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Exploring the practice of democratic education in Chinese public schools
An ethnographical study

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Exploring the practice of democratic education in Chinese public schools: an ethnographical study

by
Wenchao Zhang B.Ed., M.Ed.

A thesis submitted as part of requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the Queen’s University Belfast

School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work
November 2019
Abstract

Having existed and being developed for more than two thousand years, democracy could be treated as one of the oldest political conceptions that is still vigorous and popular in contemporary. Despite of the continuous evolvement, the definition and practice of democracy are always in controversy, particularly under the background of globalization and multicultural. Such feature also influences the application of democracy in the field of education, which leads the interpretation of democratic education becomes diverse, especially in the context of different cultures.

Since the late nineteenth century, when the concept of democracy impacted on the feudal monarchical system and people’s political ideas in China, the development and evolvement of democratic education was beginning. Within this background, many scholars and educators pay attention to this concept and try to apply principles of democracy in the terrain of education.

In recent years, the emphasis on democracy and democratic education is further reflected in some national governmental documents. The publication of the Core Values of Chinese Socialism explicitly raises democracy as one of the general goals of the whole country. In the 2001 promulgation of Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline and the Outline of the National Medium- and Long-Term Program for Education Reform and Development (2010-2020), democracy is mentioned for the cultivation of informed citizens and the adjustment of teaching method and school management (Cui, 2001, Development, 2018). Align with these governmental policies, more scholars recognize the significance of democratic education and conduct an increasing number of research related to this topic. However, most Chinese studies of democratic education are conceptual - not empirical- studies, which suggests the real practice of democratic education is insufficient.

Given this context, many educators express their confusions about democratic education. Various questions emerge from both the theoretical aspect and the process of implementation. Such as, what is 'real' democratic education? What does democratic education include? What teaching behaviors are democratic? Does democratic education mean that teachers should allow students to keep silence all the time in class, or is it rather about encouraging students’ voice?
In consideration of these questions and the research gap, this research was designed as an ethnographical study to deeply explore the specific comprehension and practice of democratic education in Chinese public schools in the current context of China. On account of this research purpose, two Chinese public schools which explicitly advocate democratic education were selected as the research objects. The focus of democratic education was also expanded from the mere focus on classroom practice in previous research to the whole school life to identify more possibilities and paths in practice.

Throughout the fieldwork, I spent 190 days staying at research schools, which allowed me to observe more informally activities and engagements, and helped give me greater insight into school. Throughout the data collection process, various types of sources were collected by means of observation, interview, focus group, document/picture collection and reflection. Specifically, I conducted 31 interviews and 4 focus group, which involved 25 teacher participants and 19 student participants. I wrote 193 observation records and 120 reflective fieldnotes. In addition, 102 documents were collected and 755 pictures were taken in the field. With the method of thematic analysis, five qualities across six areas emerge as the important principles for the practice of democratic education in China, which specifically include the approach of participation, the approach of democratic centralism, the cultivation of a more reciprocal relationship, the simplification of the rule content and the diversification of the evaluation approach. It turned out such practice and comprehension of democratic education entail a group of strong roots in the field of society, culture, politics and education in China. With these qualities, a possible structure for the implementation of democratic education was constructed at the end of the research. This structure might be helpful for school practitioners in China to comprehend China’s democracy and take as an reference for their future practice about democratic education. It would also provide some material for educators in other countries to understand more about China and an alternative path to reconsider the conception of democracy in the field of education.
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPC</td>
<td>The Communist Party of China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPCC</td>
<td>The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNKI</td>
<td>China National Knowledge Infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KMT</td>
<td>Kuo Min Tang/ Nationalist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSESW</td>
<td>School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen’s University Belfast</td>
</tr>
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Acknowledgement

It is a long journey to conduct this research and present it in this thesis. During this academic journey, the particular achievement of democratic education in Chinese schools usually gave me a lot of surprise. While as a young researcher, the difficulties I came across also confused me all the time. For the completion of this research, I receive a lot of help and support from many people. Without their help, this research cannot be finished in such a smooth way.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

To begin this thesis, this chapter will illustrate some initial reasons and considerations for doing this research. It will also give a brief introduction for the entire research and the content of this thesis.

Some initial considerations

The selection of this research topic is under a background in which Chinese democracy begins to be advocated explicitly and a lot of educational practice with democratic style draws the attention of more scholars. While this research focus could also be attributed to some personal experiences. As one of millions of Chinese students, I spent nineteen years in schools and universities before this study. Within this long educational trajectory, I came across many teachers with various teaching styles. My study experience and outcome for the same course usually varied a lot with different teachers. With the more controlling style of teaching and teachers, I always suffered in class and struggled to pass exams. But with a democratic-style teacher, my learning outcome would become much better with an enjoyable experience. Such phenomenon was also observed on some students I taught before. All these experiences arose my interest to explore the topic of democratic education. What is the rationale for this conception? How can it be put into practice, especially in the current context of China? These preliminary considerations became the strong impetus to conduct this study.

A brief introduction of the research and the content of this thesis

Based on initial considerations, a thorough research plan is designed upon the literature review about democracy and democratic education. Retaining the focus on the school practice of democratic education in the initial consideration, this research is designed as a qualitative research drawing on ethnography to deeply explore the implementation of democratic education within the school context in China. Two public post primary schools in China which explicitly advocate for democratic education are selected as research objects. To deeply dig into people’s understanding and practice in the research school, a whole academic year, equivalent to 190 days, were spent in the field to collect data by immersing into the campus life. By applying a variety of methods including observation, interview, focus group and so forth, a huge amount of data were collected with different groups of participants. All the data was analyzed by means of thematic analysis for three rounds to answer the research questions. In line with the
research process, this thesis would be arranged with a similar sequence to present the result of this study.

This thesis includes 9 chapters. The following chapter (chapter 2) will dwell on the conception of democracy. This chapter will first illustrate the history, different models and features of democracy generally. Then it will focus on democracy in the context of China. Based on the review, some principles of democracy would be picked up to assist this research. The review on both the development of democracy and Chinese democracy would provide some important background information for understanding this study.

Chapter 3 will focus on the review of democratic education. In this chapter, theories of two prominent theorists, John Dewey and Paulo Freire, would be introduced and compared first. Their particular influences in China would be analysed with history and relevant literature. Following this, the school practice of democratic education across the world would be reviewed. Practice in China would be reviewed particularly in a separate section.

Chapter 4 will demonstrate the methodology applied in this research. In this chapter, the research aims and objectives, methods for both collecting data and analysing data will be explained in detail. The ethical issues and some reflections would also be presented here.

Chapter 5 will provide a general description of both research schools, which aims to provide more information to help the audience understand the specific context. Schools’ history, their educational conceptions, information about students and teachers will be outlined to portray a general picture of the research school.

Chapter 6 to 8 will present the analysis of this research. The analyzing result emerged from data will be organized and presented by certain themes. At the meantime, analysis of data would also be linked back to the review of literature in chapter 2 and chapter 3.

Finally, chapter 9 would launch a discussion on the practice of democratic education in Chinese schools which will be made based on all the data and analysis. Research questions would be answered to make a conclusion to research.
After the main body of this thesis, 15 appendixes would present more relevant documents of this study. They would include different versions of interview outline, the observation form, the information and consent document and a detailed description of the preparation of data and the whole process of data analysis.
Chapter 2: A Review of Literature about Democracy

Introduction

This research uses an ethnographic approach to examine the theory and practice of democratic education in two Chinese public schools. Both schools were selected for the study as they advocate for democratic education and therefore provide examples of how this concept is put into place in a proactive manner.

According to this research purpose, this chapter will first focus on the literature about democracy generally, and within the context of China. In the first instance, the concept of democracy will be reviewed in terms of its history, principles and categories. By elaborating the history of different models of democracy, this chapter will explore the different principles and features that are used to legitimize concepts of democracy, especially how it is practiced in China. The review on both the evolution of democracy and Chinese democracy can provide a comparative perspective when comparing the praxis of democratic education in different countries.

Democracy

Having existed and being developed for more than two thousand years, democracy could be treated as one of the oldest political conceptions, if not the oldest, that is still vigorous and popular in contemporary times. Despite its continuous evolution, the definition and practice of democracy are always in controversy, particularly under the background of globalization and multiculturalism. As an essentially contested concept argued by Gallie (1964), its contestability is largely embodied in the multiple standards for the correct application and the contextual comprehension in relationship with other relevant concepts (Gray, 1977). Nevertheless, this feature also becomes a strong impetus for the promotion of democracy. In accordance with various requirements and contradictions in different eras, a series of models of democracy were created and developed constantly.

The major models of democracy and their evolvement
To provide a comprehensive understanding for different models of democracy, I weave their key factors into a succinct history of their evolvement which could explain the reasons of their specific principles and reasonable diversity.

Classical democracy

The primary model of democracy could be traced back to the fifth century BC, flourished in Athens among many poleis in Greece. Originated from Greek, the word democracy was not translated into English until sixteenth century (Held, 2006). The initial word of democracy is *demokratia* in which "*demos*" means the people and "*kratia*" means the power or authority. So from the preliminary stage, democracy was defined from the perspective of politics, which means ruling by the people (Aristotle, 1965, Knight and Pearl, 2000).

The emergence of democracy on the land of Athens can be explained by a number of reasons. One prime precondition was the naturally generated small lands due to the mountain terrain (Hattersley, 1930). Such landform provided good geographical conditions for the appearance of a self-governing community. Except from this, with the growth of sea trade, iron tools as well as the silver mines from eighth century BC, the economy in the Greek city-states, especially in Athens, prospered progressively (Roper, 2013). Consequently, the tension between the privileged people and the peasants was intensified as a consequence of the expansion of the population and the improvement of living conditions. To maintain the balance of power, concessions were made to farmers by the privileged people, which was proved as a stimulus for further economic autonomy of small sized farmers and the formation their communities (Hornblower, 1992). This autonomy could be treated as the burgeon or initial manifestation of people’s liberty. Nonetheless, if only with these factors, democracy would not be able to flourish since people did not have time to participate in social activities. It was the rise of a slave economy that emancipated people from a lot of manual labours and enabled them to reflect more about the social system and the situation of the whole society (Hattersley, 1930, Anderson, 1996).

Under such a background, several Greek philosophers including Thucydides, Plato and Aristotle began to dwell on the form of government and develop ideas of classical democracy.
On account of the oppression by the privileged mentioned above, equality and liberty were central to the emergent aims of democracy. However, at that time the definitions of these two concepts were far from how we would understand them today. The realization of equality and liberty had a prerequisite which was called “civic virtue” implying individuals’ life was subject to public affairs and the common good. Based on this, the principle of citizens’ direct participation was defined for the creation of a common life (Held, 2006). Moreover, in those politicians’ accounts democracy was not merely a theoretical concept with special features, it also involved a political mechanism which embodied those features and could make the ideal come true.

Primarily, the sovereign assembly was designed to permit all citizens to discuss and exchange ideas about public affairs with the goal of reaching a consensus on the common good (Farrar, 1992). The better arguments proposed in the assembly would then be transformed as part of the law which at that time profoundly replaced the arbitrary will as the instruction and regulation on citizens’ life yet emphasizing the equality of every citizen before the law (Sabine, 1963). This was probably the earliest time when the notion of laws was introduced and practiced.

Along with the sovereign assembly, several institutions consisting of a Council, a Committee and a Court were designed to support the operation of the assembly and dealing with affairs of the whole state (Roper, 2013, Held, 2006). Liberty and equality were also reflected in these institutions. Equality was signified that citizens had equal voting power to elect the officials, and the opportunity each citizen got elected was equal likewise. Conditioned by equality, liberty was indicated as “ruling and being ruled in turn” and “living as one like”. Strict short terms of offices’ positions were enacted to guarantee the rotation of citizens for holding the office in another respect.

Regardless of these achievements, classical democracy had a lot of limitations. The citizens were narrowly defined as Athenian men over 20 years old. Neither immigrants, slaves nor women were eligible for citizenship, notwithstanding that their work provided basic services for the whole society which were the key factors freed and enabled citizens to take part in the social deliberation (Wood, 1988).
Despite of the peculiar characteristics classical democracy possessed, the traces of it could be found readily in all subsequent models of democracy. It left a rich legacy and illuminations for the development of democracy afterwards.

**Liberal democracy**

The culture of classical democracy began to wither after the ancient Greece came under the rule of Roman. Intertwined with the drawbacks and potential risks of classical democracy portrayed by some philosophers, such as Plato, the political power conferred to populism was gradually transferred back to the elites and the emperor with a government form of monarchy. The spirit of democracy didn’t come to revival until the rise of liberalism in the period of Renaissance. As a novel ideology, liberalism proposes a central concern on the freedom of individual against the harm by others as well as the state.

Among the complicated reasons accelerated the growth of liberal tradition, one important impetus is the development of nationalism. The shift from the religious community to a more secular world of individuals in nation-states strongly promoted the growth of liberal ideas. As Anderson (2006) analyses, this transformation could generally attribute to a series of factors involving the exploration of non-European world, the demotion of the religious language and the downfall of the dynastic realm.

Almost around the same period, the Protestant Reformation was another critical factor for the development of individualism. Under the background of religious conflicts, the German theology Martin Luther, as the pathfinder of Reformation, proposed the believers were conceived as individuals before God (Metaxas, 2017). This idea theoretically weakened the power of churches and priests and highlighted a shift towards the idea of autonomous individuals in the meantime.

With the evolution of liberalism, the older relationship between the state and the people in which the sovereignty came from the king or state, and people had a relationship to the state as subjects was reversed as the sovereignty was vested in the people, and it was they who created, and therefore legitimimized, the state. The king’s legitimacy underpinned by god and religion was undermined by the concept of liberalism as well.
Aside from the cultural background, the liberal structure of politics was progressively promoted by a group of philosophers and politicians.

In Leviathan (Hobbes, 2017), Thomas Hobbes discussed the rational basis of human liberty. He assumed that, left to their own devices, people would pursue self-interest and produce anarchy. They had to agree to pool their individual sovereignty in the state, or Leviathan, which would then ensure that people could go about their day-to-day business without fear of molestation, but that was its only role. To the extent that people were safe and free of harm, the state had no business interfering in other parts of their lives.

His proposition was criticized by John Locke who deemed a fully authorized government not only would not resolve disputes of individual interests, but also had the risk of power abuse. Essentially acknowledged the natural rights endowed by God, Locke attached high priority to individuals’ liberty, and asserted the government was an instrument for the defence of citizens’ rights (Dunn, 1969). He emphasized people have the right to overthrow the state if it became a tyranny. In his famous Two Treatises of Government (Locke, 1947), a state of nature was proposed in which citizens had freedom on their actions and possessions. In the face of potential risks which might be brought about by the conflicts of individual liberty, two general rules, the Law of Nature and no interference on others’ wills, were listed as the boundaries for the employment of liberty. Aside from the limitation on individuals, to prevent the arbitrary government, he rendered the legislature should operate independently from the executive power, which in fact acted as the role of supervision (Jenkins, 2011). Albeit these ideas are rudimental, they indicated the direction and prepared for the development of modern liberal democracy.

Following John Locke, the French political philosopher, Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu advanced the theory of legal system and the separation of powers. Based on the tenet of the natural law, he advocated for the creation of a formal and positive law which was capable of regulating the real social life and in the meantime securing citizens’ liberty, which considerably enhanced the practicability of law. Within the bounds of law, the connotation of the division of power was enlarged. Except from the separation of legislature and executive power proposed by Locke,
Montesquieu emphasized the judiciary should also act independently so that the three powers could check and balance with each other.

Although the revolt against arbitrary power were taken continuously, the variants of despotic power remained in the political systems in nineteenth century in Britain (Mill, 1990). A group of philosophy radicals, leaded by Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, re-examined the temporal polity and proposed remedies for its promotion. Liberal democracy was in this case applied as a mean to ensure the accountability of government. Influenced by a liberal view of political economy, the conception of economic freedom was embedded into the theory of democracy (Trevelyan, 1922). A free market allowed freely economic transactions, good and labour exchange without government’s intervention was complemented. It became another key factor of democracy along with the separation of powers and periodic elections. Although the focus of this theory was to further control the government and emancipate individual liberty from repression, appropriate governmental intervention was permitted when the common good or social order were violated. This elaborated theory was referred to as the founding model of democracy for a modern industrial society (Macpherson, 1977).

John Stuart Mill, as the son and successor of James Mill, deeply expanded the representative government as the ideal political form for implementing liberal democracy. In the face of new dilemmas occurred in modern society, such as the large population, Mill argued the representative government was the only medium that could dispose all those problems. Additionally, the boundary between individual liberty and the government intervention was shifted from the violation of public interests to the violation to other citizens, which further secured the independence of individuals (Mill, 1984).

In terms of the election, the issue of universal franchise, particularly the subordination of women was emphatically discussed with a conclusion that this notion hindered human improvement and should be abolished (Mill, 1980). Until then, the model of liberal democracy was basically constructed.

Derived from these theories, the specific practice of liberal democracy differs across countries. However, several factors are in common which turn out to be the central
factors of liberal democracy: the elected representative government; representatives make political decisions alone; all citizens have suffrage; freedom of conscience, information and expression; association autonomy; and the right to oppose the government (Held, 2006).

However, after entering to a new age, liberal democracy evolved and the concept of who constituted the category of citizens expanded, and the issue of inequality began to emerge as an important political consideration, Marxism was one of a number of alternative theories that emerged to offer explanations for this based on principles other than those of liberal democracy.

**Democracy in Marxism**

From 1830s, with the burgeoning of technology and industry, the appearance of urbanization and the creation of an industrial working class, new social problems associated with social status and social wealth became increasingly obvious. Barely bore the huge gaps between employees and employers, strike actions were pursued to express workers’ discontent and require government to adjust relevant policies.

Reflected on the social change and political revolution in this period, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels developed a series of novel thoughts and ideologies aiming to explain the emerging social order and phenomena. In their theories, they offered a different version of the idea of democracy. Thereupon, democracy once again gained new connotations.

Unlike liberalism which particularly stresses the independence of individual, Marx attached great importance to the social nature of humankind. He argued that the nature of human could only be realized in relationship with others in society (Marx, 1970). The notion of class structure was introduced to explain the relations between categories of people. His thought was also a theory of history which suggested that all previous societies had been characterized by class divisions, related to the means of production, but that the nature of type of classes had changed over time. Due to the specific way of production and distribution which was called the social relations of production in Marxist theory, he indicated the particular class divisions that arose in western countries, in particular the new exploiting class of capitalist class. Different from the
old monarchies and aristocracy who based their elite position on ownership of land, the capitalist class bases their ownership and control on the industrial methods of production. With this background, the ruling class had control of the state and the coercive mechanisms needed to maintain their power, while the proletarian workers were in a much weaker position who can only resort to the collective power and mass action to fight for the oppression and exploitation. Considering this situation, it was believed the individualist orientation or liberalism disguised the true basis for power and weakened workers by trying to alienate them from one another and hide the potential of their collective power. It was also proposed democracy would not be able to realize if the mode of production and method of protecting self-interest were applied within the framework of liberalism.

Rather than giving an absolute negation to liberal democracy, Marx complimented its historical achievement while discovered the limitation rooted in its model of production and the institutional mechanism (Roper, 2013). Upholding the view that true democracy was only possible when the basis of society were transformed, the scope of democracy in Marxism were enlarged from the sphere of politics to social and economic domains.

In terms of the social life and economy, the collective control on the means of production, the distribution of resources, major state institutions and so forth were highly suggested (Roper, 2013). In the terrain of politics, a concept of ‘direct democracy’ was proposed to replace the form of representative democracy, and included the role of ‘delegates’ rather than ‘representatives’. This was rooted in the model of participatory democracy that had been advocated by some during the French Revolution which differed in important respects from the individualism of liberal democracy.

The role of delegate in this system was different from the role of representatives in liberal democracy, albeit both of them signified a level of representation (Pitkin, 1967). Instead of working independently after being elected as the case for representatives in liberal democracy, the delegates were required to work faithfully in accordance with their constituents’ interests and opinions. In addition, the system of direct democracy was a hierarchical system in which the smallest community employed self-government and elected delegates to a larger administrative unit, such as a town or a district. Other
layers of delegates would be elected orderly by its lower unit until forming the national
degregation (Held, 2006). By this means, the legislative power and executive power
were combined and performed simultaneously by the supervision of people (Gao,
2006). It was deemed this regime could largely keep the power grasped in the hand of
citizens. As its predecessors, democracy of Marxism also paid attention to liberty,
equality and their relationship. It was described that the ideal of democracy was equal
freedom in which freedom was built upon the conception of equality (Marx and Engels,
1969).

By the twentieth century, the theory of Marxism had evolved to three major camps
because of their disparate explanations and interpretations of the theory. These camps
were generally conceived of libertarian Marxist, Pluralist Marxist and Orthodox
Marxist. Libertarian Marxism highlighted the aspect of anti-authoritarian in Marxism,
and considered no party or associations were in need within a state, pluralist Marxism
contended to legitimate the position of the party of working class and its allies, while
the orthodox underlined the role of a revolutionary party which could firmly lead the
country to transform towards socialism and communism (Held, 2006).

Stemming from Marxism and its derivative theories, a cluster of concepts of
democracy were invented. Among them, socialist democracy and social democracy,
are the two major forms. In theory, both of them involve democracy not merely in
political area, but also the economic field and the general social life (Wang, 2012).
Nonetheless, with the evolvement of social democracy, the social democratic parties
worldwide basically abandon the element of economic democracy, whereas they still
promote social equality within the framework of liberal democratic polity and
capitalist economy (Heywood, 2015, Fotopoulos, 2006). They assert greater equality
could be achieved by direct state action through, for example, higher taxes and greater
social expenditures by the state. Yet some level of inequality is acceptable which is
considered as the necessary condition for market economy.

As the heir of orthodox Marxism, socialist democracy emphasizes more about equality
by enforcing public ownership and control of economy (Zhu, 1999), which aims to
eliminate exploitation and polarization and ultimately achieve common prosperity. In
terms of the political system, the combination of legislative and executive powers is
endorsed to protect the alienation of power and delegates from citizen (Li, 2010).
In summary, nearly all concepts of democracy regard liberty and equality as the starting point and primary concern. Derived from these two points, the differences between them are embodied in the priority they attach to these two factors and the relationship between them, and the implications this has for the relationship between people and the state, and whether people are seen as collectives or individuals. The liberal democracy generally attaches greater priority to liberty, while democracy originated from Marxism places equality in a more significant position. The liberal democracy highlights the role of individuals, whereas Marxist democracy underlines the collective role and power of people.

**Other categories of democracy**

After understanding the main thread of democracy’s history, it becomes much easier to comprehend why the seemingly diverse categories of democracy come out constantly. Essentially influenced by the two main strands of philosophy, Liberalism and Marxism, democracy is largely classified by the different preoccupations within these two ideological systems. For example, according to the adoption of regimes and social systems, Berger and Zhou categorized democracy as socialist democracy or bourgeois democracy (Berger, 2002, Zhou, 2009). With the concern on the form of implementation, the classification of direct democracy and representative democracy was proposed. Considering the involved fields, it could be divided as political democracy, economic democracy, social democracy and cultural democracy (Wang, 2012, Zhou, 2009, Wang, 2014b). Some theories also analysed it as substantive or procedural democracy, normative or empirical democracy (Kurki, 2010). Except from these, there are lots of other categories being developed by scholars from different aspects. Among those aspects, the perspective of a specific country context is always under discussion which elicits the Chinese democracy.

**Democracy in China**

The acceptance of the contestation of democracy necessitates the acknowledgement of certain type of democracy arising from its particular contextual settings (Kurki, 2010). Therefore, to better understand the characteristic of democracy in China, it is necessary to catch a glimpse of the history of democracy in China.
The official introduction of democracy and its early evolution in China

Democracy is not an indigenous concept in China. The earliest introduction of democracy was interpreted by western missionaries. 民主, the current Chinese interpretation of democracy, was initially picked by an American missionary, W. A. P. Martin, in 1864 when translating the book of Element of International Law into Chinese. At that time, the word 民主 was used for the interpretation of three concepts including president, republican and democracy (Wang, 2006). Despite of its ambiguity and the difference from the meaning of democracy, 民主 managed to present relevant concepts and features of democracy in western countries, precisely liberal democracy.

It is argued by Said (1983) that the knowledge inevitably gains new meanings in accordance with specific historical environment after translation and the adjustment usually conforms to the practitioners’ needs and requirements. This happened to the word 民主, of which the meaning started to be innovated after the explicit advocacy of democracy in China.

From the end of nineteenth century, a sequence of revolutions and movements took place in China, which aimed to alter the predicament of the whole country. The Hundred Days’ Reform, the Revolution of 1911, the May 4th Movement and the New Culture Movement happened in succession. Struggling in the era of disorder and chaos, the mass, especially patriotic students and politicians, were eager to reform the society and change the oppressed situation and cast out invaders. Under this circumstance, the conception of democracy was proposed and emphasized as a savior of China. Democracy was then interpreted to a more respectful word, 德先生 which means Mr. Democracy in English. In company with science, 赛先生 (Mr. Science), these two notions were claimed to be able to eliminate all the darkness existing in the field of politics, morality, academy and ideology (Chen, 1987). At this stage, from 1910s to 1940s, a lot of conflicts happened between different powers in China including domestic powers and foreign powers. Their advocacy of particular ideology resulted in a situation that various thoughts coexisted and strived to develop at the same time. John Dewey’s visit to China was under this context. This history will be detailed mentioned in chapter three in page 48. The adoption of Marxism-Leninism and contemporary Chineses democracy
Liberal democracy was not the only influential ideology on the evolution of Chinese democracy. After 1917, the ideology of Marxism-Leninism spread to China with the triumph of Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. The conception of democracy in Marxism, in particular orthodox Marxism, began to impress on the development of democracy in China. From then on, especially after the founding of People’s republic of China, the proletarian democracy and socialist democracy became the high-frequency vocabulary when democracy was mentioned in China.

After the chaotic situation was settled down in 1949 when CPC began to govern the country, the concept of democracy was formally introduced into Chinese political and economic structure. Following the propositions of Marxism-Leninism and practice in Soviet Union, a socialist political system, a planned economic system and the election mechanism named People’s Congress were established in the initial stage. After nearly thirty years’ implementation, the view was taken that a planned economy was inappropriate for China and so a significant economic reform was put in place from 1978 (Shen and Yang, 2018). Subsequently, the socialist market economy was created which maintains to have market played its basic function of deploying resources under the macro-regulation and control by the State (Xi, 2007). Until then, the theoretical structure of the current Chinese democracy was basically constructed.

Specifically, the socialist market economy asserts to jointly develop multiple economic elements with the economy of public ownership as the main body (Xi, 2007). In this structure, democracy is reflected in both equality and freedom. The employment of public ownership economy aims to ensure the equality. The permission for other economic forms provides more freedom. In addition, the important position of public ownership economy gives priority to equality over freedom in the sphere of economy.

After entering the 21st century, the emphasis on Chinese democracy are constantly embodied in a series of national conferences and documents. In 2003, the theory of the Scientific Outlook on Development was first reported by the former president Hu Jintao and was officially written into the constitution of Chinese Communist Party at the Seventeenth National Congress in 2007. In this theory, although the word democracy was not directly used, the spirit of it was reflected in the emphasis on the people-oriented governance. This mode of governance sought to respect the principal position of the people in the country’s political life, give play to their creativity, protect
their rights and interests. The national development is for the people, by the people and with the people sharing in its fruits (Hu, 2007). Further, in 2012, on the eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the word democracy was directly utilized for the creation of a concept called 'Core Values of Chinese Socialism'. Consisting of 12 sub concepts, the Core Values of Chinese Socialism makes a clear statement on the goals, purpose and norms for the whole country which could be divided to three layers: for the state, for the society, and for individual citizens. Democracy along with prosperity, civility and harmony belongs to the level of the state, which describes the general goals of the whole country. In the level of society, freedom, equality, justice and rule of the law are the general instructions for organizing the society. On the level of individual citizens, patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship are the guidelines (Education, 2013). In this conference, the exploration of consultative democracy was highlighted with a general purpose of improving the practice of democracy in China (Committee, 2012). Since then, the concept of democracy itself has been explicitly and strongly advocated for constructing the society and the country in China.

In the meantime, different elements of democracy are examined theoretically and practically, by which the framework of Chinese democracy becomes stronger and more mature.

In this framework, a basic element is the conception of people’s democratic dictatorship which is used to describe the form of the state. This form originated from the proletarian dictatorship in Marxism and its derivative form, the workers’ and peasants’ revolutionary democratic dictatorship created by Lenin (Cheng, 2017). In the official governmental document, people’s democratic dictatorship is conceptualized as a form of state which implements people’s democracy and people’s dictatorship simultaneously on the basis of worker and peasant alliance under the leadership of working class and the Chinese Communist Party. This form requires respecting and ensuring human rights. But those who endanger national security, infringe other citizens’ civil rights or democratic rights would be penalized according to the law (Office, 2005). It is declared that this form could guarantee the power of the state to be held in the hand of people. Drawing from the definition of people’s democratic dictatorship, three factors are extracted as the path for developing Chinese democratic
politics. They are the leadership of Chinese Communist Party, ruling country by the 
people and law-based governance. Among these three factors, the leadership of 
Chinese Communist Party is regarded as the precondition for the other two (Fang, 
2007).

To ensure this ideological design could be converted into practice, the People’s 
Congress is designed as the institutional mechanism. As the embodiment of ruling 
country by people, this mechanism is virtually a hierarchical election and opinion 
expressing system. In practice, the People’s Congress is routinely organized once a 
year. More Congress meetings could be arranged depending on the context. The deputy 
to the People’s Congress is elected by different layers. The National People's Congress 
is made up of the deputies elected from province, autonomous regions, municipalities 
directly under the central government, the special administrative regions of the 
provinces and the people's liberation army. The People’s Congress of the province, 
autonomous regions, municipalities directly under the central government, the city 
divided into districts and the Autonomous Prefecture is composed of the deputies 
elected from the People's Congress at the next lower level. The People’s Congress of 
the county, the autonomous county, the city not divided into district, the municipal 
district, the township, nationality township and the town are consist of the deputies 
directly elected by the electorates. The tenure of the deputies is five years (Congress, 
2018). In conformity with the idea in Marxism, the People’s Congress manifests the 
theory of the combination of legislative and executive powers. All layers’ 
administrations are generated by the corresponding levels of People’s Congress. The 
National People’s Congress and its Standing Committee are the legislature (Congress, 
2018).

While the construction of Chinese democracy is not a pure top-down design or action, 
it involves a lot of practical attempts as well. The grassroots people, especially 
villagers play significant role in the advancement of Chinese democracy. In remote 
areas, many villagers spontaneously try to involve more people in the village 
management to improve the efficiency and promote their productivity. Inspired by the 
outcome of this rudimental democracy, the Chinese Communist Party generalized four 
democratic rights for citizens from their practices and supplemented four rights into 
the structure of Chinese democracy. These four rights refer to democratic election,
democratic determination, democratic administration and democratic supervision, which soon become another popular category of Chinese democracy (Huang and Chen, 2011).

In addition to these elements, the conceptions of democratic centralism and consultative democracy are considered as two critical principles in Chinese democratic system.

Democratic centralism

In a series of national documents, democratic centralism is raised as not only a fundamental tenet for establishing and organizing the CPC (China, 2017), but also a basic rule for all the national institutions and the whole country’s political system (Congress, 2018). The notion tries to integrate two seemingly contradictory concepts, democracy and centralism. It tries to unify democratic decision-making and centralized decision-making to improve the quality and efficiency of decision-making, balance the interests of different stakeholders and maintain the authority of the state (Wang, 2013).

The discussion about who first created this conception remains under debate. Some thinks it was J·B· vonSchweitzer who applied this notion first in 1868 when defending his strict organizing style in the Labor Union in German (Wu, 2019), while most people argue it was Lenin who officially proposed this concept in the Forth Congress of the Russian Socialist Workers’ Party in 1906 (Angle, 2005, Zhang, 2018). But there is a consensus that the two main elements in this concept can be traced back to the theory of Marx and Engels. Although democratic centralism was not directly raised, democracy and centralism were separately attached significance by Marx and Engels in different time periods. The role of democracy was emphasised from the beginning in both the Constitution of Communist League and the Constitution of International Workingmen's Association which stipulated that all leaders should be generated by election and all the members obtain the equal rights (City, 2020). The idea of centralism was emphasized from the late period of the Communist League. Marx and Engels argued that revolutionary activities could only maximize their effects under the condition of centralism (City, 2020). The centralization and unification were also praised as the superiority of the proletarian Party (Wu, 2019). Their early exploration
and emphasis on these two aspects laid a theoretical and practical foundation for the appearance of democratic centralism (City, 2020).

Whether or not Lenin was the founder of the notion, there is no doubt he played the most important role in its development and use. His particular advocacy on centralism was first proposed on the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. In his argument, centralism could eliminate the barrier between the centre and the remotest parts of the Party (Ульянов, 1963a, P440-441). After being criticized as advocating an extreme form of centralism by Rosa Luxemburg (Luxemburg, 1984, P513-514), Lenin adjusted his initial centralized thought with democracy to distinguish his idea of centralism from authoritarian centralism. Thus, democratic centralism was officially introduced in the first Congress of the Russian Communist Party. He claimed that democratic centralism required the Party to be organized in a democratic way and supplemented some principles to enhance the democratic style: All Party affairs would be organized and determined by the Party members or delegates equally; The Party leadership would be selected by elections, and they must report back to all the Party members; They would also be able to be dismissed and replaced if they could not meet people’s expectation (Ульянов, 1963b, P418). But these rules also relied on the leading role of the Party and the need for a band of ‘professional revolutionaries’ to lead the struggle. Hence the idea that at the heart of the Party would be the leadership group who would make the final decision on issues, after encouraging discussion among Party members, and that they would then be expected to accept the decision.

With the establishment of the Comintern, an international organization which advocated communism, the principle of democratic centralism became a basic requirement for all parties or groups who wanted to join the organization (Ульянов, 1963c, P312). Under this background, the Communist Party of China (CPC) joined the Comintern soon after establishment. The tenet of democratic centralism was applied by CPC from the beginning and was constantly written as the basic organization principle into the official Party documents (Xu, 2010).

By tracking the explanation of democratic centralism in Chinese Communist Party’s documents, it could be seen the connotation of this concept experienced a transition from inheritance to development. Although democratic centralism started to be
mentioned as an important principle from the second CPC Congress, it was not until the sixth and seventh CPC Congress that democratic centralism was discussed in more detail. In the explanation, it was described with the tenet of democratic centralism the Party’s leadership of all levels should be generated by elections; the leadership should give report to the Party organization in which they are elected; the Party members should obey their Party organization, the minority obeys majority, the lower-level Party organization obeys the higher-level organization, the Party branch obeys the Party central committee; and members strictly obey the Party discipline and unconditionally comply with resolutions (Academy, 1979). Such explanations are recognized as being highly influenced by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, especially the definition in the Constitution of Communist Party of the Soviet Union revised in the seventeenth Party congress in 1934 (Xu, 2010).

By reviewing the history and explanation of democratic centralism in the period of Soviet Union, many scholars reach the consensus that Lenin put more emphasis on centralism, while the concept democracy was actually an adjective for centralism (Wang, 2014a, Yuan, 2009, Ying, 2005, Xu, 2010). Similarly, in the armed struggle period of CPC, generally from 1920s to 1940s, the aspect of centralism in this concept got more emphasis as well, which was argued it could improve the Party’s efficiency and better solve the conflict within the country (Li, 2020b).

The principle of democratic centralism got further development and reformation in the context of China through different historical periods. Apart from accepting the main rules from Soviet Union, CPC created one important explanation for democratic centralism. This integrates the aspect of applying democracy under the instruction of centralism and the aspect of practicing centralism on the basis of democracy. In comparison to the understanding by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, this explanation puts more emphasis on a reciprocal relationship between democracy and centralism. With this new emphasis, it indicates the practice of democratic centralism should be a two-step process. Generally speaking, the first step is all people are encouraged to express their ideas and launch debates, the decision would be made according to the majority’s will and approved by the higher-level organizations. If the decision relates to the whole Party, the suggestions from different levels of Party members would be collected and reported layer by layer until the highest level. It is
they who would make the final decision. If the decision-making is only related to
certain area or Party level, of which the Party committee has the authority to make the
decision as well, the discussion would be organized from the bottom to that level and
they would make the final decision. Under the rules of Party discipline, the members
then have to accept and implement the final decision. The second step is that the
decision made through the first step would regulate people’s behavior and become the
reference to distinguish the boundary of democratic practice. This process should run
iteratively to solve the problem and make decisions. The decision could also be
changed and updated in a new round of democratic centralism (Xu, 2010).

The evolution of democratic centralism in China reflects on the area it applies to as
well. No matter in Soviet Union or China, democratic centralism was initially proposed
as a tenet for organizing the Party. While along with the practice in China, this tenet
began to be discussed as the form of political system from 1940s (Wang, 2013). And
finally it is written into the current Constitution of China as the essential principle to
organize the state organs with the supportive mechanism of People’s Congress.
Specifically, the National People's Congress and the local people's congresses at
various levels are constituted through democratic elections. They are responsible to
the people and subject to their supervision so they are delegates rather than
representatives, to report the views of the people who elected them, but not to act
autonomously until the next election. All administrative, supervisory, judicial, and
procuratorial organs of the State are created by the people's congresses, to which they
are responsible and by which they are overseen. The division of functions and powers
between the central and local state organs are guided by the principle of giving full
scope to the initiative and enthusiasm of the local authorities under the unified
leadership of the central authorities (Congress, 2018).

With such inheritance and evolution, the principle of democratic centralism has
become the organizing basis of Chinese democracy. By institutionally entitling all the
Chinese people to get involved in the social and political issues, it is presented as
giving the sovereignty to people’s hand to realize people’s democracy in China (Li,
2020b).

Consultative democracy
While in comparison to the democratic centralism, which was originally an imported idea, the exploration of consultative democracy arises more from Chinese people’s efforts and the Chinese conventional wisdom.

Historically, one preliminary practice of consultative democracy could be traced back to the “Triangular Organization” Regime in the Communist Party of China (CPC) Revolutionary base area at the end of 1930s. For this regime governmental staff and public representatives were made up of three groups. One third of the group was made up of the CPC members who represented the interest of the proletariat and poor peasants, one third was the left progressivists representing the interest of petty bourgeoisie, while the remaining one third was constituted by the middle bourgeoisie and the landlord class who endorsed democratic reform (Wu et al., 2019, Lin, 2019). By applying this regime, the temporary government in the anti-Japanese base area aimed to widely absorb opinions on different sides to save the country and protect the populace during the war.

By the year of 1945, after the victory of the Anti-Japanese War, the mode of consultation was applied to resolve the domestic conflict between the Communist Party of China and the Kuo Min Tang (KMT) (or the Nationalist Party). During 1945 to 1946, both of these two parties and some other democratic parties organized a series of Political Consultative Conference to discuss the future of China. These conferences did not manage to ease the tension between the two parties, which led to a continued and even intensified party conflict. Despite this, the experience of the consultation model still had a great influence on the Chinese political system as it developed.

Nearly by the end of the KMT-CPC conflict in 1948, CPC released the “May Day Slogan” which advocated other democratic parties to join up and organize a new government (Lin, 2019). After consultation between many other parties and groups with their positive response and support, a new government of the People’s Republic of China organized by CPC was established. And the tradition of consultation and the regime of Political Consultative Conference were maintained all the way along.

However, the particular proposition of consultation combined with democracy was not raised until the 21st century. In the 2006 government document, ‘Opinions of the CPC central committee on strengthening the work of the Chinese People's Political
Consultative Conference (CPPCC)’, consultation was officially proposed with election as two main forms of democracy in China (Committee, 2006). In 2007, in the white book of Chinese Political Party System, the concept of consultative democracy and electoral democracy were first used in the political area of China (China, 2007b). Along with the proposition of the Socialist Core Values in the eighteenth CPC Congress in 2012, the exploration of consultative democracy was emphasized with a general purpose of improving the practice of democracy in China (Committee, 2012). In the national document of Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of Socialist Consultative Democracy released in 2015, a series of channels of consultative were put forward. In this document, it stressed to promote the consultation through parties, consultation through People’s Congress, consultation through government, consultation through Political Consultative Conference, consultation through people’s organizations and consultation at the grass-root level to generally improve the practice of consultative democracy. In the nineteenth CPC Congress, the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference was explicitly raised as the particular mechanism and important channel for the consultative democracy (Committee, 2017).

In the deliberation of the concept consultative democracy, many scholars argue the rudiment of the consultative thought has already existed in the traditional Chinese culture. In Confucianism, a lot of sayings of the people-oriented thought emphasizes the importance of hearing and respecting the populace’s voice. For example, the populace is the foundation of a country, when the foundation is firm, the country could be stable (民为邦本，本固邦宁。) (Ruan, 1980) The emperor is the boat, the people is the water; the water can uphold a boat, it also can overthrow a boat (君者，舟也；庶人者，水也。水则载舟，水则覆舟。) (Zhang, 1995). Additionally, the harmony thought allows the co-existence of different ideas and hopes to make better decisions by taking comprehensive considerations and balancing among those ideas. Thus, these thoughts are considered as the indigenous cultural root of the consultative democracy (Wu et al., 2019, Lu, 2015, Li, 2020a).

With all these features, some scholars indicate the essence of consultative democracy is to hear different views and find the common interests or the greatest common divisor among different stakeholders, by which the interests on all sides could be better considered to reach consensus (Fang and Zhao, 2019, Lin, 2019, Li, 2020c). By
collecting ideas and understanding various views from different perspectives, this mode of democracy works as a supportive mechanism for democratic centralism, which could enhance the implementation of Chinese democratic system. The current mechanism of consultative democracy in China could be represented by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, resident’s delegate meeting, villager’s delegate meeting and so forth.

The influence and absorption of some indigenous culture

In the evolving trajectory of Chinese democracy, the traditional Chinese culture, especially some thoughts from Confucianism are adopted to influentially shape the connotation of Chinese democracy. Among those relevant ideas, the concept being referred most frequently could be the people-oriented thought (民本).

The people-oriented thought

The earliest expression of this idea could be traced back to a famous political saying in the pre-Qin period before 221 B.C.: The populace is the foundation of a country, when the foundation is firm, the country could be stable (民为邦本，本固邦宁。) (Ruan, 1980). Since then, this idea was constantly discussed by Confucian representatives. Confucius himself integrated this thought with his main discourse of rule of virtue and benevolent governing (仁政), in which the importance of people were highlighted by the argument that the emperor should be benevolent to his people (Luan and Song, 2006). In Mencius’s discussion, he expressed the populace are the most important element in a country; the country comes next; the emperor is of slight importance (民为贵，社稷次之，君为轻。) (Zhu, 1992). In terms of Xunzi, he applied a metaphor with boat and water to further discuss this idea. Namely, the emperor is the boat, the people is the water; the water can uphold a boat, it also can overturn a boat (君者，舟也；庶人者，水也。水则载舟，水则覆舟。) (Zhang, 1995). In these discourses, the iteratively highlighted people’s role gradually constructed the core content of the people-oriented thought, which were constantly cited and expounded by scholars in the subsequent Confucian societies.

Such emphasis on people’s role and the pursuit of a good society become the main basis to connect the ancient people-oriented thought and democracy. It is also because of this, some scholars propose the idea and spirit of democracy had already existed in
ancient China (Su, 1989, Zhu, 2012). However, from its theoretical foundation and the political practice, the ancient people-oriented thought is virtually different from the contemporary democracy. In the ancient Confucian political system, the sovereignty of the state is held by the emperor rather than the populace within a pure imperial system. The status of the emperor was legitimatized by the idea of the “mandate of heaven” in which the heaven would pick up the one to become the state’s ruler (or emperor) and also supervise the behavior of the ruler (Zhu, 2012). It was believed the popular thoughts were the important basis for the heaven to make the judgement on the emperor (Ruan, 1980). This is also given as the reason why the emperor should treasure people’s thoughts when governing the country. In terms of the practice, there was no formal procedure which should be followed to ensure the idea was expressed in practice (Luan and Song, 2006). Therefore, this thought in its origin is more like a political or social ideal rather than a real practical purpose.

On account of this, when constructing the current democracy in China, these two aspects are deliberately considered and adjusted. From the original thought, the new version of people-oriented thought absorbs the emphasis on the ability and power of people, while criticizes the emperor has the absolute power and transfers the sovereignty to the people. When deliberating this idea, some scholars adjust the metaphor and assert the people could not only be “the water”, but also “the boat” and even “the helmsman” (Wang, 2006) who should be vested in the sovereignty of the country. After CPC came into stage and reinvented Chinese democracy with Marxism-Leninism, the People’s Congress becomes the mechanism to ensure the implementation of this thought.

The harmony thought

The harmony thought (和) is another thought extracted from the traditional Chinese culture to enrich the connotation of Chinese democracy. This thought is developed simultaneously by Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, among all of which this thought is attached great importance. Despite the fact that these three strands deliberate on harmony from different angles, they embrace a common argument that different parts of the entirety have been highly influential on each other and depend on each other. So it is important to coordinate them to reach a harmony result and cultivate a peaceful atmosphere.
In an early traceable text in the Commentary of Zuo (左传), a Confucian classic, the harmony thought is explained with a metaphor:

Sir Jing asked: Is there any difference between same and harmony? Yanzi answered: Yes, there is. Harmony is like cooking a meat dish. It needs to be prepared with water, heat, fish sauce, salt and plum, and then cooked with fire. The cook would mix these condiments to make the dish taste good. If it tastes too plain, then the cook would add more condiments. If it tastes too heavy, the cook would reduce some condiments. Such mixture could make a gentleman feel peaceful after eating the dish. This is just like the relationship between the monarch and the ministers. For those when the monarch thinks good, the minister could point out their drawbacks, which could make some improvement. For those that the monarch thinks not good, the ministers could point out the good part. In this way, the governance would be nice and peaceful, the populace would not have the intention to combat and fight. (Guo, 2016)

As implied in this text, harmony is not a single thing. To the contrary, it is a mixture of difference. It accepts difference, while at the same time stresses the need to coordinate divergence to reach agreement. In the later Confucian classics, this thought was iteratively discussed in various texts: In practicing the rules of propriety, it is harmony that is prized (礼之用，和为贵。). The man of noble character seeks harmony in diversity, the man of vile character aims at uniformity but not harmony (君子和而不同，小人同而不和。). The advantageous climate is not as important as favorable geographical position, the favorable geographical position is not as important as the harmony among people (天时不如地利，地利不如人和。).

In Taoism, the Tai Chi diagram also indicates the thoughts of harmony. The two parts yin and yang constitute a circle, which indicates the two contradictory parts could coexist. Each of them determines and highly influences the existence of the other part (Liu, 2020). In Buddhism, the harmony thought is both manifested as pursuing a harmony of mind in individuals’ life and cultivating a harmony environment in the Buddhist group (Dong, 2007).

Rooted in all these traditional Chinese philosophies, the harmony thought is always applied as a fundamental logic when settling the disputes and solving the personal or social problems in Chinese history. In the contemporary period, this logic is adopted
and integrated to the concept of Chinese democracy, which aims to defuse the tension and make the balance on all the sides in different situations.

By reflecting on Chinese democracy, undoubtedly the contemporary connotation of democracy is developed on a fusion of selected ideologies and cultures. Both domestic and exotic culture have profound influence on its formation. The existing democratic principles in China attribute to particular theoretical and historical sources, which explicitly explains all its special principles and features.

**Summary**

In summary, either the mode of democracy in western countries or in China has a complicated history which accumulates abundant practical experience under various circumstances. The development of Chinese democracy experiences a transformation from the attempt of learning liberal democracy to the establishment of the socialist democracy. Some relevant traditional cultural thoughts especially Confucian thoughts were continuously weaved into the concept to improve its operability and adoptability in China. In terms of the current Chinese democracy, it embraces some particular features in contrast with liberal democracy in western countries. The important difference involves the parliamentary system in western country and the system of the People's Congress in China; the separation of powers in western countries and the combination of legislative and executive powers in China; and the multi-party system in western countries and the single-party system in China. All these factors give rise to the characteristic in the practice of democracy. Yet some common principles are also reflected in all the practice, which includes the rule of law, people’s participation in decision-making and the protection of human rights.

Such accomplishments on the evolution of democracy substantially lay the foundation for the development of democratic education. The thorough review on both the evolvement of democracy and Chinese democracy could provide a fundamental perspective for understanding the application of democracy in the field of education in different contexts. In the following chapter, I intend to dwell on previous researches about democratic education to summarize researchers’ findings, as well as the barriers they encountered.
Chapter 3: A review of Democratic Education

Introduction

Following the review of democracy in the second chapter, I will now concentrate on the application of democracy in the field of education, so this chapter will focus on the literature about democratic education. Debates in theory and practice will be reviewed. Additionally, since the case of this study are two Chinese schools, the context and development of ideas on democratic education in China will be considered. The impetus for the promotion of democratic education in China will be traced, especially in relation with the support of government and educational policies. In terms of the practice, the preliminary outcome mixed with diverse barriers showed in literature will be examined and discussed. By analysing this literature, I intend to extract an outline of democratic education which will provide a referable framework for this research.

The appearance of democratic education

The practice of democracy has changed a lot over time and has even taken different forms at the same historical moment, but arguably it is rooted in a number of core principles: the notion that sovereignty originates in the people; that society operates under a set of laws; and individual citizens enjoy some defined rights. Of course those who constitute ‘the people’ can vary; the way laws are framed and the form they take can vary; and the codification and reach of rights can vary. Not surprisingly, therefore, the concept of democratic education has a level of elasticity which causes it to vary over time and context.

By tracing this history, the rudiments of democratic education appeared under the historical background of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, which was in accordance with the revival of democracy as mentioned in chapter 2. In that stage, the conception of “democratic education” was not proposed formally, while some critical issues related to democracy were employed in many educational discourses to address the temporary problem existing in the educational system. Controlled by the church and Christian ideology, almost every part of education was designed to make a commitment to religion from the beginning of the Middle Age. Under this condition, the status of minister, bishop or monk was highly praised as the source of knowledge.
and even the model of education. The religious requirement such as asceticism, controlling self-desire were regarded as the moral values. On the basis of this situation, the hermeneutic approach of teaching which was mainly embodied as lecture was commonly applied in the terrain of education. This religion-controlled education system provoked increasing dissatisfaction and complaint. The monotonous pedagogy was also challenged for its tedium and low efficiency. In the face of these negative restrictions from traditional education, in seventeenth and eighteenth century many scholars, represented by people like John Amos Comenius and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, aimed to explore new ways of education to change the educational phenomenon. To fight against the religious and adult repressive phenomena in education, they successively integrated the value of equality and liberty into education to some extent. By proposing to regard the nature rather than the religious text as the educational basis, scholars advocated to respect and liberate students’ nature, wills, interests, to provide freedom for students’ development, and to promote the development of different talents (Zhao and Li, 2018, Shen, 2018). Although they did not mention democracy in their theories, their propositions already reflected the values of democracy and laid a foundation for further development of democratic education.

**The representative theory of democratic education**

In the following centuries, the integration of democracy with education is expounded iteratively by many scholars. In correspondence with the contextual feature of democracy itself, the theory of democratic education also shows its particular stress within specific historical and social background. As such, the theory of democratic education becomes progressively diverse, complex and comprehensive. Among all these theorists, I intend to review on the thoughts of two thinkers, John Dewey and Paulo Freire, whose theories are conceived as significant by both the west and the east. Because of this, they could act as the bridge to help understand the similarities and differences of democratic education between western countries and China.

**John Dewey and democratic education**

After being developed for several centuries since Renaissance, John Dewey set a precedent for formally bringing democracy and education together in his seminal book, *Democracy and Education*, at the beginning of twentieth century. One central
argument in his theory of democratic education was presented in this book, which was
democracy is a social ideal and education is the primary tool for the establishment of
a democratic society. In the face of this general argument, some scholars criticized the
book title was quite misleading as the book neither focused on a type of democracy
nor education (Kadlec, 2007). But this exactly highlights the unique feature of
Dewey’s theory of democratic education: it is not an isolated theory of education or
democracy, rather it is a summary of a social philosophy based on these two critical
concepts.

When analysing Dewey’s work, it is not difficult to realize that democracy, education
and pragmatism are three interrelated concepts. Each of them was developed on basis
of the other two concepts and reinforced by each other. In consideration of this, in the
following part, these three aspects will be examined respectively to develop a deep
understanding of his theory of democratic education.

Pragmatism provided the philosophical framework for all Dewey’s theories. If one
reads carefully, the embodiment of pragmatism could be found almost everywhere in
all his constructed theories. In the philosophy of pragmatism, one central idea is that
the objective, absolute Truth does not exist. Theorists argue the true idea only refer to
those which are extracted from the experience and practice. As Hook (1959) expressed
in his Pragmatism and Existentialism, a true idea is the one which is carried out and
confirmed by experience. It is usually described as a plan of action which could enable
people to solve the problem in practice. McCaffrey (2012) describes this concept as
the working theory which again implies its intimate relationship with practice.
Focusing on this thought, action and experience are highlighted by pragmatists. But
they are not separated completely from theory, as they are the main source from which
theories are generated. In terms of seeking and solving problems, pragmatist tends to
wait and render the problem emerge from practice. On the basis of these ideas, inquiry
and experiment become important tools argued by pragmatists to understand the nature

These features of pragmatism are reflected in many aspects in Dewey’s discourse of
democracy. One obvious embodiment of the concept democracy could be its quite
broad definition. Expressed as “democracy is more than a form of government; it is
primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience”(Dewey,
1966), this definition readjusted the scope of democracy which left more space for people to explore and reconstruct the concept in practice.

Regarded as the primary topic and concern through Dewey’s whole life (Višňovský and Zolcer, 2016), the concept of democracy was invested with comprehensive meanings from diverse perspectives including the aspect of society, ethics, politics, economics and even religious. As showed in his former quote, Dewey redefined democracy as a mode for living together and a mode for exchanging experiences together (Dewey, 1916). This placed the social meaning of democracy in a central position. Dewey asserted that social life is an organism, in that the circumstance of each part is related to the wellbeing of the entirety. So he emphasized that the social relations between people were important instead of mere individuality (Festenstein, 2018). From the ethical and moral aspect, Dewey (1888) in The Ethics of Democracy expounded democracy should also be developed as a personal quality. It was contended this inner personality should be fostered from a man himself, not from outside. By emphasizing the moral meaning on individual, the social meaning of democracy was further strengthened.

Contrary to many other scholars, the political meaning of democracy was placed in a quite secondary position by Dewey. It was described that democracy “is a form of government only because it is a form of moral and spiritual association” (Dewey, 1888), echoing with the most famous quote mentioned before “democracy is more than a form of government” (Dewey, 1966). As for the economic aspect of democracy, Dewey mentioned that democracy should also be involved in the area of wealth, labour and industry, and help maintain the economic equality (Višňovský and Zolcer, 2016). The last aspect which might be the most surprising one is the religious meaning of democracy. In his particular book about this, A Common Faith, Dewey constructed democracy as an inquiry-tested religious experience, a natural common faith, in opposition to the supernatural thought of traditional religions. He asserted democracy was a secular faith which could be constantly renewed according to practice through communication (Dewey, 2013). This again manifests the feature of pragmatism.

Other than the general relationship between education and the other two concepts, Dewey elaborated democracy specifically on the practice of education which involved the aspect learning method, teaching method, the role of student and the management
of curriculum. Greatly related to the philosophy of pragmatism, Dewey contended students should learn by doing with their experience (Sikandar, 2016). Their engagement into the practice, during which students could develop their own understanding of the world, was regarded as the learning process. Because of this, students were undoubtedly positioned in the centre of the learning process. Echoing this, his preferred approach of teaching methods also underlined students’ participation and personal experience. This subsequently led to the popularity of project-based teaching and problem-based teaching. Depending on his view of student as well as learning and teaching, Dewey proposed the traditional curriculum which focused on the isolated subject matter should also be reformed. It should be presented in a way which permitted student to set up connections between the new information with their prior experiences (Dewey, 1902). Dewey denoted that the application of these educational thoughts meant to promote students’ growth. This growth does not refer to the accumulation of learning content, it implies students gaining the ability to understand the connection and relationship with his/her learning experiences (Gutek, 1997).

By extending the scope of democracy, Dewey manages to make the connotation of democracy become more inclusive which also provides more possibilities for the practice of democratic education.

**Paulo Freire and democratic education**

If Dewey could be called as one of the most influential educators and philosophers in the first half of the twentieth century, Paulo Freire could be the representative in the second half of the twentieth century. As a Brazilian educationalist, Freire was born in a country which had a long history of colonization and experienced first-hand the instable political situation as well as the hardship of economy since he was young. All these historical context and Freire’s personal experience primarily impacted on his thought and work. Recognizing the predicament of the whole country, which was mainly led by the aftermath of colonization, Freire resorted to education for the pursuit of the social reform and improvement. As an educator, he experienced diverse roles in practice. Having the chance to work in both a secondary school and a government agency, Freire was able to teach language classes, analyse educational policy, train teachers and parents and carry out a literacy campaign. These various experiences
offered fertile resources for his further deliberation and reflection on education, which laid the foundation for a series of his books, especially his ground-breaking book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Influenced by many theorists such as G. W. F. Hegel, Karl Marx, John Dewey, Anísio Teixeira and so on, Freire recognized the eminent political quality of education based on which the philosophy of critical pedagogy was initially created (Giroux, 2017). Freire approved with Dewey and Teixeira that education could be a path for cultivating people’s democratic sensibility and the democratization of the society (Giroux, 2010a), so this purpose was fused as a premise in the process of education in his works. Karl Marx’s conception of class consciousness left the foremost influence on Freire’s construction of the key concept, conscientização. As Marx argued the importance of people’s awareness of the class division, Freire also underlined people’s consciousness in the process of education. But the conscientização here extended the scope of consciousness from merely the awareness of class to that of the sociocultural reality and personal capacity to change it (Freire, 1970).

In Freire’s work, both the above ideas, the social democratization by education and conscientização, were elaborated with a group concepts from the dehumanizing situation in education. Freire explained the reason that the existence of dehumanizing and oppression situation should be attributed to the oppressor-oppressed relationship. When analysing the circumstance of oppression, Freire proposed that it was very common the oppressed kept acting as what they were ordered by the oppressor, even though the oppressor had been physically removed. This was due to the internalization of the oppressor which meant the oppressed internalized the role of the oppressor inside themselves. One fundamental solution to transform this situation was conscientização. Namely, the oppressed people should be aware of the oppressed situation, the unbalanced relationship, the reality of the society and themselves. Freire argued it should only be the oppressed who restored the humanity for both themselves and the oppressor on the premise that they should prevent themselves from becoming another generation of oppressor.

In the practice of education, Freire denoted the oppression phenomenon existed everywhere, especially in the relationship between teacher and student. He criticized teachers who assumed they were the possessor of the knowledge and students were
merely the passive recipients. The pedagogy derived from this unbalanced power dynamic highlighted to transmit the knowledge into students’ brain. This is called the banking method of education in Freire’s writing. To undermine this oppressed situation and the unilateral teaching method, he raised the technique of dialogue based on a reciprocal relationship between teachers and students which allowed everyone to become both educator and at the same time the educatee for the creation of knowledge (Taylor, 1993, Kohan, 2018). To clarify the misunderstanding of the method of dialogue, Freire further explained the requirement of a genuine dialogue in a discussion with researcher Pepi Leistyna. He expressed in practice many educators misconceived dialogue as a bureaucratic position which led to a mechanical process of questions and answers. But it is not a dialogue when there is no epistemology curiosity and real engagement with the material. In a dialogue, the educator does not repeat the information merely, they inspire and at the same time be inspired by students to reflect on the existing knowledge to develop a better understanding of it (Leistyna, 2004).

In comparison of these two theories, the democratic ideal of the society and students’ participation in knowledge construction are emphasized by both thinkers. Specifically, John Dewey put more efforts on elaborating the connotation of democracy as the social ideal whereas Paulo Freire deliberated more on its realization within the scope of classroom. To some extent, it might be claimed that they provided mutual complementation with each other. In western countries, these two theories arose a lot of attention since publication and this attention is still continuing on both the aspect of theory and practice.

**The major difference between the thoughts of Dewey and Freire**

With an intersection on the deliberation of democracy in education, Dewey and Freire embrace a lot of unique arguments derived from the time and the country they lived in, the philosophy they endorsed and their particular experience.

**John Dewey**

John Dewey was born in a middle class family in the US (Gutek, 2010). When pursuing his bachelor degree in the University of Vermont, the thoughts of German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel significantly arose his interest on idealism. After spending
several years on high school teaching, Dewey started his doctoral degree in philosophy at Johns Hopkins University in 1882. At that time, the influence of Hegelian idealism was still visible in his writings as in, for example, his doctoral dissertation titled “The Psychology of Kant”, he criticized Kant from an Idealist position (Hildebrand, 2018).

After he took a position to teach philosophy and psychology at the University of Michigan, however, his interest on idealism began to turn towards pragmatism. In 1894, after joining the University of Chicago, he was able to develop his progressive pedagogy in a laboratory school of the university which was an early example of the importance he attached to experiential learning. At the same time, he firstly engaged with a labor movement. In the year Dewey arrived in Chicago, a big strike was organized by the workers at the Pullman Palace Car Company to protest the reduction on their wage, in which huge number of workers pulled together in the revolt (Livingston and Quish, 2018). Witnessing how this strike was finally suppressed by the government, Dewey recognized the critical tension between capitalism and democracy in the US and began his journey of reframing the concept of liberalism and democracy to resolve such social problems. In his deliberation, the capitalistic production mode makes capitalism no longer liberal as it coerces the workers to do the labor. In fact, workers do not have the liberty to choose except from doing the heavy work or losing their jobs. People’s freedom turned out to be illusory, an unrealistic ideal in theory, which can hardly be transformed into practice. Supported by his philosophy of pragmatism, Dewey said the American philosophy must be born out of and must respond to the demands of democracy (Dewey, 2008, P74). Knowledge should not be considered as something external to experience so that people could better engage in the society and influence the institutions which affect their lives (London, 2020). Therefore, Dewey proposed freedom should not only be an idea, but also a real practice. This idea was also embodied in his education approach. For Dewey, education should not be the passive transmission of information, but the combined effects of knowledge, practice and culture. In terms of democracy, he argued democracy cannot be just learnt in textbook, but should be learnt by doing it in practice. When reconstructing the connotation of practical liberty and democracy, he criticized the theory of social Darwinism and embraced the idea of egalitarian Darwinism, emphasizing the factor of freedom of inquiry, personal liberty and equal opportunity (Livingston and Quish, 2018). In practice, he supported women’s suffrage, equal
rights for immigrants and minorities, economic justice, and the world peace (Shook, 2019).

Despite acing as a representative of the Progressive movement and endorsing the radical change, Dewey was an advocate of progressive reform, but not of revolution. He worried the space of potential democracy unleashed from the economy and society would be repressed by the ideology of communism. What he insisted to do is radicalizing the concept of liberalism with certain socialist principles, such as his emphasis on equality. In the end, he explicitly delineated a thought of democratic socialism which encouraged workers to take control of the social force by collaborating each other and change their lives. However, it is worth mentioning all his thoughts were developed in the frame of capitalism and liberal democracy. His political philosophy laid the foundation for his thoughts of democratic education. His ideas of educating students reflected his understanding and ideal of a democratic society.

In Dewey’s theory, his advocacy of pragmatism, concern on people’s development, his deliberation of community and social relations and his endorsement on socialist principles provide the basis for its acceptance in different time period in the context of China.

*Paulo Freire*

Stretching the lifetime from 1921 to 1997, Paul Freire’s life experience is quite different from Dewey’s. In September 1921, Freire was born in the northeast of Brazil in a middle class family. While negatively influenced by the Great Depression and his father’s early death, his family fell into poverty to which he, and they, had to adapt. In some tough circumstances, he had to steal food on the street to support his family. Most of his childhood was spending with other poor children. In the book of *Reading Paulo Freire: His Life and Work*, Freire recalled during that hardship, “I didn't understand anything because of my hunger. I wasn't dumb. It wasn't lack of interest. My social condition didn't allow me to have an education. Experience showed me once again the relationship between social class and knowledge” (Gadotti, 1994, P5). His unique experience brought up his sense of solidarity with the poor people and became a critical impetus for him to improve those people’s living condition.
In addition, some historical problems and domestic environment in Brazil intensified the hardship of Brazilians. Historically Brazil had been colonized by Portugal from the sixteenth to the beginning of nineteenth century and slavery was not officially abolished until 1888. The consciousness of this history of colonialism and legalized slavery influenced on his thinking, his work, thereupon, strove to resolve the historical problem in temporal Brazil.

From 1943 to 1947, Freire took a degree in the law school at the University of Recife, but ended up working as a secondary school Portuguese teacher. In his teaching job, he got the chance to work at the government agency of Serviço Social da Indústria (SESI), which aimed to provide social services in health, housing, education, and leisure for the working-class people in Brazil. By doing this work, he was able to recognize the educational situation and problems for the working-class students, and gathered abundant material for his later work. After returning to the university, he began to focus on adult literacy in his doctoral studies. In 1963, he was appointed Director of a national literacy program and conducted a large-scale program to eliminate illiteracy. In the field, he was able to observe the practice of education and develop his educational theory. However, after the Brazilian coup in 1964 which was supported by the CIA, Freire came to be regarded as a threat to the government and had to go into exile with his family to Bolivia and Chile.

His experience and understanding on politics and education largely shaped his view of the world. He argued that capitalism was the main reason why poor people are deprived and marginalized. His groundbreaking work, The pedagogy of oppression, absorbed many key elements of Marxism, and highlighted his radical orientation (MacKie, 1981). In his new approach, Freire argued that no neutral education exists. All teaching and learning activities reflect ethics and politics (Benade, 2012, Freire, 1984). In the struggle between classes, only the class of the oppressed can reform the unbalanced power and create a new social order. For Freire, education is intimately related to a political ideal, which should vest in people the tools to improve the society. The skills people obtained in education should be treated as the basis for a more radical transformation of education and society as a whole (Giroux, 2010b).

Dewey and Freire both argued that education was closely linked to democracy and played a key role in promoting the social ideal. But in comparison, Freire endorsed a
more radical method, based more explicitly on Marxist principles, and wished to overthrow, or radically transform, the whole system of capitalism. Dewey, by contrast, preferred to adopt some elements of socialist principles to reform and improve society within a broadly capitalist framework. Understanding where their distinctive thoughts came from has to be set within the specific contexts of history, politics and culture within which they worked. The disparity of their experience, thoughts and arguments also provides the clue of their different deliberation on democratic education.

**The two thinkers’ influences in China**

*The understanding and influence of John Dewey and his theory*

As the influence left on western countries, these two thinkers also arouse big interest and leave significant impact on China. By reviewing the history of these two theories in China, their prevalence could be attributed to some special connections with particular context in different times of China.

At the beginning of the 20th century, in response to the invitation of his Chinese students, Dewey visited China and spent more than two years in Chinese universities giving lectures about his thoughts involving democracy, politics and education (Zhang, 2010, Allsup, 2012, Yang and Frick, 2015). His visit was during a significant transactional period of China. Before his arrival, the imperial regime was officially abolished in 1912 with the establishment of a republic system, which marked the appearance of a modern state form in China. This fundamental national revolution was led by some progressives represented by Sun Yat-sen who was the founder of the new system. Largely influenced by western ideologies, they hoped to apply liberal democracy to reform China. Since then, the famous “Three People's Principles” including the principle of Nationalism, the principle of Democracy and the principle of the People's Livelihood significantly shaped people’s thought across the whole country. However, the implementation of this new regime was not smooth, conflicts continued between different domestic powers which rendered the chaotic situation last for a few decades until CPC came into power in 1949. Different ideologies existed at the same time including liberal capitalism, socialism, feudalism, Confucianism and so forth.
Arrived before the outbreak of 1919 May Fourth Movement which was introduced in the second chapter about democracy in China, Dewey witnessed the tremendous national change and extended his trip to 1921. During his stay, the western political thoughts had started to prevail in China, which provided a contextual basis for the acceptance of Dewey’s theory. His visit was welcomed by his disciples across the country and his thought was associated with modernity (Su, 1995).

In his two-year visit in China, Dewey delivered more than two hundred speeches and composed 23 papers about China which was regarded as the impetus for the progress of the old China at that time (Zhang, 2019). Apart from his utterances, Dewey’s personal participation in the “New Education Reform Movement (新教育改革运动)”, which was organized by his student Jiang Menglin, left a substantial influence on Chinese education. The central targets of this movement involved the development of students’ individuality, the promotion of social progress and democratization as well as the advocacy of scientific spirit. On the basis of the reform result, the “Decree of School System Reform (学校系统改革令)” which was also designed with Dewey’s participation was released by the government (Keenan, 1977). This document further regulated the national school system as the 6-3-3 pattern in accordance with the American pattern, and designed a modern curriculum system with a stress on children-cantered material and teaching technique (Zhang, 2019, Su, 1995, Feng, 1998). Both of these achievements are still applied in the current educational system in China. This reform is commonly regarded as a great transformation in the field of education which left a rich legacy for both the educational democratization and the design of curriculum.

However, it is worth mentioning that Dewey was not the only western philosopher who visited China around that historical turn, another prestigious thinker, Bertrand Russell, also spent a year teaching in China (Russell, 1922). Therefore, why was Dewey’s thought selected to transform the country rather than Russel’s or others? Why did people conceive Dewey’s thought could work as a marvellous medicine for the ill society? Yang and Frick (2015) argue it could be attributed to the compatibility between Dewey’s practical thoughts and his Chinese students’ cultural psychology derived from Confucianism. They consider the New Culture Movement which endeavoured to undermine the negative influence of Confucianism and sought solutions from western countries did not erase people’s personal quality of
Confucianism completely. It was the encounter of their enrooted Confucius thought and Dewey’s theory, both of which highlighted the practical use for society and the caring on people rendered the prevalence of Dewey. While almost the same time, Russel stated his commitment and compliment to the pacifist thought from Laozi and Zhuangzi (Ding, 2007) who represented another branch of traditional Chinese philosophy Taoism, which was conceived as inappropriate when China envisaged the pressing national issue of the colonization. Currently, it is difficult for us to judge if these are the key reasons. I would even boldly guess those who were enrolled in the tide of history were ambiguous about the reason. But what I can confirm is the selection and all the events were closely associated with both the social context and historical event, or sometimes the personal connection. It is also due to these reasons that the same philosophy and theorists often receive great different evaluations across times.

Within this particular background, Dewey and his theories exercised great influence in China for about three decades from 1920s to 1940s and was even likened as the second Confucius in modern time (Zhou and Mo, 2002). But the comment for him was not always positive. As the Chinese social context continued transforming sharply in the 20th century, people’s attitudes towards Dewey changed enormously.

Despite of the acceptance of some western political thoughts, the continuous unstable environment impeded their implementation and development in China. Conflicts kept happening between many different powers including the old warlord power, the new party powers and some exotic powers. Until the end of the Second World War when Japan signed on the capitulation in 1945, the united CPC power and KMT power finally defeated the feudal power and cast out the external force. While a five-year combat between CPC and KMT followed under the global context of the Cold War. At this time, CPC had developed an affiliation with the Comintern in the Soviet Union, while the Nationalist Party (Kuo Min Tang) maintained a special connection with the United States. The camp and ideology the two Chinese parties chose aggravated their hostility to each other and led to the implementation of two complete different political systems in separate regions. Although CPC took the power of mainland China in 1949, the diplomatic relation with the US was still maintained by KMT in Taiwan.
Under this context, approximately from 1949, a wave of denouncement for the ideology of United States and Dewey’s followers started by CPC leader, Mao Zedong, which resulted in a popular resistance to Dewey’s thought (Mao, 1949). Due to this complicated history, the strong objection for Dewey was not based on the rationality of his thought but derived from the aspect of political ideology. Elaborated from the divergence between Dewey’s thought and Marxism, some severe criticism claimed that Dewey was anti-Marxist and reactionary (Su, 1995). His glorious title was overturned instantly to the label of enemy, such as the “biggest obstacle for establishing the people's education” (Cao, 1950), “the one who induces students to an evil road” (Teng, 1957). During this time, Dewey became a target of political and partisan conflict whereas most of his ideas were neglected.

The situation transformed again around 1980s, after the Cultural Revolution, especially after the reform and opening-up policy in 1978 and the establishment of the official diplomatic relation between CPC government and the US in 1979. Aligned with the change of the international climate, the former fixed ideology of orthodox Marxism was adjusted by leader Deng Xiaoping. By reviewing on the tragedy of Cultural Revolution, Deng raised the argument that practice was the sole criterion for testing truth. His stress on the extract of truth from practice evoked intellectuals’ interest on Dewey’s theory. The support from the political ideology enabled Chinese scholars to analyse the rationality of Dewey’s thought again. In contrast to the former stage, academics resumed to seek the compatibility of Dewey’s thought with the context of China and political background. By finding more similarities between the thought of Dewey, Marx and Mao Zedong, the comment on Dewey shifted the focus from the political position to its contribution to education (Su, 1995). Although the critic for its counterrevolutionary position of politics was still necessary to be emphasized, more academics appealed to the re-evaluation of Dewey’s theory on a matter of fact. Within this context, the resulting heated discussion mainly concentrated on his several arguments particular about education, namely “learning by doing”, “education has no end beyond itself” and the “children-cantered activity or techniques” (Dewey, 1916).

In the late 1980s, by raising the idea of conquering the disadvantages of exam-oriented education, a basic education curriculum reform was first carried out in Shanghai with
an advocacy of the quality education (素质教育), emphasizing the freedom of individuality. This reform focused on the adjustment of curriculum and finished with the achievement of constructing a three-category curriculum including compulsory course, optional course and activity course. In 2001, the curriculum reform was enlarged to the scope of the whole country. A three-level curriculum was designed as national curriculum, regional curriculum and school-based curriculum, by which the authority was decentralized to some extent. The teaching and learning strategy of autonomy, cooperation and exploration were highly advocated (Zhong, 2001). It is argued the theoretical background of this national reform of curriculum consists of Dewey’s theory, the Post-Modern Perspective on Curriculum by Jr. William E. Doll, the theory of multiple intelligences by Howard Gardner and the theory of Constructivism by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky (Zhang, 2019). Since then, the comment of Dewey and his theory were rehabilitated especially from the perspective of curriculum, which made his theory became popular again in China. Although some scholars as Zhang (2014) suggests the fundamental nature of this reform is educational democracy because a variety of specific requirements such as personality, the freedom of thought embody the spirit of democracy, the concept democracy was only mentioned twice directly with the Chinese word of democracy, 民主, in the governmental document of this reform. The first time it is mentioned as “improving students’ awareness of socialist democracy and law”（使……学生具有社会主义民主法制意识）, the second time democracy appears as “the Basic Education Curriculum Reform insists on the rule of democratic participation and scientific decision-making” (基础教育课程改革必须坚持民主参与和科学决策的原则) (Zhong, 2001). By reviewing the research and practice in China afterwards, it seems the inseparable relationship between education and the deliberation on democracy throughout Dewey’s theory has been divided and viewed separately. The underpinning political ideology of his educational theory is silently neglected. Instead, the Chinese socialist democracy is sometimes mentioned in the research, which seems to replace the role of liberal democracy in Dewey’s theory to adapt to the context of China.

*The understanding and influence of Paulo Freire*

In comparison to the enduring impact and relatively adequate discussion of Dewey’s thought in China, the analysis of the theory of Paulo Freire is still in a primary stage.
By searching the Chinese literature with the key words of 弗萊雷, the Chinese translation of Freire, in the Chinese database, China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), only 283 papers could be found since 1980s, while the literature about Dewey reaches a number of around ten thousand of which the earliest one was published in 1950s. From the number of publications, it could be inferred the attention on Paulo Freire was improved from the beginning of twenty-first century in China. Similar to the focus on Dewey’s theory, one focus on Freire’s theory is his thought on teaching and learning (Cui, 2014). Specifically, the most concerned conception in Freire’s thought involves the banking education versus problem-based education and the application of the dialogue method. But from the analysis with practice in the literature, it could be recognized the misunderstanding and superficial explanation of Freire’s thought exist everywhere. For example, when elaborating the method of dialogue, the majority of researchers put emphasis on the process of raising and answering questions as well as the style of question-raising (Zhang et al., 2019). The central idea of power dynamic and epistemology curiosity are largely ignored in discussion. The other group of literature about Freire aims to introduce and explain his theory. Many scholars attempt to use his thought on curriculum practice as a new path or supplement for the Basic Education Curriculum Reform or the theory of Dewey. Similar to Dewey’s theory, the political meaning and social goal entailed in his theory are also widely neglected in both theoretical and practical analysis.

Drawn from this review, it could be concluded that John Dewey and Paulo Freire have different degrees of influence on China. Owing to Dewey’s personal relationship with Chinese scholars and his trip to China, abundant material about his thoughts was left in China, which contributes to his more influential role. While in comparison, Freire’s political ideology is actually more consistent with Chinese political ideology. It could be inferred maybe in the near future Freire’s theory would raise more attention by Chinese scholars.

The development of other theories in relevant field

The advent of the twentieth century brought about two severe painful world wars which followed with dramatic changes worldwide. Under this background, the globalization gradually sprung up, human rights and children rights got more attention,
the universal franchise was gradually realized, and the field of citizenship education continued to evolve. Intertwined with the specific social context, culture and the utilization of certain type of democracy, this international situation led to more diverse interpretations of democratic education. For instance, in the United States, Amy Gutmann established a theory of deliberative democratic education which targets for the pursuit of a society based on deliberative democracy (Yang, 2007). I am sure there are more theories of democratic education which have been constructed or still under development within diverse contexts. Each of them must embraces various unique characteristic originated from their own situation, but the deliberation of the intimate relationship between education, democracy and politics is basically inevitable and inescapable as the mentioned theory shed light on.

Inspired by these theorists and their thoughts, the attempt on interpreting the conceptual idea into practice has been made at the same time. By implementing the thought into practice, the practitioners have made a lot of achievements and upon which the reflection also provides some new paths for improving the theory in reverse.

**The practice of democratic education in western countries**

**The general definition and purpose of democratic education**

As for one topic or one thing, the definition is always the basic description in which the key concerns are presented explicitly. As the difference showed in above theories, in practice, a variety of aspects are also highlighted by other researchers to define democratic education. For example, Korkmaz and Gümüşeli (2013) emphasize rights and participation as the basic principles in their practical definition. They argue within democratic education students should have the right to participate in school activities as well as selecting their way of learning and living in schools. In the light of Amartya Sen’s thought about capabilities approach, DeCesare (2014) construes democratic education as a composite of diverse learning processes which improve students’ ability for their democratic participation in social and political life.

On account of the practice is always conducted within particular contexts with precise focuses, it is very common that the practical definition presented by scholars differs a lot but overlaps with each other at the same time. But when we analyse them carefully,
a similar structure could be realized upon which one general definition of democratic education could be generated, namely, democratic education could be epitomized as an approach in which education is informed or infused with, or aims to promote, democratic principles.

The goals of democratic education reflected in practical literature mainly correspond to that mentioned in the theory. Being consistence with fundamental target underlined in the theory, one frequently mentioned purpose is constructing a more democratic environment in class or school for a further aim of cultivating a democratic society which is in line with specific context of culture and history (Corngold, 2011, De Lissovoy, 2011, Korkmaz and Gümüşeli, 2013). The other goal which further emancipates the feature of educating is fostering citizens. It is precisely expressed as aiming to create citizens who not only know what democracy is, but also how they can or should participate in the political and public life of society (Gutmann, 1993, Beehler, 1993, Stoddard, 2014).

**Democratic education at school**

In accordance with the developing trajectory and basic description of democratic education, it is not difficult to claim that its practice could happen in almost every aspect of life and all walks of life. But as the organization specialized in education for young people, school is often considered as a particularly important institution through which democratic values, culture and practices can be learned, experienced and acquired.

Considering the feature of schooling is promoting students’ development, in schools the cultivation of citizens usually gets more attention between the two purposes described above. Specifically, the aspects of cultivation could involve the knowledge, the disposition and the capability (Gutmann, 1993, Beehler, 1993, Stoddard, 2014), which are usually embedded in daily school life ranging from curriculum, school activities to the culture and environment.

**School curriculum about democratic education**

When talking about school education, curriculum has its irreplaceable status and meaning. In previous research about school curriculum, its classification not only
refers to the formal class such as the explicit curriculum, official curriculum and the operational curriculum, but also reflects the aspect of school culture and activities in the category of implicit curriculum, hidden curriculum and extra curriculum (Eisner, 1979, Posner, 1995). In this part, the curriculum to be discussed will only focus on those related to the formal class. While the other types of curriculum will be replaced with the expression of school culture and school activities which will be elaborated separately in the next several parts.

In terms of the official curriculum represented by the course menu offered in school, it could be summarized as the designed material and instruction provided for both teachers and students to carry out the course. Among the course menus, many subject curricula could be the carrier of democratic education. In practice, a wide variety of subjects including sports education, history, citizenship education (Niens and Chastenay, 2008, Kerr et al., 2002, Sears and Hughes, 1996, Mutch, 2013, Hodgson, 2008) and so forth are adopted to embody democracy across countries.

In some countries, themes related to democratic education can be found across a range of different subjects, and sometimes exists in those curriculum subjects for reasons other than the promotion of democratic values. In this situation, certain topics of democracy are adopted in appropriate subject curriculum among which history, geography, politics, sociology and economics are mentioned the most (Sears and Hughes, 1996, Mutch, 2013, Hodgson, 2008). In these subjects, democracy is not the main goal or the main body of subject learning, instead it is usually manifested as some related information or principles which are intertwined with the primary course content. While in some areas, imparting democracy is deemed as one of the overall objectives for the whole curriculum system. In this situation, democracy would be considered deliberately and weaved into all the formal curricula systematically.

Except from integrating democracy into other subject curriculum, some countries design a particular type of course exclusively for teaching democracy. As a representative of this type, citizenship education is the one become very popular after being proposed, especially from the late 1990s to the beginning of the 21st century. Until now, a number of countries have introduced citizenship education as a separate and formal course into school curriculum (Naval et al., 2002, Kerr et al., 2002, Yuen et al., 2016). In addition, some school-based or regional courses are also developed to
support the development of a sense of national identity. For instance, in some American schools, a course called the “public life” is created (Kaplan, 1997). In courses like this, democracy is delivered with more local events and materials, which would be helpful for promoting students’ comprehension of democracy as well as the connection with democracy.

The operational curriculum refers to the whole process of course teaching based on the content that teachers select with particular teaching methods. As reflected in the definition, the various stresses of democratic education results in diverse content offered in curriculum, but the teaching methods applied have a lot in common. In practice, the application of pedagogy experiences an overall change transformed gradually from the passive teaching method to the more active method. The passive teaching method, as what is showed in its name, doesn’t require much participation, but highlights the rote memorization of static information (Iacovino, 2007) based on the one-way flow of knowledge in the course of teaching (Naval et al., 2002). Compared to this, the active teaching method allows and encourages students to participate in the learning and teaching process with more interactive and engaging teaching techniques (Naval et al., 2002). Exemplified by inviting students into the class discussion and group work (Simovska, 2007), the active teaching method offers students the opportunity to build the relation between the topic and their own life. To instruct students further producing their own experience about democracy, some teachers introduce the project-based learning and research-based learning approach in their classes (Iacovino, 2007). In the process of conducting a project or doing a research, students would be able to search information, analyse the material and propose their own arguments, which would be helpful for students to develop deeper understanding around certain topic.

Despite the curriculum of democratic education has experienced transformation with a lot of improvements, the form of curriculum still has many limitations. Therefore, some activities cannot be organized in class. As a result, educators resort to the school activities to provide students with more opportunities to experience democracy in real life.

School activities about democratic education
In terms of the school activity of democratic education, most are created for promoting students’ self-governance and their participation in school issues. In this case, the student-participated council turn to be very popular and advocated in many places. In England, every school is encouraged to establish a council (Alderson, 2000). Wales requires all its primary, secondary and special school to have a school council after 2005 (Government, 2005), whereas Denmark demands each Upper Secondary School to establish a pupils' council of which members are elected from amongst the pupils (Print et al., 2002). The name and form of the council might be slightly different, but most of them centre on a common intention of involving students in managing school affairs. By participating in the council activity, student might be able to elect student representatives, express their opinions and communicate with other stakeholders on behalf of their peers (Whitty and Wisby, 2007).

**The democratic school culture**

If a school could be compared to a tree, the school culture and environment could be treated as the tree branch which nourish and build up connection between all the parts in school life. When implementing democratic education, the school culture also gets a lot of attention. Existing as the overall instruction of school life, the trace of school culture could be identified everywhere at campus. For this reason, in previous study, the discussion around democratic school culture is demonstrated from diverse perspectives and levels, which also involves the curriculum and school activities.

Resonating with Amy Gutmann’s shared authority, some researchers propose sharing the power with school stakeholders in order to support the cultivation of a democratic school culture. The contrast lies with a rather authoritarian-managerial environment in which the school leader holds the power for school management, whereas some scholars advocate to distribute the authority to more stakeholders (García-Huidobro and Corvalán, 2009, Özkan, 2013, Wadesango, 2010, Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009, Cheng, 2008, Somech, 2002, Somech and Bogler, 2002). But in accordance with the key concern of school or research, the practice and elaboration of the power-shared culture could differ from each other.

In some cases, certain types of stakeholder are emphasized for sharing the power. For example, Özkan (2013) and Wadesango (2010) argue teachers’ participation in school
decisions is critical for changing the relative autocratic atmosphere at school. It is contended that sharing the power with teachers not only benefits the whole institution, but also be advantageous for teachers’ job satisfaction and career development (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009, Cheng, 2008, Somech, 2002). More precisely, Somech and Bogler (2002) consider the authority shared with teachers need to involve not only the technical domain about students and teaching, but also the managerial domain dealing with the administrative issues and school operation.

Aside from emphasizing teachers that should engage in sharing power, in some articles, students are treated as another important stakeholder who should participate in this process. Overall, the situation discussed in the literature mainly include two domains: the domain of teaching and learning and the domain of school operation. Concentrating on class teaching, some teachers suggest that to establish a democratic environment, students should be encouraged to express opinions about the curriculum design and entitled with the power to determine the learning content to some extent (Print et al., 2002, Stoddard, 2014, Kaplan, 1997, Stoddard et al., 2016). While paying attention on issues about school operation, some researchers consider students should be able to propose their ideas (Print et al., 2002, Stoddard, 2014, Kaplan, 1997, Stoddard et al., 2016) and has discernible impact on relevant decisions (TISDALL, 2015).

Compared to focusing on one type of interest group, some schools distribute all its educational authority to all the concerning parties including the school staff, students, parents and even district governors. In a school reform of implementing democratic education in America, experimental schools set up a group of organizations to assist people exercising the authority. Precisely, they include the district oversight team, the school council and the parents organizing. Upon these organizations, the dialogue is organized between people and the decision is made after negotiation (Wilson et al., 2001). Drawn from these discourses about sharing authority, people’s participation and their impact on school decision are regarded as two key factors for a democratic environment.

Closely related to this, people’s right is adopted as another perspective when discussing the democratic culture. Stoddard et al. (2016) demonstrate, as the prerequisite for participation, both teachers and students should have the right to express their ideas, especially in the course of decision-making. Knight and Pearl
expound more about students’ rights. They assert students should have the right of privacy, the right of movement and the right to protect themselves from harsh and cruel punishments.

In addition to this, the relationship between people at school also becomes a discussion area. In regard to the process of enrolling students, some educators argue within a democratic environment, it should reflect an equal and inclusive relationship between the school and students. School should not exclude students on the basis of their family backgrounds, religions, abilities and so forth. The minority groups and vulnerable groups should be treated the same with other students (García-Huidobro and Corvalán, 2009, Corngold, 2011). By emphasizing the conception of inclusive education, researchers García-Huidobro and Corvalán (2009) even propose that a democratic school culture should root in the attempt to include and mix all types of children who have potentials to form a broader community. They believe when school becomes representative of the non-segregated equal and inclusive society, it enables students to experience and practice democracy in a micro society which is similar to the real society.

In other papers, the relationship is discussed as a factor of school culture. As for a democratic school culture, some propose teachers should not classify students with biased expectations and every student should be welcomed and valued equally (Knight and Pearl, 2000, García-Huidobro and Corvalán, 2009, Corngold, 2011). Kaplan (1997) indicates that to set up a respectful and harmony relationship, teachers should provide patient instruction with considerate caring for students, pay more attention on students’ emotion and ensure students to gain the sense of security. Except from this, some educators pay attention on cultivating an equal relationship between students. They express students should be instructed and encouraged to respect the diversity and socialize equally with others from various economic, social and cultural backdrops (Kaplan, 1997, Gutmann, 1999).

In some regions, all of these above techniques are combined and implemented as a whole school approach. Aiming at the cultivation of a whole school culture of democracy, this design allows and enables students to experience democracy in every aspect of daily school life (CONVINCE, 2018).
**Challenge for the implementation of democratic education**

Intertwined with the resolution, educators also face a variety of challenges when practicing democratic education.

From the position of academics, Apple (2011) proposes one major problem is the insufficient connection between theory and real practice. By arguing the ultimate target of democratic education is the influence on practice, he indicates the attention on practice in classroom and school should be further enhanced.

From the perspective of practitioners at school, some researchers mention that a main challenge they come across is to support the inclusion of different types of students. They express it is always hard to make decisions when the requirement of including diverse backgrounds of students irrespective of their religions, abilities, cultures which indeed improves the level of equality in schools also become the threat for the efficiency of democratic education (García-Huidobro and Corvalán, 2009, Terren, 2002, Knight and Pearl, 2000, Petrovic, 1999). For example, in the late twentieth century, when the issue of homosexuality got increasing attention in the United States, Petrovic (1999) points out the contradiction between moral tenets of teachers who hold religious conservative positions and the trend of including the content of homosexuality within school practice. Lefrançois and Ethier (2010) express sometimes it is also worrying when teachers organize group work. They argue although group work promotes cooperation and solidarity, students sometimes generates the unexpected preference of competition with which students may hope to eliminate the least well performing member.

Some challenges are brought about by particular social context, Saltman (2012) indicates an institutional challenge. By analyzing the school system, he considers the two-tiered public-school system in the United States does not support the proposition of democratic education and cannot solve the problems of segregation or inequalities at all.

Overall, despite in western countries, the comprehension and implementation of democratic education have all sorts of manifestations. Drawn from these conceptions and practice, it could be concluded that there is not a single structure for democratic
education. As discussed in the first chapter, there could be similarities and common concerns for all sorts of democracy. But the local culture and social context are the decisive factors which forge the unique interpretation of democracy and influence its practice. Apart from this, different priorities such as the knowledge of democratic practices, the value of equality and inclusion from contexts and schools could be another reason why different practice can be found in different places.

To make a comparison with the practice of democratic education in western countries, in the next section I will review the practice in China. To develop a deeper understanding for the phenomenon, I will focus more on the theoretical and political background as well as the research status of democratic education in China.

**The evolvement trajectory of democratic education in China**

Since the late nineteenth century, when the concepts of democracy impacted on the feudal monarchical system and people’s political ideas in China, the development and evolvement of democratic education was beginning. Over the past century, the definition as well as content of democratic education transformed constantly, affected by the national political system, ideology, international context and so forth.

As mentioned in the first part, Dewey was one of the significant theorists who introduced democracy and advocated to apply it in the field of education. After he left China, his students and devotees continued to extend his thought from both the perspective of theory and practice. As Dewey argued that the concept of democracy should be readjusted according to particular context, democracy was firstly understood and translated as the “populist” (平民主义) in Chinese which implies the emphasis on the equality between people (Chuankao, 2009). This emphasis was further reflected in the practice of education later on.

Among Dewey’s followers, Tao Xingzhi was the one who really attached great importance, if not the most, to the practice of education. By paying attention on mass education and teacher education, Tao called upon all people’s equal rights for receiving education. With regard to the problem of lacking teachers at that time, he proposed a “Small teacher system” which encouraged students to go out school and become teachers for the public to eliminate illiteracy. When working at the Nanjing
Higher Normal School, the current Nanjing University, Tao promoted gender equality for enrolment. His school along with Peking University, became the first two Chinese institutions which accepted female students. It could be claimed that his school created the precedent for permitting female students’ study with male students in the history of Chinese public university.

On the other hand, equality was embedded in his proposition of a more equal relationship between school staff and students (Wei, 2015). Emphatically criticizing the despotic thoughts and behaviours of teachers, he appealed to adults to be humble and learn from students. Influenced by the philosophy of pragmatism, Tao introduced the liberty and participation into the process of teaching and learning. He proposed education was emancipation, liberty and creation which were in contrast to oppressed education and the cramming method of teaching. He advertised that students should have autonomy and liberty, particularly for their brain, mouth, eyes, time and space with which their creativity would be able to develop. By transforming Dewey’s idea of learning by doing, Tao raised a concept of the combination of teaching, learning and doing. This adjustment was also associated with his Confucius background, especially the thought of Wang Yangming. The argument of “integrating knowledge and action” (行知合一) from Wang Yangming largely affected Tao’s thought and provided a path for accepting and transforming Dewey’s theory. It is worth mentioning that the first name of Tao, Xingzhi (行知), was a new one renamed by himself to respect the idea of “integrating knowledge and action”. Literally speaking, Tao’s practice and the reconstruction of theory from practice opened the door for implementing democratic education in China. It is quite interesting to realize that although Tao basically inherited the thought from Dewey, many similarities could be found between Tao’s thought and practice with Paulo Freire, such as his attempt to reduce illiteracy and the support for a mutual-learning relationship between teachers and students. This might due to the commonalities between the situation of two countries when they composed their ideas.

Along with Tao Xingzhi, Cai Yuanpei was another scholar who tried to reform education with democracy. As an activist in democratic revolution, Cai was also a follower for John Dewey. It was him who raised the compliment of modern Confucius for Dewey. Inspired by the tide of learning western thoughts including his study
experience in Germany and the ideology of liberalism, he focused on the practice of
democratic education in university. Appreciating that the university should influence
the country rather than in reverse, he considered the university should be separated
from politics (Li, 2015). Therefore, after being recruited by Peking university in 1910s,
he reformed the management system and advocated an environment of freedom and
inclusiveness of thoughts (Wang, 2015). His concern of democratic education was the
university management of which the centre idea was the university autonomy and
ruling by professors.

Apart from the local thinkers or doers, Suchomlinsky is a theorist whose thought is
often discussed by educators as having a significant impact on the contemporary
development of democratic education in China. In corresponding to the historical
period when China had an intimate relationship with Soviet Union, the book and theory
of some Soviet Union educators including Suchomlinsky are widely read and studied.
Although in his theory the word democracy is not directly used, his theory is also taken
as the reference and good example by many Chinese scholars when discussing the
topic of democratic education. This echoes with the phenomenon mentioned in the first
section that academics quoted similar ideas of Chinese political leaders or those from
Soviet Union to legitimate the conception or argument of democratic education from
western countries. When talking about democratic education, some parts of the theory
of Suchomlinsky, especially about humanity and moral education are mentioned the
most.

Struck by the consequence of war, Suchomlinsky considered education was
fundamental for the development of humanity, and the humanity was the decisive
factor for constructing a peaceful world. Starting from this point, all the propositions
in his theories attached great attention to human development. He shed light on that
teachers should treat student as whole person who was equal to them. They should
respect, trust and care students in terms of their abilities, interests, creativity and so
forth (Левовицкий et al., 2018, Xiao, 2018). In terms of the relation between
education and society, he thought only people with wholesome personality and civic
virtues were capable of building a better society (Xiao, 2018).

In addition to the contemporary educational thoughts, some traditional education
principles in Confucianism are frequently cited in the terrain of democratic education.
When discussing people’s equal right to receive education, the saying of providing education for all people without discrimination (有教无类) is often used. Confucius was the first one who proposed all people should receive education regardless of their family background, financial situation and even age. In accordance with the History of Confucius’s students, they came from more than ten states with a big age difference of forty-seven years (Ding, 2010).

Another principle often related with democracy is the tenet of teaching students in accordance to their aptitude (因材施教). In his communication with different students, Confucius proposed the particular features of students and usually provided different types of answers to help students understand in a better way.

In the teaching process, Confucius said that teaching could benefit both students and teachers(教学相长). This argument emphasizes that teacher should not only teach students, but also learn from students. This mutual learning and teaching process is reflected in a famous saying: if three of us are walking together, at least one of the other two is good enough to be my teacher (三人行，必有我师) (Yang, 2009). It stresses no matter who they are, one could always learn from others. In this process, it reflects a reciprocal relationship. Furthermore, in another saying, the teacher-student relationship is further discussed to improve the teaching quality. It is raised only when students could get close with a teacher, they would believe in what teachers teach (亲其师，信其道) (Chen, 2004). In this saying, a nice and close relationship between teachers and students is clearly proposed as a crucial factor in the educational practice.

In the current educational practice, all these sayings provide a traditional perspective for teachers for the implementation of democratic education in China.

According to the history, the integration of democracy with education reached a peak from 1920s to 1940s. After being ignored and condemned for several decades, it became a heated topic again from the 1980s. Under this constantly changing social context, the expression of democratic education varies a lot. Among all the expressions adopted in previous research, educational democratization, democratic schooling, democratic management, democracy and education, democratic education are those utilized most frequently when illustrating this idea. However, after the focus on democratic education shifted from a topic which concerned the future of the entire
nation to a quite narrow scope of curriculum practice from 1980s, the implementation of democratic education is also primarily embodied in the range of curriculum. Different from the diverse meaning and connotation in other research (Eisner, 1979, Posner, 1995), the curriculum here mainly refers to official curriculum and operational curriculum.

In terms of the official curriculum, some relevant content about democracy could be identified scattering in different subject courses. For example, in the subject of history, the Chinese democratic revolution are introduced as the history before the new country was founded. Some stories related to democracy might also be used as learning materials in various subject learning. Among them, the curriculum which mainly embodies the content of democracy is those about politics (Lei, 2010, Zhong and Zhang, 2015). In different stages of education, the curriculum precisely includes ideological and moral education, ideological and political education. In different editions of texts books of these courses, democracy is simply introduced with several concepts in official curriculum. Namely, the democratic centralism, people’s democracy, people’s democratic dictatorship, socialist democratic politics with Chinese characteristics and the rule of law. However, the boundary between these concepts and their explanations are quite ambiguous.

Apart from this, a lot of research and reflection on practice are conducted upon the operational curriculum. Within this scope, many educators explored and summarized their experience of applying democracy in teaching. There are two practitioners who are famous for their democratic approach of organizing classroom practice. Both being the secondary school teacher of the course of Chinese Language, Li Zhenxi and Wei Shusheng commonly conceive the democratic method is beneficial for students’ academic performance. Despite the slightly difference between the expression they adopt when deliberating democratic education, of which Li usually group democracy with teachers’ love, Wei often combines democracy with science, their arguments are not that divergent. The central principle they raised are basically in common, which involves respecting students’ rights, cultivating equal relationship between teachers and students, do not discriminate students who have poor grades, establishing rules together and organizing class strictly according to the established rules (Wang, 2012, Yang and Xu, 2015, Zhang, 2015). The discussion of their democratic method is
always intertwined with their teaching stories. The meaning of the concept including democracy, love and science are barely expounded in their writings. But the principles which are extracted from their teaching experience are widely considered as useful and effective for instructing teachers’ operation in class.

In comparison to these two aspects, the exploration on other parts of school life is relatively insufficient in the current research. For those which are mentioned in research are still quite simple and superficial. When explaining the practice of activity, the description of the referenced case is often brief and ambiguous which cannot provides much instruction for other teachers.

However, the significance of democratic education has been gradually recognized in practice align with some governmental policies. In two most recent document of education, the 2001 promulgation of Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline and the Outline of the National Medium- and Long-Term Program for Education Reform and Development (2010-2020), democracy is mentioned respectively for the cultivation of informed citizens, the adjustment of teaching method and school management(Cui, 2001, Development, 2018). Although the discourse about democratic education is quite simple, it has signified the increasing attention put on it by the government. Nevertheless, the real practice of democratic education is scarce. Most Chinese studies of democratic education are conceptual - not empirical- studies, which suggests that although educators have realized the significance of democratic education, they do not know how to put it into practice or just practice it in a superficial way due to the lack of referential experience (Yu, 2008, Wang, 2012).

As the concept of democracy in China is still developing, there are a lot of ambiguity for both the connotation of democracy and democratic education. The sole focus on official and operational curriculum instead of the overall school life, the separation of democratic education with politics further deepens the vagueness in practice. Given this context, many educators express their confusions about democratic education. Various questions emerge from both the theoretical aspect and the process of implementation. For example, what is 'real' democratic education? What does democratic education include? What teaching behaviours are democratic? Does democratic education mean that teachers should allow students to keep silence all the time in class, or is it rather about encouraging students’ voice? Can teachers punish
students in a democratic class? When practicing democratic education, can teachers select certain students, such as top students, rather than others to implement democratic education (Li, 2004)?

In consideration of these dilemmas and questions, many problems about democratic education have occurred in China. In some situations, democratic education is implemented superficially. Although teachers want to organize activities to show democracy, they still enact some autocratic behaviours in the course of doing so. Moreover, sometimes democratic education becomes “compromised education”, which means that sometimes teachers think that to show their democratic commitment they must do whatever students say, which may lead to the loss of reasonable judgement and instruction (Li, 2008).

**Conclusion**

After reviewing the literature around democratic education, it could be concluded that the comprehension and implementation of democratic education are very diverse across the world. This is explicitly shown from the divergence between John Dewey’s and Paulo Freire’s theories. Embracing particular political ideal with totally different personal experiences, Dewey’s arguments on democratic education are basically constructed within the framework of liberalism, while Freire tends to explore democratic education with Marxism. Politics always has a decisive influence on the development of democratic education. This feature is obvious in the evolution of Chinese democracy. The interpretation of Chinese democracy transferred all the time along with the preferred political ideology. However, it is interesting to recognize in China Dewey’s theory rather than Freire’s has great influence on the practice of democratic education. This might be attributed to Dewey’s personal visit to China by which abundant material is left over. But by analysing the Chinese literature about his theory, it turns out his theory is split into education and politics and his political orientation is written out of the script.

For the aim of understanding the practice of democratic education in Chinese schools, the three principles including the protection of human rights, participation in decision-making and rule of law, which are broadly understood as the basic themes contained with notions of democracy would be used as the organizing framework to analyse the
data. In addition, this thesis will also explore whether these themes are made manifest in the schools through liberal democratic practices, however implicitly, if Dewey was the key influence; or whether practice reflected more the principles of socialist democracy, as this is the organizing framework for politics in the wider society.

The practical aspects within school worldwide generally refer to three aspects including the school curriculum (the official curriculum and operational curriculum), school activities and school culture. Therefore, these three aspects will be considered emphatically when collecting and analysing the data of Chinese schools.
Chapter 4: Methodology

Methodology refers to an overview plan which involves the research strategy, design, process or action. In accordance with this definition, this chapter will outline the research design and the detailed action procedure for conducting the research. This design will include the research question, the research aim, the research objects, and the research methods. The rationale for the selection of each method in every research stage, the reason why particular method was selected and how it was applied in the course of conducting the research would be discussed. In general, this research was designed as a qualitative case study, drawing on ethnography to study the phenomenon of democratic education in the context of Chinese public schools.

Research question

The existing literature on the practice of democratic education in Chinese schools is limited. Influenced by the current social requirements and a series of governmental documents, the significance of democratic education has been recognized increasingly by scholars and educators. However, the lack of practical experience brings out a variety of questions and uncertainties which especially lie in the process of implementing democratic education.

Given this situation, this research mainly focuses on the specific practice of democratic education in the current context of China. The focus is on two aspects of democratic education, namely, the conceptual interpretation and practical interpretation, the central research questions are derived as:

(1) What do democracy and democratic education mean in Chinese schools?

(2) How have the ideas of democracy and democratic education been put into practice in some Chinese schools?

Research aim

Corresponding with the two research questions, the aim of this research also includes two aspects. The definition of democracy has changed over time and is contested at any particular point in time. There are also different historical traditions which claim to represent the ‘true’ understanding of the concept. Hence, the first research goal is to
explore educators’ understanding and interpretation of democratic education in Chinese school settings. Based on the conceptual comprehension, the second research goal is to investigate the specific ways in which democratic education is carried out in a sample of schools. For the purpose of this, the problems educators come across, the solutions they propose and the outcome they achieve will be described and analyzed in relationship with each other within a dynamic educational context.

Synthesizing from these two research goals, the general research goal is to help educators build a better understanding of democratic education in China and establish a practical structure for its implementation. By portraying the practical scenarios of democratic education, this research also intends to provide more vivid examples as references for not only Chinese educators who have the aspiration of implementing democratic education in their educational practice, but also as a comparative example for practice in other countries.

**Research strategy**

Among the three main research paradigms including quantitative research, qualitative research and mix-method research, the qualitative methodology emphasizes more on exploring the contextual conditions and understanding the phenomena in a broader sense for creating understanding and critical analysis (McNabb, 2002). In that the aim of this research is to explore in-depth the practice of democratic education and extract a practical structure for its implementation, it emphasizes on the details and the dynamic context in practice which is in line with the features and characteristics of qualitative methods. Therefore, I design this research as a qualitative research, aiming to explore the contextual conditions and understand the phenomena in a broader sense for creating understanding and critical analysis (McNabb, 2002).

Considering their features with my research aim, an ethnographic case study is suitable for discovering the comprehensive answer for my research questions. In conclusion, this research will be a qualitative case study, drawing on ethnography to study the phenomenon of democratic education in its naturally occurring settings based on the ordinary activities in school (Brewer, 2000, p.56).

**Research methods and research object**
Methods for selecting research objects

Selecting research objects is about choosing what and who the researcher is going to study (LeCompte et al., 1993, p.56). A well-defined and appropriate sampling strategy would lay a solid foundation for gathering useful and robust research data. There are generally two sampling logics for social science research, the logic of representative and the logic of comparison.

The logic of comparison is mainly adopted by case study. Delineating this logic as a process of replication, Yin (2003) further distinguishes the literal replication and the theoretical replication. The literal replication indicates the case is selected on the prediction of similar result, whereas the theoretical replication is designed for choosing the case with possible contrasting results.

On account of choosing the methodological framework of case study, the logic of comparison is utilized when choosing the research object in this study. Considering a multiple-case study is more compelling and robust in comparison with a single-case study, I designed this research as a multiple-case study (Herriott and Firestone, 1983, Yin, 2003). In line with the logic of literal replication, my intent was to select two Chinese schools both committed to democratic practice with an anticipation to mainly check on their similarities in the practice of democratic education.

As a new researcher in the field of democratic education, I was unfamiliar with the practice of democratic education as well as the Chinese school in which democratic education is carried out with good outcomes. To identify an initial list of potential schools, I arranged a series of discussion with experts before selecting the case. All discussions were developed around the following questions: 1) What do you think is democratic education? 2) Which public school in China implements democratic education and has achieved good outcomes? 3) Why do you think so? At the same time, I also searched for possible schools online by examining their websites and relevant school documents.

In this process, a group of Chinese public schools committed to democratic practice were able to be identified. All of them were chosen on the basis of placing a higher priority on the practice of democratic education in comparison with mainstream
schools in China. I focus on public school rather than private school because the public school occupies the vast majority of schools in Chinese educational system, which could better exemplify the general trend and situation of education in China. The investigation on public schools could also have more referential values for the Chinese educators. In addition to this, on the basis that older students may have a broader understanding of democracy and are likely to have more opportunities in school to practice it, post primary school was another filter when choosing the case.

After identifying the list of potential schools, the practical limitation on space and time was taken into consideration on the final selection to ensure the commute between research schools become possible and easy. At last, two schools with similar levels of commitment to democratic education which at the same time located in the same city in China that were reasonably close to one another were selected.

**Research object**

With the whole process of case selection, the research objects were finally decided as two public post primary schools, the **Central City Middle School** and the **Sunflower Middle School**, which located in city A in China (the school names are pseudonyms). Both of them advocate democratic education directly and integrate democracy in their normal school life with the achievement of some outcomes. The detail of these research schools will be explored in chapter 5.

**Methods for collecting data**

After selecting the case study schools, the next step involves data collection. As the influence on the selection of sampling methods, the research aim also plays a pivotal role on choosing the data collection methods. In another respect, the research strategy affects this decision as well. Since this research aims to apply ethnography to explore the culture and context for the school implementing democratic education, the method of observation was selected as a critical technique.

**Observation and the role of observer**

Observation is regarded as the primary and fundamental data collection method for the variations of social science research including ethnography. The approach of
observation is usually thought of as a scale between complete observation to complete participation, which corresponds to a continuum role from complete observer to complete participant (Gold, 1958). On the two polarity of the approach scale, the unobtrusive observation requires researchers not to interfere the study phenomenon or population by just observing and listening passively, while the participant observation encourages researchers to interact with the people in the field or even live with them for a period of time.

In this study, the method of observation was used in both schools. In each Chinese school, I got permission to work in a position and do my research at the same time. In one school, I worked as a secretary for one grade leader (a grade is a common organizing unit in Chinese schools. The role of grade leader is in charge of some general issue for all the class in a grade). In the other school, my official school role was the secretary for the dean of moral education. As a member of the school, I managed to participate in the daily school life with the permission of attending all the activities that were available for the ordinary school staff. I use “ordinary school staff” rather than all staff here as there were also some activities particularly organized for school leaders. Although they did not propose openly that I was not allowed to participate, I felt their unwillingness and pressure on this issue. So I did not attend any leadership meeting in either of the school. As leaders usually explicated the discussion result of their meetings in different occasions. These occasions became my observation targets for understanding the leadership’s thoughts.

As a participant in the normal school life with an overt role of researcher, I indeed felt my role changing all the time from the first day entering to the field to the end of my fieldwork. As what I wrote in my reflection:

(In the third month of fieldwork) My role is still changing all the time the same as what I felt after two weeks fieldwork. I feel my role moves continuously between a researcher and a real teacher…… (self-reflection, November 2, 2017)

For most of my days, my role shifted iteratively between an observer to a participant and most of the time in between. In the field, I attempted to disclose my role as both a researcher and a temporary school staff when I had the chance. But my role still
changed frequently as the circumstance and my relationship with people were different. With people who had got familiar with me on some school-working issues, my role was nearer to a colleague, a participant. My researcher, observer role was more prominent when people knew both of my roles but had no relation with me on work. There were also some circumstances that people did not know me and recognized me as an ordinary young teacher, in which I was a complete observer. Along with the time I spent in the field, the time and opportunity to play the role of a participant increased.

In the whole process of data collection, I made big effort to maintain the appropriate role. As the research proceeded, the challenge I came across were different. One time after I just began the fieldwork, I doubted my choice of being a researcher and expressed my wiliness to be an ordinary teacher in one school in my reflection.

Teachers are so nice in the school. The school culture and environment are also very good. I even want to become a teacher in this school. If in that case, I can work with children in a quite simple environment. If I had children in the future, their enrollment in such a good school would not be a problem. There is also some living support service for teachers who can rent some nice apartment with quite cheaper price. (The schooling and housing issue are two big concerns in China.) One idea flashed through my mind: why did not I find a job as a teacher after my master graduation? I need to remind myself of my researcher role and pay more attention on the issue of observation. (self-reflection, September 20, 2017)

After several months, the affiliation with teachers also brought about a challenge for my role.

Since two weeks ago, one teacher began to complain about the school life with me. She expressed a lot of personal views on certain things happened in school. She wanted me to put myself in her shoes and supported her. But as a researcher, I do not want to make the judgement without understanding the whole thing and I do not want to be influenced overly by certain people’s idea either. So I reminded her politely that I was still a researcher in her school with an implication that I could not support her as a pure friend. She agreed but I could feel her upset. After our conversation on last Friday, I tried to keep distance
with her and hoped to lower her expectation of me as a friend. (self-reflection, December 20, 2017)

As showed in my self-reflection above, I was very cautious about my role at any particular point in the data collection. The daily reflection memo and regular discussion with my supervisor were the applied two techniques to make me alert about my role. In the first few months, my observation concentrated on all the school activities I witnessed. As my understanding deepens, I paid more attention on the school event which had more relations with democracy. The observation content in these activities ranged from the idea to behavior of different people including students, teachers and school leaders. The collection of various data sources helped me to triangulate the information I got and prove the consistency of people’s behavior and thoughts in the field. Throughout the fieldwork, I spent 190 days staying at research schools. The number of days I spent in the school allowed me to observe more informally activities and engagements, and helped give me greater insight into school practice. At the end of data collection, 193 observation records were written. Specifically, 53 records about **Central City Middle School** and 140 records about **Sunflower Middle School**. These observations also helped inform the approach to the interviews and focus groups.

*Semi-structured interview and unstructured interview*

Aside from the “passive data” from observation by which I mean this kind of data is picked and recorded by researchers subjectively based on their own experience, the verbal data collected by interview could provide more insights from the view of participants.

According to the form of questions, interview can be categorized as structured interview, unstructured interview and semi-structured interview. Among them, the structured interview is the most fixed one which is full of close questions.

In my research, interview was utilized for gathering information about the events, activities as well as people’s thoughts and ideas that related to democracy or democratic education. In this circumstance, open-ended questions were indispensable, since it provided opportunities for people to express themselves which cannot be anticipated by researchers. The close questions were used when some ideas need to be
proved or confirmed. Nonetheless, it was not used solely, it was used integrating with open questions to explore the reasons or stories behind that answer. The semi-structured interview was mainly applied. In this study, the interview outline was designed separately for students, teachers and school leaders with some general discussion topic. All of them were updated frequently on the basis of the collected data. Until the end of the fieldwork, eleven interview outlines were devised of which four for teachers, 6 for students and one for school leaders. As mentioned in the second chapter, the question area basically covered all aspects of school life encompassing curriculum, school activities and the school culture. But the specific topic was extracted from observation, casual conversation and interviewees’ response. Until the end of my data collection, 16 interviews (13 with teachers, 3 with students) were conducted in Sunflower Middle School and 15 interviews were conducted in Central City Middle School (8 with teachers, 7 with students).

**Focus group**

Similar to interview, the method of focus group also aims to collect verbal data. But it is not with only one participant, it is conducted with a group of participants. As defined by some researchers, focus group is a topic-based informal discussion among a group of selected participants (Beck et al., 1986, Krueger, 1986). In comparison with other interview methods, focus group is a group activity which aims for creating a permissive atmosphere beneficial for eliciting more comprehensive and diverse ideas (Vaughn et al., 1996). The dynamic communication could disclose further information which would enable researchers to develop a deeper understanding about one topic or research question.

In my research, this method was applied for both teachers and students when they were willing to attend a group discussion, especially when the time was tight for conducting separate interviews. The discussion structure was almost the same and changed simultaneously with the interview outline. Three focus groups were conducted in Central City Middle School in which four teachers and six students were involved. One student focus group was organized in Sunflower Middle School with three students.
The mainly problem for both interview and focus group was that the discussion topic was easy to get diverted. To solve this problem, I used the interview outline to assist me focusing on certain discussion topic. In the meantime, I wrote down the key words from interviewees’ answer which was then identified the connections with the discussion topic for further questions. When the conversation went too far from the topic, I repeated the question politely and led them back to the conversation.

**Vignettes**

The Vignettes are defined as short stories about a hypothetical person to grasp participants’ real opinions or beliefs on certain topic (Gourlay et al., 2014). These vignettes were used as triggers for discussion during interviews and focus group discussions and was particularly useful for eliciting discussion on issues which are sensitive or dilemmatic (Brewer, 2000).

In my research, since an increasing number of educators have realized the significance of democratic education, they sometimes gave me the official preferred answers rather than their real thoughts. Or sometimes they feel reluctant to give their personal answer. In this occasion, I usually made up some vignettes requesting the participant to give their judgements and analysis to the imaginary situation. This helped me get people’s answer in special circumstances.

**Documents and physical trace collection**

All the above methods are for the collection of instant information in the field. However, there are also a lot of existing information which could be used in the research. Among the various records in institution or organization, researchers would be able to find substantively valuable study sources. As for this sort of existing data, it is called differently by scholars. LeCompte et al. (1993, p.217) call it archival material and demographic data banks, while Yin (2003, p.72) mentions it in both parts of documentation and archival records. Here I intend to follow Brewer (2000, p.72) and name all kinds of records as documents. No matter the documents are personal or official, primary or secondary, contemporary or retrospective, paper versions or electronic versions, they will all be checked if they are associated with democratic education about the study school. Analysis of related documents could not only elicit
some new clues to further the development of research, but also prove the specific information extracted from other methods.

Apart from the documents, relevant physical objects that are used or designed by research participants can also reflect some ideas (LeCompte et al., 1993, p.218, Yin, 2003, p.96). In my research, I collected some books, advertisements, students’ homework in hard copies. I also took pictures for some school infrastructure, ornaments, pictures and statues associated with democratic education. Nineteen documents were collected for Sunflower Middle School and 83 documents were collected for Central City Middle School. In total, seven hundred and fifty-five pictures were taken in the research schools.

Fieldnotes

It is argued that ethnographers themselves are the main instrument for collecting data (Burgess, 2003, p.45). So the reflective field notes on both the field itself and researcher’s experience could be a sort of precious data for the research. The reflective notes for specific situation or discussion were inserted in the observation records or interview transcription the time when I wrote them or read them. This type of records was highlighted after a tag of reflective notes which could distinguish the record and the notes. I also wrote separate reflective notes around certain topics. The notes about the role of researcher were composed whenever I was confused about my role or the work I had done. These notes were very helpful for me to find the connections and new clues for the research, they also constantly reminded me of the work I should do. At last, I wrote 120 reflective fieldnotes. Throughout the data collection process, various types of sources were collected with many participants. The specific number of source and participants are listed in the table below. While the number of participants in observation is not provided because numerous teachers and students were involved when observing the school activities, classes and daily campus, which was not countable.
Table 1: The applied research methods, involved participants and number of data being collected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Teacher in SFM</th>
<th>Student in SFM</th>
<th>Teacher in CCM</th>
<th>Student in CCM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group</td>
<td>1 (4 participants)</td>
<td>2 (6 participants)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (3 participants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td>140</td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document and materials</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>190 days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Interview & focus group:
  - Teacher participants: 25
  - Student participants: 19
- Observation: 193
- Document & materials: 102
- Photos: 755
- Reflection: 120

**Methods for recording storing data**

The methods for storing data might sounds less important than the sampling methods or data collection methods. However, the high-quality data storage can lay a solid
foundation for data analysis. The inappropriate storing method may lead to the loss of all the data and ruin the whole research. Considering this, to be on the safe side, I created two data bases, which included a concrete one and an electronic one. The paper record were put in a particular archive which were scanned and transferred to electronic version. All the electronic records were stored within a special disk. All the records were named with the date, the name of activity and sometimes with the participants’ type.

Methods and tools for data analysis

The results from the analysis are the direct sources for writing the final thesis. Derived and based on different philosophies, theories and methodologies (Atkinson, 1992, p.38), a wide range of methods for data analysis are available for qualitative research. In the consideration that in my research democratic education could be epitomized on any event or activity, the emphasis of my data analysis is identifying the meaning or ideas behind them and establishing relationships between them. Consequently, I adopted the method of thematic analysis in view of its characteristics.

Thematic analysis

Paralleled with the grounded theory, content analysis, and discourse analysis, thematic analysis is an analysis approach dealing with the qualitative data. Compared with other qualitative analysis techniques, the distinct trait of thematic analysis lies in its attention on the interpretation of ideas in data (Guest et al., 2012). In the process of interpretation, a series of codes and themes would be generated which could capture and summarize the impressive characteristics in data related to research questions (Clarke and Braun, 2017).

Notwithstanding that data analysis of qualitative research cannot be done in a clear sequent of steps, there are still several general stages can be complied with in the course of analyzing. King and Horrocks (2010, p.152) propose a three-stage analytic system of thematic analysis which consists of descriptive coding, interpretive coding and overarching themes. For the stage of descriptive coding, it demands researchers to read the whole transcript first and extract something interesting as codes from the original data. This stage aims for capturing and summarizing participants’ interesting
account. For the second stage, researchers are required to pay more attention on interpreting the meaning of those accounts. For the purpose of this, the interpretative codes are proposed to be created. These codes are set up by grouping different descriptive codes based on researchers’ understanding. In the last stage, key themes will be further developed on account of interpretative codes. The relationships between codes and themes will be identified (King and Horrocks, 2010, p. 152-158).

In ethnographic research, data analysis is done along with data collection. It is suggested that data analysis starts when reading the field notes and should be done before entering the field again (Brewer, 2000, p.107). According to this, during the field work, I organized the field notes frequently and did the descriptive coding as soon as I can. In order to develop a more comprehensive understanding with abundant sources, the second stage of analysis were done every time in a longer period less than a month. The last stage of analysis were done after the stage of data collection. All the research schools were analyzed separately first. But the code list was created based on all the data in both schools. The final result were generalized by connecting all the themes emerged from the data.

_Nvivo and other software_

As a qualitative data analysis computer software, Nvivo is developed for qualitative researchers to deal with rich text-based data or multimedia evidence (McNiff, 2016). In this study, Nvivo was applied for all the stage of data analysis. It was used as a tool for both data analysis and data management in my research. The record of observation and the transcription of interview were imported timely after being proofread in word documents preliminarily. Some relevant pictures and scanned documents were imported and updated every day. All types of data were imported as the source in Nvivo, which were organized in separate folders with the name of the data type. For example, interview. The reflective notes were imported to the category of Memos which was a particular subfolder of the Sources. To easily distinguish the school origin and the interviewees’ type, two folders of case nodes were created. The first step before analyzing the data deeply was connecting the whole document with different case nodes. Start from the first stage of analysis, the theme nodes were created in each documents around the topic of democracy. The list of nodes was developed and
updated as I analyze the data. When identifying the relationship between nodes, the nodes were organized within hierarchy by creating parent nodes or children nodes.

Two other chart drawing software, Xmind and Edraw, were used to assist me finding the connections between the nodes created with Nvivo. In different stages, I drew many mind maps and flow charts to clarify my understanding towards the nodes emerge from the data.

**Ethics in this research**

**Ethical dilemmas and reflections**

The unique feature of ethnographical study allows researchers to deeply dig into the research field and discover something rarely recognized before. But this feature also brings about some ethical dilemmas, which mainly relates to three possible situations.

The first risk refers to “going native”. This means when researchers get too involved in the research context, they may forget their purpose is to do the research and may even drop out the research. To avoid this situation, keeping regular contact with their research bases is usually helpful to remind them and help them keep in mind their role of researcher.

The second main dilemma would be building the relationships with individuals in the field that get in the way of, or run the risk of unduly influencing, the interpretation of what is going on in the context. After entering to the field, especially in the early days, different participants in the context may cast the researcher in a particular role, which may engage or disengage the researcher in certain activities on that basis. This echoes with McMullan (2003)’s research experience in the field, her work used to be suspected by some teachers and considered as an inspection from the principal. In terms of the risk of contaminating the context, she avoided observation with certain participants for a while. In comparison, with the time spending in the field, some participants may become researchers’ friends and start to self-disclose inappropriately. Over-familiarity may also become a potential weakness as some crucial data might be missed (Gold, 1958, Brewer, 2000) and may lead to the over dependence on certain participants (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002). So the personal relationship in the field needs to be reflected constantly to ensure it wound not overly influence the research itself.
The third dilemma could be the most serious one. As ethnographers need to stay in the context, they may observe or hear things that involve breaches of context rules. In some occasions, participants may purposely arrange the researcher to see the violation of rules or even ask them to participate. Researchers would have the dilemma to feel obliged to report this. While this situation is less likely to occur in a school context than when engaging with a small community living on the margins of society.

When conducting this study, the first two dilemmas were encountered in the field. As I mentioned in the reflection note in page 74 to 76, I personally experienced the risk of “going native”, I used to doubt about my research and my role of a researcher. But the regular debrief sessions with my supervisor help me to conquer this problem. During the whole process of my field work, regular online meetings with my supervisor were arranged at least every two weeks by Skype. These meetings provided opportunities to reflect on what had been seen in the previous period and to talk through the potential implications of the data, which was very helpful for me to develop and deepen my understanding of practice in the schools and their implications for my study. These conversations also helped shape themes and issues for further explorations and testing in the field.

With regard to the relationship with participants, it changed along with the research process. At the early stage of data collection, participants were not familiar with me. As the quote of my reflective note showed in page 75, different groups of participants saw me with various roles. Students saw me as teachers, some teachers considered me as colleagues, some knew me as a researcher but were suspicious about my purpose there. This situation was mainly dealt with my taking on various personas, and being aware of the potential, challenges and limitations of any particular role; and triangulating data from different sources to test interpretations. With more time spending in the field, some participants became friends with me and started to share some quite private stories. When this happened, the situation was discussed with my supervisor promptly at our online meeting. The protocol for dealing with this was agreed, which was mainly about making clear to the individual involved that I was a researcher to help them set up an appropriate boundary with me.

In my study, the third dilemma related to breaching the rules did not appear in the field, so this was not a problem for me.
Ethical approval for this research

This research has been approved by the Ethics Committee at the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work (SSESW), Queen’s University Belfast.

After entering to the filed, I sought the written institutional consent from principals to undertake observations, interviews, focus groups and documents and physical trace collection (such as the teaching aids, schools’ infrastructure, ornaments in classrooms, pictures or statues) in the whole school. All the adult participants who were involved in interviews and focus groups were provided with a written information document and accompanying consent document to sign. In terms of the minor students’ participation, I sought the consent from the school rather than seek parental consent as it was the typical practice in China. However, student participation remained entirely voluntary and they could withdraw participation. This issue had been approved by the SSESW Ethics Committee for the aim of the best research practice in Chinese cultural context. Two consent forms of the institution and teacher/school leader were constructed for each group and presented in both Chinese and English (see Appendix 13 and 14).

Given the ethnographic nature of the study observations and field notes include indirect participants, I ensure that indirect participants were not identifiable in field notes or in recorded audio. The audio files were encrypted, transcribed and the transcript was anonymized after data collection. The encrypted audio file and any associated field notes were stored on my own laptop and the original is erased from the digital recorder. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study up until the point when I began to anonymize the data and informed that after this period withdrawal cannot take place. In line with QUB guidance, they were also informed that the data would be held securely at the university for a period of five years and then destroyed.

The process of analyzing data

To acquire the satisfactory findings to the research question, I carry out three rounds of analysis. The result from each stage defined a direction for further analysis in next stage. In the first round, I used no particular filter to pick up the theme. At this stage, I mainly read the source iteratively and let the preliminary themes emerge from the
Six areas of campus life stood out as relevant to democratic education. The second round analysis aimed to further analyzing the school practice from the perspective of democracy. The principles of participation in decision making, the protection of human rights and rule of law were selected as a set of lenses for the democratic practice at school. With the assist of the three democratic tenets, the democratic practice was capable of being analyzed with a more consistent logic. A clear connection between the educational practice and democracy has been built in this stage. In the third round of analysis, all the codes were summarized again for the sake of generalizing the school approach of democratic education. Depending on the aspects of school life, five specific qualities emerged at the end of the analysis. A more detailed process delineation is attached in appendix 15.

Summary

Aiming at exploring the implementation of democratic education in Chinese schools in depth, this research was an inductive qualitative study which concentrated on constructing both the conceptual interpretation and practical interpretation of democratic education based on the practice of two particular Chinese schools. To gain a deeper understanding on these interpretation within schools, this research was designed as a multiple-case study which intended to identify interesting similarities and differences on the practice of democratic education under different circumstances and provide more vivid examples on this research topic. Ethnography was adopted when researching the two cases. By focusing on the context, culture, people and relationships inside the field, this study aims to portray a holistic picture for the practice of democratic education on both of the two research schools in China.
Chapter 5: School introduction

Introduction

This chapter will give a brief introduction to the research schools to provide a general background of this study. Both of the schools will be firstly introduced with their general social context and public evaluation in their region. Following this, a more comprehensive and internal image will be portrayed based on the school history, the physical environment, the general school objective or principles and the people in school.

From September 2017 to July 2018, I spent at least four days a week, and sometimes five days a week in the research schools. For the week of four days fieldwork, I usually spent two days in each school with one day for organizing the data and writing reflections. For the week of five days, one more day was spent in either school especially when there was some interesting activity I wanted to attend or some work required by the school. The data presented in this chapter is mainly based on my observation in the fieldwork, the archive or documents collected in school and the information on the school official website. By portraying a general picture of the research school, this chapter will lay a foundation for further analysis of the school life from the aspect of democratic education, which will be presented in the following chapters.

The general social context and public evaluation outside school

As mentioned in chapter 4, both schools locate at the same city in China, City A. Among all the Chinese cities, City A is a big city which has a high level of economic development and prosperous cultural industry. In terms of education, the overall level of teacher resources and school’s infrastructure could rank Amongst the highest in the country. Embracing a tradition of educational reform, it is always among the first batch of cities which put new educational concepts into practice. This social background of the region provides the condition for the implementation of democratic education in the research schools.

The first school, the Central City Middle School, is a high-reputation school with a long history. It is well-known in the region mainly because of its teaching results,
including students’ high achievements in Gaokao, the college entrance examination, and in the national or international competition of various disciplines. In the field of education, it has an extensive influence on other schools. The teaching quality, the quite open school culture and the colourful student activities were highly appraised by many other schools.

In contrast to the first school, the Sunflower Middle School is a quite new school with a history of less than 10 years. As a young school, it is not widely known by the public. But the first several years’ exploration of educational reform and experiment had raised increasing attention of educators and schools locally, especially in its own district.

**The Central City Middle School**

As an old school with a history of more than a hundred years, the Central City Middle School had experienced a lot of different historical periods and witnessed many social changes. The constant exploration of better education across space and time leads to some valuable extracts of educational methods and conceptions which encompassed the idea of democratic education.

XIAOJUAN (A TEACHER): We did not purposively use the concept of democratic education, we even did not propose to implement democratic education at first. It is a kind of education that is naturally formed in our daily educational practice. We do not have a course or anything else called democratic education. The reason that we are using this word is that many students summarize our school life with the word democracy after three years or six years of learning here.” (Xiaojuan, personal communication, June 19, 2018)

The conception of democracy is recognized and selected with the endeavour of all people from the school practice.

**The school environment**

The school environment plays a quite important role in understanding school life, as it not only reflects certain educational conception subtly but also endows the space with a special atmosphere.
The **Central City Middle School** locates around the central area of City A.

After entering the school gate, a big synthetic playground with run tracks comes into view. On either side of it, several buildings stood in opposite which are aligned by the edge of the playground. Two more buildings extends the building line on both sides where the playground stopped. In the middle of them next to the playground, there is a small but beautifully designed garden. When you step into the garden, a narrow winding path surrounded with diverse flowers and plants would lead you to a quiet and secluded arbor. Although there are more buildings behind the garden, the arbor is like an isolated place as it is wreathed with Chinese wisteria and other branches. The wood texture of the arbor echoes with the plant which created a quieter and more peaceful atmosphere. It is a popular place for both teachers and students to chat and relax with friends.

In addition to the garden, many types of trees could be seen everywhere on the campus, such as the pine tree, poplar, begonia and so on. When spring comes, the campus becomes colourful with the green of trees, the purple of Chinese wisteria, and the pink of rose and begonia. With the breeze, the pleasant fragrant scent of flowers would be spread to every corner of the campus.

Behind the garden, four more buildings of different sizes are constructed in different directions which naturally formed a small square in the middle of it. This place is often used by students to carry some activities, such as the reading group and poem club. They would sit on the ground quite relaxed and casually, discussing or sharing the work they compose or select. There is little sign of statues or slogans around the campus, just some notice boards displaying some upcoming or finished events stands in front of one building which made the campus quite neat.

Different sport facilities are provided in the campus. The table tennis tables, a mini football yard and the basketball places were placed either on the playground or among the buildings. Students like to go and play their favourite sports during break time. Integrated with the natural landscape, the neat layout of architecture with the dark brick colour creates a steady and classic school style.
As for the buildings, all of them are assigned with specific functions or departments. There are three buildings which mainly contained students’ classrooms and teachers’ offices in the main campus. Other buildings are designed for the staff room, functional room or other facilities.

Inside the building, more details of school’s educational ethos are reflected from the decoration. Outside each administrative classroom (a management unit which will be further introduced in the next section), a display board on the wall presents a brief introduction of their class collective which includes a unique class name they created, a common target and the feature of their collectivism. All the boards are decorated with special style. Some are cartoon style with hand drawing, some are created with calligraphy style or with narratives. It could be realized that diversity was encouraged to some extent rather than requiring consistency all the time. A lot of activity posters designed by students hang on the wall in the teaching and learning buildings. Drawn from the content, it could be inferred that various activities were carrying out at school and students are encouraged to participate. The activity pictures of student are also exhibited in different buildings. This demonstrates again that the student gained the support from school for organizing and attending activities.

In some public areas in the building, such as the library, the counselling room, the conference hall and even the canteen, I observed students always do their work or preparing for activities in the different time period, consciously and passionately. Students are not always organized by teachers but mostly by themselves, which shows students have the autonomy to use the school facility and arrange their own time. In contrast to the peaceful natural environment, students’ learning atmosphere is diverse, lively and full of enthusiasm.

**The administrative structure in school**

As mentioned in the former section, the administrative class along with the grade group are the basic units of school management in most Chinese schools. After enrolment, the new students will be grouped into different class with particular classrooms, which is commonly called the administrative class. This class does not refer to the academic class, it is treated as a collective group in which students are instructed and supervised roundly. In most cases, students have fixed academic teachers with a fixed
administrative classroom where almost all the academic classes are taken and the maximum time of student, generally from 8am to 5pm, is spent. Each administrative class is mainly organized by a teacher called Class Advisor who acts as a supervisor for all the students. The work of Class Advisor involves the instruction and supervision of all the aspects of students, such as academic learning, moral education, school activities and living habit (Commission, 1988, China, 2009). When other school staff encounter some problems with students, they would communicate with the Class Advisor first to report the issue and discuss solutions.

All the administrative classes in the same grade and their teachers would then constitute a grade group. Every grade group has a Grade Dean who is in charge of the issues of the whole grade including the academic aspect and the administrative aspect, which is similar to the Class Advisor in an upper level. These all existed in the Central City Middle School. The difference was in some grades, the school provided some space for students to select the subject teacher and attend class across the administrative class within the grade group.

In addition to the administrative class and the grade group, the management structure of Central City Middle School comprises various departments ranging from teaching and learning to support service. In terms of relevant teaching and student affairs, they has the office of education administration, the office of academic teaching, the office of student affairs and the office of educational research. As for the issue of the particular organization, the school sets up the office of CPC committee, the Labour Union, the Chinese Communist Youth League committee and the Young Pioneers. Except from these, some special departments are also created to deal with specific issues across the school, which specifically includes the Centre of Education Technology, the Centre of Technology, Arts and Sports, the Centre of Cultural Development, the Centre of International Communication, the Centre of Student Development and the Centre of Educational Service. As showed in their names, each department is designed to primarily take charge of the issues in a particular area, but in practice they has an intimate relationship with each other and corporate frequently to manage certain issues.

The general school target and the educational conception related to democracy
It is very prevalent for Chinese schools to design a general principle for educational practice. The expression of such principle was often embodied as “theory on school management”, “educational aims”, “educational thoughts”, “cultivating objective”, “school features”, “school motto” and so forth in different schools (Chen, 2007). In the history of Central City Middle School, some basic principles used to be proposed to instruct students’ growth. These tenets include being honest, being cautious, being creative and being eager to find out the truth. Along with the development of education in China and worldwide, the cultivating objective is proposed in a more explicit way. After being revised and improved constantly, the current version is expressed as promoting students’ all-around development with their own specialty. To further improve its instructional effect on practice, an explanatory document is composed with more specific requirements from the aspect of academic learning, social responsibility, domestic culture, international perspective and the ability to live a good life. Among these requirements, some values related to democracy are mentioned repeatedly, such as respect, creativity, cooperation, communication, social responsibility and participation. The concept of democracy was particularly mentioned twice. For the first time, it is mentioned when discussing the relationship between people. It is encouraged to establish an equal, democratic, interactive and harmonious relationship between teachers and students. The second time democracy mentioned is for cultivating students’ consciousness of democracy and equality in public life.

Apart from the whole school target, the value of democracy could be read as a crucial principle of the school management in some official documents. But different from the cultivating objective which is treated as the overall and explicit guideline for schooling, democracy in management was delineated as a traditional and hidden tenet that people regulates themselves continuously. Resonating teacher Xiaojuan’s quote (see page 88), it is gradually summarized from the long-time educational practice and just begun to be proposed explicitly and increasingly in recent time.

In these documents, the school management is argued to involve the management of school staff and student moral education. Here, the scope of moral education is defined to include all kinds of school activities outside academic class. To exemplify the fruit of exploration, students’ autonomy, students’ participation in decision-making, as well
as the Faculty Representative Congress are mentioned as some specific approaches to implement democracy.

**The school staff and student**

From the description of the school environment, it could be realized the size of the school is quite large. In correspond to the campus area, the population contained in the campus is large likewise. As for the smallest management unit, there are more than a hundred administrative classes with an approximate number of four thousand students in the school. On average, each administrative class contains forty students. More than five hundred staff working in the school, with about four hundred of them undertake academic teaching work.

**The Sunflower Middle School**

In comparison to the Central City Middle School, many differences could be identified between these two schools. The school history, the campus size, the school population could all be seen as the contrast to the first school.

**The general school principle and educational target**

The Sunflower Middle School was set up at the beginning of the twenty-first century which had almost a century interval compared to the founding year of the Central City Middle School. Its appearance could be directly attributed to an educational reform in its local district. With the purpose of exploring a new model of education and promoting a better educational quality in the local district, the Sunflower Middle School is approved by the government to be established as a small-sized experimental school. Shouldering such a clear mission, a series of educational thoughts and targets were formulated firstly, among which the value of democracy is explicitly listed.

The general guidelines included the strategy for school development, the school motto, and the student cultivation target. As the strategy for school development, it involves the leading of the Communist Party of China, the cultivation of a unique school culture, the implementation of democracy, the emphasis of learning and the encouragement of external communication. The factors entailed in these guidelines are also involved in
the principles of **Central City Middle School**, but are expressed in documents with slightly different.

Based on these management principles, the student cultivating target is defined as living a happy life and becoming a person who could carry great responsibility for the country. In relation to this, the school motto is described as “Improving myself to make a better world”, which is explained as promoting students’ comprehensive and free development. To achieve these targets, it is further stated that teachers should provide instruction for students about learning to gain knowledge, learning to get along with others, learning to live a happy life and learning to innovate.

**The school environment**

The **Sunflower Middle School** has two campuses which locate around a quite new business district in City A. The new campus is constructed to enlarge the school size, so its campus area was larger and the building was bigger in comparison to the old campus. Both places are built as the same environment style.

In the old campus which could also be regarded as the current main campus, four small buildings are built for the learning and living facilities. The main building which contains classrooms and teacher offices stands in the face of the school gate with two big rooms built on each side. One room is for the school security who would check all strangers’ ID before letting them get into the campus. The other is designed for parents as the rest room to wait for their children when needed. The small area in front of the main building is elaborately arranged with two pieces of lawn and some parterres on the left and right. The flower in the parterre is constantly changed according to the season which provided some fun and freshness for people when entering the school. By laying the parterres along with the inner side of the lawn, a wide walking path is naturally formed for students to enter the building. Some sycamore trees and ginkgo bilobas are planted on the lawn next to the school fence forming a streamline of plants which connect the main building and the school gate. This plant streamline is extended by the creepers wreathed on the wall of the main building, which made the main building blend into the natural background. On the lawn, two statues are placed on each side. One was written with the school motto “improving myself to make a better world”, the other is written with the word love.
Walking into the main building, a big lobby on the ground floor is decorated with many students’ work. Some exhibition tables lay around the lobby presenting students’ handwork, article and homework across disciplines. They are not placed there for merely showing off for the visiting guests, it is often utilized as a space and method to organizing some learning activities by teachers. For example, the Chinese teaching group might provide a collection of student writing homework and ask all students of the same grade to read during breaktime and answer some questions. It is a public area that teachers from all grade groups could apply to use.

On the wall of the lobby, all the pictures hanged are related to students. Some are the individual pictures of themselves, some are pictures taken by students, some are the pictures of students’ handwork or painting. On one piece of wall, a student club of Lego uses blocks to create and update pictures regularly. At the beginning of the Chinese year of the dog, students in the club designed and built a picture of dog to celebrate the new year. Actually, students’ work and picture are not just adopted for decorating the lobby, they are the primary ornaments for the whole school. From the main campus to the new campus, a variety of student work could be found everywhere, such as the calligraphy work, the painting, the picture, the biological model and so forth.

On the wall of stairs, there are also some group photos for the whole school. By observing the picture, the standing position of student and teacher is quite different from tradition. Students and teachers stand without any particular classification, but just mixed together, while in most of school group pictures in China, teachers usually gather and sit in the centre of the first front with students standing behind them. It is a kind of standing pattern which manifests the hierarchy at school. In the first front, the more central the position is, the higher level the staff is. Therefore, the school principal usually sit in the middle of the first front, and on either side would be some department leaders, then the ordinary teachers. In the group pictures of the Sunflower Middle School, no adults could be found standing in the middle or together purposively. Rather, they are scattered in different positions with students which signified an aspiration of cultivating a more equal relationship between teachers and students, a theme which is confirmed in conversation with both students and teachers.
In the corridor, some storage cabinets stand beside the classroom. Each student is allocated with a small cabinet to store their personal things. In the classroom, the desk is arranged as the group arrangement rather than the traditional field arrangement to promote communication with each other. Outside the administrative classroom, the display board, the activity posters are hanged on the wall, presenting information and work of particular activity. Some sofas with bolsters are placed in the corridor around the classroom, which acts as a bridge to promote a better connection between individuals. During the break time, teachers usually sit with students on the sofa to develop some casual chats or discuss academic questions. It is also a popular space where students prepared activities and play around.

Compared to the environment in the Central City Middle School, the environment is not that neat as almost all the space on the wall, in the corridor is bedecked with ornaments and furniture. But this precisely produces a stylish and cosy environment as one teacher mentioned: “My wife had a very good impression of our school the first when she came. She was surprised about the decoration and the sofa we get in the building. She said it is quite nice and unique to do that.” (Tiandi, a teacher, personal communication, May 30, 2018)

Next to the classroom in the building, the laboratory of physics, biology and chemistry as well as a library are provided. These places are open to all people and could be used at any time outside class. Except some experiments with potential danger would be supervised by teachers, students could be seen doing experiments and explorations in the lab and reading books freely by themselves. Two other buildings specifically design for a conference hall, small conference rooms and some dancing rooms, which are constructed next to the main building.

The other building is built as a two-floor canteen which receives high compliments from all people in the school because it serves all people including students and school staff irrespective of their working position at school. All people are required to wait in the same line for ordering and eat in the same place, which is quite different from the situation in mainstream schools. Under most situations, the staff and student are treated differently whether they are separated or staff would get some privilege when ordering. During lunch time, some volunteer students help keep order of the canteen and remind students of their manners.
A small playground with a mixture of run tracks, basketball place and football place locate in the middle of all buildings. Students play the sports they like between classes and after school without much limitation.

In the new campus, the decoration style and regulation are almost the same. What is interesting is that a piece of field was utilized to plant vegetables for the aim of academic learning and activities. The harvested vegetable is always offered for all the people to have a taste back home.

The campus arrangement and the detail of the carefully select ornaments generally give two implications, the emphasis on the role of students and the cultivation of a more equal relationship between teachers and students.

**The administrative structure and people**

As a young school with a comparatively small size, the administrative structure is not as detailed as the Central City Middle School. But the basic administrative unit is also comprehensive including the administrative class, the grade group, the academic teaching group, the office of administration, the office of educational research and the centre of student development. They also get four departments of the organizational branch which encompassed the office of CPC committee, the Labour Union, the Chinese Communist Youth League committee and the Young Pioneers.

The population of student was about four hundred in five grades until I finished my fieldwork. Each grade group was made up of four administrative classes which contained twenty students in each. Three grade groups stay in the main campus, while the other two were at the new campus. The number of school staff was about one hundred and fifty which resulted in a high student-faculty ratio.

**Summary**

Based on the introduction of the research school, it could be concluded that the integration of all the factors endowed a special and charming style for each school. Regardless of the difference of external elements, such as the size, the population and so forth, it is not difficult to find that the value of democracy is applied as one central concept for organizing the school life in both schools. In addition to democracy, a
group of relevant terms including liberty, autonomy, equality are either written down in the official documents or implied from the school decoration and arrangement.

With such support from the school, how is democracy carried out in daily educational work? How is democracy comprehended by the people in the school? In the next few chapters, I will explore their understanding of democracy and analyse their specific practice with the lenses of rights, participation in decision-making and the rule of law, the three basic principles for both socialist democracy and liberal democracy which has been discussed in the second chapter of democratic education. Precisely, chapter 6 to chapter 8 will introduce the practice at school by the areas extracted from the first-round analysis. The last chapter will launch a discussion on the final result as well as the establishment of the possible framework from this research.
Chapter 6: Analysis from the aspect of school activity and the pedagogy and classroom practice: participation within constraint

Introduction

From this chapter, I intend to analyse the practice of democratic education in Chinese schools. The specific practice carried out at school and people’s comprehension of democratic education would be explored by piecing the relevant data together in the context of the theoretical framework. In accordance with the results from the first-round analysis, practice will be organized by relevant areas. Among those areas mentioned in the previous chapter, it could be inferred that school activity, curriculum, interpersonal relationship and decision-making in school management are conceived by practitioners as the most outstanding areas in which democratic education is primarily practiced and realized. Although other areas also emerge as relevant, they are proposed in a way that they have a quite intimate relationship with the above explicit areas rather than being directly connected to democratic education. Considering this divergence, this chapter will firstly pay attention to two perceived outstanding areas, the school activity and the pedagogy and classroom practice, to examine what are primarily considered as the manifestation of democracy at school.

School activity

When explaining democracy in either research school, most participants would raise the practice about school activity and classroom teaching as examples.

In each school, the diverse and participatory activities are always taken as initial examples to explain the principle of participation on democratic education. While in the explanation of these activities, two student-run organizations, the student council and student club, are mentioned a lot as the important democratic mechanisms which support the implementation of student activities.

Student council and student club

Depending on their special concerns, the student council is prone to deal with more issues about school-management, while the student club is oriented to cater to students’ hobbies and interests.
Student council

In Central City Middle School, the first student council was established in 1985. Thanks to this quite long history, a clear set of participatory procedures for the establishment of a new student council have gradually formed and are carried out each year.

Around every September, the current student council would organize a conference to give a working report. Students who are willing to participate in the next year student council would attend the conference and get the application form. By listening to the report of different departments, they would be able to choose the one they want to attend upon a comprehensive understanding. The applied students will be arranged to do the internship in the corresponding department. During this time, the candidates will learn the history, the routine work of the department and participate in the departmental work with the assist of current members, which aims to prepare them for the future work at student council. Every student at school is entitled with the right to apply for a position at a new student council and the campaign.

SHUXIAO (A STUDENT/A MEMBER OF STUDENT COUNCIL): The election of student council is organized every year, and the tenure is one year…… The new campaign is usually organized in every November. During the week before the final election, all the candidates are required to attend a defence…….On the day of election……every candidate will give a speech……The student delegate will vote for them. Twenty-two candidates who get the highest votes would then form the new student council. (Shuxiao, personal communication, June 12, 2018)

In terms of organizing the campaign, the embodiment of participation is that the authority is completely devolved to students who work at the current student council. All the preparation work including applicants’ internship, the application defence, the public speech and the final election are all managed by the student members. The result of the campaign is determined through student delegates’ votes, who are selected from each administrative class vote on behalf of all students. The views of student delegates directly influence the final decision of the election and lead to the formation of the new student council. The opportunity of participation enables students to learn different
skills in their experience, which is in line with the Dewey’s emphasis on learning by doing.

However, a phenomenon is identified by many school members in the course of participation. Although students possess the equal right to attend the campaign, the majority of students who would like to participate in the student council are those from the international department who intend to pursue their undergraduate degree overseas. This phenomenon is related to the selection method of the university.

LIYIN (A TEACHER): It can be realized that the majority of students who attend these extra-curricular activities are from the international department. Because they need it, they need to improve their capabilities on such issues.” (Linyi, personal communication, March 14, 2018)

As the oversea university often requires students to demonstrate their leadership skills in their application, students from the international department have extra impetus for their participation except from personal interest.

In contrast, students who attempt to take the national college entrance examination tend to spend more time on their curriculum study. So the assessment system here appears to be a mediating factor on students’ participation.

Despite this, many teachers and students, no matter which department they belong to, consider this process as a specific practice of democracy, as it totally depends on students’ participation and autonomy, which is not intervened or forced by teachers:

NINGJUAN (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): As for the establishment of student council, it is processed by a series of democratic procedures including autonomous application, running the campaign, and voting by student delegates……if the student members are appointed by teachers, not through students’ votes based on their own wills, it is not democratic. (NINGJUAN, personal communication, May 22, 2018)

GUANGXIU (A STUDENT/ A MEMBER OF STUDENT COUNCIL): The student council is formed by students ….. The activity is not organized by teachers as
the conventional way. Instead, students act as the organizers and participants. (Guangxiu, personal communication, June 12, 2018)

This is compared with the method of appointment which used to apply in many conventional schools. With this method, students could not influence the process at all. It was the school staff who possess the whole authority on the construction of student council. In that case, students usually had no choice either on applying a position or refuse a position. In most situations, students with high academic achievement were normally selected, while others hardly obtained the chance to participate. However, this approach also starts to be transformed in more schools, by which the staff begin to emphasize students’ involvement in the process (Li, 2011, Peng, 2009). In line with the general transformation, in Central City Middle School, the opportunity of participation is offered to all students within this student council mechanism. Anyone who hopes to join the council can participate through the selection process and all the candidates got the equal chance to be elected. By experiencing this whole process with autonomy, students would learn that they can participate in school affairs and influence decisions, which is helpful to improve their democratic awareness. Factors such as student delegates and the way they work could provide specific examples on certain features of socialist democracy.

Apart from the selection process, students’ participation is reflected throughout the work of all departments. In terms of the inner structure of the student council, it is constructed with seven departments with special concern on different areas. Precisely, it includes the department of student management, the department of art and entertainment, the department of activity, the department of sports, the department of creative media and the department of external connection. In each department, the task of the student member highlights a high-level engagement in campus life management, which mainly involves organizing the inherited traditional activities created by former student councils, making some adjustments or designing new activities. The decisions of how to deal with the existing activities and the creation of new activities are basically made by the student members likewise.

GUANGXIU (A STUDENT/ A MEMBER OF STUDENT COUNCIL): From every student council, there are some activities being inherited, while some are abolished. For example, the department of art and entertainment used to
organize an event of campus radio. It had been implemented by several student councils. But the recent several student councils gradually lost interest in that event, so it was abolished then. Every student council would arrange new activities. Take my department (the department of creative media) as an example, in the last student council, they did not put much effort on activity’s summary and reflection but mainly focused on the forecast of activity. And we think we should pay attention on the part of summary. So we inherit the part of activity forecast. We form a journalist team to do this job. In the course of the activity, we would pay attention on students’ response, the good activity will definitely be kept. After the activity, we would write a summary and reflect on the organizing process. For example, if we made some mistakes when organizing the activity of (student) Party. We would write them in the summary and give them to the next student council. (Guangxiu, personal communication, June 12, 2018)

As showed in the quote, student members use their autonomy to design a series of activities without being directly controlled by teachers. In addition, the participation of ordinary students who do not work as representatives or leaders, is regarded as another aspect of democracy by both students and school staff. Hence, when organizing activities, the student council endeavours to meet ordinary students’ needs and involve more students in the process of activity management. This again shows an emphasis on learning by doing. In accordance with specific activity, the student council usually recruits ordinary students to form temporary working groups to participate in the work of student council.

YANRAN (A STUDENT/ A MEMBER OF STUDENT COUNCIL): In terms organizing the activities……we would also set up some working groups to improve the work efficiency……This is in charge of the three deans of the department of activity. They would hand out questionnaires, the interested students would come and join us. In the meantime, they would also widely collect ordinary students’ ideas. Their views are very important and necessary. (Yanran, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

With the effort of every student council, several popular activities have been created which includes the New Year’s Party, the Week of Public Interest, Chorus Festival
and so forth. But the support for students’ engagement and autonomy does not mean they could do whatever they want. In the course of organizing these activities, the school staff supervise these activities all the time. Appointed from the school, a particular teacher is required to take charge of the issues about the student council. One of his main tasks is to inspect the activity and judge if it violates the school rules generally.

YANRAN (A STUDENT/ A MEMBER OF STUDENT COUNCIL): Teachers usually do not intervene our activities if we do not violate the school rules……There is one teacher who has an intimate relationship with us……teachers usually play a role as advisor……For example, we have a school account on a social media. We have a supervision group for the message delivering, and that teacher is one of the members of this group. Before we send out one message, that teacher would check on the content. For example, does the content contain too much commercial information? Does it violate the school rules? Another thing is, will it damage the image of our account? How is the quality of the content? How are teachers’ and students’ favourability? If most teachers and students feel uncomfortable with the content, we would stop using the content. I think the teacher supervision has many positive effects. (Yanran, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

In this process, the teacher plays a role as the guardian of the school rules and the school image which draw another boundary of students’ participation. However, students argue this teacher is not a hostile inspector who negatively prevents students’ activities, but as an advisor for the improvement of activity, who is in fact a promoter for students’ engagement. The model of democratic centralism can be recognized here. Students are encouraged to participate autonomously, but their behaviours are overseen, perhaps kept within limits, by the school staff. Students’ positive understanding on teachers’ supervision becomes the basis for them to accept and practice democratic centralism in a broader context.

This student council is a school-wide mechanism which provides the participation opportunity based on students’ personal interests. In different grade groups, there is another similar mechanism called the Grade Student Management Committee, which is often regarded as mini student council by teachers. Working separately from the real
student council, this mechanism also aims to offer students the chance of participation. But rather than depending on their own interest, the participation approach is assisting the school staff with the daily student management and bear the daily checking work. For example, they help to check students’ behaviour in accordance with the specific requirement, record them and report to the staff. Other than the student council, this agency is initiated by teachers who are organizers. But the selection of members also relies on students’ own will and public voting within the scope of particular grade. The practice of this mechanism highlights students’ experience as well, while it contains less features of socialist democracy.

In **Sunflower Middle School**, the steps of forming a new student council is slightly different from the **Central City Middle School**. As a relatively new school, fixed procedures for establishing a student council have not yet been established. But students’ participation is also underlined in the process of establishment. In this process, it is the student rather than school staff who mainly take charge of the whole election procedure and determine the final result. As for the current student council (the council I observed in the field), it consists of two levels which precisely incorporate one council on the school level and several branch councils on the grade level. The school student council works as the head of all the grade student councils.

**Sunflower Middle School** has not established a fixed selection process. All the implemented procedures resulted from students’ ideas and participation. The members of the previous student council put a lot of efforts on designing the process of selecting the chair of the school student council. Every student who intends to attend the campaign needs to design and post a poster at campus to demonstrate their ideas of running for the student council. Based on their posters, all students are allowed to vote in the preliminary election to elect some candidates for the next step. While in the final election, all the candidates are requested to give a separate speech and debate with other candidates to explain their working concepts. In this round of election, the student council arrange all teachers and student delegates who were selected from each administrative class as the voters to make their choice.

After the campaign, the new chair of the student council undertakes the work of formulating the two-level system of student council. In his plan, any student who wants to join the student council is required to run a campaign in their administrative class.
Each class selects two members to enter to their grade student council. While the members of school student council are selected from the grade student councils. It is argued this two-level system is designed to efficiently collect students’ views from different groups, which at the same time guarantees students’ participation of different groups.

RANXUAN (A STUDENT/ THE CHAIR OF SCHOOL STUDENT COUNCIL): A group of students are selected in each grade to form the grade level of student council……So this is carried out in each grade. Students with interest would apply first. In terms of the grade student council, my thought is, it needs to ensure every administrative class has some members and avoid selecting all the members from the same class……As for the school student council……every grade student council would select three to four members to enter the school council, which ensures the school student council is made up of students from all different grades. (Ranxuan, focus group, May 28, 2018)

Although the organizing procedure is different from Central City Middle School, it embraces two similar features: it provides opportunities for students to learn through their own experiences and the whole process contains some factors of socialist democracy. In the communication, it seems the student designer does not purposely design it in according to the socialist democracy, but the two-level mechanism actually echoes with the People’s Congress with a same purpose of collecting more people’s ideas and making the final decision in the central committee, of which the underpinning political conception is democratic centralism.

In the course of launching the design, the practice is regularly checked by the school staff according to the school requirement before practice, which aims to check whether students’ participation has crossed the boundary. Nevertheless, almost every student participant conceives teachers as supporters and advisers who do not control students or adjust their designs coercively.

RANXUAN (THE CHAIR OF SCHOOL STUDENT COUNCIL): [After designing the procedures,] we would submit it to a teacher to check. They may make some adjustments, but the main body is designed by us……This (checking by teachers) mainly aims to improve the efficiency of the activity, for example,
they raise some suggestions for the public speech before the final election. And to do that is also for the sake of ensuring the fairness of our activity. (Ranxuan, focus group, May 28, 2018)

These comments are similar to that in Central City Middle School, which indicate that students understand teachers’ work of supervision and they appreciate the nice relationship with teachers who usually provide supports, advices rather than coercive orders all the time. The nice interpersonal relationship and teachers’ working style become the important basis for the practice of democratic centralism.

When describing the structure of student council in Sunflower Middle School, the student members propose the departments are designed from the perspective of how students can participate in the management, in which students’ participation gets highlighted again. On account of this, the student council on both school level and grade level set up four departments to provide various chances of participation. They include the discipline department, supervision department, activity department and supportive service department. The function of the discipline department is similar to the Grade Student Management Committee at Central City Middle School, which undertakes the routine inspection work of the whole school students to check if they behave as the school requires. The department of supervision is specifically designed to render members of student council to participate in the supervision of other members’ behaviour. Those student members who do not work well could be removed from the student council according to the record of attendance. Every week, the student council including the school level and the grade level would organize the routine meeting to discuss the problem recognized at the campus and make the arrangement for some upcoming events.

A piece of observation of the routine meeting of student council at Sunflower Middle School:

This meeting was organized by all student members themselves. They discussed different things at the campus.

Student A (seemed a leader of one department): Do you have any work plan (for the rest of this semester)?
Student members from different grades talked about their plan in terms of the department they belong to. In the meantime, the responsible teacher came in and sit aside listening to their discussion.

Student A: You do not need to worry about the teacher, he is not important (making a joke).

After demonstrating their working plans in the following months, student members discussed the problem recognized during their work and tried to figure about the solution. There was a student member writing down the record.

The issue being discussed included:

1. The volunteer at the canteen does not help to maintain the order.
2. Recognizing some students are using mobile phone at campus which is prohibited.
3. Recognizing some students use the earphone which is related to mobile phone but not is demonstrated in the school rule.
4. Maintaining the order in the classroom before the lunch time.
5. Discussing the event of Good Voice about the time and the particular arrangement. Asking all members to tell all students about their plan after discussion. (Observation, December 15, 2017)

Apart from such administrative missions, the main task of the student council is engaging students in organizing activities, which is chiefly in charged by the activity department and supportive service department. This reflects the student council functions to create platforms and provide chances for more students to improve their skills when attending activities.

JIAOYU (A STUDENT/ A MEMBER OF SCHOOL STUDENT COUNCIL): From my experience, I think the main task of student council is designing and organizing activities. We would seek for students’ real needs and organize some activities that would help relax ourselves. (Jiaoyu, personal communication, May 28, 2018)

In the course of organizing activities, the student council also underlines the importance of respecting ordinary students’ interests and suggestions to support
students’ participation and enrich their campus life. Within this approach, a series of popular activities has been created by the student council. For example, the Good Voice is a very welcome singing competition which has been organized for three years. The process of organizing this activity is basically carried out by students.

**The preliminary contest of the Good Voice at Sunflower Middle School:**

This event was organized completely by the student council. All the participants came to the room of contest to sing in front of the judge and other participants. The group of judges were made up of students. No teacher was involved in the event, but the responsible teacher of student council came and had a look after the competition began. (Observation, December 19, 2017)

The Teachers’ Festival Party is an event held to show students’ gratitude and respect to teachers. Before the event, students are organized to prepare a lot of thank-you cards and deliver to teachers. On the party, many teachers and students would go on the stage and give a performance. But before any activity, the plan still needs to be checked by the staff, which exemplifies democratic centralism again.

RESEARCHER: Before organizing these activities, do they need to be examined by teachers and get permission?

DAHAO (A STUDENT/ A MEMBER OF SCHOOL STUDENT COUNCIL): Yes, we definitely need to do this. Because when organizing an activity, we need to deal with a lot of details, such as arranging the time. So, we need to communicate with the teacher who takes charge of the work of student council. For example, if several students propose to organize a badminton competition. Then two to three student members would write a proposal on this activity which would include the time and place of the event, the people in need to support, the number of expected participants and so forth. The students need to draft a detailed plan and then submit it to the teacher. The teacher may raise some suggestions for improvement. For example, how to make the event safer etc. At last, the teacher will give permission with specific place and time according to our plan to organize the activity. (Dahao, personal communication, June 01, 2018)
From the practice, it could be recognized that in both schools, the student council is established as particular mechanism which supports students’ participation in the campus life. The participation of council members could range from working as staff’s assistant or organizing more student-expected activities as an independent agency. Although bearing some assistant work for the staff, it primarily acts as a kind of representative body which mainly focuses on collecting students’ ideas and make them come true. Nevertheless, no matter what kind of participation, in both schools, the staff keep appearing as an important role who supervise students’ work according to the school rules. As the exam and evaluation system also influence on students’ degree of participation, both of them seem to work as the boundary of participation, which is usually guarded or instructed by the staff.

Student club

In comparison to the student council, the student club is a mechanism through which students can engage in activity related to a shared hobby or interest. In both schools, students can not only attend the club they prefer, but also apply to set up a new club through particular procedures.

The Central City Middle School operates a mature system of the student club. With students’ efforts, more than a hundred student clubs are running at campus, which to some extent demonstrates the advocacy of students’ engagement. It is said students can join any club as members only after a simple registration. There is not any limitation on students’ participation in the club, such as the number or the type. At the same time, students can apply to create new clubs with simple procedures as well.

XINYU (A STUDENT/ A FOUNDER OF ONE STUDENT CLUB): The procedure of setting up a new club is easy and simple. Basically, we just need to fill an application form to present the name of our club and state the purpose of the club. And find at least ten members to sign on the form. Then the application can pass. (Xinyu, personal communication, January 22, 2018)

There are some basic requirements for the establishment of a new club, which indicates the general model of democratic centralism again. Students approve with these rules and propose the school does not apply tight control or complex inspection process.
This judgement is made in comparison to the regulation in some conventional schools. Considering the examination result is the most important element for the development of students and the school, many conventional schools regulate the area of student clubs should be beneficial for the curriculum learning. Because of this, many student-expected clubs are not permitted to set up. While in Central City Middle School, students are conferred with more autonomy to create different kinds of clubs. For example, they have a King of Glory (a mobile game) Club, Bridge Club, F1 Racing Club, Model Airplane Club which are regarded as almost impossible to be organized in many conventional schools. Moreover, after being formally set up, the autonomy of arranging specific activity of club is also granted to students.

XINYU (A STUDENT/ THE FOUNDER OF THE CLUB OF SIMULATION OF CHINESE PEOPLE’S POLITICAL CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE): In terms of the club activities, the school does not interfere with us. (Xinyu, personal communication, January 22, 2018)

GUANGXIU (A STUDENT/ A MEMBER OF THE CLUB OF ORIENTEERING): As for organizing activities in our club......we would propose different ideas and discuss together......we would consider for the future of our club. If we think the activity is good for our club, we would arrange for it. (Guangxiu, personal communication, June 12, 2018)

The idea that the school staff do not interfere the club activity is also certified by the observation of club activity in the field. Appropriate rules turn out to be of importance in practice for both the encouragement of participation and some necessary control. The combination of participation and supervision mirrors the model of democratic centralism, and rules work as the boundary between the part democracy and centralism.

An activity of the club of simulation of Chinese People’s political Consultative Conference at Central City Middle School:

This activity was organized in a hotel outside school with students from different other schools who were interested in this topic. The activity was completely organized by students, no teacher appeared in the site. Modelling the process
of Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, students formed the delegation of different parities. Each of the party delegation first demonstrated their propositions in various areas. Then, all students conducted a discussion in terms of all the propositions. One student helped to set the time limit on the presentation and discussion throughout the whole process. The club leader also prepared some snack and tea for students during the tea break.

After the whole process of the simulation of Chinese People’s political Consultative Conference, there was a sector of awarding. Determined by the club committee, some delegations and delegates got the prize from the Club leader. (Observation, December 31, 2017)

To guarantee the quality of student clubs, a formal supervision system is implemented by the student council. Specifically, it is said the department of student management composes the regulation of the student club and executes it. This further indicates the special attention attached to students’ experience. In addition, by participating in the supervision work, students learn the practice of democratic centralism through experience. With the working process examined in the former section, it could be inferred this regulation has been supervised by the responsible teacher. The responsible teacher of the student council also takes charge of the issues about the student club. But it is reported that he does not often get involved in the supervision of student clubs directly, which hands over more opportunities for students to engage in the supervision work. Whereas the teacher would still oversee the process by hearing the information from the student council.

GUANGXIU (A STUDENT/ A MEMBER OF STUDENT COUNCIL): The issue of student club is basically supervised by the department of student management at student council. Teachers do not usually make the supervision directly, but sometimes they would seek information from the student council to conduct a simple inspection indirectly…… [In terms of the supervision system,] the department of student management would make investigation on the work of different clubs. They develop a club archive to record the information of clubs, such as the information of club members…… in the meantime, the club will be checked on their practice, for example, to see whether they have organized any activities, whether the club leader attend those activities and so
forth……If the club has a severe problem, the student council has the authority to cancel their official registration at school and do not let them register any more. (Guangxiu, personal communication, June 12, 2018)

The problem mentioned in the quote refers to a situation that violates the regulation of student clubs and even the school rules. This is exemplified by one example: students cannot set up clubs without carrying out any activities and just trying to enhance their Curriculum Vitae. However, in practice, it seems all student clubs would follow the rule and no severe problem had been identified in any club during the time when I was in the field.

When implementing the supervision work, students’ participation is not only limited to checking the club according to the regulation. It also involves providing the corresponding advice of club adjustments and specific working support to improve the quality of student clubs. In accordance with the need of different clubs, the support from the student council could range from big issues to detail arrangements.

YANRAN (A STUDENT/ A MEMBER OF STUDENT COUNCIL): [As for the inspection work,] we usually give them reminders, such as do not put the commercial advertisement of sponsor everywhere……and most of the time we provide supportive service for them. Specifically, we always help them with the grant application, finding event place, the invitation of some expected guests and so on……We also assist to advertise their activities and unique club culture……and promote a democratic style of management within clubs……For some undemocratic phenomena in some clubs, for example, in some clubs most things are merely decided by the club leader……in this occasion, the department of student management would raise our suggestions to promote their democratic development for the sake of all students’ interest. (Yanran, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

We can see from this quote how the student council actively promotes a particular style of management in the student club. The connotation of democratic management is not explicitly presented, but within the discourse context, it refers to a balance between centralist and student participation, which again can be seen as consistent with the logic of democratic centralism. In addition to the explicit inspection system carried by
students, staff’s informal supervision actually exists all the time. As for different aspects of school life, the school staff with diverse duties automatically undertake the mission of supervising the activity related to school club.

YANGBING (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): It was interesting one student used to ask if he can open a club of computer games. But I thought the idea was quite bold…… Now they have already run some club about computer games……But we need to keep an eye on them and regulate their behaviour. [For example,] some boarders get up in the middle of the night and play the game to finish their task……the club requires their members to sign in every night and play games. (Yangbing, personal communication, January 25, 2018)

In this occasion, students’ behaviours could be dealt with the explicit rules about dormitory regulation. But when there is not a clear principle, some social ethical principles and common sense are used by people as the judgement basis.

XINYU (A STUDENT/ THE FOUNDER OF THE CLUB OF SIMULATION OF CHINESE PEOPLE’S POLITICAL CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE): At the beginning of setting up my club, I did not intend to do something about the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPCC) at first. I attempted to launch some discussions about civic rights, conduct some investigations and write report on some controversial issues. We made some attempts by writing articles online. But then my politics teacher, who is very familiar to us, came to talk with us. He thought the topic we picked were too sensitive which might be disadvantage for our future. He suggested us to alter our focus to other related areas and proposed maybe we can focus on the CPCC……I was contradictory at that time. Because if I change a direction, the things are different from what I wanted to do first. But I confess my initial thought was quite radical, which means I may not make any practical improvement if I insist……Hence, I searched a lot of information about the CPCC on the internet to understand it. Then all of our club members discussed together about this in (last) May. Finally, we [changed our club focus, and] developed a new scheme. With two-months preparation, we organized the event of the first-year Simulation of CPCC. (Xinyu, personal communication, January 22, 2018)
In this case, the teacher restrains students’ participation again. But the judgement is apparently made on the common sense view of relevant issues, as neither the whole society nor the school has any rules which explicitly stop students from conducting such activities. Such common sense usually composes of, but not limited to, personal experience, others’ experience, the comprehension on certain social events, moral rules and cultural rules. All these factors are quite flexible and unreliable, which makes the comprehension of common sense could vary from people. It might because of this, teachers seldom give forcible orders, but often launch discussions with students to explain their reasons. If students conceive their suggestions as reasonable and helpful, they would take the advice and make adjustments accordingly as showed above. In the field, most students would take teachers’ advice especially when some proposed reasons are not considered before.

But there are also some occasions that the student cannot be convinced by the staff and decisive about their decisions. In that case, a thorough negotiation is usually conducted between students and teachers which may lead to either teachers’ or students’ concession in the final decision. This clearly demonstrates the mode of democratic centralism which collects people’s opinions first and makes the decision by the decision maker later. It also shows a combination with consultative democracy which provides more space to participate and more power to influence and change the final decision.

Despite of the divergence of school practice, similar participation opportunities are also created in Sunflower Middle School when operating the student clubs. As for joining the clubs, students are allowed to make any choice among all the options.

RESEARCHER: Is there any number limitation for the participation of student club?

XUHUI (A STUDENT/ A MEMBER OF STUDENT CLUB): There is not any requirement in theory, but we can at most attend one club each day because of the time limitation. So, at most five clubs in each semester.

RESEARCHER: Is there any minimum requirement? Is it compulsory for students to attend at least one club?
ZEXUAN/XIAOYI/XUHUI/JINGXIAO (STUDENTS/ MEMBERS OF STUDENT CLUBS): (Answering together) No, you can choose to not attend any clubs.

RESEARCHER: Does any student choose to not attend that currently?

XUHUI (A STUDENT/ A MEMBER OF STUDENT CLUB): Yes, some students consider academic learning is more important. Then they would not join any club. (Zexuan, Xiaoyi, Xuhui, Jingxiao, focus group, January 12, 2018)

In terms of setting up a new club, students also can choose any topic they prefer to form a group. But the application process seems more formal and demanding in contrast to that in the Central City Middle School as described by students.

HEJIE (A STUDENT/ A FOUNDER OF DESSERT CLUB): Another girl and I set up a dessert club……After we proposed this idea, we went to talk with teacher Zeyan at the Student Development Centre……She told us we need to submit a detailed proposal which clearly states the purpose of the club, the division of work for club members, the expected number of recruited members, the content of each course and the plan of using fund. After we submitted our proposal, teachers raised suggestions for us to revise it. Until when we finished revising the proposal according to the suggestions, we got the permission to establish our club. (Hejie, focus group, January 12, 2018)

XUHUI (A STUDENT/ FOUNDER OF PHILOSOLHY CLUB): Creating a club is not as easy as I imagine. My application for the Philosophy Club was refused the first time and passed the second time……For my first application, the teacher said my plan was not thorough enough, not scientific enough and not specific enough. So, I was requested to rewrite a proposal and applied again. It was the second time that my application was approved. (Xuhui, focus group, January 12, 2018)

The application asks students to provide a specific proposal of the club to explain the title, the purpose, the anticipated number of club members and the specific plan of club activities. Teachers treat this process as a good opportunity to urge students to take a comprehensive consideration on the club and improve students’ relevant abilities, such as the ability of communication and the ability of scheme in using them. On account
of this, some applications require a number of attempts before they are approved, as in the example in the student quote above. One application may get refused or revised for several times before the club is officially set up, and the main reason club proposals get refused is based on the quality and the rationality of the application, rather than the type of club being proposed. In the course of review, the reviewer would focus on the rationality of their plan and raise suggestions accordingly for further improvement. This rationality refers to the aspect of club specialty on one hand, it involves the aspect of the school rule on the other hand. Therefore, as a process of training students’ capabilities, it is also adopted as a chance to supervise students’ work.

In addition to the supervision on application process, it is required that each club need to find a teacher who will sits with them all the time when they organize club activities. This explicit supervision system is deemed mainly for assisting the club leaders to maintain order and ensure students’ safety. Students indicate the supervision teacher do intervene much on activity’s specific content.

XUHUI (A STUDENT/ FOUNDER OF PHILOSOLHY CLUB): The supervised teacher basically does not intervene with our views or content applied in the club activity. What they usually do is help the organizer to maintain the order……Because this teacher usually does not specialize in the area the club focuses on. For example, a math teacher could be invited as the supervisor of a Chinese Language Club. (Xuhui, focus group, January 12, 2018)

**The activity of a Dessert Club at Sunflower Middle School:**

The activity was totally designed by students. A teacher accompanied them by sitting aside and sometimes reminded students to be careful when using the oven and the boiler. It seemed the club would arrange a different topic for their activity each week. The topic of this week was making the milk tea (a special and popular drink in China). All the members were allocated with the job of preparing the ingredients, cooking, selling the dessert and so forth. There was one student who was in charge of the finance of the club. The money they earned by selling dessert were planned for buying ingredients in the future.
After making the milk tea, two club members sold the drink at the canteen. Many students and staff came to buy a cup of drink. (Observation, October 18, 2017)

“Maintaining the order” is a frequently used expression in Chinese schools, which usually means enacting the discipline requirements to avoid students’ certain behaviour to improve the teaching/learning efficiency. In conversation with teachers who frequently talked about maintaining order to avoid disorder within students’ clubs, they also said their oversight in the student clubs was less prescriptive than their previous work in conventional schools: in the research schools it implies a meaning of avoiding the chaotic situation that cannot be dealt with the club leader, in which the role of teacher is similar to a helper. But it could be inferred the school rule would be adopted as the basis to make judgement on the situation, which again makes the role of teacher become the guardian of the school rule. In all schools, order is important, but teachers’ rule is more controlling in conventional schools in comparison with the research schools. Students have a degree of choice of who the teacher is. It appears to be less restrictive in the research school compared to conventional schools. This once again proves school’s encouragement on students’ participation provided it conforms to the school requirement.

Aside from the student-running clubs, to support students’ interests and participation in diverse areas, the Sunflower Middle School encourages the school staff and introduces the external teacher resources to run more professional clubs. Exemplified by the Club of Astronomy and the Club of Programming, these clubs usually provide a series of systematic courses around a professional field. In each semester, all these clubs are provided together with student-running clubs as the parallel options for all students to choose. So students can experience how to choose and make decisions.

Based on shared hobbies, the mechanism of student club manages to increase the number of activity and diversify the activity area, which obviously enlarges the scope of student participation. While in the whole process, the staff’s supervision is never far away, which becomes a quite clear boundary of students’ engagement.

*Student working group and student project group*
In contrast to the student council and student club which are operated as two fixed and perennial systems, each school develops a flexible and temporary form of student organization, which aims to create more opportunities for students’ engagement in the campus life.

The Central City Middle School creates a system of student working group, as the example mentioned in the section of student council. Acting as an auxiliary system for the work of student council and the grade student management committee, this working group system is often adopted to offer more chances for ordinary students outside the student agency to participate in the management of campus life.

In Sunflower Middle School, the created temporary form is called the student project group. Rather than attaching to other student agency, it works as an independent agency. Within this system, every ordinary student is entitled with the autonomy to form a project group and organize their own events.

RANXUAN (A STUDENT/ A MEMBER OF STUDENT COUNCIL): From this semester, our school is constantly promoting the project group which encourages students to conduct their own project and promotes more students’ participation. Everyone could launch a project around any social issue or school issue with their ideas. For example, I can launch a project of decorating this wall (pointing the wall in front of us). (Ranxuan, personal communication, May 28, 2018)

By allowing students to conduct a whole project, the student project group is regarded as an alternative path for applying and organizing student activities in addition to the student council. This definitely brings more opportunities for students to participate, to experience and to apply their autonomy, but it is also considered as a challenge for the work of student council.

RANXUAN (A STUDENT/ THE CHAIR OF STUDENT COUNCIL): The focus of some projects actually belongs to the working area of the student council. But [because of this system,] they can take it out from the student council and conduct it independently. This is what I always feel worried most of the time. That is to say, students do not need the student council that much. Sometimes,
it becomes an empty mechanism without any practical use. So, on one hand, I feel it is not very good for the development of student council. But on the other hand, in terms of democracy, it is a good practice. (Ranxuan, personal communication, May 28, 2018)

As a kind of representative body for students, the student council keeps playing an important role to realize students’ idea. In light of this, when the project group obtains the similar function, many students no longer need to resort to the student council to make their idea come true, which worries this student on the development of the student council. However, he comprehends this system is good for democracy, which indicates his comprehension of democracy is embodied in participation too.

Drawn from the practice of students’ agency, participation is regarded as a very important aspect of democracy. Various degrees of participation are promoted by diverse mechanisms in terms of different areas. The school rule sets the limitation and requirement on students’ engagement which is mostly carried out by the school staff officially or voluntarily.

Apart from these mechanisms, some particular school wide events are highly connected with democracy by school members. Among them, one similar event is raised by both schools as a representative of democratic school activities, which encourages students to engage in the school management by proposing advices.

**The event of raising suggestions for the school management**

In the field, each school organizes a public event of raising suggestions, which allows the suggestions to be proposed and discussed in a public conference. Carefully observing the activity respectively, the specific way of organizing the activity in two schools works as an imitation of the mechanism of People’s Congress in China.

In the **Central City Middle School**, the event of Campus Proposal is adopted by many participants including staff and students as a concrete and successful practice when explaining democracy at school. The Campus Proposal is a routine activity created to bring students the opportunities to express their suggestions about the school life. Being in charged by the department of student management at the student council, this activity is organized basically by students themselves.
Acting as a channel of expression, it is claimed that every student at any time would be able to raise suggestions for the school life by handing in a well-written proposal. Whenever students come across an idea of improvement, they would draft a proposal and submit it to the student council. The student working at the department of student management usually carries an initial evaluation and selection process by the content of proposal.

YANRAN (A STUDENT/ A STUDENT COUNCIL MEMBER): There is a selection process for the submitted proposals, as some issues might have been discussed before. I think this process is similar to [the process before] conducting a research. There might be someone who had made suggestions [on the same topic] before, or even had finished with a nice result. In addition, there might be other proposals around the same issue which raise a better idea. In other case, the practice of the similar proposition may have led to a failure. Therefore, we usually make an initial evaluation on the proposals……But this is not a one-way evaluation. We also communicate with the proposers to clear up their confusions. (Yanran, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

At this stage, the student council has the authority to make decisions on the initial selection of propositions based on their experience and the communication with proposers. After selection, a feedback working group is established for each proposal to enhance it with a more reasonable solution and prepare for the formal discussion with leaders.

YANRAN: [So] when the proposal is selected, the student management department will organize a feedback working group to further discuss and research on the issue……Sometimes we would appoint some students, sometime the group member might be recruited volunteers. As the leader of the working group, the student who raised the proposal will lead the group to conduct more investigations and adopt the useful results to seek solutions …… For example, one graduate of our school used to promote the establishment of our campus Wi-Fi. The success of his proposal cannot be separated from the thorough investigation conducted by his feedback group. Based on their work, the proposal was revised as more comprehensive with good reasons and solutions. (Yanran, personal communication, March 08, 2018).
The feedback working group is proposed as playing the most significant role in this activity. “It is almost meaningless if we only point out the problem without providing a solution.” (Yanran, a student, personal communication, March 08, 2018) It is believed the quality of the proposition has a decisive influence on whether it can finally be accepted and put into practice by the school.

Every year, a formal proposal conference is organized to publicly discuss the final proposals between students and the school staff. The school leaders who are responsible for different aspects of schoolwork, such as the leader of school’s technology, the leader of support service, principles and so forth would participate in the conference and give feedback from the standpoint of their departments. On the conference, the proposer would explain their ideas with a followed discussion on the issue. When the proposal is accepted by the school leaders, the corresponding leader will give a permission on the implementation. The reason will also be explained when the proposal is refused. This process again demonstrates the mode of democratic centralism in decision-making in which the school staff has the authority to make the final decision. While the negotiation part reflects the approach of consultative democracy in the area of politics which emphasizes the participation of different groups before the final decision.

In practice, the content of Campus Proposal involves diverse aspects of the school life.

MINGBO (A STUDENT): For example, several days before, one student suggested to change the everyday yogurt in lunch to more fruits on a proposal…… Then the yogurt was changed to a fruit every two days. (Mingbo, personal communication, January 15, 2018).

GUANGXIU (A STUDENT): I remember there was a place at campus which can only be reached by stairs. There was not a slope, so it was difficult for students who used wheelchair. Some student raised this problem and provided the solution on the conference. Many school leaders participated in that conference and many answers were directly given on the conference. When discussing this issue, the leader admitted this problem and immediately arranged some teacher to solve this problem. (Guangxiu, personal communication, June 12, 2018).
If the proposal is not raised around the conference period, the negotiation process would still be carried out personally, and the student council would take the responsibility of arranging the discussion between school leaders and the feedback group.

In the field, the whole process is conceived as a democratic way of making decisions and the negotiation between different groups is emphasized as a particular manifestation of democracy. But most practitioners seem not to realize that these two approaches are consistent with the political conceptions of democratic centralism and consultative democracy, or at least, these connections are not openly discussed.

In Sunflower Middle School, a similar activity, the “Good Idea”, is also argued to be connected with democracy by enabling students to raise opinions for school management.

YUANBING (A TEACHER/A SCHOOL LEADER): We hope democracy could be seen in practice. If not, it is problematic……In terms of student management, school respect students’ will on many issues……In our school, students have the autonomy and many opportunities to raise their suggestions. For example, every year we organize an activity called Good Idea……This activity provides students a platform to implement democracy. Students’ opinions could be raised and collected through this activity. Their opinions will be considered by school to see if they can be implemented. If cannot, the feedback will be given to students.

In contrast to the activity of Campus Proposal, this is designed as a compulsory activity for all students for the sake of cultivating an attitude of active participation, self-expression and developing the required capabilities for students.

LIRAN (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): It might due to our traditional culture …… people do not like to express their ideas, especially when it is not related to their personal benefits…… it may also relate to the immature feedback system at school which sometimes reduces people’s enthusiasm of participation……Therefore, a quite determined system of implementation is very important. It should be judged as meaningful and carried out firmly……
As the organizer of the activity of Good Idea, I state clearly about the process. Every student should first raise an idea which would be discussed within their groups……then some will be demonstrated in class……on the grade level……and present on the school conference. (Liran, personal communication, January 26, 2018).

As mentioned in this quote, this activity usually starts from the level of administrative class. At this stage, all students are firstly formed into four to five groups and every student is required to raise one suggestion in each group. By discussing within the group, one suggestion would be chosen by the group members upon which they will prepare for a formal proposal to demonstrate in the class. In the following step, three proposals would be chosen as the representatives of each administrative class to be selected on the grade level. By competing within each grade, every grade group selects three proposals to present on a formal conference of the school level. So rather than being a pure channel of expressing ideas, this activity also embraces a quality of competition which echoes with the activity purpose of stimulating students to enhance their democratic abilities.

As for the demonstrated proposals, the school leaders would decide whether the suggestions will be carried out. Further actions will be taken to solve the problem if the suggestion is accepted.

WENBIN (A STUDENT): One of the proposals from our class was selected to present on the school conference. It was about the broken football net……My classmate proposed to repair it to promote students’ sport activity……This proposal was approved by school leaders, and then the football net was repaired afterwards. (Wenbin, personal communication, March 18, 2018).

Therefore, as the Central City Middle School, this pattern first encourages people’s thorough communications and the person in charge makes the final decision is also in line with the conception of democratic centralism and consultative democracy in the framework of China’s democracy. The feature of socialist democracy is reflected throughout the whole activity. The purpose of promoting students’ learning in practice is in line with Dewey’s arguments that democracy cannot only be learnt in textbook,
but needs to be learn in practice, and this is combined with the principle that the person in charge makes the final decision after consultation.

In comparison to these two formal public events, a relative private channel of communication with school leaders is instituted in both schools to render students’ participation in more ways. In Central City Middle School, one day of each week is fixed as the “Principle Talking Day” when every student could visit the principle to whether express their suggestions on the campus life or seek school’s support to implement their own ideas personally. In practice, this channel is gradually extended to daily communication with school leaders. Students have got used to talk with different school leaders when needed. The time is not fixed on the “Principle Opening Day” and the leader does not limit to the headmaster either. For example, one student launched a series of discussions with the school leader on an idea of opening a student-running coffee shop. Based on the communication, the school finally made the decision to support this proposition, with which the proposer got an interest-free loan and a place at the campus to put the proposal in practice.

This channel in Sunflower Middle School is also unimpeded. Students are welcome to discuss with school leaders at any time. “Whenever we have any thoughts, we can visit and talk with the school leaders, such as the dean of the grade group and the principal.” (Ranxuan, a student, personal communication, May 28, 2018) Around the new rule of dormitory assignment which rendered students to find their own roommates, a student expressed his worries that some unpopular students might be isolated. A series of discussion are launched later between the student and school leaders around this topic. Despite the different forms, these channels also manifest the mode of democratic centralism, in which the decision maker makes the final decision on the basis of collecting various ideas and abundant discussion. In the practice of such approach, a common problem is recognized by students in both schools. Namely, it is not easy to get the approval of the proposition from school staff, which puts students in a dilemma about participation. The situation might never be changed if they do not propose their ideas, but even though they put a lot of efforts in the preparation and negotiation. In practice, the probability to get changed is low. This discloses the contradiction between participation and the mode of democratic centralism. The balance of these two approaches becomes a problem in the practice of democratic
education. In response to this phenomenon, a student from Central City Middle School provides a reasonable explanation.

YANRAN (A STUDENT/ A MEMBER OF STUDENT COUNCIL): The acceptance rate of our proposal is not very high. But if we can change our perspective, I think the feedback and solution given by teachers are reasonable. And I can feel the school leaders endeavour to provide a better environment at campus…… Sometimes students cannot consider as thorough as the staff, we may only see one aspect of the issue and the solution we provide might not be good enough. (Yanran, personal communication, June 15, 2018).

This resonates with the analysis in the former section that the school rule carried out by school staff constructs the boundary for students’ participation. As showed in the above quote, most students could get convinced by staff’s suggestions, as they usually consider their thoughts are not mature or complete. Moreover, as explained by Yanran, people’s judgement on this approach from the aspect of democracy does not purely rely on the acceptance rate. The communication between the two stakeholders and staff’s attitude all matter on the final judgement.

It is mentioned in both schools that even though students’ propositions cannot be accepted, if the staff shows a sincere attitude to support students rather than showing their superiority and antagonistic to students, people still conceive it as democratic practice. This refers to the importance of the type of relationship in democratic practice which will be analysed in the next chapter.

Activities highlighting whole students’ participation

As a young experimental school, the Sunflower Middle School creates more opportunities for all students’ participation. Rather than conferring the autonomy to a small amount of student delegates, some activities are designed to involve students as many as possible. Because it is believed by both students and the school staff that the various ways of encouraging students’ participation are the embodiment of democracy.

DEHUI (A SCHOOL LEADER): We consider education is a process which promotes human development, achievement, which helps people to discover themselves and become themselves. We hope students could become independent, free
and equal individuals. Considering this, we want to provide them an educational environment which promotes students’ all-around development, a democratic environment......Considering the status quo of education, we realize it focuses more on the knowledge transmission and lacks first-hand experience and real practice......Therefore, when designing of all kinds of activities, we always consider which part could be organized by students instead of teachers. (Dehui, personal communication, June 26, 2018)

This piece of commentary provides a nice explanation of democracy from the official position of school. Democratic education is conceived as a particular mode of education which attempts to promote students’ comprehensive development in comparison to the simple knowledge accumulation. Participation is adopted as a main approach to supplement the deficiency of rote learning and enhance students’ experience in practice. This implies that the school considers giving students many opportunities to participate, rather than simply telling them what to think could help them develop as better citizens. These all echoes with Dewey’s emphasis on learning through practice and experiencing.

Spring Outing Day

Based on this consideration, the mode of whole student participation is increasingly adopted in school activities in which the Spring Outing Day is the most popular activity among students. As a traditional activity implemented across the country, it is always planned and designed completely by the school staff in other schools. The most common process is described as “the principal chooses the trip destination, the school staff prepare for the transportation and the ticket, everything will be well arranged by teachers, then the activity is implemented by just taking students to the destination.” (Xiaodong, a teacher, personal communication, May 15, 2018) This means students do not have any chance to get involved in the process of arrangement. The activity becomes a simple sightseeing tour. While in Sunflower Middle School, the approach of all students’ participation is applied when organizing this activity. Resonating with the quote of the school leader Dehui, many school members express their approval on applying this approach for the aim of develop students’ various abilities for their future life.
HONGYI (A TEACHER): The Spring Outing is quite simple in many schools. It could be as simple as taking students to somewhere and bring them back. But why do we make it so complicated? They need to draft plans and attend the defense. Some plans which cannot pass the defense the first time due to various reasons such as the security issue need to take the defense for the second time. Actually, we spend a lot of time and energy on this event, why do we decide to do this? Because what matters is not the result of going out, it is the whole process in which students design, undertake the risk and responsibility and be able to experience. Our original intention of designing this new approach is to help students learn how to deal with a task, how to consider in a task. This is the most important lesson after they enter the society. They have to deal with tasks, make arrangements, collaborate with others all the time. (Hongyi, personal communication, May 24, 2018)

On account of this, the Sunflower Middle School reforms the traditional form of Spring Outing Day by rendering students getting in charge of the whole process.

XIAODONG (A TEACHER): In terms of the specific procedure, all students in each administrative class will first be formed into several groups. Each group makes a plan for the Spring Outing Day, and then demonstrates in front of all their classmates. All students within the class will vote to select a plan they want to implement. After further improved by all students, the final plan will then need to attend a defense to be questioned at the school level. (Xiaodong, personal communication, May 15, 2018)

In this activity, students can fully participate in the preparation work. They can make plans on the transportation, the meal, the expenditure and all relevant details by themselves which also required plenty of work before the defense. For instance, as for a class which intended to climb a mountain, several students were allocated with the work of trying the transportation first and calculating the average time on the way. But the final decision on their plan would need to be determined by the final defense.

The defense committee is made up of four student delegates, four teacher delegates and one responsible school leader. The final vote by the committee members determines if the administrative class can carry out their plans on the Spring Outing
Day. However, among the committee members, the responsible school leader has the veto power of which the vote has more weight than others and can decisively influence the result. If a plan wants to get approval, it needs to get the majority of approval votes from the whole committee which at the same time must include the approval from the responsible school leader. If the school leader disapproves the plan, no matter how many approval votes they get, the plan cannot proceed to the next stage. This reflects again that the boundary of student participation is clearly controlled by the school staff, another example of democratic centralism. Such role of guardian gets explained by some staff in relation with the Headmaster Responsibility System (校长负责制). With this system, the principal is entitled with the autonomy to manage the school life most of the time. But at the same time they are bearing the responsibility of doing a good job, which will be supervised by a higher level of education administration. The principal might get punished from the higher level if a problem emerges in the campus. This system indicates a wider control on the school practice, which is also a practice of democratic centralism in a wider scope.

In the practice of defense, each class group gets two chances to take the defense. If they failed the first time, questions and suggestions raised by the committee members could instruct them to make further improvement.

**The second defense of the proposal of the Spring Outing Day for some class groups at Sunflower Middle School:**

This activity was organized for those class groups who did not pass their first defense. Two students from each class would first give a presentation. The committee then raised questions and suggestions in terms of particular proposals. Each of the committee member including the student delegate, teacher delegate and a responsible school leader demonstrated their decisions by raising a sign with a tick on one side and a cross on the other side, which means approval and refusal respectively. No group failed again in this defense. (Observation, March 19, 2018)

Despite it is claimed those which cannot pass the defense for the second time will need to stay at campus on the event day, no plan failed twice until I finished my field work.
This once again certifies if only it conforms to the school rule, students’ participation is largely supported.

*Learning Trip*

Embracing the same intention, the Learning Trip is another activity designed to enhance all students’ participation. In response to the national advocacy of the social practice in education, increasing schools organize the Learning Trip which integrates students’ learning with the social life. Normally, to maintain order and ensure students’ security, students usually play the role of passive participants. They are normally organized to attend a series of activities such as visiting the museum and finishing the required assignment. On the basis of this, the *Sunflower Middle School* designs to improve the proportion of student participation. Before the Learning Trip, several working areas are provided as the options for students to choose. Specifically, they include the group of living management, the group of touring service, the group of activity planning, the group of publicity and report and the group of research. By attending each group, students need to undertake some additional work apart from simply taking the trip.

**A preparation day before starting the learning trip at Sunflower Middle School:**

Students in different groups first prepared for a proposal and formal presentation with the supervised teacher. I was walking around different classes observing students’ preparation for their presentation, when a school leader asked me to be the supervisor of a research group as a teacher was ill.

I was led to a class and introduced to a group of students: “This is teacher Wenchao, your research will be supervised by her, because your former supervisor is ill.” I then began to join students to understand their research and raise suggestions.

This class had four research groups, two were supervised by me. Two others were supervised by another teacher. The four research groups gave presentations respectively after suggestions. Me and another teacher with all students raised questions and suggestions for different research groups.
In the following section, all the research groups went to the auditorium to attend the presentation of the group of living management, the group of touring service, the group of activity planning and the group of publicity. They demonstrated their arrangements of the trip and gave introduction and advices about the trip for students from the aspect of accommodation, the weather forecast, the cloth suggestion and so forth. There was also a question and answer session which allowed all the participants to understand this upcoming trip better. (Observation, November 03, 2017)

TIANDI (A TEACHER): Students who choose the group of living management get involved in regulating students. Frankly speaking, it is related to basic living aspect such as food and accommodation……The group of touring service is responsible to give introductions of the upcoming spot of visiting on the way before arrival……The group of activity planning is in charge of designing some competitions or activities in accordance with the feature of destination and some useful abilities for students. For example, as for the past Learning Trip, the group of activity planning designed an activity of Interesting Museum which required students to answer questions after visiting the museum……Another activity was Experiencing Fire by Rubbing Sticks……Students competed to see who can make a fire first……The research group students need to choose a instructing teacher, considering the research topic and the data needs to be collected……The group of publicity and report takes charge of taking photos and write report to post on social media through school’s official account. (Tiandi, personal communication, May 30, 2018)

In this activity, several options are designed by the staff to promote students’ participation. While no matter which group students participate, there would be one teacher accompany with them who acts as a supervisor to give students suggestions and guarantee the practice does not violate the school rule at the same time. The boundary of participation appears again with staff’s control in the practice of all the group. While actually the provided options have already framed a general boundary of participation. Students have the autonomy to make any choice among the options to participate in certain activity, whereas they have no choice except those options.
The Formulation of Student Convention

As for the creation of school rules, the regular approach adopted by the majority of schools in China is the school staff designs the rules. In Sunflower Middle School, the basic school rule called the Student Convention is formulated with students’ highly participation. At the preliminary stage of the school establishment, all the students participated in creating the Convention.

HONGYI (A TEACHER): When creating the Convention, the content is discussed [again and again] by different layers. [First,] every student [in each administrative class] raised specific things they cannot do at campus……Then the ideas were discussed by all students within class to organize the important terms. Finally, all the items [raised by each class] were combined together on the school level as the Student Convention. (Hongyi, personal communication, May 24, 2018)

It could be said the Convention is composed with all students’ wisdom. Based on these ideas, some novel items are created, such as students need to wear the school uniform from Monday to Thursday, but on Friday they can wear their own clothes. However, one critical step is neglected in this quote. All the terms need to get the approval from the school staff before officially being implemented. This again manifests the boundary of participation is continuously kept by the school staff.

Concluded from the practice of student agency and school activities, the promotion of participation stands out as a critical principle of democratic education. Participants’ understanding about experience and democracy largely mirrors Dewey’s argument about democratic education. In the field, this does not explicitly involve promoting students’ learning about democracy through experience and participation, but this is the underlying principle behind what can be seen in practice. In other words, in a very Deweyan manner, students’ comprehension about democracy is enhanced experientially, even if this is not addressed explicitly. While the specific practice of participation is actually practiced within a general structure of democratic centralism, participation is always supervised by the school staff to ensure they conform to the school rules which in fact constructs a boundary for the practice of participation.
exam and assessment system also shows its influence on participation, but its influence is not as explicit and strong as the school rule in this area.

**Pedagogy and classroom practice**

In curriculum, some content about democracy is embodied in the course of politics in both research schools, but directly teaching the content of democracy is not perceived as part of democratic education by participants per se. Both students and staff conceive democratic education as the educational practice which is carried with a democratic style rather than teaching the content of democracy directly. This resonates with many participants’ comprehensions that political democracy is separated from the educational democracy, which demonstrates a quite cautious attitude on political democracy in line with the general social atmosphere discussed in chapter 3.

In light of this, in both schools, democracy is attached to the teaching method of the operational curriculum and the approach of choosing class, which refer to the pedagogy and classroom practice. The mode of democratic class is often adopted to describe the class which has transformed the teaching method from passive knowledge transmission to more student-involved methods, which accords with both Dewey’s and Freire’s argument on teaching method about avoid passive and banking teaching. Hence, participation is once more highlighted in the classroom practice.

**SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:**

DEHUI (A SCHOOL LEADER): The process of learning depends on individual himself. It is the result of his/her own thinking. If he/she does not think by himself, teachers cannot put the knowledge in his/her brain. If he/she does not think, the lesson taught by teachers cannot be become knowledge, but just the static information. From this aspect, students should participate in the learning process. (Dehui, personal communication, June 26, 2018)

**CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:**

DANJIE (A TEACHER): If everything is done by teachers, students cannot learn. It means if you really want to internalize the knowledge, you need to do things
personally, to participate in the process. Only in this way can you truly learn. (Danjie, personal communication, May 11, 2018)

In both schools, this argument is endorsed by many teachers. It is considered the transformation of more students’ participation in class has become a national trend, which corresponds with the national education policy and the theory of brain science and psychology. The most frequently quoted governmental document is the Outline of the National Medium- and Long-Term Program for Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) in which the integration of thinking and learning, the approach of participative teaching are explicitly advocated for the cultivation of creative talents to serve the national target of good citizens’ cultivation. In practice, such new teaching methods are also welcome by students.

**SUNFLWOER MIDDLE SCHOOL:**

RESEARCHER: In comparison between the traditional teaching methods which require teachers speaking all the time and students always listening and writing notes and the student-involved teaching method, which one do you prefer?

XUHUI (A STUDENT): The second one. Because the first type of teaching methods can easily make us sleepy.

ZEXUAN (A STUDENT): Yes.

XUHUI: When teachers lecturing, they are always excited, but we feel…

ZEXUAN: Dull and dry.

……

XUHUI: [For the new type of teaching methods,] our participation is increased, the extent of understanding the knowledge increases too. (Xuhui, Zexuan, focus group, January 12, 2018)

**CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:**
MINGBO (A STUDENT): The method I prefer is we can conduct some group work, to do some small research and find the result by ourselves. (Mingbo, personal communication, January 15, 2018)

On account of such internal acknowledgement by teachers and students as well as the external policy support, a reform of teaching approach is conducted in both schools. In Sunflower Middle School, students’ participation has become a basic requirement for all the class teaching.

RESEARCHER: It seems there are several basic requirements for the class teaching at school, may I request you to summarize them?

YIZHUANG: The first one for the teaching design, teachers should render students to participate more in the class. The second one is teachers must give certain instructions. Students are not allowed do whatever they want to make the class has no focus. There must be some main points highlighted in each class. The third one, as for the teaching content, some particular content chosen or sharing by students could be used as the supplement content in the part of knowledge extension. (Yizhuang, May 15, 2018)

This practice once again indicates the model of democratic centralism as students’ participation is supervised by teachers all the time. The instruction here becomes the boundary of students’ participation. In practice, this instruction includes the guidance of the learning content which guarantees the completion of certain teaching plan. It also involves the implementation of the class rule and the school rule in which the role of teacher becomes the guardian of the participation constraint again.

To support these educational conceptions, students’ seats are adjusted to cultivate a participation friendly environment. In contrast to the most widely used seats arrangement in China, by which the seats are arranged in separate lines and rows, the Sunflower Middle School organizes students’ seats into groups in almost every classroom. With such ideological and environmental support, teachers of various courses design a lot of in-class activities to promote students’ communication and participation in the course of teaching.

A PHYSICS CLASS (IN THE PHYSICS LABORATORY):
The teacher demonstrated a picture taken by students and used the picture to introduce the topic of this lesson: the image of a plane mirror.

Raised questions: what do you think is object distant can image distance? Students raised their hands and answered questions.

The teacher instructed students to raise questions by themselves and find the result by doing experiments.

Students conducted experiments in groups. Each student undertook different tasks including recording the data, using the instruments and discussing with each other. At the same time, the teacher walked around students to check their progress.

A group of students found a new approach to do the experiment; the teacher encouraged other students to talk with them.

A while later when almost all students had finished the experiment, the teacher asked different groups of students to demonstrate the process and result of their experiments.

Class finished. (Observation, October 10, 2017)

A POLITICS CLASS (IN AN ADMINISTRATIVE CLASSROOM):

A student went in front of the classroom and gave an oral analysis of the one-week holiday. (I asked some students after class about this activity, they said it is a compulsory activity that every student needed to give an oral speech on a piece of recent news in turn.)

The student analyzed the advantage and disadvantage of the holiday for the whole country. Finally, he gave some suggestions for solving the problem.

Other students randomly stood up to give comments or express different opinions. Sometimes they even debated with each other. (It is a very lively occasion.)

At last, the teacher supplemented some points from his point of view and gave a general comment. (This activity costs about 20 minutes)
After this activity, the teacher began the new class. (Observation, October 10, 2017)

A CHINESE LANGUAGE CLASS (AT A SCHOOL TEACHING SEMINAR):

The class was organized as a simulative bid for the creation of a book cover and book spine of O. Henry’s collected work. Students designed either of them based on their comprehension of O. Henry’s writings in the previous class.

In this class, different students first demonstrated the reasons of their designs. Then students discussed about each design within group and used the writing of O. Henry as the basis to explain their opinions. iPad was used as the tool to record their discussions. At last, students voted for all the designs.

After teaching, the teacher gave a short explanation about the teaching design. Specifically, the design of book cover aimed to help students summarize the writing style of O. Henry’s novel, while the creation of the book spine could help them to generalize the key features of the author’s writing. Students also got involved in designing these activities. “All the activities are designed with students, they gave me a lot of suggestions.” (Observation, October 19, 2017)

A piece of field note for the atmosphere of the class teaching at Sunflower Middle School:

In most of the classes in Sunflower Middle School, students are quite lively in the class. After the teacher raised a question, students are actively and enthusiastically to answer questions. Teachers do not strictly require students to keep quiet …… but students do not talk all the time. Although teachers do not particularly regulate students, students usually listened to teachers quietly after their autonomous discussion. (Field reflection, April 02, 2018)

In these classes, the class rule is not as strict as that in some conventional schools. Teachers no longer regulate students to keep silence with strict discipline requirements, which releases more space for students’ engagement in class. But there are a series of rules implemented, such as students’ talking needs to be related to the class learning. On account of the encouragement of student engagement, the class usually has a lively atmosphere in comparison with the classroom practice in conventional schools. At the
same time, the proportion, the form of participation vary a lot which could attribute to the difference between courses and specific teaching contents.

HONGYI (A TEACHER): Actually, participation is related to the teaching content……For example, sometimes the operation of the experiment in my course (biology) is quite complicated. [When teaching about these operations,] there is not much space for students to develop thinking, it is just standard operation……As for one experiment which takes two classes. That experiment is very complicated. Students need to observe the heart of the little animal which is very difficult. They need to learn how to observe and how to count the heartbeat. All these need precise scientific methods as the premise, which can make the next step [in the second class], designing experiments, become possible and meaningful. But in the first class, it is hard to let student explore by themselves, they would play and waste time. The class will end with very low efficiency. (Hongyi, personal communication, May 21, 2018)

Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of this teaching approach by the majority of teachers has made students’ participation in class become normalization. The advocacy of participation also extends to the off-class activities and assignments. Many course activities after class are organized to offer students more opportunities to learn through participation. These activities are usually organized by particular Course Teaching and Research Groups. For example, the Course Teaching and Research Group of Politics develops activity of Politics Analysis. In this activity, students introduce the news and express their analysis in the form of speech.

The activity of Talent Show of political analysis at Sunflower Middle School:

All students from this campus came to an auditorium as the audience or participants in this activity. Most students listened carefully. The activity hosts were two students, the photographer was also a student.

The host first introduced the rule of the activity: each group included three students. One student made the introduction, one gave the presentation and the other student gave some comments for the analysis.
The presentation began. Each group discussed a contemporary topic of politics. Twelve groups specifically discussed eleven topics (two groups selected the same topic):

- Kim Jong-un visited China
- Trash recycling
- Gun controlling at US
- Analyzing the social phenomenon of laying more stress on science than arts from the new universities
- Seeing the period of big data from the information disclosure of Facebook
- The gun controlling: is it imperative or impossible to do?
- The US-China trade war
- Females are as excellent as their male peers, to become important people of the Chinese nation
- The North and South Korea issue
- The cross-strait issue
- The shooting accident in Parkland

The judge committee was made up of some officers from the educational department of the district and some teachers. All the officers and teachers were quite pleased about students’ analysis on different topics. (Observation, April 12, 2018)

There are also other off-class activities, one of which is the English Drama developed by the Course Teaching and Research Group of English. Every administrative class chooses and plays drama on a drama day. In this activity, students are expected to learn English through performance. These off-class activities have a similar function with other school activities. Their divergence lies on specific purposes, of which the off-
class activity mainly aims to improve students’ learning on certain courses, while other school activities intend to promote students’ comprehension of diverse issues on a more general level. Both types highlight gaining the knowledge and abilities through practice, which corresponds with Dewey’s idea of instrumentalism and his preference of a student-engaged pedagogy. In practice, the class rules and school rules frame a boundary of student participation in class, but some teachers still seem confused on the exact location of the boundaries and applying these in practice.

YUYI (A TEACHER): Because of the emphasis on students’ involvement in class, some teachers neglect the importance of teaching basic knowledge. Too much time is spending on designing and organizing learning activities……Some activities also consume plenty of time after class……Students’ energy is limited……they usually need to prepare a lot of demonstrations with PowerPoint after school, which sometimes makes them feel sleepy in class. (Yuyi, personal communication, May 03, 2018)

A piece of field note about the contradiction of time and energy:

It seems the time arrangement of different activities still needs to be improved. Sometimes students need to attend a lot of activities during the same period of time …… This is also agreed by teachers and school leaders in the field. The better way of students’ participation is still under exploration. (Field reflection, May 03, 2018)

It is obvious the more time spent on the learning activity, the less time could be applied for strengthening students’ basic knowledge. Such time allocation problem urges the staff to reflect on the design of students’ participation. In their analysis, some staff attribute to the teachers’ understanding on this method.

DEHUI (A SCHOOL LEADER): Teachers’ previous experience is always influential which would lead teachers to work as before. In the situation when the time is limited and the teaching content is abundant, teachers on one hand appreciate the approach of students’ engagement, on the other hand they worry this approach consumes too much time……Does the activities fundamentally contradict with the basic knowledge teaching? Or does it because teachers do
not understand the teaching method according to the current context, but simply conceive the learning activities and the traditional methods are separated? (I think) it is this comprehension which gives rise to the contradiction.…..In terms of the negative views, it is often because they do not regard themselves as participants [of the teaching approach reform], but as commenters. So, I think one solution is increasing teachers’ recognition and creativity in practice. (Dehui, personal communication, June 26, 2018)

Except from this, students’ ability is also treated as another influencing factor of the time issue. “Sometimes because students are not familiar with the process of doing certain activities, they spend plenty of time on the preparation.” (Yuyi, a teacher, personal communication, May 03, 2018) In the face of this practical dilemma, most teachers are very confused and concerned as they are bearing the duty of teaching a good class. In many conventional schools, teachers’ nice control on the class and students’ exam result are the main basis to judge if the teacher carries the duty well.

**A piece of field note about the assessment for teaching in conventional schools:**

By talking with teachers, it seems the assessment for teachers’ teaching ability in conventional schools has two main standards: one is students’ exam outcome; the other one is the observation and evaluation of the class teaching. In terms of the observation and evaluation of teaching classes, one important requirement is teachers can control students, and the class is not disordered. This also consists with my former experience of attending the activity of observation and evaluation of teaching classes in various schools. The quietness and order are argued by many educators as a basic requirement for a good class. (Field reflection, March 19, 2018)

If teachers do not meet the expectation from these two aspects, they may get criticized or some sort of punishment because of their work. In Sunflower Middle School, such rules have been eliminated, which provides more space for teachers’ work, but many teachers consider the judgmental basis of a good class is taken away at the same time. Because of this, these two aspects, particularly the exam result, is considered to adjust the classroom practice which construct a narrower boundary of students’ participation. When students’ exam result decreases, teachers would reduce the time of participation
in class and put more effort on imparting the knowledge and doing exercise. While if the exam result is good, the teacher may consider to design more participatory learning activities. Nevertheless, the judgement on these two aspects become another problem. As there is not a fixed criterion, teachers’ perceptions vary a lot, which makes the boundary become quite personal and flexible. This once again demonstrates the dilemmas caused by the dilemma lies in trying to integrate a bottom-up process of encouraging participation which values openness and discussion, as opposed to the top-down pressure coming from exam results and the a transmission style of teaching which focuses more on rote-learning and memorization.

In this tide of teaching transformation, the Central City Middle School does not lag behind either. A school-wide project of promoting Learning Activities which underlines students’ engagement in class is implemented at school for all courses.

In correspondence with this revolution, a series of teachers’ activities are carried out to discuss on this topic. From the whole-school teaching conference to the meetings of each Course Teaching and Research Group, Learning Activity becomes a heated discussion topic. In addition, the seminar of class teaching to explore the implementation of learning activities is organized by course in each week. On the seminar, a particular designed class applying the Learning Activities would be firstly taught and observed by other teachers. Then, all the teacher participants will develop a discussion on the class design, the effects and so forth.

Similar to Sunflower Middle School, the general comprehension of Learning Activity also aims to improve students’ thinking quality and learning quality. In comparison, Sunflower Middle School extends the scope of student participation a bit further in practice. But both schools emphasize more on students’ engagement than conventional schools.

A piece of field note about the teaching style:

The teaching style and class atmosphere at Central City Middle School is different from that of Sunflower Middle School. It seems students at Sunflower Middle School prefer to talk more in class …… The teaching pace is controlled in a nicer way in most classes in Central City Middle School.
There are opportunities for students to engage in the teaching process. The most frequently used method is raising questions …… most teachers are amiable, kind and friendly. Students are able to express their ideas and discuss with teachers and classmates. (Field reflection, March 21, 2018)

Paying more attention on the efficiency of class, teachers conceive the learning activity should not be the reason to slow down the in-class teaching progress. This leads to an endorsement on the relevant quiet thinking activities.

XIAOQING (A TEACHER): The knowledge taught in the class in which students organizing activity by themselves is very little. It emphasizes more on experiencing, but this experiencing is very slow. There are so many knowledge accumulated from human’s history, how much can be experienced in a class? ……The promotion of learning activity just aims to provide an option for teachers…… We have to explore how to maintain a high efficiency. (Xiaoqing, personal communication, May 28, 2018)

NINGJUAN (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): Based on the comprehension of learning activities, many people think learning activity should be concrete and visible in which teachers usually stand back and students need to experience the process of self-organizing, exploration, communication, demonstration, evaluations and so on. But I think learning activities could be permeated into different teaching parts……For example, when an experiment is in need to demonstrate some experimental phenomenon, I would express what kind of experiment I will do, I will ask them to pay attention on the experiment and tell them what we will observe. In this process, teachers can control the teaching process well, upon which we can promote students’ thinking by using learning activities. [After I do the experiment] I may ask: “Can we design an experiment to solve the problem?” Students can discuss and raise their ideas……I may invite some students to do another experiment with me……But I can give full ten minutes to students. (Ningjuan, personal communication, May 22, 2018)

Teachers’ control on the in-class learning process still gets more emphasis for the sake of completing the teaching plan and the learning efficiency. Owing to this, the line-
and-row seating layout and a relative strict discipline requirement are adopted to avoid students talking about irrelevant things and wasting their learning time in class. In comparison to the relative tight constraint on students’ participation in class, students’ direct learning experience is mainly enhanced by off-class course activity. Similar to Sunflower Middle School, many activities are designed by the Course Teaching and Research Groups. As for the two famous activities, the English Drama and poetry recitation, students participate in the whole process including choosing the content, audition, rehearsal and performance.

**The observation of the activity of poetry recitation (at an auditorium) at Central City Middle School:**

This activity was organized by grade ten. So the organizers, participants and audience were from the same grade group. The activity was mainly designed and organized by the teaching preparation group of Chinese Language, assisted by students from one administrative class.

Each administrative class performed their poetry recitation on the stage. The poetry, the background music, the performers’ clothes were all designed by the students in their classes.

All the students were thrilled about the creativity of different class groups. It was a very lively and interesting activity which promoted students’ participation while learning the poetry. It changed the traditional boring situation of learning difficult poetries. (Observation, March 22, 2018)

These practice reveals students’ engagement is promoted in the activity in and off class. But it also reveals that this encouragement is within the structure framed by various requirements and rules at school, which reflects a practice of democratic centralism in the practice of teaching and learning.

Except from the teaching approach, the new method for choosing class is also attached to democracy. In both schools, the traditional approach of class organizing is reformed, by which students are taught by the fixed teacher allocated to each administrative class. Students have no choice on teachers or the teaching style. It is the teacher instead of students who move between the allocated administrative classes to teach. As for the
new approach, some autonomy is released to students to provide more opportunities for students’ participation. The entire list of the provided courses with particular teachers or specific features of the course is offered for students to choose. Each teacher is fixed in a classroom, and all the students who select the course with that teacher move from their administrative classroom to the course classroom. As this breaks the situation that all students are fixed in one classroom with all the same classmates, it is named as the Mobile Learning System which shows students are moving between classrooms all the time to attend the class that is more suitable for them. Participants believe this system could help students to understand different learning styles and how to make appropriate decisions in accordance to their needs in practice.

In Sunflower Middle School, three courses are organized with the Mobile Learning System, which include Chinese Language, English Language and Math. For each course, the school provides three options based on the difference in teaching styles. In terms of the first option, teachers would provide more instructions with a less proportion of students’ engagement which is called Instructional Learning Class. The second option named as Exploring Learning Class emphasizes more on students’ exploration rather than teachers’ guidance. Despite of the different emphases, these two options are normal class, while the third option is the Self-study Learning Class of which the teacher only acts as an assistant. All students are entitled with the autonomy to choose from these three options. Since the required ability for these three options are divergent, students’ choices are usually quite rational. When making the decision, students usually consider their regular learning experience, exam result and their preference of teaching style synthetically. Hence the scenario that many students rush to the relaxed teaching style does not appear. But the staff still employ a regulation in case the course students choose is not suitable for them, and the exam result is used as a judgement basis, which sets limitation on students’ participation. This reflects the mode of democratic centralism is always ready to enact.

RESEARCHER: If a student who chooses the Self-study Learning Class is not good at learning this course, will he/she be allocated to the Instructional Learning Class?
ZEXUAN (A STUDENT): For example, if his regular exam score at the Self-study Learning Class or the mid semester exam is lower than the average score of the Instructional Learning Class, he will be arranged to the Instructional Learning Class. (Zexuan, focus group, November 12, 2018)

In Central City Middle School, courses arranged with the Mobile Learning system are more diverse. The course includes Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Math, History, Politics and Geography. The class options are not designed by the teaching style, but by students’ future plan and the evaluation system.

YANGBING (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): We construct a class structure by providing four options on each course, which are P Level (Professional Level), A Level (Advanced Level), R Level (Regular Level), and B Level (Basic Level) …… [Take the course of Physics as an example,] If students want to choose physics as their major in the university, want to find a job related to physics and find themselves are good at learning it, they can choose the P Level class for Physics. If they do not want to study physics as the main major, but want to choose some discipline which has a close relationship with physics, they can choose the A Level class. If they just want to pass the College Entrance Examination, they would need R Level. If their requirement is lower, just want to pass the graduate test, they may need B Level. Therefore, we construct this structure according to students’ developing plan and the related assessment system. (Yangbing, personal communication, January 25, 2018)

Students are allowed to choose and apply first, then the school staff would help to make the final decision. In practice, teachers report the decision on choosing the P Level are quite rational, as those students have a clear understanding on their plan and their learning result. But the application for A, R, B Level are confused, since many students are not very clear about their own situation and the future plan. This leads to a phenomenon that the majority of students choose A Level, and seldom students choose R Level and B level. In this case, the school staff would consider students’ learning experience and exam result to make the final decision on the class allocation. Hence, when the problem caused by participation cannot be solved, the control and limitation are applied again.
As a novel area which has inadequate experience, there are not many rules developed about the Mobile Learning System nationally. The difference in practice discloses the school and teachers’ diverse comprehension of education which become another source of constraint on students’ participation.

Participants’ comprehension of democracy on pedagogy and the classroom practice makes the principle of participation stand out again. But similar to the practice in the area of school activity, students’ participation is always accompanied by limitation and constraints. This demonstrates that democratic centralism is also applied in the area of pedagogy and classroom practice. The basis of constraint mainly includes the school rule, the exam result and teachers’ conception of education. The school staff take charge of executing the mode of democratic centralism and acts as the guardian of the participation boundary.

Summary

Drawn from the practice of school activity and curriculum, the principle of participation emerges as a critical aspect of democratic education. Both research schools put a lot of efforts on creating more opportunities for student participation. Their purpose of enriching students’ knowledge and enhancing their abilities through practice accords with Dewey’s idea of instrumentalism. The transformation of the conventional and passive teaching method which corresponds with both Dewey’s and Freire’s ideas further promotes students’ participation inside and outside the classroom.

From these two aspects, participants’ comprehension on democratic education highlights students’ learning and development with the approach of participation. But this participatory emphasis is not built from a liberal perspective, rather it is framed within the structure of Chinese socialist democracy, particularly the model of democratic centralism. The supervision from school staff appears everywhere across all sorts of activities. They are those who enable democratic centralism function in practice, and the basis for them to consider includes rules and some evaluation result. This result echoes with the literature analysis that Dewey’s theory has great influence on Chinese democratic education, while his political conception was erased in practice.
The advocacy of participation also conforms to the evolution of Chinese democracy. As a descendant of socialist democracy, China’s democracy inherits the participatory mechanism of People’s Congress in which people’s ideas are reported up the hierarchy to the central government where final decisions are made. While in the face of the dilemma in democratic practice brought by the essential top-down feature, both the government and political scholars deliberate on the conception of participatory democracy and identify its compatibility with China’s democracy and the governing idea of the Communist Party of China (CPC) to solve the contradictions in practice. Some scholars represented by Dong (2014) argue citizen’s participation in politics is an important aspect in the development of China’s socialist democracy to advance China’s democracy as an integration of top-down design and bottom-up design. Liang (2006) proposes the exploration of participatory democracy is a useful way to promote citizens to learn the knowledge of democracy, develop relevant capabilities and cultivate democratic awareness. It could be recognized the endeavor of promoting students’ participation in school exactly coincides with the practical attempts of improving China’s democracy at a national level.

The enhancement of participation in school is embodied with various practice including endowing the autonomy, encouraging expression, providing options and so forth. However, similar to the exploration of participation in the area of politics within the whole country, the exploration of school participation is also in the preliminary stage at which the rules are still being developed. Most of the various practice are designed randomly on certain event for the simple aim of providing more space for student participation. As a leader from Sunflower Middle School expresses

DEHUI(A SCHOOL LEADER): [The difference between the participation practice] is not particular designed, it is gradually evolved by both teachers’ and students’ efforts…… What we always consider is how to give more chances for students to participate, to experience and to practice.” (Dehui, personal communication, June 26, 2018)

Although not being directly explained in Central City Middle School, such logic is also observed in practice. Hence, the principle of participation is continuously underlined in practice, while the specific tenets of participation are still under exploration.
In the field, the activity of raising suggestions operate as an imitation of the People’s Congress and the system of student delegates are similar to the people’s deputies in People’s Congress. The practice of democratic centralism and consultative democracy are embodied in the course of student participation all the time, which matches the political idea of constructing an integrated top-down and bottom-up design of China’s democracy.

As a focus issue of how to integrate the top-down and bottom-up design in terms of China’s democracy, this is also reflected in the school practice of democratic education. With the promotion of student participation, the constraint and boundary employed in the mode of democratic centralism are explored at the same time. Being composed of the school rules, teachers’ experience and common sense as well as the exam result, the boundary is applied in different areas and always guarded by all the school staff. In practice, most participants including students and the school staff deem the limitation and control are necessary and acceptable. Although the space of negotiation is provided in various activities, seldom students challenge the boundary defended by the staff. Whereas as the diverse comprehension of the balance, the boundary dynamically changes all the time with different staff and specific issues, which gives rise to a main practical problem of how to normalize and rationalize the boundary.

In short, this chapter primarily examines the bottom-up endeavor on the practice of democratic participation in schools. In the next chapter, the top-down part which directly refers to the practice of democratic centralism and its relevant aspect, the democratic relationship, reflected in school practice will be discussed.
Chapter 7: Analysis from the Aspect of Interpersonal Relationship and Decision-making: the Approach of Democratic Centralism

Introduction

Following chapter six, this chapter will analyse another two areas of school life which provide examples of democratic practice. In the previous chapter, the two areas of focus, school activity and curriculum, referred to the main working tasks of the institute. In this chapter, we focus on interpersonal relationships and the approach to decision-making in the schools, which could be perceived as the code of conduct for living and working at school.

Interpersonal relationship

As the consequence of people’s interaction, relationships are like an invisible but constant thread which permeates every corner of the school life. In both schools, a lot of participants say the interpersonal relationship is a significant element for making the judgement of democratic practice. The particular relationship supports democracy and applies democratic principles are referred as democratic relationship. In the light of people’s different roles, the democratic relationship can be considered in two contexts, the relationship between school staff and students, as well as the relationship between the teachers and the school leader.

Relationship between students and the school staff

As an institution whose main mission is educating students and promoting students’ development, the relationship between students and teachers are commonly deemed as the primary relationship among others. When analysing this type of relationship, the phenomenon of teachers’ strict control is frequently cited, by teachers and students, as an example of a coercive relationship in contrast to democratic education.

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:

JIANGHONG (A TEACHER): [In addition to students’ in-class participation,] another aspect of democracy is the relationship between teachers and students. Teachers should not oppress student all the time with their absolute authority and dignity [as the traditional way]. Always thinking I am the teacher, you are
the student, you must obey me. Keeping a straight face every day, and never talk with students. Whenever they talk, it is nothing but rebuke and criticism. I think this kind of relationship is not harmonious, not democratic. (Jianghong, personal communication, March 06, 2018)

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:

XINYU (A STUDNET): [In my former school,] the daily regulation was very strict which aimed to improve our compliance and concentration on learning …… In terms of the in-class discipline, my previous school was very strict. For example, we must sit as required. And every time we wanted to express our opinion, we must raise our hands …… [If we do not do that,] the teacher would scold us. (Xinyu, personal communication, January 22, 2018)

As revealed in these quotes, such strict control by teachers is considered as the antithesis of democratic relationship. The problems caused by this approach provide a reference or comparator to help us understand the practice of democratic relationships in our study schools. A non-coercive relationship between students and teachers corresponds with Freire’s idea that the mutual learning is beneficial for both groups and indicative of a democratic process.

The first problem emphasized most in the field is this approach creates too much impediments for the teacher-student communication. “For instance, when we ask teachers questions, because it involves communicating with teachers, we would feel very nervous or so.” (Yanda, a student, personal communication, May 17, 2018) Under this situation, students attempt to avoid expressing their thoughts to teachers to stay away from the potential rebuke unless they are obliged to speak, which makes teachers hardly know students’ real ideas or their learning situation. Based on this, the first feature of democratic relationship, as outlined by students and teachers in the research schools, is described as promoting better communication between teachers and students. This lays a good foundation for students’ participation within the structure of democratic centralism.
On account of this, the various expression-promoted school activity and curriculum practice, which are introduced in the previous chapter, are elaborated iteratively by participants as the concrete measures for a democratic relationship.

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:

TIANDI (A TEACHER): Every semester, our school organizes an activity called Good Idea. When it comes to the end of each semester, students are allowed to raise their suggestions for the school life. Is not this equal relationship? When conducting some activities or work, we would also collect students’ opinions. (Tiandi, personal communication, May 30, 2018)

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:

GUANGXIU (A STUDENT): I think the relationship between teachers and students is nice……In class, because of such teaching approach [which promotes students’ engagement], we definitely would like to express our opinions……we can express ourselves, let them hear our ideas……this kind of teaching approach could cultivate a better relationship between both sides. (Guangxiu, personal communication, June 12, 2018)

In practice, many school members consider the implementation of such practice opens up the real communication channels between teachers and students. This shows again its intimate relationship with the approach of participation. With the creation of such measures, both teachers and students believe the inequality between teachers and students is gradually diminished. This elicits the second feature of democratic relationship proposed in the field, which is the staff’s conception of equality towards students. In addition to the structural rationality provided by certain form of activity in class and after class, teachers’ conception of students’ role and status is perceived as an important influencing factor for democratic relationship.

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:

YANGBING (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): When you (the teacher) really treat the student as a person, treat him as an equal person as you, it is very democratic. For example, you do not regard him as a passive receiver of the
information. You would like to talk with him. I would like to share the process of seeking knowledge of my course and how did the predecessor conduct the research. [In that case,] I am not commanding, I am equal with the student. And in the course of my sharing, I would present my own thought and judgement, and student can question me……In this way, I am treating the student as an equal person with me……In other words, I am not imparting the knowledge, I am teaching them the approach of learning. In this way, I am treat him/her as the one who has the equal dignity with me, as an active learner rather than an information receiver. Even more, we may need to learn something from them. (Yangbing, personal communication, January 25, 2018)

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:

YUANBING (A SCHOOL LEADER): Last semester, our school took part in an overall evaluation for school’s development. We got a very high score on the affection interaction between teachers and students …… I think one of the important reasons is that teacher does not regulate students in a coercive or mandatory way. It (the management) is based on the conception of trust, respect and treating students as real humans …… when communicating with students, we often consider from two aspects: if I was a child and if the student was my child……These assist teachers to think from the perspective of student. (Yuanbing, personal communication, March 19, 2018)

Certain forms of activity guarantee the opportunity for communication within the institution, but the quality and frequency of communication is described as depending on staff’s understanding on the role of students and their attitudes towards students’ status. With this conception, they said they would like to show their respect, trust and explain their thoughts to students. Teacher Yuanbing from Central City Middle School also mentions a mutual learning relationship between teachers and students. This is similar to both the Confucian idea that teaching could benefit both students and teachers(教学相长) and the reciprocal relationship advocated by Freire. Intertwined with the encouraging channel of expression, the conception of respecting, trusting students manage to increase both teachers’ and students’ willingness on
communicating with each other. But the encouragement on communication is still arranged and led by teachers, which reflects the mode of democratic centralism.

In practice, many teachers tend to seek students’ opinions before making decisions, and a lot of students also develop a habit of seeking suggestions from teachers. The content of communication covers all areas of the school life in both schools which is not limited to the learning issues. For example, in Central City Middle School, the school leader used to arrange a series of talks for the sake of seeking opinions from students on the lunch problem. In consideration of reallocation of lunch time due to severe crowding in the canteen, some students suggested this solution would have negative influence on their afternoon learning, based on which the previous solution of reallocating lunch time was cancelled and the new solution was still under exploration until I finished my fieldwork. In Sunflower Middle School, the issue of dormitory allocation, the usage of iPad and so forth have all been negotiated between the school staff and students. In addition to the area related to the campus life, in both schools the communication area is also extended to students’ personal life and feelings.

**SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:**

DAHAO: For example, one of my classmates planned to take a trip in another country. And there was one teacher in our school who studied in that country before. So that student went to talk with that teacher directly, asking which university the teacher had been to……The teacher gave him some detailed introduction and recommendation on the places that were worth visiting. (Dahao, personal communication, June 01, 2018)

RANXUAN (A STUDENT): Many students would like to share their confusions of life with teachers, which are not about academic learning. For example, the pressure they bear and the difficulty they envisage in life. Some girls would cry with teachers if they do not get a good exam result……the teacher would comfort them just like a big sister……I think it is because of the equal relationship, they would like to open their heart and express their confusions. The teachers are the advisors who can help us to plan for our life. (Ranxuan, personal communication, May 28, 2018)
CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:

GUANGXIU (A STUDENT): Including the after class [communication], our consultation with teachers is increasingly not limited to learning knowledge, it also involves organizing activities, instructions for psychology and other aspects of our growth. All of these we can talk with teachers. If we come across some problems, we can communicate with them. This does improve the relationship between teachers and students, which makes us feel teachers are friends. A teacher could have many roles. In class, he is a person who teaches or discuss the knowledge with us. While after class, he could be a friend or a thoughtful sister if a female teacher. (Guangxiu, personal communication, June 12, 2018)

Considering as a distinct phenomenon which shows the mutual preference of communication, this is also adopted to explain the third feature of democratic relationship, which is a closer and warmer relationship in comparison to the distanced and cold relationship often found in traditional schools. A prevalent behaviour of Chinese teachers is showing their dignity by keeping a straight and grim face in front of students and maintaining quite a distance from them, which is conceived as an effective way of regulating students.

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:

NINGWEI (A TEACHER): In my former school…… the approach of centralism was used more. [In comparison to students,] I [teachers] am more powerful. Students basically had no rights, they just listened to my arrangements on learning and on other parts of school life. [In that case,] students were very obedient …… but it was pretty difficult to cultivate a harmonious relationship between students and teachers. When teachers are more powerful, the teacher-student relationship is not bad, it was indifferent …… this [harmonious] relationship [in my current school] could be barely seen in my former school. There I was the one gave orders which cannot be challenged by students …… such as “Stop talking! Do this. Do that” …… It was quite difficult for students and teachers to get close in such circumstance. (Ningwei, personal communication, May 16, 2018)
DAHAO (A STUDENT): In my former school, our relationship with mild teachers was ok …… but as for those strict teachers, when we saw them, we did not dare to make any sound and slip away tamely. (Dahao, personal communication. June, 01, 2018)

With this conception, teachers hardly talk anything that is not related to academic learning with students, and students do not dare to start a casual conversation either. It is very common that students escape in a haste whenever they see any teacher in many schools. Because “whenever teachers’ authority is challenged, or their dignity is not respected”, they would sharply rebuke students regardless of the situation. (Zeyan, a school leader, personal communication, July 04, 2018) Hence, this fearful distance is considered as another symbol of undemocratic relationship.

To alter this traditional approach, making jokes is considered by students and teachers as both a symbolic behaviour and a strategy for the development of a much closer relationship with warmth.

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:

NINGJUANG (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): Teachers and students do not have much different status……When we communicate with students, we would like to use appropriate expressions, gestures to show students that we trust them, we want to continue the talk with them……We would also make some jokes with students. For example, we may say: ‘we said do not study so hard, but you persist to study so hard and so good.’ Or ‘I just ask you to achieve the exam result of top twenty, but you persist to become top ten.’ This kind of joke is also inspirational. (Ningjuan, personal communication, May 22, 2018)

A piece of observation about teachers making jokes in class at Central City Middle School:

A CHEMISTRY CLASS (at an administrative classroom):

The teacher handed out the evaluated homework paper and presented the item on the screen, preparing to teach about it.

Student A: Teacher, I do not have that.
Teacher: Did you submit it? Or did you just swallow it (joking)?

Student A: I did not receive it.

Teacher: Then you can write it down.

Student A: But I do not have paper (joking).

Teacher: What about going to the toilet and find some (joking in a nice way)?

Student A and others laughed. (Observation, December 07, 2017)

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:

YANDA (A STUDENT): [The teacher-student relationship is] harmonious. Our school culture is pretty free. We can make jokes with teachers. (Yanda, personal communication, May 17, 2018)

HONGYI (A TEACHER): [The teacher-student relationship is relative equal in our school.] It not a big deal to make jokes with students. (Hongyi, personal communication, May 24, 2018)

A piece of observation about teachers making jokes in class at Sunflower Middle School:

A HISTORY CLASS (at an administrative classroom):

In the middle of the class, a boy began to massage the shoulder of another boy.

Teacher: What about giving me a shoulder massage (joking and reminding the student of paying attention on learning)?

Student A: Ok, but I will charge you (all students burst in to laughter).

Teacher: How much is it? I can consider if it is affordable.

Student: I will give you one yuan per hour (joking, students continued to laugh). (Observation, April 03, 2018)
In the educational system, the hierarchical teacher-student relationship existed for a very long time in China. This relationship is usually manifested as solemn and distant in which students should respect teachers seriously without making jokes. Many scholars attribute this phenomenon to the influence of the emphasis on teachers’ dignity and authority in Confucius philosophy in the traditional culture, and the teacher-centered thought of Kairov Ivan Andreevich from Soviet Union (He and Yan, 2012, Xu, 2000). Although the student-centered thought gets increasing attention since 20th century, especially following Dewey’s visit in China, the traditional relationship still could be seen everywhere (Xu, 2000, Shi, 2017). In contrast to this, the staff in both research schools regard making jokes as a useful technique to close the distance between the two groups. Students deem this signifies the teachers are approachable.

In addition to making some nice jokes, it is also popular in Sunflower Middle School that the two groups give some special nicknames for each other to show their affection and kindness. In the discourse system of Chinese, calling people’s full name is the official and distant way. Between people with closer relationship, the first name or a nickname are prevalent used to call each other. Among them, the nickname is funnier. But this is not largely applied in conventional schools. A few teachers may like to call students with their first names to show their amity, whereas students are basically banned to do that. The nicknames that students give to teachers are always considered as insult no matter what it means. Considering the possible insulting circumstance, there is a necessary premise for the usage of nicknames in Sunflower Middle School. All the nicknames need to obtain the consent from the receiver before being used, this is the basis to judge if the nickname is respectful or not.

JIANGHONG (A TEACHER): The teacher-student relationship in our school is similar to friends......We would call students more with their nicknames......In that case, students would feel our relationship is more amiable and natural. With such appellation, they do not have the distant feeling with teachers. (Jianghong, personal communication, March 06, 2018)

JIANGXIAO (A STUDNET): We have a good relationship with the teachers of all courses.

RESEARCHER: Is there any manifestations?
JIANGXIAO: We would give teachers special nick names……

RESEARCHER: Did your previous school not allow you to do this?……

XUHUI (A STUDENT): If we did that, we were actually seeking for rebuke.

JIANGXIAO: The teacher would scold us sharply.

RESEARCHER: What about now in your current school?

ZEXUAN (A STUDENT): First, we need to obtain the consent from the teacher. But the majority of teachers would accept the nickname we gave them……

XUHUI: Some teachers really like the nickname we give them.

RESEARCHER: They like?

XUHUI: Yes, they consider this is a happy thing. (Jiangxiao, Xuhui, Zexuan, focus group, January 12, 2018)

In Sunflower Middle School, the positive nicknames are welcomed by both teachers and students. They consider this technique could further improve the teacher-student relationship and add some interesting elements to make the relationship become more vital.

Except from the causal jokes and nick names, teachers’ support is considered as another way to maintain the closeness of a democratic relationship. In practice, many detailed behaviours are regarded as the support from a personal level. For example, in Central City Middle School, many teachers participate in students’ club activities when invited.

A piece of observation at Central City Middle School:

In the afternoon, two students visited my office and advertise their club activity. They said they are from the Bridge Club and intended to conduct a fundraising by organizing a Public Interest Party, of which the money was planned to donate for the bridge building in a remote village. I bought one ticket, so did some other teachers in the same office.
Teachers expressed their encouragements and students said they were really grateful for all the support from teachers. There were even some teachers in other offices who bought the tickets even they did not have time to attend the party. (Observation, January 04, 2018)

In Sunflower Middle School, when students organize some school activities, all the school staff including the principle would like to advertise for them through their own accounts of social media. “The principle’s social media account is full of the report of various student activities. Every student whenever he (or she) makes some improvement, the principle would write some compliment on the social media. I feel he is really proud of us.” (Ranxuan, a student, personal communication, May 28, 2018)

Some teachers also voluntarily help students with their academic learning.

A piece of observation at Sunflower Middle School:

XINGHONG (A TEACHER): (After the meeting of the grade group, teacher Xinghong talked with me in the corridor of the teaching building) I arranged a Pinyin (the pronunciation rule of Mandarin) class for students which will be taught later. Some students’ Pinyin is not good. So I told them I would give them some extra teaching about Pinyin after school, whoever is interested can attend my class.

I then attended and observed this Pinyin Class. Some students stayed after school to attend this class. The teacher made a good preparation with a nice presentation. All students listened carefully. (Observation, November 16, 2017)

It is considered such supports create more warmth and good experience between the two groups, which further strengthens the closeness of the relationship.

Additionally, participants express the democratic relationship is also embodied in the specific measures which provides equal rights for teachers and students. In Sunflower Middle School, all the students and staff share the same canteen.

JIANGHONG (A TEACHER): [At school,] we never have lunch separately with students. This is regarded as impossible in many other schools. Because the canteen for teachers and students are usually divided, and we all know that
nicer dishes would be provided for staff. While in our school, we hope to spend more time with student, not only in class or on the stage, but also in the normal and daily life. To eat together and chat together. (Jianghong, personal communication, March 06, 2018)

In such occasions, teachers do not have any privileges than students, they are required to stand in the same queue and choose from the same menu. There is no special area for teachers to eat their meals, and the whole space of canteen is shared by all students and school staff. When entering to the canteen during the meal time, it is easy to recognize that teachers and students sit together and chat in a relaxed way with the laughter burst out frequently.

In Central City Middle School, there are also some particular occasions which emphasize the equal rights of students and teachers.

GUANGXIU (A STUDENT): In terms of applying to post articles on the school official account of the social media, although some teacher expresses he (or she) wants to get the chance to post today, if certain student has reserved the chance several days before, the teacher will not get the chance to post on the main column. If the teacher is really urgent, we may help him to post on a second or third column. We have three columns of which the main column would get the highest attention. This means teachers and students are equal to us. We would arrange by the application order ….. But if teachers or students whose message is quite urgent, we would help them to solve the problem without any distinction. (Guangxiu, personal communication, June 12, 2018)

Apart from applying for the usage of the social media, in Central City Middle School, the applications of using public facilities including different conference rooms, auditoriums are open for all the school members. Everyone is entitled to access to an online application system to check the status of the room and book online.

When demonstrating democratic relationship with practical examples, participants also provide some specific reasons why school should implement democratic relationship instead of the conventional mode of relationship.

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:
WENBIN (A STUDENT): Although some teachers say we may dislike the teacher, we should not dislike his course. But the most common situation is when students dislike one teacher, they would not listen to the teacher in class. Then they cannot learn well in that course. But if I have a good relationship with that teacher, I would be happy to listen to all his words, which then would assist me to enjoy the course and learn well. (Wenbin, personal communication, May 18, 2018)

As the student described, basically all the participants consider democratic relationship have positive influence on students’ learning. In Central City Middle School, teacher Ningjuan expressed the approval on this argument.

NINGJUAN (A TEACHER/A SCHOOL LEADER): “The good relationship with students could positively affect students’ learning behaviours. They would consider we are connected with them. If he/she does not work well, they would make us lose our face.” (Ningjuan, personal communication, May 22, 2018)

However, similar to the prevalent assumption of many Chinese teachers that the democratic relationship would endanger the routine regulation as school, a common concern is raised from both schools. Namely, what if students do not listen to teachers and do not do what they should do in such relationship? This refers to maintaining the boundaries of students’ participation. In accordance with this particular question, one solution is simultaneously proposed by many teachers, which is uncompromisingly exercising teachers’ responsibility and implementing the established rules.

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:

NINGWEI (A TEACHER): There are indeed some problems when teacher and student develop a closer relationship …… one problem is that students seems do not listen to teachers as always …… In this occasion, I think the teacher must make clear on the requirement …… although we have good relationship, teachers should never compromise on the [requirement of the] bottom line. I will never compromise at all. For example, during this year’s Learning Trip, one requirement for students was to write a diary every day. Some students would fawn teachers to escape the assignment …… In that occasion, teacher
should not compromise at all. I accompanied with one student to finish his diary until twelve thirty after midnight on the first night. So, this must be made clear. Good relationship is separated with the learning requirement. This is the purpose of our Learning Trip. We can discuss if you do not know how to write …… but I will not allow students to escape with tricks …… After one-time persistence, he (that student) never tried to escape in the following days. (Ningwei, personal communication, May 16, 2018)

It is believed teachers must clearly understand their responsibility and the requirement, which acts as the boundary between students’ engagement and the application of democratic centralism. At the same time, some participants propose the integration of these two aspects to draw a clear boundary for the teacher-student relationship, which solves another problem of being difficult to judge how close the relationship should be. A potential scope for the development of relationship is defined, which determines the extent of closeness and equality the relationship could be. When these two conditions are satisfied, some participants describe this relationship can also provide possibilities for some unconquered problems.

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:

NINGWEI (A TEACHER): The close relationship can solve many problems ……
Because the relationship between teachers and students is very good …… I can lead them to discuss more questions and develop deeper understandings (on certain question). This is really good. Previously, (in my former school,) in the situation that we were difficult to get close with students, we mainly taught the exam skills and imparted the key points of exam …… This harmonious relationship is really helpful for teachers, especially the teachers of humanity courses. (Ningwei, personal communication, May 16, 2018)

In this example, the close relationship with students is considered as an impetus for students’ engagement. It assists teachers to lead students to develop deeper discussions in class which can be hardly achieved with the conventional relationship.

Drawn from these specific explanations, several critical themes could be extracted to describe people’s comprehension of democratic relationship between teachers and
students. Specifically, they encompass good communication, closeness and warmth, and the conception of equality. In participants’ explanations, it could be realized that all these features aim to promote the efficiency of students’ participation. As suggested by the participants, these themes of practice are different from the relationships that are fostered and exist in conventional schools. Justification of that relationships in conventional schools is talked about a lot in China. As Luo et al. (2013) elaborate in their paper, in the school education in China, a common phenomenon is that educators see themselves as the tool of knowledge transmission, while students are seen to be knowledge receivers. The sole concentration on the teaching/learning task further results in a one-way relationship which only concerns the quality of knowledge imparting and largely neglects the lives in education (Yi, 2002). To comprehend synthetically, the relationship is regarded as instrumentalized and dehumanized, which broadly ignores other aspects of human development and, in the terms used by our case study schools, would represent an undemocratic relationship. This description corresponds with Paulo Freire’s argument on the teacher-student relationship. He asserts students should be treated as humans rather than simply as knowledge receiver.

On the basis of this, it could be recognized the key words of democratic relationship basically centre on the humanization of the relationship. Among the key words used in the study schools, equality could be regarded as the core conception. With such expression, the staff does not intend to highlight students are equal with teachers all the time. Rather, it underlines the equal process of humanizing themselves and students by which both teachers and students are treated as real humans rather than the teaching/learning object. On the basis of this, various affective elements to promote good communication, closeness and warmth are added in practice to enrich the emotion side of the relationship. This comprehension of the teacher-student relationship is also connected with an argument in the Confucianism which is broadly used to describe the ideal teacher-student relationship in China: “Only when students could get close with a teacher, they would believe in what teachers teach (Chen, 2004).” Albeit this conception has the cultural root in China, not many schools put it into practice due to the long-time criticism on the traditional culture including Confucianism since 20th century. However, with the appeal of recovering the outstanding traditional culture across various areas to improve people’s confidence in
Chinese culture and promote the social quality of morality, especially after the publication of the Guidelines for Improving the Education of Outstanding Traditional Culture (China, 2014) in the area of education, increasing schools begin to pay attention to the traditional culture again.

Same as the target expressed in the above saying, the democratic teacher-student relationship also aims to help students trust their teachers so that the learning quality could be promoted. In the field, the specific measures indeed create a lot of positive circumstances and improve the pervasive tension between the two groups in school education.

However, the same humanizing process does not involve the equal distribution of power. After being humanized, the authority to control the development of the relationship is still largely grasped in the hand of the staff. Although the keyword of the equal right endows the staff and students with the same rights on certain issues, the scope of equal rights is quite limited and the authority of determining on such specific entitlements is grasped by the staff. In the field, the application of the authority also gets practical direction and limitation. In terms of the purpose of promoting students’ comprehensive development, both schools compose some documents with the detailed explanation of students’ all-round development, which is expanded by synthesizing professional knowledge of different areas, such as education, educational psychology, the social requirement and cultural features. This will be elaborated in the next chapter about rules. Within the structure constructed by these aspects, students’ needs are carefully considered in practice, while the measures to meet their needs are determined by the staff. So the initiative of adjusting the relationship is embraced by the staff. Such relationships is also in line with the advocated teacher-student relationship in the national governmental document, which is expressed as “the student is the centre of education, while the teacher is the leading factor” (Development, 2018) in the National Outline for Medium- and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development (2010-2020).

**Relationship between ordinary teachers and school leaders**

Being argued as another aspect of the democratic relationship at school, the leader-teacher relationship does not get the attention as much as that of the teacher-student
relationship in the field, which leads to the thoughts on this aspect are not very comprehensive. With their current consideration, two features could be extracted for a democratic relationship, which are good communication and relative equal status.

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:

YANWEI (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): One phenomenon in our school is the school leader is not that “posted” …… in many schools, the staff with administrative work is very powerful. Whenever the principle or the dean say something, other teachers can only execute their words without any chance to discuss. This is impossible in our school. Before the publication of anything, there will be a long time discussion between teachers. (Yanwei, personal communication, March 08, 2018)

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:

YUANBING (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): In our school, the school leaders do not give commanding instructions (for ordinary teacher). Any teacher could express their opinions if they want …… all the school leaders are quite humble and would like to communicate with all the teachers. (Yuanbing, personal communication, March 19, 2018)

As described in the quotes, people’s understanding on this relationship is also developed against the conventional mode of relationship. In both schools, many teachers say that their opinions are broadly respected and valued when they engage with leaders. This shows the advocacy of teachers’ engagement. Teachers do not have much difficulty if they intend to communicate with the leaders. It could be observed in many occasions that the ordinary teacher arranges casual talks with different levels of leaders in their offices, on the way to their offices or even in the canteen.

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:

An observed casual talk between a school leader and a teacher in the corridor:

LIRAN (A TEACHER): Hi Zeran, many students said they hope to invite this lecturer to give another speech.
ZEYAN (A SCHOOL LEADER): Really?

LIRAN: Yes, they pretty like his talk show [making a joke] ……

ZEYAN: I heard he also sang a little bit, did he sing well?

LIRAN: Yes, he sang a section of Shanxi opera. Students are crazy about him.

Liran smiles and makes a call for the lecturer for another speech. (Observation, October 26, 2017)

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:

An observed discussion between a teacher and a school leader in the office:

In the office of grade group, many teachers would come to discuss the working issues in daily school life with the grade leader. One teacher of Chinese Language came to discuss about students’ assignment of the winter holiday. The teacher explained their plan of the assignment and hope to request students to buy a particular kind of paper to improve the quality of the assignment. [It seems the school staff cannot charge students randomly] Depending on the discussion that the paper is necessary and not expensive, the leader approved the teachers’ proposition. (observation, December 27, 2017)

The school leader is no longer the sole decision maker who acts alone. Teachers are encouraged to offer their opinions and help shape the final decision, especially when the decision is related to class teaching. Similar to the teacher-student relationship, it is also a process of humanizing the two groups, to transform teachers/leaders from instrumentalized worker to those who can apply their initiative and creativity. These phenomena are also regarded as the signals representing a much narrow status gap between the two groups in contrast to that in the conventional schools. In the light of this, participants argue the democratic relationship is the one that could construct a relative equal status between the two groups. When explaining this idea, the practice of good communication and the situation that they are conferred with certain autonomy are adopted by participants to certify that in practice the distanced relationship between ordinary teachers and school leaders has been adjusted.
Nevertheless, despite the fact that ordinary teachers are permitted to express their ideas and even get some autonomy, the limit is set by the circumstance that the authority to choose such approach and make other decisions mostly belong to the school leader who is the decision maker. There may be more engagement and leaders may welcome input from teachers, but in the final analysis it is still the leader who makes the decision. The school leader’s conception on the relationship plays the decisive role on the real practice. In the field, as the school leaders approve the participatory school culture and attempts to cultivate a communication-friendly atmosphere at campus, the adjustment of the relationship between the two groups becomes possible. So teachers’ larger-scale participation still works within the structure of democratic centralism. In this teacher-leader relationship, the school leader become the one enact supervision and the power of decision-making.

In contrast with the practice in conventional schools where the leader decides for him or herself, in these schools teachers are encouraged to offer views, even when they are different to the views of the leader, and have some influence on the final outcome. So, this mode of relationship is one in which teachers’ participation in decision-making process is encouraged and welcomed.

In general, the comprehension of democratic relationship could be concluded as a humanized relationship between different groups which embraces some hierarchical features but allows space for discussion. Despite both aspects of democratic relationship are scarcely described with political words, the general organizing structure reflects the model of democratic centralism. In practice, democratic relationship is frequently described with harmonious, participation promoted, friendly and student-oriented relationship, which are essentially consistent with some thoughts of the Chinese traditional culture and the Chinese cultural root of democracy. The expression of student-oriented is highly consistent with the people-oriented thought. The adjective of harmonious and friendly accord with the traditional harmony culture in China. It could be recognized that the comprehension of democratic relationship is merged with the indigenous culture and social context to a great extent.

**The approach of decision-making**
As another code of conduct, the approach of decision-making is also integrated into almost every aspect of the school life. Among all the explicit areas being attached to democracy, the area of decision making is the only one whose explanation is directly connected with politics. As mentioned in chapter 3, the majority of Chinese scholars endeavour to avoid politics when talking about democratic education, some school staff in the field also behave very carefully on this topic.

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:

YANWEI (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): When talking about democratic education, we need to ensure its political orientation. (Yanwei, personal communication, March 08, 2018)

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:

YUANBING (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): The democracy we are talking about [in democratic education] is for life and for work. [I think] it is separated from political democracy …… the political connotation of democracy is another topic. (Yuanbing, personal communication, March 19, 2019)

When being asked directly about the relationship between democratic education and politics, the majority of school staff either break the connection of these two topics or provide an ambiguous but safe answer. From their answers, it could be recognized that people are unwilling and indifferent to relate education with politics, which might be possibly attributed to the negative influence of the Cultural revolution and social context introduced in chapter 3. Nevertheless, this does not mean the practice of democratic education really has no connection with politics. Conversely, the connotation and approach of Chinese democracy are applied in many aspects of school life as showed in previous analysis. But it is not recognized or related to democratic education by most practitioners.

Despite this situation, some teachers, especially those teaching politics or have political background demonstrate a clear connection between the practice of democratic education and the political conception. One central conception being referred to the most is democratic centralism.
CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:

YANGBING (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): I think the democratic practice of our school is basically aligned with the democracy in our national political system …… When we conduct the management work and make decisions at school, I realize we really need to apply the principle of democratic centralism …… When I am about to make a decision, I would visit the people who are related to this decision and understand their thoughts. If their thought have a big difference with my assumption, I will try to understand the reason of the difference. If my idea cannot convince them, I would adjust my decision according to their opinions …… After mutual communication, the decision could be improved as more rational which then would be executed. (personal communication, December 25, 2018)

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:

LIRAN (A TEACHER): I think democracy should be listening to the opinions of all sides, and making the decision in accordance with the actual situation on the basis of collecting all the ideas from different people. I really approve the type of democracy within the system of democratic centralism. [I think] democracy does not necessarily mean taking anyone’s idea or take the idea approved by the majority. Because the truth is usually in the hands of the minority …… I think the basic criterion for making the final decision from the perspective of school is if it is advantageous for students’ lifelong development and if it is beneficial for whole schools’ development. (Liran, personal communication, January 26, 2018)

DEHUI (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): China’s democracy has one conception of democratic centralism …… At first, anyone could express their opinions. The decision maker would listen to all people’s ideas and make a reasonable judgement by accommodating the interests of all sides. This judgement should accord with the requirement of the majority. (Dehui, personal communication, June 26, 2018)
Drawn from these accounts with slight divergence, the target and practical procedures are able to be concluded. As for the target, the practice of democratic centralism aims to improve the quality of decision and a better development of the whole institution. In addition, two key steps could be identified for the implementation of democratic centralism. The first step is collecting ideas widely from people who are involved in the decision. In this process, all people are encouraged to participate and express their concerns and suggestions. The decision maker would launch discussions with different people to understand their demands or worries. The second step is making the decision. Based on all the information collected from people, the decision maker would make the judgement by contemplating on both people’s demands and the overall situation. All people are encouraged to contribute their ideas before making the decision, but the authority to make the final decision basically belongs to the decision-maker. Such understanding is totally in line with the design of democratic centralism in the area of politics which has been introduced in chapter 2. Depending on diverse issues, the number of decision maker could range from one person to a group of people. This echoes with the analysis in the former section about relationship. However, considering such practical procedure, sometimes democratic centralism is problematically comprehended as an approach which applies democracy first, and centralism later. By drawing a clear line in between the procedure of collecting information and making the final decision, this comprehension sometimes leads to a result of going through the motions in some schools

**SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:**

XIAODONG (A TEACHER): It (democracy) should not be going through the motions. Many other schools or institutions conduct the process like this. They would provide you a way to participate, but it would just pass after going through the motion. The collected ideas were actually not accepted and no feedbacks were provided either. This is a prevalent problem [in the society]. (Xiaodong, personal communication, May 15, 2018)

In both research schools, this problem is avoided by providing more space to discuss and negotiate in the whole process including when the decision maker is about to make the decision or even after the decision. There is not a clear boundary between the information collecting step and the decision making step. The decision maker does not
shut down the door and make the judgment by themselves undoubtedly. This corresponds with the political feature of democratic centralism that the two parts, democracy and centralism, work continuously and iteratively without clear boundary to ensure decisions’ quality.

**SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:**

YUANBING (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): Our administrative (school committee) meeting is a good example which reflects a process of democracy. No matter which area the leader is in charge of, everyone would participate in the discussion. Even some times we would argue with each other. But this does not influence our relationship, because we have the same target of promoting a better development our school and students. The principal always seeking opinions from everyone. Even sometimes the teacher who helps to record the main points of the meeting is not a member of our school committee, the principle would also ask for his opinions. After listening to everyone’s opinion, if people’s ideas are obviously similar and can reach the agreement, the decision would be made immediately. But if people’s thoughts are obviously at odds, the decision might be laid aside temporarily. (Yuanbing, personal communication, March 19, 2018)

**A piece of observation at Sunflower Middle School:**

The meeting of deans of administrative classes:

LIRAN (A SCHOOL LEADER): …… This meeting will first hold some discussion about different topics …… One issue is about bring the food into the teaching building and the classroom. Some students said they would not take the food into the classroom, but just put it in their cabinets (each student has an allocated cabinet in the corridor). But some students forgot about the food which then decayed in the cabinet.

……

JIANGHONG (A TEACHER): About the issue of bring food into the building. It is because some students did not finish eating their breakfast at canteen and were
afraid they would be late for class. So they had to take the food back to the building.

YANZI (A TEACHER): Some students like to buy some breads at the canteen. Are they allowed to put in their cabinets (teachers laughed)?

XINGDONG (A TEACHER): I think teachers also have the similar behaviour. Sometimes teachers buy some food and take it into the building (in particular occasions).

JIANGHONG (A TEACHER): Teachers need to teach.

XINGHONG (A TEACHER): But students would say they also need to learn.

……

YUZHI (A TEACHER): Can students take snacks into the building?

ZUIHUI (A TEACHER/A SCHOOL LEADER): The principal used to say students are not allowed to take snacks into building.

KEYI (A TEACHER): Some students would buy some bread and eat at the library when they were very hungry.

LIRAN: This is quite contradictive. But we cannot stop all these behaviours without considering the situation

……

The school leader Liran intended to ask teachers to regulate students’ behaviour of taking food into the teaching building. But after teachers’ discussion, it seems this decision was cancelled and sought for more consideration. No agreement was reached at the meeting, but it also showed a negotiation space between teachers and leaders when making decisions. (Observation, December 15, 2017)

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:
YANGBING (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): As a middle-level leader, after listening to teachers’ opinions, sometimes I also need to express their ideas to an upper-level leader. In this process, I would try to convince my leader and he may also use his thoughts to convince me. So it is a process of mutual compromise …… What I call compromise is actually [information] supplement. In another words, because of my standpoint, I may only pay attention on one aspect of certain issue. Let me explain with an example. Recently, another school leader and I recognized many students report the problem of having lunch. So we intended to make some adjustments on the time arrangement of students’ lunch time …… [before making the decision,] we both communicated with many people from different sides, such as the teaching and research group …… the student affair office which had a close relationship with the dean of administrative class …… but then [in the process of hearing people’s voice,] we recognized some students have different opinions …… in that case, we communicated with students about our plan again …… a lot of students reported this plan would have negative influence on their afternoon learning, because they would be easily feel sleepy after shifting the lunch time. [So the solution is still under discussion] …… You can see here is concession and compromise. In fact, it is a process to get the job done in a better way. (Yangbing, personal communication, January 25, 2018)

All people are encouraged to raise ideas continuously before and after the decision-making continuously. Although not being mentioned or even not being realized, this practical approach is actually an integration of democratic centralism and consultative democracy. As described in chapter 2, the consultative democracy is also a conception in the framework of China’s democracy, which promotes broad idea exchange and a more appropriate decision-making. It is not only a process that anyone expresses on their own appeal, but the process of finding a moderate but most beneficial solution for the context and the majority of people. This is considered as a peaceful approach to settle the social disputes, which is consistent with the argument of Confucian culture, “in practicing the rules of propriety, it is the harmony that is prized (礼之用，和为
While in the process of implementing this approach, the critical elements include people’s participation and their attitudes of pursuing mutual understanding, especially the decision makers’ attitude. As the decision makers embrace the authority to make the final decision, if they have a severe hierarchical and commanding attitude and just treat the opinion collection as a procedure without taking people’s opinions seriously, this decision-making structure is actually losing its practical significance.

In both research schools, the significance of different stakeholders’ concession and compromise to reach the agreement on the final decision is highlighted. In practice, this principle is indeed fulfilled with endeavor. But the agreement on the final decision is not always achieved easily. In this circumstance, a common solution is suspending the decision and take more time to contemplate and discuss, as showed in the quote. This avoids the arbitrary and inappropriate decision to some extent, but it also gets complaint that the problem cannot be solved promptly and the outcomes from the discussion cannot be put into practice immediately. In another occasion, when the time is limited, the decision maker would need to make the decision with current comprehension. Such decisions can hardly meet all stakeholders’ requirements, but the chance to discuss and adjust is often provided afterwards.

The integration of democratic centralism and consultative democracy is applied by different groups in many aspects of school life which cover the areas of management on the school level, the management on the level of administrative class as well as the class teaching.

In terms of the issue about school management which is often organized by school leaders, the channel of expression works as a supportive mechanism for this decision-making approach. In addition to students’ expression channels such as the activity of Campus Proposal at Central City Middle School and Good Idea at Sunflower Middle School, which have been introduced in chapter 6, ordinary teachers also have the official and causal ways to express their thoughts. In terms of the official way, each school operates the Teacher and Administrative Staff Congress regularly. This is a mechanism which is advocated and required to establish in all the public schools by
the National Ministry of Education (China, 2011). Similar to the Student Congress, the teacher delegates are voted by all the school staff who are responsible to convey all teachers’ concerns and negotiate with the school leader on behalf of all the ordinary staff at school. Except from this collective platform, the routine meeting of teaching and research group as well as the meeting of grade group are also considered as important platforms to exchange ideas. Issues related to specific courses would be discussed within the teaching and research group of particular course, while things about particular grade group are usually discussed within the group meetings. The casual expression channel refers to the casual talks with school leaders. As another type of important stakeholder, parents also get channels to express their thoughts. In both schools, the Parent Committee is established as the official place to report reflections and advices about the school life. But they are also encouraged to talk directly with school leaders of different levels. In the field, it is very common to witness or hear that the school leader is having a conversation with some parents in person or by phone.

A piece of observation at Sunflower Middle School:

A teacher in my office got a phone from a parent. The parent tried to talk with the teacher about his/her child. The child was accused of cheating in an exam by a teacher (on her internship) yesterday. The child said he did not cheat, argued with the teacher and finally called the police angrily. So the teacher and the parent tried to explain the process of the whole thing. Both of them were patient and nice. (Observation, November 01, 2017)

A piece of observation at Central City Middle School:

The school will organize the Drama Festival next Monday. One parent called a teacher to ask if they could come and attend the student activity. The teacher said they were very welcome to attend, but the seats were limited. They may need to stand to watch the drama. (Observation, December 27, 2017)

Although the term of democratic centralism and consultative democracy are barely used by ordinary teachers to describe their work, through observations I am able to
recognize that this approach is also adopted by ordinary teachers to make decisions on the management of administrative class and even the class teaching.

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:

XIAOQING (A TEACHER): In terms of formulating the regulation of my [administrative] class, it is gradually established through the whole-class discussion. [At first,] we started to discuss about this regulation in a(n) [administrative] class meeting ….. I would also participate in the discussion. (Xiaoping, personal communication, May 28, 2018)

A piece of observation about the class committee at Central City Middle School:

A dean of administrative class came to the office with all students of the class committee. The teacher asked students to collect ideas about how to make a class video for a particular school activity.

Teacher: Everyone can express your ideas about this video. We can also take other classes’ video as reference.

Student committee members watched the video of other classes and discussed about their ideas. It seemed students’ ideas were very valued by teachers. The design of the video was mainly conducted by students, but at the same time supervised by the dean of their administrative class. (Observation, January 04, 2018)

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:

A piece of observation about the preparation day of the Learning Trip at Sunflower Middle School:

Students of the research group prepared for the proposal and presentation in the classroom. After preparation, a teacher was in charge of organizing students to give presentations.

XINGHONG (A TEACHER): We have one hour in total for all the presentation. How do you think we should arrange the time?
Student A: We have five groups in total, each group can have 12 minutes.

XINGHONG: But there is another section after the presentation, do you recognize it?

Students: A section of discussion.

XINGHONG: Yes, so how long should each presentation last? I think each cannot exceed 10 minutes, do you agree?

Students: Yes.

XINGHONG: What about 5 minutes?

Students: Ok.

In this process, the teacher encouraged students to participate in making the arrangements rather than being designed solely by teachers.

WENBIN (A STUDENT): Teachers are quite open at our school. We think students’ ideas are reasonable, they would take our advice …… In terms of the politics course, some classmates used to propose some problems of the teaching approach …… The teacher accepted our suggestion and said he will make some adjustments. (Wenbin, personal communication, May 18, 2018)

In many occasions like this, the responsible teacher attempts to transform their management style and no longer manages the class by their own thoughts. Students’ participation and discussion are organized as a routine process before the final decision. But the authority and initiative on choosing the management style belongs to teachers. The mode of democratic centralism appears again. Despite this, both schools organized an activity called Evaluation on Teachers to regulate teachers’ behaviours. By allowing students to express their comments and suggestions anonymously on different teachers, the information would be collected as a basis to raise suggestions for teachers’ work from the school. Hence, although most students do not dare to challenge teachers face to face if the teacher insists on applying the conventional arbitrary style, they still have the path to make some influence.

Within the structure of democratic centralism and consultative democracy, both students and teachers are also entitled with certain autonomy on specific issues in the
research school. This is usually compared to the strict requirements of all kinds of
detailed things and the emphasis of high consistency in the majority of other Chinese
schools.

As for students, the autonomy is primarily entitled to them on certain issues. For
example, as mentioned in chapter 6, in Central City Middle School, the student
delegates are conferred with the autonomy to select the member of the student council.
In terms of the initial selection of the Campus Proposal, the department of student
management at the student council has the autonomy to make the decision. While in
Sunflower Middle School, one example could be students have the autonomy to
decide on the activity or student organization for participation. In the self-learning
class, sometimes students do get the autonomy to plan on their own time and choose
the specific place to study, such as their administrative classroom or the library.

As for teachers, the frequently referred autonomy is choosing the teaching approach.
Although both schools highlight the teaching approach of student engagement, it is the
teacher who obtains the authority on the application of specific teaching approach. In
the field, such practice is regarded as big progress compared to the practice in other
schools from the aspect of democracy.

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:

NINGWEI (A TEACHER): In my former school, we had unified requirements [on the
class design]. It emphasized more on uniformity. We were provided with a
same form, and we must design the class according to that form …… It would
have procedure requirements, such as what you should do first and what should
be done as the second part. [You needed to list as required.] which part was
designed for moral education and which part involved group cooperation ……
It was a structural template. In my current school, there is not any template for
us to follow …… There are more conceptional instructions ……The class
could be very different due to the content. So, I think it is really good that the
school do not give us the unified standard. The unified template of my former
school is awkward some time. Because sometimes I can fill the form according
to my design, but sometimes it is not useful at all. (Ningwei, personal
communication, May 16, 2018)
A piece of field note about the teaching approach:

In both research schools, there is not any strict requirement for the teaching design. Both schools explicitly advocate for the student-engaged teaching approach, but both schools do not interfere teachers’ design and release more space for teachers. This allows teachers to prepare class teaching according to their understanding and preference. (Field reflection, May 09, 2018)

By conferring the autonomy to individuals, the creativity of teachers and students are able to be inspired in different areas. Without the limitation from the unified standard, plenty of interesting and effective teaching activities are created by practitioners. Students also get more chances to develop their abilities and show their talents in various areas. While the necessary and significant premise for such practice is the structure of democratic centralism. This means all the autonomy needs to be firstly confirmed through the process of democratic centralism before the final implementation.

In short, as a critical conception in China’s democracy, democratic centralism is also applied as the fundamental approach of decision-making in almost every aspect of campus life. To further improve the rationality of decision and meet the requirements of various groups, the approach of consultative democracy is integrated into the practice of democratic centralism.

Summary

This chapter firstly focused on the nature of relationships in the schools, between students and teachers, and between teachers and their leaders. When talking about relationships, participants described them as being consistent with the democratic principles of the schools. Corresponding with the Confucian idea and Freire’s thought, their understanding of democratic relationship indicates a level of reciprocity and engagement. But as the application of Dewey’s theory, the political basis of Freire’s theory is not involved either. In the field, various types of engagement are observed as people talked about which proofs the principles advocated in the schools do seem largely to be in accord with practice. This type of relationship is supportive for both
students’ and staff’s participation in the campus life, which has been analysed as one key element of democratic education in chapter 6.

But when moving from the arena of relationships to the arena of decision-making a change occurred – there was an impression, perhaps even a rhetoric of equality in the relationship between teachers and leaders, but in the final analysis the leaders still took the decision. They could be and were included by teachers, but the leaders took the decision themselves after consultation. This mirrors the political structure of democratic centralism in the wider society. Within the research school, examples of engagement between teachers and students that appeared also to be influenced and shaped by the principle of democratic centralism are also discovered largely. In other words, when people in the school talk about democratic education, what they are talking about is a conception of democracy that is heavily influenced by the principles of socialist democracy, especially democratic centralism.

The democratic relationship and democratic mode of decision making work as two codes of conduct which are applied in various aspects of school life. The comprehension and practice in these two areas reflects some part of Freire’s ideas without politics, but are highly integrated with some indigenous culture about harmony, the people-oriented thought as some traditional China’s cultural root of democracy and the contemporary political conception of socialist democracy.
Chapter 8: The System of Rules and the Assessment System: the Boundary and Balance

Introduction

In comparison to the previous two chapters which examine the explicit areas attached to democratic education by participants, this chapter will focus on analysing two areas, the system of rules and the assessment system, which are not raised directly as the component of democratic education, but are described by the school staff implicitly as two significant influencing aspects in practice. But how do they influence democratic education? What are the roles of them in the practice of democratic education? This chapter will present and analyse people’s comprehension from these two perspectives and their relationships with democratic education.

The system of rules

A system of rules is designed to organize the social behaviour of a group of people with the aim of ensuring that stability and order is maintained, and the goals of the group are achieved. The rules for schools are usually designed to set guidelines for appropriate behaviours, including boundaries which are inappropriate to cross. In the previous two chapters, school rules are constantly applied as the boundary between participation and democratic centralism. In addition to school rules, some external rules seem also influence the school practice from a wider scope. Here we are interested in particularly examining whether and how do the principles of democratic education advanced by the school appear to influence the system of rules used in the school. As an important basis for making the judgement, the rules implemented in school have two layers which compose the relevant laws, the national or regional regulations formulated by the educational administration outside school and the school rules designed for different groups within the school.

External rules

In terms of the external rules, a series of specific laws and regulations in China are mentioned as relevant to schooling in the field. The frequently mentioned provisions involve the Law on the Protection of Minors, the Teachers’ Law, the Regulation for Primary and Post-Primary Students, the Guidance by the Ministry of Education to
Improve and Standardize the Management of Primary and Post-Primary Schools and the Guidance by the Ministry of Education to Improve Teachers’ Ethics.

Such external rules include rules of different legal hierarchies in Chinese legal system, which specifically involve the national law, administrative regulation and local decree, from high to low. In this system, if certain laws are violated, people can file a lawsuit in the court. By contrast, if the administrative regulation or local decree is violated, people can only initiate an arbitration against someone or some institution in the higher level administration. Only if they are not satisfied with the judgement can they file a lawsuit against the administration in the court.

According to this hierarchy, the lower rules are usually developed based on the higher rules. When the content of certain national law is general, some particular administrative regulation and local decree could be enacted in accordance to the local context to give detailed instructions for practice. This means the explanation on the same article in the same law could vary in regions. For example, the Law on the Protection of Minors states that adults cannot apply corporal punishment to minors (Development, 2018). The Chinese expression of corporal punishment, 体罚, is an ambiguous word which sounds like body punishment and so teachers are very confused about what behaviour can be defined as this. In some regions, teachers are not allowed to use any punishment related to students’ body, such as obliging them to stand in the corner. While in some regions, educators think it is not体罚 if the student is not severely hurt, and some physical punishments are acceptable.

Before the rules on different levels being issued, people’s participation is emphasized. In the process of drafting, the relevant groups are usually organized to discuss on the document and raise their suggestions. For example, when composing the Curriculum Standards of different courses for compulsory education, the National Ministry of Education released a notification on the official site to collect different groups’ opinions on the draft document. It was stated that all the education administration on the province level need to pay high attention on the collection of people’s thoughts, to apply various forms and methods to hear from diverse sides. The participant groups needed to cover the school locates in the city, in the county and in the village area, the excellent and key teachers (an evaluation level of teacher in China), the department of
education and research, the university in the region and the academic body. Based on the suggestions, the final document was revised and released by the National Ministry of Education to implement in the area of education across the country (China, 2007a).

In the administrative system of education, every layer of educational institution or department is in charged and supervised by a higher level administration, which seeks to ensure the policy or requirement can be carried out smoothly from the level of conception to practice. This supports the inference in previous chapters that there is wider control outside the scope of school. The process of collecting ideas also shows a feature of socialist democracy which requires people’s ideas to be reported layer by layer, which underlines people’s engagement in the whole system. The integration of the participatory approach and democratic centralism could be identified in all the links of the education system. Within this system, any individual or institution is allowed to raise suggestions for revision with the prescribed channel for the improvement of the whole system, while they cannot privately violate the regulation without getting the permission from their responsible administration. It turns out the formulation of the general rules for schools also follows principles of democratic centralism and that these practices are common across all schools. In fact, except from the laws and regulations mentioned in the field, the whole legal system of education in China encompasses eight educational laws, about twenty education administrative regulations, more than seventy education department regulations and more than two hundred regional regulations which are all developed based on The Education Act and centre on the education articles in the Constitution (Sun and Zhai, 2017, Shen and Wu, 2019). The evidence collected in the research schools suggests people are not very familiar with these laws and regulations. In contrast to the specific requirements within the school, the article of laws is seldom directly used to measure the practice at school. Unless certain particular-emphasized content by the school leader or the superior administrative department, such as a contemporary hot topic of teachers’ ethics, the practitioners neither know about or are too concerned with the regulations and laws. Such circumstance reflects that people lack the legal awareness on one hand, while on the other hand this could also be ascribed to the general problem of the legal system of education. Based on the analysis on the whole system, Sun and Zhai (2017), Shen and Wu (2019) propose several problems existing in the current legal system of education in China. Firstly, the expression used in the regulation and law is quite
general and ambiguous with lots of uncertainty and low operability, which implies the difficulty of the implementation. The largely used policy language makes the boundary between policy and the law become ambiguous. Secondly, they argue the law enforcement mechanism are still under development, which makes the practice of law enforcement a little unstable or inconsistent. Thirdly, they argue the law-enforcement personnel on different levels of educational department generally lack of the legal consciousness and the professional ability, which results in a low efficiency of enforcement in the whole system.

Because of the ambiguity of the general regulation for the whole country, the regional education administration and the practitioner usually need to develop the regional regulation of the regulation and compose more concrete rules in practice. As the education administration embracing the authority and responsibility to enforce the education laws and regulations (Sun and Zhai, 2017), their requirements are usually treated as the real boundary given from the superior to the school. Therefore, the evidence seems to suggest that the regional education administration’s understanding on the legal system along with their educational conception play a critical role on the school practice. The boundary could be constructed in a much narrower way by those with conservative conceptions, while it could also be established in a wider way by more open-minded people. For example, in terms of the article of loving the country and loving socialism which appears in almost every education regulation and law, a conservative understanding might be embodied as people cannot propose any problems or drawbacks of the country or political systems. Whereas a more open understanding may allow sincere analysis on the practice and propose useful suggestions for further improvement and a sustainable development. This circumstance resonates with another problem of the legal system of education proposed by Zhao (2017). In this system, as the administrative regulation and local decree can be developed to explained the rule in different regions, it gives rise to a phenomenon that the implementation of rules mostly relies on the leaders’ thoughts and the administrative instruction. Within the school, the school leaders therefore get the authority to further interpret these external rules. This may reflect a problem with the system of democratic centralism as so much depends on the decision of the leader. Then whatever the school leader decides is the way things should operate and what happens in practice. But surely there are constraints on the local explanations. As part
of the administrative system, the local interpretation would be supervised by the higher level administration. It is also supervised by all people who can apply for an arbitration in the administrative system or sue the administration in the court. But this would take a long time.

Integrated with the lack of thorough execution mechanism, the boundary established by the external rules could fluctuate all the time, because of which the school are actually practicing according to the dispersive requirements from the education administration rather than the explicit written rules.

In the case of our two study schools, the relative larger space given to students’ participation in both of the research schools could also be partly attributed to a quite open-minded education administration and their quite inclusive policies on the regional level.

**SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:**

DEHUI (A SCHOOL LEADER): The external policy is very important. Since we belong to the public school system, we cannot conduct some (novel) practice unless getting the permission from the superior. Their judgements ….. would decisively influence the scope of practice at school.” (Dehui, personal communication, June 26, 2018)

**CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:**

RESEARCHER: Is there any special external rules for our school?

YANGWEI (A SCHOOL LEADER): I do not know if there is any exact special rules for us. But from my understanding …..for example ….. [when conducting some educational reform as those in our school,] which is required by the educational department…… [because it would bring novel problems,] the particular support from external rules is quite normal and necessary. (personal communication, March 08, 2018)

**A piece of field note about the external rules:**
From the practice of the two schools, it seems the external rules along with the some internal factors including teachers, students and culture are very important elements for the development of the whole school. (Field reflection, March 19, 2018)

Both of the research schools, among a group of schools in their districts, obtain some particular external rules which confer more autonomy for them to conduct some educational experiments in their schools as a small scale first. The result of the exploration of the novel education practice would appear to be the basis to enact the rules for more schools in a larger scale. Therefore, for different schools the external rules construct an autonomous scope for the school practice by putting the constraint, which directly influences the democratic exploration in schooling.

**Internal rules**

As implied in Chapter 7, such hierarchical management system is also applied within schools. Integrated with the Headmaster Responsibility System, the headmaster’s comprehension on the external policy and the education conception generally form a basis for the school rule which is also treated as a main influence on whether the school rules can be supportive to democratic education or not.

**CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:**

NINGJUAN (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): The feature of school management and school culture adopted by the headmaster is very important. The headmaster’s conception does influence schooling. If what teachers want to do are always intervened by the headmaster or the middle-level leader …… and this intervene has exceeded the normal need of management, and [he/she] arbitrarily make decisions on some courses that (he/she) does not specialize. This would influence teachers’ democratic feelings. (Ningjuan, personal communication, May 22, 2018)

**SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:**

YUANBING (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): The constraint on the school headmaster from the regional education administration is quite tight. There are
a lot of education inspections and supervisions which would propose a lot of rules and boundaries for the school practice. So the headmaster has the absolute authority within the school …… I came from a conventional school. In fact, when determining on something for school’s development, the headmaster or school leader do not need to carry out the democratic process at school. Many issues could be directly determined by the headmaster, and all other staff just need to execute the decision …… so there is a saying that a good headmaster equals with a good school. I am thinking why there is a saying like this? It is because the headmaster has great power at school. So if the headmaster is good, the school could be developed in a good way with no doubts. But in reverse, if the headmaster’s ability is not good enough, the problem would be easily caused as he/she has the absolute power. And his/her conception of education would influence the school’s development. (Yuanbing, personal communication, March 19, 2018)

In the Headmaster Responsibility System, as the headmaster is entitled with the authority to run the school, his or her comprehension and ability of democracy basically determines if the democratic approach would be implemented or how could it be implemented. In both research schools, the authority encourages principal to do something different. Therefore, the headmasters’ endorsement of democratic approach is raised as the decisive factor on the internal school rules. In addition, the middle-level leaders and the ordinary teachers are also regarded as the important people for the school rules, as they are the practitioners who convert the conception and the general rules into more concrete rules and the real practice. The external and internal rules form a hierarchical system which echoes with the hierarchical system of democracy in the area of politics. After some decisions are made in the central committee, it would be operated through the system from the top to the bottom. In such hierarchical system, no matter the people in which link disapprove of the democratic conception, the specific rules they establish would be a hindrance for the practice of democratic education. In consideration of this, as the school has been given the authority to explore different educational practice, all staff’s democratic consciousness and ability, especially that of the school leaders play a significant role in the establishment and practice of the rule system within schools.
To judge whether the school rule system is supportive for democratic education, participants raised some features of the rule as the basis. The first and prime feature of the supportive rules is argued as basic without redundancy, which aims to provide more space for school members’ participation and autonomous exploration.

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:

XINYU (A STUDENT): My former school and the current school are both good schools. But in terms of the management style, my current school is more open with more freedom. My former school employed a very strict management style …… [For example,] as for the hair style of boys, (pointing at his own hair which is about three to four centimetres), mine is already long, it needs to be cut shorter than mine. And all girls could only wear short hair …… the rule in my former school was very detailed. Its management included every small part of the school life starting from every morning when we arrived at school until the time when school time finished. The rule in Central City Middle is more open, which only gives us the basic requirement. (Xinyu, personal communication, January 22, 2018)

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:

NINGWEI (A TEACHER): I think the best practice at Sunflower Middle School is the logic of bottom line. Except those across the line, all the things could be considered by [students] themselves. Actually, we are trying to treat students as independent individuals rather than the subject of custody …… The attitude of keeping the bottom line is very important. Because many schools are easily get worried …… because of the worry of certain behaviour, they would assume a lot of bad situations. To avoid these bad situations, the school would design a series of detailed rules. But in this process, the school may cross the boundary. So I think the conception of bottom line is the best practice of Sunflower Middle School. This attitude is very good. It shows I (the school or staff) will not intervene or constrain you (students) too much. I will tell you (students) the boundary, the rest of the practice could be determined by yourself …… we would like to give the space for students to participate by
themselves, this is quite good. (Ningwei, personal communication, May 16, 2018)

The strict school rules are conceived as an approach to cautiously keep students’ behaviour on the right track and away from the potential risks. While it also demonstrates a high degree of control on them. For example, some schools require their students can only use black schoolbags and wear black shoes at campus. Such requirements are proposed for the sake of eliminating the difference and reduce students’ mind of rivalry to focus on their learning tasks. School rules are less restrictive, and teachers say this reduce the control on students, which accordingly releases more space for students to participate and organize their own life. Although the expression of “basic requirements” is usually used in the field to describe their attempt on the adjustment of the school rule system. But what is basic rules? It seems participants are not able to provide a clear definition for this expression. In their discourses, it is used as a comparative expression which shows a reverse direction of the overly strict rules. There is actually not a standard to measure if the rules have already been basic or not. But this idea proves again one function of the rule system is to maintain the boundary of participation.

The second feature raised by participants is the establishment and adjustment of school rules should accord with the principle of education. This contrasts with the rule raised in some regions with the emphasis on the exam result (Tang, 2016). For example, in some school, the colour of students’ school bags and shoes are required as black to instruct students focus on learning and avoid them wasting time on comparing with each other. Along with the evolution of different areas related to education, participants think theories from these areas rather than the simple target of exam outcome should be treated as the basis of designing school rules. The frequently mentioned area includes education, psychology, brain science, the new requirements of citizens in the society and the new understanding of the exam and evaluation system. Specifically, in accordance with the theory of Constructivism, Cognitivism and the student-centre theory, teachers say some rules such as regulating students to sit without move which only emphasizes students’ passive role learning are abolished. With the conception of people-oriented and the requirement of creative talents, the apparent conventional wisdom in conventional schools represented by “students cannot raise
any different opinions from the teachers” are transformed. In the face of the social problem that many students who get very high scores in the examination do not obtain the comprehensive abilities to solve problems and even cannot find their interested career field after entering to the university, the rules which only underline the importance of pure paper-pencil test rather than other capability development are reformed. These reforms in accordance with the contemporary findings in various areas demonstrate an aspiration of students’ healthy and all-round development as a future citizen. While it is again influenced by the staff’s comprehension on these theories as well as democracy.

Based on this general conception of reducing redundant rules, a series of explicit school rules are developed by different school members which are regarded as the basic internal requirements in school practice. The internal school rule system consists of the general school rules, the administrative class rules, the course learning rules and specific activity rules. All these rules are developed in a close relationship with the school’s aspiration goal.

In both research schools, the general aspiration goal is proposed by the headmaster. In Central City Middle School, the conception could be summarized as conducting the genuine education and promoting students’ all-around development with their own specialty. While the educational conception of Sunflower Middle School is expressed with several sentences including “improving myself to make a better world”, “seeking for harmony in diversity and enjoying the process”, “to be an important person to the China nation, and enjoy the wellbeing life”. Despite of the difference in expression, the staff from both schools consider their school educational conception is more advanced than some conventional schools which underlines the importance of comprehensive development rather than purely emphasis on the improvement of examination score.

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:

YANWEI (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): One ethos of our school is to develop students as excellent and brilliant …… they should have the sense of social responsibility. This means they can make contributions to the society after graduation or promote the development of the whole society [rather than
purely caring about the exam result]. (Yanwei, personal communication, March 08, 2018)

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:

DEHUI (A SCHOOL LEADER): The purpose of education is in fact to conduct a learning process which helps students to develop themselves, make achievements, helps them to discover themselves and become themselves …… this requires the school to provide an educational environment for the sake of students’ comprehensive development …… we also hope students can have excellent exam outcomes. But we need to consider the basis for the achievement on the exam result. It is the development of students’ cognition and thoughts. It also depends on students’ self-management, independence and their motivation of self-achievement. These all constitute the basis of a good exam outcome. If the school just focuses on the training of exam skills without these, it could be helpful for students to reduce their mistakes on memorizing the knowledge. As for developing students’ thoughts in this process, it only underlines the thought of examination. By just doing exercise (preparing for exams) cannot develop students’ thoughts which are in need when facing and solving real problems. In this situation, the school in fact needs to make a choice, to think about what kind of people should be cultivated. [To educate students ] based on the college entrance examination as the final target, students’ better development in their whole life or a better development after entering to the university. It becomes very common that undergraduates suffer from an occasion of “hollow heart” which means students become lazy and less ambitious who cannot find their life targets after pass the college entrance examination. (Dehui, personal communication, June 26, 2018)

Such conception is deemed as setting a tone for the development of the whole school and a direction for constructing more specific rules, which in fact allows to release more space for students’ participation fundamentally.

The process of establishing the general school rule is different between the research schools. In Central City Middle School, the school rules are directly designed by the
school committee made up of the school leaders. While at **Sunflower Middle School**, it is initially drafted by students and approved by the school leaders. The content of the school rule involves some common areas in the research schools, such as the dressing, the assembly, the usage of facility, the in-class learning and so forth. While there are also some particular rules that are constructed in the face of particular problems. For example, a section of iPad using rules is written as the part of the school rules in **Sunflower Middle School** and a section of Mobile phone using is supplemented as a particular rule in **Central City Middle School**. With regard to the content, the rules are described from various aspects in a quite explicit and specific way without much ambiguity which makes it easy to enact. The corresponding punishment rules are also clearly designed in each school. All these rules draw a clear line on students’ behaviour from different perspectives, which at the same time ensures certain degree of participation and provides the basis for supervision. They are making the balance between the principle of participation and the practice of democratic centralism.

Except from the rules on the school level, as mentioned in chapter seven, teachers in both schools are entitled with the authority to make decisions in their classroom or activity practice, hence some teachers who emphasize the significance of rules create more specific rules on certain issues. While there are also a lot of teachers who do not design rules to constrain the practice. “We do not have very detailed rules [for the classroom practice], so we can only rely on the teachers’ wisdom and experience, or in another word, the teachers’ mood. It is very inefficient.” (Danjie, a teacher, personal communication, May 11, 2018) As expressed by this teacher, it seems most teachers do not consider creating rules is their responsibility. Although the authority of organizing classroom and activity seems to be conferred to teachers, the school leaders just stop intervening teachers’ work, but the authority and responsibility on designing these rules are not clearly stipulated at school. The regulation on experience and mood shows a lack of rule awareness among teachers. Without clear rules, the practice of regulation on the level of class or activity is random and changeable, which leads the constraint and boundary of the practice become unclear and unreliable. In fact, as expressed in the quote, some teachers have recognized the significance of applying clear rules, but many of them either treat making rules is not their job or do not know how to make rules. This to some extent shows staff’s deficiency in participation.
awareness and the relevant abilities. Even though the constraint from above is released, they are still not capable of making the rules, which has a negative influence on democratic practice.

When establishing such different levels of internal rules, the integration approach of democratic centralism and participation are usually applied to make the decisions as explained in chapter 7. While possessing the final authority, the decision maker’s comprehension and consciousness of democracy basically determines the final process and the involved participants. This again proves that the decision maker’s awareness and capability of democracy is very important for the democratic practice as they are the one designing the scope and drawing the boundary of participation.

**A piece of field note about the importance of decision-maker:**

The importance of a good leader, particularly a good principle is usually mentioned by teachers in the field. The capability, vision of development, experience and knowledge of the decision-maker highly influence the quality of the decision, which impacts the practice of various areas in the school. (Field reflection, March 19, 2018)

In the field, most of the rules mentioned are basically designed for students, which is treated as the main and most important part of the school rule system. The rules for teachers are less mentioned than that of students’, of which the content is also not as comprehensive as students’ rules. It appears the rules for teachers are also purposely reduced to “the basic requirements” to promote teachers’ participation and novel inspiration in their work. In this case, the external regulations and some temporary decision or requirements from the leaders are used as the basic rules for teachers.

From the school level to the classroom and activity level, from the school staff to students, the internal rules have basically constructed a boundary for all school members’ engagement in the school life. The execution of these rules thus becomes the hinge to maintain the boundary between the practice of top-down democratic centralism and the bottom-up participation. However, the rule execution mechanism in both schools still needs improving. At school, there is usually an office or department at school which takes charge of checking students’ behaviours according
to the school rule, but the limited number of staff usually cannot undertake all the supervision work for all students, and they are merely responsible for the general school rule on the school or grade level rather than all the detailed rules designed by different teachers.

In this circumstance, these staff often seek help from the student council and all other ordinary teachers. A new problem emerges in this process of transferring the authority, which is the obscuring of the authority and responsibility of the rule enforcement. Such uncertainty gives rise to a phenomenon that the staff sometimes consider they have the authority and duty to execute the rules, while sometimes not. Except from the general school rules, the duty and authority of enforcing rules on other levels are not clearly stipulated either. Additionally, it seems some staff do not attach great importance to the application of rules.

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:

FANYI (A TEACHER): There are a lot of articles in the school rules, but not each of them would be applied in the daily school life …… We do not always educate students with the book of student regulation strictly, we prefer to use a mild way to inform students with their potential negative behaviour …… So we do not use the rule to measure students’ practice all the time. The rule is usually applied when it is necessary. (Fanyi, personal communication, May 31, 2018)

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:

DEHUI (A SCHOOL LEADER): [There are a series of requirements for teachers.] For example, the teacher cannot accept parents’ money. They cannot be hired as private tutors after school. They cannot apply corporal punishment and the variation of corporal punishment. If they violate these rules, they are crossing the line, which will result in punishment. There are according punishment rules, such as demotion, dismissal or even being removed from the public teacher system. But of course these regulations are basically not applied. They are playing a warning function which is seldom used in practice …… what we lack is how can we render teachers to understand the rules and remember them as well as the strict execution in practice. When the rules are enforced strictly,
many problems would be solved …… the rule enforcement and supervision need to invest a lot of energy and time …… we emphasis trust. I trust you, you should worth my trust. So we mainly lead teachers from the conception level. While the bottom line including being absent without reasons, corporal punishment, accepting money from parents and private tutors cannot be violated. (Dehui, personal communication, June 26, 2018)

The above quotes present several confusing expressions on the rule enforcement. Just the expression of “The rule should be used when necessary” and “They are the bottom line which cannot be crossed …… they are basically not applied but for a warning function” have already show many paradoxes literally, let alone the contradictions brought about in practice. When facing an occasion which may violate the rule, some school staff firstly tend to arrange a discussion with the relevant person to analyse the situation and give some suggestions based on their experience before resorting to the rules, which is referred to the mild approach as described in the quote.

**SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL:**

**A piece of observation about checking the school uniform**

After an activity of speech, a teacher asked all students of the same grade to stay and check whether they wore school uniform as required by the school rule. The teacher required all students who did not wear the whole set of uniforms to stand in a line. Every student was allowed to give some explanation. Most students who did not wear the coat of the uniform explained they left it in classrooms. There was only one student who purposely wore casual clothes.

Teacher: What is your reason?

Student: Sorry teacher, I do not wear the uniform.

But as the teacher did not find the student council members who would record this behaviour, the teacher just gave an oral reminding to the student. (Observation, October 19, 2017)

**CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL:**
DANJIE (A TEACHER): Many teachers regulate students with the moral standards. For example, when students use dirty words or some bad jokes, the teacher may give that student a fierce look if the teacher was in a good mood. If the teacher does not have a good mood, then he/she may criticize the student …… write a self-criticism and even ask to see the parents. (Personal communication, May 11, 2018)

Reflection on this quote:

It seems some aspects of school life lack certain rules as well as the enforcement system. In this case, teachers can only regulate students in accordance with their own experience. (field note, May 11, 2018)

Some teachers propose they apply the mild approach because the purpose of punishment is not punishment itself, they should understand the reason of certain behaviour so that more useful instructions can be provided for people for a better growth. However, it seems they obscure the meaning of rule enforcement and reason analysis. These two conceptions actually do not conflict with each other and should be implemented at the same time. If all the rule enforcement is replaced by discussion and verbal warning instead of applying the written rules, the rule thereupon loses its meaning and function, the constraint on all the educational practice, not only democratic practice disappears.

These confusing thoughts and practice on the rule enforcement to some extent demonstrate staffs’ deficiency of rule awareness and the enforcement capability, which corresponds with the general problem of the whole legal system of education mentioned above. In both schools, a common idea of providing freedom on the basis of the clear rules is proposed, which is summarized as the application of strictness and freedom simultaneously. The strictness refers to the boundary constructed by the basic rules should be strictly maintained, on which the freedom could be guaranteed at the same time. However, due to the lack of execution awareness and thorough enforcement mechanism, the rule does not work as strict as people think, which gives rise to more practical problems such as people do not know where the boundary is and if the practice of freedom and autonomy is still within the scope of rationality.
Similar to the hierarchical mechanism of Chinese democracy, the system of rules at school is a hierarchical system which is composed of external rules and internal rules. The rule on the lower level is usually designed on the basis of the upper level rule. The rule enacted from the upper level is usually more general, among which the rule formulated by the central department of education is most general. This allows the educational department or people on the lower level to interpret the rule in accordance with their local context, which means the specific rules in different areas and schools derived from the same national rule for education could be different. But their practice is always supervised by the upper level department to ensure their interpretations is within a reasonable scope. So the model of democratic centralism is enacted through the whole system.

**The assessment system**

Apart from the explicit rules which specifically regulate students’ and staff’s behaviours, the assessment system is also argued as having great influence on the education practice. Many educators express the assessment system determines the education process, influences if education can be helpful for students’ growth and whether the student can become a useful citizen for the society (Chu, 2016). Therefore, as a particular type of educational practice, the encounter between school’s democratic attempts and the current assessment approach generates some specific situation and problems. In the field, all the evaluation approaches for different groups could be classified as two general types, the examination result and the process evaluation.

Because of the long history of imperial examination and the social effects of the resumption of university entrance examination after the Cultural Revolution, the whole society including schools, teachers, students, parents as well as the education administration began to pursue the examination result, which gradually became a national trend in China especially after 1980s. Considering the negative experience of university enrolment in 1970s when the corruption in the enrolment process was prevalent (Liu, 2017), the examination result was chosen as the most fair criterion for the selection of students who can continue learning in the university. This thought highly influenced the educational practice, especially that of the post-primary schooling. In the face of the low acceptance rate of university and the increasing number of candidates, many schools placed undue and unilateral emphasis on the
proportion of students entering universities (Liu, 2017). This led to a circumstance that all the practice at school were organized for the aim of improving students’ score in the exam. Upon this, a social problem gradually emerges: the so-called good students selected from this system are not able to compete with those from other countries, which further impacts the national competitiveness. There are two interesting vignettes quoted and analysed by a Chinese researcher, Chu Zhaohui, which vividly present this situation in his book of *People-Oriented Education Transformation*.

In the June of 1979, China used to send a team to investigate the elementary education in the US, which composed a report after returning to China. In the same year, the US also sent a team to China as the exchange visit, who also wrote a report.

The report written by the China’s investigation team: Students in the US are all complacent regardless of their virtues and abilities; the students in grade two who cannot recognize many words and use their fingers to do the simple calculations always talk about invention unrealistically; they emphasis music, sports and arts, but make light of maths, physics and chemistry; the class is nearly out of control, or even like doing shopping, [students] hang around in the classroom. The conclusion is: the elementary education in the US is incurable. With twenty more years, China’s culture and technology will definitely catch up with or even exceed this superpower.

The report written by the American investigation team: Chinese pupils would like to put their arms in front of their chests. They do not easily change their gestures unless when raising their hands to answer teachers’ questions; before 7 am, the majority of people in the street are students; Chinese students have homework which is the continuation of their assignments at school; In China, the student who gets the highest score in the examination is called the good student who can get a certificate, while others cannot get it. The conclusion is: Chinese students are the most indigenous students in the world. Their examination results are the best in comparison to any other countries in the world. It could be anticipated, China’s culture and technology will leave the US behind after twenty years.
Twenty years later, the “incurable” elementary education in the US has produced dozens of Nobel laureates and more than a hundred knowledgeable billionaires, while not a single school in China has produced a talent like this. (Chu, 2016, p. 230-231)

This completely opposite result from anticipation shocks China and presses Chinese educators to contemplate on the educational practice and the criterion for the quality of education. Similar to the analysis of scholar Chu (2016), a famous question proposed by a well-known scientist, Qian Xuesen, also reflects this social problem: There is not yet one student in China for these years [after the new China being established] whose academic achievements can be compared with those great masters in the Republic time of China. Why cannot our schools produce talents (Shang and Ti, 2019)? In consideration of the situation and these questions, the unitary evaluation approach by the exam result is considered as the important aspect that needs to be reformed to have some positive influences on the education practice. On account of this, a lot of governmental documents, represented by the Guidelines of the National Program for Medium- and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development (2010-2020), begin to explicitly propose the reform of assessment system with a focus on the exploration of a diversified system (Development, 2018). At the meantime, practitioners at school have also realized the negative influence of exam on students’ development. In this case, the process evaluation approach gradually gets the attention from many schools.

However, how does the assessment system, especially exams influence democratic education? As the practice of democratic education advocates the enhancement of school members’, especially students’ participation, it usually costs a large amount of time and energy which renders that for the examination practice and relevant skill training does not remain much. In other words, as exam results become more important the time spent on preparing for exams becomes a higher priority and time for other activities decreases. Also, if high exam results are a priority then other priorities, including social ones, become de-prioritized.

Process evaluation approach
In response to the requirement of reforming the assessment system on the national level and the similar appeal from practitioners, both research schools apply a variety of strategies to reform the pure exam evaluation approach and evaluate the learning process or working process for students and teachers respectively. These new forms are created to distract people’s undue attention on examination, and hope to encourage students’ participation in various areas.

In terms of the process evaluation for teachers, a common activity carried out in both schools is called Evaluating Researchers and the Teaching. Each semester, all students are organized to make anonymous evaluation on teachers who teach them. By scoring on different aspects of the teacher and teaching, students are able to present their appraisal for teachers’ daily behaviour and the situation of teaching. With the open questions, they are also encouraged to point out specific problems and raise their suggestions for teachers.

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL

YANGHONG (A STUDENT): Every semester, we have an activity to evaluate the teachers and their teaching. Every student would make the evaluation for teachers online. For example, if I think he/she is good, not good or general. There are a lot of questions. Such as the class time, the assignment, teachers’ care on students and so on ……. The result of the evaluation will be told to teachers …… they will make the improvements on the proposed issues. For example, as for the situation that some teachers usually do not stop teaching on time, the teachers would make the change. (Yanghong, personal communication, January 15, 2018)

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL

YIZHUANG (A TEACHER): After all students finish the evaluation, we can check the result for us online. Then the teacher will realize the problem. For example, I used to be a supervisor for a student club. Some students raised that it could be better if I could regulate the students who eat in class. So I took notice of that afterwards, and I began to stop students eating in the club class. (Yizhuang, personal communication, May 15, 2018)
In the field, the evaluation result is regarded as an important basis for teachers to adjust their practice, while it is not used by the school to praise or punish teachers. On account of the emphasis of students’ participation, this activity is also considered as a manifestation of democratic education, as it entitles students the authority to express their ideas and provide the space for students to participate in the course of supervising teachers’ work. The implementation of this activity aims to promote students’ and teachers’ participation simultaneously. Students could influence teachers’ assessment, while teachers could have more chances to listen to and interact with students.

As for the assessment of students, the teacher of every course employs a process evaluation system in each school. In Central City Middle School, different teachers design specific rules and give students daily scores from different aspects. Depending on the particular design by teachers, the aspects could involve students’ assignments, the activity they participate and the daily tests.

Central City Middle School

A piece of observation about the process evaluation approach:

A politics class.

At the end of 10 minutes, the teacher asked a group of students to give their presentation in front of the class. The topic was about Engel's Coefficient. After the presentation, students and the teacher discussed on the topic.

After the discussion, the teacher said: “some students are inspired by their presentation, and hope to change the chosen work of writing report to presentation. If you want to change it, just come to my office.”

The presentation and writing report are two forms of assignments among which students can choose one to do. Each student would get a score which would be calculated with other daily assignments and task to generate a final process score. (Observation, December 21, 2017)

At the end of each semester, each course will generate a comprehensive daily score for students based on their performance on these aspects.
In **Sunflower Middle School**, a similar approach is employed by teachers. As the score on different aspects is demonstrated with one to five stars, it is called the Five Star Evaluation. At the end of each semester, every student would get a formal evaluation form presenting the stars they get on different aspects and a written assessment from the teacher of each course.

**A piece of field note about the Five Star Evaluation:**

The Five Star Evaluation does not use the exam result as the only basis of assessment. This assessment approach uses more words more than just numbers. This method instructs students to be concerned not only with the numeral exam result, but also to pay more attention to the daily assignment and requirement. The final result is presented with stars rather than scores, which weakens the importance of exam score. (Field reflection, May 09, 2018)

Except from the evaluation on the learning process in each course, there are also some activities evaluating students’ performance in other areas. A traditional activity conducted in each school is the appraisal of the Merit Students. Students who behave well in all the three areas including the morality, learning and sports can get the prize of Merit Students. To further promote people’s emphasis on students’ development in different areas, the **Sunflower Middle School** creates another evaluation of Seven Stars, which aims to select students who have outstanding performance in other areas. Depending on the area, all students can apply to become the Star of Morality, the Star of Art and Entertainment, the Star of Technology, the Star of Learning, the Star of Sports and so forth. By reviewing students’ application and their daily performance, the review committee which is made up of the student council members and some other students will determine the prize-winner of each Star. All these activities are regarded as the encouragement for students to engage in different areas and develop diverse abilities rather than only focusing on study for paper-pencil test. These process evaluation approaches are also deemed as the effective path for all the school members to understand students more comprehensively rather than making the judgements merely with the exam result. Nonetheless, the critical role of the examination result still cannot be replaced by any other approaches.

**Exam result**
In comparison, exams try to draw people’s attention again on the exam result. In the field, the examination result is still treated as the very important approach and target, if not the most, at both schools. Although the evaluation system is being reformed, the exam result is still used as the basic criterion for students to pursue further education. As the only quantifiable index, it is also adopted by many groups to criticize on the education quality. The main role of paper-pencil test on the selection and evaluation of students does not change virtually.

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL

DANJIE (A TEACHER): The exam result is very important. Because it is an important criterion to judge if the school is good or not. (Danjie, personal communication, May 11, 2018)

NINGJUAN (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): The exam is very important …… As for a school, the pressure brought about by the social assessment indeed generates some challenges for us. So I think as teachers, we need to balance two aspects. One aspect is the anxiety about further education from parents and the whole society, the other aspect is conducting an ideal education. (Ningjuan, personal communication, May 22, 2018)

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL

YUYI (A TEACHER): There is not a single school that is as open as they do not ask for the good exam result for students. (Yui, personal communication, May 03, 2018)

WENDA (A TEACHER): This is a simple question. How can students be enrolled into universities? The only path is the college entrance examination; we only have the college entrance examination now. There is no other way. Other paths such as the nomination from the headmaster, the independent recruitment also depend on exams. It is also exam. What can parents do? [They have no other choice.] (Wenda, personal communication, March 06, 2018)

Despite of this, the new social demand, the requirement adjustment in the education administration as well as the reform on the evaluation reform in the whole country
urge the school and teachers to transform their attitudes about examination. This shows even exams attempt to promote the participation of students in the process of learning.

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL

YANWEI (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEACHER): At present, the examination in our country has transformed to promote individualization …… how can this be understood? It could be conceived the examination is transferring to promote students’ personal interests and abilities …… This is because the social development requires diverse talents. (Yanwei, personal communication, March 08, 2018)

NINGJUAN (A TEACHER/ A SCHOOL LEADER): The reform of the college entrance examination reflects an educational conception: to improve students’ comprehensive quality. People hope [after reform] the examination score can demonstrate students’ quality. Indeed, in terms of the course I teach, it (the reform) has already has some effects. The students who can get high scores but embrace low abilities are less and less, while more and more students who get high scores also have good abilities. (Ningjuan, personal communication, May 22, 2018)

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL

YIZHUANG (A TEACHER): There is a transformation on the design of examination …… the exam question becomes more and more open. About five years ago, there were more closed questions such as the choice question …… but nowadays the knowledge is tested in different exam sections …… I realize the exam question is changing constantly. (Yizhuang, personal communication, May 15, 2018)

HONGYI (A TEACHER): From the design of the examination, a teacher invited from the Education Examination Authority expressed the evaluation approach (the examination) being reformed to reversely promote the transformation of teaching practice. If the examination does not change, teachers will still organize students to recite the knowledge and doing exercises, which is the way of cultivating nerds. If the examination tests on in a more flexible way,
the teacher would realize their former teaching method is no longer useful, and will organize students to make experiments, conduct activities. [They will realize] only when students’ ability is improved can they get the high score. In that case, the teacher will definitely change. (Hongyi, personal communication, May 24, 2018)

A piece of field note about transformation of assessment system:

With increasing attention paying on the negative influence of the exam, various groups including teachers, parents and so forth in the society have recognized that students sacrifice a lot on their growth to achieve high exam results. The educational practice which only emphasises exam outcome rather than students’ comprehensive development gets a lot of criticisms. These social opinions are also in line with the contemporary educational documents which explicitly proposes the importance of transforming the assessment system. (Field reflection, May 03, 2018)

The alteration on the exam question is proposed to change school’s focus on knowledge transmission and instruct teachers to change their passive teaching approach and organize more student-involved activities to improve students’ comprehensive ability. This demonstrates a national transformation on the teaching method to enhance students’ engagement, which highly accords with both Dewey and Freire’s rejection on passive learning as analysed in chapter 6. In practice, the exam style intimately influences the practice of participation. Additionally, with the application of the independent recruitment approach by some universities, many teachers realize the memory of knowledge and exam skill can no longer satisfy the evaluation system.

Within this context, apart from the application of other process evaluation approaches, both research schools attempt to reduce the degree of emphasis on the examination result to alleviate teachers’ and students’ stress as well. Unlike some conventional schools rank students with their exam result and publish the whole rank list to all teachers, students and parents, the research schools only present students’ exam result privately to themselves. In contrast to that the teachers’ promotion and evaluation are directly related to the exam result of the students they teach in some conventional
schools, both research schools do not use the exam result to praise or punish teachers. Nonetheless, the pressure of achieving high score still largely exists, as the education administration, parents and even students, teachers themselves still use the exam result to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning at school. The environment of competition and evaluation created by the exams cannot be totally erased.

CENTRAL CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL

XIAOQING (A TEACHER): The exam result is a main work of teachers. Other things are not quantifiable. And the exam result can demonstrate a teachers’ teaching quality some time. (Xiaoqing, personal communication, May 28, 2018)

SUNFLOWER MIDDLE SCHOOL

JIAOYU (A STUDENT): [After entering the high school period,] some teachers still want to organize some activities, because they think this approach can help us develop a deeper understanding [in the learning process]. But on the contrary, some students do not want the participatory approach. They want teachers to teach some formal class, which are the so-called useful knowledge for the College Entrance Examination. (Jiaoyu, focus group, May 28, 2018)

In the face of the College Entrance Examination which will determine whether a student can enter to the university and how good a university they can enrol, nobody can get rid of the stress and anxiety of getting high scores. This leads to a phenomenon that although the process evaluation approach is largely applied in schools and the result of process evaluation is provided for all the groups, the majority of people do not care this result but the exam result. Additionally, as the process evaluation result does not influence students’ future decisively, many teachers do not take it as serious as the exam, and students are quite easy to get a good result in their process evaluation.

As the significance of exam result is constantly highlighted from diverse perspectives, the dilemma in the practice of democratic education emerges. Albeit the examination questions are transformed with more flexibility and endeavour to test on students’ abilities, the limitation on the paper-pencil test makes it almost impossible to demonstrate all the abilities and virtues of students that are required by the country at present. The contradiction between the urgent social demand and the evaluation
requirement thus generates a question for all the practitioners: how can the educational practice balance these two requirements?

Facing this dilemma, both research schools implement a routine and a long-term strategy to adjust the education practice and try to maintain the balance between the two requirements. In terms of the routine strategy, the Central City Middle School attempts to ensure the in-class time is not occupied too much by student-involved activity. As demonstrated in chapter 6, although they advocate students’ participation in class, they prefer the silent learning activity which does not decrease the teaching and learning efficiency in class. More colourful participatory opportunities are provided after class in the school activities to develop other important abilities. While in Sunflower Middle School, both the teaching and the school activity are organized in a very lively and participated way. Students’ capability is encouraged to be cultivated in any potential occasions. Teachers try to integrate the exam key points into the class activity and even some after-class activities. But if the daily exam result is lower than their anticipation, the proportion of teaching exam points will be increased in class in the period afterwards. When recognizing the decline of certain students’ exam results, the teacher in both schools would suggest the student to adjust the time and energy they spend on activities and pay more attention on the learning for examinations. Such suggestions are considered as an improvement as many conventional schools would force students to stop participating in all the activity without any option.

In addition, both research schools adopt a similar long-term solution for the dilemma. They arrange and encourage the students to develop their comprehensive abilities by participation in the first several years away from graduation. When they enter the senior year and will take the decisive examinations, the participatory opportunities will be cut down. Students will be organized tensely to practice and be trained for the examination. Therefore, the evaluation approach’s influence can be clearly seen in this process.

Summary

In the research schools, the rules and the assessment system are two aspects which put constraint on the practice of democratic education. Being underlined as an important
aspect of democratic education, all school members’ participation in school life is largely influenced by the system of rules and the evaluation approach.

Explicitly bearing the feature of socialist democracy, the system of rules at school is a hierarchical system which is composed of external rules and internal rules. In this system, the rule designed by the central department is usually expressed in a general way which indicates the overall requirements and leaves the space for the lower level department or personnel to practice according to the particular context at the same time. But their practice is always supervised by the upper level department to ensure their interpretations lie within a reasonable scope. The rule on different levels basically defines a scope of school members’ participation and confirms the use of the model of democratic centralism. With the conception of basic rules within schools and the inclusive policies outside school, the space of participatory practice at school is larger than some conventional schools. But due to the deficiency of the rule enforcement mechanism and executers’ lack of rule awareness and ability, the boundary between control and autonomy becomes weak and hard to maintain sometimes.

The exam pressures are having a strong effect on most schools and narrowing the focus of their concerns. The undue emphasis on the examination result challenges the social requirement on students’ diverse capability and creativity. It also brings difficulties for teachers when arranging the participatory activity. But in the research schools, they are committed to preventing this from happening and have developed a series of alternative assessment systems to reward students more holistically, mainly in order to stop the drift towards a narrow focus on exam outcomes. However, as the decisive evaluation and selection basis for pursuing further education is still the exam result, it urges the school and teachers to pay attention on the short-term practice as well the long-term plan cautiously to both guarantee students’ exam score and promote their development of other capabilities. The integration of process evaluation and the exam result supports the approach of participation and democratic centralism respectively and make the balance between them.

In general, the integration of participatory approach and the democratic centralism can be identified in all parts of the school practice. As mentioned in former chapters, the principle of participation is implemented as a bottom-up approach to develop people’s capability and disposition of democracy. While the top-down mechanism is carried out
to keep control and put constraint on the practice. In the course of integrating these two approaches, the rules and assessment system operate to draw the boundary between the two. In this process, as the regional education administrator and the school staff usually act as the designer and the guardian of the rule system and the evaluation system, their awareness and ability about democracy, participation and rules could be identified having huge impact on the implementation of democratic education.
Chapter 9: Conclusion: An Alternative Path of Democratic Education in China

Introduction

This final chapter will draw together the findings from our observations, interviews and analysis of the implementation of democratic education in the two research schools in China. Arising from the conclusions we will offer some ideas to both understand and further explore the practice of democratic education in more depth. In addition, the practice will be further discussed from four aspects of the society, politics, culture and education to demonstrate the roots of such implementation of democratic education in China.

The comprehension and practice of democratic education

As being explicitly raised as a national target as part of the Socialist Core Values in China, democracy has become a more frequently used word in governmental documents and, in consequence, gets more attention in educational practice. To explore the particular practice of integrating democracy and education, this research focuses on the practice of democratic education in two Chinese schools. These schools were chosen as sites for the research because they advocate the application of democracy in their school life and have been attempting to develop and implement the particular comprehension of democracy in the field of education within the context of China. In contrast to the research schools, conventional schools in China are more hierarchical, which is in large part due to the pressure to achieve high examination results. In conventional schools the authority of the teacher over the students, and the school leader over the teachers, is almost an accepted and assumed reality. In this study we talked with teachers who had worked in both conventional schools and the research schools and had noticed the differences in practice and ethos.

To further understand people’s comprehension of democratic education in the research schools, I spent an entire school year of 190 days in total, in the field with at least four days a week, and at most five days a week to collect data with various methods. I organized formal interviews with staff and students through one-to-one interviews and focus groups; observed classroom practice; observed daily life within the schools; had informal conversations with staff and students. By means of all these methods of data
collection, I tried to immerse myself in the life of the schools according to the requirement for a good ethnographer for the aim of developing a better understanding of how it worked for people and why it worked that way.

What I found in the field was that the way people talked about democratic education and the way they practiced democratic education was quite diverse. Many features and specific practices were labelled by the participants as democratic education, across a wide range of areas of the school life. In the face of this situation, and the very large amount of data it generated, I used the method of thematic analysis to analyse the data in three main rounds of analysis. In the first round, I let the preliminary theme emerge from the content itself without using any particular filter, based on which six particular areas for the practice of democratic education were extracted from the practice. In the second round of analysis, three principles of democracy were adopted as the lenses on the result of literature review to further examine the data. As for the third round, the theme of principles of democracy generated from the second round was re-examined with the identification of five qualities of democratic education in research schools. Drawn from the result of data analysis, these six areas include pedagogy and classroom practice, school activity, interpersonal relationships, approaches of decision-making, the rule system and the assessment system. Accordingly, five qualities were identified across these six areas.

From the aspect of the pedagogy and classroom practice as well as the school activity, the approach of participation was emphasized in all regards: the stated aim of the school in this was to promote students’ development of diverse abilities and all-round growth. In relation to interpersonal relationships, a more reciprocal relationship between different stakeholders was argued to close the distance between people and promote better communication with each other. As for the decision-making approach, a strong contextual theme emerged as the mode of democratic centralism appeared to provide the structure within which some level of control and constraint can be exercised, while at the same time providing a basis for wide spread participation in the decision-making process. In terms of the system of rules, the conclusion was that the schools simplified the rule content to provide more space for both the school staff and students to engage in the school life. While as for the assessment system, the measure
was to diversify the evaluation approach and weaken the influence of exam result on students’ learning process to encourage students to learn more than just the exam skills.

Table 2: The practice of democratic education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The main aspects of democratic education</th>
<th>Pedagogy and classroom practice</th>
<th>School activity</th>
<th>Interpersonal relationships</th>
<th>Approach of decision-making</th>
<th>The rule system</th>
<th>The assessment system</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The quality in each aspect</td>
<td>The approach of participation</td>
<td>Cultivate a more reciprocal relationship</td>
<td>The approach of democratic centralism</td>
<td>To simplify the rule content</td>
<td>To diversify the evaluation approach</td>
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</table>

It should be noted that although these five qualities were identified separately in the analysis, they appear to be connected with each other in practice. They help to understand the nature of the connection when we consider the proposed purpose of democratic education as it was articulated in the schools. In both schools, democratic education was commonly described as a particular type of education which aimed to promote students’ all-round development. Furthermore, the schools are explicit in contrasting this holistic commitment with the singular target of improving students’ examination scores which seemed to be the primary driver in most conventional schools in China.

On account of underlining the importance of fostering students’ diverse abilities, the application of participation approach appears to be treated as the prime approach in the practice of democratic education among the five qualities. By means of creating more space for students’ engagement, it appeared that the students are able to exercise some degree of autonomy entitled by teachers and develop their own ability to tackle different issues and solve problems. In classroom practice, a variety of activities such as conducting experiment, discussing the design of class were organized to train students’ ability of independent learning, critical thinking, cooperation, expression and so forth. In the practice of school activities, particular mechanisms and activities
encompassing the student council, student club, raising suggestions for the school management and so forth upheld students to engage in the school management and explore personal hobbies. While as the necessary basis for students’ participation is the approval of school staff, and the whole process of students’ engagement is always supervised by teachers, the practice of participation is all the time integrated with the mode of democratic centralism which turns out to be the second main element and organizing principle in the implementation of democratic education in these schools. Basically as a decision-making approach, this framework provides a mechanism through which everyone within the school could be provided with opportunities to express their view on key issues, but it also ensured that the content and the scope of participation was under supervision all the time. Because of the application of this framework, in the practice of the schools in democratic education, the application of democratic centralism combines participation and control in a way which was contextually appropriate echoing the Chinese socialist democracy, but quite different from practice from a liberal perspective. On account of the specific feature of the decision-making process, the commonly used participatory method is embodied as another Chinese political conception of consultative democracy, which allowed different stakeholders to participate in the discussion before and after the process of decision-making to ensure the quality of the judgement.

As a consequence, the method of participation and the method of democratic centralism are adopted as a combination for the practice of democratic education. They support each other and also put restrictions mutually. The integration of these two approaches generally outlines a core structure for the implementation of democratic education. Within this structure, the other three qualities seem to work as supportive factors for these two main approaches. To be specific, the cultivation of more reciprocal relationship provides opportunities for different stakeholders to participate in the educational process without destabilizing the schools because the control features of democratic centralism remains in place. The simplification of the rule content aimed to releases more space for people’s engagement, but the basic limitation is still embedded in the simplified rule system through the process by which final decisions are made. The diversification of the evaluation approach intends to divert people’s concentration from purely preparing for examination to the experience learning through engagement, but the exam result still acts as a judgmental basis to
adjust people’s degree of participation: in other words, exam performance was important, but it is not driving all aspects of school life, as sometimes appeared to be the case in more traditional schools. Therefore, in practice they are making the balance between the two main approaches and playing the roles of stabilizing the whole structure. In particular, the rule system and the assessment system work as the practical boundary between the two main approaches. Based on these interrelations, a possible practical structure of democratic education could be constructed as below.

*Chart 1: a possible structure of practicing democratic education*

In this structure, except from the main part composed by the five qualities, there are four participatory methods expanded from the approach of participation. These particular methods are extracted from the practice of participation in both research schools. But as the exploration of democratic education is still in the preliminary stage in both schools, the explicit rule of defining the certain degree of participation has not been developed yet. Hence, apart from the method of consultative democracy which is usually used when making decisions, the method of providing options, entitling the
right of expression and entitling a degree of autonomy on different levels for specific issues are popular techniques when designing the participatory activity. Hence, in this structure, they are acting as the possible ways to practice the approach of participation, but not necessary components. The dashed arrows are used to show their optional feature and demonstrate there might be more ways of participation that could be explored.

Consequently, the practice of democratic education in Chinese schools could be comprehended as a particular type of education which mainly integrates the approach of democratic centralism and the approach of participation to foster students’ all-round development and meet the national requirements for the future citizens at the same time. From a theoretical perspective, this finding highlights the importance of context when trying to understand how abstract concepts are understood and put into practice in different places (Sant, 2019). In part because of universalized notions of human rights, there is perhaps sometimes an assumption that the concept of democracy is essentially one with a common core of elements, with variation in practice around the periphery. The results of this study highlight the importance of understanding and engaging with localized meaning and the framework of assumptions that people in context bring to these concepts. The next section will examine the root and basis of such practice and how they appear to have shaped current practice in Chinese schools.

**Roots of the practice of Chinese democratic education**

Drawn from the analysis, it could be recognized the comprehension and practice of this particular mode of democratic education entails a group of strong roots in the field of education, politics, culture and society. Some thoughts and conceptions in these fields greatly influence the practice as anticipated in chapter 3.

**The theoretical foundation in education**

In accordance with the literature review about democratic education, John Dewey and Paulo Freire are two influential theorists in China. In comparison, Dewey gains a higher degree of concern and influence as he used to visit China and engage in the Chinese educational reform in the 20th century. This was evident throughout this study. Participants’ understanding about democratic education mirrors a lot of Dewey’s thoughts. The emphasis that students should learn through participation, the advocacy
of transforming passive teaching methods to students-engaged teaching methods are all in line with the ideas in Dewey’s theory. Although not being mentioned directly, Dewey’s argument that democracy should be learnt by practicing rather than in the textbook is also reflected in the field. A series of school activities imitating the mechanism of People’s Congress or embracing different features of Chinese socialist democracy are organized in both research schools. Students can obtain certain knowledge and ability about democracy by their own experience. At the end of the data analysis, participation even stands out as a main part of the structure of democratic education.

In contrast, Freire’s thought is not reflected as much as Dewey’s. In practice, the main resonation with Freire’s theory lies on the description of democratic relationship. As the traditional personal relationship is criticized as excessively controlling and oppressive, a humanized, reciprocal relationship is proposed to set up between different groups including students, teachers, and school leaders. The practice of promoting the communication between groups corresponded with the technique of dialogue in Freire’s thought.

However, the application of both theories does not involve either of their political views which virtually form the basis of their ideas of democratic education. Despite the fact that some of Dewey’s thoughts are adopted and integrated as a main approach to participation, his ideas of liberal democracy are completely eliminated in practice. This echoes with the analysis result of previous Chinese literature.

**The political foundation**

According to the analysis on democracy and democratic education in chapter 2 and chapter 3, the political view plays a significant role in various theories of democratic education. Different arguments on politics always provide reasonable explanations for specific elaborations of democratic education. But in previous Chinese literature, democratic education is always treated as a pure educational concept without relating to politics. Even when analysing other theorists’ thoughts, their political views are also largely erased. As mentioned in the section above, political elements in Dewey’s and Freire’s theories are ignored in the field as well. While being different from this, in practice the Chinese socialist democracy, especially democratic centralism, is weaving
through all areas of campus life. This result answers the anticipated question raised in chapter 3 that whether liberal democracy is implicitly applied or socialist democracy.

Unlike the idea proposed by many participants that democratic education is an independent conception from politics, the analysis result draws an opposite conclusion that highlights the importance of context by showing that the practice of democratic education had an intimate relationship with the Chinese political system.

Firstly, as an educational institution, the public school is a part of the educational system, of which the whole management process entails the feature of the socialist democracy. In the course of enacting a policy and afterwards, people’s suggestions are encouraged to be reported hierarchically to the central department and taken as the judgmental basis. After the formulation of the policy, the top-down supervision is employed to ensure the policy to be efficiently implemented from the central department to the terminal institution. The conception of democratic centralism is actually applied for the management of the whole education system in which the schools also get involved.

Secondly, the hierarchical supervision and advice collection system which reflects the conception of democratic centralism was also applied as the basic management structure within the school. In addition, the practice on the combination of the approach of democratic centralism and participation in the educational practice also corresponds with the exploration on the integration of China’s democracy and participatory democracy in the political area. Particularly, the combination of democratic centralism and consultative democracy functions basically the same as the national mechanism of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). From the level of the particular activity, the suggestion-raising activity models the People's Congress. The system of the student delegate and the staff delegate have the similar function with the People’s Deputies working at the People’s Congress. This implies the factor of Chinese socialist democracy is permeated in the school practice.

As a part of the education system, the school practice turns out to be a link of the national practice of the Chinese socialist democracy. It bears the mission to cultivate students’ awareness and ability of socialist democracy. At the same time, it also plays the role of seeking the possible path of implementing China’s democracy in the field
of education. Therefore, the practice of democratic education in Chinese schools gets a strong support from the area of politics and showed a close connection with the Chinese socialist democracy.

**The culture root for the practice**

In the field, some thoughts of traditional culture, especially Confucian culture are adopted to further legitimize the practice of democratic education.

In both schools, the target of cultivation of diverse talents with certain requirements corresponded with a central idea, harmony in diversity (和而不同), in the Confucius culture. Being precisely expressed as “the man of noble character seeks harmony in diversity, the man of vile character aims at uniformity but not harmony” (君子和而不同, 小人同而不和), this conception indicates the man of noble character should have independent thinking which can supports the realization of harmony, while although those with vile character can create a uniformity atmosphere on the appearance, they could easily cause conflicts due to lack of independent opinions. The target of seeking harmony in this saying is also reflected in the Socialist Core Values, in which harmony is written as target of the national development.

The adjustment of the teacher-student relationship in the practice of democratic education was in line with a mode of relationship advocated in the Confucius culture, which was described as “Only when students could get close with a teacher, they would believe in what teachers teach (亲其师, 信其道) (Chen, 2004).” In the research school, various practice including promoting good communication, closeness and warmth are implemented to improve the emotional relationship between teachers and students to help students trust their teachers so that the learning quality could be promoted.

These thoughts in the practice of the research schools reflects not only a link between practice with current political priorities, but also the restoration of a link with a much older historical tradition of Confucius philosophy which was attacked and rejected for quite a long time since the New Culture Movement at the beginning of the 20th century, especially at the time of the Cultural Revolution. The establishment of such connections in the school also corresponds with a strong appeal of recovering the
outstanding traditional culture across various areas to improve people’s confidence in Chinese culture and promotes the social quality of morality. In the area of education, the Guidelines for Improving the Education of Outstanding Traditional Culture (China, 2014) is released in 2014 which also seems to become an impetus for the integration of the traditional thoughts with democratic education in the research schools.

**The social foundation for the practice of democratic education**

Apart from the above three foundations, the current social requirement also turns out to influence the construction of democratic education in China.

The whole society’s advocacy on students’ acquisition of various abilities rather than the simple improvement on the examination score positively promotes the implementation of democratic education. It provides the basis for two research schools to explore alternatives to the hierarchical approach which seems to be the predominant mode of practice in mainstream schools.

As demonstrated in chapter eight, the general emphasis on the examination score in the whole country could be traced back to the urgent quest for an equitable evaluation approach of education to protect the talent-selection process from the harm of corruption when a normal social order was just re-established after the Cultural Revolution. Being regarded as the fairest way to select students with which the trick of corruption was hard to play, the exam score was adopted in order to ensure that personal ability, rather than family background or relationship, was the mediating factor in gaining access to new education opportunities. The disruption caused by the Cultural Revolution had perhaps placed undue emphasis on the spirit of rebellion and the rejection of basic knowledge learning in the field of education: both of these were seen as problems that needed to be addressed, and a focus on a renewed commitment to high quality education was seen as the best way to restore order in education in that particular historical period (Liu, 2017).

However, with the transformation of the whole society, especially after the implementation of the Reform and Opening-up policy (Liu, 2017), the national requirement for the education system and the outcomes for students changed at the same time. In the current context, students who focus narrowly on exam results are
believed to be increasingly unable to meet the needs of a booming and rapid-changing society. In the new era, the view of the government is that the task of the educational system is wider and deeper than simply boosting qualifications levels (Development, 2018). As the economy and society has changed over time, and as a consequence of frequent exchanges with other countries, there is a growing perception that graduates need a wider set of skills and attributes in order to make a fuller contribution to society and economic growth, particularly in the age of globalization. As a consequence, more and more people recognize the problem of the conventional education system, based on which the national famous question was raised by the scientist, Qian Xuesen, why cannot the education system in China cultivate talents (Shang and Ti, 2019)? These new social challenges and requirements were then written into the education governmental documents. In the Outline of the National Program for Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) which is considered as an overall and instructional document for the development of whole country’s education system, it mentions the education reform and innovation should solve the current contradictions between the social requirement of diverse talents and the deficiency of the education system when cultivating such talents (Development, 2018).

It is in this context in which there is a government recognition of the need for change that the two research schools in this study have been given the opportunity to develop new approaches and innovations in school practice. In this way it has been recognized that the development of a new form of democratic education may cater to the needs of the next stage of the national development and the perceived need for the cultivation of a wider set of talents among students.

**Summary and the research direction in the future**

In conclusion, the creation on the practice of democratic education in Chinese schools is a process of indigenization. A lot of local elements in the field of society, politics and culture are fused into the practice, which improves the operability and the suitability of democratic education in the context of China. The integration of these Chinese factors into the framework of democratic education supplements the former practice in China. At the same time, the adoption of local factors, especially the deliberation on China’s democracy could also eliminate people’s misgivings about the sensitivity on the topic of democratic education.
The construction of the possible structure improves the practical system of democratic education in the context of China, which could provide a basis for people to understand and make further exploration on the implementation of democratic education. Based on the structure, the deficiency of the current practice and the future research directions are also able to be identified. Drawn from the practice, one deficiency in practice is the lack of attention on the practice of democracy between the staff. As analyzed in chapter 7 and chapter 8, the staff plays an important role in the course of enacting and executing the rule. Their awareness and ability of democracy and participation largely impacts the practice of democratic education for students. However, in the field, both schools attaches great importance on students’ cultivation when referring democratic education, but rarely discussed from the aspect of teachers. This indicates a direction for the future research
Appendix

Appendix 1: Observation Form

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<th>Time:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Location:</td>
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<td>People:</td>
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<td>Name of activity:</td>
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<th>Process of the activity</th>
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Appendix 2: Student interview outline 1

• 自我介绍  Self-introduction
  - 做简单的自我介绍，并对研究进行介绍。用伦理问题申请那个文件进行介绍。
    Introducing myself and my research with the ethical document.
  - 请问大家是否可以录音，打开录音设备。
    Asking permission for recording. (Remember to turn on the voice record equipment.)

• 说规则 Explain the rule of talking turn in focus group
  - 大家自由发言，原则上按照顺时针的顺序，如果有些问题不想回答或不知该如何回答可以不回答。
    Talking in the order of clockwise. If the participant do not want to answer the question or do not know how to answer, they can choose to skip the question.

• 焦点访谈问题 Questions for the focus group
  - 暖场问题 Warming-up questions
    - 你们什么时候来这个学校读书的吗？
      When did you come to study at this school?
    - 喜欢现在的学校吗？为什么喜欢呢？
      Do you like this school? Why do you like it?
    - 和之前的学校比，你喜欢这个学校的那些特点呢？
      In comparison to your former schools, what school features do you like in your current school?
有关社团 About the student club

- 你们都参加什么社团了? 简单介绍一下你所参与的社团。

  Do you attend any club? Can you introduce the club you attend?

- 社团是怎么建立的?

  Do you know how is the club established?

- 为什么想要建立/加入这个社团?

  Why do you choose to establish and attend this club?

- 学校对于社团有什么要求?

  Is there any requirement for the club from the school?

- 学校对于社团有什么支持?

  Is there any support for the club from the school?

- 学校对社团有监管吗? 有哪些具体的监管措施?

  Does the school supervise the club activity? What supervision measures does the school take?

- 你觉得学校对于社团这一部分民主吗? 为什么?

  Do you think the school management on club is democratic? Why?

- 你觉得社团是怎么体现出民主的?

  How do you think the running of club manifest democracy?

有关民主 About democracy
你认为什么是民主？

What do you think is democracy?

你理想中的学校民主是什么样子？

What is the ideal democratic practice at school?

现在学校的情况和你的理想符合吗？

Do you think the current practice at your school consistent with your ideal?

你觉得学校里有民主吗？为什么？有哪些表现？

What do you think are the important feature of democracy?

课堂中有民主吗？有什么体现？

Does democracy exist in class? What is the manifestation?

学校活动里有民主吗？有什么体现？

Does democracy exist in school activity? What is the manifestation?

你觉得学校实施这种民主的原因是什么？

What do you think is the main reason for the school to implement democracy?

你希望中的民主和学校的民主一致吗？

Is the democratic practice at school consistent with your ideal?

你觉得民主最重要的特点应该是什么？
What do you think are the important features of democracy?

Do you think democracy is important? What is the meaning of democracy?
Appendix 3: Student interview outline 2

- **自我介绍 Self-introduction**
  - 做简单的自我介绍，并对研究进行介绍。用伦理问题申请那个文件进行介绍
    
    Introducing myself and my research with the ethical document.
  - 请问大家是否可以录音，打开录音设备。
    
    Asking permission for recording. (Remember to turn on the voice record equipment.)

- **说规则 Explain the rule of talking turn in focus group**
  - 如果有些问题不想回答或不知该如何回答可以不回答。
    
    If the participant do not want to answer the question or do not know how to answer, they can choose to skip the question.

- **访谈问题 Interview questions**
  - **暖场问题 Warming-up questions**
    - 你们什么时候来这个学校读书的吗?
      
      When did you come to study at this school?
    - 喜欢现在的学校吗？为什么喜欢呢?
      
      Do you like this school? Why do you like it?
    - 和之前的学校比，你喜欢这个学校的那些特点呢?
      
      In comparison to your former schools, what school features do you like in your current school?
有关民主 About democracy

▪ 你认为什么是民主?
What do you think is democracy?

▪ 你理想中的学校民主是什么样子?
What is the ideal democratic practice at school?

▪ 现在学校的情况和你的理想符合吗?
Do you think the current practice at your school consistent with your ideal?

▪ 您觉得西方民主和中国民主有区别吗？有什么区别？
Is there any difference between democracy in western countries and Chinese democracy? What is the difference?

▪ 中国开展学校民主的前提是什么？保证高考成绩和平时的考试成绩是前提吗？
Is there any precondition for carrying out democracy in Chinese schools? Is the high achievement of the daily exam and college entrance examination the precondition of democratic education?

▪ 民主与秩序的关系是什么？维持秩序时民主教育的前提吗？还有哪些前提？
What is the relationship between democracy and order? Is maintaining the order the precondition of democratic education? What other preconditions for the implementation of democratic education?
你觉得老师或者学校在开展民主教育的时候有没有一个度，这个度是如何把握的？

Is there a boundary or balance for the practice of democratic education? How is this balance maintained in practice?

你觉得民主有一个严格的标准吗？一定要做到什么才算是民主呢？

Do you think there is a strict standard for democratic education? How can the educational practice being judged as democratic practice?

你觉得学校里有民主吗？为什么？有哪些表现？

What do you think are the important feature of democracy?

学校活动里有民主吗？有什么体现？

Does democracy exist in school activity? What is the manifestation?

你觉得学校实施这种民主的原因是什么？

What do you think is the main reason for the school to implement democracy?

你希望中的民主和学校的民主一致吗？

Is the democratic practice at school consistent with your ideal?

你觉得民主最重要的特点应该是什么？

What do you think are the important features of democracy?
你觉得民主重要吗？民主的作用是什么？

Do you think democracy is important? What is the meaning of democracy?

年龄是影响学校开展民主的因素吗？除了年龄，还有什么其他因素需要考虑，从而作为开展民主教育的分类依据？

Is students’ age a factor for the practice of democratic education? Is there any other influencing factors except the age?

有关社团和学生会 About the student club and student council

你们都参加什么社团了？简单介绍一下你所参与的社团。

Do you attend any club? Can you introduce the club you attend?

社团是怎么建立的？

Do you know how is the club established?

为什么想要建立/加入这个社团？

Why do you choose to establish and attend this club?

学校对于社团有什么要求？

Is there any requirement for the club from the school?

学校对于社团有什么支持？

Is there any support for the club from the school?

学校对社团有监管吗？有哪些具体的监管措施？
Does the school supervise the club activity? What supervision measures does the school take?

- 你觉得学校对于社团这一部分民主吗？为什么？

Do you think the school management on club is democratic? Why?

- 你觉得社团是怎么体现出民主的？

How do you think the running of club manifest democracy?

- 我听说学校有写提案的活动，你了解吗？你写过提案吗？写提案的过程都有什么呢？

I heard we have a campus proposal activity? Do you know it? Have you ever written proposal before? What is the process of raising the suggestions?

- 你属于学校的学生会吗？学校的学生会成员都是怎么产生的？

Are you working at the student council? How are the student members selected?

○ 关于课堂中的民主 About democratic practice in class

- 课堂中有民主吗？有什么体现？

Does democracy exist in class? What is the manifestation?

- 在课堂当中，你会更喜欢讲授法多一点的，还是小组合作多一点的？为什么？

Which teaching method do you prefer, lecturing or student-engaged method?
你觉得大家都喜欢哪种方式呢？如果大多数学生都喜欢讲授法，那么如果老师听从了学生的意见，采用讲授法，你觉得这种方式算是民主吗？

Which teaching method do you think other students prefer? If the teacher listens to students’ opinion and adopt the teaching method of lecturing, do you think this practice is democratic?
Appendix 4: Student interview outline 3

- **自我介绍 Self-introduction**
  - 做简单的自我介绍，并对研究进行介绍。用伦理问题申请那个文件进行介绍
    Introducing myself and my research with the ethical document.
  - 请问大家是否可以录音，打开录音设备。
    Asking permission for recording. (Remember to turn on the voice record equipment.)

- **说规则 Explain the rule of talking turn in focus group**
  - 如果有些问题不想回答或不知该如何回答可以不回答。
    If the participant do not want to answer the question or do not know how to answer, they can choose to skip the question.

- **访谈问题 Interview questions**
  - 暖场问题 Warming-up questions
    - 你们什么时候来这个学校读书的吗？
      When did you come to study at this school?
    - 喜欢现在的学校吗？为什么喜欢呢？
      Do you like this school? Why do you like it?
    - 和之前的学校比，你喜欢这个学校的那些特点呢？
      In comparison to your former schools, what school features do you like in your current school?
  - 有关民主 About democracy
▪ 你认为什么是民主？

What do you think is democracy?

▪ 你理想中的学校民主是什么样子？

What is the ideal democratic practice at school?

▪ 现在学校的情况和你的理想符合吗？

Do you think the current practice at you school consistent with your ideal?

▪ 您觉得西方民主和中国民主有区别吗？有什么区别？

Is there any difference between democracy in western countries and Chinese democracy? What is the difference?

▪ 中国开展学校民主的前提是什么？保证高考成绩和平时的考试成绩是前提吗？

Is there any precondition for carrying out democracy in Chinese schools? Is the high achievement of the daily exam and college entrance examination the precondition of democratic education?

▪ 民主与秩序的关系是什么？维持秩序是民主教育的前提吗？还有哪些前提？

What is the relationship between democracy and order? Is maintaining the order the precondition of democratic education? What other preconditions for the implementation of democratic education?

▪ 你觉得老师或者学校在开展民主教育的时候有没有一个度，


这个度是如何把握的？

Is there a boundary or balance for the practice of democratic education? How is this balance maintained in practice?

▪ 你觉得民主有一个严格的标准吗？一定要做到什么才算是民主呢？

Do you think there is a strict standard for democratic education? How can the educational practice being judged as democratic practice?

▪ 你觉得学校里有民主吗？为什么？有哪些表现？

What do you think are the important feature of democracy?

▪ 学校活动里有民主吗？有什么体现？

Does democracy exist in school activity? What is the manifestation?

▪ 你觉得学校实施这种民主的原因是什么？

What do you think is the main reason for the school to implement democracy?

▪ 你希望中的民主和学校的民主一致吗？

Is the democratic practice at school consistent with your ideal?

▪ 你觉得民主最重要的特点应该是什么？

What do you think are the important features of democracy?

▪ 你觉得民主重要吗？民主的作用是什么？

What do you think are the important features of democracy?
Do you think democracy is important? What is the meaning of democracy?

- 年龄是影响学校开展民主的因素吗？除了年龄，还有什么其他因素需要考虑，从而作为开展民主教育的分类依据？
  
  Is students’ age is a factor for the practice of democratic education? Is there any other influencing factors except the age?

○ 有关民主活动 About democratic activities

- 我听说学校有写提案的活动，你了解吗？你写过提案吗？写提案的过程都有什么呢？
  
  Do you know about the activity of writing propositions for the school management? Did you write proposal before? What is the whole process for raising propositions?

- 你属于学校的学生会吗？学校的学生会成员都是怎么产生的？学生会是怎么运作的？
  
  Do you work at the student council? How are student members selected? How does the student council work?

- 你们觉得这些活动的开展能被称为是民主的吗？
  
  Do you think these activities embody democracy?
Appendix 5: Student interview outline 4

- **自我介绍 Self-introduction**
  - 做简单的自我介绍，并对研究进行介绍。用伦理问题申请那个文件进行介绍
    Introducing myself and my research with the ethical document.
  - 请问大家是否可以录音，打开录音设备。
    Asking permission for recording. (Remember to turn on the voice record equipment.)

- **说规则 Explain the rule of talking turn in focus group**
  - 如果有些问题不想回答或不知该如何回答可以不回答。
    If the participant do not want to answer the question or do not know how to answer, they can choose to skip the question.

- **访谈问题 Interview questions**
  - **关于学生会 About student council**
    - 学生会是如何成立的？
      How is the student council established (in different years)?
    - 学生会的工作内容包含哪些？平时都需要做些什么？
      What is the working content of student council? What do they usually do in daily campus life?
    - 你觉得学生会锻炼了自己的哪些能力？
      What kind of ability do you think the work at student council can develop for a student?
关于学生代表 About the student delegate

- 您觉得在咱们学校，学生自治组织或者班级里的学生干部更多地是学生的代表，代表学生去和教师谈判，还是更多地是帮助老师开展管理工作？

Which interest group do you think the student leader or the student council represent, teacher or student?

- 在管理班级或者课堂的过程中，有没有出现过个体利益和集体利益出现矛盾的时候？如果出现矛盾要怎么解决？

Is there any conflict between individual interest and collective interest in daily school life? How is the contradiction usually solved?

关于提建议的活动 About the activity of raising ideas for the school

- 提建议的活动是如何开展的？过程是怎样的？

How is this activity carried out at school? What is the process?

- 在开展活动的过程中学生和学生会分别做什么工作？

What exact work do the participant and student council do in this activity?

- 会不会有学生不积极参加的情况？

Is this activity popular among students? Is there any student who does not like this activity?
提议会得到学校的反馈吗?

Does the school give feedback to students' propositions?

○ 关于春游活动 About the Spring Outing Day

- 春游活动是如何开展的？过程是怎样的？

  How is the Spring Outing organized? What is the process?

- 在开展活动的过程中学生和学生会分别承担什么工作？

  What do students and student council do in this activity?

○ 关于游学活动 About the learning trip

- 游学活动是如何开展的？过程是怎样的？

  How is the learning trip organized? What is the process?

- 在开展活动的过程中学生和学生会分别承担什么工作？

  What do students and student council do in this activity?

○ 关于社团 About the club

- 你参加过什么社团吗？

  Have you attended any club?

- 社团是如何成立及开展的？

  How is the club established?

○ 关于学校规则及班级规则 About the rule on the school level and class level

- 这两种规则是由谁制定的？

  Who are the rules made by?
Who design these two kinds of rules?

- Who supervise the enforcement of rules?

- Is there any punishment when violating the rules? Who enforce the punishment?

- What’s the difference between the rule system at your school and your previous school? What’s the difference between the working effect?

○ About the official school account at the social media

- Does the school have any official account at the social media?

- Who establish and run the account?

- What do you think is the meaning of the official account at the social media?

- Besides the above mentioned, did the school have any other similar activities that students must participate in?
Is there any other school activities which encourage students’ engagement?

▪ 你觉得这些学生参与活动的意义是什么?
What do you think is the meaning for students to engage in these activities?

▪ 你觉得这种鼓励学生参与、开展民主教育的方式有什么优势和弊端吗?
What’s the advantage and disadvantage of democratic education which emphasizes students’ participation?

○ 关于师生关系 About the teacher—student relationship

▪ 在现在的学校，你觉得师生关系是怎样的?
How do you think of the teacher—student relationship in your school?

▪ 和以往学校的师生关系有什么不同吗?
Is there any difference between the teacher—student relationship in your former school and the current school?

▪ 你觉得这样的师生关系有什么优点吗？对学习、对生活方面。
What are the advantages for such teacher—student relationship in your school (from the perspective of learning and school life)?

▪ 您觉得师生关系重要吗？为什么？
Do you think teacher—relationship is important? Why?
○ 关于教学 About teaching and learning

▪ 你觉得现在的课堂和以往学校的课堂有什么不同？

Is there any difference between the teaching style in this school and your former school?

▪ 老师组织学生参与的环节多吗？

Do teachers usually organize student-engaged activities in class?

▪ 你觉得学生参与的环节有什么作用吗？

What’s the effects and meaning of these student-engaged activities?

▪ 参与活动和讲授法的课堂在理解知识上会有很大的不同吗？

Is there any difference for learning between the teaching method of lecturing and student-engaged method?

○ 关于民主教育 About democratic education

▪ 你觉得什么是民主教育？学校里的民主都表现在哪些方面？

What do you think is democratic education? What are the practical manifestations?

▪ 我曾经听说过学校所说的严格而自由的民主，你对这句话如何理解？你同意这个说法吗？学校严格的底线有哪些？在学生触碰底线后会有什么样的措施吗？

I heard an expression of “strictness and freedom”, how do you understand this sentence? Is there any strict boundary in practice? Is there any punishment when students violate
the boundary?
Appendix 6: Student interview outline 5

* 自我介绍 Self-introduction

- 做简单的自我介绍，并对研究进行介绍。用伦理问题申请文件进行介绍
  Introducing myself and my research with the ethical document.
- 请问大家是否可以录音，打开录音设备。
  Asking permission for recording. Remember to turn on the voice record equipment.

* 说规则 Explain the rule of talking turn in focus group

- 如果有些问题不想回答或不知该如何回答可以不回答。
  If the participant do not want to answer the question or do not know how to answer, they can choose to skip the question.

* 访谈问题 Interview questions

- 关于学生会 About student council

  - 学生会是如何成立的？
    How is the student council established (in different years)?

  - 学生会的工作内容包含哪些？平时都需要做些什么？
    What is the working content of student council? What do they usually do in daily campus life?

  - 你觉得学生会锻炼了自己的哪些能力？
    What kind of ability do you think the work at student council can develop for a student?
○ 关于学生代表  About the student delegate

▪ 您觉得在咱们学校，学生自治组织或者班级里的学生干部更多地是学生的代表，代表学生去和教师谈判，还是更多地是帮助老师开展管理工作?

Which interest group do you think the student leader or the student council represent, teacher or student?

▪ 在管理班级或者课堂的过程中，有没有出现过个体利益和集体利益出现矛盾的时候？如果出现矛盾要怎么解决？

Is there any conflict between individual interest and collective interest in daily school life? How is the contradiction usually solved?

○ 关于提建议的活动 About the activity of raising ideas for the school

▪ 提建议的活动是如何开展的？过程是怎样的？

How is this activity carried out at school? What is the process?

▪ 在开展活动的过程中学生和学生会分别做什么工作？

What exact work do the participant and student council do in this activity?

▪ 会不会有学生不积极参加的情况？

Is this activity popular among students? Is there any student who does not like this activity?

▪ 提议会得到学校的反馈吗？


Does the school give feedback to students' propositions?

○ 关于春游活动 About the Spring Outing Day

- 春游活动是如何开展的？过程是怎样的？

  How is the Spring Outing organized? What is the process?

- 在开展活动的过程中学生和学生会分别承担什么工作？

  What do students and student council do in this activity?

○ 关于游学活动 About the learning trip

- 游学活动是如何开展的？过程是怎样的？

  How is the learning trip organized? What is the process?

- 在开展活动的过程中学生和学生会分别承担什么工作？

  What do students and student council do in this activity?

○ 关于社团 About the club

- 你参加过什么社团吗？

  Have you attended any club?

- 社团是如何成立及开展的？

  How is the club established?

○ 关于学校规则及班级规则 About the rule on the school level and class level

- 这两种规则是由谁制定的？

  Who design these two kinds of rules?
▪ 由谁监督实行？
Who supervise the enforcement of rules?

▪ 是否有惩罚措施？谁来进行惩罚？
Is there any punishment when violating the rules? Who enforce the punishment?

▪ 和以往学校的校规有什么不同？开展的效果有什么不同？
What’s the difference between the rule system at your school and your previous school? What’s the difference between the working effect?

○ 关于学校的公众号 About the official school account at the social media

▪ 学校是否有公众号？
Does the school have any official account at the social media?

▪ 是由谁来创立并管理运行的？
Who establish and run the account?

▪ 你觉得公众号的作用在于什么？
What do you think is the meaning of the official account at the social media?

▪ 除了以上提到的这些，学校还有没有其他类似的让学生主要组织参与的活动？
Is there any other school activities which encourage students’
engagement?

▪ 你觉得这些学生参与活动的意义是什么？

What do you think is the meaning for students to engage in these activities?

▪ 你觉得这种鼓励学生参与、开展民主教育的方式有什么优势和弊端吗？

What’s the advantage and disadvantage of democratic education which emphasizes students’ participation?

○ 关于师生关系 About the teacher–student relationship

▪ 在现在的学校，你觉得师生关系是怎样的？

How do you think of the teacher–student relationship in your school?

▪ 和以往学校的师生关系有什么不同吗？

Is there any difference between the teacher–student relationship in your former school and the current school?

▪ 你觉得这样的师生关系有什么优点吗？对学习、对生活方面。

What are the advantages for such teacher–student relationship in your school (from the perspective of learning and school life)?

▪ 您觉得师生关系重要吗？为什么？

Do you think teacher–relationship is important? Why?
○ 关于教学 About teaching and learning

▪ 你觉得现在的课堂和以往学校的课堂有什么不同？

Is there any difference between the teaching style in this school and your former school?

▪ 老师组织学生参与的环节多吗？

Do teachers usually organize student-engaged activities in class?

▪ 你觉得学生参与的环节有什么作用吗？

What’s the effects and meaning of these student-engaged activities?

▪ 参与活动和讲授法的课堂在理解知识上会有很大的不同吗？

Is there any difference for learning between the teaching method of lecturing and student-engaged method?

○ 关于民主教育 About democratic education

▪ 你觉得什么是民主教育？学校里的民主都表现在哪些方面？

What do you think is democratic education? What are the practical manifestations?

▪ 我曾经听说过学校所说的严格而自由的民主，你对这句话如何理解？你同意这个说法吗？学校严格的底线有哪些？在学生触碰底线后会有什么样的措施吗？

I heard an expression of “strictness and freedom”, how do you understand this sentence? Is there any strict boundary in practice? Is there any punishment when students violate
你觉得从初中到高中在学校管理方面有什么明显的变化吗？
（包括成绩、学生参与活动、学生会等方面）

Is there any difference between the school management in the period of secondary school and high school (including the aspect of exam result, student-engaged activity, student council and so forth)?

你觉得参加活动和提高学习成绩之间有矛盾吗？会不会因为参与活动影响了学习成绩？

Do you think attending activities and exam result contradict with each other? Do they have influence on each other?

学校如何评价学生？只是成绩还是什么其他方式？老师会因为学习成绩而阻止学生参与活动吗？

How does the school evaluate students? Exam or other approaches? Do teachers stop students participating activities because of the exam result?

你觉得咱们学校和其他学校最大的不同在于什么？

What do you think the big difference between your current school and other schools?
Appendix 7: Student interview outline 6

- 自我介绍 Self-introduction
  - 做简单的自我介绍，并对研究进行介绍。用伦理问题申请的文件进行介绍。
  Introducing myself and my research with the ethical document.
  - 请问大家是否可以录音，打开录音设备。
  Asking permission for recording. Remember to turn on the voice record equipment.

- 说规则 Explain the rule of talking turn in focus group
  - 如果有些问题不想回答或不知该如何回答可以不回答。
  If the participant do not want to answer the question or do not know how to answer, they can choose to skip the question.

- 访谈问题 Interview questions
  - 关于学生会 About student council
    - 学生会是如何成立的？
      How is the student council established (in different years)?
    - 学生会的工作内容包含哪些？平时都需要做些什么？
      What is the working content of student council? What do they usually do in daily campus life?
    - 学生会都会承办什么活动？这些活动都是由谁发起的？
      What are the activities organized by the student council? Who design and organize these activities?
你觉得学生会有哪些方面表现出了民主？

How is democracy embodied in the practice of student council?

- 关于学生代表 About the student delegate

  - 学生会的过程是怎样的？

  What is the process of the conference of student delegates?

  - 学生代表都由谁组成的？

  Who can become the student delegates?

  - 有怎样的作用？

  What is the meaning of the student delegate?

  - 你觉得是如何体现民主的？

  How is democracy embodied in the practice of student delegates?

- 关于学生代表 About the student delegate

  - 您觉得在咱们学校，学生自治组织或者班级里的学生干部更多地是学生的代表，代表学生去和教师谈判，还是更多地是帮助老师开展管理工作？

  Which interest group do you think the student leader or the student council represent, teacher or student?

  - 在管理班级或者课堂的过程中，有没有出现过个体利益和集体利益出现矛盾的时候？如果出现矛盾要怎么解决？

  Is there any conflict between individual interest and
collective interest in daily school life? How is the contradiction usually solved?

关于社团 About the club

- 你参加过什么社团吗?
  
  Have you attended any club?

- 社团是如何成立及开展的?
  
  How is the club established?

- 你觉得社团是如何体现民主的?
  
  How is democracy embodied in the practice of club?

关于学校规则及班级规则 About the rule on the school level and class level

- 这两种规则是由谁制定的?
  
  Who design these two kinds of rules?

- 由谁监督实行?
  
  Who supervise the enforcement of rules?

- 是否有惩罚措施? 谁来进行惩罚?
  
  Is there any punishment when violating the rules? Who enforce the punishment?

- 和以往学校的校规有什么不同? 开展的效果有什么不同?
  
  What’s the difference between the rule system at your school and your previous school? What’s the difference between
the working effect?

▪ 你觉得这方面是如何体现民主的？

How is democracy embodied in practice?

○ 关于学校的公众号 About the official school account at the social media

▪ 学校是否有公众号？

Does the school have any official account at the social media?

▪ 是由谁来创立并管理运行的？

Who establish and run the account?

▪ 你觉得公众号的作用在于什么？

What do you think is the meaning of the official account at the social media?

▪ 除了以上提到的这些，学校还有没有其他类似的让学生主要组织参与的活动？

Is there any other school activities which encourage students' engagement?

▪ 你觉得这些学生参与活动的意义是什么？

What do you think is the meaning for students to engage in these activities?

▪ 你觉得这种鼓励学生参与、开展民主教育的方式有什么优势和弊端吗？
What’s the advantage and disadvantage of democratic education which emphasizes students’ participation?

▪ 你觉得这方面是如何体现民主的？

How is democracy embodied in practice?

○ 关于师生关系 About the teacher–student relationship

▪ 在现在的学校，你觉得师生关系是怎样的？

How do you think of the teacher–student relationship in your school?

▪ 和以往学校的师生关系有什么不同吗？

Is there any difference between the teacher–student relationship in your former school and the current school?

▪ 你觉得这样的师生关系有什么优点吗？对学习、对生活方面。

What are the advantages for such teacher–student relationship in your school (from the perspective of learning and school life)？

▪ 你觉得师生关系重要吗？为什么？

Do you think teacher–relationship is important? Why?

▪ 你觉得这方面是如何体现民主的？

How is democracy embodied in practice?

○ 关于教学 About teaching and learning

▪ 你觉得现在的课堂和以往学校的课堂有什么不同？


Is there any difference between the teaching style in this school and your former school?

- 老师组织学生参与的环节多吗?
  Do teachers usually organize student-engaged activities in class?

- 你觉得学生参与的环节有什么作用吗?
  What’s the effects and meaning of these student-engaged activities?

- 参与活动和讲授法的课堂在理解知识上会有很大的不同吗?
  Is there any difference for learning between the teaching method of lecturing and student-engaged method?

- 你觉得学生参与的环节有什么作用吗?
  What’s the effects and meaning of these student-engaged activities?

关于民主教育 About democratic education

- 你觉得什么是民主教育？学校里的民主都表现在哪些方面?
  What do you think is democratic education? What are the practical manifestations?

- 我曾经听说过学校所说的严格而自由的民主，你对这句话如何理解？你同意这个说法吗？学校严格的底线有哪些？在学生触碰底线后会有什么样的措施吗?
  I heard an expression of "strictness and freedom", how do you understand this sentence? Is there any strict boundary in practice? Is there any punishment when students violate
the boundary?

- 你觉得从初中到高中在学校管理方面有什么明显的变化吗？
   （包括成绩、学生参与活动、学生会等方面）

Is there any difference between the school management in the period of secondary school and high school (including the aspect of exam result, student-engaged activity, student council and so forth)?

- 你觉得参加活动和提高学习成绩之间有矛盾吗？会不会因为参与活动影响了学习成绩？

Do you think attending activities and exam result contradict with each other? Do they have influence on each other?

- 学校如何评价学生？只是成绩还是什么其他方式？老师会因为学习成绩而阻止学生参与活动吗？

How does the school evaluate students? Exam or other approaches? Do teachers stop students participating activities because of the exam result?

- 你觉得咱们学校和其他学校最大的不同在于什么？

What do you think the big difference between your current school and other schools?
Appendix 8: Teacher interview outline

• 自我介绍  Self-introduction
  
  o 做简单的自我介绍，并对研究进行介绍。用伦理问题申请的文件进行介绍
    Introducing myself and my research with the ethical document.
  o 请老师阅读并签署知情同意书
    Asking the teacher to read the introduction of the research and sign the consent form.
  o 请问大家是否可以录音，打开录音设备。
    Asking permission for recording. Remember to turn on the voice record equipment.

• 说规则  Explain the rule of talking turn in focus group
  
  o 如果有些问题不想回答或不知该如何回答可以不回答。
    If the participant do not want to answer the question or do not know how to answer, they can choose to skip the question.

• 访谈问题  Interview questions
  
  o 暖场问题 warming-up questions
    
    • 您工作多少年了?
      How many years have you worked?
    
    • 您在这所学校工作几年了?
      How many years have you worked in this school?

  o 有关民主 About democracy
你认为什么是民主？学校民主的最关键特点是什么？你觉得民主教育的目标是什么？

What do you think is democracy? What are the key features of democracy at school? What is the target of democratic education?

一些人觉得民主敏感，您觉得敏感吗？为何敏感？

Some people think democracy is sensitive, do you think it is sensitive? Why?

中国开展学校民主的前提是什么？保证高考成绩和平时的考试成绩是前提吗？

Is there any precondition for carrying out democracy in Chinese schools? Is the high achievement of the daily exam and college entrance examination the precondition of democratic education?

民主与秩序的关系是什么？维持秩序时民主教育的前提吗？还有哪些前提？

What is the relationship between democracy and order? Is maintaining the order the precondition of democratic education? What other preconditions for the implementation of democratic education?

你觉得民主有一个严格的标准吗？一定要做到什么才算是民主呢？

Do you think there is a strict standard for democratic education? How can the educational practice being judged as democratic practice?
• 对学校是否民主的判断是由何而来的，根据是什么？如果没有明确的标准，这种判断是否是根据比较而来的？

How can the educational practice being judged as democratic practice? What is the basis of judgement? If there is not any explicit basis, is it judged by comparing to other educational practice?

• 政治上的民主和学校民主有什么区别或关系吗？

Is there any relationship or difference between democracy in the area of politics and education?

• 您觉得民主教育、德育教育、政治教育之间有联系吗？是什么样的联系？

Is there any relationship between democratic education, moral education and political education? What is the relationship?

• 您认为现在学校从哪些方面能够体现出民主？从学校活动和教学（课堂）、班级管理几个方面。

Which part of practice at school embody democracy (from the aspect of school activity, class teaching and management)?

• 您觉得在民主教育开展的过程中，一定要考虑哪些因素（人、环境等，积极或消极）？

Are there any factors that need to be considered in the practice of democratic education (such as people or environment factors, positive or negative)?
您觉得维持良好秩序是民主教育的前提吗？有一种说法是能民主就民主，如果民主管不好就集中，您怎么看这种说法？

Do you think maintaining the order is the precondition for the practice of democratic education? There is a saying mentioned by some teacher that if you can implement democracy, you can implement it. If you cannot, then implement centralism. How do you think of this saying?

在民主教育的开展过程中，您如何把握这个度？

How do you make the balance in the practice of democratic education?

您觉得现在还有哪些方面还可以在民主教育方面得到提升？

Which aspects of democratic education do you think still can be improved?

您觉得学校开展民主教育的原因是什么？又有哪些作用？

What do you think are the reasons of democratic education?
What is the meaning of democratic education?

你如何判断一个学校是否是好学校？重要的参考因素有哪些？

How do you judge if a school is good or not? What are the factors to judge?

○ 有关社团 About student club

您带社团吗？带社团的老师是如何选拔的呢？
Do you supervise any student club? How are the teacher supervisor selected?

▪ 学校对社团有什么要求或支持吗?

Does the school give any requirement or support for the student club?

▪ 学校或老师对于社团有哪些监督吗?

Does the school or teacher supervise the student club?

▪ 学校最初从什么时候开始允许学生成立社团的？为什么会这样？

When is the mechanism of student club started? Why?

○ 有关走班 About the mobile learning system

▪ 学校的走班是如何开展的？有哪些学科走班？

How is the mobile learning system organized? What courses are involved in this system?

▪ 为什么会开展走班？

What is the reason for implementing mobile-learning system?
Appendix 9: Teacher interview outline 2

• 自我介绍 Self-introduction

  o 做简单的自我介绍，并对研究进行介绍。用伦理问题申请的文件
    进行介绍
  Introducing myself and my research with the ethical document.

  o 请老师阅读并签署知情同意书
  Asking the teacher to read the introduction of the research and
    sign the consent form.

  o 请问大家是否可以录音，打开录音设备。
  Asking permission for recording. Remember to turn on the voice
    record equipment.

• 说规则 Explain the rule of talking turn in focus group

  o 如果有些问题不想回答或不知该如何回答可以不回答。
  If the participant do not want to answer the question or do not
    know how to answer, they can choose to skip the question.

• 访谈问题 Interview questions

  o 关于民主 About democracy

    • 你认为什么是民主？学校民主的最关键特点是什么？在和
      其他老师交流的过程中，他们谈到了尊重、平等、自由、
      权利、参与、商讨、学生为本等因素，您觉得民主教育确
      实包含这些因素吗？在日常的教学和学校活动中，哪些方
      式或活动能体现这以上几点呢？

    What do you think is democracy? What are the key features
    of democracy at school? Some teachers mentioned the concept
of respect, equity, rights, participation, discussion, student-orientation when describing democratic education, do you agree? In the daily teaching and school activity, how is democracy reflected?

- Except from these factors, what other factors do you think is important for democratic education? Why?

- Is there any negative result of democratic education or unexpected result in practice?

- What is the school culture in your previous school? what is the big difference between the previous and current school? what are the advantages and disadvantages?

- What are the disadvantages of students' growth in the type of education which overly emphasizes the exam result? What are the disadvantages of students' growth in the type of democratic education?
▪ 在学校这种民主教育文化下，在实践的过程中有没有什么比较突出的矛盾？比如高效地提高成绩和让学生在参与活动中缓慢的成长。对于类似这种矛盾，您会如何平衡？您会怎么做？

Is there any practical contradiction in the practice of democratic education? For example, to improve the exam result and to promote students’ growth by encouraging students’ participation. How do you make the balance when facing such problems?

▪ 现在学校是如何对教师做评价的？以前的学校是如何做评价的？学校的评价会对老师的日常工作或做法有什么影响吗？

How does the school evaluate teachers? How does your previous school evaluate teachers? Does the evaluation influence teachers’ daily work?

▪ 学校对学生的评价方式都有哪些？

What are the evaluation approaches for students?

○ 关于走班制与活动 About the mobile learning system and school activity

▪ 为什么要开展走班制？

Why does the school implement the mobile learning system?

▪ 在学校诸多的活动中，您觉得哪些是应该参加的，哪些其实可以不参加？为什么？或者是否有哪些活动您觉得可以
做改变或者做调整的？为什么这么调整？

Among all the student activities, which do you think are necessary? Which are not? Why? Which activity do you think should be adjusted? Why?
Appendix 10: Teacher interview outline 3

- 自我介绍 Self-introduction
  - 做简单的自我介绍，并对研究进行介绍。用伦理问题申请的文件进行介绍
  Introducing myself and my research with the ethical document.
  - 请老师阅读并签署知情同意书
  Asking the teacher to read the introduction of the research and sign the consent form.
  - 请问大家是否可以录音，打开录音设备。
  Asking permission for recording. Remember to turn on the voice record equipment.

- 说规则 Explain the rule of talking turn in focus group
  - 如果有些问题不想回答或不知该如何回答可以不回答。
  If the participant do not want to answer the question or do not know how to answer, they can choose to skip the question.

- 访谈问题 Interview questions
  - 暖场问题 warming-up questions
    - 您工作多少年了?
      How many years have you worked?
    - 您在这所学校工作几年了?
      How many years have you worked in this school?
  - 关于民主 About democracy
你认为什么是民主？学校民主的最关键特点是什么？在和其他老师交流的过程中，他们谈到了尊重、平等、自由、权利、参与、商讨、学生为本等因素，您觉得民主教育确实包含这些因素吗？在日常的教学和学校活动中，哪些方式或活动能体现这以上几点呢？

What do you think is democracy? What are the key features of democracy at school? Some teachers mentioned the concept of respect, equity, rights, participation, discussion, student-orientation when describing democratic education, do you agree? In the daily teaching and school activity, how is democracy reflected?

除了这些因素，您觉得在学校管理过程中，有没有其他特别重要的因素，可能和民主无关的因素？为什么？

Except from these factors, what other factors do you think is important for democratic education? Why?

政治上的民主和学校民主有什么区别或关系吗？

Is there any relationship or difference between democracy in the area of politics and education?

中国学校开展民主的前提是什么？保证高考成绩和平时的考试成绩是前提吗？维持秩序是民主教育的前提吗？保持集体主义是民主教育的前提吗？还有哪些前提？

What is the precondition for carrying democratic education at school in China? Is daily exam result or result of college entrance examination the precondition? What about maintaining the order, the collectivism? What about others?
在民主教育文化下，在实践的过程中有没有什么比较突出的矛盾？比如高效地提高成绩和让学生成长的矛盾。对于类似这种矛盾，您会如何平衡？您会这么做？

Is there any practical contradiction in the practice of democratic education? For example, to improve the exam result and to promote students’ growth by encouraging students’ participation. How do you make the balance when facing such problems?

您觉得开展民主教育的弊端有哪些，或者说有哪些不太好，您不希望看到的效果？

Is there any negative influence or unexpected result of democratic education?

对以往的那种特别关注成绩情况下的教育，您有没有发现学生在发展中是否有所不足？在现在这个学校开展民主教育的前提下，您觉得学生的不足体现在哪方面？

What are the disadvantages of students’ growth in the type of education which overly emphasizes the exam result? What are the disadvantages of students’ growth in the type of democratic education?

对于现在要参加考试的年级和其他年级，或者现在正在教的其他班，在教学设计上会因为目标的不同而有所不同吗？

As for students who are taking the important exam, will you change your teaching design compared to students in other grades? Is there any difference between the teaching target?
您觉得在咱们学校，学生自治组织或者班级里的学生干部更多地是学生的代表，代表学生去和教师谈判，还是更多地是帮助老师开展管理工作？

Which interest group do you think the student leader or the student council represent, teacher or student?

现在学校是如何对教师做评价的？以前的学校是如何做评价的？学校的评价会对老师的日常工作或做法有什么影响吗？

How does the school evaluate teachers? How does your previous school evaluate teachers? Does the evaluation influence teachers' daily work?

学校对学生的评价方式都有哪些？

What are the evaluation approaches for students?
Appendix 11: Teacher interview outline 4

- Self-introduction
  - Introducing myself and my research with the ethical document.
  - Asking the teacher to read the introduction of the research and sign the consent form.
  - Asking permission for recording. Remember to turn on the voice record equipment.

- Explain the rule of talking turn in focus group
  - If the participant do not want to answer the question or do not know how to answer, they can choose to skip the question.

- Interview questions
  - Warming-up questions
    - How many years have you worked?
    - How many years have you worked in this school?
  - About teacher-student relationship
您更崇尚什么样的师生关系？为什么？

What kind of teacher–student relationship do you prefer? Why?

为了达到这样的师生关系，您都如何做？

What do you do to cultivate this type of relationship?

在建立师生关系中，您觉得最重要的因素是什么？您觉得尊重、平等、商讨、学生为本等这些因素重要吗？在日常的学校生活中，都有哪些例子可以反应或表现以上这些因素吗？

What are the important factors for this kind of relationship? Do you think the factors of respect, equity, discussion and student-orientation are important? Is there any example in practice that reflect these factors?

您觉得师生关系重要吗？为什么？

Do you think teacher–student relationship is important? Why?

关于教学 About teaching

您觉得在教学设计中最重要的是什么？您最会考虑哪些因素？为什么？

What do you consider as the most important factors when designing a class? Why?

学校对教学有哪些要求吗？比如对进度的要求，对教学方式和教学风格的要求？
Does the school have any requirement for class teaching, such as the teaching method and teaching style?

▪ 在教学过程中，您更倾向于哪种教学方式？为什么？

What kind of teaching method do you prefer? Why?

▪ 您觉得在课堂组织时最需要考虑的因素是什么？比如课堂纪律、保证成绩、学生参与？为什么？

What factors should be considered when organizing the class, for example the discipline, the exam result, student participation? Why?

▪ 现在学校在推行课堂中的学习活动，在教学方式上，您觉得学生参与的课堂活动不同于以往的地方在哪里？为什么？

What do you think are the difference between the student-engaged activity and the traditional activity? Why?

▪ 您觉得学校为什么要推行学生参与的课堂活动？比如是为什么了提高教学效率？

Why do you think is the meaning to promote the student-engaged activity, for example to improve the teaching efficiency?

○ 关于学生代表 About the student delegate

▪ 您觉得在咱们学校，学生自治组织或者班级里的学生干部更多地是学生的代表，代表学生去和教师谈判，还是更多地是帮助老师开展管理工作？

Which interest group do you think the student leader or the student council represent, teacher or student?
在管理班级或者课堂的过程中，有没有出现过个体利益和集体利益出现矛盾的时候？如果出现矛盾要怎么解决？以集体为重还是个体为重？

In the class management or teaching, is there any situation that the individual interest contradict with collective interest? How do you solve the contradiction if there is? Do you emphasize individual interest or collective interest?

如何判断个体利益或集体利益是否受损呢？谁来判断呢？

How can it be judged if individual interest or collective interest is damaged?

现在学校是如何对教师做评价的？校的评价会对老师的日常工作或做法有什么影响吗？

How does the school evaluate teachers? How does your previous school evaluate teachers? Doe the evaluation influence teachers' daily work?

学校对学生的评价方式都有哪些？

What are the evaluation approach for students?
Appendix 12: Teacher leader interview outline 5

- 自我介绍 Self-introduction
  
  - 做简单的自我介绍，并对研究进行介绍。用伦理问题申请的文件进行介绍
    Introducing myself and my research with the ethical document.
  
  - 请老师阅读并签署知情同意书
    Asking the teacher to read the introduction of the research and sign the consent form.
  
  - 请问大家是否可以录音，打开录音设备。
    Asking permission for recording. Remember to turn on the voice record equipment.

- 说规则 Explain the rule of talking turn in focus group
  
  - 如果有些问题不想回答或不知该如何回答可以不回答。
    If the participant do not want to answer the question or do not know how to answer, they can choose to skip the question.

- 访谈问题 Interview questions
  
  - 关于民主 About democracy
    
    - 从学校层面来看为什么提出开展民主？最初是什么原因使学校明确提出民主这一点?
      Why is democracy proposed on the school level? What is the initial reason for raising this?
    
    - 您觉得什么是学校的民主？您觉得咱们学校民主都有哪些具体的表现呢？
What do you think is democracy at school? What are the manifestation of democracy at school?

- In this kind of culture, in the process of practice, are there any practical contradictions? For example, to improve the exam result and to promote students’ growth by encouraging students’ participation. How do you make the balance when facing such problems?

- Except from these contradictions, are there any other problems or unexpected results?

- What are the disadvantages of students’ growth in the type of education which overly emphasizes the exam result? What are the disadvantages of students’ growth in the type of democratic education?

- Do you think democratic education can be carried out in
other areas? What is the meaning of that?

▪ 决定一个学校能否开展民主教育的条件和因素都有哪些？
（校长的理念、教师的理解、外部政策等）我们学校是否有
有哪些其他学校没有，并且对发展民主教育很重要的外部
政策呢？

What are the main factors that determine the implementation
of democratic education, such as principal’s conception,
teachers’ understanding and external rules? Do you have
any special external rules which are beneficial for the
practice of democratic education?

▪ 有人说大城市才能有民主教育，边远山区不好推广，您同
意吗？有什么原因呢？我们学校推广民主教育的原因是什
么？是因为高考评价方式的不同吗？

Some people say democratic education can only be
implemented in big cities rather than remote areas, do you
agree? Why? What’s the reason for the practice of democratic
education in your school? Is it because of the transformation
of the assessment system?

▪ 有老师提到好的校长、好的校领导在开展民主教育时发
挥着至关重要的作用。在学校中，谁来评价、并且如何评价
校长和校领导是否好呢？有哪些评价的方面？由谁来评价
和监督呢？

Some teachers mention a good principle is decisive for the
practice of democratic education. Who give the evaluation
to the principal? What aspects are evaluated? Who give the
evaluation and supervision?
关于教学管理 About teaching management

▪ 在教学中，学校对教师有没有什么基本要求？提出这些要求的原因是呢？

Is there any requirement for teachers’ teaching from the school? What are the reasons for these requirements?

▪ 学校不像传统学校那样特别强调学生的考试成绩和每次的排名，这是为什么呢？

It seems we do not emphasize exam result as other conventional schools, why?

▪ 很多老师都提到，虽然不像传统学校那样去强调成绩，但是成绩也是很重要的。为什么成绩如此重要呢？成绩对谁来说是重要的呢？

Some teachers mention the exam result is still important even though it is not emphasized as other schools. Why the exam result is so important? To whom it is important?

▪ 成绩为什么对学校的发展比较重要？

Why is the exam important for school’s development?

▪ 如果好成绩是为了吸引好学生的话，学校为什么一定要招收好的学生呢？是因为地方政府是以成绩的好坏来评价学校、分配资源的吗？针对成绩的不同，会有具体的什么做法吗？

If the good exam result aims to appeal good students, why does the school want good students? Does it a basis to evaluate the school and allocate resources? Is there any
different support according to the exam result of schools?

- If the school and principal are pressured about the exam result, what would they do in practice?

- Some conventional schools would transfer the pressure to teachers, for example they adopt the exam result as the basis for teachers' promotion and even resign, why do not your school do this?

○ About the leadership decision-making

- Democratic centralism is an embodiment of democratic practice, which first collect teachers' opinions and the leader will make the decision on the basis of teachers' opinion. Is there any supervision system for the leader? How can the decision be ensured as good decisions? If there is not a supervision system, why?

- The school's many activities are encouraging students to participate, teachers to participate, but participation
的程度不一样。学校在进行管理、组织学生和老师参与时，
会有一个不同类型活动的参与的标准吗？师生参与活动的
程度是由哪些因素决定的呢？

Many activities encourage students’ and teachers’
participation, but it seems the degree of participation is
different. Is there any particular rule to design activities
with different degree of participation? How are these rules
designed?
Appendix 13: Principal information and consent document

Principal information and consent document

研究说明及知情同意书

Research title: Doing ‘successful’ democratic education in Chinese schools: an ethnographical exploration

研究题目：在中国学校开展“成功”的民主教育——一项民族志的研究

Dear Principle

尊敬的校长您好：

You are invited to participate in the Ph.D. thesis research project conducted by Ph.D. Student Wenchao Zhang, under the supervision of Prof. Tony Gallagher at Queen’s University Belfast in Northern Ireland, UK. Thank you for considering this invitation.

诚挚地感谢您能够参加我的博士论文研究。我叫张文超，目前在英国女王大学攻读教育学博士学位，本研究由我的导师——英国女王大学的Tony Gallagher教授监督并给予指导。

This research aims to explore the good practice of democratic education in your own school and other schools in China and UK. Here democratic education could be described as an educational context in which democratic principles that are in accordance with unique characteristics of different countries are applied into school life to establish a democratic community. I hope to discuss how your school implement democratic education; what democratic principles are implemented in school life; What and how do school activities and classes be organized in a democratic way.

本研究的目的在于探索在中英两国不同的学校中，有关民主教育的优秀实践活动。本研究中民主教育被定义为一种教育情境。在这一情境中，具有其所在国家特点的民主原则被运用于学校生活当中，从而建立起一个民主社群。在本研究中，我希望能够与您一起探讨以下几个问题：在您的学校中民主教育是如何
实施的?哪些民主原则被运用在学校生活当中?有哪些学校的活动及课程是运用民主的方式进行组织的?这些活动是如何组织的?

Initially, I hope to observe the school life including school activities, ordinary classes, to interview and hold focus groups of school leaders, teachers as well as students, and to collect documents and physical trace (such as the teaching aids, schools’ infrastructure, ornaments in classrooms, pictures or statues) related to the implementation of democratic education. Interviews and focus groups will last no more than 60 minutes and will be audio recorded. I will take notes while doing observation and analysing documents. I would hope to use this data to write my PhD thesis. Please note that if you would prefer the interview and focus group not to be recorded I can make hand written notes instead. I would hope to be able to hold the interview and focus group on your school premises.

在研究的过程中，我希望能够进入学校进行观察，包括观察学校活动、进行课堂教学观察、组织包含校领导、教师、或学生的访谈活动，搜集学校的相关文件或一些实物资料（比如与民主教育相关的教学辅助材料、教室里的装饰物、学校的一些基础设施、雕塑、图片等）。访谈或焦点访谈都将不超过60分钟，并且会在征求参与者同意的情况下进行录音，若您不同意录音我将手写进行记录。在进行观察和资料分析时我将撰写笔记。在这些活动中所收集的数据都将用于撰写我的博士论文，我计划将访谈和焦点访谈的地点定于学校之中。

The written notes of observation and document and physical trace collection will be anonymised. Audio recordings of interviews, focus groups will be encrypted and transcribed and the transcripts will be anonymised soon after data collection. The encrypted audio file and any associated field notes will be stored on my own laptop and the original erased from the digital recorder. All hand-written notes will be transferred to an electronic medium and hard copies destroyed after data completion.

The collected data will be treated confidentially and I will be strict about ensuring anonymity for all participants involved. Participants’ name will not be used in any documents produced by this research. Data will undergo anonymization which involves removing and replacing names of people and institutions with pseudonyms as well as references to positions held that might identify individuals.

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有关观察的笔记和搜集的相关文件资料都将进行匿名处理。此外，所有录音也将在访谈结束、转录后进行匿名处理。被匿名处理并整理过的文件将被储存在我的笔记本电脑上，原始文件将从录音设备上删除。手写的记录将在随后转成电子版，手写记录会在转录之后销毁。本研究收集到的所有的资料都将被匿名处理，所有参与本研究的人名都将被隐去，参与者的名字不会出现在有关本研究的任何材料中。数据的匿名处理将包括去掉或改变参与者的姓名及学校机构的名称，以及一些能够辅助辨识出您及学校信息的具体地标名称。

If you agree that research can be conducted in your school please note that participants can withdraw even after interviews and focus groups have taken place. However, it will not be possible to withdraw from the study once I begin to anonymise the data as it will prove difficult to identify participants after this point.

如果您同意我在您的学校开展本研究，请注意，所有本研究的参与者均可随时退出本研究并删除与其相关的材料，即使在访谈或焦点访谈开展之后也可以退出。但是一旦我开始对数据进行匿名处理，因为无法辨认哪些材料与参与者有关，所以相关材料将不能被删除。

I also want to assure you and your staff that MY research is not designed to be critical of your practice or profession.

最后，我想要强调的是本研究的目的不是对您学校的教学实践或教学专业性提出批评质疑。

In line with University guidelines, participants will also be informed that data will be held securely at the university for a period of five years and then destroyed.

Please note that this research has been approved by the Ethics Committee at the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, Queen’s University Belfast.

根据英国女王大学的相关要求，有关本研究的所有数据资料在 5 年之内都将被英国女王大学保存，5 年之后将被删除。本研究已经通过英国女王大学的社会科学、社会工作与教育学院的伦理委员会的评审。

Further Information
更多信息:

If you have further questions or concerns about the research, you can contact me:

如果您有其他有关本研究的问题或疑问，您可以与我或我的导师联系：

PhD student Wenchao Zhang, School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, Queens University Belfast, 18 College Green, Belfast. BT71LN. Tel: 07751854605
Email: wzhang09@qub.ac.uk

Or my Supervisor:

或我的导师

Professor Tony Gallagher
School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work,
Queen’s University Belfast, 6 College Park, Belfast. BT7 1LP
T: 028 9097 5357
E: am.gallagher@qub.ac.uk
**Written Consent**

If you wish to take part in the research, I would grateful if you could provide written consent to demonstrate that you understand the contents of this document and in particular the right to withdraw and the section on confidentiality.

如果您愿意参与本研究，希望您能阅读并签署本同意书，从而表明您已经理解上述文件中的内容，尤其是了解您有退出研究的权利，以及所有数据都将被保密，并进行匿名处理。

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please read the following statements which summarize the research project</th>
<th>Please tick ✓ that you understand the key points of the research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I understand that I am being asked to provide institutional consent for research to be undertaken in this school.  
在进入我的学校开展研究之前，研究者先征求我了的同意。 | |
| I understand that this will involve a researcher carrying out observation, interview, focus groups as well as documents and physical trace collection in the school with school leaders, teachers and students. The interview and focus group will be recorded and will | |
not last longer than 1 hour. The observation and
documents and physical collection will be taken
notes.

我知道本研究的活动涉及研究者开展的观察、访
t谈、焦点访谈、资料搜集工作。研究所涉及的对
象包括校领导、教师和学生。其中，访谈和焦点
访谈不会超过一小时，并会在征求我同意的情
c下进行录音。在进行观察和资料分析时，会有相
应的记录。

| I understand that data collected will be treated confidentially and transcriptions stored securely and destroyed after a period of five years. |
| 我知道本研究搜集的所有数据都会被保密，被匿 
名处理过的大会被保存 5 年，5年后会被销毁。 |

| I understand that the researcher does not intend to use this research to be critical of work practices in the school. |
| 我知道本项目的研究目的不是批评学校的教学工 
作。 |

| I understand that participation of the school is voluntary and can be withdrawn up to the point where data is anonymized. |
| 我知道参与本项目是自愿的，并且在研究者对数 
据进行匿名处理前我校可以随时退出本研究，并 
删除相关数据。 |
I DO consent to take part in this research.

我愿意参与本研究。

I DO NOT consent to take part in this research.

我不愿参与本研究。

Signature

签名：-------------------

Date

日期：-------------------
Appendix 14: School leader/Teacher information and consent document

School leader/Teacher information and consent document

研究说明及知情同意书

Research title: Doing ‘successful’ democratic education in Chinese schools: an ethnographical exploration

研究题目：在中国学校开展“成功”的民主教育——一项民族志的研究

Dear School leader/Teacher

尊敬的校领导/老师您好:

You are invited to participate in the Ph.D. thesis research project conducted by Ph.D. Student Wenchao Zhang, under the supervision of Prof. Tony Gallagher at Queen’s University Belfast in Northern Ireland, UK. Thank you for considering this invitation.

诚挚地感谢您能够参加我的博士论文研究。我叫张文超，目前在英国女王大学攻读教育学博士学位，本研究由我的导师——英国女王大学的 Tony Gallagher 教授监督并给予指导。

This research aims to explore the good practice of democratic education in your own school and other schools in China and UK. Here democratic education could be described as an educational context in which democratic principles that are in accordance with unique characteristics of different countries are applied into school life to establish a democratic community. I hope to discuss how your school implement democratic education; what democratic principles are implemented in school life; What and how do school activities and classes be organized in a democratic way.

本研究的目的在于探索在中英两国不同的学校中，有关民主教育的优秀实践活动。本研究中民主教育被定义为一种教育情境。在这一情境中，具有其所在国家特点的民主原则被运用于学校生活当中，从而建立起一个民主社群。在本研究中，我希望能够与您一起探讨以下几个问题：在您的学校中民主教育是如何
实施的？哪些民主原则被运用在学校生活当中？有哪些学校的活动及课程是运用民主的方式进行组织的？这些活动是如何组织的？

Initially, I hope to observe some school activities and ordinary classes organized by you, to interview or hold focus groups of up to 8 school leaders/teachers, and to collect documents and physical trace (such as the teaching aids, schools’ infrastructure, ornaments in classrooms, pictures or statues) in activities related to the implementation of democratic education. Interviews and focus groups will last no more than 60 minutes and will be audio recorded. Observation and documents collection will be notes taken. I would hope to use this data to write my PhD thesis. Please note that if you would prefer the interview and focus group not to be recorded I can make hand written notes instead. I would hope to be able to hold the interview and focus group on your school premises.

在研究的过程中，希望能够参与一些您组织的活动或您讲授的课程，对您进行访谈，或者开展不超过8个人的焦点访谈。访谈或焦点访谈都将不超过60分钟，并且会在征得您同意的情况下进行录音，若您不同意录音我将手写进行记录。访谈中所收集的数据将用于撰写我的博士论文，访谈和焦点访谈都将在您的学校中开展。

The written notes of observation and document and physical trace collection will be anonymised. Audio recordings of interviews, focus groups will be encrypted and transcribed and the transcripts will be anonymized soon after data collection. The encrypted audio file and any associated field notes will be stored on my own laptop and the original erased from the digital recorder. All hand-written notes will be transferred to an electronic medium and hard copies destroyed after data completion.

此外，所有记录都将进行匿名处理，访谈的录音也将在访谈、转录后进行匿名处理。被匿名处理并整理过的文件将被储存在我的笔记本电脑上，原始文件将从录音设备上删除。手写的记录将在随后转成电子版，手写记录会在转录之后销毁。

The collected data will be treated confidentially and I will be strict about ensuring anonymity for all participants involved. Your name will not be used in any documents.
produced by this research. Data will undergo anonymization which involves removing and replacing names of people and institutions with pseudonyms as well as references to positions held that might identify individuals.

If you agree to attend this research please note that you can withdraw even after interviews and focus groups have taken place. However, it will not be possible to withdraw from the study once I begin to anonymize the data as it will prove difficult to identify participants after this point.

I also want to assure you that MY research is not designed to be critical of your practice or profession. 最后，我想要强调的是本研究的目的不是对您的教学实践或教学专业性提出质疑批评。

In line with University guidelines, participants will also be informed that data will be held securely at the university for a period of five years and then destroyed.

Please note that this research has been approved by the Ethics Committee at the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, Queen’s University Belfast.

根据英国女王大学的相关要求，有关本研究的所有数据资料在 5 年之内都将被英国女王大学保存，5 年之后将被删除。本研究已经通过英国女王大学的社会科学、社会工作与教育学院的伦理委员会的评审。

Further Information
更多信息：

If you have further questions or concerns about the research, you can contact me:

如果您有其他有关本研究的问题或疑问，您可以与我或我的导师联系：

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或我的导师

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邮箱：am.gallagher@qub.ac.uk

Written Consent

同意书

If you wish to take part in the research, I would grateful if you could provide written consent to demonstrate that you understand the contents of this document and in particular the right to withdraw and the section on confidentiality.

如果您愿意参与本研究，希望您能阅读并签署本同意书，从而表明您已经理解上述文件中的内容，尤其是了解您有退出研究的权利，以及所有数据都将被保密，并进行匿名处理。

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please read the following statements which summarize the research project</th>
<th>Please tick ✓ that you understand the key points of the research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand that I am being asked to provide consent take part in research which will be undertaken in this school.</td>
<td>如果您认同该点，请在该点后画勾。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>在我参与本研究前，研究者先征求我了的同意。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that this will involve a researcher carrying out observation, interview or focus groups as well as documents. The interview and focus group will be recorded and will not last longer than 1 hour.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The observation and documents and physical collection will be taken notes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that data collected will be treated confidentially and transcriptions stored securely and destroyed after a period of five years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that the researcher does not intend to use this research to be critical of work practices in the school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that participation of the school is voluntary and can be withdrawn up to the point where data is anonymized.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I DO consent to take part in this research.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>我愿意参与本研究。</td>
<td>I DO NOT consent to take part in this research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>我不愿参与本研究。</td>
<td>右侧空白处</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Signature

签名：---------------------

Date

日期：---------------------
Appendix 15: The preparation of data and the process of data analysis

The preparation of data

Before analysing data, the source was organized with particular procedures. Each file of source undertook the following steps before they were analysed.

When obtaining some source, the first step was classifying and storing them. In consideration of the source type, I applied two ways of storage, a concrete file folder and the electronic folder, as mentioned in the third chapter. Therefore, in this step, the hard copy of source including books, leaflets and so forth were collected into the concrete folder. As for the electronic source, there was a particular folder called research data created both on my computer and my private online disk. Within this electronic folder, each research school had exclusive folder, under which the folder for interview, observation, other documents and reflection were created respectively to manage certain source. Therefore, all the electronic files of source were attached to a particular folder depending on their attributes.

The step following this was the complement of some source, especially the interview and observation. As soon as the interview and observation were conducted, the interview record was be transcribed, and the record of observation was be supplemented particularly when some logograms were written down while observing. After this work, the source was almost prepared for analysis except another necessary step, to anonymize.

According to the requirement of ethical application, the information involved the name of people, school, specific location and city in all the source was anonymized. An Excel document was created in the folder of research data to record this procedure of anonymity, precisely including the real information and the corresponding pseudonym in the case of future revision. On the basis of this, all the file was renamed with the pseudonym of school and attendant as well as the date of collection. In terms of the reflections, the discussion topic was used as part of the file name. For example, one interview file with a teacher from City Central Middle School was named as CCM_20180314_INT_T_Lingyi. Here CCM was the abbreviation of the pseudonym of the school name, the number shows the date of data collection, INT represents the
type of record of interview, T describes the type of attendant as teacher, while Lingyi is the pseudonym of the teacher.

After all these arrangements, the source was well-prepared to be analysed, which was then be imported into the software Nvivo for analysis. Within the software, the same set of folders were created in correspondence with the folder on my computer. In this way, all the source was managed to clearly show its type and originated school, which provided the convenience for separated analysis by school. Up to this point, the data was well organized and waits for analysis.

It should be mentioned that these procedures of data preparation were not necessarily linear. In different occasions, the organizing order might be slightly different. Sometimes I would complement observation record before putting into the folder. But all the above steps were finished before data analysis.

**The process of data analysis**

To acquire the satisfactory findings to the research question, I carried out three rounds of analysis. The result from each stage defined a direction for further analysis in next stage.

**Identifying school areas to focus**

According to the method of thematic analysis, I used no particular filter to pick up the theme for the first round of analysis. At this stage, I mainly read the source iteratively and let the preliminary themes emerge from the content by itself.

After being uploaded into Nvivo, the material was usually read through about two times before setting up a node. For the first time, I would read the material thoroughly to get familiar with the content. When reading the second time, I concentrated to find some key words or descriptions directly about democracy or democratic education and coloured them in red. Integrated with the context, these highlighted texts became ladders for the creation of preliminary themes. To clarify the nodes from different rounds of analysis, a particular folder named as First Round analysis was created in Nvivo to contain all the nodes from this stage. As these preliminary nodes were closest to the data, many indigenous words from the field were used when creating them. For example, when analysing a piece of interview with a teacher:
LINYI (A TEACHER): I think democracy in our country is a kind of democracy with the characteristic of socialism. It is not the same type of democracy in western countries with election. The central feature of socialist democracy is the inclusive and open mind of leaders, which means they would like to hear the suggestions from people who have lower positions, right?

RESEARCHER: It is hierarchical?

LINYI: Yes, it is hierarchical......But it is a kind of manner, not on the level of institution. (Linyi, personal communication, March 14, 2018).

I highlight the expression of “a kind of democracy with the characteristic of socialism”, “the inclusive and open mind of leaders”, “it is hierarchical” and “it is a kind of manner”. Based on these key words and the context, by selecting all the above text, one node was created as “China’s democracy is a kind of manner, it is hierarchical”.

After the creation of the initial themes, I regularly grouped and interpreted these themes into upper levels of node according to the topic of the theme. For instance, the just mentioned node, “China’s democracy is a kind of manner, it is hierarchical”, was grouped into a parent node “China’s democracy” with several other nodes about this topic.

For the purpose of setting up connections between the nodes and the research question, some preliminary nodes were grouped at most four times into a main node. For example, the node of “The management of administrative class_the dean of administrative class would set up rules” was firstly grouped into an upper node “Democracy and principles” which was then classified into another node “Democratic education and rules, order and collectivism”. And at last they were all attached to the main node “Democracy in school”.

After this round of analysis, 932 nodes were created with eight main nodes which included “China’s democracy”, “the democratic practice in school”, “the undemocratic practice at school”, “the basic information of school”, “the research background of democratic education in China”, “the social evaluation for schools”, “teachers’
laziness” and “the branch of CPC at school”. To make the result visually explicit, I present the first two layers of node for the first-round analysis in Table 3.

**Table 3: First Two Levels of Themes for the first-round analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. China’s democracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. China’s democracy is a kind of manner, it is hierarchical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. The definition and feature of China’s democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Using the democratic approach is more complex and tiring than the approach of dictatorship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Using the approach of dictatorship may cause bad effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. The reason why democracy is a sensitive topic in China</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II. The democratic practice in school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. The definition of democracy and its critical features at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. The component of school democracy: democratic decision-making, democratic management, democratic supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. The reason of implementing democratic education and its significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. The target and reference of democratic education of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. The social background of democratic education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. The democratic school activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. The democratic practice for the management of administrative class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. The management of curriculum teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. The extent of applying democracy at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. The influencing factors for democratic education at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### III. The undemocratic practice at school

| A. | The opposite practice of democratic education: the controlling culture of school |
| B. | The shortage of students’ participation |
| C. | The reason that student dislike the teaching approach of lecturing |
| D. | The undemocratic practice in class |
| E. | The undemocratic management about student dormitory |
| F. | The feature of typical traditional school |
IV. The basic information of school

A. School feature
B. The outline of school management
C. Important people at school
D. School environment
E. School activity
F. School curriculum
G. Others

V. The research background of democratic education in China

A. In traditional school, the knowledge transmission is highly emphasized, but the cultivation of ability and disposition is neglected
B. The problem of the approach of teaching and management in traditional schools
C. About the history of democracy and democratic education
D. The democratization of education
E. The historical view of researcher
F. The current situation of democracy in Chinese schools

VI. The social evaluation for schools: two scores and one percentage

VII. The branch of CPC at school

Under the main nodes, diverse child nodes or sources showed the connection with democratic education. For example, under the most important main node which was directly connected to the research question, “the democratic practice in school”, there were twenty-two child nodes in the second layer which organized the source from
various perspectives. They basically involved all the aspects of school life and the factor which had influence on school practice.

Although each of them had a particular perspective and stress, it could be seen the overlap between them existed a lot and the themes were wide-ranging with a lot of ambiguity. Nevertheless, several areas did stand out from the analysis result in which democracy was referred the most (as presented in Table 4). This assisted me to narrow down the aspects of data to concentrate, especially the scope of school life for further analysis.

Table 4: Areas Stand Out From the First-Round Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Social background of democratic education</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Relevant social event of democracy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. The practice in traditional schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II. Practice of democratic education at school</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. School activity (curriculum and outside class)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. School management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Interpersonal relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Exam and result</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Rules and order</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Problems when implementing democratic education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further analyzing the school practice from the perspective of democracy

However, the content of the above areas, especially the second part about the practice of democratic education, was expressed from diverse perspectives at school. Hence, to further analyze the data from the perspective of democracy, the principles of participation in decision making, the protection of human rights and rule of law were selected as a set of lenses for the democratic practice at school in the second-round
analysis. As mentioned in the second chapter, the choice of these three principles is based on the result of literature review. As there was not an existing framework for analyzing democratic education, the three principles which were applicable for both liberal democracy and socialist democracy were chosen to form a scaffold. In addition to this, they had also been verified in practice. By carefully reviewing the original data and the result of the first-round analysis, these tenets could also be identified as three main aspects of democratic education manifested in school practice.

Therefore, in the second-round analysis, I attempted to further organize the data about the areas extracted from the previous analyzing stage, and emphatically reinterpreted the source about democratic school practice with the three principles. From the logic of comparison, the data from the two research schools was analysed respectively at this time. On account of this, two node folders were created in Nvivo named as Second Analysis CCM (Central City Middle School) and Second Analysis SFM (Sunflower Middle School). Two separate codebooks for the two research schools were developed in each folder.

Different from the analysing order in the first round, the main nodes were first settled at this time as a fixed structure to ensure an explicit direction of analysis. On the basis of the first-round analysis, two main codes including “Social events and performance related to democracy”, “Practice in traditional schools” were first established for both schools to manage the relevant content about social background. Another general main code of “The principles of democracy” was created with three second-level codes of “Participation in decision-making”, “Protection of rights” and “Rule of law” were established. These themes were established primarily for organizing the data about democratic practice at school. In addition, the theme of “Aspects of school life”, “Problems that school come across when implementing democratic education” and “Administrative structure of the research school” were set up in accordance with the areas elicited from the first round to manage relevant data and get a more detailed portray of the real school life.

In comparison of the analysing result, the democratic practice in both schools showed a high degree of similarity, which was basically reflected on the analysis by the theme of “Principles of democracy”. Based on the data in two schools, the same set of child themes were able to be developed under each principle. In terms of the code of
“protection of rights”, “the right of supervision and evaluation”, “the right of free thought and speech”, “the right of self-management” and “the right of participating in activities” were recognized from data in both schools. Under the code of “rule of laws”, the two schools shared the code of “general school rules”, “formal rules”, “hidden rules” and “interpersonal relationships”. As for “participation in decision making”, the same features of “mainly applying the approach of democratic centralism, but allow people to raise suggestions”, “some decisions are directly decided by adults or leaders”, “teachers and students have the autonomy on some issues” were identified in both schools.

This result verified the logic of case selection in this research. As described in the third chapter, these two schools were selected by the logic of literal replication which mainly aimed to check on the similarities in the practice of democratic education in China.

Therefore, despite the separate coding process of two schools for the second-round analysis, a shared codebook was gradually generated, as Table 3 shows. While the unique practice of each school was entailed in further child codes in their own codebook which was not showed in this table.

Table 5: Shared Codebook for the Second-round Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Principles of democracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Participation in decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Mainly applying the approach of democratic centralism, but allow people to raise suggestions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Some decisions are directly decided by adults or leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teachers and students have the autonomy on some issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Protection of rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The right of supervision and evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The right of free thought and speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After the second round of analysis, the total number of codes was decreased to 299. The data which introduced school activity and social background were reorganized in a tidier way compared to the first-round analysis. With the assistance of the three democratic tenets, the democratic practice was capable of being analysed with a more consistent logic. A clear connection between the educational practice and democracy had been built in this stage. But the explicit answer about people’s understanding of democratic education and the specific approach of practice which were still not generalized. In consideration of this, another round of analysis was conducted to find the answer.

**Constructing a possible framework of Chinese democratic education**

In the second-round analysis, the school events and activities had been linked to certain democratic principles. However, the complete separation of three principles built up a concrete boundary between the practice attached to them, which made it difficult to
establish the relationship with practice. Therefore, in the third-round analysis, I intended to focus on and re-examine the theme of “Principles of democracy” and all its child themes. At this stage, I first took out of those boundaries by deleting the second-level themes including “Participation in decision-making”, “Protection of rights” and “Rule of law”, as showed in Table 6. By doing this, the principle from A to K became more specific and practical.

*Table 6: Deleting the Boundaries Created by the Three Principles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Principles of democracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Mainly applying the approach of democratic centralism, but allow people to raise suggestions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Some decisions are directly decided by adults or leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Teachers and students have the autonomy on some issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. The right of supervision and evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. The right of free thought and speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. The right of self-management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. The right of participating in activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. General school rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Formal rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Hidden rule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Interpersonal relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following this, I merged the child themes attached to principle A to K with each of their corresponding principles. For example, in the second-round analysis, one child node developed under “The right of free thought and speech” was “Encourage students to express their opinions”. In the third-round analysis, they were merged as “Expression and discussion_Student_Curriculum learning” and “Expression and
discussion_Student_outside curriculum”. The code “Students’ self-decision-making in school activities” was merged with its parent code “The right of self-management” as “Autonomy_Student_choose and make decisions in school activity”.

After this, all the codes were summarized again for the sake of generalizing the school approach of democratic education. Depending on the aspects of school life, five specific approaches emerged at the end of the analysis as showed in Table 7.

*Table 7: The First Two Layers of Themes for the Third-Round analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. The practice of democratic education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. The approach of participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. To cultivate a more reciprocal relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. The approach of democratic centralism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. To simplify the rule content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. To diversify the evaluation approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II. Experience as a researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. My confusing feeling as a researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. I lost my notebook with some data on it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. People in the field get familiar with me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Feel my role is changing in the field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. My understanding of democratic education is led by the field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. My complicated feeling of choosing activity and planning time in the field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. My understanding of the school changes all the time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on the information showed in data, the relationship between these eleven principles was examined to construct a possible framework for practicing democratic education.

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