

# Book Reviews

*Information for Autocrats: Representation in Chinese Local Congresses*

MELANIE MANION

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*Information for Autocrats* is a book about representation in China's authoritarian political system. The focus is on local congresses and their relationship to ordinary citizens. Manion seeks to understand in what way and to what extent congress deputies act as representatives for their constituents. She uses unique survey data of more than 5,000 local congress deputies in combination with 65 qualitative interviews. Her main finding is that there are essentially two types of deputies: the "good types" nominated by ordinary citizens, and the "governing types" nominated by the Party. While there are important differences between these two types, they both view themselves as delegates whose purpose is to ensure the provision of public goods rather than as state agents. This is the first study that can say with confidence that the large majority of local congress deputies consider their main role to be representing community interests rather than acting as state agents. But this should not be seen by the Party as a step towards democracy or a cause for worry. Instead, Manion convincingly shows how this "representation by design" is in fact part of the carefully crafted electoral rules and the Party's cadre management system. Congress deputies serve the purpose of giving authorities important information regarding the opinions and will of the people, which in turn strengthens Beijing's authoritarian rule. In addition to this main part of the study, Manion also examines the phenomenon of independent candidates. Based on blog posts on Sina Weibo and analyses of available Chinese publications, she delivers the most comprehensive study so far of independent congress candidates as well as an estimation of their numbers – at least 27,000 since 1979. If the parochial representation performed by ordinary congress deputies serves the purpose of strengthening authoritarian rule, independent candidates are an unintended consequence of the election system. Consequently, local authorities suppress them with silent approval from Beijing.

This well-written book is a strong contribution in many respects. First, it presents valuable and unique empirical data on local congress deputies. A survey of 5,130 congress deputies is in itself a great research effort that was only possible through collaboration with Peking University's Center for Research on Contemporary China. Second, the study is methodologically sophisticated. Manion has a long experience of conducting surveys in China and her transparent discussions on how the survey was conducted as well as her statistical analysis leave no doubt about the validity of the data. Similarly, she discusses at length the methodological challenges related to qualitative interviews and blog posts. Third, she connects the Chinese case to comparative research on representation and legislatures in general, which gives it theoretical strength. By using a comparative perspective, Manion shows that we should see China's congresses as representative institutions and not as meaningless "rubber-stamp legislatures," and understand that the Chinese political context affects their function. Representation is real but it is restricted to parochialism. Finally, based on her in-depth knowledge of Chinese politics she manages to explain exactly how

the people's deputies fulfill their function within the complex authoritarian political system.

In the conclusion, which is a model of brevity, Manion starts by saying that the book tells two stories. One story is about the political elites and representation by design (chapters one to three) and the other is about society (chapters four to five). This is one possible way to understand the structure of the book. However, I find the connection between chapter four, which is based on a survey of 983 villagers and their views on congress delegates, and chapter five, which focuses on urban activist independent candidates, rather weak. To me, chapter five stands out from the rest of the book, but not in a negative way. Manion seems to emphasize the first three chapters since the summary of the book on the very first page only refers to that part of the study. Certainly the research behind this part of the book is impressive and the results are clear and robust. Yet the findings mainly confirm what previous research on local congresses suspected. In contrast, chapter five is more explorative and its conclusions can only be tentative, but it tells us something about a phenomenon about which we know very little. The many anecdotal examples related to independent candidates also make this chapter a fascinating read that adds to the impression that this is a highly relevant book for our understanding of contemporary Chinese politics.

This book is essential reading for anyone interested in China's people's congress system, but its value goes far beyond that. It will be useful for students and researchers interested in Chinese politics, authoritarianism and comparative politics. Melanie Manion's book is a great contribution to the field of Chinese politics.

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*Populist Authoritarianism: Chinese Political Culture and Regime Sustainability*

WENFANG TANG

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xiii + 220 pp. \$27.95

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Weaving multiple public opinion surveys collected from mainland China (between 1987 and 2015) in this book, Wenfang Tang, a leading survey researcher on Chinese politics, provides a thorough and comprehensive analysis of a key empirical puzzle in today's largest authoritarian regime: why do the Chinese people consistently show strong government support while China witnesses increasing social unrest? To effectively tackle this empirical puzzle, Tang brings the CCP's revolutionary experiences and governing style to the centre of his theorization and analysis. More specifically, building upon the literature of political culture in comparative politics, Tang argues that China's political culture, primarily shaped by the CCP's mass-line-inspired political mobilization, collectivization and provision of social services, exerts great influence on the Chinese people's political attitudes and behaviour. According to Tang, this political culture can be best described as "populist authoritarianism," which consists of six key components, namely (1) mass line ideology, (2) accumulation of social capital, (3) public political activism and contentious politics, (4) a hyper-responsive government, (5) weak political and civil institutions, and (6) a high level of regime trust.