

## The Modernization of Government Governance: Practice and Exploration of the Network Deliberative Democracy

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### Abstract

At the Eighteenth National Congress of the CPC, the concept of “socialist deliberative democracy” is put forward for the first time. While, in the eighth session of the Fifth Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the CPC which has just ended, the buzzword “Internet +” is first written in the communique in this information age. “Internet +” strategy is to combine the Internet and all works of life in the traditional industry together through the use of Internet platform, information and communication technology to create a new ecology in the new field. In recent years, with the rapid development and wide application of the Internet, the Internet has enriched the content of socialist democratic consultation with its freedom, equality and inclusiveness and modern democratic consultation.

**Key words:** Internet; Socialist democracy; Citizen

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### INTRODUCTION

In our country, along with the rapid development of network society in China, the network has become a new model for democratic operation. Its huge striking force and strong impact has been beyond imagination, which deeply influence social media and Party committees, relative government decision-making and changes people’s lifestyles, thinking modes and concept models.

### 1. THE CONNOTATION AND PRACTICE OF THE NETWORK DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Democracy has been a heated topic in the political field around the world for a long period of time. Deliberative democracy means that on the basis of equality, social public will look at all strategic suggestions with their own personal preference and public interest, but based on reason. It points out in Eighteenth National Congress of CPC:

The socialist deliberative democracy is an important form of people’s democracy in our country, we should perfect the deliberative democracy system and working mechanism, and promote the development of broad, multi-layered and systematic development of deliberative democracy.

It fully demonstrates the Chinese Communist Party’s recognition of the development of deliberative democracy.

The earliest network democracy incident may date back to “the Sun Zhigang Event” in 2003. After that, with the increasing popularity of the Internet and the increasing number of Internet users, network democracy events also showed a rising trend, the characteristics of its political participation are becoming more and more obvious. In 2007, the three network events, “The Photo-taking of South China Tiger Event”, “Shanxi Coal Mines Event”, and “the Steadiest Cattle Nail Household” involve not only wide participation, long duration, but also profound problems. By 2008, network democracy has entered a period of acceleration. At the beginning of the year, Wang Yang, Party Secretary of Guangdong Province and Huang Huahua, Governor of Guangdong Province, give users a letter of greeting, lighting the heated topic of “participation of netizens in politics”. Later on, politicians around the world have turned to netizens for “political advice”, inviting netizens to “give suggestions”, and “make decisions” and accepted the supervision of Internet users. And in June 20th, our National Chairman Hu Jintao exchanges ideas with netizens in “People’s

Net”, which erupted the enthusiasm of Internet users. In the second half of 2008, the enthusiasm of Internet users developed from the “participation in politics” to “network supervision”. Netizens’ eyes stare at “corrupted officials”. Once pushed onto the Internet, some incidents which normally would not be noticed came out as evidence that is difficult to cover up by those who were at the scene.

In 2009, a survey done by *People’s Daily* and people.com shows that 87.9% of Internet users were very concerned about the network supervision, and 99.3% Internet users choose the network exposure in the face of a bad social phenomenon. According to the latest statistics, the number of Internet users in China reached 338,000,000, broadband Internet users reached 320,000,000, and mobile Internet users reached 155,000,000, of which 56% of Internet users often made comments on the internet. Data shows that Internet users have become a force which can not be ignored in today’s society, and it can even be said that “the class of Internet users” are gradually formed.

The political orientation and value orientation of the 338,000,000 people is related to the image of the Party Committee and the party’s ruling position, the construction of socialist core value system in the main position of the Internet, the harmonious stability of the society and the country’s long-term stability. On February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the Central Committee of the CPC issued the “opinions on Strengthening the Construction of Socialist Deliberative Democracy”, which pointed out that “to play the advantages of each channel, to do a good job in convergence and cooperation, and constantly improve and perfect the socialist deliberative democratic system. All kinds of consultation should be based on their own characteristics and the actual needs so as to determine the reasonable content and manner of consultation”. And the government and people communicate and discuss specific issues in the network field through various ways, thus facilitating the formation of government decision-making, which is undoubtedly an important practice of deliberative democracy.

## 2. THE LIMITATIONS OF NETWORK DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Deliberative democracy is a form of democratic governance with great potential, and it can effectively respond to some of the core issues of intercultural dialogue and multicultural social cognition. It particularly emphasized the responsibility for public interest, the mutual understanding of political discourse, the identification of all political wills, and the collective binding policy that support the needs and interests of all.

(a) The gap between the digital divide, which makes the network deliberative democracy not a universal participation.

“Digital divide” refers to the differences between different regions, groups or individuals, in the master, possession, control and use of information, which is reflected in the gap of construction of network hardware facilities, network information literacy, age and gender. By the end of December, 2013, the Internet penetration rate of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong and other provinces was more than 65%, while that of Jiangxi, Yunnan, Guizhou and other provinces was less than 33%, the gap between regions was still obvious; City Internet users accounted for 71.4%, while of rural Internet users accounted for 28.6%, which still meant a big gap. Internet users with the income of 1,500-8,000 yuan accounted for more than half of the total Internet users, accounting for 57.1%, which meant that income and Internet use rate were positively related. In China, the sex ratio of Internet users in China is 56:44. In the use of Internet, gender differences were significant. Although instant messaging and blog use showed a steady growth, but the use of the forum, BBS and micro-blog showed negative growth, decreasing 19.3 percent points and 9 percent points, accounting for only 19.5% and 45.5%. From this data, it is not difficult to see that the majority of people who participated in deliberative democracy were young men living in the city. It was because of the existence of the digital divide, the network deliberative democracy would be excluded from the so-called vulnerable groups, the inequality of participation in this part of the people’s interests were nowhere to be declared, so the results of the consultations did not reach the real consensus

(b) Lack of laws and regulations and the corresponding guarantee mechanism, making the network of democratic consultation ineffective and merely formal

The orderly development of the network deliberative democracy depends on the government’s active guidance, the equality of the free network environment, and the participants’ spontaneity. The current network negotiation is different from the previous news media reports in that the initiative is more in the hands of the participants, namely the hands of citizens. In reality, because the network consultation is an emerging thing, related laws and regulations is not perfect, which leads to the proliferation of false information on the Internet, participants often can not distinguish between true and false effectively. An opinion which has been strengthened through the action of the group gains the following of those participants who can not accurately identify its truth. Ultimately, they come to extreme views, posing an irrational danger for deliberative democracy. The development of deliberative democracy can not be separated from the corresponding system security. Cohen Joshua, a famous American scholar, said: “to achieve the responsibility and ability in the negotiation decision is not something we can obtain only if we are independent of the right strategy and order. The system itself must provide the framework for the formation of the will; they decide whether there is equality, whether it is free and rational, and whether it is autonomous, etc..

No system arrangement, or no perfect system, is not conducive to the development of deliberative democracy. The development of deliberative democracy in China is also the same. Therefore, to promote the construction and improvement of the relevant consultation system, it becomes the inherent requirement of China's deliberative democracy development. In the network society, the full political and civil network interaction plays an active role in the improvement and the formation of the relevant deliberative democracy system.

At the same time, due to the lack of the corresponding guarantee mechanism, and the virtual nature of the network, which is different from the reality of political participation, the network deliberative democracy is easy to become a mere formality, especially in China's grassroots deliberative democracy. The government promotes the network consultation in accordance with established procedures, all the negotiations just follow a certain process, the results announced on the government website have no influence on the actual process, resulting in the waste of human and material resources.

(c) The government controls the information on the Internet, squeezing the free space of the network deliberative democracy to a certain extent.

The government grasps the right to publish information, which leads to the public information asymmetry of deliberative democracy. Citizens need to obtain a large number of relevant information from the internet to participate in network consultation. Public information widely released by the government is likely to become the means that the government uses to implement the established political line and public policy, and a tool for the government to instill established political ideas and political value. Different political systems have great differences in the use and requirements of information technology, and some political systems are seeking to promote the orderly and healthy development of the democratic political system. That is to say, in the practice of network consultation, the information participants get reflects the government's subjectivity and arbitrariness, and the information asymmetry between the government and netizens, which influences the citizens' ability in political consultation, reduces the enthusiasm of citizens' participation in politics, decrease the deliberative democracy exchange and debate effect, and makes the netizens in a passive position in the consultation process. In the specific cultural, political and ideological domination, for their own special interests, those who release the information will provide some real and effective information, and also mix with some invalid information, even the phenomenon of network political fraud. Some political forces are trying to confuse the public, influence public opinion, and guide public or public opinion to support their own interests

In the practice of the network deliberative democracy, the government has been in a dominant position, not only mastering the information dissemination, but also

controlling the dissemination of information. In order to avoid risks, the government chose to control the network terminal. Participants can only carry on discussion on topics within the range allowed by the government, and will be restricted and even held legal responsibility once out of bounds. In this case, participants often cannot express freely their true points of view of their own interests or are forced to distort their views, the freedom and equality essence of deliberative democracy has been virtually decreased.

### **3. TO IMPROVE THE NETWORK DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY MEASURES**

#### **3.1 Eliminate the Digital Divide, Improving the Quality and Enthusiasm of the Participants**

To eliminate digital divide and to improve the quality of the participants promotes each other. Vigorously develop education and training institutions, increase the investment of human capital, popularize network knowledge, and constantly improve the level of education, further promote social justice, narrow the gap between the rich and the poor, strengthen the construction of network infrastructure in remote and rural areas, adopt preferential policies in the less developed regions, popularize computers and the Internet, improve the absorption and application information of the poor and disadvantaged, and ultimately achieve "universal access" to form the essence of network of public participation.

Improve the quality of the participants, popularize civic moral education of the network users, carry out a wide range of network ethics and moral education in the society, so that citizens are aware of the need to improve their moral standards responsible for their behaviors. To enhance the citizen's sense of ownership through activities, and strengthen the political enthusiasm and initiative. God is a belief and commitment to of the citizens to "public". To cultivate the spirit of citizenship, which means the concern, love and respect of citizens to the "public", the responsibility and obligation to "public, and "the high public morality and quality". Deliberative democracy is not the aggregation of voter preference, but the conversion of the main body's preference. In the process of participating in the consultation, the citizens can achieve the common understanding and support of the public interests through the mutual understanding of the political discourse and the full exchange of the political will. Through the full participation of citizens in consultation, they can determine whether their own point of view is right or not, and change their views in the discussion or to convince others. Therefore, for Internet users to participate in deliberative democracy, they should learn to uphold the public spirit, hold the consciousness to actively devote to and participate in and assume the responsibility for interests, and support the spirit to actively stand for, appeal to and give suggestions for public utilities, public interest and

public policy of network consultation spirit, and to take the public interest as a standard of value speculative public policy issues, and put forward their views and suggestions.

### 3.2 To Improve the Relative Measures and Legal Safeguard

“The rule of law can institutionalize and legalize democracy and create a controllable and stable operation and development space for it and lead the democracy which is easily prone to passionate characteristics to a rational track so as to escort the health development of democracy” (Liu Ningjun). The existing legal system on network security needs to be further modified and improved. Strengthen network supervision, and increase law enforcement efforts. Resolutely crack down on the dissemination of immoral information on the Internet, curb the spread of rumors in time so as to create a clean living space for the network deliberative democracy. Strengthen network supervision and strengthen law enforcement efforts. To create a network monitoring team network of regular inspection and occasional spot checks; regulation by law do not abide by the law of the social forum and undocumented illegal forum, resolutely investigate and deal with the spread of malicious bad information website; severely crack down on network rumor, network deception, network infringement, Internet crime and other violations, and resolutely crack down on illegal and criminal acts of abuse retaliation network of informers. To strengthen the network of justice, fight against Internet crime; to improve the democratic quality of the staff of the judicial department, strengthen the legal literacy of judges at all levels, investigate and deal with illegal acts of corruption and bribery in the judicial departments, improve the credibility of the judicial system, establish a judicial review system, and effectively balance the network democracy.

### 3.3 To Strengthen the Construction of Digital Politics, Building Up the Communication Channel Between the Government and Citizens

Information is not only the basis of citizens' political participation and expression, but also an important source of the right to consult. In our country, the construction of e-government has already started in many areas, which can make the ordinary people participate in the discussion of public issues through the government website easily, and improve the transparency of the government, the government and citizens thus can build up a bridge, effectively promoting the public of government decision-making. Only government release information timely and objectively, can the hearsay annihilate by itself. And they will not undermine in event of major emergencies but to publish the relative information for the first time, fully protect the citizens' right of knowing, and avoid network rumors.

Firstly, it is the normalization of the communication between the officials and the people. Starting with the current political system, the creation of a leader mailbox, online forums, microblogging, micro channel public number and other network interactive software, the

building of a public communication platform will be needed to achieve the official and the public interaction. Secondly, it is consultation hearing of major livelihood issues online. For major public interests or the interests of masses, the network consultation hearing will be resorted to fully listen to the views of the masses. Thirdly, it is to invite netizen representatives to attend relevant meetings. Netizen representatives are grassroots leaders for the network consultation, who can transfer interests of Internet users, and represent voice of Internet users. Fourthly, it is to guide the rational discussion of Internet users. To timely track discussions on public forums, encourage participants to speak freely, and guide users to mutual respect and tolerance, to avoid the occurrence of collective irrational phenomenon. Fifthly, it is to interactive with the news media. To open up the network column in the TV, newspapers and other traditional media, release public response to the hot and difficult issues of Internet users to respond to the organization to implement follow-ups of network consultation. Sixthly, it is to pay attention to the supervision of network complaints. To attach great importance to the demands of Internet users, timely respond to, address and reflect the interests of more centralized issues of coordination and protection of rights and interests, especially the deeper level or a larger range of issues of social management, economic development, security and stability, and to communicate well with the relevant functional departments, and then set a deadline on solving the issues.

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## CONCLUSION

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With the development of Internet and consciousness improvement of citizen participation in politics, the joint efforts of the government and the people to use Internet technology to promote the government's ability to govern are needed in order to ensure more and more citizens to participate in the network of the deliberative democracy. The society is developing and the time is changing, democracy also shows the quality of catching up with the times. Although, Network deliberative democracy can not completely replace other democracy, especially the representative democracy, but as a form of democracy, the theory commitment of network deliberative democracy will undoubtedly have great significance to the development of democratic politics.

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