

**POLITICAL REPRESENTATION BEYOND ELECTIONS:  
A COMPARISON CHINA/WESTERN COUNTRIES  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

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and

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Very often political representation is considered only as emerging through elections. This is especially the case in Western political theory but not only. However, if this dimension has been central in Western representative governments since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, other forms and concepts of representation have existed long before representative governments became the central feature of Western political systems, and still exist in articulation with, or independent from, electoral mandate. This is even truer in China, where the “Mandate of Heaven” (天命 *tiānmìng*) in Imperial China or the theory of the “Three Represents” (三个代表 *sāngè dàibiǎo*) in the People's Republic of China do not rely upon elections.

Rather than opposing Western and Chinese traditions and contemporary political systems, we would like to work in a direction that could step back from the “deceptive familiarity” of the word “representation” and analyze parallels and differences between forms of representation that are not reducible to the electoral principal-agent (or mandate) relation. This comparison will involve historians of ideas as well as political theorists. Our aim is to distinguish several notions of representation, starting with the words used by actors and then putting them through a process of abstraction, and examining how historical analyses may provide ways of thinking about current transformations beyond mandate representation.

To start with, the “Mandate of Heaven” (天命 *tiānmìng*) in Imperial China is no “mandate” in the meaning that Western political thinking gives to the word. In the Chinese Confucian tradition, there is no personal God with a personal will. The “Mandate of Heaven” (天命 *tiānmìng*) implies much more a harmony between Heaven, Earth and the human realm, between a cosmic order and a political order. This harmony is confirmed by rituals, natural events and the social peace and wealth. Conversely, failed rituals, natural disasters and social unrest reveal a trouble in this harmony. Could one therefore consider that the “Mandate of Heaven” (天命 *tiānmìng*) is no representation at all, and that the concept of representation existed only in the West, before being imported to China via Japan at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the notion of 代表 *dàibiǎo* was created?

This hypothesis needs to be verified and a broader discussion on the various meanings of “representation” has to take place. One has to be aware that the various meanings that are captured by the word “representation” in English (and in other languages influenced by Latin) are expressed by different words in Chinese, but also in languages such as German, Persian or Hindi. “Representation”, understood as the production of meanings, has quite various translations in Chinese, which vary according to the context (*Biǎoyǎn* 表演, *Zhànshì* 展示, *Huàxiàng* 画像, *Miáohuì* 描绘). What does this imply when a number of contemporary theories insist upon the fact that political representation intrinsically is a performance and a production of symbols? In addition, the idea of “representativeness”, which is central to the notion of descriptive representation, can also be translated in different ways (*Dàibiǎo xìng* 代表性, *Diǎnxíng* 典型). A reflexive distance with the English meaning of the word is therefore necessary in order to better understand the associations that this ambivalent word allows, but also the conceptual shortcuts to which its naïve ethnocentric understanding can lead.

Beyond the ambiguity of words, one has to stress that there have been two different concepts of political representation in the Western tradition. The German conceptual history (most notably Hasso Hofmann) as well as German-speaking historians have quite convincingly analyzed them. The legal and conceptual notion of representation is not that old. It was created in the Middle Ages. It implies that the representative and the represented are one and the same artificial juridical person, which in turn implies that the represented are bound by the representative’s decisions. Since the Middle Age, a first kind of political representation has implied a principal-agent relation, a mandate given by the principle to the agent (what the Germans call *die Vertretung*); elections have become the symbol of this first type. In the second kind of representation, which was called “identity representation” in the Middle Ages and which could be modernized as “embodiment representation” nowadays, a “*pars pro toto*”, a part of the political body, represents the latter without an explicit mandate; instead, it is largely the existence of the representative which makes the multiplicity of the represented exist as one and the same political body (this was conceptualized later by German political theory, especially during the Weimar Republic, as *die Repräsentation*). Invented in the context of medieval corporations and communes, this notion was taken over in the Church by Conciliarism, and in a later period by absolutist theory (the famous “I am the state” attributed to Louis XIV), but also by a number of the Parliamentary advocates who claimed to better embody the Nation than the King.

The non-electoral forms of representation have not disappeared in modern political systems. In China, this is most notably the case for the theory of the *Three Represents* (三个代表 *sāngè dàibiǎo*), proposed by Jiang Zemin in 2000, and explicitly included in the Constitution of the CCP in 2002 and in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China in 2004. It states that “the Communist Party of China is the vanguard both of the Chinese working class and of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation. It is the core of leadership for the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics and represents the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people.” (*Constitution of the CCP*). Interestingly enough, the French official translation provided by the CCP sometimes uses the expression “embodies” (“*incarner*”)

rather than “represents”: does this suggest some similarities with the old Western notion of embodiment representation?

It would however be misleading to think that the embodiment-representation has completely vanished from the scene in modern Western countries. To start with, it is interesting to notice the evolution of the words used by the US Founding fathers. In the Declaration of Independence, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1776, they declared “We... the Representatives of the united States of America... do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States...” Eleven years later, adopting the Constitution, on September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1787, they pronounced the most famous words of the US political history: “We the People of the United States... do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” Nowadays, when a French President takes office, the President of the Constitutional council who declares him/her president tells him/her officially: “You now embody (*incarnez*) France”. Electoral mandate, in these cases, tends to merge with the old idea of embodiment representation. Beyond the USA and France, the constitutional lawyer Carl Schmitt has written: “in any state, there must exist persons who can say: ‘we are the state’ ” (*Constitutional Theory*). One could even say that beyond the legal framework, a representative claim (Saward) was raised by the Occupy Wall Street movement with the rallying cry “We are the 99%”, by the Davos Forum when its participants speak with expressions such as “the world economy necessitates x or y”, or by NGOs’ activists during the COP 21 (Earth Summit) when they say: “the global civil society claims...”

The questions that the conference will raise are the following:

1. How is the “Mandate of Heaven” (天命 *tiānmìng*) in Imperial China to be understood? Was it a special kind of representation? Were there various competing interpretations of the “Mandate of Heaven” (天命 *tiānmìng*)? More broadly, is it possible to speak of political representation in China before the invention of the notion of 代表 *dàibiǎo* and the development of Republican forms of government?
2. Is the idea of harmony between different orders that characterizes the “Mandate of Heaven” (天命 *tiānmìng*) relevant to understand the logic of the old concept of “identity-representation” or “embodiment-representation”? The origins of the “Mandate of Heaven” (天命 *tiānmìng*) are clearly deeply rooted in the Chinese tradition, but to what extent should its conceptual structure be confined to the later? Can the idea of harmony help analyze a variety of representative claims in contemporary societies (both in the West and in China) that go beyond, or are coupled but not reducible to, electoral representation?
3. What is exactly the conceptual meaning of the theory of the “Three Represents” (三个代表 *sāngè dàibiǎo*)? Could the old European notion of embodiment-representation be used to seize its logic?
4. What was precisely the logic of *identity*- or *embodiment*-representation in Western medieval and early modern world? What have been its various

competing interpretations? Its origins are clearly deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, but to what extent should its conceptual structure be confined to the later?

5. With what concept(s) should we analyze a variety of representative claims in contemporary Western society that go beyond, or are coupled but not reducible to, electoral representation? Could the old European notion of embodiment-representation be instrumental in seizing their logics?
6. What are the benefits of approaching forms of modern political societies—Western and Chinese—through the lens of political representation? Can transitions to modern political societies be detected and analyzed in terms of various types of political representation?

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**POLITICAL REPRESENTATION BEYOND ELECTIONS:  
A COMPARISON CHINA/WESTERN COUNTRIES  
PROGRAM**

**FRIDAY OCTOBER 21TH**

8:30 Welcoming speech: Qiang LI (Professor in School of Government, Director of Centre for European Studies, Peking University)

8:45. Demin DUAN (Associate Professor in School of Government, Peking University):  
Presentation of the conference

**POLITICAL REPRESENTATION BEYOND ELECTIONS: THEORETICAL ISSUES**

Chair: Qiang LI (Professor in School of Government, Director of Centre for European  
Studies, Peking University)

9:00. Yves SINTOMER (Professor, Paris 8 University, French University Institute): *Political representation beyond elections*

9:25. Jürgen GEBHARDT (Emeritus professor, University of Erlangen-Nürnberg): *Symbols and political representation*

9:50. Respondent: Jun-Hyeok KWAK (Professor, Sun Yat-Sen University, China)

10:05. Discussion

10:25. Tea/Coffee break

10:55 Dario CASTIGLIONE (Professor, Exeter University): *Political representation and the role of the public*

11:20. Quanxi GAO (Professor, Shanghai Jiaotong University): “The Concept of Representation in John C. Calhoun's Constitutional Theory”

11:45. Respondent: Luca GABBIANI (Director, Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, Beijing Center)

12:00. Discussion

12:20. Lunch break

**POLITICAL REPRESENTATION BEFORE THE MODERN REVOLUTIONS**

Chair: Pierre Etienne WILL (Emeritus Professor of the history of Modern China, Collège de  
France)

14:20. Alessandro MULIERI (Post-doctoral Research Fellow, KU Leuven University, Institute of Philosophy): *Marsilius of Padua's Political Theory of Representation*

14:45. Thomas MAISSEN (Professor and Director, German History Institute in Paris): *The Virgin and Her State: Representing the Body Politic Through Metaphors of Marital Status*

15:10. Respondent: Qiang LI (Professor in School of Government, Director of Centre for European Studies, Peking University)

15:25. Discussion

15:45. Tea/Coffee break

16:10. Samuel HAYAT (Research associate professor at the CNRS-CERAPS): *The Republican Paradox: Embodiment-Representation in 19th century France*

16:35. Pablo Ariel BLITSTEIN (Post-doctoral Research Fellow University of Heidelberg): *Making the Heaven present: the Mandate of Heaven and political representation in late imperial China*

17:00. Qifu LIN (Associate Professor, Jilin University): *The Element of Representation in the Political Thinking of a Unified China*

17:25. Respondent: Pierre Etienne WILL (Emeritus Professor of the history of Modern China, Collège de France)

17:40. Discussion

18:00. Dinner

## **SATURDAY OCTOBER 22TH**

### **POLITICAL REPRESENTATION BEYOND ELECTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA (1)**

Chair: Jean-Louis ROCCA (Researcher at the CERI Science Po Paris)

9:00 Demin DUAN (Associate Professor, School of Government, Peking University): *Representation Beyond Election: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Political Representation in Contemporary China*

9:25. Eric FLORENCE (Researcher and director, CEFC Hong Kong, Centre for Ethnic and Migration Studies of the University of Liege): *An exploration of “representation through subjectivisation” or how rural migrant workers’ collectives draw on arrangements of visibility in their everyday struggles for recognition*

9:50. Respondent: Chloé Froissart, (director of the CFC, Tsinghua University)

10:05. Discussion

10:25. Tea/Coffee break

10:55. Zhiqi NIE (Associate Professor, Beijing Normal University): *Beyond Election? A Critical Review of China's Descriptive Representation*

11:20. Thomas HEBERER (Senior Professor for East Asian Politics, Duisburg University): *The Representation of Entrepreneurs in Contemporary China*

11:45. Respondent: Emilie FRENKIEL (Associate Professor, University of Paris East, LIPHA)

12:00. Discussion

12:20 Lunch break

## **POLITICAL REPRESENTATION BEYOND ELECTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA (2)**

Chair: Emilie FRENKIEL (Associate Professor, University of Paris East, LIPHA)

14:20. Biao ZHANG (Lecturer, China University of Political Science and Law): *Representation: A Sorry Case of Mutual Neglect*

14:45. Jinyu SUN (Ph.D. candidate, University College London): *Political Obligations in Non-Democratic Societies through the Lens of Political Representation*

15:10. Judith AUDIN (post-doctoral researcher, Sciences Po Aix CHERPA/MEDIUM), Jérôme Doyon (PhD candidate, Sciences Po/CERI): *From political activism to social work: The renewed intermediary function of two mass organizations in 21st century China*

15:35. Respondent: Yunyun Zhou (Ph. D. candidate, Oxford University)

15:50. Discussion

16: 10. Tea/Coffee break

## **CONCLUSION**

16:40. Introduced by Demin DUAN and Yves SINTOMER

17:00. End of Programme

18:00 Dinner