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In any society the number of potential public issues almost always exceeds the capabilities of the government to process them. Issues thus must compete for a place on the decision-making agenda. While it is certainly a dimension of power to influence the decision-making process per se, it is perhaps even more important to have a say in setting the agenda. This article proposes a typology of six agenda-setting models and discusses how those models have evolved in contemporary China. It argues that only by grasping a subtle yet significant transformation of agenda-setting models can one fully appreciate the extent to which China's political system has changed.

Keywords: *public policy; agenda setting; political change; regime type*

The right to elect public officials is no doubt important. Yet, this form of political participation is sporadic, occurring only once in several years. In many electoral democracies, election is the only way for the majority of people to involve themselves in public affairs, even though normally less than a majority even bothers to vote in all but national elections. Every now and then, bustling electoral campaigns dupe voters into believing that they are the "masters of the country." As soon the electoral season is over, however, most people exhibit little interest in public affairs and few know how to influence government decisions by any means other than electoral participation. They are what Schattschneider (1960) call "the semi-sovereign people," or the "audience" of politics rather than active participators in politics. Yet, the initiatives and actions taken by the elected elite exert enormous impact on people's livelihood and the prospects of the country. For this reason, policy making should not be an exclusive domain of political leaders, even if they are elected by the people. A real democracy is a polity where people have the chance to influence the entire process of policy formation.

With respect to policy formation, people tend to focus on who influences key decisions and how that influence is exercised, thus ignoring a more crucial question: Where do public policy issues come from in the first place? Or,

put differently, why do certain controversies or incipient issues come to command the attention and concern of authoritative decision makers within the political system while others fail to do so? In any modern society at any given time, the range of issues pressing on government is virtually boundless, but the resources available to government to address those issues—money, personnel, information, time, and above all, attention—are constrained, and often constrained quite severely. Since the demands exceed the capacity of the system to deal with them effectively, policy makers have to choose among a wide variety of possible agenda items. In other words, not all problems brought to the doorstep of government will receive attention. The process of translating certain public issues into items vying for the serious attention of decision makers thus is the first stage in the public policy cycle.

Forty-five years ago, two American political scientists—Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz (1962)—published a six-page article entitled "Two Faces of Power." The article soon became a tour de force in the discipline because it revealed a simple yet frequently overlooked fact: the "first face" of power, the authority to choose between issues and alternatives, may be less important than the "second face" of power, the ability to control what issues and alternatives are to be considered in the first place. A comparative study of two American cities is illuminating in this regard. The issue of air pollution was rarely touched on in public or government in one city despite a very serious pollution problem. In another similar city with much less pollution, however, public and governmental officials discussed it often and took steps to combat it. The reason behind the difference in the behavior between the two cities was that, in the first city, powerful interest groups were capable of controlling the agenda. They went out of their way to distract local people and government officials from the issue of pollution (Crenson, 1971). Suppose there is a society harassed by extreme inequality, yet its government rarely attempts to address the issue of distributive justice and quiescence characterizes its unmobilized population. No matter how free and competitive elections appear to be in the society, it is safe to conclude that there must be a black hand controlling the agenda setting behind the scenes. Therefore, before discussing formal policy making as such, we need to understand the pre-decisional processes, namely, which problems become salient as political issues meriting the attention of policy makers and which do not, who participates in agenda setting, and which institutions and groups appear to enjoy the greatest access to agenda setting.

Here agenda setting refers to the process of prioritizing public issues according to their importance. For the sake of analyzing the agenda setting of public policy, it is useful to make a distinction among three different

types of agendas. The media agenda refers to issues on which the press and the media concentrate; the public agenda consists of issues that have achieved a high level of public interest and visibility in society; the policy agenda is the set of issues under serious and active consideration by political decision makers at any given time.

The focus of this article is the policy agenda setting, but the three types of agenda setting are more often than not closely interrelated. Numerous empirical studies in Western countries, for example, have established firm correlations between the media's and the public's priorities. When mass media emphasize certain topics, the audience/public receiving the message will consider those topics important. The media accomplish this public agenda-setting function not by directly telling the people that some issues are more important than others, which has proven to be counterproductive, but instead by signaling the importance of certain issues by giving these issues preferential treatment, such as more frequent coverage and a more prominent position (Cohen, 1963; McCombs and Shaw, 1972). In recent years, some scholars have gone further by examining how the media help to directly shape the policy agenda of decision makers (Kingdon, 1995).

However, the media are but one factor that influences the public agenda. Political mobilization, social movements, focusing events (e.g., accidents and disasters), and many other factors may also lead the public in assigning relative importance to various public issues. No matter what shapes it, public agenda setting is closely linked to policy agenda setting. Since policy agenda setting is the focus of this article, instead of pondering how the media and other factors influence the public agenda, it will concentrate on the relationship between the public agenda and the policy agenda.

As mentioned above, the public agenda refers to the set of policy issues to which the public attends and thinks the government ought to address. Although there may always be minor or major disagreements on all kinds of public issues among the people, were we to conduct periodic surveys of people's opinions regarding "What is the most important problem facing the nation today?" we would be able to trace the trajectory of a society's changing public agenda. Even if there were no such surveys, the public agenda may reveal itself in other ways. Thus, a fundamental political question emerges: to what extent do the policy priorities of the public and of the government correspond across time? An inquiry into this issue may provide us with a new approach for gauging the nature of a political regime. The conventional political science literature normally uses the presence/absence of free and competitive elections as the sole criterion for categorizing political regimes, which in effect allows the form of representation to override

the essence of representation. It is perhaps far more meaningful to ask two related questions: "Are the policy priorities of the public—those issues that members of the public consider to be the most important ones facing the country—reflected in the activities of the government?" and "Which social groups and political institutions appear to play the crucial role in the process of setting the policy agenda?" If the rulers or a handful of social, economic, and cultural elite dictates the policy agenda setting, and if what concerns the people is fundamentally different from what concerns the policy makers, then the political regime could be called anything but "democratic" even if the rulers come to power through free and competitive elections. Conversely, if the public is seriously involved in the agenda-setting process, and if the public agenda has a direct influence on the policy agenda, then the political system in question should not be simplistically labeled "undemocratic," even though its officials are not popularly elected. In other words, an investigation into the policy agenda setting process presents a new approach to representation, which sheds new light on the real nature of a political system.

Here the degree of congruence between the public agenda and the policy agenda is the key. This leads us to distinguish six different models of the policy agenda setting by their location along two dimensions: the initiator of the policy agenda (decision makers, advisers, and citizens) and the degree of public participation in the agenda-setting process (low and high): "closed-door," "mobilization," "inside access," "reach-out," "outside access," and "popular pressure" (see Table 1).[1]

The rest of the article is divided into two parts. The first part briefly discusses each of the six models, while the second focuses on the last model—the popular-pressure model. By analyzing how the prevailing model of agenda setting has shifted since the foundation of the People's Republic in 1949, this article intends to demonstrate that China's political system has undergone profound changes and thereby to challenge a conventional wisdom in the West that no political reform has ever taken place in China.

Six Models

The Closed-Door Model

In the closed-door model, decision makers attempt to exclude the participation of the public. An issue arises from within the inner circle of top political decision makers, who see it neither necessary nor desirable to seek

Table 1
Models of the Policy Agenda Setting in China

		Initiator of Agenda		
		Decision Makers	Advisers	Citizens
Degree of Public Participation	Low	I. Closed Door	III. Inside Access	V. Outside Access
	High	II. Mobilization	IV. Reach-Out	VI. Popular Pressure

popular support for their initiative. It is unnecessary because, in their view, the public generally lacks the ability to understand the complexities of the policy issue. It is undesirable because decision makers are afraid their initiative might be defeated if it were expanded to include social groups that are opposed to it. Decision makers believe it is easier for them to set the policy agenda and implement policies that result from it if they can prevent the issue from expanding to the mass public. In a word, in this model the initiators make no effort to get the issue on to the public agenda, and therefore at no point is the public greatly involved.

The closed-door model prevailed in imperial China, when the people had no idea of political participation. In contemporary China, moreover, such a model of agenda setting has not yet altogether disappeared. A case in point was the price reform in 1988, which was a "touchy" issue at the time.

When moving from a planned to a market economy, China encountered enormous trouble in fully exposing its pricing mechanism to the supply and demand of the market, since the government had always controlled the pricing process in the past. In the early 1980s, Deng Xiaoping warned that great caution should be taken in price reform (Fujian sheng difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, 1994). Until 1985, he still believed that "it will take three years to straighten out the prices of consumer goods. It may take even longer, if the prices of capital goods are reformed simultaneously" (Deng, 1985). From 1985 to 1987, as the consumer price index started to rise in line with steady progress of the price reform, China came to be faced with the most serious inflation that it had experienced since the early 1950s (National Bureau of Statistics, 1999). At the February 1988 meeting for analyzing the economic situation, the CCP Politburo realized that prices had risen so fast that people could no longer endure it. The State Council then took some measures to hold down prices, including exerting control over government expenditures and cutting down investment in fixed assets. With these initiatives in

place, the State Council then decided to increase the purchase prices of some agricultural products and to replace the old practice of price-fixing with open subsidies to urban employees. Unexpectedly, the introduction of these measures set off panic purchasing all over China. In this situation, it would have been wise to slow down the price reform, yet Deng Xiaoping insisted then that the reform should brook no delay.

Against this backdrop, *People's Daily*, the most influential newspaper in China, published an editorial entitled "Plough Ahead with Reform" on June 9. The author of this editorial was quite clear that the price reform would temporarily harm the interests of a great number of people, but he seemed to be confident of the people's endurance. The CCP Politburo, obviously affected by such an optimistic view, discussed and then approved the Preliminary Program for Price and Salary Reform, which declared that the main objective of the reform was to liberalize the prices of most commodities except for strategic commodities and labor services. On August 19, when the reform plan was promulgated, there was another fit of nationwide purchasing fever. In some places, people swarmed into banks and withdrew immature deposits from their fixed accounts to get their hands on cash for a buying spree.

During the price reform, the agenda was virtually set alone by the CCP Politburo through a series of internal meetings. Once policy makers determined to speed up the price reform, they did not bother to seek the understanding and support of the public. They wishfully hoped that people would cotton to the plan and willingly bear the loss caused by the ensuing inflation. As a result, the consumer price index rocketed all the way to 18.8 percent in 1988 and discontent was soon contagious, which partly foreshadowed the political crisis in 1989. Later, Deng Xiaoping took a good lesson from the experience; he said, "In short, in formulating a policy, we have to proceed from reality. If we take reality into account, we will not make major mistakes. Once we discover a mistake, we should not conceal nor ignore it, but correct it right away" (Deng, 1989).[2]

The Mobilization Model

In the mobilization model, just as in the closed-door model, policy makers are the initiators of the agenda. The mobilization model differs from the closed-door model in that here policy makers go out of their way to arouse the interest of the public and try to win their support for the agenda. That is to say, the policy agenda precedes the public agenda. Under what circumstances will policy makers adopt the mobilization model instead of the closed-door model? First, if the public has developed a strong sense of participation and

the legitimacy of the closed-door model is widely questioned; second, if successful implementation of such an agenda requires widespread, enthusiastic support from the mass public; and third, if policy makers lack the resources necessary for executing the agenda, then in these cases, policy makers may hope to overcome obstacles to the implementation of their agenda by expanding an issue from the policy to the public agenda, or more precisely, by actively mobilizing the people's involvement. In the meantime, however, they want to discourage the people from contending for the initiative in setting the agenda.

The mobilization model is quite familiar to people in China. During Mao's era, this model was applied in setting almost all major and strategic agendas, ranging from the Land Reform, the Three-Anti and Five-Anti campaigns, the General Line for the Socialist Transition, the Great Leap Forward, the People's Communes, and the Four Clear-ups Movement, all the way to the Cultural Revolution. In general, the mobilization model consists of five phases. In the first phase, "the movement is started and instructions issued" (运动开始，发出文件). Instructions may take the form of either an official document from the CCP Central Committee or the State Council, or an editorial or commentator's essay of the CCP-controlled *People's Daily*. During the Cultural Revolution, such instructions often came as "Chairman Mao's Latest Directives." In the second phase, "the instructions are disseminated to all levels in company with an imposing propaganda campaign" (层层传达、普遍宣传). The dissemination is normally arranged in a set order: Party members should know before non-Party individuals; cadres should know ahead of ordinary people. The propaganda campaign is to ensure that everyone in the country knows about the relevant instructions. Sometimes when speed is emphasized, it is required that the whole process of dissemination should be completed within twenty-four hours. In the third phase, people are organized to "study the instructions for deeper understanding" (认真学习、深刻领会). Here "study" means to discuss the official documents, editorials, and commentaries as well as supplementary reading materials. The objective of studying is to make sure that people get a clear, full understanding of the essence of the CCP Central Committee's initiative, including why the new agenda is set, what is the thrust of the new agenda, and what steps are to be taken to carry out the new agenda. The fourth phase involves "grasping typical cases and spreading the experience gained at selected units to the whole country" (抓住典型、以点带面). "Typical cases" can be negative as well as positive. Highlighted "typical cases" are used to convince the public that the agenda is necessary, feasible, and superior. Finally, after all the above-mentioned phases, the mobilization model seeks to form a consensus among people on

how to fulfill the agenda. According to Charles Lindblom, emeritus professor of political science at Yale University, there are three elemental mechanisms for social control. The first is authority: the power to force the public to obey by the threat of coercion or other forms of sanction. The second is exchange: to induce the people's obedience through offering them some benefits. The third is persuasion: to indoctrinate the people so that they eventually internalize the official ideology and turn the governmental intent into their voluntary actions. Compared to other political systems, Lindblom notes, "Maoist China may have been making such distinctive use of persuasion as a method of social control that its system for doing so warrants special attention. In any case, one can imagine a picture or model of a certain kind of control system like China's based on massive unilateral persuasion" (Lindblom, 1977: 13). The mobilization model frequently seen in Mao's China obviously falls into the third category. The upside of this method is that it is much less costly than either coercion or exchange; the downside is that it cannot have an enduring effect.

Since the reform and opening up, the mobilization model has not been used as frequently as before, but it has not been completely abandoned either. For instance, it played an important role in setting the agenda in the following policy areas: introducing the one-child-per-couple policy (1980); opening channels for employment in the private economy (1981); establishing the household responsibility system in the countryside (1982); launching the "five emphases, four beauties, and three loves" campaign and the "clearing-up of ideological pollution" campaign (1983); speeding up the reform of the urban economy (1984); pushing forward the wage reform in state-owned enterprises and stopping the practice of eating from the same big rice-pot (1985); restructuring the labor system through breaking the "iron rice bowl" (1986); counteracting bourgeois liberalization (1987); stepping up the restructuring of the personnel, income distribution, and social security systems (1992); advancing the reform of the old-age pension system of public enterprises (1995); reducing staff for improved efficiency and laying off or dispersing redundant employees (1997); and introducing a nationwide reform of the heath insurance system in the urban sector (1998) (Renmin wang, 1978–2003).

The Inside Access Model

In the inside access model, the agenda is not proposed by policy makers but by the official brain trust that is close to the core of power. Brain trusters offer their advice to policy makers through a variety of internal channels, in expectation that their advice may be included in the agenda. They value policy makers' appreciation more than the support of the public, whom they do not bother to win over unless it is absolutely necessary. Normally, they

prefer that the issues at hand not be put on the public agenda, as they are afraid that possible opposition from the public may sway policy makers and lead them to reject their proposal. In this model, there is only interaction between policy advisers and policy makers, but little, if any, interaction between the mass public and policy makers.

Mao's was an era of great men, when most important policies were made by Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and other members of the highest leadership.[3] But that does not mean there was no room for the inside access model. We may spot some special features of this model in the following cases from the early 1950s to the early 1970s.

Case One. The Korean War broke out in June 1950. By early August, the People's Army of the North had gained control of more than 90 percent of the Korean peninsula. The socialist bloc headed by the Soviet Union then took the optimistic view that Korea would be reunited in next to no time. But Mao Zedong and other Chinese leaders remained sober-minded. On August 23, after a thorough analysis of information received from all sides, Lei Yingfu and his colleagues in the Operations Room of the General Staff came to the conclusion that the odds of American troops landing at Inchon were great. If so, the supply lines of the North Korean army would be cut and its main forces would be open to attack from both the north and the south, and consequently the war situation would change overnight. Furthermore, they predicted that the American troops would most probably carry out their invasion at Inchon on September 15, 1950, a day of high tide. This report alerted Mao Zedong, who commented on Lei's report, "your judgment and conclusion sound right and are extremely important" and "the war is not likely to be over soon; on the contrary, it will be lasting, complex and tough." Then he began to deploy forces in anticipation of the worst-case scenario (Lei, 1993). Lei's predication, which turned out to be correct, had a direct bearing on the strategic decision making of the highest leaders at this crucial juncture.

Case Two. The military conflict between China and the Soviet Union in March 1969 triggered heated debate in China over its strategy toward the Soviet Union. Some thought that the Soviets would shift their strategic center of gravity to the East and attack China, while others reckoned that the Soviet Union would continue to focus on the West, striving for strategic advantage in Europe in competition with its main rival, the United States. What worried the Chinese government most then was the possibility that the Soviet Union and the United States would join forces against China. At the end of 1969, Wang Shu, then a staff reporter with the Xinhua News

Agency in West Germany, wrote an in-depth analysis of the Soviet strategic posture. With well-documented facts and reliable statistical data, Wang argued that Europe was still what the Soviet Union and the United States really coveted, and the Soviets' vital interests still lay in Europe. As for the Sino–West German relationship, Wang Shu suggested that China should abandon the old view that West Germany was a "militaristic, revanchist country." He believed that pacifism prevailed in West Germany. With rapid economic growth, West Germany was more and more eager to acquire a bigger share of the international market. It would be mutually beneficial if China could improve its relationship with West Germany. More specifically, Wang Shu recommended that Chinese leaders should invite the leaders of West Germany's main opposition parties to China in the hope of putting pressure on the ruling party to boost relations between the two countries. Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai expressed deep appreciation of Wang's view after they read his reports on the European situation, Soviet strategy, and the relations between China and West Germany. They separately met with Wang Shu in late July 1972. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs cited him for commendation in an internal official dispatch. Wang Shu's report exerted a considerable influence on China's highest leadership in their decision on the country's global strategy. Subsequently, Sino–West German relations developed speedily. The two countries signed a communiqué on the establishment of diplomatic relations on September 29, 1972. Wang Shu played an irreplaceable role in the negotiations that led to that step (Wang Shu, 2002).

These cases highlight three characteristics of the inside access model during Mao's time. First, this model was largely applied to issues related to national security. Second, proposals or advice for internal reference came mainly from military staff officers or intelligence agencies rather than research institutes. Third, most of the proposals were products of individual "masterminds" rather than institutionalized think tanks. At that time, the newly founded People's Republic was faced with a treacherous and hazardous international environment so that the priority of China's highest leadership was strengthening and defending the country. Clearly these three characteristics were products of the time.

The inside access model was applied more frequently after the reform. The most important reason for this is that China had profoundly altered its strategic priorities. If the primary concern in Mao's time was how to make the country stand on its own feet, the issue of the utmost importance in the reform era would be how to make China prosper. It is no easy task to develop a modern economy; the process is so complicated that no single

individual is capable of engineering it. The task requires a transformation of the existing supporting mechanism for decision making, which, by counting on individual masterminds for advice, could no longer satisfy the modern needs of decision making. Against this background, China put forward the slogan of "scientific decision making" at the outset of the reform. Soon after, clusters of think tanks began to emerge.

The Chinese Rural Development Research Group, formed in 1980, was one of the first think tanks in China. The group consisted of children of some high-ranking officials and well-known intellectuals. Their family ties enabled them to maintain close connections with the central leadership. With the support of both the Research Section under the CCP Central Committee Secretariat and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the members conducted field investigations and submitted their research reports directly to the central leaders, who used them as comprehensive and systematic firsthand data for the Central Meeting of Rural Work in 1981. Later, the group participated in helping the central government with drafting a series of "No. 1 documents" on issues related to the countryside and agriculture. Gradually, the research output of the group became very influential in governmental policy making. Later, some group members entered government-run research institutions like the China Economic Reform Research Institute (CERRI) (Huang, 2005). CERRI began to play an increasingly important role when the reform extended toward urban and industrial areas. It remained the most influential think tank in China until 1989. Apart from CERRI, other think tanks also came into being, including several research centers under the State Council (later integrated into the Development Research Center of the State Council), the CITIC International Research Institute, and the like (Zou, 2004).

From the 1990s on, as the country's economic structure grew increasingly complex, research in different fields became more and more specialized. Hence, the research institutes under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the ministries and commissions of the State Council, and key colleges and universities began to be more frequently involved in policy-related projects (Lin, 2004). Even in some sensitive areas such as foreign affairs and cross-straits relations with Taiwan dozens of think tanks of different sizes have emerged in recent years (Sun Zhe, 2004). In addition, crowded with experts in all areas, China's eight democratic parties did not want to remain reticent; they also made full use of their privileged position, putting forward proposals to the government and articulating policy opinions (Hong Fuzeng, 2003). At the same time, the central leadership designated a selected group of scholars

from various fields as their advisers for highest-level policy consultation. By definition, these specialists had a much greater influence on governmental agenda setting than any other scholars (Yu, 2005).

Typically, these think tanks published some internal reports such as "briefings," "reference materials," and so on. The circulation of their publications tended to be very small, yet such publications might go straight to the top leaders of the central government. The highest leaders read, commented, and passed some of these reports around almost on a daily basis (Shen Yanhui, 2005). Some researchers even delivered their secret proposals, advice, or admonitions to the highest authorities through extraordinary channels by taking advantage of their academic reputation and interpersonal networks.[4]

The current central leadership team came into office at the end of 2002. Compared to their predecessors, they seem to be more aware of the importance of making policies in a democratic and scientific way. An indication is that from December 26, 2002, to April 23, 2007, the new CCP Politburo held forty-one workshops, averaging one every forty days, inviting philosophers, natural scientists, social scientists, and legal scholars to give them lectures (Zhongyang zhengzhiju jiti xuexi, 2005). The new central leadership has never tired of emphasizing the importance of building up and strengthening think tanks and brain trusts, in the hope that, based on forward-looking and strategic research, they can provide decision makers at all levels of government with thoughtful policy advice (Li Changchun, 2003). In response, the Chinese Academy of Sciences promised that, as the nation's foremost think tank in science and technology, it would "bring its initiative into full play so as to upgrade [its] capacity of offering advice for pivotal strategies concerning national development" (Qi, 2004). The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences also required its research institutes "to work hard as think tanks and brain trusts and contribute more to decision making of the Party and the state" (Zhang Chewei, 2004). It can be expected that the inside access model will continue to play a significant role in China's future agenda setting.

The Reach-Out Model

In the inside access model, policy advisers of the government are only concerned with whether or not decision makers appreciate and adopt their proposals. However, they act differently in the reach-out model. Rather than concealing their proposals from the public, they publicize them in the hope that aroused public opinion will become powerful enough to break down

any barrier that may dissuade decision makers from accepting their ideas. Generally speaking, policy advisers prefer to influence decision makers directly rather than in a roundabout fashion. Unless it is as a last resort, they do not take issues to the public for help and risk offending decision makers. Why, then, do they occasionally take that step? The most important reason perhaps is that they encounter strong opposition from within the establishment and believe public opinion will surely be on their side.

The reach-out model is by no means common in China. Nevertheless, there is a recent example. China began market-oriented medical reform in the 1990s. According to nationwide surveys of medical service in 1993, 1996, and 2003, medical expenditures of urban and rural residents increased steadily while the percentage of the population covered by health insurance shrank (Wang Shaoguang, 2005). In a dramatic way, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) crisis of 2003 revealed the vulnerability of China's health-care system brought about by the market-oriented medical reform and led people to reflect on the whole matter (Wang Shaoguang, 2004). However, some governmental officials insisted that the country's medical system should be further marketized and "the state should gradually withdraw from the health sector" (Zheng and Yang, 2004)

In the spring of 2005 the China's Medical System Reform Study Group, a project jointly sponsored by the Social Development Section of the Development Research Center under the State Council and the World Health Organization, published a series of reports that concluded that China's medical reform "had not been successful," if it was not a "colossal failure." At first, the reports drew little attention because they appeared in an internal journal. In June 2005 the situation took a sudden turn when Ge Yanfeng, deputy director of the Social Development Section of the Development Research Center under the State Council, disclosed the conclusion of the general report while being interviewed by news media. He argued that medical reform in China must stick to two principles. First, the reform ought to ensure equity, that is, guarantee all people equal access to basic medical services. Second, it should emphasize the cost-effectiveness of medical investment; in other words, the health of the whole population should be improved as much as possible under the condition of limited public investment in health care. In his view, it was impossible for the market-oriented medical reform to achieve either goal (Zhang Ranran, 2005). Almost at the same time, Liu Xinming, director of the Policy and Law Department of the Ministry of Health told *Hospital Journal* that "marketization should not be the direction of China's medical reform" (Yang, 2005).

Their remarks aroused great excitement among the media and the mass public. At the time there was much discussion in the media about medical reform, while the public almost universally agreed with the judgment that "the medical reform was a total failure" (Tang, 2005). Although some liberal scholars insisted that the medical reform should not be turned back (Hu, 2005), and the Ministry of Health was continually trying to avoid any comment on whether the medical reform was a success or a failure (Li Zongping, 2005), the Pandora's box had been opened and the public would not accept any further reform measures unless the government made big policy adjustments.[5] Soon thereafter a new consensus seemed to have emerged: the government should guarantee basic care to everyone in the country. Now the government has pledged itself to introducing an urban health-care system covering all residents and to assisting all rural communities to restore the cooperative medical system (CMS) before long. Apparently, in this case at least, the reach-out model performed wonders.

The Outside Access Model

Here "outside access" refers to a situation in which a citizen or a group of citizens submits suggestions on public affairs in the form of a letter to central decision makers, excluding complaints or appeals about the interests of an individual or a small group. The outside access model resembles the inside access model in that someone makes proposals to top decision makers. The two models differ in the proposal initiators. In the inside access model, those who make proposals are doing so in their capacity as advisers to decision makers; in the outside access model, the proposal initiators are not professional government advisors. In most cases, however, those initiators are not ordinary citizens but intellectuals or persons enjoying prestigious social status; because they may have some say in certain issue areas, they know better through which channels they can most effectively transmit their messages to decision makers, and their opinions are more likely to be highly valued. In fact, even proposals written by such social elites are often ignored. The words of common people carry even less weight. Their policy proposals often end in the trash cans of top leaders' assistants, rarely having the chance to catch top leaders' attention, not to mention shaping the policy agenda. This has been true both in the past and at present, in China and elsewhere.

Even though the outside access model is seldom practiced in China, there have been nevertheless a couple of cases in point in recent years. The so-called three parallel rivers (the Jinsha, Nujiang, and Lancang) of Yunnan Province were put on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage list as a natural property on July 3, 2003. Less than a month later, the National Development and Reform Commission approved a hydroelectric project on the Nu River (Nujiang), which met with immediate and strong opposition from domestic environmental organizations. These organizations mobilized the media in an effort to win over the public, and at the same time wrote letters to the leaders of the State Council, asking them to stop the project. In mid-February 2004 Premier Wen Jiabao remarked on a report submitted to the State Council by the Development and Reform Commission that "as far as this giant hydroelectric project is concerned, more careful study is needed to make a rational decision since the project has received great attention from the public and there are still disagreements about its environmental effects." Wen's comments temporarily halted the project (Cao and Zhang, 2004). In July 2005, when Wen went to inspect local work in Yunnan, a local official reminded him that the Nujiang hydroelectric project had been stopped for a long while, and that the local government, caught in the crossfire, wanted the central government to make an immediate decision. When he returned to Beijing, Wen ordered the Development and Reform Commission, the State Environmental Protection Administration, and the Ministry of Water Resources to "step up the investigation and research and bring forward your plans." For fear that the project was to be restarted, sixty-one environmental organizations and ninety-nine individual activists jointly wrote an open letter in September 2005 addressed to the State Council and the subordinate ministries or commissions concerned (Xu, 2005). Meanwhile, those who backed the project also wrote to the central government, pushing for an immediate resumption of construction (Guo Shaofeng, 2005). Hence began a seesaw battle between the two camps. The central government has not made a final decision to date. This is a landmark case in Chinese history, showing that the activities of civil organizations and the letters submitted to top decision makers by citizens at long last can produce enormous effect on the central government.

As Chinese society becomes increasingly pluralized and open, people from all walks of life and with different political stances have become more willing to express their views and more forceful in doing so. It can be predicted that the outside access model will become one of the major models for China's future agenda setting.

The Popular-Pressure Model

The popular-pressure model, in which the force to change the agenda comes from outside the government, works in many ways like the outside

access model. The only difference is the degree of popular participation. In the outside access model, agenda initiators hope to affect the agenda-setting process through presenting the facts and reasoning things out. In the popular-pressure model, on top of reasoning, agenda initiators pay more attention to mobilizing public opinion so as to exert pressure on decision makers, forcing them to abandon the old agenda and adopt a new one. We can detect some elements of the popular-pressure model in the above-mentioned story of the Nujiang project. In general, the model has the following distinctive features.

First, issues emerge from nongovernmental sources, including individual citizens or a group of citizens, and are then expanded to reach the public agenda and finally the policy agenda.

Second, agenda initiators are not difficult to identify when an issue is first brought forward. However, once the issue receives public support, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify the promoters of the issue. Then the key is how strong the mobilized public opinion turns out to be and whether or not it puts a sufficient amount of pressure on policy makers. When discussing public opinion, we need to differentiate two groups of the public: namely, "the attentive public" and "the general public." The attentive public, though always a tiny segment of the population, consists of those who are most interested and involved in an issue. Well informed and full of energy, their attention may help a certain issue remain in the focus of public awareness. The general public is the majority of a population, whose attention to most public issues tends to be transitory and who are seldom involved in policy disputes for long. Because of this, it is important to seize the moment when the general public is aroused, eager for agenda change, because then policy makers will be under tremendous pressure. This is the time when the public agenda is most likely to become the policy agenda (Cobb and Elder, 1975: 107–8).

Third, the popular-pressure model may not function until an issue turns from the interest of a small attentive public to an item on the public agenda concerning many people; otherwise, there will be little popular pressure. Such progression takes time. Even if a public issue has been put on the public agenda, it still takes time for it to be included in the policy agenda. That is to say, the popular-pressure model is more time-consuming than are the other models.

Fourth, because of the first three features, researchers often find it hard to ascertain exactly how popular pressure ultimately shapes agenda setting. What they can do at best is to conjecture about the linkage between the rise and fall of popular pressure on the one hand and changes in the policy agenda on the other by tracing the sequence of events.

The popular-pressure model normally possesses these four features. However, occasionally when a certain "focusing event" suddenly occurs and quickly attracts public attention, policy makers may have to change the agenda swiftly. Focusing events are usually bad things, like disasters, accidents, and the like, which inflict real and direct harm on the interests of some special groups and potentially harm the interests of the general public. Such events will make the social groups concerned, government officials, mass media, and the general public more acutely aware of some latent problems, and motivate them to address those problems through policy changes (Birkland, 1997). Attention focusing is conducive to breaking the existing balance of power and strengthening the public's determination to change the policy agenda. Once powerful public pressure is built up, decision makers may have no choice but to reorient their policies without delay. The effects of focusing events are direct, instantaneous, and easy to detect. That is why many scholars of agenda setting have concentrated their research on the influence of focusing events (Light, 1982; Majone, 1989; Baumgartner and Jones, 1993).

The Rise of the Popular-Pressure Model

In the past, the first five models mentioned above were commonly observed in China, while the popular-pressure model was rarely applied. Although Chinese leaders began to call openly for "scientific" and "democratic" policy making in the mid-1980s,[6] the more democratic popular-pressure model did not often come into view until the late 1990s. How do we account for the growing prominence of the popular-pressure model? To answer this question we have to explain where "popular pressures" come from and why "popular pressures" become increasingly consequential in the policy agenda setting.

Where do the pressures come from? Although China's economy has grown, on average, at 9 percent per year throughout the last quarter of a century, the single-minded pursuit of the highest possible aggregate growth rate has resulted in a whole series of acute challenges. By the end of the 1990s, quite a few problems had become alarming, including the environmental crisis, the widening income gap (regional gap, urban-rural gap, and gap among urban residents, and gap among rural residents), the lack of economic and social security (high unemployment rates, unaffordable education and medical services, and frequent workplace accidents), and so on. Meanwhile, the society became more and more differentiated and polarized. At the outset of

the reform, when the country was highly egalitarian, people were willing to sacrifice their individual short-term interests for the sake of long-term social interests, because they believed that everyone would benefit from the reform eventually and could not imagine that the reform might one day turn into a zero-sum game. Then the overwhelming majority of the Chinese population embraced the reform wholeheartedly. Now, people are more guarded, suspicious of every new reform measure (Sun, 2005). Those who have suffered losses in one way or another in the early stages of the reform no longer support new reform initiatives without hesitation. These people have deep hatred for the abuse of power, corrupt officials, and overnight upstarts and their extravagant lifestyle, and contempt for glib-talking scholars who try to make a pile out of the "reform." Above all, most of them feel that China's reform has gone astray lately and that it is time for China to change course by pursuing more balanced and more coordinated socioeconomic development. This is the social pressure that the Chinese government is now facing.

What makes popular pressure forceful enough to change the policy agenda? Four factors appear to be crucial, namely, stakeholder consciousness, the associational revolution, the changing role of the mass media, and the rise of the internet.

Stakeholder Consciousness

When a society is not highly differentiated, all interest groups remain "in themselves," with little awareness of "for themselves." They are thus unlikely to exert pressure on policy makers in pursuit of their own interests. As society becomes highly differentiated, each interest group becomes more sensitive to its own interests, thus giving rise to a strong incentive for putting pressure on policy makers. Of course, it is one thing to have such incentives; it is another to be able to exert real pressure. What counts here is a group's mobilization ability. Those that control political and organizational resources no doubt possess the greatest mobilization ability.

The reorientation of China's regional policy is a good example in this regard. A regional gap already existed in China before the mid-1980s, but the problem was not severe. Later, as the government's policy intentionally gave preferential treatment to the eastern part of the country, the gap between China's coastal areas and the inland provinces soon widened (Jian and Qi, 2000). In the early 1990s, scholars and policy researchers heatedly debated the country's regional policy. The prevalent view then was that

there was no need to make a fuss over the regional disparity either because it had not widened or because it was not yet very big.[7] Even paramount leader Deng Xiaoping (1992) insisted "we should not dampen the vitality of the developed areas at present." He contented that "the right time to raise and settle this problem might be the end of this century," "when our people are living a fairly comfortable life." But the underdeveloped regions did not have patience to wait any longer. Starting from the early 1990s, each year, at the annual meetings of the National People's Congress, some representatives of the inland provinces openly expressed their disapproval of the government's lopsided regional policy. In 1996, under the mounting pressure, the Fourth Session of the Eighth National People's Congress passed the Ninth Five-Year Plan and the Long-Term Objectives for the Year 2010, both of which stressed the importance of more balanced development of regional economies and aimed to narrow the existing disparities. Unfortunately, in practice, not much real effort was made to achieve these goals in the years that followed. In the late 1990s, that provoked more resentful complaint and more forceful criticism of the regional policy of the central government. Against this background, in 1999 the central government finally decided to launch the Go-West Program. The State Council soon set up the Leading Group for Western Development, which symbolized the official start of the Go-West Program (Lu, 2002). It was not long before the National People's Congress deputies from the provinces in Northeast China began to beg the central government to reinvigorate their local economy, as this part of China had became the nation's "rustbelt" during the course of the economic reform. In September 2003 the project of Revitalizing the Old Industrial Bases in Northeast China officially became "a strategic decision" of the central government (Wu Dongyan, 2003).

Associational Revolution

The past two decades have witnessed an unprecedented associational revolution in China. By March 2007 there were over 190,000 associations of various types registered with government civil affairs departments at the county level and above (Minzhengbu, 2007). However, those registered associations account for only a small fraction of China's associational landscape, as a large number of associations choose either to register as business organizations or not to register at all.[8] More important, according to Chinese law, for grassroots organizations below the county level (e.g., organizations whose activities are mainly confined to specific enterprises, administrative units,

schools, residential communities, townships, or villages), registration is not required. If the unregistered are included, it is estimated there are at least 500,000 associations operating in China (Wang and He, 2004).

Most associations have no interest in public policy, but one type is heavily involved in policy-related activities, namely, so-called advocacy groups, commonly known as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Environmental groups are among the most active NGOs in China. Before the 1990s, there had been environmental organizations, but most were quasi-official, top-down academic societies of environmental research. At that time, pollution was not a grave problem and did not trouble most people. Environmental organizations devoted more effort to research than action or took no action at all. However, with the 1990s, China's environment steadily deteriorated and people's awareness of ecological issues heightened. Consequently, the number of environmental NGOs multiplied (Wu Chenguang, 2002). In the new century, environmental NGOs, especially those made up of university and college students, mushroomed in every part of China. According to incomplete statistics, at present there are at least 2,000 environmental NGOs in the nation (Hong Dayong, 2004). Most receive no financial support from the government at all; for many, a significant proportion of funds comes from abroad. Those NGOs engage in environmental education, help the government to draw up environmental protection plans, and work as environmental consultants for some institutions. More important, they try by every possible means to improve the environment, and to stop projects, plans, or actions that may cause environmental damage. By doing so, they put great pressure on the government (Tong, 2004). The nearly aborted hydroelectric project on the Nujiang is a case in point.

Changing Role of the Mass Media

Environmental NGOs are not large in number but are quite influential. One reason for their effectiveness is that many of them maintain close ties with mass media and many of their organizers are journalists by profession, both of which help amplify their voices and add to their weight.

Apart from serving as the "loudspeaker" for environmental NGOs, Chinese media have in general been playing an increasingly active role in setting the public agenda, thus contributing to policy adjustments in recent years. The media may affect agenda setting in three ways: they may select certain issues for coverage while ignoring others; they may highlight some issues while downplaying others; and they may prioritize the highlighted

issues in a certain order (Chen and Li, 2005). Here we are not talking about coverage for a short while by any particular newspapers, magazines, television networks, radio stations, or publishers. Rather, we mean coverage for an extended period by a whole class of the public mass distributors of news and information. Obviously, without media coverage the public would not know about some issues. For example, research has found that in China deadly coal mine accidents were more frequent and appalling in the 1980s, but they did not become a public issue. Since the mid-1990s, at the same time that the death rates from coal mine accidents have been steadily declining, coal mine safety has become a focus of public attention, because this issue has received not only extensive but also highlighted media coverage (Wang Shaoguang, 2006). Normally there coexist several highlighted public issues within a relatively long period; thus the way the mass media prioritize these issues influences the public's assessment of their relative importance.

In recent years, the Chinese people have shown growing concern about such issues as agriculture, the countryside, farmers, migrant workers, the ecological environment, public health, health insurance, inequality, and others. This can be largely attributed to the media's extensive and highlighted coverage of them. In China, the mass media are supposed to serve as the Party's "propaganda machine" (Xinwen chubanshu, 1990). Yet the Party's mouthpiece has been gaining more publicity in recent years, facilitating interaction between the government and people, because of great changes in both the quantity and the quality of the media.

As far as quantity is concerned, compared with the early days of the reform, the number of radio stations has tripled and the numbers of television stations, newspapers, and magazines have increased tenfold (National Bureau of Statistics, 2006: 196). Chinese media have gone through an even more profound change in quality. The marketization of media began in the 1980s and sped up in the 1990s. The government is still the owner of radio stations, TV stations, and some newspapers and magazines in the legal sense. However, with little or no budgetary allocation from the government, media organizations have to survive harsh competition on their own. The operational logic of media agencies altered once they become primarily profit-driven entities. They have to consider how to attract readers, viewers, and listeners, and how to expand their commercial influence. Of course, as the mouthpieces of the central or local Party/governments, some newspapers and magazines are granted only a limited degree of freedom. Their survival strategy is to create, under their banners, subsidiary newspapers and magazines that enjoy much more latitude. Examples include *Global*

Times under *People's Daily*, *Oriental Outlook* under the Xinhua News Agency, *Xinmin Evening News* and *Bund Pictorial* under the Shanghai Wenhui–Xinmin United Newspaper Group, and a host of others. Newspapers and magazines such as *China Newsweek*, *Finance*, *Commercial Week*, and *China Industry and Business Daily*, are not designated as organs of the Party and government to begin with; they seem to be more autonomous. Perhaps inspired by these well-known publications, hundreds of regional and local newspapers and magazines (e.g., *Southern China Times*, *Dahe Daily*, etc.) have added new pages for investigative reports, news reviews, and commentaries on public affairs, trying to expand the boundaries of freedom of expression. Even radio and television broadcasting has begun to follow such examples.

As competition is getting increasingly furious, media are eager to get close to common people and inquire into real life and search out the truth. Every now and then, they report sensitive news events and comment on sensitive public issues. By doing so, they provide more and more space for various social groups to articulate their needs, demands, interests, and policy preferences, and help turn people's concerns into public issues, thus contributing to the country's recent changes in policy, law, and institutions.

The Rise of the Internet

The competition the mass media faces comes not only from within the traditional media, but also from such burgeoning media as the internet, mobile phone short message service, and so on. In particular, the rapid growth of internet use has forced traditional media to change their conventional ways of disseminating news and information and to provide more room for discussing public affairs.

It has been less than fifteen years since China was officially connected to the internet, yet "explosive" may be the proper word to describe the growth of internet use in the country. In early 1997, China had barely 620,000 internet users. By July 2007, the number had soared to 162 million, an astounding leap by any standard (Zhongguo hulian wangluo xinxi zhongxin). More to the point, the upsurge shows no signs of slowing down.

Before 2000, there were virtually no network media in China since internet users numbered no more than 10 million. This situation began to change in 2001, when China's internet population reached 25 million. In 2002, when the internet population exceeded 45 million, public online discussion increased dramatically. In 2003, when the internet population rose to 70 million, online public opinion flourished (Zhongguo hulian wangluo

xinxi zhongxin). A series of cases, including the pornographic video case ("黄碟"案), the Liu Yong case (刘涌案), the Huang Jing case (黄静案),the BMW car case (宝马案), the case of a Japanese group whoring in Zhuhai (日本人珠海买春案), the Beijing-Shanghai high speed railway (京沪高铁案), case and the Sun Zhigang case (孙志刚案), triggered widespread public debate in cyberspace.[9] No wonder that 2003 was deemed "the year of online public opinion" (Zhang Yuhong, 2004). Since then, the internet has become a primary channel for the public to send messages, express ideas, comment on public affairs, and vent their spleen. At present, online public opinion is exerting more and more influence on the public agenda setting.

Compared with traditional media, the internet is characterized by four distinctive features. Every person is a potential information provider; the number of potential information providers is in the millions rather than in the hundreds or thousands; information flows in more than one direction; and information can reach every corner of the earth instantaneously. As these features make it extremely difficult to manipulate information dissemination, Chinese netizens now enjoy more freedom of expression than ever before and therefore acquire more say in governmental activities.[10]

Characterized by publicity, openness, interactivity, diversity, and instantaneity, network media have changed the logic of the public agenda setting. In the era of traditional media, the public agenda was set all in all by a small bunch of media agencies. The government had little trouble dominating agenda setting since controlling these agencies was fairly easy. However, things are different in the time of the public network: through interactions, netizens are capable of turning what they (rather than media agencies) deem important into part of the public agenda. For example, through discussion in cyberspace about a series of cases (including the BMW car case, the Sun Zhigang case, migrant workers demanding payment of their salaries, unsuccessful medical reform, Professor Lang Xianping's criticism of the state-owned enterprises reform), online public opinion demonstrated how powerful it was in influencing public agenda setting. Netizens were outraged by those cases because all of them violated the principle of equity and justice that people cherished.

As the net has become an important channel of public expression, the highest leadership is paying more and more attention to it. For instance, both President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao admitted that they had learned from internet sources about public opinion during the outbreak of SARS in 2003. The Fourth Plenary Session of the Sixteenth CCP Central Committee held in September 2004 decided that "much attention should be

paid to the influence of some new media like the internet on public opinion." For this purpose, in addition to traditional internal reports for reference, the Information Section of the First Secretariat Bureau under the General Office of the State Council began to edit and submit *Excerpts of Online Information* to the State Council leaders on a daily basis (Dong and Yang, 2006; Lin, 2006). In recent years, quite a few serious cases (e.g., the fake powdered milk case in Fuyang, Anhui Province [安徽阜阳假奶粉案], the case of migrant workers coming under attack while demanding payment of overdue wages from their employers in Guangzhou [广州农民工讨薪遭打案], and the case of the illegal pulling down and removal of a residential community in Jiayang, Hunan Province [湖南嘉阳违法拆迁案]), were quickly reported to the State Council in this way (Chen and Dong, 2005). The great concern of the high leadership with online public opinion indicates how influential network media have become.

Of course, network media are by no means pitted against traditional media. On the contrary, they are complementary. When an issue becomes the focus of netizens' attention, traditional media will probe the issue and provide in-depth reports. Likewise, reports by a traditional media agency about an individual event may set off intense debate in online forums and rapidly elevate it to the public agenda. In most situations, network media and traditional media interact with each other. It is often difficult to judge which is the initiator. The Sun Zhigang case is a typical example of such interaction. As matter of fact, before the internet was widespread in China, local newspapers in Guangzhou had published several stories disclosing negative aspects of the custody and repatriation system. From 2000 to 2001, there were at least six such news reports, but none of them attracted much attention in the city or elsewhere (Li Yanhong, 2005). On March 20, 2003, Sun Zhigang, a young man from Hubei Province, could not show his proper identification document and was beaten to death at the Guangzhou Detention Center. At the end of March, a media-major postgraduate student in Beijing exposed this case on an online forum, Peach Flower Port (桃花坞 <www.xici.net/b280834>), maintained by a well-known BBS provider, Xici Lane (西祠胡同 <www.xici.net>). Peach Flower Port is a cyber club where media professionals all over the country often meet together. Learning of the case from this online forum, Chen Feng, a reporter with the *Southern Metropolis News*, and his coworkers decided to interview Sun's relatives and the authorities concerned, the result of which was the *Southern Metropolis News*'s report of the case on April 25. Other papers soon reprinted the report. By this time, the number of China's netizens had topped 70 million. With the help of the internet, the Sun Zhigang case became a household topic everywhere in the nation in no time

and caused a strong response online (Chen, 2005). The furious public reaction to this case placed continual and powerful pressure on the government to do something. Eventually, the State Council decided, on June 20, to abrogate the custody and repatriation system altogether. Had the internet not existed, the case might have emerged and then faded out quickly like previous happenings of the same kind. To the best of our knowledge, there was no precedent in China nor elsewhere in the world for an interaction between network media and traditional media that resulted in such a quick nullification of an administrative system that had been in place for more than forty years.

The Sun Zhigang case perhaps qualifies as a "focusing event," but it is somewhat special. In most cases, it tends to take longer for public opinion to alter the public agenda and then to change the policy agenda. By comparing the issues put on the public agenda (including the three agricultural problems [*san nong*], migrant workers, household registration reform, compulsory education, public health, medical security, etc.) and government policy adjustments in recent years, we may establish a clear line of close connections between the two. In almost all policy areas, public criticism of the old policies tends to appear three to five years earlier than policy adjustments. That the former contributes to the latter is beyond doubt (Li Yiping, 2003).

At first, the public aimed its criticism at some specific policies. As debates went on, people came to realize that the faults with those policies could be traced back to the general policy orientation—"efficiency first"—adopted by the central government.[11] It was this misguided policy orientation that led local governments to strive for high growth of GDP at any price. Hence, in recent years, the network and traditional media often aired sharp criticism of the "efficiency-first" principle. The central government was pressured to respond. To cushion the criticism, the Sixteenth National Congress of the CCP in 2002 tried to reinterpret the expression of "efficiency first, fairness valued (giving priority to efficiency with due consideration to equity)" and reformulated it as "more attention should be paid to efficiency in primary distribution, but to fairness in redistribution" (Jiang, 2002). Yet, the widening gap between rich and poor put people on alert: the problem of unfairness in primary distribution (for example, the income gap between bosses, managers, and employees) also needs to be solved. Redistribution through taxation and government expenditure alone was barely enough to narrow the income gap (Liu Guoguang, 2005). The expression "efficiency first, fairness valued" was maintained, but substantially modified by the "humanist and scientific view of development" at the Third Session of the Sixteenth CCP Central Committee in October 2003. This catch phrase was finally rejected by the Fourth Session of Sixteenth CCP Central Committee in September 2004 (CCP Central Committee, 2004).

Adopted by the Fifth Plenary Session of the Sixteenth CCP Central Committee at the end of 2005, "Suggestions of the CCP Central Committee on the Formulation of the Eleventh Five-Year Guidelines on National Economic and Social Development" seemed to have gone further, demanding that China should "promote social equity and enable all the people to share the benefits of reform and social development" (CCP Central Committee, 2005). This is a historic leap from "no development, no surviving," "allowing the early bird to catch the worm (encouraging some people to get rich first through honest labor and legal management)," and GDP worship, to "humanism," "shared prosperity," and "building a harmonious socialist society." Without the public's questioning of the "reform," without animated debate over public policies among new and traditional media, and without the strong public call for reorienting China's reform, such a great transformation in policy orientation would be unimaginable (Wu and Shang, 2005; Zhong, 2005; Zhao, 2005).

Summary

The six models of policy agenda setting coexist in various degrees in China today. Compared with the Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping eras, the legacy of strongman politics has almost disappeared. As the influence of policy researchers, experts, media, stakeholders, and ordinary citizens on agenda setting increases, the closed-door model and the mobilization model have become largely obsolete, the inside access model a normal practice, the outside access model and the reach-out model occasionally observed, and the popular-pressure model frequently used. This study suggests that today the public is not an ignored bystander but is seriously involved in the agenda-setting process and that there is an impressive congruence between the priorities of the public and the priorities of the Chinese government. In the ruling party's terminology, agenda setting "is becoming a more and more scientific and democratic process"; or in Wen Jiabao's words, agenda setting "emphasizes solutions to major problems, either relevant to the grand strategy of the country's social-economic development or of deep concern to the mass public" (Wen, 2006). Although the political process in China has yet to become as scientific and democratic as desired, the logic of Chinese politics has nevertheless been undergoing fundamental change. These profound changes in Chinese politics cannot be properly appreciated from the peephole of authoritarianism. Like a "dog-skin plaster" used by quack doctors in traditional China, "authoritarianism," a concept imported from the West, has been randomly applied everywhere in the past century.

Chinese politics has always been so described, from the late Qing dynasty to Yuan Shikai, the warlords, Chiang Kai-shek, Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and now to Hu Jintao, irrespective of the earth-shaking changes in between. The term is so absurd that it serves more as an ideological curse than as an instrument for academic analysis. It is the time for researchers to forsake such nonsense once and for all.

Notes

1. Roger Cobb et al. distinguish three models of agenda setting, which resemble what we call the "popular-pressure model," the "mobilization model," and the "inside access model" (Cobb, Ross, and Ross, 1976). Inspired by Cobb et al. and contemplating the reality of China, we propose six models of agenda setting here.

2. This quotation and others from official translations have been slightly revised to correct the solecisms in the original translations.

3. For more examples, see Zhongyang dang'anguan dangde wenxian bianjibu, 2005.

4. For instance, He Xin, former research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and a standing member of the National Political Consultative Conference, on many occasions submitted seven copies of each of his reports respectively to such top leaders as Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Chen Yun, Wang Zhen, Li Peng, Li Xiannian, and Wang Renzhong. He also had the chance to talk to some of these leaders face to face. See He (2004).

5. This was indicated by the stormy criticism provoked by Hu Shuli's article and Gao Qiang's speech.

6. Wan Li, then vice premier of the State Council, advocated "more democratic and scientific policy making" for the first time at the National Soft Science Forum on July 31, 1986. Deng Xiaoping endorsed Wan Li's speech with the remark, "Very good. Please have it published unabridged." See Zhang Dengyi (2004).

7. For more information about the debate, see Wang and Hu (1999: chapter 1).

8. A former official of the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau told the author that she had begun to work with a nongovernmental organization after retirement and that the organization was unregistered because qualification requirements for registration were too demanding.

9. A huge amount of information about those cases is available online through keyword search of those key terms in Chinese.

10. By comparing data from different countries, the UCLA-based World Internet Project found that the majority of the people surveyed in other countries do not believe "people would acquire more say in governmental activities." China seems to be an exception, as more than 60 percent of the interviewees agreed with the statement. See Guo Liang (2004).

11. "Efficiency first, fairness valued" was first suggested by the Social Equity and Social Security System Reform Research Group, which was headed by Zhou Weimin and Lu Zhongyuan at the Central Party School. The main report by the group, entitled "Efficiency First, Equity Valued: An Approach to Prosperity," was published in *Jingji yanjiu* (Economic research) (no. 2, 1986). Later, the "Decision of the CCP Central Committee on Certain Questions Regarding the Establishment of a Socialist Market Economic System" approved by the Third Plenary Session of the Fourteenth CCP Central Committee in 1993, formally introduced the motto "efficiency first, fairness valued." The Fifteenth Plenum of the Fourteenth CCP Congress continued to use the expression.

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