ruling.

The fast growing of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) not only accelerates the transformation of China's economic, but also has a great impact on China's political ecology. Internet as the most representative instrument from ICT has already been widely used in

political sphere. The traditional top-down one direction participation mode is no longer capable for the era of this information nonlinear propagation. In 1986, the first email sent from China to Germany started the age of the internet in China.[1] Since then, China has started to implement series of policy and projects to regulate the development of the Internet as well as using it in the construction of a modern country. E-governance is one of the core projects among all the initiatives. To improve the government efficacy and build a harmony social environment has become the government's first concern before making any new movements. Since the last century 90s, China has launched a series of national E-governance projects that covered the main aspects of state governance named 'Golden projects', such as 'Golden Bridge', 'Golden Tax', 'Golden Custom' and so on. These projects are all based on the informatics and communication technology with the original purpose of facilitating the government service. Within the broadening of these online service implementations, the growing number of citizens realized that cyber space is not only an information receiver, but also is a powerful method to convey their voices. Many online participatory instruments have been launched in responding to this new trend. Among these instruments most of them were introduced by the government, while some of them were citizens- oriented. Online opinions polls, social media or even online forums are all the common instruments in this context.

Blended or hybrid participation

The global digital era has greatly change the ecosystem of politics, both democratic and non-democratic states are facing crisis of losing citizens' participation, it's reason not only because of the political apathy, but also has connection with the cynicism that caused by the explosion of information (Kersting, 2012b).The growth of ubiquity of online and offline communication technologies opens up spaces for citizen participation in democratic processes (Kersting 2017). In reaction to this new trendy, most of the governments provide more democratic space and implementing new instruments for participation which is known as 'invited spaces' (Barber, 1984; Budge, 1996; Kersting, 2008), referendums, round tables and forums are the most well-known instruments in the 'invited space'. But in most of the times, these new innovations are dominated by political parties and authorities, that the citizens can hardly

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[1] In 1986, the 706 Academy of China Aerospace (BJ) with Karlsruher Institut für Technologie (KIT) generated the first international networking project 'Chinese Academic Network' (CANET) in Beijing. In the following year, Prof. Werner Zorn from KIT and Prof. Wang Yunfeng from China built the first International Internet email node in China and wrote the first Email from Beijing to Germany with the contents of `Across the Great Wall we can reach every corner in the world'.

lead the direction of the participation. The demand for citizen participation in democratic space and the dissatisfaction with the reality led citizens to find their own channels to express the political interest. A bottom- up participation space that made up by the citizens and civic groups is known as the 'invented spaces', (Kersting 2008, 2012a, 2014, 2013a) which initially led by the citizens for creating more civic- oriented participation. The new forms of 'invented' participation were developed as a kind of public counterweight to the existing political structure as well as the dominant from the old ruling elites. (Kersting, 2012a) In 'invented space', the ICT applications are commonly used for collecting civic observations, opinions and suggestions with crowdsourcing approach (Kersting 2012a, 2013a).

All political systems have forms of political participation, either as an invented or an invited space. Invented space includes bottom-up processes where people come together to express their opinions, plan and deliberate together and even may have a vote on this. This invented space is often quite autonomous and driven by individual as well as organized interest groups. (Kersting, 2013) Most democratic system allows certain degree of this bottom up invented space. So, invited space is a top-down process where participatory instruments are implemented by government and administration to allow people consultative inputs as well as binding decision-making.

Political participation are defined here an act to influence political decision-making (Barnes and Kaase et al., 1979). In this regard, all forms of communal self-help such as civil engagement will not be classified as political participation in this paper. This civic engagement as co-production, however, has an important social function especially when it comes to the development of social capital (Kersting et al., 2009).Following this argument, Kersting has divided the current blended participation trendy into four main spheres, which includes representative participation, direct participation, demonstrative participation and deliberative participation. Those online and offline instruments of political participation as well as their main and collateral functions will be described using a model of participation with four spheres of participation (see Kersting 2013, 2014, 2015 Figure 1). These diverse forms could be related to four different spheres of democratic participation, characterized by different intrinsic logics and specific participatory instruments online and offline. As showing from the Figure 1, the representative participation traditionally belongs to the 'invited' space, since it is known as the fairest and the most acceptable approach that organized by the government and the ruling parties to elect the representatives of the people; it follows the majority rule and is a vote – centric participation. Representation represents the decisive and institutionalized way of pub-

lic engagement and possesses the exclusively conventional feature. Other forms of participation are subordinated. Though the joining of multiple participative channels have threaten the leading position of the representative participation, elections remain clearly the most used and efficacy instrument of political participation (Gabriel/Neller 2010; Hay 2011). The demonstrative participation places in the opposite square from the representative participation which shows the most features of 'invited' space. Political demonstrations in most of cases come from the bottom up citizens' spontaneous initiatives, and it is a symbolic participation with the features of political disenchantment, individualism and societal change of values, the widening variety of protest and unconventional participation can count for a growing importance of this sphere (Gabriel/Neller 2010, Hay 2011, Rucht 2007).It is an innovated form of participation that apart from the institutionalized and conventional characters. Online and offline flash mobs, illegal and violent political protest, show voices to mass media are all means of demonstrative participation. Both direct participation and deliberative participation can either be placed in 'invited' or 'invented' space according to different contexts. Direct participation is also a vote-centric form, but in contrast to the representative logic, direct participation is issue-oriented and produces decisive decisions by circumventing the representatives. In this way direct participation weakens the power of elected representatives and awards political veto-power to the citizens. Decisive referendums and citizen initiatives are the central instruments. Deliberative participation represents the new forms of democratic participation trend. In the 1990's, the political participation has shown the tendency towards to more dialogue-oriented. It has been called as the "deliberative turn" (Dryzek 2003; Goodin/Niemeyer 2003; Kersting 2008). Dialogical or deliberative democratic innovations are not decisive and influence political discourse and inherent perceptions of the participants. They are often implemented to solve manifest or latent moral conflict.

In the real practice, the complex social and political settings always require one participation instrument having multiple functions to meet the wide range of demands. Therefore the blended or hybrid participation has become the new trend, in some context deliberation, demonstration of opinions and direct vote are together, and some intermingle the representative and direct participation. Nowadays online digital participatory instruments innovation is implementing convergent online and offline instruments. The modern society only adopts one form of the participation cannot fulfil the constantly increasing demands from the citizens as well as may lead to the unstable of the social society, therefore, to implement blended participation (or hybrid participation) is a common way adopted by most of the governments.

Before the administration reform as well as introducing ICT, the political engagement in China remains in a relatively backward level. Most of the participation methods are managed and controlled by the government. The invented space, where citizen produce instruments of participation in a bottom up way is strictly controlled by the authority. Invited space predominates where government office strictly regulated ways of communication and feedback predominates. The rising of the Internet has dramatic changed the political ecology in China and promoted the modernization of government ruling. Various online participatory instruments emerged in Chinese cities which brought Chinese citizens unprecedented experience of practicing political involvement. Those online instruments become the stronger integrated instrument of checks and balances which means for crowd monitoring as well as crowd planning. In the new digitalized era, the cyberspace breaks the limitation and the boarder of the autocratic participation system. Some democratic-oriented forms of participation can also be found in China's context, such as direct participation. The four innovated participative instruments will be introduced in the fowling part that based on the blended participation rhombus mode (Kersting, 2013). They are the products of the administration reform and the technology innovation as well as representing different forms of participation, and practice different functions in social society. Most of them play positive effects on of improving Chinese participation in local levels and encourage more people to be active in political issues, but in the long run, many institutional and social factors still limit the development of these innovations, such as political elitism and digital divide.
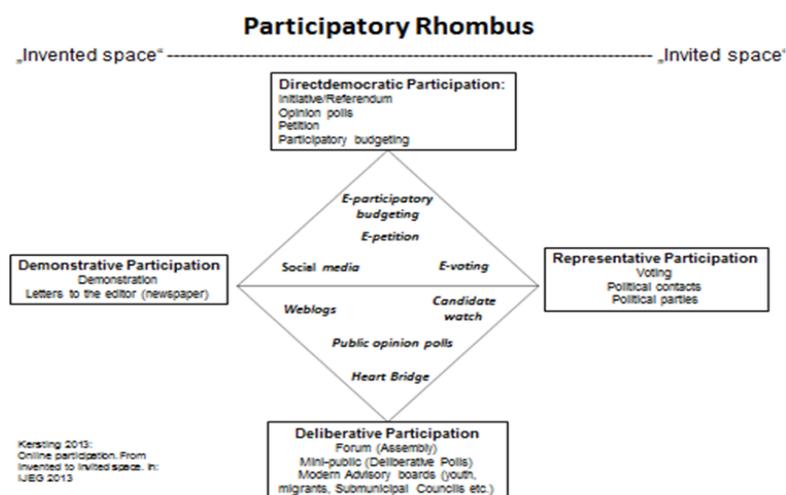

Figure 1 Hybrid and blended participation

Online participatory budgeting

Modern China adopts the socialism with Chinese characteristic is a representative participation oriented political system. The National People's Congresses (NPC) is the national policy making (representative participation). In addition to the NPC, other forms of participation are subordinated. Direct participation so far is not yet available in the offline space in China, the instruments such as decisive referendums and citizen initiatives are not commonly introduced in the public sector. In the online space, the instrument of online participatory budgeting is being texted in some cities, such as Wenling (Fujian Province), Wuxi (Jiangsu Province), Ha'erbin (Heilongjiang Province) and Jiaozuo (Henan Province). In those small – scale pilot cities, citizens take the initiatives directly to act on the local final budgeting decisions. Though the real effects of those initiatives are still very limited in the broader context, the direct participation can be practiced in China is already a great attempt.

> 'Participatory budgeting (PB) is a process of democratic deliberation and decision-making, and a type of participatory democracy, in which ordinary people decide how to allocate part of a municipal or public budget. Participatory budgeting allows citizens to identify, discuss, and prioritize public spending projects, and gives them the power to make real decisions about how money is spent (Chohan, 2016).'

Participating Budgeting programs confront Brazilian political legacies of clientelism, social exclusion, and corruption by making the budgetary process transparent, open, and public. The use of participatory budgeting began in 1989 in the municipality of Porto Alegre. Originally, PB was developed as a means to favor the poor and lower the social inequity. (Baiocchi, 2005). In 2015, thousands of PB variations have been adopted in the countries of Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe (Ganuza and Baiocchi, 2012). When PB has been introduced in China by the end of 1990s (Zhongguofazhan yanjiu jijin hui, 2006; Chen, 2007), it endowed with new meanings by the Chinese government as a government initiative to curb corruption, improve administrative efficiency and enhance state capacity (Collins and Chan, 2009). This reshaped PB has become an ideal tool of expanding participation as well as narrowing down the social contestation; it not only adapts to the democratic society but also can functioning well in the state dominated administration, the famous cases include the Law of Complaints in Vietnam and the Feedback Unit in Singapore. (Rodan and Jayasuriya, 2007). As one of the

few city level PB pilot cities, Jiaozuo[2] adopts online participatory budgeting platform to process the service. In online space, Jiaozuo government combines the open government data and empowering citizens' engagement to create an online participatory budgeting platform— Jiaozuo government.cn. The initial purpose of introducing PB in Jiaozuo is to contain the increasing financial corruption. The online budgeting system in Jiaozuo enforced the institutional coordination and based on national budget enforcement system to form a typical Chinese style participatory budgeting process with 7 steps. Through the website, citizens can involve in each steps of the budgeting process and make their vote for their preference budgeting projects. In 2007, Jiaozuo City re-edited the scope of government opened budgets, in which the government public budget, the social security budget, the government debt budget, the government procurement budget, the budget for government-managed funds, the government investment, the financing budget, the budget for state-owned assets, the government non- tax revenue budget, and the social gender budgets were all in the list of publicity, Internet users can freely access to any of the budget details and select their interested projects from the government website. In the beginning of each year, the government opens all the budgeting projects from the above list and starts the voting channel to the public. After two month voting collection, the government selects top 15 citizens' preference budgeting projects and brings them into the next step of implementation. Though before the real practice, each project will have to experience the steps of expert review, public hearing and congressional examination (see Figure2); the final implemented projects still come from the citizens' top 15 choices. The online participatory budgeting has brought positive changes to the Jiaozuo city. Both the economic status and governmental transparency have been greatly improved. The following table 1 selects some data to show the differences between the pre-PB phase and PB phase in Jiaozuo city.

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[2] Jiaozuo (Chinese: 焦作) is a prefecture-level city in northern Henan province, China. Its population was 3,520,101 at the 2014 census. It includes 4 urban districts and four counties.
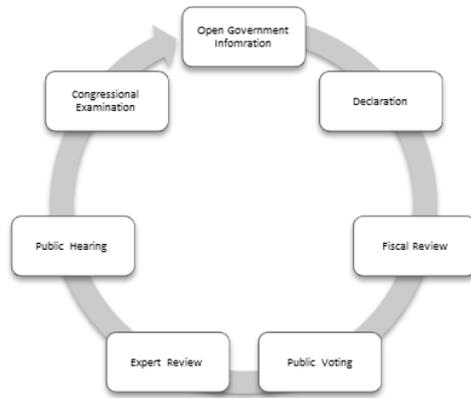
Figure 2: the working process of online participatory budgeting in Jiaozuo city

	Financial corrup-tion amount (million Yuan)	GDP (100 million Yuan)	Government open procurement budget (100 mil-lion Yuan)	Social security budget (million Yuan)	Per capita disposable income of urban residents in the whole city (Yuan)
1999	5.805	1116	0.15	169.2	4007.59
2007	0.13	211	21.94	9334	14282

Table 1: the financial data comparison (After the participatory budgeting project) between 1999 and 2007 in Jiaozuo

'Elect pro'- the first E-voting attempt in China

As introduced previously, the general election can only be practiced under the township levels of the government in China, the nationwide election is impossible. The discussion of online voting in China in this research only refers to those lower than the township government elections. So far the E-voting method has been tacitly approved by the central government, but the real practices only base on the local conditions case by case. There is no unique authorized E-voting system in China; most of the E-voting events have been outsourced to the commercial companies. E-voting has not yet become the mainstream in the Chinese society; many local governments prefer to remain in the paper voting method due to the complex local conditions (leader's interests, government budgets, transparency, etc.). The E-voting practices are stellate distributed.

Elect Pro is one of the commercial E- voting products of Beijing Huitong Technology Co.,Ltd that provides functions of vote counting, conference voting processing and conference attend-ance, etc. which was founded in Beijing in 2008, currently it has three service centers in Bei-

jing, Shanghai and Taiyuan. For the last 8 years, Elect Pro has serviced more than 300 different elections and its clients include all levels of Party Congress, NPC and CPPCC, and other social organizations. The rich practical experience makes Elect Pro become the best research epitome of China's E-voting. Local government either can buy or rent the facilities from the Elect Pro to implement the E-voting events.

Specifically，Elect Pro provides three basic functions for conducting the E- voting, which are Smart E-ballot boxes, Wireless voting system and E-counting system. The Smart E-ballot box is not a totally paperless voting facility; it is an OCR based image processing recognition technology, which is always used during the Local People's Congress election scene. The E-ballot box will count the vote and display the result as soon as the voters cast their paper votes into the box. According to the different requirements and preferences, E-ballot box can generate more than 20 voting templates; voters print the templates, fill in the vote and then throw them into the box. The box can accurately recognize the contents from various paper types as well as different voting templates. This E-ballot box system to the great extent eliminates the human intervention from the voting process, which not only gets rid of the manual supervision, counting as well as avoids possible human errors. It provides timely tally result before the end of the election meeting that effectively avoids the black case work and enhances the transparency and fairness of the election. In some extent, it is an innovation of the traditional ballot voting system, but eventually it has not been divorced from the paper- based voting tradition and does not exert the superiority of the IC.

According to the Statistics from the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the prospective qualified Chinese voters can be around one billion; the numbers of the Village Committees which change the term of office every three years is more than 58 million, the number of the Neighborhood committee is reaching 100000, there are 2853 representatives of the County and Township People's Congress whom may change the term of office every five years. [3] Based on these data, elections seem to be a common and normal social activity in China, but the fact shows still a lot of Chinese have never practiced any forms of elections for various reasons. From 2008 to 2015, Elect Pro has served more than 300 different levels of elections and processed over 200000 votes in total. [4]In compare to the highly demands of society, the E-voting in-

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[3] The data retrieved from http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_7d22934e0102vqy4.html

[4] The data retrieved from: http://www.xuanjutong.com/about/

strument such as Elect Pro is still in its initiative stage with very limited influence. Though E-voting instrument unable to change the voting system in China essentially, it conveys a modern and innovated way of political thinking which still cannot be accepted or understood by some of the local Chinese government.

Online opinions polls

In recent years, a new form of 'E-deliberative instrument' trendy has emerged in local Chinese government. Instead of applying direct open online conference or discussion, online opinions poll or deliberative poll is a more acceptable form for Chinese government. The essence of deliberation is to find a conclusion by exchanging opinions and arguments, online opinions poll is the place to collect public opinions as well as sharing arguments. Zhengzhou, the Capital city of Henan Province with the population of 9.57 million, [5] since 2011, Zhengzhou government has launched a series of online government projects to collect public opinions as well as extend the space for citizen engagement for the purpose of breaking the traditional one-way political decision process.

HeartBridge (Xin Tong Qiao) is a citywide online crowdsourcing platform which led by the Zhengzhou government and relies on the technology and platform of zynews.com. On October 2011, HeartBridge was launched with the good hope of building a bridge to connect the government and the citizens. For the last six year, Heratbridge has grown into the most influential crowdsourcing platform in Zhengzhou. By the time of doing this research, it had accepted 130414 citizen reports and the completion rate had reached to 83%. The platform doesn't limit the types of citizens' post, it can be a problem report, a complain, a suggestion or even a praise, and the posting contents are also diverse ranging from living community, financial issues, food safety, social activities, administration and corruption, transportation, city planning and so on. The Figure 3 presents the grid-style reports distribution system of the HeartBridge, citizen can report their problem by selecting the relevant department or administration unity from this page, there are more than one thousand government departments and all level of administration unities have been posted on this page, citizens' reports will be replied and managed by the correspondent departments directly. HeartBridge regulates that all the presented government departments and social sectors must provide reply within four hours

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[5] The data retrieved from: https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%83%91%E5%B7%9E/123948?fr=aladdin

as soon as they receive a report. And each report should be posted a phased conclusion in 15 days, no matter it has been official fixed or still requires longer time. (Seeing from the Heart-Bridge website) The website is responsible for censoring the content of the reports in case there are no anti-society contents and radical words as well as pushing the involved department to provide replies following the above two deadlines. The website has right to warn the related departments and report to the higher authority about the nonfeasance, but the website doesn't have executive power to command departments to take certain actions directly.

In addition to the problem reporting function, the website also provides online open forum and discussion functions. The registered users can make comments and organize discussion on certain issues as well as provides suggestions and complaints to the government. The complaints or reports about transportations and social infrastructure are the main reason of making the peak of website visiting. This means, the social fluctuation is one of the leading factors of influencing the deliberative oriented participatory instrument. Citizens practice issues- led unstable participation in those platforms. Those forms of participation have the features such as targeted, focusing on actual results, short-term and limited influence on agenda setting.

HeartBridge builds up a new channel for Zhengzhou citizens to convey their request to the government, and optimizes the traditional opinions and social problems collection system and mobilize citizens' engaging enthusiasm by connecting the participation with improving living conditions. But this form of online deliberative participation appears very limited effects on political decision making and agenda setting for the higher level.

Social media

Social media is the Web 2.0 based interactive application that facilitate the creation and sharing of personal information, opinions, professional interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. Within the fast growing of some of famous social media platforms, such as Facebook, twitter, YouTube and so on, many scholars are astonished by their amazing spread, at the same time, start to pay attention on the political influence of those social media. Specifically, researchers have asked how these applications affect individuals' social capital, the nature of online communication, and communicative expressions (Ellison et al., 2007; Walther et al., 2009). Evidence suggests that social media use facilitates political participation and engagement in civic activities (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2009; Macafee and Simone, 2012); however, the literature has mainly focused on the direct influence of social media use and less is known about what mediates the relationship between social media use

and citizens' participatory activities (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2009; Pasek et al., 2009; Tufekci and Wilson, 2012). Previous studies have demonstrated that news media use indirectly influences citizens' participatory behaviors via psychological variables such as political efficacy (e.g., Jung et al., 2011; Shah et al., 2005). Citizens use social media to form short-term, events oriented and unconventional participation.

Blogging applications have been introduced to China since the beginning of the new millennium, it initially present the form of 'web log' and have become a social entertaining and information exchanging platform. It also known as the forth web communication method after email, BBS and ICQ. In regards to the 'freedom, openness, and sharing' of the blog, users have started to enjoy this new information sharing method. Within the joining of the celebrities and politicians, blogs have gradually become familiar with more and more people. According to the Statistic Report of China Internet Development, the numbers of China's blog users appeared geometric increments,

> 'In 2002 the number of blog users was less than ten thousand, in 2003 the number grew to 200 thousand, the 2004 had reached to 2 million…by the June of 2011 the number of China's blog and web space users had broken through 318 million. '(CNNIC, 2011)

'Weibo' is the Chinese pronunciation of Microblogging. It refers to mini-blogging services in China, which includes the Internet social service platform for information sharing, communicating and capturing based on the users relation. The famous weibo services include Sina Weibo, Tencent Weibo, Sohu Weibo, and NetEase Weibo. Sina Weibo is the most influential one, the media sometimes directly uses "Weibo" to refer to Sina Weibo. Akin to a hybrid of sites Facebook and Twitter, it is one of the most popular sites in China with approximately 297million monthly active users.[6] It was launched by Sina Corporation on 14 August 2009, and as of December 2012 has 503 million registered users. More than 100 million messages are posted everyday on Sina Weibo.[7]

In compare to the traditional blog, Weibo shows advantages of providing a smoother communication channel and more convenient service for users to share information. Users can make

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[6] The resources retrieved from: http://data.weibo.com/report/reportDetail?id=346

[7] The resources retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sina_Weibo#cite_note-3

comments and reproduce any contents at any time. Similar to the Twitter, users are adopting # to organize different hot topics. The different between blogs and weblogs include three aspects: 1, Weibo has the limitation of 140 words for each post, while blogs don't have the limitation of the words. 2, blogs are article- based online personal sharing space which requires web accessed computers as well as an appropriate typing facility to produce the articles in most of the cases. The dapper Weibo shifts from the computer terminals to the mobile phones with the characters of short, flexible and easy to post, which makes Weibo have larger amount of information and spread faster. 3, the social relations in traditional blogs appear a long- term and stable interactive relationship; the relations in Weibo are more flexible and unstable, which has strong mobility and one-sidedness. Owning to these differences, as soon as Weibo has introduced, it has arose great attention in social society and has been grew rapidly into one of the largest social media in China.

With the popularized of Weibo, this open platform has become the easiest information sharing and discussing channel in China. The various political functions of Weibo also have been developed in its fast growing process. The political communication and demonstrative function is the most prominent features. Duncan notices that in any kinds of parliamentary democracies, the regulators and regulated should develop a proper communication method to guarantee the former will responsible for the later. (Duncan, 1997) In this sense, Weibo has greatly extended the scope of the political communication. Political communication in Weibo is not restricted by time, space communication channel, the limited contents and the depth of discussion. Most of government departments and politicians have launched official accounts on Weibo to facility the communication with the public. At the same time, it has broken the hierarchy of the traditional political communication. The traditional communication process follows the principle of hierarchical administration which involves many departments and takes longer time. The Weibo politics break the administration boundary and build a direct channel between the government and citizens which improves the administration efficiency. Nevertheless, social media like Weibo develops a relatively equal and interactive communication mode, though the social elites and authorities still hold the absolute dominate position in making the political decision, while normal citizens have a platform to express their feeling and political requirements, thus reducing the information and communication inequality between the government and the citizens. According to the rhombus mode, the political participation on social media shows the feature of demonstration. Mass public are driven by certain issues to form massive and powerful public opinion pressure on social media and then influence the policy making.

The distribution of the four types of blended participation in China

According to the participatory rhombus (Kersting, 2013), the political participation either comes from the invited space or the invented space. After reviewing the four online participatory instruments it is clear that the mainstream of political participation in China belong to the invited space that the government mostly takes the initiatives and the leading position. In which, the E-voting instrument and the online participatory budgeting are belong to the invited space, the social media political engagements mostly come from the bottom up initiatives which citizens invent their own political participation. In this context, the online public opinion polls which represent the deliberative participation shows the features of both invited and invented space. Take the Heart Bridge as the example, citizens' opinion as well as the discussion is the only factor that acts on the government actions, from this perspective the public can influence certain levels of government decision and can be seen as the invented participation, on the other hand, the platform of the Heart Bridge is a government ran social service channel, the government is the starter of inviting citizens to show their willing and requirements on this platform, therefore, the instrument of this online public opinions poll is also defined as the initiatives from the invited space. It is the case that should be discussed separately according to different social contexts.
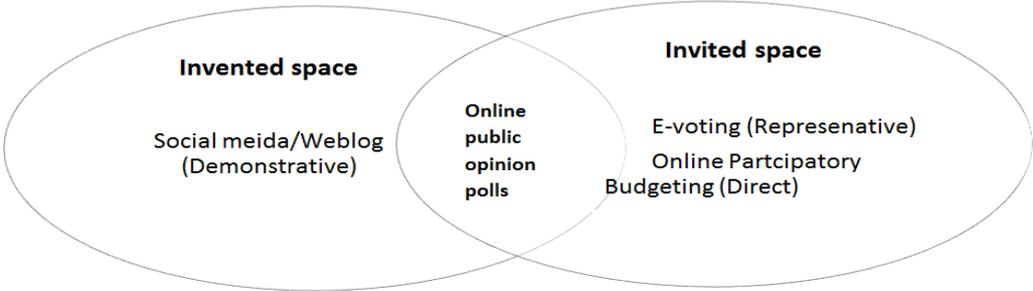

Figure 3: The instruments belonging spaces

So far there are no exact statistics of the utilization rate of each instrument, but the different implementation conditions lead each instrument have certain amount of cover population. By comparing those potential coverage of population can help us have a general image about the implementation situation of those instruments in China.

The E-voting method from the representative participation in this paper only refers to the direct elections that have been used in the people's congress member election below the county

level (social organization and commercial elections are not included in this context). The number of the citizens in urban and rural areas below county level approximately composes 70% of the total population which approximately equal to 980 million[8] ; those 980 million people are the target groups of the E-voting instruments of conducting the local people's congress election. In fact, due to the various limitations and problems, the real practice of E-voting only covered less than 1 million out of the 980 million (Fang, 2016).

The direct participation of the participatory budgeting projects is still in the initial phase of the development in China. Since 2004, Minxing District of Shanghai launched the first participatory budgeting pilot project in China, Jiaozuo, Wenling and other 4 pilot cities have joint in succession. After 13 years, thousands of Chinese villages and dozens of town- level and above administrative areas have implemented the participatory budgeting projects. Due to the digital divide and infrastructure differences, most of the lower level of administrative areas, such as in the villages and small towns cannot practice the online participatory budgeting services. The real openly online participatory budgeting engagement only functioning in the city based projects and there are 23 online PB projects have been confirmed by this study[9]. These online PB projects cover around 30 million populations[10], whom mostly live in the urban area.

Due to the diverse characteristics of the Internet, Social media is the biggest platform for normal citizens to practice online demonstrative participation. According to the 39th China Statistical Report on Internet Development (CNNIC, 2017), by the end of 2016, Chinese Internet users had reached to 713 million, in which the social media users accounted for more than 85% of the total number. The number of Sina Weibo users also ran up to 297 million. Those users may not all be interested in political issues, but each of them is capable to react to the sudden online incidents and to form great public opinion pressure to the authority, such as in the '2011 Wenzhou high-speed railway accident'[11], Sina Weibo had become the central of public opinions and pushed the government to provide reasonable answers.

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[8] The data retrieved from: http://www.stats.gov.cn/

[9] The data retrieved from: http://www.budgetofchina.com/list6-2.html

[10] The data retrieved from: http://www.stats.gov.cn/

[11] On 23 July 2011, two high-speed trains travelling on the Yongtaiwen railway line collided on a viaduct in the suburbs of Wenzhou and four carriages fell off the viaduct, Zhejiang province, China. In total, 40 people were killed, 192 were injured, in the accident. After the accident, the responds and attitudes from the Ministry of Railways had stirred controversy, online space once became of the central of public opinions.

Online public opinion polls belong to one of the government crucial projects named 'democratic and modernized government reform,' in which the government draws the help of the ICT facilities to integrate the public opinions to optimize the government decision process, the functions are similar to the online crowd monitoring instruments 'FixMyStreet'.It is a deliberative and discourse oriented form of participation, which focus on finding a solution via gathering public opinions and civic information. The government in this context doesn't play the role of leading the opinions direction, but to corporate and implement. This also can be seen as a government initiative to increase the long time downturn participation. Normal citizens can use online platforms to report and push the government to take actions for the sake of pursuing better living conditions or political conditions. In response to the call of the Central Committee, 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities have launched 856 different forms of online public opinion polls interments in China covers around 25% of the urban population.[12] These instruments may be an independent website as 'Heart Bridge' or may be just embedding opinion-collection and discussion functions in local government websites. According to the coverage ratio, the coverage population of those online public opinions polls is around 190 million. [13]

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[12] The data retrieved from: http://leaders.people.com.cn/wenzheng/

[13] Calculated based on the latest update from http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/

The distribution of potential participants of four types of E-partcipation instruments (Million)
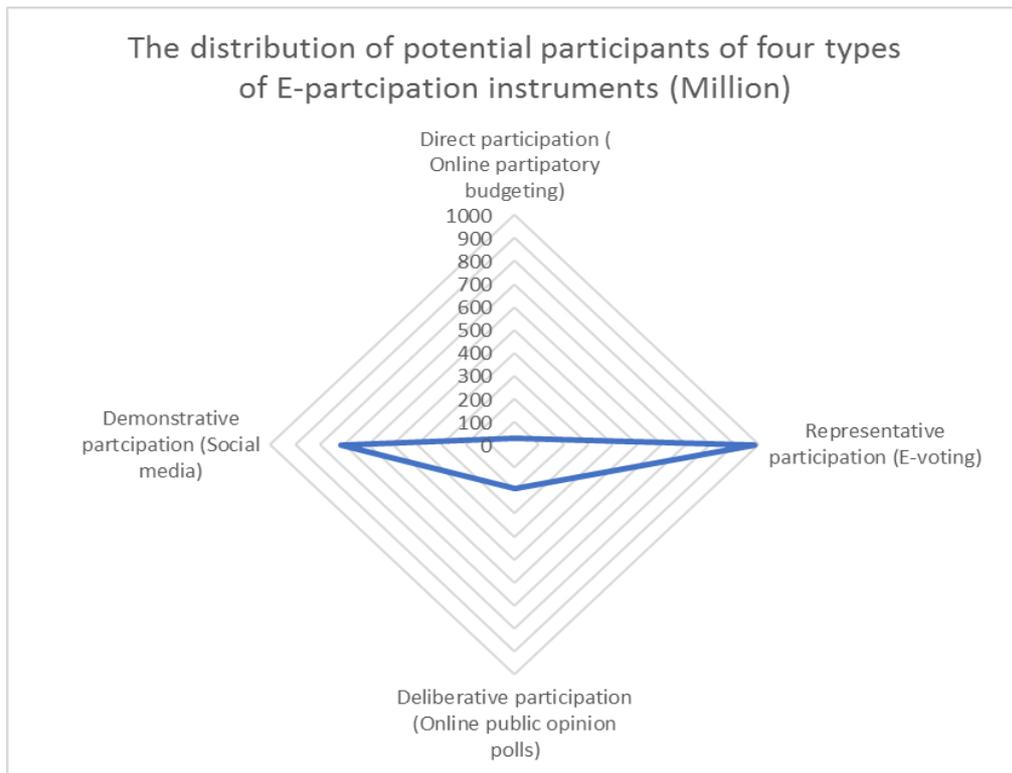
Figure 4 the distribution of potential participants of four types of E-participation instruments in China

The Figure 4 is not an accurate statistics, but it can provide a general image about the developing tendency of four types of political participation. Seeing form the Figure 4, the E-voting instrument of representative participation has the most extensive coverage rate than the other three. The reasons may include two aspects of contents; firstly, the representation is the basic form of participation in China and represents the decisive and institutionalized way of public engagement and possesses the exclusively conventional feature. Each citizen shares the equal chance and right to vote and select their own candidate. Voting system covers all levels of political administrative unites in China and can be practiced by every citizen theoretically. Secondly, this E-voting system only facility the working process, which replaces the manual and paper -based voting system to a machine based voting system. The overall voting system hasn't been changed. With the help of this E-voting system, the traditional voting process has become more efficient and transparent in terms of votes collection, votes accounting and result publishing. The issues such as public nominate the candidates and remote voting is still not possible in this form of innovation. In essence, it doesn't influence the local appointment and removal of personnel system as well as not threatens the authority of the local government. Therefore, without considering the infrastructure and budgets conditions, most of the lower level governments can accept this efficient voting system. Demonstrative participation on social media has the second largest coverage rate due to the popularity of the social media.

So far the deliberative participation such as the online public opinion polls is still in its initial stage of development, though 856 different forms of deliberative platforms have been launched across the country, most of the citizens are still not familiar with this innovated discourse oriented to convey their voices, and some of them worry about the possible consequence after they provide heated speech on the governmental websites. The form of direct participation has the least coverage rate in the comparison, participatory budgeting projects has been introduced to China more than 10 years, but both the influence and developing speed is very limited due to the special political conditions. So far the direct participation can only be implemented as pilot projects in small areas.

Reflections and Conclusion:

Blended participation in the online and offline space:

Within the decreasing of the old democratic forms, the world political system turns to a diversified trend, in which both democratic and non-democratic states have started to set the focus on social development rather than only limiting themselves in the consideration of the political system's optimization and discussion. Increasing the public participation has been accepted by most of the political systems as the crucial way to promote the government modernization. As introduced in the Participatory rhombus (Kersting, 2013), the current political participation appears a hybrid or blended tendency which combine the online and offline participation spaces. The participation means have become more multifunctional, humanized and easier. The joining of the online participatory instruments has opened up the new space to motivate the citizens' participation as well as balanced the government 'absolute' power of leading the participation. Citizens not only have more channels (online and offline) to engage in the political issues, but also can take the initiative to form their own power to influence the decision making process. In this digitalized age, the government shows more inclusiveness towards those bottom up participation and tries to optimize the work by hearing more voices from the 'invented space'. This trend seems to be quite common in liberal democracies in Europe, America as well as in countries of the global south such as Brazil, the country like China also shows great interests in introducing online participations and adopting blended participation methods in local levels. The introduced four types of participatory instruments reflect how this online and offline blended space works in China. Based on the research, China can be seen as an 'invited' oriented country, since the majority forms of participation are led by the government. In Figure 3, the E-voting and online participatory budgeting are defined as government initiatives, the online public opinion polls also work under the govern-

ment implementation and supervision. The demonstrative participation on social media is the only form of participation can organize initially bottom up, which also can be called as the 'invented' participation. Even so, the authority puts an eye on the social media to monitor the public opinions forming process. Therefore, the pure 'invented' participation is still not yet available in China, since all forms of political engaging activities are still under the supervision of the government both in online and offline space. Cyberspace has greatly extended the scope of the participation and provided more channels for citizen engagements, but it doesn't fundamentally change the overall organizational form of China's political participation.

Some critical concerns along with the implementation of these innovated participatory instruments:

Digital divides:

Even though the development of the Internet in China facing various restrictions and boundary, a new political trend has already come. The cyber space has enhanced the political transparency and freedom of the public opinions and facilitated the modernized government reform of China. It also should be noticed that this discussion is based on the condition of Internet general popularized, for the moment, the digital divide has not yet been considered. In fact, the digital divide exists in China and limits the equality of participation access. According to the 39th China Statistical Report on Internet Development (CNNIC, 2017), by the end of 2016, the Internet coverage rate in China has reached to 53.2%, which means there are still 46.8% of population out of the Internet access. And this situation is even worse between the urban and rural area comparison, the report shows that the rural Internet users account for 27.4% of the total number, and the urban users is 72.6%. The uneven Internet coverage leads to the unequally online participation facilities access. For instance, the reason why online public opinion poll is a city- based participatory instrument not only because of the low website running capability of the lower level governments, but also consider the Internet coverage rate in the rural areas is not as good as in the cities. The public opinions collected by the online instruments such as 'Heart Bridge mostly represents the voices of the urban citizens. The similar situation exists in all forms of online political participation. Because of the digital divide and regional development differences, the voices of rural citizens cannot be heard easily via these innovated instruments.

Political limits and apathy

The broadening of political participation is regarded as an important symbol of political modernization and development (Huntington, 1989). It is not only suitable the democratic states, but also works in the context of China. Due to the socialist political condition, the innovated participation in China has to follow certain limitations and regulations before it officially implied. Firstly, it should follow the legal order. According to China's law, violent gatherings, terrorist activities and any activity that threatens the stability of society will be strictly prohibited. Social media platforms such as weibo are the place that suitable for forming demonstrative participation, where also known as the place that easily breeds the illegally social activities. In order to nip the risks in bud, central government have taken series of initiatives to monitor and censor the social media space, net police and filter application are always used by the government to maintain the stability and harmony of the online discourse space. These methods effectively curb some potential cybercrimes and violent gatherings in the open online space, while they also affect people's enthusiasm of participation in some extent. Another crucial factor that limits the effect of these innovated instruments is the political apathy. In China, government restricts, history reasons, lack of civic virtue, benefit driven insufficiency and imperfect system are all the factors of leading to the political apathy. According to the research from Renmin University on 'Social politics and culture of Beijing residents' in 2010, 35% of the interviewees gave the answer of 'don't care about politics at all ', 27 % voted for t 'care a little, but not much', around 10% interviewees selected 'others' to avoid answering this question directly, only less than '30% of the answers gave to 'very care about politics'. This research only showed the data in Beijing area, where the people supposed to be the most interested in politics. The real national level will be much lower than this standard. In the research, Chinese political apathy mainly presented in the following aspects: the apathy on election and voting activities, the apathy on the leadership change, indifference to government actions, the apathy on the policy and the reform (Yu ,2010). If people lost their interest in politics, then he (she) would not pay any attention on any forms of the political activities. The serious political apathy poses the challenges on these innovated participatory instruments in the real practice.

Combining the online and offline participatory space is a great innovation of China's political environment which not only provides more possibility for citizens to access the political process, but also promotes the construction of socialist democratic politics in China. Firstly, to introduce these online participatory instruments into daily life will greatly promote the civic sense and the democratic culture building. It has broken the communication border between the government and the public. The instruments like online public opinion polls and online

participatory budgeting applications both forming a public discourse space that can be known as the 'public sphere'. Citizens can improve their civic virtue and awareness by joining the discussion in these 'public sphere'. At the same time, the instant information exchange function facility the spread of political information, the growing number of normal citizens would love to participant or discuss political issues since it is easier to acquire relevant information. In this background, open government data and transformation of government functions have become inevitable. In Renmin University's research, the interviewees who selected the option of 'don't care about the politics at all' gave the reasons of 'feel inequality in politics and worry about the governmental shadowy practice'. Thus it can be seen the transparency of the government is also a factor of influencing the public participation. Many innovated instruments with the functions of open government data and transparent the administration process have been launched in the online space, participatory budgeting projects , weibo government official accounts and some public opinion polls all share the similar idea. Last but not the least, the innovation of the participatory instruments has strengthened the democratic supervision in both online and offline space. Cyber supervision has become a powerful means to supervise and restrict the public power. Citizens can escape the complex offline administrative steps to report corruption issues to the discipline inspection departments and anti-corruption institutions timely through online instruments. The demonstrative participation on social media plays an important role in this term. Once government negligence or a corruption case has been published on social media it will fast spread and cause huge influence. The efficiency of supervision has been greatly improved. These blended participations have changed the China's political environment smoothly and push it into a more democratic stage.

Conclusion:

China's politics is undergoing an unprecedented reform with the influence of the Internet. Internet as the most representative instrument from ICT has already been widely used in political sphere. The traditional top-down one direction participation mode is no longer capable for the era of this information nonlinear propagation. In the context of worldwide democratic innovation, Chinese government also has expanded the space of political participation basing on the ICT applications. There is a new trendy of reform. The introduced four innovated participatory instruments present four types of political participation and develop a new blended space participation form in China. This blended participation space has blurred the border between the government and the civil society, more and more citizens can involve in the political process by following their own willing and initiatives. The participatory instruments not

only come from the 'invited' space, but also can be 'invented' in this context (Kersting, 2012). The political participation in China shows positive tendency, the growing number of normal citizens can easily access to different levels of political process and show their opinions to the authority through those online instruments. The civic participation enthusiasm has been mobilized, as well as the civic awareness has been improved. China's political ecosystem is undergoing a democratic change. At the same time, the innovated participation forms and blended participatory spaces also raise several social problems that cannot be ignored, Firstly, the conflict between the online democracy and Chinese traditional political culture. China is a country that directly transits from the feudal system to the socialist system, the capitalist democracy never has been experienced through the Chinese history, therefore, some of the innovated participatory instruments may not achieve the desire result initially owning to the lacking of social foundation. Secondly, the abuse using of the Internet freedom. Cyber space is the place where people can enjoy unlimited communication and speech, freedom is the prominent features of the Internet. And so it is, some people abuse using the freedom of Internet to create chaos. Such as releasing false information on social media or providing unprovoked hate speech on public sphere. The government has to maintain the stable and harmony of the cyber space while guarantee the freedom of speech on the Internet. This easily leads to the dilemma of whether should control the Internet and how to balance the intensity of the controls. Thirdly, even though the Internet have extended the participation space, most of the innovated participatory instruments still come from the 'invited' space, and the overall tendency of China's political participation still belongs to the mobilized type. The blended innovated participation has created new trend of Chinese political engagement, it fully active the online and offline participation space. At the same time, it reveals many social problems along with the growing of the political participation. It will be sure that this blended participation innovation will promote the democratic process of China, but to fully be known and accepted by the society still has long way to go.

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