

DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT SELF- EMPOWERMENT? – LIMITED DEMAND FOR POLITICAL LIBERTIES AMONG CHINA’S NEW MIDDLE CLASS

By

Shuo Miao

Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Political Science

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Political Science

Supervisor: Dr. Lea Sgier

Budapest, Hungary

2016

ABSTRACT

This study tries to explore political values and perceptions of respondents from China's creative class through in-depth interviewing, with specific focuses on whether they have developed substantial demands for democracy and on how much individual autonomy they possess. Through a thematic analysis of the interview materials, I find that while they are generally satisfied with their living standards and possess adequate material and social autonomy in private life, they have perceived limitations in their understandings and experience of politics so they do not feel intellectually empowered to make autonomous political judgments. Moreover, they have sensed a lack of political efficacy under the current authoritarian regime, thus will not consider taking actions to promote political freedom. For above reasons, though they generally hold positive views toward democratic values, they do not strongly demand the actualisation of those political liberties.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
Table of Contents.....	ii
List of Figures or Tables.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Modernisation Theory and Institutionally Learnt Political Values.....	6
1.1 Modernisation Theory.....	6
1.1.1 Modernisation Theory and Cultural Change.....	6
1.1.2 The Human Empowerment Process.....	7
1.2 Institutionally Learnt Political Values.....	8
Chapter 2: Political Values and Authoritarian Control in China.....	9
2.1 Political Values and Perceptions of Chinese People.....	9
2.1.1 Political Attitudes of China's Middle Class.....	9
2.1.2 Political Perceptions and Understandings of Chinese People.....	10
2.2 Authoritarian Control in China.....	12
Chapter 3: In-Depth Interviewing and Respondents' Profiles.....	15
3.1 Research Design.....	15
3.1.1 Overview of the Research Design.....	15
3.1.2 Method of In-Depth Interviewing.....	16
3.1.3 Explanation of the Topic Guide.....	18
3.2 Selection of Respondents, Their Characteristics and Living Environments.....	19
3.3 Interview Environments.....	24
3.4 Interview Process.....	25
Chapter 4: Main Findings.....	27
4.1 Autonomous Life of the Creative Class in China.....	27
4.2 Insufficient Politically Relevant Intellectual Autonomy.....	29
4.2.1 Limited Political Knowledge and Experience.....	29
4.2.2 Perceptions of Political Environments in China.....	30
4.3 Ambiguous Demands for Political Liberalisation: From Values to Interests.....	33
4.3.1 Reservations for Actual Political Reform and Democratisation.....	34
4.3.2 Unwillingness to Take Actions and Sense of Political Powerlessness.....	38
4.4 Alienated from the State.....	40
4.4.1 Non-Political Concerns and Expectations.....	41
4.4.2 Life without Politics.....	42
4.4.3 Attitudes toward Emigration.....	44
Conclusion.....	46
Reference List.....	51
Appendices.....	54
Appendix A: Interview Topic Guide.....	54
Appendix B: Questions on Attitudes Toward Democracy.....	58

LIST OF FIGURES OR TABLES

Table 1 Percentage of different people's perception of state of democracy in their country	11
Table 2 Overview of the Respondent's Profiles.....	21
Figure 1 Locations of Guangzhou and Shenzhen	23
Figure 2 Photo of Guangzhou	23
Figure 3 Photo of Shenzhen	24

INTRODUCTION

Economic development can induce various kinds of socio-political changes in a society, one of them being political democratisation. Some researchers argue for the existence of a unilinear modernisation process, claiming that an enhanced economic environment will consolidate democracy, or at least facilitate democratisation (Lipset, 1959; Boix & Stokes, 2003; Teorell, 2010; Welzel, 2013). Others are suspicious of such a straightforward correlation and focus more on the specific socio-political and cultural backgrounds in different countries, thinking different political cultures will change the possibility or the progress of democratisation (Almond & Verba, 1963; Putnam, 1993; Eckstein, 1998). At the same time, the unilinear theory identifies a growing middle class in a society as a potential social force of political transformation (Diamond, 1993; Glassman, 1997; Hattori & Funatsu, 2003). It presumes the middle class to be the promoter of democratisation in authoritarian states, and to demand more individual liberties once it becomes wealthier. However, another possibility is that the middle class does not challenge undemocratic states as long as their own economic interest can be preserved, given that, together with the upper class, it belongs to the segments of society that have benefited from the existing socio-economic structure under authoritarian rule (Sundhaussen, 1991; Rueschemeyer, Stephens & Stephens, 1992; Bertrand, 1998; Englehart, 2003).

Because of the successful economic reform and social development in China during the last three decades, China's observers have paid growing attention to the prospect of the country's democratisation. As China has become the second largest economy in the world, it has reached a higher degree of industrialisation, and as many of its affluent regions have evolved into post-industrial societies, the country's social condition and quality of human life have considerably improved. Its Human Development Index (HDI) Score is now higher

(0.727 in year 2014)¹ than that of many countries in the year of their democratic transitions, such as Brazil (transition in year 1985, HDI score 0.608 in 1990), Chile (0.699 in year 1990), Indonesia (0.606 in year 2000), and Poland (0.713 in year 1990)². Furthermore, although the proportion of China's middle class is still small compared with the national population (Ekman, 2014), it is a new social class that appears for the first time in sixty years of rule by the Communist Party. This potentially powerful social force may have various consequences for the country's future economy and political development (Li, 2010). In line with the unilinear modernisation theory, some authors expect that, along with the enhancement of economic standards and new forms of communication tools, the Chinese middle class will "want a freer society" and will have "vast implications for the country's stability" over the next few years (Fukuyama, 2013).

Meanwhile, after cracking down the biggest democratic movement in 1989³, the Chinese authorities have successfully maintained authoritarian rule and have so far rejected any essential political reform. Some researchers interested in new forms of authoritarian development call this system "resilient authoritarianism" (Nathan, 2003; Li, 2012), "adaptive authoritarianism" (Shambaugh, 2008), or "deliberative authoritarianism" (He & Warren, 2011). These studies claim that China's Communist Party has made the political system and government more effective while avoiding any substantial political liberalisation. Over the last decade, the party-state has allocated a great amount of resources to build a stability maintenance system to strengthen its political control. Especially in recent years, during president Xi's administration, the control of the Internet has been tightened, and the suppression of the civil society and NGOs becomes more and more harsh (Yang, 2016).

Therefore, under the twofold circumstance of economic prosperity and authoritarian resilience, what kind of social force will China's middle class grow into? Given their relative

¹ Data from Human Development Reports of United Nations. See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>.

² See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/trends>.

³ Tiananmen Square Incident. See <http://www.britannica.com/event/Tiananmen-Square-incident>.

material security, will they push for more political freedom, as modernisation theories would predict? Or, on the contrary, will they accept the status quo to preserve their economic interest? Moreover, what will their specific political values and perceptions look like, under the combined influences of economic development and political authoritarian control?

Among the research that studies China's middle class's political implication, some show that China's middle class's demand for democracy is actually very limited, and it prefers social stability to freedom of expressions and political influence (Sonoda, 2010; Li, 2010; Tang, 2011; Chen, 2013). Especially, by conducting a large-scale survey analysis, Chen (2013) finds that the support of China's middle class for democratic values is limited, for the reason that a substantial number of the middle class respondents are the employees of various state institutions and corporations, or have other economic ties with the state. Given their high material dependence on the current authoritarian state, they are unlikely to push for a democratic reform that might change the current socio-political structure.

Despite Chen's convincing evidence on the political attitudes of China's middle class, and their dependence on the state, several questions still remain unanswered. First, although Chen suggested that he conducted about one hundred interviews in addition to the survey, he just presented a few quotes and left most of the interview material unanalyzed. Besides, chiefly survey-based data makes it difficult to investigate how various types of authoritarian rule, such as political repression and the party-state's censorship on information, influence people's political perceptions and attitudes. More precisely, what are the specific political values that members of China's middle class hold, and what are their explanations of these values? How are their political views shaped and what will be the possible mechanisms responsible for shaping them? These questions cannot be answered by a survey. Second, Chen identifies strong economic ties between China's middle class and the party-state, thus more questions arise, such as what will happen if economic liberalisation reduces the middle

class's dependence on the state, or what will the political values of a sub-group within the middle class be that has no or only very weak connections with the state? Chen predicates that they “may become enthusiastic about democracy and democratisation” (2013: 164), but this claim certainly needs more examinations.

In this thesis, I investigate these issues with a qualitative approach, more specifically by conducting in-depth interviews with a number of respondents from the China's middle class who have no close economic ties with the state. My study tries to understand their political values and perceptions, with a particular focus on the relationship between their material wellbeing and political values: does material autonomy prompt them into making claims for more political liberties? If so, what sort of claims, and why? If not, then why do the material autonomy they possess not act as 'motivators' for demanding political liberalisation? Instead of the economic ties linking the middle class with the state as previous research suggests, what might obstruct the formulation of such demands?

Chapter 1 reviews the key literature relevant to the effects of economic development and institutions on people's political values. Chapter 2 discusses the current situations of people's political values and institutionalised state's political control in China. In particular, it also presents the findings from previous research about political attitudes of China's middle class. Chapter 3 introduces the methodology of this study. It explains why in-depth interviewing is a feasible method for this research, and discusses the interview design and how interviews were conducted. It also contains a short description of the respondents' profiles and their living environments. Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the interview materials. I identified different themes that linked with the respondents' material resources and their political values, finding that though they generally hold positive attitudes toward democratic values, their demands for actual political liberalisation in China are very limited.

The conclusion discusses possible mechanisms for explaining the respondents' limited political demands, and suggests some directions for future research.

CHAPTER 1: MODERNISATION THEORY AND INSTITUTIONALLY LEARNT POLITICAL VALUES

With regard to the relationship between society's political culture and its socio-political development, modernisation theory argues that socioeconomic development can transform people's political values and make them demand more political liberties both under democracies and non-democracies. On the other hand, institutional learning theory suggests that democratic mass culture is endogenous to democratic institutions. Under authoritarian regimes, institutional restrictions on information and access points of politics may hinder people's demand for democratisation.

1.1 Modernisation Theory

1.1.1 Modernisation Theory and Cultural Change

Modernisation theory claims that economic development can trigger a series of changes in social and cultural structures within a society, which promote the transformation of the political structure and lead to democratisation of the country or to a more consolidated democracy (Lipset, 1959, 1960; Diamond, 1992; Boix & Stokes, 2003; Teorell, 2010). Lipset (1959) was the first to systematically discuss some social requisites of democracy, and then by conducting statistical research in several countries, he pointed out (1960) that the more industrialised a country, the more stable democracy it tends to get. With few exceptions, the unstable democracies and dictatorships were all countries that were not fully industrialised.

When considering culture as an intervening variable, political scientists have also argued that internal political culture is embedded as precondition to a country's political development. Mass values such as trust and tolerance, which represent "civic virtues", enable democratic institutions to function effectively (Almond & Verba, 1963; Putnam, 1993; Dalton, 2000, Bernhard & Karakoc, 2007). On the other hand, a central claim of modernisation theory is that socioeconomic development can transform a society's political

culture and breed those “civic virtues” (Pye & Verba, 1963; Huntington, 1968; Acemoglu & Robbison, 2006). As such, socioeconomic development changes a society’s basis of material subsistence and its social fabric (Sen, 1999), and it brings occupational specialisation, rising educational levels and income levels. It also diversifies human interaction and in the long run, hence develops trust and tolerance in this society.

1.1.2 The Human Empowerment Process

Inglehart and Welzel (2005) further points out that when a society develops from industrialisation stage to post-industrialisation state, the above changes in political culture can then emerge. They propose a theory combining the modernisation process with cultural change. This theory, called ‘human empowerment process’, provides an integrated explanation of human development towards a final, as well as a prevalent human need, the individual autonomy (Welzel & Inglehart, 2008).

The process of human development starts with rises of three-dimensional action resources that available to citizens: economic growth will increase people’s material resources, while rising levels of education, expanding information access, and more knowledge-intensive work can widen people’s intellectual skills. Also, growing social complexities and connections diversify people’s social resources and opportunities. Expanding resources will not only improve people's life quality, but also diminish the constraints on their life choices. With rising action resources, people will have material security, intellectual autonomy, and social independence, and can be presumed to govern their own life.

Then, self-expression values are supposed to emerge with increased sense of individual autonomy, which lead them to questioning unlimited authority, and make them not only receptive to, but actively promote ideas of individual freedom and equality. Even in non-democracies, people will feel increasingly empowered to demand political liberties.

Under such circumstances, the number of political and civil activists will increase, and there will be more mass support for political rights movement in a society. People start to recognise *the high utility of freedoms* and take actions to assert and exercise these freedoms (Welzel, 2013).

1.2 Institutionally Learnt Political Values

In contrast to the theory that changes in political culture brought by economic development influences the construction of democratic institutions, some scholars argue that a democratic mass culture actually results from living under democratic institutions. They also claims that values can be categorised as self-expression values are endogenous to democratic institutions (Vanhanen 2003; Hadenius & Teorell 2005). The concept of “institutional learning” indicates that individuals, as part of their socialisation process, will adapt to accept the values that the political institutions embody (Rustow, 1970; Jackman & Miller 1998).

Dealing with the condition of authoritarian politics, Bueno de Mesquita and Downs (2005) define the types of institutionally secured public goods that will engender the survival of authoritarian governments as “coordination goods”. Among them the most important parts for political empowerment are political and civil rights, and a diverse, unregulated press. Institutional restriction rather than encouragement of coordination goods can effectively reduce the chance of revolutions or the possibility of organising political oppositions, while the authoritarian governments can continue to provide other public services that necessary for economic growth. Countries like China and Singapore are typical examples.

CHAPTER 2: POLITICAL VALUES AND AUTHORITARIAN CONTROL IN CHINA

According to modernisation theory, a middle class with rising material resources will become motivated to push for democratisation, but existing research finds that China's middle class does not have strong demand for democracy. Moreover, Chinese people may have very distinctive understandings of democracy, and this is probably the result of various forms of institutionalised political control imposed by the state.

2.1 Political Values and Perceptions of Chinese People

2.1.1 Political Attitudes of China's Middle Class

To explain the link between economic development and support for democracy, Lipset (1960) pointed out that industrialised countries have a large middle class, which is the basis of democracy. Later researchers also claim that once the middle class becomes large enough, its pressure for liberal democracy can no longer be resisted (Diamond, 1993; Lipset, Seong, & Torres, 1993; Hattori & Funatsu, 2003). The socioeconomic conditions of a postindustrial society (with a large share of the service and knowledge sectors) will produce a middle class with more autonomy than ever, and which becomes motivated to demand democracy (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

But existing research has shown that China's middle class does not have strong demands for democracy (Sonoda, 2010; Li, 2010; Tang, 2011; Chen, 2013). For example, by using people's occupation as an indirect measurement of their class belongings, and drawing on large-scale survey data collected in three major Chinese cities⁴ during 2007 to 2008, Chen (2013) presents a picture of the middle class in China as being quite different from that of the developed countries. A large proportion (about 60 percent) of the members of the Chinese middle class are civil servants or work for various state institutions and enterprises. He finds that these people are normally not keen supporters of democratic values because they heavily

⁴ Beijing, Chengdu, and Xi'an.

rely on the country's authoritarian regime for survival and development. He concludes that there is a negative correlation between the middle class's dependence on the state and its support for democracy. For this reason, the existing members of this social class are not in favour of democratisation, for such a process "could no doubt threaten the very existence of the current party-state" (p. xv). For the same reason, if new members of the middle class also rely on the state occupations to make their living, they are probably not eager to support democratisation either.

In more detail, this research shows that the emerging middle class in China advocates individual rights such as the right to work, the right to receive a good education, the right to social mobility, free access to public information, religious freedom and so on. But at the same time, people still restrain from participating in political activities, especially activities through unofficial channels such as demonstrations, petitions and forming in-official organisations. What is more, this middle class exhibits a lower level of support for participatory norms, including participation in the government's decision-making processes and for promoting ordinary citizen's role in political reform, etc. This reality is also reflected in the fact that the middle class supports the party-state as an exclusive institution more than the working class in China.

2.1.2 Political Perceptions and Understandings of Chinese People

When comparing Chinese people's political perceptions with that of some other countries, available data from World Value Survey shows that they may have very distinctive understandings of democracy. Table.1 displays respondent's response to a survey question: 'how democratically is this country being governed today?' According to democracy index generated by *The Economist*⁵, United States has 'full democracy'. Poland and Singapore all have 'flawed democracy'. While China and Russia are both 'authoritarian regimes', more

⁵ Data from the website of The Economist Intelligence Unit. See <http://www.eiimedia.com/index.php/latest-press-releases/item/2127-democracy-in-an-age-of-anxiety>

respondents in China give a high evaluation of their country's state of democracy than that of Russia. Even comparing with respondents' responses in Poland and United States, in general Chinese respondents' have not given a noteworthy lower evaluation. In the meantime, more Chinese respondents do not know the answer for this question or did not respond to it.

Table 1 Percentage of different people's perception of state of democracy in their country⁶

	<i>China</i>	<i>Russia</i>	<i>Poland</i>	<i>Singapore</i>	<i>United States</i>
Not democratic⁷	13.4%	41.1%	22.8%	13.5%	15.7%
More or less democratic	44%	39%	48.1%	53.6%	47.5%
Democratic	28%	6.8%	23%	38.8%	33.2%
Don't know or No answer	14.6%	10.5%	6.1%	-	3.5%
Sample size⁸	2,300	2,500	966	1,972	2,232
Mean (1-10 scale)	6.43	4.56	5.89	6.90	6.46
Regime type	Authoritarian regime	Authoritarian regime	Flawed democracy	Flawed democracy	Full democracy

The data indicate that people's feelings regarding democratic politics and the operation of the political system may relate to their understanding of some core concepts of politics. When citizens living in authoritarian regimes give a similar degree of evaluation of their countries' "democratic" politics compared to citizens from flawed democracies and full democracies, it implies that these citizens from different countries might have quite distinct understandings of what democracy really is. Actually even within the group of democratic countries, citizens' conceptions of democracy might be different and consequently influence the citizens' patterns of political participation. For instance, there is evidence showing that

⁶ Data is available in the online analysis of World Value Survey's official website. See <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>. Firstly select the data from the 2010-2014 wave, and then select these countries and the variable No.141.

⁷ Responses are originally measured at 10 scales. I converge the lowest four scales into "Not democratic", and highest three scales into "Democratic".

⁸ Selected samples: China 2012, Russia 2011, Romania 2012, Singapore 2012, United States 2011.

people who think experts should play a more prominent role in democracy are less likely to actively participate in all kinds of political activities (Bengtsson & Christensen, 2014).

From a demand-supply perspective (Qi & Shin, 2011), democratisation follows “the logic of reducing the incongruence between citizen demand and institutional supply of democracy” (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005: 187). When citizens are satisfied with the current level of democracy that their political system provides, they will not demand more democracy from the authorities. In the context of authoritarian regime, the implication could be that if people already perceive their political system as democratic, they accept the status quo and will not demand an actual democratisation process. Under this circumstance, the middle class can hardly be regarded as a potential social force that would push the system towards a democratic reform.

In China, scholars find that a majority of the population is content with the one-party rule, and accepts it as more or less democratic (Lu & Shi, 2014), because the authorities are seen as “promoting paternalistic meritocracy in the name of democracy” (p. 23). Through systematic institutional action such as intentionally misleading education and maneuvering of the media system, such a discourse can effectively disguise the system’s authoritarian nature, and make people believe that the priority of democracy should be a meritocratic process which breeds satisfactory results. It does not emphasise general election procedure or protecting human rights and political freedom.

2.2 Authoritarian Control in China

Thus, apart from lacking autonomous material resources that makes the middle class in China reject a democratisation process and accept the current regime, their distinctive political perceptions and understandings may also keep them from developing a full range of self-expression values that would demand further political liberties. This is probably the result of the authorities political control and influence conveyed by different institutional

settings, as Lu & Shi (2014) suggest, as the regime tries to shape people's political values by maneuvering information through state-controlled media and education systems.

A group of scholars (Cantoni, Chen, Yang, Yuchtman, & Zhang, 2015) find that new textbooks that aim to strengthen the official ideology used in China's high schools successfully created more positive views of China's governance and, more critical views of democracy among students. As for the system of higher education, which is supposed to increase citizens' intellectual autonomy and constitute the basis for the middle class, it is also under a form of authoritarian control manoeuvred by the Communist party (Yan, 2014). Another research (Huang, 2015) shows that more exposure to state propaganda in the form of education makes Chinese students believe that the regime is able to maintain strong political control, so they become less willing to express political dissent.

In addition, political repression might be another factor that impinges on people's will to push for democratic reform. The regime keeps a grip control over coercive power, constantly imposing deterrents to citizens who express deviant political opinions or try to participate in political activities. For example, although civil societies have been flourishing in China for many years, the scope and nature of their activities are under strict restriction, especially for all kinds of politically oriented ones (Spires, 2011; Yan, 2012; Teets, 2013).

Consequently, these institutional restrictions and repression may impinge the human development process, and suppress the generation of self-expression values among the rising middle class. Even if socioeconomic progress enables them to become materially independent, this outcome alone may not suffice to lead to an "empowerment" process. They may still not have adequate political intellectual resources and access to be motivated to demand more political liberties.

In fact, even though Inglehart and Welzel rejected an institutionalist version of democratic values, they are still using "experience under communism" as a variable

measuring people's political values. It indicates that certain political institutions and employment of power and ideology by authorities are able to affect mass political values in some way, particularly in a regime like China that still holds communist-like ideology and authoritarian political control over the society. Therefore, when Inglehart and Welzel marked China as one of the ex-communist countries, they may overlook some foremost characteristics of this regime. As long as the harsh restraint on people's political will and participation is not lessened, the fact that "its economy and culture have been moving away from the communist model since 1978 where over half of its output is now produced in the market sector" (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, p.113) does not necessarily lead to the prospect that "China will eventually make the transition to democracy when it reaches a high level of development" (p.42).

CHAPTER 3: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING AND RESPONDENTS' PROFILES

My study tries to explore political values and perceptions of respondents from China's creative class through in-depth interviews, with specific focuses on whether they have developed substantial demands for democracy and on how much individual autonomy they possess. This chapter explains the logics behind the research design and how the interviews were conducted.

3.1 Research Design

3.1.1 Overview of the Research Design

This study uses in-depth interviews to explore questions related to respondents' personal life and sense of autonomy, perceptions of China's social and political environments in general, and also press on more detailed questions of political issues. The questions on politics include asking their perceptions of the Internet censorship, the level of political knowledge they possess, their attitudes towards the government and understanding of democracy, etc. The interviews were conducted in Chinese, and relevant quotes were translated into English and presented in the analysis chapter. Potential connections among different categories such as respondents' living conditions and their perceptions of the political environment, how much political knowledge they have and their attitudes towards the government, their general views on personal freedom and specific attitudes to democracy, would also be enquired into during the analysis.

I identified and interview fourteen members of a sub-group of the middle class who can be categorised as *the creative class* (Florida, 2012), and live in two of China's most developed cities i.e. Guangzhou and Shenzhen, both large metropolises situated in the south of China. The concept of creative class refers to those middle class people who have a higher education background and work in creative or knowledge-based industries. These industries often have only loose ties with the state, in other words their employees' life and career is not

directly dependent on state institutions. In my concrete case, this means that the respondents are not civil servants or state employees, nor employed by one of the various state-owned enterprises. They largely work for foreign enterprises in the financial or Internet industries, or other high-tech industries. Their salaries are no less than they could get from state institutions. The employees' careers mainly depend on their own capabilities and are not secured by the state. With a high level of mobility, they do not have to worry about finding a job as long as the economy is more or less stable.

My respondents have all received an excellent education in the top universities of China, and now have a state-independent occupation. In other words, they live in a social environment close to a postindustrial society elsewhere, which is considered as a breeding ground for the evolution of individual autonomy and self-expression values (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Welzel, 2013). On average, the interviews lasted for about one hundred minutes.

3.1.2 Method of In-Depth Interviewing

The most important reason for adopting the method of in-depth interviewing is to investigate in-depth questions of “what is there” and “why is it”. Legard, Keegan and Ward (2003) explain that an initial response to a question is often at a surface level. While by conducting an in-depth conversation, a researcher can use follow-up questions to explore deeper contents in a respondent's thought. By pushing the conversation, the researcher can also ask questions penetrating into reasons, feelings, opinions and beliefs that underpin the respondent's initial answers. Compared to a deep conversation that an in-depth interview can achieve, answers to the questionnaires of large-scale survey research are usually confined in several options that researcher provides, and more often in the studies of value system the questions are used to measure the scale of respondents' attitudes. Under these circumstances there is no room for the respondents to give further explanations to clarify what exactly they

think about the options, and why this would choose this rather than that. For example, there is a question in the World Value Survey asking to what extent the respondents believe they are living under a democratic country, but such a question is not able to explore according to what standards they make this judgment or how exactly they understand democracy. There may be different reasons behind the same response. While the in-depth interviews with open-ended questions enable the respondents to explicate their thoughts and attitudes, and can push them to reflect the reasons behind their responses.

Second, the questions asking about political values and preferences in the interview are related to the topics that Chinese people would not usually discuss. And in spite of the fact that they would discuss stories involving the gossips of the country's political leaders, they are not used to display their political values explicitly and to discuss political affairs in a formal manner. The method of in-depth interviewing takes a perspective that knowledge and thoughts, at some stage, are created during the conversation (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). Respondents can direct themselves, or be directed by the researcher to contemplate questions that they have not explored before. So in-depth interviewing is especially useful to tackle political questions with respondents in China.

Moreover, research (Jiang & Yang, 2015) shows that in China's non-democratic political environments, there is a gap between people's expressed political support and their actual political support. After a political purge in Shanghai in 2006, the data shows that respondent's expressed political support increased, while their actual political support declines, which can be seen as an example of preference falsification (Kuran, 1997). Thus, if the in-depth interviews can be conducted in a setting of both privacy and formality, based on a high-level of trust between interviewer and interviewee, then the interviewees could be motivated to think about questions that he or she has not thought through before, and to

express their views genuinely. At the same time, preference falsification might be avoided to the greatest extent.

Forth, the logic of qualitative research that adopt in-depth interview as its method is different from that of large-scale survey research. Such qualitative research cannot generalise its findings to a whole population, and its result does not necessarily equivalent to the average of the population. But its advantage is investigating explanatory evidence (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003), which enable the researcher to propose explanations for the potential mechanisms only through a small number of interviews.

3.1.3 Explanation of the Topic Guide

The topic guide (see Appendix A) develops through four parts that cover and specify the categories of action resources and self-expression values that respondents may have. Though as a semi-structured interview design, in the actual situations the questions were not asked exactly in the same way and same sequence, and different stages of the interview will intersect when expedient.

The first part of the interview deals with several aspects of the respondents' personal life, such as their job, living condition and life satisfaction. Its main function is to allow me to get familiar with the general background and characteristics of the respondents. Then the second part of the interview deals with respondents' perceptions of the social environment around their daily life and their sense of personal autonomy, trying to find out the extent that people govern their life. The third part includes questions related to politics, for example, the respondents' general feelings on politics in China, their news consumption habits and perceptions of Internet censorship.

The fourth part is designed to tackle the most politically sensitive questions in the interview, which are also the questions that usually would not be brought up in daily conversations. These questions ask about the respondents' feelings on state governance and

political leaders, their thoughts about political reform and democratisation, and their inclination to participate in self-organised political actions. Some questions dealing with respondents' attitudes toward democracy (see Appendix B) adopted from Chen's (2013) research will also be asked in the interviews with following-up questions, such as the support for participatory norm and competitive election. Furthermore, the interviews will discuss the respondents' perceptions and views of some specific political affairs such as Hong Kong's socio-political conflicts in recent two years, and news about detentions of some notable political dissidents in China. At last, I will ask their reflections on the whole interview, and whether they want to add anything else to it.

3.2 Selection of Respondents, Their Characteristics and Living Environments

A purposive sampling method was applied for identifying respondents who meet the criteria described earlier. The first four respondents were selected among my friends. Starting from there, I found additional respondents by "snowballing", i.e. asking my initial respondents to designate acquaintances of theirs that would fit my criteria, with an emphasis to diversify the respondents' age and occupations.

Four pilot interviews were conducted in January 2014 in Beijing, to test for the feasibility of my research. Because of my intention to incorporate sensitive questions of personal life, salary and family economic condition, political views and opinions towards Chinese government, etc, it was necessary to ensure that the interviews could be conducted under trust between the respondent and me. Hence I selected the respondents of the pilot interviews among my relatives, whose backgrounds are similar with the subsequent respondents. Two of the pilot interviews did not cover all themes proposed by the current research design, and the respondents of the other two interviews either works in a state-owned enterprise or is a private business owner, who do not fit exactly into the criteria of the creative class. Therefore those four pilot interviews were not included in the final analysis,

though they built a basic structure for the later interview designs. When conducting the next fourteen interviews, I inserted more questions that were directly related to respondent's political perceptions and knowledge.

A second round of four interviews was conducted in January 2015, in Guangzhou and Shanghai. The respondents were again selected among my friends. Initially, interviews for this research were intended to cover respondents who live in China's four most developed cities, which are Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenzhen. Before conducting the third round, and also the final round of the interviews for this thesis, I recalculated my time resources and accessibilities to suitable respondents, and decided to only incorporate respondents from Shenzhen and Guangzhou, except for one from Shanghai who has already been included in the second round of the interviews.

Thus, the last ten interviews were conducted in Guangzhou and Shenzhen, in December 2015 and January 2016. The respondents for these interviews were mainly introduced by my friends, and I did not know them before. I reckon that their trust in me was derived from their trust in the introducer, since they did not ask much of my background information before and during the interviews.

In overall, more than half of the respondents graduated from universities in these two cities, and have lived and worked there since graduation. A majority of them earn more than 20,000 US dollars a year, while GDP per capital in China is about 7,500 US dollars in 2015⁹. All the respondents who are under thirty years old have not married. The female respondents who are over thirty years old all got married and have a child. Regarding the respondents' personal living conditions, the majority of them shares an apartment with other people or lives with their partner in a rented apartment. The married respondents, who have a child, at the age of thirties, live in their own property with their family. A few single, male respondents

⁹ Data from the World Bank. See <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>.

at the age of twenties also bought a property with the financial support of their parents.

Details of the respondent's information are summarised in the following table.

Table 2 Overview of the Respondent's Profiles

<i>No</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Income (in US dollars)</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Date of Interview</i>
1	F	26	Master's degree	Commercial bank HR	20,000~40,000	Guangzhou	January 1, 2015
2	M	27	Bachelor's degree	Online media advertisements salesman	50,000~80,000	Guangzhou	January 2, 2015
3	F	25	Bachelor's degree	Foreign enterprise marketer	20,000~40,000	Guangzhou	January 2, 2015
4	F	25	Master's degree	Online news video editor	<20,000	Shanghai	January 9, 2015
5	M	26	Master's degree	Educational institution lecturer	20,000~40,000	Guangzhou	December 18, 2015
6	F	30	Bachelor's degree	Mobile APP product manager	20,000~40,000	Shenzhen	December 26, 2015
7	F	36	Master's degree	Housewife (Former financial investment employee)	80,000 (Family)	Shenzhen	December 26, 2015
8¹⁰	F	39	Doctorate degree ¹¹	Consultant	50,000~80,000	Shenzhen	December 26, 2015
9	F	26	Master's degree ¹²	Bio institution research assistant	<20,000	Guangzhou	December 28, 2015
10	M	26	Bachelor's degree	Foreign accounting firm accountant	20,000~40,000	Guangzhou	December 29, 2015
11	F	32	Master's degree	Mobile APP product manager	50,000	Shenzhen	December 30, 2015
12	M	27	Bachelor's degree	TV news director assistant	<20,000	Guangzhou	December 30, 2015

¹⁰ This interview is excluded from the analysis because it turned out that the respondent actually is a permanent resident of Hong Kong and no longer holds a Chinese passport. Her home is in Shenzhen but she works in Hong Kong. Although the political values of the respondents with such experience are also worth studying, their backgrounds do not fit into the main criteria of this research design.

¹¹ Received in Hong Kong

¹² Received in the United Kingdom

13	M	26	Bachelor's degree	Internet finance engineer	<20,000	Guangzhou	December 30, 2015
14	M	29	Master's degree	IT programmer	50,000	Guangzhou	January 2, 2016

Briefly speaking, Guangzhou and Shenzhen locate in the south of China, and both belong to Guangdong province. Guangzhou is the capital of the province and also the third largest city in China, after Beijing and Shanghai. It has a population of over 1.3 million and nearly five million of them are not local residences but people moved here from China's other regions¹³. In 2015, its total GDP catches up that of Singapore and Hong Kong, while its GDP per capital reaches 20,000 US dollars and two thirds of the economy belongs to service sector¹⁴. Shenzhen is adjacent to Hong Kong, and like Guangzhou, it is also a city of migrant workers who mainly came from the country's northern part. Its economic output ranks the fourth in China and GDP per capital even outweighs that of Guangzhou¹⁵. Apart from this, many high-tech companies locate their headquarters in Shenzhen and make the city "China's silicon valley"¹⁶. Figure 1 shows the locations of these two cities. Figure 2 and 3 are two photos of them.

¹³ "Guangzhou Economic and Social Development Statistics Bulletin 2014" (in Chinese), *Guangzhou Daily*, http://gzdaily.dayoo.com/html/2015-03/22/content_2887547.htm.

¹⁴ Hongyu Du, "Guangzhou's GDP in 2015 will outweighs Singapore's" (in Chinese), *21st Century Economic News*, January 13, 2016, http://epaper.21jingji.com/html/2016-01/13/content_29104.htm.

¹⁵ Qunde Wu, "Shenzhen's GDP per capital reaches 24,000 US dollars in 2014" (in Chinese), *Shenzhen News*, February 5, 2015, http://district.ce.cn/zg/201502/05/t20150205_4527300.shtml.

¹⁶ Tom Whitwell, "Inside Shenzhen: China's Silicon Valley", *The Guardian*, June 13, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/jun/13/inside-shenzhen-china-silicon-valley-tech-nirvana-pearl-river>.

Figure 1 Locations of Guangzhou and Shenzhen¹⁷



Figure 2 Photo of Guangzhou¹⁸



¹⁷ Retrieved from https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/e/e4/Guangdong_in_China.svg/2000px-Guangdong_in_China.svg.png, and <http://www.china-map-guide.com/image/province/guangdong/guangdong.jpg>.

¹⁸ Retrieved from https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/49/Guangzhou_skyline.jpg.

Figure 3 Photo of Shenzhen¹⁹



3.3 Interview Environments

Among the fourteen interviews, five were conducted in the respondents' apartment or apartment of the introducer's. Because of the sensitive topics that the interviews intended to tackle, at first I was hoping to do all the interviews in private spaces if possible. However, other nine interviews took place in various public coffee shops or restaurants, even for respondents whom I had known for a long time and whose apartments I had visited before. This is due to several reasons. First, for respondents who receive the interviews in workdays, the talks usually took place after having lunch or dinner together in a restaurant near their apartments or workplaces. The interviews were held in a more quiet coffee shop nearby, or in the same restaurant if the environment was appropriate for recording and other customers could not clearly hear the details of the conversations.

¹⁹ Retrieved from <http://www.dragonfruitevents.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/shenzhen-cityscape1.jpg>.

Second, respondents who were interviewed during weekends or holidays also preferred talking in some public spaces such as coffee shops. On the one hand that is because they perceived the conversations with me as a kind of social activities, they hoped to enjoy the interviews in particular places for relaxing. On the other hand I realised that such public spaces could provide a formal setting for asking questions that would not usually be raised in daily social interactions, and a sense of formal conversation was especially important between the respondents and me who I already knew before. Third, mainly the respondents who have a family and a child to attend suggested having the interviews at their home, and it is also because that they are accustomed to meet guests and hold social activities in their owned apartments. For the contrary reason, it could be presumed that for respondents who live in a rented apartment with others, even with people whom they do not have much interactions with and could be considered as “strangers” in some cases, they get used to meet friends and have social entertainments outside.

3.4 Interview Process

All of these interviews went smoothly. As for the respondent’s perceptions on me, because my friends knew what I am studying and other respondents were informed of the interview topics before they were introduced to me, so I felt that they had a perception that I had more knowledge about the topics appeared in the interviews than them. Nonetheless, they spoke frankly about their opinions and I did not sense any signs that they might be afraid of me judging them.

As for the sensitivity of the interview topics, no respondents showed concerns about answering the questions, and no one signaled that they prefer not discussing some of the questions, although they may have perceived some topics as politically sensitive. Two respondents showed signs indicating that they realised the sensitivity of the conversation,

implicitly or explicitly, although I believe they did not try to hide their true feelings or real thoughts judging by the exact ways they reacted and the answers they gave for the questions.

Respondent (No.12): I would still worry about the condition of freedom (in China). To be honest, we talked about such things today, if something happened...Right?"

Interviewer: You certainly could not discuss them on television.

R12: Sure. Certainly not! But if someone, I don't mean somebody like an agent from the KGB. But if someone hide another recorder here, record our conversation and put some excerpts on the Internet, claiming that I said such and such things, it is still (unsafe). #01:19:49#²⁰

Another case is a respondent (No.14) that I met in a coffee shop, at a table in the outside garden. The respondent kept his voice low along the whole conversation. When a waitress brought coffee, he consciously stopped talking and waited for her to leave. These two cases show that if the conversations had happened in a different setting, publicly or with someone the respondents would not have trusted, they might have been more reluctant to disclose their views. Additionally, to my perception one of the respondents (No.7) seemed to have some reservations during the interview, since she answered some questions slowly and not very coherently. But later when I transcribed the recording I found that it was because her three-year-old daughter was around us and she could not fully focus on the interview.

²⁰ Indicates the exact time when selected quote appeared in the relevant interview recording.

CHAPTER 4: MAIN FINDINGS

Using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clark, 2006), I searched for interview materials with similar patterns of meaning, and identified four major aspects that related to the respondents' political demands and the state of their personal life. The first one summarises that the respondents are generally satisfied with the material resources and social autonomy they possess. The second one shows that they do not have enough intellectual autonomy in political sphere due to their lack of relevant knowledge and experience. The third aspect reveals a gap between the respondents' political values and their actual political demands. Last but not least, the fourth one shows that the creative class respondents in China feel alienated from the state and politics. Consequently, they devote all of their time and energy into private issues.

4.1 Autonomous Life of the Creative Class in China

Working in creative or knowledge-based industries and living in the most developed cities enables these respondents to live a relatively satisfied life and to realise personal and social autonomy, although at the same time, they may still feel a shortage of material resources in some aspects.

The most important finding relates to individual autonomy is that respondents feel that to a large extent, depending on the social environment and their own endeavours, they are able to govern their life. The respondents expressed their feelings in such ways:

I think for most of the time, there is eighty percent of chance that I could govern my own life. What are left are opportunities, luck, and some elements that I cannot predict. Nowadays the environments are stable and I feel that I could make endeavours to change my life (R1). #00:34:26-1#

I think I have been governing my own life. Like I just said, I gave a high score on the quality of my life because I feel that I'm governing my own life. The reason for this is that you could see what you could have from what you have done (R3). #01:11:39-1#

The social environment is really OK. If I would like more self-realisation, there are paths that could let me do it, and some obstacles wouldn't hinder me. Also, people usually don't criticise you for what you are doing (R4). #00:07:20-7#

Apart from the social environment in general, some respondents also mentioned that policy issues would affect their life autonomy.

I don't think I can control a lot in my life, really not much. The things I can control are nothing more than how hard working I can be, or more straightforwardly, how much I can earn and what extent of life quality this money can bring along. But these are actually restricted. For example, if I want to buy some imported goods, the taxes I cannot control, or I am not able to buy the good at all because it is not imported into China. Furthermore, you know I work in the advertising industry, if some day a national policy says that certain types of advertisements are not allowed on air, then a huge part of my work will be influenced (R2). #00:34:21-0#

Although these respondents feel that they have a relatively high level of personal autonomy, material resources are still one major focus in some respondents' life, and the shortage of such resources lowers their sense of security or life satisfaction.

I cannot say I completely feel insecure. I just don't have enough sense of security, and it is mainly because of the shortage of resources. The most relevant part is the economic conditions. Actually I have a decent income compared to other people who just graduated, but I still cannot be too free from economic constraints (R1). #00:03:16-0#

For myself, I'm satisfied with how much I can earn now. But if you were going to get married, you need to think about the medical and education resources for your parents and children. China has a large population so these resources are scarce, and can't only be obtained by money. Because of the lack of these resources, I would be under pressure if I got married (R2). #00:20:45-9#

4.2 Insufficient Politically Relevant Intellectual Autonomy

4.2.1 Limited Political Knowledge and Experience

Another common feature of the respondents is that, when discussing details of the political system or democratic elections, they admitted their limited knowledge and experience of politics. More importantly, their lack of such knowledge and first-hand experience makes it hard for them to evaluate the merits and disadvantages of a democratic system, or to judge which type of political system is more suitable for China. For example, one respondent said that he couldn't imagine what democracy would look like, because he only has the experience of living under China's political system and does not have a tangible feeling of democratic politics. He concluded that people might need to know what democracy is for them to have desire for it.

Interviewer (I): Do you think it would make a difference if we had a democracy in China?

R5: How can I say it... After living in China for so many years, I really can't tell the difference, because I haven't experienced democracy. Such as perceptions of national election and universal suffrage, I don't have them. So I know nothing about democracy (laughing).

I: You can't imagine it?

R5: No. I can't. I can only say it is not the politics that I am involved in.

I: So you can't say you want it or not?

R5: No. I don't know enough to even have desire for it. What people want is something they have an image about. When you don't know what it is, you would not want it very much.

#00:54:57-1#

Some other respondents expressed similar feelings, that they are not familiar with the western democratic model or a multi-party system.

You just mentioned the Western model. I can't judge because I haven't experienced other political systems. Also, I haven't paid much attention to them, so I don't know whether the Western model is suitable for China or not, and I can't judge whether it is good or bad (R2).

#00:42:36-7#

To be honest, I don't know why there will be different political parties, or how you will define the difference between them. I don't know exactly what's the difference between Democrats and Republicans in the US, or in Taiwan the difference between Democratic Progressive Party and Kuomintang. Is the difference between them really about political beliefs, or it's just like in the beginning you joined a "wrong" group so you represent the interests of different people (R3). #01:21:15-2#

Moreover, due to the lack of consideration of the political issues in their daily life, their judgments sometimes are incongruent. After the interview, some of them conceded that their thoughts are actually contradictory. For instance, one respondent thinks that, "historically and in the long run, dictatorships are doomed to fail (#01:13:14-2#)." But when asked about his opinion towards the political dissidents some movements in China, he also voiced his reservation.

Like Charter 08²¹, is it something that can be accomplished in one day? Obviously not. If you are a mature dissident who really cares about this country, you shouldn't sign it. Instead you should do something within your capability, like teach the common people to understand the spirits of rule of law, and do things within a reasonable sphere (R12). #00:36:49-9#

At last, he conceded that,

After talking to you, I feel that I'm kind of contradictory. When I try to express my views and link them in a coherent account, it turns out that some parts are contradictory. I still don't have enough thoughts on those issues, and the realities sometimes deviate from my understanding (R12). #01:37:57-9#

4.2.2 Perceptions of Political Environments in China

4.2.2.1 Awareness and Understanding of State Censorship and Political Oppression

Respondents showed various degrees of awareness of the state's political censorship and oppression, yet their perceptions of the censorship are not too clear. Several respondents clearly expressed their disappointments on the condition of freedom of speech in China,

²¹ "Charter 08 is a manifesto initially signed by over 350 Chinese intellectuals and human rights activists. It was published on 10 December 2008, the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopting name and style from the anti-Soviet Charter 77 issued by dissidents in Czechoslovakia." From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charter_08.

either saying “it is not enough. It is still under a lot of restrictions” (R4), or “it is obvious that we cannot log on to Google, and that there are many overseas websites we can’t open” (R2). However, some other respondents did not voice such complaints although they might be aware of the existence of Internet censorship like the “Great Fire Wall”:

Actually I don’t feel that I have insufficient freedom of speech. Also, I don’t feel that I’ve been violated for not having the right to vote (R1). #00:01:32-2#-02

To be honest you can’t compare China with foreign countries. Everybody says in China we don’t have freedom of speech, but I can’t make this conclusion because I haven’t lived abroad and experienced how free he or she could be. At least for now, I don’t feel I need to say something that needs the state to give me more freedom, or I will get punished or something like that because of what I said. It is that I don’t know what this freedom is when people say they don’t have enough freedom (R3). #00:53:03-5#

These respondents discussed censorship in more detail; nevertheless, overall they conveyed an idea that they could not understand the logic behind censorship very well. They either think that censorship is useless, or they do not feel the need to browse the websites that have been blocked by the authorities. This finding might be critical in analysing the interrelationship between the state’s actions on political control and people’s responses to them, which may contribute to the understanding of the mechanisms behind the formation of their political perceptions.

I don’t understand why the state must set such a “wall” on the Internet to encircle us inside. Otherwise we will be reactionary? I don’t think so. Chinese people, whatever they say, they will not do it. More importantly, what’s the purpose of it if everyone has the ability to “climb out of it” (through using VPN) (R4)? #00:41:37-6#-1

I know this “Great Fire Wall”, though to be honest I seldom have the need to browse overseas websites. It is something that completely can’t explain itself. I think it's not a wise governing method. It is silly, not clever enough. I think it is because the government haven’t figured out how to solve the problem of controlling information in the short term, so they have to shut down foreign web sites temporarily. I believe access to these sites will open up before long (R3). #00:55:18-4#

Nevertheless, respondents who are aware of the specific aim of state censorship on information and of methods of surveillance express fear of a potential oppression. They clearly said that they wanted to remain cautious and did not dare talk about political issues in public or online, particularly during current president Xi's administration.

The space for online speech has been tightened. You can talk about some minor things like inequalities or some individual corrupted officials. But you cannot talk about the political system. Several years ago people still dared say something online, but they dare not say it now (R5). #00:54:02-6#

When you are aware that somebody can have access to all your records, and your chat history might become evidence against you, do you still dare say anything (R5)? #00:59:32-2#

4.2.2.2 Perceptions of Specific Political Issues: the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong

During Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement in late 2014, the Chinese authorities initiated a large-scale and intensive propaganda against the protesters in various media platforms²², trying to influence the public opinion in Mainland China. At the same time they censored the information spread from Hong Kong. Their efforts might have been very effective. When asked about their understandings and opinions of this political incident, a majority of the respondents were unable to say what the basic aim of the Umbrella Movement was (i.e. direct election of the Chief Executive by Hong Kong people). The frameworks from which they see the movement and the vocabulary they use to describe it largely reflected the Chinese authorities' propaganda. Both Guangzhou and Shenzhen are cities very close to Hong Kong, and some of my respondents had even visited Hong Kong during the movement, yet few could provide a more or less accurate description of its basic features. All seemed to have been very much influenced by the state controlled media in Mainland China.

Interviewer (I): Last year there was the so-called Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. Have you heard of it?

²² See related description and references in Wikipedia entry of "2014 Hong Kong Protest". https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_Hong_Kong_protests#Chinese_government_and_media.

R6: Yes. I have.

I: Do you know it well?

R6: Not much. Because I haven't seen many detailed descriptions of it. Only some short videos on the social media.

I: So you still don't know what it is about?

R6: No. What is it about, exactly? #01:04:27-1#

It is like a group of students that were incited by somebody who have ulterior motives and did some unwise matters. Even if you had a benign starting point, you might have been influenced by some overseas power and incited by them, as some domestic media reported during that time. I think such influence did exist. Because at first the movement was not like this, later it changed direction (R11). #01:16:43-8#

4.3 Ambiguous Demands for Political Liberalisation: From Values to Interests

Discussions of questions related to democratic values (see Appendix B) show that most respondents hold positive attitudes towards the ideas of competitive multi-party elections, demonstrations, and participating in government decision-making processes, etc. While regarding actual demands for political liberalisation, the respondents' answers are ambiguous and sometimes contradictory. The analysis of the interview process in the previous chapter shows that they did not try to hide their true opinions during the interviews, even though some of them might perceive the topics as sensitive. It can be regarded that they have given genuine replies. So the ambiguities and contradictions in their thoughts might due to a lack of clear understanding of certain issues, or to collisions between values and considerations of self-interests. The collisions can be seen especially when they express evident reservations about actual political reform or effort to push democratisation.

First of all, as much as they agree with the values of political liberties, such as freedom of speech or civic participation, they do not really think of freedom itself as a higher value that worth defending. When the choices involve a risk of their personal interest, they tend to give away the political rights and try to keep what they already have. As a

consequence, even for those respondents who are willing to support actual democratisation in China, they have no intention to promote and advocate the regime change in any explicitly way. Nor do they think it is realistic or they have any accesses to do so, unless the change is initiated by the state. So there are a complete lack of political efficacy and a sense of political powerlessness among these creative class respondents.

4.3.1 Reservations for Actual Political Reform and Democratisation

4.3.1.1 Acceptance of the Regime and Current Political Situation

Although the respondents seemed aware of problems such as social inequality or violations of laws by the state agents, they also said that they had not encountered any such problems in their own personal life, nor witnessed any directly. Thus, they felt that the social and political environment around them is generally acceptable. Consequently, they did not see an urgent need to change the political system, at least not as long as the state can provide a stable social environment.

Problems like limited freedom of speech and improper ways of tackling social emergencies by the authorities still exist, but in my living and working environments, I didn't see people receive unequal treatment. Maybe they simply can't say what they want, but at any rate, I don't feel the environment around me is not good enough or not suitable for living (R1). #00:11:30-2#-1

The conditions of the legal system are OK...But we can still see some incidents that chill us, like law enforcement agents not obeying the law. Of course I only read about such issues in the news, I haven't witnessed them myself (R2). #00:48:35-5#-1

The nation is in a stable condition, and provides an environment where we have stable economic growth. Personally I feel comfortable under these circumstances (R7). #00:34:04-3#

Furthermore, some respondents also explicitly expressed positive expectations about the bureaucratic and legal system.

I think the rule of law system is improving. At least regarding some laws like labour law, or economic laws related to our company, people have increasing legal awareness. The company now is clearly aware what is within the rules and what is not. And the state may also have made some contributions to it (R1). #00:27:57-6#-1

Specifically, the anti-corruption movement and more strict evaluations of the civil servant systems launched by the current administration received their praise, and made them think that governance is improving, even if some of them feel that there have been more restrictions of freedom of speech than two years ago.

Interviewer (I): Then do you think the current change in the governance is leading to some improvements, in general?

R9: I think it is rather better.

I: Which aspect in particular?

R9: In particular... Actually I'm not interested in politics, but you see isn't the anti-corruption doing well now? Previously the officials of the civil servants like to have luxurious dinner using public money. Now they do not dare do it at public expense any more. #00:34:02-6#

Interviewer (I): In general, what do you think of the governance in the last two years? All aspects considered, do you think there is any improvement?

R10: Yes. There is improvement.

I: Are there any backward steps?

R10: I feel that there are more restrictions of free thought. #00:20:22-8#

R10: This is unfortunate. But overall I still hold a positive attitude to its governance. #00:47:31-0#

4.3.1.2 Results Count More than Procedures

Although the respondents expressed positive attitudes towards ideas of democracy, when asked more specifically, they also have reservations regarding democratic election procedures, and think democracy may not be as effective as China's current concentration of power. More importantly, they perceive the ideal political system as a meritocratic decision-making process that could produce better results and listen more to public opinion, rather

than a democratic procedure that everyone would have a right to vote for leaders and “to pit ambition against ambition and interest against interest” (Murphy, 2007: 173).

I haven't thought about participating in the governmental decision process and I still support the one-party system (laughing). I think China's conditions are different from some other countries', and we have our own ethnic problems. So it needs a certain extent of concentration of power to be more effective. Actually the western democracies have sacrificed efficiency (R7). #01:11:22-9#

When discussing the right to vote, some of the respondents think that it is not very important for people who have only a limited understanding of politics to vote, at least not in the short term, also because people might not be able to use it very well.

Em...The right to vote is important, but it depends on who could vote. For people who are sensible in this area and have studied relevant information, each one vote of theirs is really very important. But for people who care less about it, their votes are actually useless. He or she may decide who to vote for some superficial reasons. For example, if we adopt universal suffrage like the US, someone might choose to vote for this candidate only because his or her voice sounds nice, without a deep understanding of the issues. So I think such votes are useless, and might dilute the votes of those really interested in elections (R2). #00:47:07-2#-1

Rather, one respondent (R1) emphasises that her expectation of the political reform is to make political leadership more responsive to public opinion.

I surely hope that people on the top, leadership, would listen more to the voices from below, the complaints and public demands. Then, for some major public issues or accidents, they should not cover them up, and should be more objective instead. At such moments, the role of the government is very important. Its attitudes should be clearer and give a more reasonable explanation. #00:30:04-3#-1

Similarly, another respondent would prefer a decision-making process that could produce better policies in a more democratic form, for instance, through public consultation, rather than through democratic election procedures. The following dialogue between the respondent and myself illustrates his views in detail.

Interviewer (I): For example, the leadership is still not democratically elected like nowadays, you can only hear the announcements of new leaders, but for the policies that would influence your life, they would conduct a real and just public consultation, and to implement such policies after relevant public consultations. Do you think you can accept such a way?

R2: I can.

I: Could you be completely satisfied?

R2: Yes.

I: So it is like...if you think they are not very corrupt, you could accept them to be the leaders (even if not democratically elected)?

R2: Yes. I think it is if you say so. I really don't care who are the people in leadership. What I care about is whether what they do will really has a positive impact.

I: So about the reform of the system, you hope that the process of making and implementing policies could become more democratic?

R2: Yes.

I: But a system to democratically elect leaders is not very important to you if it can meet this condition?

R2: Yes, it's not. #00:29:35-4#-1

Even the very few respondents who think that the current political environment is "not acceptable" expressed their reservations about democratisation. For example, one respondent thinks that people in China are still not politically mature enough to run democracy:

I: So, you think maybe a democratic system will be better?

R4: Not necessarily.

I: Not necessarily?

R4: Because the environment now in China is too complicated. If everyone...if they all have their own minds and thoughts, it would be better. But, I've also seen someone talking about the comparison of these two systems.²³ Maybe in China people do need someone to lead them to do things. If it becomes endless quarrels between two people, maybe in the end it will be ruined. I really don't know about this...although in the one hand maybe...I am also unable to think of a better political system that could suit China, if not an authoritarian one like this. But...maybe sometime later, with the awakening of the people, it might need more political openness (R4). #00:01:50-7#-2

²³ A Ted speech titled "A tale of two political system".
http://www.ted.com/talks/eric_x_li_a_tale_of_two_political_systems?

Moreover, when their personal interests are considered, democratisation seems to be even less desirable, since it would possibly promote the interests of the working class to which they do not belong. Even though their interests would not be sacrificed, they still prefer a stable socio-political environment instead of an unknown democratic future.

I feel that a democratic China would attract people of the lower class and people from rural areas. But I don't belong to these groups. My interest might need to be sacrificed to compensate them and I would not get benefit from this. However, if it comes true, I think I would not lose any interest since I don't have much vested interest either. So I'm like indifferent to it. But I still don't want this society to become chaotic. I think the current social condition is relatively better than before. Though there are still unsatisfactory aspects, it is not that I can't accept it, or I just haven't encountered any problems. So in general I still think the current situation is already good (R13). #00:37:08-0#

4.3.2 Unwillingness to Take Actions and Sense of Political Powerlessness

4.3.2.1 Risk Calculation and Unwillingness to Take Political Actions

Concerning the possibilities of taking political actions to strive for one's goal, the respondents generally think that if there are some issues involving their critical personal interest, they might consider doing something. But more importantly, they need to think about how much risk it would take and what it would cost them. For them, it is not worth taking any actions if it would result in imprisonment or other kinds of retribution from the state, unless their personal life has been seriously endangered and they have to defend it. If they still have all the necessities in life, they would not want to risk them for more political liberties.

If it would get you into the prison, and what you are striving for is not something you cannot live without, then I think...(it would be unnecessary). I think for some people from other social classes, they fight for some rights because they would live very poorly without them, like workers fight for their deserved salaries. They would die for it, since there is no leeway for them. It is their only option. But I think I am not such a person and I still have a lot of things to treasure #01:23:34-2# (R9).

Interviewer (I): If you see any petitions against the Internet censorship or for using Google in China, would you sign it?

R10: I think I need to consider what it would cost to my personal life. I won't do it if I evidently feel that I might be punished for this.

I: So you need to what is the risk there.

R10: The importance is what influence it would have on my personal life. #01:08:50-1#

4.3.2.2 Lack of Political Efficacy

One important reason why the respondents seem not care about political issues is that they sense a complete lack of political efficacy. None of the respondents think that any efforts to advocate political reform or fight for more political rights would be effective. They cannot find any access points to participate in real politics outside state institutions. To their perception, individual political power, if there is any, is insignificant and unable to change anything. Being aware of this powerlessness and frustrated, they divert their attention away from politics and give up on the thought of trying to make substantial changes. And such feelings are especially evident among the respondents who emphasise values of freedom more than other values.

One respondent (No.10), though only 26 years old, half jokingly says that "When I was young (in high school and early years of college), I used to discuss those political problems, but I no longer discuss them now" (#00:22:58-5#), because "there is no space to do anything about it" (#00:42:28-8#).

The same reason applies to the following respondent,

Actually I was once passionate about political issues and angry at those problems. But now it's really...I started to feel that politics has moved further and further away from me, and I would also reject thinking of those issues. It's not that I don't have the intention to make the world a better place. I do. But I feel that I'm so powerless in front of the whole society, and that I don't have any access. I really want to speak up or do something, but I don't know how to do it (R11). #01:42:04-4#

The same respondent mentions that her husband prefers a democratic system, but he also thinks that,

Under the one party system, it would be extremely hard to push the political reform. Even if you make a political movement like this (referring to the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong), the result would be nothing. #01:24:30-4#

4.4 Alienated from the State

If we were to depict an overall image of their life, it should be like this: compared with the upper class, they do not possess that much wealth and social power. Compared with the working class, they are materially sufficient and have enough savings, which makes them do not have to depend on the pension to sustain their future aged life. Besides, they are heavily taxed²⁴. And compared with their middle class fellows who work in various state institutions and enterprises, they have more personal autonomy and working skills. Thus, the only condition they require is a stable socio-economic environment. When a stable society and continuous economic growth are provided, they can have enough free space to lead a life of their own. Like one respondent (No.5) says, which can be used to describe the relationship between this creative class and the state in China, “the state doesn’t help us, but it hasn’t blocked our way either” (#00:36:14-8#).

Thus, politically, they tend to accept the current system and do not demand more political rights and freedom. In spite of the fact that they are aware that political rights in China are restricted, they will not be too critical about the situation, mostly because they do not consider those rights and freedom as necessities of life. Even if they do value political liberties, they will not have the intention to take any political actions, since they feel extremely powerless in front of the state and do not think anything can be changed. They also do not care much about social issues, unless the problems are highly related with their personal life. And there are problems like property price and Child’s education that would

²⁴ See <http://www.newschinamag.com/magazine/the-middle-class-burden>.

deliver constant pressure to them. Nevertheless, they are not patriotic either. Only one respondent expresses explicitly that she loves her country. To many others, they are at a place that the state will not interfere in their daily life, and vice versa. Emerging from these characteristics, there is a sense of political alienation among these respondents and they feel distant from the state. As one respondent explains:

The so-called new middle class like you said about us, should be the people with the least sense of security. We don't have the help and support from the government. Anyway, it's like, I don't care what and how this country is doing, since it doesn't care about me either (R6). #00:31:25-4#

4.4.1 Non-Political Concerns and Expectations

Despite the fact that the majority of respondents are more or less satisfied with their current living standards and material conditions, their major concerns for life are still the economy and material welfare. Except when I brought up political issues in later stages of the interviews, they seldom mentioned the political environment and their concerns regarding politics. When I asked if there were any elements that they thought “might have hindered” life beyond their control. Apart from housing prices, the cost of children's education and medical care these three concerns they often talk about, and what they refer to “the three huge mountains”, they tend to not to relate their personal troubles with social problems or the government. When discuss if they are satisfied with the current life and if they feel any daily pressures, though they may understand some of their dissatisfaction derives from social and public problems, they will look into it through a personal angle and think about how they can deal with it in their private life.

For example, when asked about what kind of improvements they expect most in China in next five years, one respondent replied that it should be more good-quality schools. When I further asked what other aspects she could think of that need improvements, she said

“the pension system”, because “when you get older, you would worry about that more”, though she is only 32 years old. She explained that,

In China elderly people basically have to dependent on their family to maintain a livelihood. So when you get married you would find a lot of pressure waiting for you, since you have to bear the burden of supporting two families. The problem of being old will continue to exist in China. Even the next generation has to worry about it. Therefore you have to earn more money (R11). #00:37:05-7#

However, she thinks that she could deal with the problem by herself, and there is no need to worry too much. She says, “I think it is solvable given my economic condition. There is no need to despair (laughing). No problem” (#00:37:18-9#). In other words, though she hopes that more welfare will be provided by the state in the future, she thinks she can live well even without the expectation coming true.

The only social issue that many of the respondents have mentioned is the problem of inequality and ever more evident class differentiations. They think that social mobility is now stagnant in China, and that “access points allowing to climb the social ladder have become fewer and fewer. Education or other ways are also not effective in changing the current social structure. An economically successful person can no longer be raised from a poor family (R10).” Nonetheless, to most of them this condition does not have much to do with their life, because they are aware of their class belonging and conscious of how many personal interests have been harmed by the current socio-economic structure. As one respondent further says,

I was not born in a poor family. So I should be kind of people that own many interests within the current system (R10). #00:09:39-1#

4.4.2 Life without Politics

Even if some respondents showed awareness of the censorship and restrictions on political liberties, they generally expressed a view that their life are not influenced by and not related to macro-level political issues. Furthermore, they admitted that this view was shaped

either because of insufficient attention paid to politics, or because of a lack of relevant experience.

I think such demonstrations and protests (disclosing officials' property, releasing political prisoners, etc.) are OK. Because the protesters expressed their own ideas, and I value freedom of speech, so I can understand them. However, I would not participate in those activities because I think they will have no real influence on me (R1). #00:07:12-4#-2

Limited resources for attention is one major reason for such a feeling:

Em...it's also because, on the other hand, I'm now paying less attention to them (political affairs), and it is a very important reason. Three years ago when I was at university, I would become angry when I heard about those political issues. But nowadays, I don't have a lot of time to pay attention to them, probably because my life and work are more important to me. #00:11:57-3#-1

Similarly, one respondent (No.2) said that he would think about the potential effect of specific policies, but would not consider the influence of the broader political system:

Because my thoughts are not that...or still a little bit narrow. For myself, I will not be a politician, and I will continue to work in a commercial business, so high politics will not have a large influence on me. It can only be a specific policy that derives from politics that could influence me, so I'm more sensitive to the policy area. #00:44:21-6#-1

Furthermore, when the respondent was asked if he was aware that specific policies are also generated by the broader political system, he replied that his attention and time are limited:

Yes. I understand what you mean. But I haven't thought about it that much and deeply. Or frankly speaking, my attention is limited. I'm sure to put 80 or 90 percent of the attention on things that directly relate to me. So I won't consider political issues much. Because even I know this aspect would also have an influence on me, but not that direct and obvious compared with the things around me. #00:45:05-5#-1

Another respondent (R4) perceives high politics as irrelevant to ordinary people's life:

I think politics in China is related to something more broadly, and at the micro level they might not produce any hindrance to your personal life. What they are doing at the top-level

leadership, whether positive or negative things, I think they don't have much influence on the life of us ordinary people. #00:36:21-5#-1

Lastly, the following dialogue between another respondent (R3) and myself shows the role of lacking political experience in her life:

I: You just mentioned that without participating in politics or political liberties you think you can also live a good life?

R3: Yes. I think I can.

I: You already feel that your life has all the elements that it needs?

R3: It might because you haven't experienced them before. It is like now you only have experienced 70 percent of all the rights, the other 30 percent is something you never knew, and you don't know what things these 30 percent could bring you. So now I don't have a sense of lacking anything. #01:07:02-7#

4.4.3 Attitudes toward Emigration

For respondents who showed explicit dissatisfaction with China's current socio-political environment, emigration is an option as a way out. Given their sense of political powerlessness, they cannot figure out other solutions to live a secure and free life. Welfare and a guaranteed pension system in developed western countries like in the US and Canada look tempting for them. But on the top of that, they feel that in those countries the human dignity and freedom of ordinary people are more respected than in China. As one respondent explicated his intention of emigration:

I've thought of emigration, considering the welfare in those countries, and the human dignity. Like one of my Chinese friends who is an electric engineer and now living in Los Angeles, actually he probably earns as much as I do, but he can live an easier life. Of course he pays more taxes, but he is able to really enjoy what he paid for the welfare. In China you are able to lead a so-so life, but you should pursue more, like pursuing a kind of freedom. Free from being trapped by a house or all sorts of policies. In China there are no solutions for the lack of such freedom. You dare not and cannot change it, so the only thing you can do is running away from it (smile) (R14). #00:20:01-5#

Yet most of the respondents have not considered the option of emigration, for they are more or less are satisfied with the current living standards and environment. However, as one respondent suggested, it might be because they are still in their late twenties or early thirties and do not have enough experience to think about other options, or because they do not own much property so they do not have to worry about losing much. The people she knows who own more than her actually feels more insecure than she does.

Now it's like those people I know who are in their late thirties or forties, all think about emigration. Like my boss and his friends, who own at least two properties in Shenzhen, they fear that one day the Chinese government would take their property away (R6). #01:09:28-0#

CONCLUSION

This study shows that my respondents of the creative class in China are generally satisfied with their living standards and the material resources they possess. Though they still have a persistent life pressure related to money and material issues, such as buying a property, supporting their child through good quality education, and worrying about pension system, they do not expect the state to solve those problems for them. They believe that they are able to overcome the difficulties by hard-working and prospected continuous increase in their income. Further, they feel that they have adequate social autonomy that enables them to govern their personal life. Nevertheless, in the political sphere, they have perceived limitations in their understandings of politics so they do not feel intellectually empowered to make political judgments. Moreover, they have sensed a lack of political efficacy under the current regime, and think that the efforts put into political thinking and actions will all be in vain or will even jeopardise their private life. Therefore, they tend to accept the one-party ruled political system as it is and do not strongly demand more political rights. Consequently, they feel alienated from state politics. They do not pay much attention to it, or have shifted the attention they once paid. Instead, most of them have wholeheartedly embraced their family life and careers, while a few of them consider leaving China in the future and seeking a life of better quality in other countries.

Explanations for Respondents' Limited Political demands

There are four possible explanations for the limited political demands of the creative class respondents in China. First and foremost, most of the respondents are satisfied with the current socio-economic environment and social stability that the state provides. They believe that it is an environment in which they can achieve a pleasant living standard through their own endeavours. Having seen and experienced a rapid economic development in China during the last decade, they obtained an impression that their personal life has been

improving day by day. So in general they also have a positive prospect of the country's future development and their own life. In this aspect, the regime owns a kind of performance legitimacy (Zhao, 2009). People in China accept its rule partly because they are pleased with the economic performance that the regime has been providing.

Second, the respondents have already been enjoying a large extent of personal autonomy in daily life. The regime has successfully created a social sphere that people can lead an autonomous life and seek their own goals, as long as they do not try to touch the boundary of its political power. Thus, it can be said that the creative class respondents living in those metropolises in China have the freedom of self-realisation without state interference. There are no substantial obstacles for them if they want to be successful players in this market-oriented society. And these cities have developed to an extent that there are abundant types of entertainment and options of hobbies for them to chase, no less than in any cosmopolitan metropolises elsewhere. Possessing more autonomy in personal life, they have less motivation to claim specific political rights when they feel that those rights are not necessities of life.

Third, the respondents have not developed real alternative values other than valuing a better living standard. They generally hold positive attitudes towards political liberties such as freedom of speech and civic participation, but the analysis shows that this is only because they think that these liberties can bring about better policy outcomes, not because freedom itself is an important value to hold on. If freedom conflicted with social stability or endangered their life quality, they might no longer support it. As a consequence, though they are not patriotic, and actually often feel quite distant from the state and its political ideology, they are not strongly critical of it either.

Last but not least, the sense of political powerlessness among the respondents makes them shift their attention from political affairs to personal life and accept the current political

environment. Several respondents expressed the idea that they had to tolerate the authorities since they were unable to change anything. And if all the efforts and time they devote to thinking and arguing about politics were proved to be useless, they would rather pay attention on personal affairs and their own career.

Ruptures in the Human Empowerment Process

A major finding of this study shows that, although the creative class respondents in China do not rely on the authoritarian regime to maintain a prosperous life, and although many of them have expressed positive attitudes toward the idea of democracy and freedom of speech in general, they still did not exhibit a clear support for democratisation. More importantly, they did not demand strongly that those political rights they agreed with should be realised. That is to say, they have reservations about the reform of the political systems that aims to fully adopt the procedures of democratic election, and there is a gap between their value orientations and actual demands.

The human empowerment process (Inglehart & Welzel, 2008; Welzel, 2013) suggest that when people possess sufficient material, intellectual, and social resources, they would gain a full range of individual autonomy that enable them to develop growing support for self-expression values and especially actual demands for more political liberties. It can be seen from the analysis that my respondents' needs for material resources have been met, and they also gained enough social autonomy for them to believe that they can control the track of their personal life. However, they lack the intellectual autonomy to fulfil the full empowerment process. My respondents in China do not possess adequate knowledge of politics that allow them to make autonomous judgments on political affairs. In addition, one more element related to the empowerment process also emerges during the study, which is political experience. Without relevant experience of particular political liberties and experience of participating in politics, they do not have enough confidence to evaluate an

alternative type of political system, nor do they feel the need to possess more political rights. Lacking such critical intellectual resources, they have a perception that they are not yet self-empowered to deal with politics. Moreover, because of the party-state's tight control of the political accesses and retribution on political activists, even those respondents who display a clear support for democratisation feel a sense of political powerlessness and will not consider taking actions to promote it. They recognised *the low utility of freedom* (Welzel, 2013) in China's current political environment, and perceive that efforts to assert freedom would endanger the quality and stability of their daily life.

Thus, I propose the following explanation for the absence of political self-empowerment among my creative class respondents. First and foremost, the state's control of information system will constrain the political knowledge that people can possess. Furthermore, for some respondents, the deficiencies in political knowledge might also influence their perceptions of those state's restrictions *per se*, and that makes them demand even less political liberties, because they have no such perceptions that their rights might have been violated and hence accept the current authoritarian regime. While for other respondents who have more political knowledge and a more accurate understanding of China's political environment, their perception of the state's repressive threats decreases their sense of political efficacy, thus keeping them from voicing their demands for political liberalisation. Moreover, the Chinese authorities implement the control of information and political oppression in very systematic and institutionalised ways that aim to restrain the coordination goods available to the citizens and limit their political experience. These methods of political control affect people's political values, as the concept of institutional learning (Rustow, 1970; Jackman & Miller 1998) indicates. As a consequence, it might be concluded that if China's economic growth does not decline, or before the political reform initiates from above, the chances that those creative class respondents start to demand

democratisation would continue remain low. Even if the country's economy does face a downturn, the analysis also shows that as long as the state could sustain the social stability, they will have no motivation to try to change its political system.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Because the total number of the interviews in this study is small and all of the respondents are my friends and their friends or acquaintances, it is possible that there are members of creative class in China who live in other cities and have quite distinct political values, that have not been covered by this study.

While if this study conveyed any substantial understandings of the creative class in China, and previous understandings of the general Chinese middle class could be added to, we may find that the Chinese middle class group will only have minor political relevance to the country's political situation in foreseeable future, whether it is about the Communist Party elites' efforts to sustain authoritarian regime or demands for democracy from below. Given that studying party elites who have great political influence is often not possible, future research of China's political changes may focus on the country's working class and track their life changes when now the economy seems to be facing a downturn and many of them have lost their jobs. What are they thinking about under such circumstances? And what might they do if they find increasingly difficult to sustain an acceptable living condition? These questions may have more political relevance to China's future.

REFERENCE LIST

- Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2006). *Economic Origins of Democracy and Dictatorship*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2012). *Why Nations Fail*. London: Crown Publishing Group.
- Almond, G., & Verba, S. (1963). *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes in Five Western Democracies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bengtsson, Å., & Christensen, H. (2014). Ideals and Actions: Do Citizens' Patterns of Political Participation Correspond to their Conceptions of Democracy? *Government and Opposition*, 1-27.
- Bernhard, M., & Karakoc, E. (2007). Civil Society and the Legacies of Dictatorship. *World Politics* 59: 539–67.
- Bertrand, J. (1998). Growth and democracy in Southeast Asia. *Comparative Politics*, 30(3): 355-75.
- Boix, C, & Stokes, S. (2003). Endogenous Democratization. *World Politics* 55, 517–49.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Bueno De Mesquita, B. & Downs, G (2005). Development and Democracy. *Foreign Affairs* 84: 77–86.
- Cantoni, D., Chen, Y., Yang, D. Y., Yuchtman, N., & Zhang, Y. J. (2015). Curriculum and Ideology. *Journal of Political Economy*, forthcoming. Copy at http://faculty.haas.berkeley.edu/yuchtman/Noam_Yuchtman_files/curriculum_draft.pdf
- Chen, J. (2013). *A Middle Class Without Democracy: Economic Growth and the Prospects for Democratization in China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dalton, L. (2000). Value Change and Democracy. In: Susan J. Pharr and Robert D. Putnam (eds.), *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 252–69.
- Diamond, L. (1992). Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered. In: Larry Diamond & Gary Marks (eds.), *Reexamining Democracy*. London: Sage, pp. 93–139.
- Diamond, L. (1993). The Globalization of Democracy. In: Robert O. Slater, Barry M. Schutz, & Steven R. Dorr (eds.), *Global Transformation and the Third World*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, pp. 31–69.
- Eckstein, H. (1998). "Congruence Theory Explained." In H. Eckstein, F. J. Fleron, E. P. Hoffmann & W. H. Reisinger (eds.), *Can Democracy Take Root in Post-Soviet Russia?*. Lanham, ML: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 3–34.
- Ekman, A. (2014). The Distinctive Features of China's Middle Classes. *Asie Vision*, 69, 18. Copy at http://www.iberchina.org/files/china_middle_classes_ifri.pdf
- Englehart, N. A. (2003). Democracy and the Thai middle class. *Asian Survey*, 43(2): 253-79.
- Florida, R. (2012). *The Rise of the Creative Class, Revisited*. Basic Books.
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Glassman, R. M. (1997). *The new middle class and democracy in global perspective*. New York: St. Martin's; London: Macmillan.

- Hadenius, A. & J. Teorell (2005). Cultural and Economic Prerequisites of Democracy. *Studies in Comparative International Development* 39: 87–106.
- Hattori, T., & Funatsu, T. (2003). The emergence of the Asian middle classes and their characteristics. *Developing Economies*, 41(2): 140-60.
- Huang, H. (2015). Propaganda as Signaling. *Comparative Politics*, 47(4), 419–444.
- Huntington, S. (1968). *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Inglehart, R. (1997). *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, R., & Welzel, C. (2005). *Modernization, cultural change, and democracy: The human development sequence*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jackman, R., & Miller, R. (1998). Social Capital and Politics. *Annual Review of Political Science* 1, 47–73.
- Jiang, J., & Yang, D. (2015). Lying or believing? Measuring preference falsification from a political purge in China. *Comparative Political Studies*. 49(5), 600-634.
- Kuran, T. (1997). *Private truths, public lies: The social consequences of preference falsification*. Harvard University Press.
- Legard, Keegan and Ward (2003). "In-depth Interviews", in Ritchie, Jane et Lewis, Jane (Eds), *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage, pp. 138-170.
- Li, C. (2010). *China's Emerging Middle Class: Beyond Economic Transformation*. Brookings Institution Press. Chicago.
- Lipset, S. (1959). Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy. *American Political Science Review*, 55, 69–105.
- Lipset, S. (1960). *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Lipset, M., Seong, K., & Torres, J. (1993). A Comparative Analysis of the Social Requisites of Democracy. *International Social Science Journal* 45, 155–75.
- Lu, J. & Shi, T. (2014). The battle of ideas and discourses before democratic transition: Different democratic conceptions in authoritarian China. *International Political Science Review*, 36(1), 20-41. doi:10.1177/0192512114551304
- Murphy, W. F. (2007). *Constitutional democracy: creating and maintaining a just political order*. John Hopkins University Press.
- North, D. C., Wallis, D. J., & Weingast, B. R. (2009). *Violence and Social Orders*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Qi, L, & Shin, D.C. (2011). How mass political attitudes affect democratization: Exploring the facilitating role critical democrats play in the process. *International Political Science Review*, 32(3), 245-262. doi:10.1177/0192512110382029
- Rueschemeyer, D., Stphens, E. H. & Stephens, J. D. (1992). *Capitalist Development and Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rustow, D. (1970). Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model. *Comparative Politics*, 2(3), 337-363.
- Putnam, R. (1993). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Pye, L, & Verba, S. (eds.). (1963). *Political Culture and Political Development*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press.
- Sonoda, S. (2010). Emergence of Middle Classes in Today's Urban China: Will They Contribute to Democratization in China? *International Journal of China Studies*, 1(2), 351-369.
- Spires, A. (2011). Contingent Symbiosis and Civil Society in an Authoritarian State: Understanding the Survival of China's Grassroots NGOs. *American Journal of Sociology*, 117(1), 1-45.
- Sundhaussen, U. (1991). Democracy and the middle classes: Reflections on political development. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 37, 100-117.
- Tang, M. (2011). The Political Behavior of the Chinese Middle Class. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 16 (4), 373-87.
- Teets, J. C. (2013). Let Many Civil Societies Bloom: The Rise of Consultative Authoritarianism in China. *The China Quarterly*, 213, 19-38.
- Teorell, J. (2010). *Determinants of Democratization*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Vanhanen, T. (2003). *Democratization*. London: Routledge.
- Welzel, C., & Inglehart, R. (2008). The Role of Ordinary People in Democratization. *Journal of Democracy*, 19(1), 126-140.
- Welzel, C. (2013). *Freedom Rising: Human Empowerment and the Quest for Emancipation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yan, X. (2012). Where have all the people gone? Some Reflections on Civil Society and Regime Stability in the People's Republic of China. *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 8(2), 17-24.
- Yan, X. (2014). Engineering Stability: Authoritarian Political Control over University Students in Post-Deng China, *The China Quarterly*, 218, 493-513.
- Yang, D. (2016). China's Developmental Authoritarianism Dynamics and Pitfalls. *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 12(1), 100-123.
- Zhao, D. (2009). The mandate of heaven and performance legitimation in historical and contemporary China. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 53(3), 416-433.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Topic Guide

Opening statement:

This interview mainly asks about questions concerning the relationship between one's personal life, career, and a bigger socio-political environment, and their possible mutual influence. Besides, I will also ask your opinions and thoughts on related issues.

The data currently is collected for my master's thesis. I will transcribe and analyse them and select excerpts that can be put into the research article. The respondent will remain anonymous, despite that the information that reflects personal socio-economic features might be used in the analyses. And above all, the recording will be under my supervision and I will not spread it.

1. The condition of one's job and career, and the extent of autonomy one has in the work. *(About 10 minutes, together with the introduction)*

- General information about one's job
 - Firstly, I will need information about how much salary you earn from the work each year. Would you please tell me the approximate range of your salary?
 - What do you do exactly in the work?
 - Why did you choose this job in the first place? What do you think the advantage and trend of it?
- Sense of security and autonomy towards one's job
 - When talks about job security, will you worry about your working capability, or difficulty of finding another job when faced with lay-off or any other unexpected situations?
 - How much autonomy do you feel in this job?
 - How do you think this job's relationship with the state and the market?

2. The general condition of personal life and level of satisfaction. *(About 15 minutes, together with the second part)*

- Generally speaking, how is your current personal or family life?
- What do you think of your current income and other material resources?

- Is there anything that you want or want to do but the chances are limited due to your financial condition or other resources you possess?
- How satisfied are you with the current condition?
 - What do you think your life satisfaction link to?
- If respondents mention any pressures or obstacles in their life, ask what exactly these are.
 - Are there any troubles that you feel difficult to solve due to your current condition? (The respondents usually refer to real estate, health care, and the education of future generation those “three mountains” that general modern urban Chinese have to worry about)
 - Ask the respondents how do they perceive the problem of owning a property in China? How troublesome is this problem for them?
 - Would you think of sending your child abroad for education? If so, which level would you prefer to let your child start with?
- What is the future goal for your personal life or your family?

3. **Perceptions of the social environment, of the city they live in and of related administration affairs. General feelings about life autonomy.**

- Why did you choose to find this job and live in this city?
 - What are the advantages of living here? Compared to other cities in China?
 - What are the defects do you think still exist in this city, concerning government administration maybe?
- To what extent can you say that you are able to control your life? Are there any elements (in the society or government side) that you think might hinder or have hindered your life that beyond your control or endeavor?
- What do you think of the social environment in China?
 - Can you think of any current major social problems?
 - (If respondent mention social inequality) What do you think of this problem? How serious is this? What’s the influence of it over your personal life?

4. **Media use habit and news focus, perceptions of relationship between personal life, the state, and politics. On Internet censorship and restrictions (eg. Great Fire Wall).**
(about 15 minutes)

- How often do you read news?
 - What news outlets do you usually use?

- What are your focuses?
- What about political news or news on current affairs?
- Which recent news that you has paid particular attention to? What elements of it attracted you attention?
- How much trust do you have in China's news media? Why? Do you have different trust level towards state media and more marketised media?
- If you usually do not pay attention to current affairs news, why not?
- If you think the state and politics are unrelated to your personal life (*when respondents thinks this is the reason they do not pay much attention to political news*), why do you think so?
- How do you feel the information environment in China? Is there sufficient information you need or not?
- What is your Internet use habit?
- How do you perceive China's online censorship and restrictions?
 - What do you think of it? Does it have an influence over your Internet use behaviour? Do you feel frustrated by the GFW? Will you "climb over the wall" in a regular basis? (*The phrase refers to overcoming the Internet restrictions by using some free or paid online services such as VPN*)
 - How strongly do you feel the need to use Internet freely? What are those needs? If not, why?
- Why do you think the government wants to impose such restrictions? How reasonable do you think it is?

5. On perceptions of political environment in China, political knowledge and experience, attitudes towards the government and political liberalisation. (about 25 minutes)

- If we talk about political environment in general, what do you feel about it? Would you say you have any experience with it, or do you feel that politics is close to you?
 - What do you think of politics in general? What is it?
 - How comfortable do you feel about the current political environment in China?
- What is your feeling on the state governance in the recent two years? Are there any improvements or regress?
 - On freedom of speech and Internet censorship, do you feel the restrictions have been tightened or loosed?

- What are the influences of these changes on your daily life?
 - How do you feel about those changes? Do you like it or not? Why?
 - What do you think will happen in the next five or ten years in China?
 - What do you feel the condition of rule of law in China?
 - What expectations do you have from the state? On which aspects do you hope it could improve?
 - What is your understanding about liberty, about freedom in general?
 - What is your general understanding about democracy?
 - What do you think the difference would be if we have democracy or not? What do you think the advantages we would have?
 - How do you feel about elections? About the right to vote?
 - Compared with China's political system and censorship on speech, what do you feel about western democracy, and their freedom of speech (are you familiar with it)? To what extent it is desirable to you? Or not?
 - What do you think of China's political future? How possible will it become democracy? How much expectation do you have of it?
 - How much desire do you have to participate in politics if China becomes democratic?
 - Would you consider doing anything to push China towards that direction? Why or? What are your motivations? Or why not? What is your major concern?
 - How likely will you participate in any form of self-organised activities that aim to address some (major) problems you face in the daily life?
 - If it were about the conflict between personal interest and safety, under what circumstances would you consider doing something?
 - Have you ever thought about emigration in certain moment? Why or why not?
6. **Perceptions and views of Hong Kong's socio-political conflicts, of China's political dissidents** (*about 5 minutes*)
7. **Questions in the appendix B with follow-up questions** (*about 15 minutes*)
8. **Anything else that want to add. Respondents' own reflections.**

Appendix B: Questions on Attitudes Toward Democracy

In Chen's research (2013, Chapter 3), he used the following three groups of questions to evaluate people's general attitudes towards democracy:

(A) Valuation of Political Liberty

In general demonstrations should not be allowed because they frequently become disorderly and disruptive. (Disagree)

The harmony of the community will be disrupted if people form their organisations outside the government. (Disagree)

(B) Support for Participatory Norm

Government leaders are like the head of a family; we should all follow their decisions and don't need to participate in government decision-making. (Disagree)

Measures to promote political reform should be initiated by the party and government, not by ordinary people (laobaixing) like me. (Disagree)

(C) Support for Competitive Election

Government officials at various levels should be selected by multi-candidate elections. (Agree)

Competition among several parties in election of government leaders should not be allowed. (Disagree)