ORIGINAL PAPER

Alienation of Civic Engagement in China? Case Studies on Social Governance in Hangzhou

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Abstract   This article tries to map the state of civic engagement in social governance at local level in China. Using case studies in Hangzhou, we find that civic engagement in China has not increased responsiveness to citizens' appeals as predicted in democracy theories. In contrast, civic engagement degrades to a powerful tool for the government to rule the people, which we call the "alienation of civic engagement." Institutional Isomorphism theory is evoked to explain this phenomenon. Based on the strength of regime stability and responsiveness to citizens' appeals, civic engagement is categorized into four types: ceremonial civic engagement, substantial civic engagement, absorptive civic engagement, and propagandistic civic engagement. We show the discourses, participation behaviors, and participation outcomes of each type of civic engagement. We also demonstrate how the authoritarian government developed strategies for each type of civic engagement.

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Résumé   Cet article essaie de dresser la cartographie de l'état de l'engagement civique en matière de gouvernance sociale au niveau local en Chine. À l'aide d'études de cas à Hangzhou, nous constatons que l'engagement civique en Chine n'a pas augmenté la réactivité aux appels des citoyens comme prédit dans les théories de la démocratie. En revanche, l'engagement civique se dégrade en un outil puissant permettant au gouvernement de gouverner le peuple, que nous appelons l' « aliénation de l'engagement civique » . La théorie de l'isomorphisme institutionnel est évoquée pour expliquer ce phénomène. Basé sur la force de la stabilité du régime et la réactivité aux appels des citoyens, l'engagement civique est classé selon quatre types : engagement civique cérémonial, l'engagement civique de grande ampleur, l'engagement civique d'absorption et l'engagement civique de propagande. Nous montrons les discours, les comportements de participation et les résultats de la participation de chaque type d'engagement civique. Nous montrons aussi comment le gouvernement autoritaire a mis au point des stratégies pour chaque type d'engagement civique.

Zusammenfassung   Dieser Beitrag versucht, den Zustand des Bürgerengagements in der sozialen Steuerung auf lokaler Ebene in China darzustellen. Anhand von Fallstudien in Hangzhou stellen wir fest, dass das Bürgerengagement in China die Reaktion auf die Bitten der Bürger nicht verbessert hat, wie es in Demokratie-theorien prognostiziert wird. Im Gegenteil, das Bürgerengagement entartet zu einem mächtigen Instrument für die Regierung, um das Volk zu beherrschen, was als „Verfremdung des Bürgerengagements"bezeichnet wird. Man bedient sich der Theorie zum institutionellen Isomorphismus, um dieses Phänomen zu erklären. Beruhend auf dem Ausmaß der Regimestabilität und der Reaktion auf die Bitten der Bürger wird das Bürgerengagement in vier Arten unterteilt: förmliches Bürgeren-gagement, substanzielles Bürgerengagement, absorbierendes Bürgerengagement und propagandistisches Bürgerengament. Wir zeigen die Diskurse, das Partizipati-onsverhalten und die Folgen einer Partizipation für jede Art des Bürgerengage-ments. Wir demonstrieren des Weiteren, wie die autoritäre Regierung Strategien für jede Art des Bürgerengagements entwickelt hat.

Resumen   El presente artículo trata de cartografiar el estado del compromiso cívico en la gobernanza social a nivel local en China. Utilizando estudios de casos en Hangzhou, encontramos que el compromiso cívico en China no ha incrementado la reactividad a los llamamientos de los ciudadanos como se predecía en las teorías sobre la democracia. Por el contrario, el compromiso cívico se degrada con-virtiéndose en una poderosa herramienta para que el gobierno rija a las personas, lo que llamamos la "alienación del compromiso cívico". Se recurre a la teoría del isomorfismo institucional para explicar este fenómeno. Basándonos en la fortaleza de la estabilidad del régimen y la reactividad a los llamamientos de los ciudadanos, el compromiso cívico se desglosa en cuatro tipos de categorías: compromiso cívico ceremonial, compromiso cívico sustancial, compromiso cívico absorbente y com-promiso cívico propagandístico. Mostramos los discursos, los comportamientos de participación y los resultados de la participación de cada tipo de compromiso cívico.

También demostramos cómo el gobierno autoritario desarrolló estrategias para cada tipo de compromiso cívico.

Keywords   Civic engagement · Alienation · Social governance · Institutional isomorphism · China

Civic Engagement and Social Governance in China

The "reform and opening up" policy since 1978 in China has not only accelerated economic development, but has also transformed the State–Society relationship. China, as a totalitarian state in the Mao era, is not on a path toward civil society, rather, it is heading toward a "state-led civil society" (Frolic 1997) or an "administrative absorption of society" (Kang and Han 2007, 2008). Such transformation means that the state governance cannot solely reply on coercion from an authoritarian regime, but also on decentralization, autonomy, and consultation. In 2007, the Chinese central government began to promote innovations of "social management"[1] from top to bottom and employed a new guiding framework for innovations of social management. The framework is composed by "Party committee leadership, Government responsibility, Non-governmental support, and Public participation" (Hu 2007). The framework particularly emphasizes civic engagement, which, in official documents, means to "mobilize and organize the people to participate in social management and public service according to the law rationally and orderly to achieve self-management, self-service, and self-development of the people" (Zhou 2011).[2] According to Zhang et al. (2012), civic engagement was found in more than 60 % of the 117 cases of social management innovations at local level. Thus, civic engagement became an expanding and irreversible social fact covering different aspects of people's daily life and political decision-making process in state governance.

There is a tendency to romanticize civic engagement in western theories. Civic engagement, considered as an expression of "direct democracy"(Tolbert et al. 2003), not only benefits representative democracy premised on the rule of law and citizen rights, but also enhances responsiveness of government (Pateman 1970; Bessette 1980; Barber 2003). However, civic engagement is not as perfect as imagined, especially because it may raise uncertainty for both political stability and institutional performance in a non-democratic country. While accepting the necessity to satisfy the expanding demand for civic engagement in order to

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[1] For the Chinese government, "Social management" (She Hui Guan Li) is used since 1998 as one of functions of the government. "Social governance" (She Hui Zhi Li) is a new concept that was developed by Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2013 to replace "social management." In China, "social management" and "social governance" are exchangeable sometimes. In this paper, we use the original terms employed by the government at certain period of time.

[2] Zhou Yongkang was China's ex-security chief. He was one of seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee and the Secretary of the Political and Legislative Affairs Committee of the CPC Central Committee from 2007 to 2012. He demonstrated the CPC Central Committee's options of the innovations of social governance at May 2011 in Qiushi Journal. Qiushi is considered to be the official mouthpiece of the CPC Central Committee.

maintain political stability, Huntington (1964) also identifies the innovation ability of policy and the absorption ability of society as two key elements of political institutionalization. Putnam et al. (1994) and Putnam (2000) suggest that different categories of civic engagement will impose different influence on institutional performance. In their analysis, horizontal associations, such as choirs, football teams, bird-watching clubs, and rotary clubs, are more likely to improve institutional performance by bringing equal relationships and trust. In contrast, vertical associations—within which people are tied in an unbalanced power system—will bring negative effects on institutional performance. Given different conditions of government behavior and social organizations, civic participation still needs to be careful inspected.

In China, research about civic engagement is just at the very beginning. Most of the studies are intended to introduce theories rather than to do indigenous empirical work. On the one hand, some studies concentrate on topics with rich political contexts, including institutions of People's Congress (Almén 2012), Public Finance & Budgeting (He 2011), struggle for civil rights, and environmental protection movement (Tang and Zhan 2008; Xie 2011). These studies pay relatively less attention to social governance which is closely related to people's daily life. On the other hand, using democratization theory from a socio-centrism perspective, most of the research finds that autonomy and consultation gradually become governing instruments in China. This kind of autonomy and consultation is summarized as Consultative Leninism (Tsang 2009), Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0 (Mertha 2009), Authoritarian Deliberation (He and Thøgersen 2010; He and Warren 2011), or Consultative Authoritarianism (Harding 1987; He and Thøgersen 2010; Fewsmith 2013; Hildebrandt 2013). These studies began to keep a watchful eye on governments' behavior but failed to explain the mechanism and the process of government's behavior in authoritarian states, which is just like the parable of the blind men and the elephant or a wild profusion of new labels (Baum and Shevchenko 1999).

Authoritarian states always put civic engagement in a structural paradox: It is hard to achieve the dual goals—improving policy performance by expanding civic engagement and reinforcing the state's governance by maintaining political stability—at the same time. However, it is interesting that when promoting civic engagement, the Chinese government not only avoids political turbulence but also consolidates its authority (Teets 2013). We call this phenomenon "alienation of civic engagement," referring to the case that civic engagement is not able to improve the responsiveness of the government to citizens' appeals, rather, it is degraded into a tool for government to rule the people. In this paper, we will try to understand the process of alienation of civic engagement by exploring two questions: (1) What categories of civic engagement institution are designed by the Chinese government, and (2) What factors are considered by the Chinese government in the institutionalization of civic engagement?

The Logic of Alienation of Civic Engagement in Social Governance

"New institutionalism" is evoked as theoretical foundation for our analysis of civic engagement in China's social governance. Specifically, we use Institutional Isomorphism to analyze the phenomenon of decoupling between the institution design and institution operation of civic engagement in China.

Institutional Isomorphism

From the perspective of new institutionalism, environments that organizations incorporate are not only economic-technological elements such as market and technology, but more importantly the legitimacy dimension (Deephouse 1996). In modern society, rationalized institutional structures have become a myth, accompanied with corresponding ceremonies permeating in the environment (Meyer and Rowan 1977). The myth and ceremony of such rationalization intertwine, which constitutes isomorphic external pressures on all formal organizations. Such pressures generate isomorphic change on the structures of organizations. Whatever the daily organizational behavior is, all organizations have to transform their structures to internalize the requirement of legitimacy, and to form isomorphs with the institutional environment. This trend of institutional isomorphic change of formal organizations occurs in the whole society, which is called Institutional Isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Coercion, mimicry (or imitation), norm, and market signals have been widely documented in the theory of Institutional Isomorphism (Haveman 1993; Haunschild and Miner 1997; Mizruchi and Fein 1999; Lee and Pennings 2002).[3] For example, organizations can be reshaped by following targeted organizations when the environment is full of uncertainty. Organizations can also learn and use existing solutions with less cost when the causes and solutions are unclear.

Institutional Isomorphism formed by either coercion or mimicry makes an obvious paradox that organizational structure deviates from organizational behavior. On the one hand, in order to gain and verify their legitimacy, organizations have to establish ceremonies that are necessary for rational institutional myths (Ashworth et al. 2009). Those ceremonies, however, are not relevant to organizations' performance. On the other hand, organizations have to perform their daily routines and to improve their performance. These daily routines and performance, however, are not connected with the rational institutional myths (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Organizational structure and organizational behavior are not always mismatched. Orru et al. (1991) find that vulnerable organizations are more sensitive to the pressure brought by culture, politics, and norms within their environments. These vulnerable organizations are likely to achieve both institutional legitimacy and

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[3] Scott (1995) indicates that there are three pillars of institutions: regulative, normative, and cognitive. Mechanisms of the regulative pillar are coercive; mechanisms of the normative pillar are normative; mechanisms of the cognitive pillar are mimetic. The basis of legitimacy of regulative pillar is legally sanctioned; basis of legitimacy of normative pillar are morally governed; basis of legitimacy of cognitive pillar are culturally supported and conceptually correct.

organizational performance simultaneously. This suggests that institutional legitimacy and organizational performance should be considered together in a unified theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

In China, civic engagement is one of the measures taken by the Chinese government to consolidate its ruling status in the post-totalitarian state era. The Chinese government realized the fundamental change in concurrent social structure and institutional environment as the market economy developed. In a speech by Zhou (2011), he said: "People's consciousness of fairness, democracy, rights, law, and supervision is continuously increasing. The demand of sharing the achievement of reform and development is also progressing rapidly…To consolidate the leadership position of the Communist Party of China…we…should strengthen and make fundamental innovations in social management." These words indicate that there are dual goals considered by the Chinese government when taking civic engagement as an innovative choice for social management: consolidating the stability of the regime and enhancing responsiveness to citizens' appeals. When the former is considered as the ultimate goal by the Chinese government, the two goals might be either consistent or conflicting with each other.

Institutional Isomorphism considers civic engagement as a rationalization myth that can increase government's responsiveness to citizen's appeals by involving citizens into policy process. So, civic engagement is regarded as "direct democracy" or "the rule by the people" that can be attributed to "institutional legitimacy" requirement (Grillo et al. 2010). However, from an organizational performance perspective, the government cares more about the stability and validity of its ruling power, which are identified as the innovation ability of policy and absorption ability of society by Huntington (1964). It is necessary for the government to avoid the challenge created by civic engagement. Thus, according to Institutional Isomorphism theory, civic engagement is a strategic tool for the Chinese government to pursue its own interests by generating division between institutional discourse and institutional practice. In this case, civic engagement will become a governing tool rather than increase responsiveness to citizens' appeals. Civic engagement will eventually be alienated.

The government's response to civic engagement depends on the interaction between the effects of civic engagement on government's *institutional legitimacy* and *organization performance*. Institutional legitimacy is achieved when the institution conforms to legal rules, social norms, and psychological expectations in a specific society (Scott 1995; Suchman 1995). Civic engagement encourages governments to respond to citizens' appeals and therefore creates a different institutional legitimacy of the government based on different types of civic engagement. Organizational performance of the authoritarian government is shown by the stability of political power, which means the current government can hold power and implement its policies effectively. The pursuit of political stability forces the Chinese government to minimum petitions, mass incidents, and group events

when promoting civic engagement in social governance. So responsiveness to citizen appeals and political stability are the two key targets when the government is dealing with civic engagement in social governance. The government pushes forward civic engagement in their discourse system, while in reality, it tries to eliminate the negative effects of civic engagement on political satiability and assimilate civic engagement.

To understand different types of civic engagement, we refer to a "participation ladder" drawn from Arnstein (1969), which is one of the best known participation typologies. According to the power to affect the outcome, Arnstein constructed an eight-rung ladder with citizen control at the top and manipulation at the bottom. Three categories including eight levels of participation are in the ladder. At the bottom of the ladder is the category of non-participation, including manipulation and therapy. This category reflects the imposition of power holders' ideology on common people by educating and curing people rather than genuinely involving them in decision making. In the middle of the ladder is the category of tokenism with three sub-levels including informing, consultation and placation. In this area, citizens, especially the disadvantaged, could make their own voices heard through participation, but those holding power would not in reality adopt their suggestions. At the top of the ladder is the category of citizen power, including partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. At these levels of participation, citizens could either negotiate with power holders or have decision-making seats to play a genuine role in affecting the outcome.

Based on two factors influencing the government's strategy selection, namely, the institutional legitimacy and organization performance, and referring to citizen control as a dimension of categorizing participation form (Arnstein 1969), we develop four different types of civic engagement in China. This typology is also constructed from empirical studies which we will illustrate later. Different
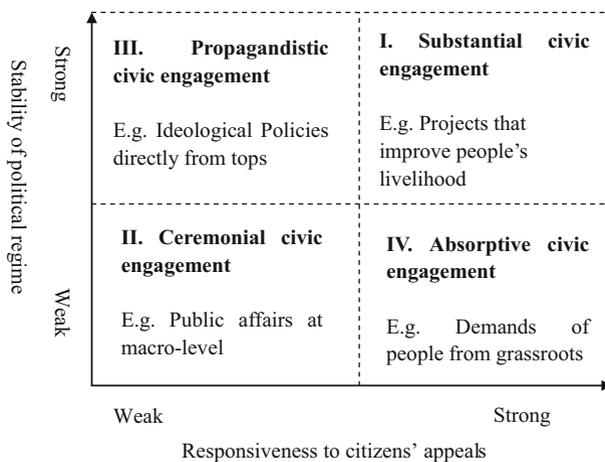
Fig. 1 Political stability, government responsiveness, and typology of civic engagement

interaction models between institutional legitimacy and organization performance are shown in Fig. 1 (p. 7).

> *Type I: Substantial civic engagement* The government will promote substantial civic engagement when civic engagement could both consolidate the stability of the political regime and improve responsiveness of the government. This is a win–win strategy. It also corresponds with the findings of Orru et al. (1991) that civic engagement could have consistent positive effects on both institutional legitimacy and organizational performance of the government.
> *Type II: Ceremonial civic engagement* Ceremonial civic engagement will be selected when government realizes that civic engagement could neither consolidate the stability of the political regime nor enhance its responsiveness. Pressure from legitimacy requirements is relatively weak for the government. Civic engagement is no more than meeting procedural requirements.
> *Type III: Propagandistic civic engagement* Propagandistic civic engagement will be employed when government thinks that civic engagement will consolidate political regime stability but cannot improve responsiveness to citizens' appeals. In this circumstance, government will separate institutional practice from institutional discourse of civic engagement. Meanwhile, the government will try its best to obtain support from citizens by education and persuasion.
> *Type IV: Absorptive civic engagement* The government will adopt the strategy of absorptive civic engagement if civic engagement can only boost responsiveness to citizen appeals. In this situation, the government is unable to neglect

Table 1 Indicators to describe civic engagement

First-level indicator	Second-level indicator	Explanation of indicators
A. Discourse	A1. Discourse of government	How does the government interpret the meaning of civic engagement in its official expressions?
	A2. Discourse of citizens	How do citizens evaluate civic engagement?
B. Participation behavior	B1. Participation scope	Which areas of public affairs will citizens participate in? What is the procedure arrangement of civic engagement?
	B2. Participation subjects	Who can participate and what are the characteristics of those participants?
	B3. Participation channels	Through which channels can citizens voice their wills and who are the initial founders of those channels?
	B4. Power distribution	Can citizens be involved in decision making on issues related with actual interest distribution, such as how to share information, how to make policies, and how to implement policies?
C. Participation outcome	C1. Stability of the regime	Does civic engagement challenge political regime?
	C2. Degree of responsiveness to citizens' appeals	Can civic engagement make the government respond to citizens' appeals and increase satisfaction of citizens?

legitimacy requirements in the institutional environment. In order to prevent the political regime from being weakened, the government has no choice but to absorb civic engagement.

Indicators of Civic Engagement

To justify our theoretical framework, we have designed a set of indicators of civic engagement.

New Institutionalism tends to probe into the detailed process of civic engagement. Rational choice institutionalism pays attention to participation outcomes, like questions about which group of citizens could participate and what citizens could gain from participation (Fiorina 1999). Historical institutionalism is concerned more with participation behavior such as channels for participation and power distribution pattern in participation process (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999). Institutional Isomorphism focuses on division between discourse and practice of participation. It regards discourse and ceremony as the reflection of institutional environment. With an integrated perspective of all those theories, our design of indicators of civic engagement includes three dimensions (first-level indicators): discourse, participation behavior, and participation outcome. Table 1 (p. 9) shows the detailed indicators.

Discourse is a ceremonial expression of legitimacy constraint in the institutional environment. It contains two sub-indicators: the discourse of the government which focuses on interpretation of the meaning of civic engagement in official expressions, and the discourse of citizens which represents citizens' evaluation of civic engagement.

Participation behavior embodies the institutional practice of civic engagement, especially institutional exclusion designed by government. Sub-indicators include participation scope, participation subjects, participation channels, and distribution of decision-making power. Participation scope is used to identify areas of civic engagement, such as urban planning, public service design, and government performance evaluation. It also examines the procedural stages such as decision making, implementation, and supervision. Participation subjects are used to investigate characteristics of the participants such as their social class status (elites or general masses) and whether they are stakeholders. Participation channels are employed to identify established linkage for citizens to voice their appeals, such as platforms operated by government, government organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs), and non-government organizations (NGOs). The indicator of power distribution is of great importance, reflecting citizens' strength of influence directly. Here we divide this indicator into four sub-indicators: the right to know, the right to participate, the right to decide, and the right to supervise.

Participation outcome concentrates on the effects of civic engagement in state governance, rather than the outcomes of certain public affairs in which citizens participate. Two dimensions are contained in this indicator: stability of the regime and degree of responsiveness to citizens' appeals.

Research Method and Case Selection

This research is a qualitative case study. In China, civic engagement in community-level social management is government-oriented and taken as an innovation. Since research on civic engagement in China is at the very beginning stage, the priority is to probe its context, goals, strategies, and outcomes. Thus, it is more suitable to employ a "case study" approach to grasp a relatively whole picture of civic engagement and the logic behind civic engagement.

The cases used in this paper are from community-level social management practice in the city of Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. Located in eastern China, Hangzhou is developed economically but relatively under-developed in civil society. For Hangzhou government, it is more possible to improve government performance in the social domain but less possible to improve the economy to a higher level. This results in sufficient drive for the Hangzhou government to pursue governance innovation. From this point of view, Hangzhou is typical in terms of China's governance demand for innovation.

In practice, Hangzhou is an excellent place to study civic engagement in China. Since 2000, community-level social management practice has lasted over 10 years in Hangzhou, showing a high level of consistency and systematicness. It has experienced three strategic stages including "Social Composite Subject Construction" (Providing participation platform), "Democracy Facilitating People's Livelihood" (Boosting civic engagement), and "Construction of Our life" (Cultivating participation sense). Civic engagement is throughout the whole process. The Hangzhou practice has been granted "Award of Innovation in Local Governance" by Publicity Department of the Central Committee of Communist Party of China. It is valued as the most suitable approach for other local governments to learn from in the future (Kang and Xu 2013).

From 2012 to 2014, we performed a systematic investigation on the institutionalization of civic engagement in Hangzhou. We got a list of cases from Hangzhou government. We selected nine cases in terms of representativeness and outcomes: three from "Social Composite Subject Construction," three from "Democracy Facilitating People's Livelihood," and three from "Construction of Our Life." Data collecting methods include semi-structured depth interview, observation, and documentary review. Informants include both government officials and citizen participants.

In this paper, we used four typical cases: one from "Social Composite Subject Construction," which is about urban renewal; one from "Democracy Facilitating People's Livelihood," which is about building people's livelihood; and two from "Construction of Our life," which are about appeal expression and consensus building. These four cases cover different areas and stages of civic engagement in Hangzhou.

Research Findings from Typological Analysis

Theoretical analysis suggests that government may take advantage of civic engagement strategically. Here we will establish our typological analysis according to the outcome of government behavior (institution practice). By doing that, we aim to display a ladder of civic engagement in China and to illustrate both discourse and government behaviors behind each type of civic engagement.

Type I: Substantial Civic Engagement—"The Courtyard Improvement Project" 2007–2010

In 2007, the municipal government began "The Courtyard Improvement Project" (CIP) including old community renewal and dilapidated building repair. Some citizens regarded this as "popularity winning projects at home." Hangzhou government planned to renew 745 courtyards and 3365 buildings, and expected 555,000 people would be benefited within 3 years. The government established a special office for CIP and encouraged local citizens to establish their own platforms for CIP. Local citizens participated in CIP actively because they considered CIP as their own businesses. CIP was actually the implementation of government's "democracy facilitating livelihood" policy. The satisfaction rate of the project was up to 95 % (Hangzhou Development Research Centre 2010b).

Livelihood building in an authoritarian country is usually highly valued by both the government and citizens. On one hand, the government can obtain support from the masses and gain regime legitimacy via performance improvement. Hangzhou government emphasized that the government should "solve livelihood issues, pay attention to the way of democracy, respect public options and be people-oriented"(Hangzhou Development Research Centre 2010b). Here "The way of democracy" is just "civic engagement." On the other hand, CIP is so closely attached with citizens' core interest that citizens have sufficient motivations about its operation. CIP is just like citizens' private issues. People have their own rights to express their opinions. They would chose petitions, assemblies, processions, demonstrations, and other channels to "beg for a statement from the government" if they are not satisfied, which is the last thing that the government wish to see. In such circumstances, civic engagement not only benefits the citizens but also consolidates regime stability, for which the government will maintain consistency between the discourse and the practice of civic engagement. This is not new in studies of civil society in China. For example, Hildebrandt (2013) shows that the development of NGOs in China has strengthened the authoritarian state rather than weakened it.

When the CIP was first implemented without civic engagement, community-level cadres in Hangzhou encountered intractable problems: "the government offered to serve the people but why are they always unsatisfied eventually?" The government had required each community to establish a dining hall for the elderly. In the Youth Road Community of Hangzhou, local cadres first cooperated with a privately operated restaurant as they thought this restaurant could provide sufficient varieties of dishes and qualified dinning environment. However, the elderly in the community

did not consider it to be a good deal. There were too many customers and most of them were young people who desired very different food flavor from the elderly. Learning from this lesson, another community called Yuewang Community decided to turn over this issue to the community-level office for CIP. The office organized the elderly and other active residents to look for dining hall sites and investigate the price, flavor, and environment of other restaurants in the community. Finally, they made a decision to cooperate with an elderly home nearby. They also determined the price, business scope, and supervision model of the dining hall by public hearings. The new dining hall won high evaluations from local residents. CIP involved vital interests of the common people with tangled and complicated problems. To avoid the phenomenon of "good intentions but bad results," the government should hand difficult problems to citizens, letting citizens to discuss, to study, to negotiate and to get solutions.

The government tried to insist on "four askings" in civic engagement (The CPC Hangzhou Committee and Hangzhou Municipal Government 2009). The first was asking citizens whether to renew certain courtyards or not. Before initiating a project, the government would conduct a survey of all residents in the courtyard. Only if residents agreeing renewal accounted for a share of 2/3 of the total residents, that courtyard could be put into the project list. Three mechanisms were used to ensure civic engagement and democratic decision making: full-coverage survey, mass agreement on renewal scheme, and voting to solve opinion division within residents. The second "asking" is about "people's real need" on "what to renovate." A community notice board, hotline, and needs survey forms were used to display project lists for citizens to make a final decision. For each courtyard, opinions from local residents were heard. The third "asking" was "how to renovate." The government set an announcement board at the entrance of each courtyard with contacts of project managers and concrete renewal schemes on it. Citizens could express their suggestions in time via these channels. The fourth "asking" was about "evaluation of the projects." Resident representatives were invited to take part in the acceptance testing conference, giving comments on project quality and even requesting certain parties to make rectifications within a time limit.

CIP shows that substantial civic engagement within livelihood building areas helped to establish a cooperative relationship between the government and citizens. The government shared power with communities by helping communities to form grass-roots participation networks, to generate representatives through community recommendation, and individual self-nomination. Substantial civic engagement responded to citizens' appeals effectively and simultaneously consolidated regime stability.

Type II: Ceremonial Civic Engagement—"The Comprehensive Protection Project of the Grand Canal," 2002–2010

Since 2002, the Hangzhou municipal government started the Comprehensive Protection Project for the Grand Canal, Western Lake and Xixi Wetland Park, which are famous as wetland landscapes. The project aims to improve the ecological

environment of the city with a fundamental goal which is to "return the lake to the people." Thus, the project embodies ideologies of "putting people first and having humanistic concerns everywhere" (Hangzhou Municipal Government 2002). The municipal government organized a team of "social composite subjects" consisting of entrepreneurs, media practitioners, experts on urban planning, and representatives of the general population (The CPC Hangzhou Committee and Hangzhou Municipal Government 2008). For example, The Grand Cannel Comprehensive Protection Project Board was one of those organizations established via the guidance of municipal government. Different participating subjects were involved in renewal scheme designing, fund-raising, social support, etc. In the process of operation, participation subjects were mainly experts and scholars, with a few community representatives. They took part in activities such as field visits, symposiums, and sitting on the supervisory board. One interviewee said that "I am a citizen of Hangzhou. The environment of Hangzhou represents the city's image. Hangzhou's image is also our image. So we want to participate in this reconstruction project. This project, however, is so huge that we cannot involve into it deeply or provide professional options. So our participation is merely on surface. And Let the specialists handle the professional issues." From the interview, it is the high sense of responsibility and master consciousness that drive citizens to engage in the project. Their participations benefit the construction of the project and increase people's recognition of the government. According to a survey conducted by local statistical bureau, approval rating on the project among experts and inhabitants was more than 90 % (Hangzhou Development Research Centre 2010a).

Urban environmental renewal project in relatively developed regions such as Hangzhou enters into a full swing in China. This kind of project could not only highlight the performance of the local government, but also attract much attention from citizens. At the same time, such projects will also test the abilities of local government due to their large scales. Well executed projects could become emblems and image building projects of the city, but they are not directly relevant to citizen's interests. The government has to consider opinions of citizens, but try to avoid the aimless and endless civic engagement that disturbs the projects. In this circumstance, civic engagement will be taken as "ceremony" in which the government attaches great importance to civic engagement in its discourse but excludes civic engagement as much as possible in real operation process.

In the discourse of operating "The Comprehensive Protection Project of the Grand Canal," the importance of civic engagement was underlined with particular emphasis. For example, the project operation "must uphold and apply the people's rights to know, to participate, to select and to supervise, making people involved, understand and supervise to achieve scientific and democratic decision-making" (Hangzhou Development Research Centre 2010a). Another example was the expression that "smooth progress of the project needs the general mass to take it as their own affairs with a sense of responsibility like masters of their own destinies" (Hangzhou Development Research Centre 2010a). All of these words tried to illustrate that decision making about the project was up to citizens and citizens who should participate positively in offering recommendations and showing support. It

seems that the government wanted to provide an opportunity for media, experts, and ordinary citizens to supervise itself.

However, the practice of civic engagement was totally different from what was expressed in discourse. The municipal government only invited representatives of communities along the canal in the stage of implementation. In the stage of project design and evaluation, only professional organizations were involved. The government did not hold a completely open attitude toward civic engagement, as most of the representatives were retired community-level party cadres. Participation forms included watching the sandbox of the project planning, field trips, etc., accompanied with interpretations from experts.

In urban environmental renewal projects which are at relatively macro-level, the government selects ceremonial civic engagement. Civic engagement is just taken as a symbol and a ceremony to satisfy the legitimacy requirement in the institutional environment. Of course, from the side of government, civic engagement increases the rationality of the project and is good for project implementation. However, from the standing point of citizens, why did not they require more extensive participation? The field study finds there were at least two reasons: (1) Citizens did not receive any invitation from the government; and (2) citizens thought it was not directly relevant with their own interest. For urban environmental renewal projects like this, civic engagement would neither improve the governance ability of local government, nor satisfy citizens' own interest. Civic engagement here was just a ceremony.

Type III: Propagandistic Civic Engagement—"Our Round Table," 2010

It is common that people lack trust in government. The era of new media exposes such distrust, imposing significantly negative effect on policy implementation. How could government reshape its credibility? In December 2010, after careful planning and demonstration, Hangzhou municipal government cooperated with the local TV station to start a talk show program called "Our Round Table." The TV program invited experts, scholars, government officials, and ordinary citizens to participate in policy debate. The aim was to win people's support for and understanding about the work of government by gathering mass wisdom and guiding public opinion (General Office of the CPC Hangzhou Committee and General Office of Hangzhou Municipal Government 2012). The program has broadcasted over 500 seasons with favorable audience ratings in prime time slots.

An obvious tendency for education and persuasion can be found in "Our Round Table." In 2011, the Hangzhou government issued a waste sorting policy and found it hard to implement. Most of the citizens thought it would be a waste of both time and energy for themselves. They also questioned the enforcement of the government because they did not believe the government would actually dispose waste by separated categories. The Hangzhou government determined to employ "Our Round Table" as a platform to promote this policy. Officials in the environmental protection department, environmental protection experts, social commentators, and citizen representatives were invited to discuss the policy. The officials introduced the policy background while the experts explained the benefits of waste sorting. To

eliminate citizens' distrust on government, the TV station invited some citizens from a community to visit the garbage disposing process, recording and broadcasting the scene in the TV program. Finally, representatives participating in the show were persuaded. There were two notable features in this process: Firstly, citizens were in a relatively disadvantaged position while experts, officials, and celebrities took the dominance due to their professional knowledge or social influence. Secondly, the aim of policy debate was to propagandize and promote the policy rather than to revise it, as the public debate happened after the issue of the policy.

From the statistics of "Our Round Table," livelihood related topics accounted for 50 %, social construction of morality and ideological infrastructure for 22 %, urban planning and construction for 18 %, and propaganda for policy and legal publicity for 8 %. Political topics were carefully avoided with restricted selections and controls. In addition, the government was quite diplomatic in consensus building, taking full advantage of the expert's social prestige and logical rigor to render citizens speechless in policy debate.

Propagandistic civic engagement is able to serve as a powerful tool for the government to maintain legitimacy. It was obvious that "Our Round Table" was designed to persuade citizens, to educate citizens, and to give citizens suggestions rather than to listen to public opinions. Helping the government to obtain favorable public relation and social support is the main function of propagandistic civic engagement.

Type IV: Absorptive Civic Engagement—"Qingyu Studio," 2009

To collect public opinion in order to facilitate livelihood building and balance relations among different social subjects, the Hangzhou government in December 2009 started the establishment of "Qingyu Studio" as an interaction platform for "democracy facilitating livelihood" (Hangzhou Development Research Centre 2010c). The studio collected public opinion on livelihood improvement and made effective interaction between the government and citizens. According to the director of the studio, since its foundation, it had collected 2888 pieces of opinions from public. Among those opinions, one-third were provided to the government through different government channels, such as Letters and Visits (Xinfang), special reports for public sentiment, suggestions from local People's Congress, and proposals from local People's Political Consultative Conference. 141 valuable suggestions were finally adopted by the government.

In the operation of Qingyu Studio, the government encountered at least two challenges: (1) how to know the actual appeals of citizens and, (2) what to do if the government failed to respond to these appeals. The first challenge requires the government to promote civic engagement, but the second one suggests that the government should not completely open civic engagement if the government wishes to avoid threats to regime stability. From the perspective of citizens, civic engagement is an "opportunity" to express their appeals and improve their livelihood. This "opportunity," however, is just a gesture. Citizens just want their voices to be heard by the government. The government does not have to respond to

Table 2 Summary of four cases of civic engagement in the city of Hangzhou

Indicators to describe civic engagement		Typical cases in Hangzhou practice			
First-level indicator	Second-level indicator	Comprehensive Protection Project of the Grand Canal	Courtyard Improvement Project	Qingyu Studio	Our Round Table
A. Discourse	A1. Discourse of government	To promote democracy, improve social supervision, and achieve scientific decision making	To solve livelihood problems using democratic methods, respecting public opinion, and putting the people first	To establish a platform of "democracy facilitating livelihood," and a channel for public opinion to access the government	To aggregate wisdom of the masses, facilitate communication, promote development, achieve harmonious society, and improve quality
	A2. Discourse of citizens	The Grand Canal is an emblem of the city, and we are responsible to participate	For issues closely relevant to citizens' vital interest, participation is our right	(As observers) we aim to help public opinion heard by government and policy understood by the people. We aim to serve people's livelihood	It was the government who asked us to participate. We were just passive actors
B. Participation behavior	B1. Participation scope	Project demonstration and process supervision	Whether to do, what to do, how to do and whether it is good or not	Information transmission, following feedback and performance evaluation	Reflecting public opinion, defusing public discontent, and policy debate
	B2. Participation subjects	Experts, scholars, and community representatives	All stakeholder residents	party members and cadres, and active residents with high prestige	Government officials, experts, scholars, and limited number of citizen representatives
	B3. Participation channels	Advisory board organized by the government	Project office and citizen symposiums	Studio initiated by the government but run by the citizens	Participation platform though media provided by the government
	B4. Power distribution	The right to know and fake participation rights	The right to know, to participate, to select and to supervise	The right to know, to participate, and to supervise	The right to know

Table 2 continued

Indicators to describe civic engagement		Typical cases in Hangzhou practice			
First-level indicator	Second-level indicator	Comprehensive Protection Project of the Grand Canal	Courtyard Improvement Project	Qingyu Studio	Our Round Table
C. Participation outcome	C1. Stability of the regime	Enhancing citizens' support for government	Releasing sharing powers with the people	Enhancing the government's ability of grasping public opinion, which made citizens trust the government more	Enhancing citizens' understanding of and support for the policy
	C2. Degree of responsiveness on citizens' appeals	Improving ecological environment along the canal and increasing residence comfort degree	Realizing a high satisfactory rate and individualized service	Establishing a channel for citizens to express their appeals directly with only a few being responded by government selectively	Accepting the policy arrangement

Information on discourse of government sourced from relevant government documents. Information on discourse of citizens sourced from interviews conducted in the fieldwork

each of their individual voices. In such circumstances, the government would choose a strategy of absorbing critical non-governmental subjects into political systems and partly satisfying citizens' demands. Through absorptive civic engagement, the government could gain support from citizens and increase the absorption ability of society.

As a participation platform, Qingyu Studio showed two characteristics. Firstly, there was a trend of elitism of participants. The director of the studio said that among 53 public opinion observers in the studio, 39 (73.6 %) were members or probationary members of the Communist Party. If we look at the constitution of those observers from their occupation, 46 (86.7 %) were from community-level administrative organizations, public institutions, and state-owned enterprises. According to certain government officials, there were two criteria for selecting public opinion observers. One was consciousness of participating deliberating and administration of public affairs. The other was the ability to give comments or suggestions on public affairs. Residents could apply to become an observer on a voluntary base. After the first round selection of candidates by the director of the studio, the Street Party Working Committee (SPWC, a community-level of party organization) made the final decision. Also, the SPWC would directly invite citizens who were considered to be professional or experienced in certain fields.

The second feature of the studio was to respond to citizens' appeals selectively. Only emergent problems or problems highly related to people's daily life were responded to. From the standing point of the government, the director of the studio believed that although most of the suggestions were not given feedback, the studio at least set up a channel for citizens to get access to the government and express their voice, which had already been an important contribution. Actually, even the limited number of suggestions adopted by the government could motivate the observers in turn, making citizens feel that their voice could be heard. It was actually an important mechanism to release public emotions.

The essential part of absorptive civic engagement lies in government winning popularities rather than responding to citizens' appeals. To enhance the absorbability, Hangzhou government made careful designs for civic engagement, including limiting participation scopes to affairs of daily life, participation subjects to elites, participation channels to official platforms, and participation outcome to selective response. In particular, selective response in absorptive participation not only increases effectiveness of civic engagement but also controls participation to a level which will not threaten regime sustainability.

Integrative Analysis

From the typological analysis, the four types of civic engagement in China's social governance innovation have considerable differences from each other. However, they also share some similarities. According to the indicator index established previously, summaries of each case are shown in Table 2.

Why did the government promote civic engagement? Discourse of the government seemed highly consistent using words "enhancing democracy" and

"achieving scientific decision-making." Discourse of citizens varies. When the interests are directly related to citizens, civic engagement is considered as a kind of civil right. When the interests are not closely related to citizens, civic engagement is considered as a kind of social responsibility. The discourses of the government and citizens indicate the influence of globalization on the Chinese government and citizens. Discourse of democracy is worshiped as a myth, forcing the government to obey. The Chinese government has to use the terms of democracy but choose terms closely integrated with China's actual situation. In Hangzhou practice, the government did not copy the western discourse, rather, it employed terms of "democracy facilitating livelihood." It emphasizes that "livelihood can be improved only by promoting democracy and democracy can be shown only by improving livelihood." Therefore, civic engagement is a way to improving citizens' livelihood by promoting democracy.

Did civic engagement function as described in the discourse? In general, as suggested by Institutional Isomorphism, civic engagement in these cases was similar in form but different in quality. All categories of civic engagement consolidated regime stability but showed uneven influence on responsiveness to citizens' appeals. On one hand, the government would promote substantial civic engagement practice which is consistent with discourse if civic engagement could maintain regime stability and improve responsiveness simultaneously, such as the Courtyard Improvement Project. If the civic engagement could not meet those two goals simultaneously, the government would adopt a strategy with essential content deviating from original discourse. In this condition, ceremonial, absorptive, and propagandistic civic engagement will be used to either consolidate or reduce challenges to regime stability.

How is the discourse and practice separated in civic engagement? This requires analysis of the mechanisms that excluded substantial participation. Some mechanisms are naturally generated due to limitation of professional knowledge for citizens. For example, the Grand Canal Protection Project needs more expertise than the Courtyard Improvement Project. So, citizens participated more in the latter than in the former. Some mechanisms are contrived. For example, the governments' will was fully carried out by setting limitations on participant selection, participation channels supply, and power distribution. Responsiveness to citizens' appeals is just the side product of maintaining regime stability. Civic engagement degraded to a governing tool of consolidating regime stability.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study suggests that when the Chinese government promotes civic engagement under pressure from Western examples in the globalization era, civic engagement shows a character of Institutional Isomorphism. The institution design of civic engagement deviates from institution practice, which could be termed "alienation of civic engagement." Civic engagement is more like an instrumental tool for the government to maintain regime stability rather than to respond to citizens' appeals. Three features are embodied in "alienation of civic engagement": (1) The Chinese

government adopts the logic of "instrument-absorption" rather than "democracy-response" in Western countries. (2) Civic engagement degrades to a ceremony with discourse deviating from practice. When discourse of the government seems to promote democracy, a variety of operational processes are designed to limit participation to a controllable level. (3) Different strategies for civic engagement are used by the government. Whether it is substantial, ceremonial, absorptive, or propagandistic civic engagement, it is the outcome of government rational selection to balance regime stability and responsiveness to citizens' appeals.

The fundamental reason for alienation of civic engagement is the conflict between external environment and the authoritarian state. After the "reforming and opening up" policy since 1978, China has been involved in two irreversible trends: the weakening government control of social resources and the increasing influence of globalization on citizen consciousness. For authoritarian states, maintaining powers as well as controlling society mismatch their actual abilities. The government has to adapt to the new environment by changing governing skills. In the social governance area, the government has no choice but to introduce civic engagement institutions to respond to the rising citizen consciousness of democracy. On the other hand, the authoritarian state still plays the dominant role when compared with citizens. The government makes a rational choice to alienate civic engagement and uses civic engagement as a tool to sustain legitimacy of the regime.

Alienation of civic engagement not only avoids possible threats brought by civil participation, but also improves effectiveness of operation of state power. In Hangzhou the practice of promoting civic engagement, policies were effectively implemented while satisfaction rating was greatly increased. The government does not carry on policies by coercion; rather, it achieves the operation of power within society by taking advantage of democratic institutions diplomatically (Weiss and Hobson 1995). From this perspective, civic engagement will not necessarily result in direct democracy but will change the governance style, which could partly protect citizens' rights and satisfy citizens' demands.

The logic of alienation not only exists in China's civic engagement, but also in other institutional domains imported from Western countries, such as government procurement of public services. This phenomenon has been explained as political resilience of government (Nathan 2003; Wang 2009). New institutions are learned and used as governmental tools to strengthen the resistance of instability for authoritarian counties. However, such alienation suggests that institutional matching is the key problem in a systematic environment. We need to find out institutions that can support substantial civic engagement. The cultivation of public spirit, the expansion of non-governmental sectors, and the development of civil society might be possible solutions.

In this paper, the four ideal types of civic engagement (propagandistic, substantive, ceremonial, and absorptive) are developed in authoritarian states like China. The model is demonstrated in social governance which is highly state-controlled. The model should be carefully generalized in other counties or in grass-roots civic engagement. In authoritarian states, civic engagement is popular in social governance because of pressures from international environment and domestic citizens. Meanwhile, the authoritarian government has enough resources and

autonomy to choose different types of civic engagement based on its own interests. The same institutional conditions might not exist in other countries.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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