



Gustav Sundqvist

Trickle Through Democracy

Studies on Democratic Diffusion in China





Gustav Sundqvist

Born in 1985 in Uppsala, Sweden

Master of Science in Political Sciences 2013 (Uppsala University)

PhD student at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Business and Economics at Åbo Akademi University in Åbo, Finland 2013–2019

Cover: Fideli Sundqvist



Trickle Through Democracy

Studies on Democratic Diffusion in China

Gustav Sundqvist

**Political Science
Faculty of Social Sciences, Business and Economics
Åbo Akademi University
Åbo, Finland, 2019**

ISBN 978-952-12-3799-7 (printed)
ISBN 978-952-12-3800-0 (digital)
Painosalama Oy – Turku, Finland 2019

Acknowledgments

My doctoral years have entailed a number of journeys. Since I started writing my PhD-thesis six years ago, I have undertaken several physical journeys primarily to Finland and China. I have also gone through a number of intellectual journeys, both as a teacher and as a researcher. Finally, I have gone through a long mental journey as the PhD process has involved different phases of joy, hope and despair. None of these journeys would have been possible if it was not for all of the fantastic people that helped me along the way. I owe you all countless thanks!

First of all, I want to thank my supervisors and colleagues. My main supervisor Professor Carsten Anckar has given me priceless advice as well as continuous encouragement throughout the PhD process. My co-supervisor Professor Johan Lagerkvist brought me into the research field and has provided valuable help and inspiration. I also want to thank all my other helpful and inspiring colleagues at Åbo Akademi University and Uppsala University. Among Chinese partners, I am especially grateful to Dr Liu Kaiming who has provided me with enormous help during my fieldwork trips to China. I am also very grateful to the two Chinese research assistants, whose names must remain confidential, who helped me transcribe interviews conducted in Chinese. Finally, I want to thank all respondents from Chinese labour NGOs who have contributed their knowledge and expertise to the material of this thesis. I often think of you and your brave struggle for a fairer world. 谢谢!

Besides individuals, several associations and organizations have provided valuable assistance to me. I am especially grateful to the Department of Political Science at Åbo Akademi University, and at least as thankful also to the Department of Government at Uppsala University which let me stay as guest PhD at their department for the unusually long period of five years. Helge Ax:son Johnssons Stiftelse as well as foundations related to Åbo Akademi University and Uppsala University have also provided funding, without which I could not have completed this project.

Moreover, I want to thank all my friends who have supported me in different ways during my doctoral years. I am especially grateful to Hannes Anderzén, Love Rönnelid, Arvid Hallén, Linda Nilsson, Oscar Almén, Ariel Young, Camille Pellerin and Ya Jing who have directly contributed to different parts of the thesis by providing useful comments and advice. I also want to thank all my other friends who have helped keep me inspired and motivated through

interesting conversations, great laughs and helping hands in times of need.

Finally, I want to thank my closest family members. My father Olof has given not only emotional support but also valuable advice and comments on my work. During my doctoral years, as throughout my whole life, I have received constant love and support from my mother Marie-Louise and my sisters Fideli and Emilia. Special thanks to Fideli for making the beautiful picture on the cover page of this book. Last but not least, my warmest thanks to my wonderful girlfriend Lovisa. Thank you for always being there.

Gustav Sundqvist
5 April 2019

Abstract

Since the early 2000s, democratic diffusion has increasingly attracted the attention of democratisation scholars. Previous research has been characterised by a dominance of quantitative studies investigating cross-state data as well as qualitative studies examining a relatively limited number of cases. The homogeneity of method and material in the literature suggests that there is a lack of knowledge on how democratic diffusion takes place on a more detailed and local level as well as in different geographical and cultural contexts. China is an especially understudied case, since almost no research has applied democratic diffusion theories when investigating the country's politics. In this thesis, four sub-studies are conducted, examining democratic diffusion in three important spheres of Chinese politics; civil society networks in Southern China, dissent on social media and the Chinese Communist Party's ideological strategies. The aim of the thesis is primarily to deepen the understanding of how democratic diffusion works in China and secondarily to increase the more general understanding of democratic diffusion.

Unlike most previous research on democratic diffusion, the sub-studies rely on primary sources and more qualitative methods such as textual analysis and semi-structured interviewing. A multidimensional and liberal democracy concept is used to identify and compare small signs and varieties of democratic diffusion. The methodological approach enables an improved understanding of how democracy spreads in the empirical fields covered by the thesis. The results also contribute to the more general knowledge on how democratic diffusion works in China as well as in other stable authoritarian polities. All sub-studies indicate that China's authoritarian system limits and prevents democratic diffusion relatively efficiently. Nevertheless, some components of democracy still manage to spread throughout the country.

Abstrakt

Sedan det tidiga 2000-talet har demokratiseringsforskare riktat alltmer uppmärksamhet mot att undersöka demokratisk diffusion. Denna litteratur har hittills dominerats av kvantitativa undersökningar av nationell data samt kvalitativa studier som undersökt ett relativt begränsat antal fall. Likriktningen i metod och material innebär att det finns en bristande kunskap om hur demokratisk diffusion fungerar på en mer detaljerad och lokal nivå samt om hur demokrati sprids i olika geografiska och kulturella kontexter. Kina är ett särskilt understuderat fall eftersom nästan ingen forskning har undersökt landets politiska utveckling med hjälp av diffusionsteorier. Avhandlingen adresserar denna forskningslucka genom att presentera fyra delstudier som undersöker demokratisk diffusion inom tre viktiga politikområden; det kinesiska kommunistpartiets ideologiska strategier, civilsamhällesnätverk i södra Kina och samhällskritik på landets sociala medier. Det primära syftet med avhandlingen är att fördjupa förståelsen av demokratisk diffusion i Kina, och det sekundära syftet är att bidra till den mer generella kunskapen om hur demokrati sprids.

Till skillnad från huvuddelen av den tidigare litteraturen om demokratisk diffusion grundar sig undersökningarna i denna avhandling på primärkällor samt mer kvalitativa forskningsmetoder som textanalys och halvstrukturerade intervjuer. Ett multidimensionellt och liberalt demokratibegrepp används för att identifiera och jämföra små tecken på samt variationer i demokratisk diffusion. Den metodologiska ansatsen gör det möjligt att öka kunskapen kring hur demokrati sprids i de empiriska områden som avhandlingen täcker. Resultaten bidrar även till den generella förståelsen av hur demokratisk diffusion fungerar i Kina samt i andra stabila auktoritära stater. Samtliga delstudier visar att Kinas auktoritära politiska system begränsar demokratisk diffusion på ett relativt effektivt sätt. Studierna visar dock även att vissa aspekter av demokrati lyckas spridas i landet.

List of Papers

This thesis is based on the following papers:

- Study I Sundqvist, Gustav. 2016. "Marxism Still Matters: The Chinese Communist Party's Description of Foreign Democracies as an Ideological Strategy." *Studia Orientalia Electronica* 4: 89–107. <https://journal.fi/store/article/view/51455>.
- Study II Lagerkvist, Johan, and Gustav Sundqvist. 2013. "Loyal Dissent in the Chinese Blogosphere: Sina Weibo Discourse on the Chinese Communist Party." *Studies in Media and Communication* 1: 140–149. <http://redfame.com/journal/index.php/smc/article/view/121>.
- Study III Sundqvist, Gustav. 2019. "Diffusion of Democracy among Civil Society Actors in Guangdong Province." *Studia Orientalia Electronica* 7: 30–51. <https://doi.org/10.23993/store.64139>.
- Study IV Sundqvist, Gustav. 2019. "Mechanisms Behind Diffusion of Democracy in the Pearl River Delta Region." In *New Perspectives on China's Relations with the World: National, Transnational, and International*, edited by Daniel Johanson, Jie Li, and Tsunghan Wu, 43–59. E-International Relations. <https://www.e-ir.info/publication/new-perspectives-on-chinas-relations-with-the-world-national-transnational-and-international/>.

Contents

Introduction	10
Chapter 1.	
The Prospects of Democratic Diffusion in China	11
Chapter 2.	
Democracy	14
Chapter 3.	
Democratic Diffusion.....	21
Chapter 4.	
Democratisation and Democratic Diffusion in China.....	35
Chapter 5.	
The Sub-studies.....	55
Chapter 6.	
Method and Material	59
Chapter 7.	
Concluding Discussion	72
References.....	78
The Studies.....	94
Study I.....	96
Study II	116
Study III.....	128
Study IV.....	152
Appendix	170

Introduction

Chapter 1. The Prospects of Democratic Diffusion in China

Since the early 2000s, scholars of democratisation have been increasingly interested in studying how democracy spreads from one society to the next; a phenomenon often referred to as democratic diffusion.¹ So far, democratic diffusion has mostly been studied using quantitative methods with cross-state data as well as qualitative investigations of a limited number of polities and democratic transitions. Consequently, the understanding of how democratic diffusion works on a lower level, in more detail and in different geographical and political settings remains relatively underdeveloped. In order to deepen the understanding of democratic diffusion, local and context-specific knowledge on the phenomenon should be developed. In particular, there is a significant research gap regarding diffusion of democracy in the People's Republic of China (from now on China), as almost no research has applied democratic diffusion theories when studying the country's political development. In order to address this research gap, the core aim of this thesis is to deepen the understanding on how democratic diffusion works in contemporary Chinese politics.

The lasting authoritarianism of China is difficult to explain using mainstream democratisation theories. In the economic field, modernisation (Lipset 1959, 83–84), industrialisation (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, 32) and low dependency on natural resources (Ross 2001, 356) have been raised as factors favourable to democratisation. The Chinese economy performs relatively well on all of these criteria. In 2015–2016, China's industrial sector amounted to 40 percent of GDP, natural resource rents amounted to just over one percent of the economy and the nominal GDP per capita amounted to more than 8000 US dollars, qualifying China as an upper middle-income country according to the World Bank (2017a, 2017b, 2017c).

Many social conditions perceived as favourable to democracy, such as a large and growing middle class (Moore 1966, 418) and increasing waves of protest activities (Tarrow 1998, 159) are also present in China. The country's middle class amounted to 300 million, around 22 percent of the total population, in 2013 (Shi-Kupfer and Heilmann 2017, 262), and protest activities have been increasingly common after the turn of the millennium (O'Brien and Stern 2008, 12). As for regime-related democratisation factors,

1. In this thesis, a liberal definition of democracy is used based on Robert Dahl's polyarchy concept (1998, 85). For a more detailed discussion on the conceptualisation of democracy, see Chapter 2.

weakening legitimacy (Huntington 1991, 48) and factionalism (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 16) have been perceived to erode the authoritarian regimes' hold on power. This is alarming for the ruling Chinese Communist Party (from now on the CCP) since its ideological foundation, Marxism-Leninism, is at odds with China's growing market institutions (Shambaugh 2009, 104), and since factionalism occasionally has played an important role in the country's elite politics (Li 2012, 609).

One of the most puzzling factors related to China's resilient authoritarianism is the state's openness to an increasingly globalised world. Since Samuel Huntington launched his theory on democratic waves (1991, 15) democratisation has to an increasing degree been perceived as an international phenomenon, often conceptualised by the term democratic diffusion. Generally speaking, open countries that interact a lot with the democratic world seem to be more likely to democratise (Way 2008, 60; Wejnert 2005, 56). Compared to the former communist states in Eastern Europe, China is a relative open country. For instance, the value of China's trade amounted to 37 percent of the country's GDP in 2016, and no country is the source of as many outbound tourists and Internet users as the People's Republic (the World Bank 2017d, 2017e, 2017f).

There are also many factors in China which are less favourable to democratisation. The country's lack of previous democratic experience (Nathan 1997, 63), its cultural distance from the democratic epicentre in the West (Huntington 1996, 193), and the deep-rooted fear of instability and chaos among many Chinese citizens (Fukuyama 1995, 28) are some examples. Still, China's resilient authoritarianism is puzzling. As China grows richer and stronger, there is an increasing academic need to develop democratisation theories that deepen understanding of the Chinese case. This will likely be even more important in the future as more states may emulate what is often perceived as China's successful version of authoritarianism (Weyland 2017, 1248).

In this thesis, I will focus on studying how democratic diffusion works in China. Despite still being an authoritarian state, China's openness to the world suggests that democratic diffusion should be present in at least some regions of China and/or in some specific spheres of the country's political society. Four sub-studies are conducted in this thesis, investigating democratic diffusion in three important spheres of Chinese politics; civil society networks in Southern China, dissent on social media and the regime's ideological strategies. Besides deepening the understanding of how these specific political spheres relate to democratic diffusion, the research

aim is to develop more general knowledge; primarily on how democracy spreads in China and secondarily on how democratic diffusion works in similar non-democracies.

Theoretical discussions on the thesis's two key concepts; democracy and democratic diffusion, are presented in Chapter 2 and 3. The study mainly contributes to two fields of literature; democratic diffusion research and research on democratisation in China. A review of these research fields, and a discussion of how the thesis is positioned in relation to them are presented in Chapter 3 and 4 respectively. The main features of the sub-studies and how they relate to democratic diffusion are presented in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6 follows a discussion on the prime material and methods used in the sub-studies. Finally, in Chapter 7, I offer a concluding discussion on how the thesis contributes to previous literature.

Chapter 2. Democracy

Democracy is one of the most essentially contested concepts in social science (Gallie 1955, 168). Hence, any study of democratisation must usually start by defining democracy (Coppedge 2012, 11). The etymology of the Western concept has its roots in ancient Greece and means 'power of the people'. During the 18th and 19th century, based on the ancient understanding of democracy, classical theorists emphasised that citizens in a democratic state should control the government and ideally participate in political decision making as much as possible (Mill [1861] 2001, 59; Rousseau [1762] 2001, 45). The modern-day representative democracies are quite different from this classical ideal. In the Western tradition, a contemporary liberal understanding of democracy has been dominant, particularly after the end of the Cold War.

Liberal Democracy

Liberal democracy is usually defined as a set of institutions formulated as rights that determine the rules of the political process (Ball and Dagger 2006, 39). However, liberal democracy theorists disagree on which institutions and components are needed in a democracy and to what extent people should exercise control over the government. This debate can be broadly divided into two different schools; one more minimalist associated with Joseph Schumpeter and one more maximalist associated with Robert Dahl. According to Schumpeter, democracy should be elitist by nature and its most basic component consists of political competition. The electorate should mainly influence politics by instating and, perhaps more importantly, removing governments. Free elections, and the freedom to compete for political leadership, are thus the most critical democratic institutions according to the minimalist understanding (Schumpeter 1942, 271).

Dahl diverges from Schumpeter not least since he complements his empirical definition of democracy with a definition of ideal democracy more closely related to democratic ideals (Schaffer 2007, 125). According to Dahl, ideal democracy is a political system where all members of a society are equally entitled to participate in the society's political decisions (1998, 37). Dahl uses the concept polyarchy when referring to empirical political systems on the national level that are as close to his ideal as he finds realistically possible. A polyarchy is built on two basic dimensions, contestation and inclusiveness (Dahl 1971, 5). In order to fulfil these dimensions, regimes ought to include more institutions other than elected

officials and free, fair and frequent elections. Freedom of expression, alternative sources of information, associational autonomy and inclusive citizenship are also necessary criteria (Dahl 1998, 84–85). Although most liberal democracy theorists have their own definitions of democracy, the bulk of definitions are either close to Schumpeter's more minimalist concept (Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2010, 74; Lipset 1959, 71; Przeworski 2000, 15; Vanhanen 2003, 49), or to Dahl's more maximalist concept (Boix, Miller, and Rosato 2013, 1527; Bollen 1980, 372; Coppedge and Reinicke 1990, 52; Hadenius 1992, 9–35; Huntington 1991, 7; Sartori 1987, 169; Weale 2007, 18). Among liberal maximalists, some additions have been made to Dahl's theoretical core. Rule of law is for instance increasingly perceived as a necessary condition for guaranteeing the fundamental rights in Dahl's democracy concept (O'Donnell 2004, 32). This thesis follows in the maximalist tradition and defines democracy as composed of Dahl's six core institutions of modern representative democracy (1998, 85). This choice is primarily motivated by the fact that maximalist concepts are more suitable for assessing small differences in the quality of democracy than minimalist concepts (Beetham 1994, 26–27).

Before continuing, it should be noted that the dominant liberal understanding of democracy has been subject to considerable criticism. Marxists have criticised the liberal notion of democracy for disabling the peoples' influence on politics by accepting capitalist exploitation. According to this line of thought, socialisation of the means of production and the abandonment of capitalism is needed in order to liberate the masses and realise true democracy (Lenin [1917] 2001, 244; Macpherson [1973] 2001, 257; Marx [1871] 2001, 241). Some social democratic and human rights oriented theorists follow a somewhat similar argument by stating that a degree of social equality is needed to enable the lower strata of society to put their democratic rights into practice (Ball and Dagger 2006, 284; Goodhart 2005, 143). Participatory democrats have criticised liberal democrats for justifying elite rule on the basis of an incorrectly assessed apathy and incompetence among the people. These theorists advocate a democratic model where people are encouraged to participate in politics between elections (Fung and Wright 2003, 5; Pateman 1970, 16; Smith 2009, 3).

The liberal notion of democracy has also been criticised for having a Western bias. Chinese as well as Western scholars have argued that democracy is unsuitable to Chinese culture (Bell 2007, 26; Huntington 1996, 193; Jiang 2013, 30). An even more common argument is that there is a particular Chinese democracy model more

suitable for the country's political context (Brown 2012, 63; Lynch 2007, 713; Zhao 2016, 95). As noted by Frederic Schaffer (2007, 132), the term democracy has different meanings in different languages. Undoubtedly, definitions of democracy common in the West often differ from how democracy is understood in other political and social contexts such as in China. Although there are many different discourses on democracy in China, including liberal understandings, the concept is usually more closely linked to the outcome of politics than what is common in the liberal Western tradition (Bing 2014, 98; Nathan and Shi 1997, 192). In the Chinese elite as well as non-elite discourse, democracy is for instance often associated with national strength, good governance and social justice (Dickson 2016, 262–300). Large-scale surveys have demonstrated that Chinese citizens are especially inclined to associate democracy with values such as “by and for the people” (Shi 2010, 215). Popular Chinese opinion on democracy is often quite ambiguous. In the Chinese middle class, it is for instance common that people support abstract democratic concepts but are loyal to the authoritarian regime in practice (Miao 2016, 171).

Based on a Marxist-Leninist perspective on democratic centralism, Mao Zedong wanted to provide democratic rights for ‘revolutionary classes’, but not for social forces hostile to the revolution. According to Mao, a dictatorial, and not a democratic method should be used when dealing with counterrevolutionaries (Lin and Lee 2013, 155–156). To this day, the CCP describes the People's Republic of China as a democracy (*minzhu* 民主), even though the concept ‘people's democratic dictatorship’ (*renmin minzhu zhuanzheng* 人民民主专政) also remains a part of the ruling Party's vocabulary. Although, the CCP seldom defines the exact meaning of democracy, aspects of China's political system, variously termed by labels such as ‘new democracy’, ‘Chinese democracy’, ‘socialist democracy’ and ‘consultative democracy’ are often contrasted to ‘great democracy’ or ‘Western-style democracy’ in the Party's discourse (Holbig and Gilley 2010, 411; Lin and Lee 2013, 153–156).

Following Giovanni Sartori (1970, 1035), I argue that universal concepts are needed in order to make research comparable. One prime downside of merging concepts such as participation, social equality and democracy is the risk of conceptual overstretch, which may complicate stringent studies on democratisation (Beetham 1994, 27; Hadenius 1992, 32; Sartori 1991, 248). There is good reason to believe that extensive economic inequality and low political participation harms democracy (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, 358; Putnam 2000, 342). Nevertheless, it is useful to keep these concepts

distinct from each other, not least in order to enable studies on how they correlate with democracy (Przeworski 2000, 15).

When a Chinese newspaper article, microblog post or interviewee refer to *minzhu*, the Chinese term for democracy, the sources do not necessarily imply a liberal democratic meaning of that term. The perspectives of emic and etic can be used in order to distinguish local concepts from scientific concepts. Starting from the 1950s, the concept pair has grown in popularity in social science, especially in the fields of cross-cultural psychology and anthropology. Emic refers to how concepts are understood in a local context. Etic refers to concepts used by comparative scholars (Peterson and Pike 2002, 6). From a methodological point of view, the emic approach often means that research participants are allowed to define critical concepts with their own words. In contrast, etic concepts are generally based on definitions and explanations drawn from all countries included in the research (Punnett et al. 2017, 4). Scholars using the concept pair have stressed the importance of not projecting one's own emic categories onto alien systems, and to keep the perspectives of the native speaker and the analyst apart (Terkourafi 2009, 66). An advantage of the etic approach is that it enables for the researcher to perceive and interpret many behaviors and ideas that may be taken as a matter of course in a local culture (Huang 2017, 202). The liberal definition of democracy applied in this thesis should be understood as an etic concept. In the following text, the term 'democracy' refers to my etic definition of democracy unless otherwise stated.

A less normative and more methodological dispute among democracy theorists concerns the numerical form of measure. Democracy can be defined as a dichotomy (Boix, Miller, and Rosato 2013, 1524; Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2010, 68) or as a continuous concept (Elkins 2000, 294; Freedom House 2017a; Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers, 2014). Proponents of dichotomous concepts argue that categorisation is fundamental to social science and consider political systems as bounded wholes. From this perspective, democracy cannot be graded since it is composed of a set of institutions interacting with each other (Sartori 1987, 184). The opponents of this approach prefer graded concepts primarily since they argue that it is extremely difficult to determine the exact border between social concepts such as democracy and non-democracy (Bollen and Jackman 1989, 619). According to the latter perspective, even non-democracies have different degrees of democracy. The Cold War era Yugoslavia could for instance be perceived as more democratic than the Cold War era Soviet Union (Bollen 1980, 373).

Among studies rejecting dichotomous democracy concepts,

some emphasise the multidimensionality of democracy (Coppedge, Alvarez, and Maldonado 2008, 632; V-dem 2017a). Proponents of multidimensional concepts argue that it is very difficult to reach consensus on a single dimension on which democracy should be measured (Lindberg et al. 2014, 159). Instead they treat democracy as composed of different graded dimensions that, to some extent, may vary independently from each other. Most continuous democracy indexes, such as Freedom House and Polity, are in fact also multidimensional since they are aggregated based on qualitative measurement of components perceived as relevant to the overall quality of democracy. However, the final output of these indexes is often presented as a single democracy score on a one-dimensional scale. A limitation of having a one-dimensional continuous scale is that it makes it impossible to identify democratisation processes in states that, as a whole, remain authoritarian.

Following the pragmatic approach of David Collier and Robert Adcock (1999, 539), the choice of how to numerically measure democracy in this work is mainly guided by the thesis's research aim. Since this study investigates the spread of democracy in a country that is ruled by an authoritarian regime, a multidimensional democracy concept is needed in order to identify signs of democracy and democratisation in different spheres of China's political society. In line with the proponents of multidimensional concepts, the different components of democracy are treated as separate from each other when the research results are presented. Inspired by V-Dem's definition of electoral democracy, democracy is defined as a continuous and multidimensional concept based on the core components of Dahl's polyarchic concept (Lindberg et al. 2014, 161). In the sub-studies, attention will mainly be directed to the character of freedom of expression, alternative sources of information and associational autonomy as well as to what extent these polyarchic institutions are fulfilled in practice. The definition of democratisation in this thesis is closely related to how democracy is conceptualised. Democratisation is understood as the process leading to the realisation of democratic institutions (Grugel 2002, 5; Karvonen 1997, 20).

Civil Society

A concept related to democracy that is of particular interest in this thesis is what is referred to as civil society or the third sector. Like democracy, civil society is a relatively elusive and politicised concept and there is no consensus on how it should be understood (Salmenkari 2013, 686). Although there is a generally

broad agreement that civil society refers to the associational space somewhere between the state, the family and the market, scholars disagree on whether to use more descriptive or more normative definitions. According to a more descriptive understanding, civil society can include less formal organizations, social movements and groups that to some extent are integrated with the state. Descriptive theories usually do not draw any causal link between civil society and democratisation (Pellerin 2019, 56–58). In contrast, many normative scholars, especially critical and liberal theorists, argue that civil society enhances the quality of democracy (Chambers and Kymlicka 2002, 2; Diamond 1994, 7; Huntington 1984, 203). For critical theorists, civil society is usually understood as the institutions belonging to people's life world where public opinion can develop relatively unaffected by the state and the market. According to this perspective, civil society is believed to improve democracy by putting pressure on power holders as well as by involving more people in political deliberation (Chambers 2002, 90–110; Habermas [1962] 1992, 231–235).

From a more liberal point of view, civil society can be defined as “the realm of organised social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules” (Diamond 1999, 221). One of the pioneers of liberalism, Alexis de Tocqueville, perceived the development of free associations in America during the 19th century as a means to combat the rise of individualism in democratic societies and thus strengthen the resilience of democracy (Tocqueville de [1840] 2009, 970–977). Modern liberal scholars have followed the same line of argument by emphasising that civil society is critical to the balancing of unlimited state power and the development of social capital, both of which are perceived as necessary for a well-functioning liberal democracy (Fukuyama 2001, 8–11). Philippe Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl (1991, 78) go as far as to describe intermediaries channelling citizens' influence on politics between elections, such as civil society organizations, as a distinct part of a modern democracy.

Scholars studying democratisation have noted that civil society groups in non-democratic states play an especially important role for realising substantive democratic rights, perhaps even more important than the role played by their equivalents in democratic states. In non-democratic countries, dissident-groups may develop a form of proto-civil society which might put pressure on regimes and eventually bring forward liberalisation or even democratisation (Fung 2003, 516; Wnuk-Lipiński 2007, 679). Thus, civil society groups

in non-democracies may be the only organizations able to function as an oppositional force against authoritarian regimes. There is plenty of evidence suggesting that civil society has played an important role in toppling or putting pressure on non-democratic regimes in most parts of the world (Bush 2015, 67; Diamond 1999, 233–239; Grugel 2002, 115; Kamrava and Mora 1998, 911; Wejnert 2014, 93). As this work focuses on the democratising function of civil society, it is suitable to use a liberal definition of the concept that perceives the phenomenon as a force balancing or even opposing the state.

In order to keep the democracy concept distinct and to avoid conceptual overstretch, the two concepts civil society and democracy are kept distinguished from each other in this thesis. That being said, it should be mentioned that there are many examples of politically moderate or non-democratic social associations that seem to have none or even a negative impact on democratisation (Brysk 2000, 151; Teets 2014, 2). If civil society is to be perceived as closely related to democracy, it is important to identify groups which might have a democratising potential. Following Larry Diamond, the democratising impact of civil society is assessed mainly based on the actions and characteristics of civil society groups. For instance, focus is directed to the extent to which the groups exercise democratic freedoms (1999, 228), whereas the pure presence of non-state organizations is given less attention. Thus, civil society is defined in an etic way as a universal concept.

In order to identify civil society, one must know where to look. The prime actors of civil society usually consist of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Although there are etic definitions of NGOs that bear similarities with Diamond's perspective on civil society (Salamon and Anheier 1992, 135), I have chosen to define NGOs in an emic way as groups that are considered as such by China's NGO community. The emic definition is used in order to find a population of study objects. In the second step, Diamond's liberal civil society theory is used in order to distinguish groups based on their democratising capability.

Chapter 3. Democratic Diffusion

Broadly speaking, democratic diffusion refers to how democracy spreads from one social system to the next. While a plethora of other concepts such as linkage (Levitsky and Way 2005, 21), domino theory (Chun et al. 2016, 537; Leeson and Dean 2009, 534), contagion (Li and Thompson 1975, 64; Silitski 2010, 340; Whitehead 1996, 5) and snowballing (Huntington 1991, 100) have been used to describe similar phenomena, diffusion has gradually become the preferred term by most scholars interested in the spread of democracy. Consequently, it will also be used in this study. Historically, the democratic diffusion concept is derived from innovation research and refers to how innovations spread, in this case the innovation of democracy (Lehtinen 2014, 124). The research concept was developed in the early 20th century and has been used in different academic fields such as anthropology, ethnography, sociology, public health and education (Rogers 1995, 38–95; White 1945, 339).

Democratisation scholars disagree on the role of agency in the diffusion concept. Some argue that diffusion should mainly be used when referring to the unintentional spread of democracy (Ambrosio 2007, 235; Burnell and Schlumberger 2010, 5). According to others, democratic diffusion should also include intentional action (Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010, 3; Vanderhill 2017, 42) such as democracy promoting aid (Lankina, Libman, and Obydenkova 2016, 1609) and military aggression (Gleditsch and Ward 2006, 919; Wejnert 2014, 56). Somewhere between these groups are scholars who recognise that diffusion has an intentional character but argue that coordinated actions by states and networks; such as military pressure, sanctions and aid should be distinguished from the diffusion concept (Bunce and Wolchik 2006, 287; Elkins and Simons 2005, 35; Houle, Kayser, and Xiang 2016, 694; Huntington 1991, 101). Due to the width of the material used in the sub-studies of this thesis, I define diffusion in a relatively broad way, including intentional action. Barbara Wejnert's definition of diffusion as "the spread of a practice within a social system, where the spread denotes flow or movement from a source to an adopter typically via communication, role modeling, and/or coercion" is used as the core concept (2014, 35).

Actors Involved in Democratic Diffusion

According to Wejnert's definition, any actor in a social system can be a source or an adopter of democracy. Broadly speaking, the actors can be categorised as large collective actors, small collective actors and individuals. On the macro level, large collective actors

such as states (Brinks and Coppedge 2006, 470) or intra-state regions (Lankina, Libman, and Obydenkova 2016, 1608) may influence each other in a democratic or authoritarian direction, depending on their political regimes. On the meso level, external actors may influence important social groups within a state such as the elite and the opposition (Lehtinen 2014, 125) or civil society (Kopstein and Reilly 2000, 31). On the micro level, individuals are often persuaded to adopt innovations by opinion leaders who learn about the innovations through mass media (Rogers 1995, 285).

Although most scholars in the field empirically focus on the macro level of democratic diffusion, there is a widespread view that the three levels are interrelated. A large collective actor such as a state can, for instance, facilitate democratic diffusion by strengthening a small external collective actor such as an opposition group in another country (Gleditsch and Ward 2006, 918–919; Levitsky and Way 2005, 25). Civil society organizations may in turn use neighbour states as examples in order to influence their own polities in a more democratic or authoritarian direction (Brinks and Coppedge 2006, 467). On the micro level, individuals generally avoid openly supporting democracy until a certain number of supporters have mobilised. However, external influence such as foreign aid or the demonstration effect caused by a successful revolution can push the number of individuals that support democracy or dare to protest to a threshold catalysing a cascading revolution (Elkink 2011, 1652–1653; Weyland 2010, 1152).

It should be noted that not all political actors are interested in promoting democratic diffusion. Some social forces are inclined to limit or stop the spread of democracy (Solingen 2012, 633). Actors opposing democratic diffusion can consist of a wide array of individuals, social groups and associations but the prime antagonists to democracy are in most cases authoritarian regimes. Non-democratic regimes are usually more likely to successfully resist democratic diffusion if they can sustain elite cohesion, if they are supported by strong ruling parties and loyal coercive institutions and if they have an identity built on revolutionary struggle (Brownlee 2007, 203; Levitsky and Way 2012, 870). The ‘physical’ strength of authoritarian regimes is generally dependent on their ‘mental’ strength and ability to appeal to moral codes and culture (Silitski 2009, 89). For instance, in response to the post-1989 colour revolutions in Eastern Europe and the former USSR, the Russian government has spent considerable energy developing ideological strategies intended to legitimise the authoritarian regime. Non-interference in states’ domestic politics, nationalism and anti-

secularism have been raised as major components of the ideological innovations (Ambrosio 2009, 69–86; Finkel and Brudny 2012b, 26–29). Attempts to use ideology in order to counter democratic diffusion can also be seen in Lukashenko’s Belarus, where focus has been directed on promoting egalitarian state nationalism and Soviet nostalgia (Korosteleva 2012, 44).

In addition to ideological strategies, authoritarian regimes and other opponents of democratic diffusion can hinder the spread of democracy by insulating their societies from democratic diffusion (Ambrosio 2009, 19), for instance by refusing to register NGOs (Finkel and Brudny 2012a, 6). On the international stage, authoritarian states seem to have counteracted democratic diffusion by bolstering other non-democratic regimes and by subverting democratic states (Ambrosio 2007, 233). Other strategies used have been to take advantage of strategic natural resources as well as to exploit competition between great powers in the international community (Vanderhill 2013, 222–223). According to Lucan Way, authoritarian regimes are more likely to stay in power if they have fewer linkages to the West since that means that Western states have less incentives to promote regime change (2008, 60). Like actors friendly to democracy, actors hostile to democracy learn from historical democratisation experiences and continuously adopt their strategies in order to reach their goals (Houle, Kayser, and Xiang 2016, 695).

The power and status relationship between different actors, democratic as well as authoritarian, are generally perceived as being of great importance for the democratic diffusion process. Large, high-status and powerful actors are more probable to spread ideas to small, low-status and weak actors than vice-versa (Rogers 1995, 27). However, power relationships are seldom considered in the empirical work of democratic diffusion studies, especially not in the quantitative part of the literature. Most of these studies treat states as both sources and potential adopters of democracy in their empirical work. With the exception of some studies in which great powers are treated as especially influential in the diffusion process (Fordham and Asal 2007, 48; Gunitsky 2014, 591), states are often regarded as having equal potential to spread democracy to their neighbours, regardless of their size and influence (Csordás and Ludwig 2011, 236; Doorenspleet 2004, 320; Gleditsch and Ward 2006, 922; Kopstein and Reilly 2000, 17).

The Diffusion Mechanisms

On the most general level, democratic diffusion mechanisms can be categorised as imposition or emulation (Teorell 2010, 86). Imposition of democracy can take place through coercive as well as cooperative means (Gunitsky 2014, 567–575). Emulation mechanisms can be divided into adaptation and learning (Elkins and Simmons 2005, 39–45). Adaptation signifies when the choice of one actor alters the conditions of other actors (Elkins and Simmons 2005, 39). Daniel Brinks and Michael Coppedge use a similar concept, termed neighbour evolution. This concept refers to when actors in one society make actions similar to what is already taking place in another society in order to get rewarded in some way (Brinks and Coppedge 2006, 466). Competition can also be perceived as a kind of adaptation (Franzese and Hays 2008, 745).

Learning, on the other hand, happens when the actions of an adopter provide information on the conditions associated with adopting, including benefits and drawbacks (Elkins and Simmons 2005, 42). A similar mechanism; demonstration effect, refers to how actors in an authoritarian society learn from a recent democratisation process (Vanderhill 2017, 43). The existence of a democracy bordering an authoritarian society can also remind people that democracy is possible. This mechanism is termed ‘symbolism’ by Thomas Ambrosio (2007, 235).

Regardless of whether democratic diffusion takes place through imposition or emulation, democracy must spread through some kind of communication channel. As stated by Sidney Tarrow, the communication channel can be either; (1) direct through interpersonal networks, (2) indirect through impersonal connections such as through the spread of media or (3) mediated for instance by ‘third actors’ connecting pro-democracy activists from different societies (2010, 209). Generally speaking, the more communication channels that link an authoritarian society to democratic societies, the more linkages through which democracy can be promoted and spread (Wejnert 2005, 56) and the higher the cost for authoritarian governments who want to suppress democratic movements (Levitsky and Way 2005, 23). In the literature, there are many different ways of measuring communication channels such as bilateral trade flows (Beck, Gleditsch, and Beardsley 2006, 33), diplomatic representations (Doorenspleet 2004, 321), membership in economic or political networks (Wejnert 2005, 59) etc. Actors hostile to diffusion, primarily authoritarian regimes, can hinder democratic diffusion by isolating their states from unwanted external influence, by marginalising the opposition and by developing alternative

narratives about democracy to reduce local receptivity to democratic diffusion (Ambrosio 2009, 19–22; Finkel and Brudny 2012a, 6).

Diffusion and Time

Time is an important aspect of diffusion (Lehtinen 2014, 125). Everett Rogers has constructed a theoretical framework that efficiently captures the time aspect of how innovations spread. Rogers outlines three different aspects of the diffusion process that involve time; (1) the innovation-decision process, (2) the innovativeness of actors and (3) the rate of adoption. The innovation-decision process can be divided into five different steps; knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. These steps are related to time since they generally follow one another in regular sequences. Actors usually learn about an innovation before they can be persuaded to adopt or reject it, and they generally decide to adopt an innovation before they implement it etc. The innovativeness of actors is relevant from a time perspective since some actors adopt innovations earlier than others. For instance, high-status actors tend to adopt innovations earlier than low-status actors. The rate of adoption refers to the number of actors within a population that adopt an innovation during a given period of time. The rate of adoption is often S-shaped with few adopters during the early phase of the diffusion process, many during the middle phase, and few during the end phase (Rogers 1995, 20–23). While Rogers' framework is useful, it should still be noted that the democratic diffusion process tends to diverge from the diffusion process of many other less political innovations. For instance, Huntington's theory of democratic waves demonstrates that the adoption rate of democracy has not followed a simple S-curve (Huntington 1991, 16). Therefore, scholars have emphasised the need to deepen the understanding of the time aspect of democratic diffusion (Houle, Kayser, and Xiang 2016, 688).

Diffusion Conditions

Factors facilitating or obstructing diffusion, here referred to as diffusion conditions, have received considerable interest in the literature on democratic diffusion. Diffusion conditions consist of conduits that facilitate diffusion and firewalls or barriers that hinder diffusion (Rhue and Sundararajan 2014, 43; Solingen 2012, 634; Vanderhill 2017, 42). Diffusion conditions are usually closely related to the density of communication channels and are therefore often indirectly correlated to diffusion. Four diffusion conditions have received substantial attention in the diffusion literature; (1) spatial factors, (2) cultural proximity, (3) networks and (4) media.

Spatial Factors

Some of the most common factors included in studies on democratic diffusion are spatial geography and proximity. The most common theoretical argument underpinning the focus on spatial proximity is that neighbouring societies are usually connected through a dense number of communication channels which facilitate diffusion (Rogers 1995, 333). To distinguish these factors from each other, Jeffrey Kopstein and David Reilly use the concepts stocks and flows where stocks represent the external environment of a state, while flows represent the movement of information and resources between countries (2000, 13). Similar categories have been used by other scholars (Beck, Gleditsch, and Beardsley 2006, 28; Doorenspleet 2004, 321; Wejnert 2005, 56).

The literature quite convincingly demonstrates that some kind of spatial diffusion effect exists. Countries with many democratic neighbours (Gassebner, Lamla, and Vreeland 2013, 190; Starr and Lindborg 2003, 516; Teorell 2010, 81) as well as countries located in more democratic regions (Gleditsch and Ward 2006, 930; O'Loughlin et al. 1998, 568) are more likely to democratise or remain democracies. Temporal and spatial clusters of democratisation processes suggest that spatial diffusion may be an important factor explaining democratisation. However, this is not necessarily the case, since spatial and temporal democratisation clusters may be a cause of domestic factors taking place simultaneously (Brinks and Coppedge 2006, 464). For instance, a regional economic crisis may force authoritarian leaders in a number of countries to independently initiate democratic reforms. Thus, a number of studies have also integrated domestic variables in their diffusion models. The geographical pattern is strong even when controlling for institutional choices and cultural legacies (Kopstein and Reilly 2000, 13) as well as modernisation factors such as economic development and size of the middle class (Doorenspleet 2004, 328). Wejnert even demonstrates that the predictive power of domestic development variables seems to fade when the diffusion variables are introduced (2005, 73).

Cultural Proximity

It is not necessarily spatial proximity, but similarity or structural equivalence between societies that facilitates diffusion. Generally speaking, human communication occurs more frequently between people who are similar or homophilous (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001, 416). Linguistic, religious and historical similarities generally increase communication between societies. For instance,

shared language seems to have a considerable impact on trade patterns between countries (Melitz 2008, 691). It is important to note that what matters is perceived, not necessarily real, similarity (Bunce and Wolchik 2006, 297). For instance, authoritarian regimes can persuade the people that the opposition's democratic ideals are alien to the country's traditional culture (Finkel and Brudny 2012a, 6). Following the same logic, democratic movements usually have to develop a message that corresponds to a country's indigenous cultural values if they want to win sympathy among broader segments of the population (Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010, 5).

The importance of cultural proximity is often expressed in contemporary politics. The fact that Malaysia has become a political model country for many states in the Middle East, in spite of considerable geographical distance, suggests that shared religion and a shared experience of colonialism are important diffusion conditions (Rane 2012, 62). The wave of revolutions following the Arab Spring indicates that cultural proximity and the perception of a shared identity were more important than geographical proximity in the diffusion process. For instance, the revolution spread from Tunisia, to Egypt and then to Yemen. However, countries in sub-Saharan Africa were not so affected (Bellin 2012, 142).

Political Networks and Foreign Aid

Political networks are also raised as an important facilitator of democratic diffusion (Doorenspleet and Mudde 2008, 826). Participation in relatively democratic regional organizations seems to be related to democratisation (Teorell 2010, 82). By offering conditioned opportunities for membership in organizations such as NATO and the European Union, Western democracies appear to have increased democratic diffusion in Eastern and Southern Europe (Lankina, Libman, and Obydenkova 2016, 1601; Way 2008, 60). There is also evidence suggesting that foreign aid, which is frequently distributed through political networks, facilitates democratisation (Csordás and Ludwig 2011, 237; Finkel, Pérez-Liñán, and Seligson 2006, 83). For example, international networks of dissidents, an important force in many democratisation processes, have often been supported by foreign aid programs (Wejnert 2014, 136–139). Finally, colonial networks seem to have a large impact on democratic diffusion. In particular, former British colonies generally appear to have inherited more democratic institutions from their former coloniser, including civil rights and rule of law, than countries with non-British colonial history (Bernhard, Reenock, and Nordstrom 2004, 230–246).

Media

Modern mass media is considered as one of the most efficient facilitators of diffusion (Rogers 1995, 18). Media proliferation seems to be an important factor explaining democratisation, especially the resilience of democracies (Teorell 2010, 143). However, the availability of media technology and the level of access to free information should be analytically distinguished since many authoritarian states, not least China, ban access to certain media (Wejnert 2014, 47–49).

Information technologies such as the Internet, smartphones and social media are relatively recent phenomena and their effect on democratisation processes are still uncertain. Internet can foster democratisation through different mechanisms, such as by altering the information flows between the government and the opposition, by increasing communication and coordination between dissident groups and by exposing human rights violations to the world (Rhue and Sundararajan 2014, 51). Social media seems to have been of considerable importance in mobilising protest activities against Middle Eastern regimes during the Arab Spring in 2010–2011 (Bellin 2012, 138; Rennick 2013, 170; Wolfsfeld, Segev, and Sheaffer 2013, 120). However, the mobilising potential of digital social networks should not be overestimated, since there are many historic examples of revolutions quickly spreading from country to country long before the invention of social media (Weyland 2012, 929).

The Object of Diffusion

Having its roots in innovation research, the object of diffusion, democracy, is often treated as an innovation in studies on democratic diffusion. According to Everett Rogers and Floyd Shoemaker (1971, 19), innovations are ideas, acts and things that are considered as new. Thus, the object of diffusion can be either a kind of behaviour or an idea (Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010, 4). The nature of the innovation determines the probability that diffusion will take place, since some innovations are perceived as more attractive than others by potential adopters (Bunce and Wolchik 2006, 288). Anders Uhlin (1995, 37) argues that the use of the innovation concept in diffusion research is problematic since the concept has a positive connotation, and since it is difficult to determine if an idea or act is perceived as new by the potential adopter. According to Uhlin, encouragement is for instance also a form of diffusion. The fall of authoritarianism in one country can encourage people in another country to strive for an already well-known idea such as democracy (Uhlin 1995, 38).

Although all democratic diffusion scholars are interested in the

spread of democracy, their prime study object sometimes differs, which can create confusion. Firstly, there is a difference between whether regime transitions or the development of democratic institutions are treated as the main object of diffusion. Secondly, among scholars focusing on transitions, some emphasise revolutions and the fall of authoritarian regimes (Bunce and Wolchick 2006, 294–296; Bush 2015, 67; Elkins 2011, 1653–1654), while others focus on successful transitions towards and away from democracy (Doorenspleet 2004, 322–324; Starr 1991, 363; Weyland 2010, 1159). A problem associated with the former of these two approaches is that the fall of an authoritarian regime is not always followed by the establishment of a consolidated democracy (Carothers 2002, 17). For instance, a study by Axel Hadenius and Jan Teorell demonstrates that 77 percent of transitions from authoritarianism taking place between 1972 and 2003 resulted in the establishment of another authoritarian regime (2007, 152). Thus, some scholars have warned against confounding the diffusion effect on transitions to democracy with its effect on the consolidation of democracy (Doorenspleet and Mudde 2008, 822; Houle, Kayser, and Xiang 2016, 697).

Studies focusing on transitions from authoritarian rule on the micro and meso level often use protest activities and strategies as the object of democratic diffusion (Bellin 2012, 140; Bunce and Wolchick 2006, 294; Elkins 2011, 1660). Scholars interested in transitions on the macro level often use operational democracy concepts that are either dichotomous or graded in a few steps (such as free, partly free, unfree) (Doorenspleet 2004, 322–324; Fordham and Asal 2007, 41; Gassebner, Lamla, and Vreeland 2013, 179; Gleditsch and Ward 2006, 912–921; Starr 1991, 363; Starr and Lindborg 2003, 495; Ward et al. 1996, 2–4). These group of scholars seldom use operational democracy concepts that are graded in many steps as that would make it difficult to determine the time sequence of a democratic transition or breakdown. A problem with measuring transitions based on gradual democracy indexes such as Polity and Freedom House, that are originally graded in many steps, is that the thresholds used to distinguish democracy from authoritarianism must often be drawn relatively arbitrarily (Gassebner, Lama, and Vreeland 2013, 179–180).

Diffusion scholars interested in the spread of democratic institutions on the micro and meso level often study how key actors either support or restrict the spread of democracy (Finkel and Brudny 2012a, 8–11; Levitsky and Way 2005, 21–32; Vanderhill 2017, 44–49). In these studies, the object of diffusion can for instance be democratic ideas (Uhlir 1995, 2–3) or financial, technical and moral

support enabling civil society groups in authoritarian countries to stay alive (Wejnert 2014, 136). On the macro level, this group of scholars often use operational democracy concepts that are multidimensional or graded in many steps (Brinks and Coppedge 2006, 468; Kopstein and Reilly 2000, 13; O’Loughlin et al. 1998, 548; Wejnert 2005, 58). Regardless of whether the quantitative scholars in the field focus on democratic transitions or democratic institutions, they generally measure the democratic level of a single country based on democracy indexes such as Freedom House (Brinks and Coppedge 2006, 468; Starr 1991, 363; Starr and Lindborg 2003, 495), the Polity indexes (Doorenspleet 2004, 322; Fordham and Asal 2007, 41; Gleditsch and Ward 2006, 912; Gunitsky 2014, 579; Kopstein and Reilly 2000, 7; Leeson and Dean 2009, 537; Modelski and Perry III 2002, 361; O’Loughlin et al. 1998, 548) and data derived from Nations, Democracy and Development, 1800–2005 (Wejnert 2014, 145).

How to Explore Democratic Diffusion?

Even though previous studies on democratic diffusion are relatively homogenous when it comes to method and material, there are some differences. In a wider perspective, the studies can be distinguished based on if they use qualitative or quantitative methods, if they cover an extensive or a smaller selection of states and/or cases and if they study democratic transitions or democratic institutions. A table summarising the method and material of some of the most influential diffusion studies is available in Appendix.

Quantitative studies have been dominant in previous diffusion literature. The most common setup is to apply spatio-temporal regression models on data sets including the democracy scores of most of the states in the international system during long time periods.² Development factors are often used as control variables (Doorenspleet 2004, 318–320; Gassebner Lamla, and Vreeland 2013, 172; Wejnert 2005, 69). Most quantitative studies focus on measuring the effect of spatial diffusion. This factor’s impact on a certain country can for instance be measured using either the mean level of democracy (Brinks and Coppedge 2006, 471) or the proportion of democracies (Doorenspleet 2004, 321; Gleditsch and Ward 2006, 922; Wejnert 2005, 59) within a population as the independent

2. Although quantitative diffusion studies generally aim to include as many states as possible in their regressions, smaller states are often excluded. For instance, states with population of 500 000 or less are excluded from the frequently used Polity III data set (Jagers and Gurr 1995, 470).

variable. The population can be contiguous neighbouring countries (Doorenspleet 2004, 321; Leeson and Dean 2009, 538), countries in a relevant geographical region or sub-region (Beck, Gleditsch, and Beardsley 2006, 33) or countries in the world at large (Starr 1991, 369). As noted by Renske Doorenspleet and Cas Mudde, non-geographical diffusion effects are largely neglected in large-N studies (2008, 824). Nevertheless, there are some examples of quantitative diffusion studies measuring the effect of culture (Wong and Woodberry 2015, 1–2), colonial networks (Bernhard, Reenock, and Nordstrom 2004, 236) and digital access (Rhue and Sundararajan 2014, 47). Studies have also investigated how the formation of new democratic states relate to democratic diffusion (Denk and Lehtinen 2016, 3337). Besides the kind of statistical diffusion studies described above, quantitative scholars have also investigated the spread of democracy using other methods such as system dynamics (Sandberg 2011) and computer simulations of theoretical models (Elkink 2011, 1662).

Qualitative studies on democratic diffusion are also relatively common in the literature. The bulk of these studies either apply methods similar to process tracing or methods similar to cross-case analysis (Starke 2013, 563). In contrast to the quantitative diffusion literature, qualitative studies, with some exceptions (Huntington 1991, 13–207), seldom investigate an extensive selection of states. Instead, cases are usually selected strategically, either in order to develop a more general understanding of how democratic diffusion works, or since the cases are perceived as interesting in their own right. With some exceptions (Uhlin 1995, 57; Wejnert 2014, 112) qualitative diffusion studies are mainly based on secondary material. Primary sources such as interviews with opposition leaders and regime representatives are seldom used.

The core of process tracing is to identify the casual chain between an independent variable and the outcome on a dependent variable (George and Bennett 2005, 206). Diffusion scholars have applied this or similar methods when studying waves of revolutions such as the development in Eastern Europe leading to the fall of communism in 1989 (Wejnert 2014, 112–142), the post-1989 colour revolutions in Eastern Europe and the former USSR (Bunce and Wolchick 2006, 288; Way 2008, 58–59), as well as the Arab Spring in 2011 (Bellin 2012, 128–142). The detailed analysis of specific occasions means that process tracing is especially useful for explaining to what extent diffusion, instead of any other effect, explains a particular outcome, such as the revolutions mentioned above.

In cross-case studies, the similarities and differences in

theoretically relevant variables are analysed and compared across several cases. Unlike diffusion studies applying process tracing, cross-case studies are not limited to analysing the process leading to a specific outcome. As long as the case selection is based on theoretical considerations derived from the diffusion literature, this method is especially useful for identifying the mechanisms of democratic diffusions (Starke 2013, 567–577). As with studies using process tracing, cross-state analysis has mainly been applied to regions where democratisation has been relatively successful, such as Eastern Europe and the former USSR (Finkel and Brudny 2012a, 6; Kopstein and Reilly 2000, 26), Europe (Weyland 2010, 1151), Africa and Latin America (O’Loughlin et al. 1998, 564–568). Deviant democracies that lack most of the conditions suggested to be critical for democratisation such as India, Benin, Costa Rica, Botswana and Mongolia have also been investigated (Doorenspleet and Mudde 2008, 821).

Qualitative studies that have examined cases where authoritarianism has remained resilient have mainly focused on authoritarian counter strategies against democratic diffusion (Finkel and Brudny 2012a, 8; Korosteleva 2012, 38; Vanderhill 2017 43–49). Except from Anders Uhlin’s study on the democracy movement in Suharto’s Indonesia (1995, 56), there are few examples of qualitative studies investigating actors promoting democratic diffusion in states that remain authoritarian throughout the entire time span covered by the study.

Limitations of Previous Research on Democratic Diffusion

In spite of the popularity of the topic, previous literature on democratic diffusion arguably has many limitations. The overarching problem with the research field is the dominance of quantitative studies as well as the limited width of the methods and material used in the qualitative literature. These limitations imply that knowledge about; (1) the actors, (2) the mechanisms, (3) the object and (4) the area specific context of democratic diffusion is inadequate.

Firstly, previous studies mainly investigate the macro level of democratic diffusion. Most of the quantitative diffusion literature treats states as their prime analytical units. With some exceptions (Fordham and Asal 2007, 48; Gunitsky 2014, 591), states are also perceived to have the same influence regardless of their size and power. There are only a few examples of quantitative studies that have investigated democratic diffusion between intrastate regions (Lankina, Libman, and Obydenkova 2016, 1 619). Compared to the

quantitative literature on democratic diffusion, qualitative studies afford more interest to actors on the intrastate level, and special emphasis has been placed on the role of authoritarian regimes. However, since most qualitative studies investigate large regions covering many states and/or waves of revolutions, they also tend to neglect actors on the meso and micro level. In order to develop a more thorough understanding of democratic diffusion, more studies investigating individual political activists and small collective actors such as civil society groups should be conducted.

Secondly, the dominance of quantitative methods in the literature implies that diffusion mechanisms as well as the interaction between diffusion conditions and diffusion mechanisms are poorly understood (Houle, Kayser, and Xiang 2016, 688; Yilmaz 2009, 95). For instance, the effect of non-geographical diffusion is often neglected in large-N studies. Although more theoretical and qualitative studies have developed concepts such as imposition, emulation, adaptation, neighbour evolution, competition and demonstration effect to describe the mechanisms of democratic diffusion, most of these concepts address democratic diffusion on a relatively high analytical level. In order to develop a more detailed understanding of democratic diffusion mechanisms, more studies of individuals and small collective actors are needed. In addition, while studies on authoritarian counter strategies against democratic diffusion have been conducted, some dimensions of these mechanisms, such as the ideological dimension, deserve more research interest.

Thirdly, in the quantitative literature the object of diffusion; democracy, has primarily been studied based on democracy indexes measured on the national level such as the Freedom House and the Polity indexes. Thus, the knowledge of how specific components of democracy, such as freedom of expression, associational autonomy and alternative sources of information, spread is still limited. This approach is problematic since it makes it impossible to identify democratic diffusion processes that take place locally in countries that as a whole move in an authoritarian direction. In many of the qualitative studies, transitions from authoritarianism have been treated as the prime indicator of democratic diffusion, and the material in these investigations has generally been derived from a small number of revolutionary waves. The knowledge of how democratic institutions spread in countries where authoritarianism is resilient during long periods of time is still relatively limited.

Fourthly, although diffusion scholars warn against assuming that universal laws guide the growth of democracy (O'Loughlin et al.

1998, 568) there are few domain specific theories in the literature. Those that have been developed have mainly focused on Eastern Europe and the former USSR. Except one study by Rachel Vanderhill that briefly investigates China's propaganda system (2017, 44-46), China has largely been neglected in the democratic diffusion literature.

One purpose of this thesis is to address the research gaps of the general democratic diffusion literature. Thus, focus is directed to investigating the lower analytical levels, the spread of democratic institutions, the diffusion mechanisms and the country specific context, that is the China specific context, of democratic diffusion. In order to contextualise the sub-studies, knowledge about China's democratic prospects is needed. Hence, a review and discussion about previous research on democratisation in China is provided in the next chapter.

Chapter 4. Democratisation and Democratic Diffusion in China

As noted in Chapter 3, few studies have applied democratic diffusion theories to the case of China. Nevertheless, China scholars have spent considerable energy investigating democratisation processes in the People's Republic. Much of this work relates to issues on how democracy spreads. Thus, besides contributing to the literature on democratic diffusion, this thesis also addresses the more area specific literature on democratisation in China. In the following chapter, I will first briefly present China's modern political history and then discuss four aspects of Chinese politics; legitimacy, media, civil society and the country's geopolitical context. These aspects are of particular relevance to democratic diffusion as well as to the empirical fields covered by the sub-studies of this thesis.

A Brief Summary of China's Political History

China's modern political history is characterised by the struggle against foreign enemies, civil war and non-democratic rule. In the first Opium War 1839–1842, Britain annexed Hong Kong and forced China to open itself to trade (Dreyer 2000, 46). Although China was never completely colonised, the first Opium War was followed by other wars resulting in concessions to colonial powers. Failed efforts to modernise, ensure social stability and defend China against foreign aggression finally led to the fall of the last imperial dynasty, the Qing, in 1912 (Dillon 2012, 120–144). The new republican era was characterised by aggression from the rising Japanese empire and internal strife between the CCP and the more conservative Nationalist Party. Following the Japanese defeat in WWII, the CCP defeated the Nationalists in Mainland China and the remaining nationalist soldiers evacuated to the island of Taiwan where their de-facto state, the Republic of China (*zhonghua minguo* 中华民国) survived. In 1949, the CCP leader Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China (*zhonghua renmin gongheguo* 中华人民共和国) at the Tiananmen square in Beijing.

During the rule of Mao Zedong (1949–1976) the CCP developed a political system that could be described as totalitarian or command authoritarian (Linz 2000, 70; Truex 2017, 333). There were basically no legal enterprises or civil society organizations outside the control of the ruling party (Kang and Han 2008, 51). The Party's policies, rather than the law, were the prime sources of norms regulating state and society (Zhang 2017, 380). Political repression was extensive, especially during the 'Great Leap Forward' (1958–

1960) and the 'Cultural Revolution' (1966–1976). Terror, fear and a structural deficit in the capacity to develop formal rules contributed to a surging personality cult of the top leader (Leese 2007, 635). Nevertheless, in spite of the high degree of political repression, the CCP officially still embraced some ideals related to democracy and popular participation. These ideals, often denoted by the concept 'mass line' (*qunzhong luxian* 群众路线), meant that the ruling party should consult the masses, interpret their disparate ideas through the frames of Marxism-Leninism and then implement policy based on those ideas. Consequently, political participation was encouraged during the Mao era especially in rural areas (Angle 2005, 526–529).

After Mao Zedong's death in 1976, a period of power struggle resulted in the victory of a more pragmatic and less radical party faction led by Hua Guofeng (Dong and Walder 2014, 1092–1094). Hua was later replaced by Deng Xiaoping, who became China's paramount leader in 1978–1979 (Teiwes and Sun 2011, 22–23). Building on the reforms already initiated by Hua, Deng's administration initiated a bold policy program termed 'Reform and Opening up' (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放) in 1978. The new policies primarily aimed at modernising China and preserving the CCP's hold on power by internationalising and marketising the economy, as well as by transforming the political system from totalitarianism to a more dynamic form of authoritarianism (Dreyer 2000, 111–113). The main focus of Deng Xiaoping's reforms was the economy. Although the state never totally released its grip, privatisation and economic incentives were introduced. International trade, tourism and exchange studies were encouraged. The value of trade increased from lower than ten percent of total GDP during the Mao era to 30 percent in 1988, and reached its peak of 65 percent in 2006 (World Bank 2017d). China experienced impressive economic growth after the initiation of the new reform policies. The living standards of the Chinese public increased dramatically, and GDP per capita is more than 50 times larger today compared to 1976 (Heilmann 2017, 24; World Bank 2017c).

As part of the reform process, the political system was decentralised and local governments were given much more autonomy than during the Mao era (Dollar 2018, 155). 'Fragmented authority' is a concept commonly used to describe China's post-reform decentralised governance structure (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988, 22). The theory suggests that policies made at China's political center are easily influenced by the political goals of agencies and local governments that are responsible for implementing the policy (Mertha 2009, 996). China's decentralised

system has limited the central government's ability to control the country's political direction. As many governmental agencies work in the same policy areas, logrolling between them is common and even institutionalised, which often leads to inefficiency (Gilli, Li, and Qian 2018, 212–213). The fragmented governance system also creates a space in which non-traditional and non-state actors such as journalist and NGOs can influence political policies (Mertha 2009, 1012).

Moreover, the new reform policies entailed that the political system became less totalitarian. The personality cult of the highest leader, which was so obvious during the Mao era, was largely abolished in the 1980s. The importance of Marxist-Leninist ideology, particularly in people's ordinary lives, diminished. Starting from the late 1970s, Deng Xiaoping repeatedly made statements demanding rule of law and a separation of the state from the party (Zhang 2017, 379–384). The political system gradually became more professionalised and institutionalised (Nathan 2003, 7). Although popular participation in politics on the grassroots level decreased, more formal participatory institutions were developed (Almén 2016, 479; Angle 2005, 529). In the late 1980s, village elections were introduced. Grassroots elections were followed by the introduction of other consultative, deliberative and even democratic institutions such as public hearings, rights to sue the state, more transparency, public opinion surveys, deliberative polls and more political space for civil society (He and Warren 2011, 269). The new participatory institutions were officially raised as corner stones in the Chinese version of democracy and the democracy term was increasingly used by political leaders during the Hu-Wen administration 2003–2013 (Bing 2014, 95–96).

China scholars have used concepts such as authoritarian consultation and authoritarian deliberation to describe the introduction of new participatory institutions (He and Thøgersen 2010, 276). Some of these institutions can be perceived as deliberative in the sense that they make power holders responsive to claims and reasons raised by the participants, and that these claims at least partly determine policy outcomes (He and Warren 2011, 274). In other cases, the participatory innovations are better described as consultative, as they mainly enable the CCP to use consultation to collect preferences from those affected by a policy (Truex 2017, 330).

However, as far as Dahl's democracy concept is used as a yardstick, the democratic impact of China's participatory innovations should not be exaggerated. Although citizens are often consulted by local authorities it is difficult to distinguish

between authoritarian deliberation and forced participation (He and Warren 2011, 270). There are usually no accountability mechanisms ensuring that participants' opinions will influence policy in an institutionalised manner. Critical observers have described the democratic innovations as pure 'flower vases' and accused decision makers of not letting public opinion influence policy if it diverts from the government's political goals (Truex 2017, 331). Many successful democratic experiments such as direct elections of township leaders have later been cancelled as political leaders have perceived them as too politically sensitive (He and Thøgersen 2010, 684).

Although reform of the political system has taken place, China can still be described as a 'party-state', meaning that 'the formal separation between state and Party has little meaning with the CCP and the state effectively merged' (Collins and Cottey 2012, 39). Rather than being a political party, the CCP can be perceived as an institutional structure of government and a holder of political citizenship (Backer 2009, 101). In recent years, the border between the CCP and the state has been even more blurred, not least since the Party's constitution increasingly is perceived as normatively superior to the state constitution (Zhang 2017, 391–397). Although representative and elected political bodies exist, the CCP has the authority to appoint and remove personnel through its nomenklatura-system, which enables officials at the higher levels of the Party to control the outcome on lower levels (Collins and Cottey 2012, 41–42). When perceived as facing existential threats, as during the Tiananmen-demonstrations in 1989, the CCP has even used military force in order to preserve one-party rule. However, when possible, the Party seems to prefer using other means than repression in order to sustain its hold on power (Brady 2012b, 183). An important reason for that is probably that large scale repression may harm the economy as well as alienate the Chinese public (Mesquita and Downs 2005, 80).

Although the People's Republic's political system has fewer totalitarian characteristics today than during the Mao era, it is still considered as one of the most authoritarian states in the world (Freedom House 2017b). V-Dem's additive polyarchy index even indicates that the country has become less democratic since Xi Jinping became President in 2013 (V-Dem 2018). Since entering office, President Xi has turned away from the country's post-Mao collective leadership tradition by taking top positions in a number of central leading groups related to economy, foreign affairs, cyber-security and military reform (Li 2016, 8–12). In 2018, China's legislature,

the National People's Congress, enabled Xi to remain President for life by removing the previously existing two-term limit on the presidency. During Xi's leadership, freedom of speech has been further limited, not least through an order, commonly referred to as 'Document Number 9', that forbids intellectuals to openly discuss seven topics: universal values, civil society, freedom of press, civil rights, juridical reform, market-friendly neoliberalism and past mistakes by the CCP (Zhao 2016, 85). Political campaigns, including typical Maoist characteristics such as criticism and self-criticism, have once again become a feature of Chinese politics (Lam 2016, 412). Last but not least, Xi's administration has developed China's digital surveillance, including face recognition, large scale collection of private data and measurement of individuals 'social credit', to an extent making Larry Diamond worry that the country's political system may become an example of 'postmodern totalitarianism' (Diamond 2019, 23).

Prospects for Democratisation

In the shadow of economic reforms and continued lack of democracy, China is plagued by both new and old social problems, threatening the CCP's hold on power. The lack of contestation and transparency in the political system contributes to corruption and abuse of power (Pei 2006, 206). Factions in the Party implicate a continuous risk of social instability (Li 2012, 613). The constant focus on economic growth has resulted in the negligence of environmental issues (Conrad 2017, 356). Finally, privatisation and the insufficiency of welfare and social, civil and political rights have resulted in growing gaps between rich and poor (Stepan and Heilmann 2017, 254). In economic terms, rural areas in Western provinces are generally lagging behind compared to urban areas in Eastern provinces. Since rural land is owned by the public, farmers are exposed to the risk of land grabbing by corrupt party officials. Workers from rural areas, usually termed migrant workers (*nongminggong* 农民工) are allowed to work in cities but are not easily allowed to change their permanent resident status (*hukou* 户口) to these areas. Due to the hukou-system, Chinese citizens are usually only entitled to critical social rights such as education and healthcare in their native areas. Thus, the migrant workers, estimated to be 171 million in 2010, have limited social protection when living in urban areas (Liang, Li, and Ma 2014, 699). Bad working conditions, the hukou-system, the decentralisation of policy implementation and the inefficiency of the government controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) have been raised as factors contributing to a growing

marginalisation among migrant workers (Taylor and Li 2007, 711; Wong, Li, and Song 2007, 37).

The People's Republic's many social problems are a source of dissatisfaction among the Chinese public. Between the 1990s and the early 21st century, protest activities have increased in frequency, probably fuelled by factors such as rising expectations, increasing rights consciousness among Chinese citizens, better access to information technology and a slightly less repressive political climate (Dickson 2016, 38; Lorentzen and Scoggins 2015, 638). One example of increasing protest activities is labour related protest. The number of accepted arbitrated labour disputes increased from 41 121 in 1996 to 693 465 in 2008, and there is also reason to believe that strikes have become more common (Chan and Selden 2014, 607–609). Scholars have described some of these strikes as sharing characteristics with social movements (Froissart 2005, 6). The lacking implementation of labour rights is perceived as one of the main reasons explaining the increasing numbers of labour conflicts (He and Huang 2015, 472). The Chinese government has historically responded very differently to different kinds of protest activities. It has encouraged nationalist protest, mostly tolerated protest by farmers and workers but fiercely cracked down on certain religious protest activities such as the Falungong-movement (Noakes and Ford 2015, 676; Perry 2001, 167). Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the CCP has been especially worried that revolutions in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East might spread to China. The control of protest activities has consequently been especially strict during limited time periods such as the Arab Spring in 2011 (Dickson 2016, 42).

Some scholars have interpreted the rising wave of protest activities as evidence of the CCP's fragility (Shirk 2007, 56). Others suggest that most protest activities do not really threaten the party-state, since protesters often avoid direct confrontation and relate to official laws and ideology when making claims, a phenomenon that has been termed 'rightful resistance' by Kevin O'Brien and Li Lianjiang (2006, 2). The combined factors of economic growth, resilient authoritarian rule and growing social unrest should have implications for the context of democratic diffusion in China. So, what does present research say about democratic diffusion in the People's Republic?

Very few studies have directly investigated democratic diffusion in China. However, the diffusion concept has been used by China scholars. Case studies on China have for instance related to the diffusion concept when studying the spread of authoritarian policy

models (Ambrosio 2012, 382; Teets 2014, 176–192), the spread of information through social media (Chen and Fu 2016, 989), the impact of information and communication technology diffusion on local governments' responsiveness to citizens' demands (Minard 2015, 1050), the spread of liberal ideas through cross-border civil society cooperation (Chen 2012, 120) and the spread of protest activities in Hong Kong (Cheng 2016, 384) as well as in Mainland China (Lu, Zheng, and Wang 2017, 18; Zhang 2015, 377). In one of her case studies, Rachel Vanderhill has raised China's Internet censorship and active propaganda as examples of authoritarian counter-strategies against democratic diffusion (2017, 4–6). As I will demonstrate later, some of these studies provide insights that contribute to a deeper understanding on how democratic diffusion works in China. However, in order to put this thesis in a more relevant research context, it is also beneficial to discuss research fields in China studies that, while not using the diffusion concept, still relate to issues about how democracy spreads.

Legitimacy Problems

Legitimacy is important to any authoritarian regime aiming to resist democratic diffusion (Ambrosio 2009, 22; Finkel and Brudny 2012a, 6). The Tiananmen protest-movement and the fall of the USSR made the CCP conscious about the legitimacy problems of governing communist parties (Holbig and Gilley 2010, 397). On the surface, the CCP seems to have a high level of legitimacy. Numerous surveys show that the Chinese government generally has a high approval rating (Shi 2010, 210). However, temporary approval is not the same as high legitimacy (Beetham 1991, 11). Performance based sources of legitimacy such as the capability to raise living standards, promote high economic growth and ensure social stability are very important for the CCP (Shambaugh 2009, 169; Zhu 2011, 124). In case of an economic crisis or increasing social dissent, the Party's legitimacy may quickly erode (Bondes and Heep 2013, 322). Among the Chinese elite, there is a widespread fear that the CCP is too reliant on performance-based legitimacy (Zeng 2014, 614). The government has responded to this challenge by applying institutional, ideological and discursive strategies.

As long as the process of a political system is regarded as legitimate, members of a society may be more inclined to accept a government's authority even if they personally are exposed to disadvantages. An advantage of democratic processes is that they often are perceived as somewhat legitimate regardless of the policy outcome (Gilley 2008a, 263). The limited participatory channels in the

People's Republic's political system mean that its political process is exposed to the risk of being perceived as illegitimate. Although the government has introduced new participatory institutions, their impact on democratic empowerment remains dubious. For instance, a study by Rory Truex demonstrates that participation in the National People's Congress' online participation portals increased the satisfaction of citizens with low education while citizens with higher education remained unaffected. As the education level in China is likely to increase over time, there is reason to believe that any positive impact of participatory innovations on the political system's procedural legitimacy only will be temporal (Truex 2017, 332). More radical democratic reforms, such as township elections, have mostly been implemented on a low scale in poor inland provinces where legitimacy crises on the local level are widely noted (Gilley 2008a, 268). In these places, democratic institutions can often be perceived as a temporarily emergency measure used when the traditional legitimacy strategies of the CCP have failed.

The lacking procedural legitimacy of authoritarian political systems must generally be compensated by an ideology legitimising the elite's right to rule (Huntington 1991, 46–50). In the People's Republic, Marxism-Leninism has historically provided the ideological foundation of the CCP's legitimacy (Zhu 2011, 126). However, deviation from Marxist ideas in the economic field endangers this source of legitimacy. Since social justice is a prioritised goal according to Marxist orthodoxy, the relatively precarious situation of many Chinese farmers and workers and the increasing wave of protest activities carried out by these groups are especially dangerous to the CCP's legitimacy (Beetham 1991, 183). In China's elite debate, intellectuals have increasingly called for more focus on ideology, and in particular on social justice (Zeng 2014, 631–634). The Party has reacted by putting more emphasis on propaganda and ideological innovation (Brady 2012a, 1; Holbig 2009, 13). Besides continuous emphasis on aspects of Marxism (Heilmann, Shi, and Heep 2017, 51), new ideological concepts derived from nationalism and traditional Chinese political thought such as Confucianism (Holbig and Gilley 2010, 401–411) and democratic theory (Dickson 2016, 278) have been included in the CCP's ideological discourse. There is a growing consensus that ideological work is a part of the CCP's authoritarian resilience (Repnikova 2017, 399).

From a broader perspective, the Party uses not only ideological strategies but also discursive strategies to legitimise its authority. As noted by Louis Althusser, ideology should not only be perceived

as belief systems but also as assemblages of practices that shape people's language and habits (Althusser 2008, 44–51). By utilising its political machine, the Party often manages to portray reality in ways that strengthen its legitimacy in the eyes of the Chinese people. In the Party's discourse, the 2008 Sichuan earthquake was, for instance, portrayed as a natural disaster instead of as a manmade catastrophe, while the 1989 Tiananmen protest was portrayed as an outcome of anti-Chinese foreign influence instead of a popular uprising (Sorace 2017, 152; Vuori 2007, 116). These examples demonstrate that the Party is often able to limit anti-system dissent related to unforeseen policy failures as long as it controls the official discourse.

Transformation and Digitalisation of Media

As information about democracy spread easily through TV, newspapers, computers and smartphones, media is an important facilitator of democratic diffusion. Due to rapid modernisation, the Chinese public's access to different forms of media, not least digital media, has increased dramatically. In 2016, 730 million Chinese citizens had access to Internet (CNNIC 2017, 39). With 340 million active users in 2017, and 90 million posts per day, China's largest open social media platform SinaWeibo (*xinlang weibo* 新浪微博) exceeded the number of users of its American equivalent Twitter (Yu, Asur, and Huberman 2015, 1144). Wechat (*weixin* 微信), a Chinese app mainly used on smartphones, has also become extremely popular with more than one billion users in 2018. Although the Chinese public uses the Internet mostly for amusement or work, it has also become a platform for political deliberation and social activism.

The development of China's Internet has been determined by the sometimes conflicting goals of different Chinese departments (Han 2018, 5). For instance, the telecommunication administration has pushed for quicker digitalisation while the public security apparatus (*gongan* 公安) mainly has promoted monitoring and surveillance (Creemers 2017, 89). Basically, all media that channels information falls under the bureaucratic purview of the Propaganda Department (*zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu* 中共中央宣传部) (Shambaugh 2009, 107).³ The propaganda system's purpose is to spread as well as to restrict information. The government spreads its ideology and world view through all kinds of media channels (Holbig 2013,

3. In 1998, the Central Propaganda Department changed its English name to the Central Publicity Department. However, the Chinese name of the department remained the same (Brady 2012a, 1).

66). The propaganda does not always consist of fake information. Instead, it is probably more efficient when containing information more related to the truth (Payne 2009, 110).

Moreover, the propaganda institutions censor unwanted information. The censorship system enables the state to block and shut down websites, filter taboo words, suppress activists and dissent groups and deter deviant expression. Internet users must increasingly announce their real names, at least in order to write content on open digital platforms. As many creative Internet users circumvent the filtering of taboo words, manual censorship conducted by the editors of digital media is also common (Han 2018, 4–7). The red lines of the censorship system are deliberately unclear (Lorentzen 2014, 411). The Propaganda Department often punish some outspoken media in order to deter others from stepping over the line, a tactic referred to as ‘killing the chicken to scare the monkey’ (*sha ji gei hou kan* 杀鸡给猴看) (Shambaugh 2009, 110). Studies on China’s online censorship system generally demonstrate that state-criticism is tolerated while text messages having ‘collective action potential’ are often censored (King, Pan, and Roberts 2014, 1). Although the central government is sensitive to criticism, it allows some open debate on social media, not least in order to receive more information about public opinion (Rauchfleisch and Schäfer 2015, 142).

The democratising impact of China’s growing Internet is a debated topic among scholars. Optimists have pointed at the Internet’s positive influence on local governments’ responsiveness to citizens’ demands (Minard 2015, 1067) and Internet users’ higher tendency to share democratic norms and involve themselves in collective action (Lei 2011, 309) as signs of how digitalisation increases democratic freedoms. Some even argue that the growing digitalisation will pave the way for more comprehensive democratisation (Yang 2009, 213–214). Although only a minority of scholars are that optimistic, many believe that the Internet, and particularly social media, have increased freedom of speech and contributed to a growing public space (deLisle, Goldstein, and Yang 2016, 3; Diamond 2010, 75; Han 2018, 5; Rauchfleisch and Schäfer 2015, 151; Svensson 2016, 69). However, as noted by Joyce Nip and King-wa Fu (2016, 138), although Internet users utilise social media in order to express dissent they often refer to information from news organizations controlled by the government as sources. More pessimist scholars maintain that China’s propaganda system efficiently restricts unwanted information and consequently incapacitates the democratising effect of the Internet (Brady 2002,

578; Leibold 2011, 1025; MacKinnon 2011, 43; Morozov 2011, 135). A position between Internet pessimism and Internet optimism is to perceive China's digital platforms as media through which different social forces, be it the government, civil society or government friendly Internet users, compete for influence (Han 2015, 1020; Lagerkvist 2010, 18). According to Han Rongbin, the Chinese Internet community is at least as fragmented as the country's governmental institutions. This limits the Internet's potential to develop into an efficient democratising force (Han 2018, 19).

An Explosion of NGOs and Civil Society

Civil society may also facilitate democratic diffusion, as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in authoritarian states often have international contacts and often are among the first actors to adopt democratic ideas and practices. In China, groups that, to some degree, are not managed by the government are officially denominated as social organizations (*shehui tuanti* 社会团体), popular groups (*minjian zuzhi* 民间组织) and non-profit groups (*feiyingli zuzhi* 非营利组织) (Teets 2013, 21). However, the term NGO is also used as an emic term in China and will be the standard term used in this thesis (Ma 2002b, 308). The number of registered NGOs have exploded from 10 000 in 1990 to more than 500 000 today and if unregistered groups are included the total number may exceed one million (Wang 2011, 12; Wang 2017, 18). Although these groups often are referred to as civil society organizations, the theoretical understanding of the organizations have been a debated topic among China scholars. During the 1990s, corporatism was used as the main framework for analysing the increasing number of social associations in China (Frolic 1997, 49).⁴ Most of the emerging NGOs were either perceived as created by the government and/or as strictly controlled by governmental bodies (Shue 1994, 83). The growth and diversity of social organizations led many China scholars to adopt civil society theory in their studies on NGOs during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Autonomy from the state has been the most popular study topic, as well as the basic criterion used in order to assess civil society in a large part of the literature on civil society in China produced after the 1990s (Salmenkari 2013, 683). The dominant perspective has been that the authorities' attitude to social organizations, and the functional autonomy enjoyed by these groups, are very diverse and dependent on the character of the NGOs. In some cases, the CCP has even granted volunteer

4. For a conceptual discussion on corporatism, see Schmitter 1974, 93.

associations more autonomy (Luova 2011, 794). The fragmented nature of the Chinese party-state implies that social organizations can find a political space if they benefit rather than cause trouble, to local authorities (Spires 2011, 12). Based on this line of thought, Kang Xiaoguang and Han Heng argue that the political space enjoyed by NGOs are mainly based on two factors; their mobilising capability and their provision of public goods (2008, 39).

China's different governmental bodies have different attitudes towards civil society. Organizations related to public security are, for instance, perceived as more negative towards civil society groups, while other parts of the government, such as the environment agencies and province governments, are more positive (Dickson 2016, 127–130). The diverse and fragmented relations between the Chinese party-state and NGOs have been described using different concepts such as graduated controls (Kang and Han 2008, 49), consultative authoritarianism (Teets 2013, 20–21) and contingent symbiosis (Spires 2011, 2).

The most controlled organizations are official groups that channel collective interest such as trade unions, youth associations and women's organizations. These groups are usually referred to as government controlled NGOs (GONGOs) and are often affiliated to one of the governments' mass organizations such as ACFTU, the Communist Youth League of China or the All-China Women's Federation. GONGOs should be understood as corporatist groups rather than civil society groups and they generally lack autonomy from the party-state (Kang and Han 2008, 41; Taylor and Li 2007, 707).

In addition to the GONGOs, there is a growing number of grassroots NGOs run by local Chinese that usually are neither established nor funded by the government (Spires 2011, 10). These groups are often quite person driven. Moreover, the founder of the NGO usually has a strong influence on its orientation (Hsu and Jiang 2015, 108). Grassroots NGOs are involved in a wide range of activities such as poverty reduction, disaster relief, education and advocacy. Some of their actions are welcomed by local governments. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Chinese authorities found themselves caught in the dilemma of having limited opportunities to increase their governmental revenue, while at the same time facing the Chinese public's rising demands for welfare services. By accepting and even promoting politically moderate grassroots organizations providing social services, the authorities have facilitated this problem (Teets 2014, 22).

Nevertheless, the legal framework regulating grassroots NGOs

still bears signs of corporatism. All groups that wish to be officially recognised as civil society organizations must be affiliated to a state partner and clearly articulate their aims and intentions in order to be registered (Collins and Cottey 2012, 112). NGOs that manage to register generally enjoy more legal security and may also have considerable autonomy (Lu 2007, 201). Organizations which are not officially recognised as civil society groups can, in practice, often survive by registering as enterprises, or by not registering at all (Spires, Tao, and Chan 2014, 77). According to some estimates, as much as 90 percent of the whole NGO community are not registered at the Ministry of Civil Affairs (Chen 2012, 10).

Unpolitical and philanthropic NGOs sometimes enjoy a high degree of autonomy from the state, not least since they provide important public goods (Zhang and Baum 2004, 106). Although most grassroots NGOs do not aim to challenge the one-party state, they may still be able to increase the political influence of the Chinese public (Cheng, Ngok, and Zhuang 2010, 1082; Ma 2002a, 128). Besides the relatively moderate majority of social associations, there are also a few NGOs active in more sensitive political fields that are more oppositional, and consequently more in line with the liberal understanding of civil society groups (Frolic 1997, 67). The democracy promoting Chinese dissident movement surged after the Tiananmen incident but has since been fractionalised and plagued by internal strife (Chen 2012, 128–129). Although moderate NGOs are often tolerated by the authorities, more political groups, groups active in sensitive fields and organizations with international ties are generally suppressed (Collins and Cottey 2012, 59).

In addition to the Chinese GONGOs, NGOs and dissident groups, many international NGOs (INGOs) are present in China. As these groups usually origin from and have their main offices in the democratic West, they are especially relevant from the perspective of democratic diffusion. INGOs started to enter China on a large scale after the NGO forum of the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995. Today, the number of INGOs in China are estimated to be in the thousands, with organizations such as Greenpeace, Oxfam and Save the Children among the most high profiled groups (Chen 2016, 95). Broadly speaking, INGOs have mainly influenced Chinese politics through three different means; implementation, advocacy and financing (Chen 2012, 27). INGOs have assisted the government in implementing democratic reforms such as village elections (Yin and Guo 2016, 165). They have also been involved in large scale advocacy campaigns, such as when Greenpeace accused the Indonesian company APP of illegal logging

in Yunnan (Chen 2016, 106). Perhaps most importantly, INGOs have historically provided critical financial support to Chinese NGOs (Shieh 2017, 1799). As with most domestic NGOs, INGOs are usually not involved in a life and death struggle with the CCP but strive to find a pragmatic relationship with the government (Noakes and Teets 2018, 10).

The sub-studies of this thesis that investigate civil society focus on labour NGOs (LNGOs); that is NGOs working in the field of labour issues.⁵ Non-state labour organizations have an especially democratising potential for several reasons. Firstly, they may be able to mobilise workers and harm the economy through strikes (Valenzuela 1989, 447). Secondly, they may threaten the officially worker friendly government's legitimacy (Beetham 1991, 183). Finally, they may facilitate protest diffusion through their relations to highly mobile migrant workers originating from the countryside (Lu, Zheng, and Wang 2017, 18). Although few LNGOs have a more comprehensive democratising agenda, they may still contribute to democratisation by canalising the interests of an important constituency. In comparison to other grassroots NGOs, the political space of LNGOs is generally relatively small (Franceschini 2014, 490; He and Huang 2015, 472; Xu 2013, 254).

The government continuously changes the system controlling NGOs, and there are also considerable local variations. The registration process has occasionally been relaxed, particularly in some provinces and cities such as Shenzhen, Guangdong and Yunnan (Mulvad 2015, 210; Teets 2015, 159). The state uses positive and negative incentives in order to influence NGOs in a more moderate direction. Moderate NGOs are rewarded with access to capacity building programs, government grants and pilot project permits. More political groups in sensitive fields are subjected to tax fraud charges, and their employees are frequently invited to questioning by the police (Teets 2014, 9). NGOs having foreign ties are often perceived as especially suspicious by the Chinese government. Foreign subversion of the People's Republic's political system, including Western support for civil society, has been pointed out as one of the main threats to the CCP in the Party's internal discussions (Shambaugh 2009, 75). The foreign NGO Management Law (*jingwai fei zhengfu zuzhi jingnei huodong guanli fa* 境外非政府组织境内活动管理法), which came into effect in 2017, is partly developed in order to confront this threat. The law forbids foreign

5. These groups should be distinguished from member based labour unions since all Chinese unions must be affiliated to ACFTU.

NGOs involving themselves in political and religious activities. Foreign NGOs are obliged to register at the Ministry of Public Security, which is regarded as even stricter than the Ministry of Civil Affairs responsible for the registration of domestic NGOs. The new law means that it will be almost impossible for unregistered Chinese NGOs to receive foreign funding legally (Franceschini and Nesossi 2017, 63).

Due to the diversity of the Chinese NGO community, and the disagreement on how to exactly define civil society, there is no consensus on whether the growing number of social groups should be perceived as a sign of a growing civil society, nor on whether these groups can be perceived as a democratising force. Some China scholars define civil society more broadly, including not only NGOs but also more loosely organised networks in the concept and hence applying it on the Chinese case (deLisle, Goldstein, and Yang 2016, 5; Lagerkvist 2010, 14). Others use the civil society concept but avoid liberal definitions as they find them inappropriate for the Chinese context, not least since they do not consider most NGOs to have a democratising capability (Salmenkari 2013, 689–708; Teets 2013, 20). Some China scholars avoid using the civil society concept altogether since they find it too normative (Zhang and Baum 2004, 99). Scholars such as Chen Jie who, in line with the practice used in this thesis, have a more liberal and multidimensional understanding of civil society and democracy, have been more positive to the democratising capability of China based NGOs, especially INGOs. Although their democratising impact is considered as relatively low, Chen argues that NGOs have contributed to democratic development by expanding freedom of expression, mobilising people to raise claims and encouraging social groups and associations to take part in the government's policy decisions (Chen 2012, 91–92).

China's Geopolitical Context

The geopolitical context is also a highly relevant aspect of democratic diffusion in China. One of the CCP's prime strategies used in order to increase economic growth has been to improve the People's Republic's ties with the world. As interaction in the form of trade, tourism and international study exchanges with the world's large democracies have increased dramatically since the Mao era (Dillon 2012, 359), more communication channels through which democracy can spread have emerged. However, few diffusion conditions facilitate the spread of ideas through these channels. China is geographically distant from the Western democracies, separated from South Korea and Japan through the East China Sea

and separated from India by the Himalayas. Although China has some cultural similarities with South Korea and Japan, the linguistic differences are large. The cultural and linguistic differences to the West and to India are even larger. Only limited parts of China have experience of colonial rule. The media system, not least the Internet, is also separated from the non-Chinese world through the government's monitoring and censorship system. Finally, being second only to USA in terms of military spending and national GDP (SIPRI 2017; World Bank, 2017g) China is a very powerful state, and foreign democracies hence have limited possibility, to put pressure on the People's Republic. States that have angered the CCP for instance by inviting Dalai Lama for official visits, or by rewarding Chinese democracy activists, as when the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo in 2010, have been subjected to economic sanctions (Fuchs and Klann 2013, 175). Such acts may deter states from putting pressure on China.

Although small, a geographical region that may influence China from a democratic diffusion perspective is the non-mainland parts of the Greater China region (*da zhonghua diqu* 大中华地区). As a result of the Chinese civil war, Taiwan, officially a Chinese province, is in practice a political unit separated from the People's Republic. Since its first free and fair presidential election in 1996, Taiwan has become a relatively well-functioning democracy (Gilley 2008b, 215). Hong Kong and Macao were British and Portuguese colonies until they were united with the People's Republic in 1997 and 1999 respectively. Except from being the only place in China where casinos are allowed, Macao's small population and its moderate political profile mean that the city is usually not considered to play an important role in China's domestic politics (Heilmann, Zhu, and Buckow 2017, 94). From a democratisation perspective, Macao's eastern neighbour Hong Kong is much more important. As most former British colonies, Hong Kong inherited some democratic institutions such as relatively well-protected civil rights and rule of law from its previous ruler (Cheng 2016, 387; Sing 2004, 38). Diffusion conditions favour the spread of democracy from Hong Kong and Taiwan to the mainland. The non-mainland parts of Greater China are connected to the mainland through a great deal of communication channels. The culture and language are very similar. Although young people in Hong Kong and Taiwan usually prefer Western social media, mainland social media such as SinaWeibo are at least to some extent used in Hong Kong (Chen, Chan, and Lee 2016, 355). That being said, the government of the People's Republic is of course much more powerful than any democratic actor in Taiwan, Hong Kong and

Macao and may consequently have a considerable capability to resist democratic diffusion originating from these places.

To deepen the ties within Greater China has been a high priority for the CCP's post-Mao leaders, for both political and economic reasons. As nationalism and national unity are increasingly important sources of legitimacy to the CCP, a 'reunion' with Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan has been a prime policy goal since Deng Xiaoping came to power (Pye 1983, 464–465; Shirk 2007, 182). In the early stages of reform, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan were also important to the People's Republic's economic development strategy due to their advanced economies, geographical proximity and knowledge about Mainland China's culture and market (Sing 2004, 68). When the People's Republic took back control over Hong Kong, the CCP had conflicting interests on how to manage the city's democratic future. The CCP wished to ensure the former colony's prosperity, avoid deterring the democratic Taiwan from a future reunification, but also avoid democratic diffusion between Hong Kong and Mainland China (Sing 2004, 24). Although threatened, Hong Kong's extensive civil liberties and semi-democratic system have largely been preserved through the policy of 'one country two systems' (*yi guo liang zhi* 一国两制).

For instance, civil society groups in Hong Kong have been able to organise activities in support of democracy in both Hong Kong and Mainland China (Lo 2013, 924). The civil liberties in Hong Kong enhance diffusion of protest activities in the city (Cheng 2016, 397). Protest movements in the mainland Chinese regions close to Hong Kong have benefited from proximity to the city, as activists have been able to spread information through Hong Kong media (Lagerkvist 2015, 142). Hong Kong's democratic future is, however, continuously marked by political struggle between the city's democratic opposition and the central government in Beijing (Pepper 2008, 300). The CCP has for instance spent considerable energy controlling the outcome of elections, such as the 2017 Hong Kong Chief Executive election, in the city (Lo 2017, 116). China's central government has undermined democracy not only in Hong Kong but also in Macao and Taiwan. As noted by Andrew Nathan (2015, 165) one explanation for this is probably that Beijing intends to reduce the risk that democracy could spread from these areas to the mainland.

Limitations of Previous Research on Democratisation in China

As demonstrated in this chapter, China scholars have conducted a great deal of research on phenomena related to how democracy spreads. Some issues, such as the democratising role of China's

Internet and civil society are especially disputed topics and there is consequently need for further research in these fields. In contrast to previous research on democratic diffusion, a strength of the literature on democratisation in China is that most of these studies are based on well-developed contextual knowledge and primary sources. However, a limitation of the latter literature is that there is often a vagueness regarding how the central study object, be it democracy or concepts close to democracy, should be defined. China scholars' disputes about how legitimacy, media, civil society, and the international context are related to democratisation processes can to some extent be derived from this problem.

A common approach of China scholars has been to adjust the meaning of concepts such as democracy, resistance and civil society, or to develop new grounded concepts based on, but different from, etic concepts of Western origin, as these scholars perceive Western theories to be unfit for the Chinese case (Kang and Han 2008, 49; O'Brien and Li 2006, 2; Ogden 2002, 9–39; Spires 2011, 2; Teets 2013, 20–21). Although the development of grounded and area specific theories is important, I believe that analytical tools in most cases should be based on universal concepts. Otherwise, research results become incomparable. By defining democracy as an etic concept and by breaking it up in smaller components, this thesis should be able to both contribute to the area specific research on Chinese democratisation processes and make the results comparable for scholars interested in the universal phenomenon of democratic diffusion.

China from a Comparative Perspective

Although cross-system generalisations of the results from case studies can be conducted, they are primarily relevant for political systems sharing the same characteristics as the polity originally covered by the case study (Steinberg 2015, 166). It is difficult to compare China to most other authoritarian states, primarily since the People's Republic is outstandingly large and powerful. When developing theories and considering generalisations based on the Chinese case, it can be appropriate to compare China to other contemporary and relatively powerful authoritarian states. In Table I, a brief presentation of relevant properties of the six most powerful contemporary non-democracies are provided.⁶

6. The power of a state is based on the CINC-index. The index has been used in previous diffusion studies (Gunitsky 2014, 565). Only states considered as unfree by Freedom House (2017c) are treated as non-democracies.

Table I. China in a Comparative Perspective						
	China	Russia	Iran	Saudi Arabia	Egypt	Thailand
CINC (2007)*¹	9.991	1.754	0.624	0.286	0.225	0.135
GDP (2016)*²	\$11.20T	\$1.28T	\$0.42T	\$0.65T	\$0.33T	\$0.41T
Military Spending (2016)*³	\$225.7B	\$70.3B	\$12.4B	\$61.4B	\$5.4B	\$6.0B
Regime (2016)*⁴	Civilian	Civilian	Civilian	Monarchic	Military	Military
CSO repression (2016)*⁵	1.5	1.78	1.46	1.16	0.94	1.4
CSO anti-system movements (2016)*⁶	0.39	1.36	1.06	0.27	2.77	2.71
Trade as proportion of GDP (2016)*⁷	37%	46%	37%	62%	30%	122%
Internet users (2016)*⁸	53%	76%	53%	74%	39%	48%
Freedom on the Net (2017)*⁹	87	66	85	72	68	67

**¹ High number indicates high national power (Index of National Power 2014).*

**² The World Bank 2017g.*

**³ SIPRI 2017.*

**⁴ Regime type is based on definitions guiding the Democracy and Dictatorship (DD) index (Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2010, 83).*

**⁵ High number indicates less repression of civil society organizations (V-Dem 2017b).*

**⁶ High number indicates high-level of anti-system movement activity among civil society organizations (V-Dem 2017c).*

**⁷ The World Bank 2017d.*

**⁸ Proportion of the total population having access to the Internet (the World Bank 2017f).*

**⁹ High number indicates less Internet Freedom (Freedom House 2017d).*

In spite of the many factors favouring democratisation that was outlined in the beginning of this thesis, China's political system seems to be relatively well positioned to resist democratic diffusion, even compared to other powerful contemporary authoritarian regimes. China has much more economic and military resources

than other authoritarian countries, which should make it less vulnerable to pressure from the West. As a one-party system, born in revolutionary struggle, the Chinese government should also be more resilient to democratic diffusion in the ideological field than for instance the military dictatorships in Thailand and Egypt. As the data from V-Dem indicates, China does not differ considerably from other large authoritarian states when it comes to repression against civil society. Yet, China's civil society seems to be less oppositional to the regime than civil society in other powerful non-democracies.

With the exception of China's proximity to Hong Kong and Taiwan, diffusion conditions are also relatively unfavourable to democratisation in the Chinese case. Like Russia and Iran, China is not connected to the West through military alliances and has limited experience of Western colonial rule. However, in terms of spatial geography and cultural proximity, China can be perceived as more distant from the West than Russia and Iran. In comparison to China, these two states are spatially closer to Europe and have cultural ties to the West through the Indo-European language family and the Abrahamic religious tradition. Although trade is much more important for China today than during the Mao era, it is still less dependent on trade than countries relying heavily on tourism and export of natural resources such as Thailand and Saudi Arabia. The proportion of Internet users in China is comparable to that in other middle-income countries, but Internet freedom is more restricted in the People's Republic than in most other powerful non-democracies.

The strength of the Chinese regime and the country's distance from the West mean that democratic diffusion can be expected to have less impact in China than in other comparable authoritarian states. However, the relatively fragmented party-state and some favorable diffusion conditions such as the proximity to Hong Kong and Taiwan and the relatively high proportion of Internet users still mean that some democratic freedoms could be expected to trickle through, at least in restricted social fields and geographical locations. The difference between China and other contemporary authoritarian states means that the thesis's results can only be generalised to other cases with caution. However, if generalisations are made, they should be most relevant for other powerful authoritarian states such as Russia and Iran where conditions for resisting democratic diffusion at least are partly similar to the circumstances in China.

Chapter 5. The Sub-studies

In this chapter, I will introduce the sub-studies and discuss how they relate to democratic diffusion in China. The sub-studies have been selected in order to address democratic diffusion processes in three different spheres of China's society; the regime's ideological strategies (primarily investigated in Study I), social media (primarily investigated in Study II) and civil society (primarily investigated in Study III and IV). As demonstrated in Chapter 4, these social spheres are well studied by China scholars interested in the country's democratic prospects. Consequently, the thesis will contribute to this area specific literature. As the spheres are located at different levels of China's social system; the regime level, the individual level and the societal level, the sub-studies cover a relatively broad spectrum of China's political society. Thus, the thesis can be perceived as a form of patchwork case study in which the democratic diffusion processes examined in the sub-studies create a more holistic picture of how the phenomenon works in the larger case of China (Jensen and Rodgers 2001, 238). As noted by Paul Steinberg, it is much easier to generalise findings from case studies conducted in one political system to the larger political unit than to conduct cross-system generalisations (2015, 156–165). Hence, it should be possible to generalise some of the sub-studies' findings to China's broader political context, particularly if they point in the same direction.

The published versions of Study I and II are not primarily framed by the diffusion theories, and the definitions of some concepts used in these two studies are somewhat different from the overall theoretical definitions in the introduction of this thesis. Nevertheless, the results of the two articles can still be used for the purposes of this thesis. Table II demonstrates that basic components of democratic diffusion can be identified in all sub-studies. Although a brief discussion on how the articles relate to democratic diffusion is provided below, a more detailed discussion on the method and the results of the sub-studies will be provided in Chapters 6 and 7.

Table II. Actors and Objects of Democratic Diffusion in the Sub-studies			
	Source of democracy	Objects of diffusion	Potential adopter
Study I	Foreign democracies	Alternative sources of information	Chinese media audience
Study II	Chinese microblog accounts	Freedom of expression and alternative sources of information	Chinese Internet users
Study III	Hong Kong and foreign democracies	Freedom of expression and associational autonomy	LNGOs in Guangdong province
Study IV	Civil society in Hong Kong	Freedom of expression and associational autonomy	LNGOs in Guangdong province

Study I. Marxism Still Matters: The Chinese Communist Party's Description of Foreign Democracies as an Ideological Strategy

The first article (Sundqvist 2016) investigates how the CCP uses ideological strategies in order to discredit liberal democracy. More concretely, the study investigates how the CCP's most prominent newspaper, the People's Daily (*renmin ribao* 人民日报), describes the political systems of four foreign democracies; Japan, India, Brazil and USA, in newspaper articles published between 2003 and 2011. In order to understand the ideological strategies of the People's Daily, the newspaper's textual content is compared to concepts of liberal democracy as perceived by prominent representatives of Marxism, liberalism and Confucianism. The basic assumption of the study is that free information about foreign democracies constitutes a potential threat to the CCP. If the Chinese audience receives a more accurate and/or positive picture of foreign democracies through the media, they may become more willing to support democratisation and hence endanger the Party's hold on power. In order to avoid this kind of democratic diffusion, the CCP has an incentive to present a negative picture of democracy through its media channels. Since there are strong critical currents against liberal democracy among prominent Marxist and Confucian thinkers, the Party may relate to these ideologies in order to make its argument more convincing.

The study mainly contributes to the China specific literature

on the CCP's ideological development. In addition, the study contributes to the theoretical discussion on authoritarian resistance against democratic diffusion, or more specifically mental counter strategies against the spread of democracy. The scientific debate in this field has primarily focused on how authoritarian regimes use nationalism, revolutionary history and indigenous culture as ideological tools in order to limit the spread of democracy. The legitimising role of more complex ideologies such as Marxism and modern Confucianism has thus far, largely been neglected.

Study II. Loyal Dissent in the Chinese Blogosphere: SinaWeibo Discourse on the Chinese Communist Party

The second article (Lagerkvist and Sundqvist 2013) focuses on democratic diffusion in Chinese social media. The source of democracy consists of microblog accounts on SinaWeibo. The analytical units consist of especially republished and commented weibo messages discussing scandals in China during the spring of 2012. Textual analysis is used in order to assess the depth and breadth of social criticism in the written content. Although the published version of the article is not framed as an investigation of democratic diffusion, it is closely related to the phenomenon. When expressing a political message on social media, in this case different kinds of social criticism, private Internet users contribute to democratic dimensions such as freedom of expression and alternative sources of information. Political ideas are, in the second step, transmitted to other Internet users through social media. This activity can be perceived as a component of a larger diffusion pattern.

The weibo messages are collected post-censorship and therefore do not reveal what Internet users write but what they access. Consequently, the results are a combined outcome of Internet users' dissent and the effect of the regime's censorship system. As noted in the theory chapters, Internet and social media are relatively recent phenomena, and their impact on democratisation and democratic diffusion is not well known. The study contributes to the China specific literature on how the rapid expansion of the Internet is related to the People's Republic's democratic prospects. It also contributes to the more general literature on how the emergence of social media in authoritarian states with strong censorship systems contributes to democratic diffusion.

Study III. Diffusion of Democracy among Civil Society Actors in Guangdong Province

The last two articles focus on how democratic diffusion affects labour oriented civil society groups in China's southern Guangdong province. The third article (Sundqvist 2019) investigates how, and to what extent, diffusion impacts the quantity and political orientation of LNGOs in Guangdong. In the article, a high density of conflict oriented LNGOs are treated as an indicator of an incipient democratic opposition. As Guangdong is geographically proximate to the relatively liberal city of Hong Kong, there is reason to believe that international civil society actors use the self-ruling city as a springboard in order to spread democracy to nearby regions in Mainland China. Thus, the article is based on the hypothesis that diffusion through international civil society networks is an especially important factor influencing the density and conflict orientation of LNGOs in Guangdong. Two different methods; the comparative method and qualitative interviewing, are applied in order to examine the research question. The study contributes to the China specific literature about the political role of civil society as well as to the more general theoretical debate about how democratic diffusion works on the intrastate regional level.

Study IV. Mechanisms behind Diffusion of Democracy in the Pearl River Delta Region

Starting from the findings of the third article, the fourth article (Sundqvist, 2019) studies cooperation patterns between LNGOs in the Pearl River Delta region including Hong Kong, Macao as well as the southern parts of Guangdong province. The study covers two important categories of LNGOs; labour groups in the relatively free city of Hong Kong and labour groups in the much more authoritarian Guangdong. The cooperation between these two categories of LNGOs can be perceived as a form of democratic diffusion, since many Hong Kong based groups have a democratising agenda. Moreover, these organizations are protected by the political freedoms still enjoyed in the city. Qualitative semi-structured interviews are used in order to understand the strategies and mechanisms through which democratic ideas and practices spread between LNGOs in Hong Kong and their equivalents in Guangdong. The study contributes to the China specific literature regarding the political role and cooperation strategies of civil society groups as well as to the more general literature on how democratic diffusion mechanisms work.

Chapter 6. Method and Material

All the sub-studies rely on primary sources in the form of textual material, either unobtrusive data such as newspaper articles and weibo messages or intrusive data such as transcribed interviews. Previous literature on democratic diffusion has to a high extent favoured the use of secondary sources, either by applying statistical data or by referring to secondary literature on historical processes. The use of primary sources means that this thesis can deepen the understanding of how processes and representations related to democratic diffusion work in the specific cultural and geographical context of China. The chapter starts by presenting the unobtrusive methods used in Studies I–III and the intrusive methods used in Studies III–IV. Thereafter follows a discussion on how research ethical considerations are applied in the thesis. The chapter ends with a discussion on how content analysis, the thesis's prime analytical method, is applied in the sub-studies.

As noted by Maria Heimer and Stig Thøgersen (2006, 12) the overall challenge for social scientists doing research in China is the constant presence of the party-state. The topic of this thesis, democratic diffusion, is an especially sensitive research field as democratisation processes pose a threat to the power monopoly of the CCP. The methods used in the sub-studies are adjusted in order to handle research problems associated with the presence of the Party's propaganda machine, censorship system and security apparatus. When intrusive methods are used, I mostly attempt to bypass these obstacles. When unobtrusive methods are used, investigation of the Party's influence is an integral part of the knowledge production.

Unobtrusive Research Methods

Unobtrusive research strategies concern the examination of human traces (Berg 2004, 209). A major advantage of such methods is that the researcher does not directly influence the data (Silverman 2006, 157). Another advantage of unobtrusive material is that it is relatively easy to access (Holsti 1969, 15). Thus, scholars usually have a wide degree of freedom to sample a corpus relevant for the research question. However, unobtrusive research strategies are also related to challenges and limitations.

A main challenge relates to the ability of unobtrusive data to reveal information about intended action. As noted by David Silverman, textual content can either be analysed as receptacles expressing information about its authors, as in Studies I and

III, or as agents in their own right, as in Study II (2006, 155). The former approach is linked to validity problems as it is difficult to determine the intent of an actor only by studying his or her textual production. If unobtrusive data is used in order to investigate actors' intent, careful attention should be given to the context of the textual content, and the findings should preferably be confirmed by other investigations using different methods and material (Holsti 1969, 32–33). As the international relations of LNGOs are studied using intrusive as well as unobtrusive methods in Study III, its findings are supported by different kinds of evidence which increase its validity. In Study I, I only had access to unobtrusive data, as I did not manage to develop the necessary relations to high-level ideological strategists in the CCP. It should nonetheless be noted that, although the meaning of textual material is not fixed, authors often construct textual content in a way that encourage a preferred reading (Hall 1999, 100). Scholars can analyse the encoded message of content and, hence, collect information about its latent meaning, such as ideological assumptions and intentions of the author (Gunter 1999, 85). Consequently, although the findings of Study I are not as valid as the findings of Study III, they can still serve as a qualified interpretation of the textual content.

Another challenge relates to how the corpus is selected. In all three studies on unobtrusive data, the objective has been to infer knowledge from a sample to a larger population of cases. The sample strategies aim to identify corpuses relevant to the research topic, to avoid sample bias and to restrict the corpuses to manageable text masses (Holsti 1969, 132). Three choices related to the sample frame have been of special importance; the choice of media platforms, the choice of time frames and the choice of key words. The sample strategies of the three studies using unobtrusive data are summarised in Table III.

	Media	Time frame	Keywords	Form of textual units	Number of textual units
Study I	People's Daily	2003–2011	4	Newspaper articles	21
Study II	SinaWeibo	2012	13	Weibo messages	200
Study III	SinaWeibo	2013–2014	4	Weibo messages	285

The first stage of most sample processes in unobtrusive studies is to select the source of communication (Gunter 1999, 66). The purpose of the unobtrusive investigations applied in Studies II–III is to understand how non-state actors express social criticism in China’s public space. Messages posted on China’s largest open social media platform, SinaWeibo, were selected as a suitable source for inferring knowledge on this topic. Like Twitter, SinaWeibo is a public social medium without password or membership restrictions, and messages can be accessed by anyone. One limitation of using material from Chinese social media, including SinaWeibo, is that the platform is subjected to censorship and propaganda. Some search results are blocked, sensitive content is censored, and propaganda is posted by the so called ‘50 cent party’ (*wu mao dang* 五毛党) consisting of Internet users employed by the government (Hu, Qiao, and Fu 2017, 594). Although procedures for investigating pre-censored weibo messages have been developed, there are to this day no methods for studying all censored content (King, Pan, and Roberts 2014, 1). However, the purpose of the sub-studies is only to understand social criticism in China’s open debate. Thus, although censored content is interesting, it is not covered by the research questions of any of the sub-studies. Consequently, the weibo messages were collected directly from SinaWeibo’s platform post-censorship.

As the aim of Study I is to understand the ideological strategies of the CCP, I have chosen to collect material from the webpage of CCP’s newspaper the People’s Daily. The People’s Daily refers to itself as the ‘mouthpiece’ (*houshe* 喉舌) of the CCP and has historically been perceived as central to the understanding of the Party’s propaganda and Chinese elite politics (Wu 1994, 195). Although some proliferation of opinions is allowed in the newspaper, the content is strictly reviewed by the Propaganda Department in order to avoid deviation from the party line on important topics (Shambaugh 2007, 53). Thus, the material should be able to give a relatively valid reflection on how the Party wishes to express its worldview externally. A further advantage of both SinaWeibo and the People’s Daily is that their web-platforms enable users to identify material by selecting timeframes and keywords. In line with the practice of some previous studies on social media, the textual units have been collected manually, not using automatic data collecting programs such as APIs or web crawlers (Mayr and Weller 2017, 108).

The second stage of the sample process is to decide what time period to cover (Gunter 1999, 66). All unobtrusive studies are cross-sectional, and cover relatively short time periods. This is especially

the case in Study II and the first part of Study III. Since SinaWeibo was launched in August 2009, it would have been difficult to conduct comparison during longer time periods. In Study II, weibo messages posted in the spring of 2012 (February 15–May 24) were collected, and in Study III, weibo messages posted during two full years (January 1, 2013–December 31, 2014) were collected. Study I concerns a somewhat longer time period. Articles published between 2003–2011 were collected. Hence, the time frame covers most of President Hu Jintao’s time in office.

Following the practice of previous research on social media, keywords have been used in order to further restrict the text mass to a corpus as manageable and relevant as possible (Hu, Qiao, and Fu 2017, 597; Mayr and Weller 2017, 112; Nip and Fu 2016, 129). In Studies I–II, keywords were selected in order to identify content on certain topics; in the former case descriptions and evaluations of foreign democracies and in the latter case discussions on political scandals. The keywords were selected based on a first step reading process in which I reviewed the language of the relevant sources. During this process, I identified a small number of keywords that were present in most textual units on the relevant topics. Thus, the risk of key-word related sample biases in these studies should be limited. In Study III, the keywords were selected in order to identify LNGOs that expressed social criticism and/or made announcements about protest activities on SinaWeibo. Hence, keywords having a conflict oriented connotation were selected. As the understanding of these terms’ connotation varies between different social groups, the risk of sample bias is higher in this study than in Studies I–II. In order to limit this risk, activists from four LNGOs were asked about how they interpreted the keywords. All activists perceived the keywords as having a very conflict oriented connotation.

One limitation of using keywords instead of random samples is that some relevant textual units which did not include the keywords were not included in the sample. This problem could have been managed by including more keywords or by using a random sample of textual units. However, both of these strategies would have led to a sample which would have been too large to manage within the time frame of this research project.

Although access usually is a minor problem in unobtrusive research, the identification of the research objects in Study III, LNGOs, caused some access related problems. Due to the sensitivity of civil society groups’ activities, there is no open and accessible data set covering a complete list of Chinese NGOs or information about their weibo accounts (Hsu and Jiang 2015, 103). I had to rely

on my personal network in order to receive information on the LNGO population. During previous consultancy work for Swedish trade unions, I had developed relations with some LNGO activists both in Hong Kong and in Mainland China. In 2013, one LNGO in Hong Kong had compiled a relatively exhaustive data set on the LNGO community in Mainland China and agreed to share it with me. The list included names, contact information and information about weibo accounts to more than 100 groups. In order to secure the accuracy of the data set, I showed it to two Chinese scholars with extensive knowledge on the field, one based in the mainland and one based in Hong Kong. Both confirmed that the data set were among the most complete accounts of the mainland LNGO community which they had encountered. Thus, I used the data set as a resource for finding LNGOs' accounts on SinaWeibo.

Intrusive Research Methods

As a complement to the unobtrusive research methods, the latter part of Study III as well as Study IV are based on intrusive data. This material has mainly been obtained through qualitative interviewing but also, to a limited extent, through ethnographic observations. The material was collected by myself during three field work trips in China; the first on March 4, 2015–June 2, 2015, the second on April 11, 2016–June 9, 2016 and the third on April 26, 2017–June 8, 2017. It was helpful to stay in China during considerable time periods, since appointments are often made at short notice in the country (Sæther 2006, 48).

One central problem shared by all field investigators is the problem of 'getting in' (Shaffir and Stebbins 1991, 25). As noted by Roger Vallance (2001, 65), access to interviewees should ideally be sought through introduction and referrals. Thus, as with most studies conducted on respondents who are difficult to reach, snowballing was the prime selection method (Edwards and Holland 2013, 6). As mentioned above, I had developed relations with several LNGO activists during my consultancy work for Swedish trade unions. Some of these activists agreed to serve as respondents in my interviews and/or share their contact networks with me. The director at one of the main labour groups in Shenzhen was especially helpful. He provided me with a space in the organization's office and encouraged the group's employees to assist me in my research. I was also allowed to take part in LNGO activities organised by the group which resulted in some valuable field notes. As noted by Bruce Berg (2004, 160), high-ranked people in one community are often of great importance to field work scholars since they might share their

contact networks and influence people to trust the researcher.

In addition to snowballing, I also contacted LNGOs directly as I had contact information to many groups through the dataset used in Study III. In spite of having established contacts in the community, it was still difficult to arrange interviews. Firstly, most LNGO activists are busy, and some simply did not have time to meet me. Secondly, the suppression of the groups probably meant that some of the organizations denied meeting me due to fear of political repression. Although a strategic selection of organizations and respondents ideally should be applied when conducting qualitative interviewing (Brinkmann 2013, 57), there was limited opportunity to do this under the specific circumstances. Altogether, I conducted 25 interview sessions involving 27 respondents from 19 LNGOs. Eight LNGOs in Hong Kong, nine LNGOs in Guangdong province, one LNGO in Wuhan and one LNGO in Beijing were covered. As there are altogether 12 Hong Kong LNGOs (according to information provided by four Hong Kong based LNGOs) and 30 to 50 Guangdong LNGOs (Franceschini 2014, 480; Fu 2017, 448; Xu 2013, 246), the material can be perceived as a relatively representative sample of the Hong Kong groups while findings on the Guangdong-based groups must be treated with more caution. Results from the Wuhan and Beijing based groups are mainly used as comparative and contrasting cases to further deepen the knowledge about LNGOs in Guangdong.

When conducting the interviews, I used a method often referred to as semi-structured interviewing. According to this approach, pre-determined questions are used, but the researcher is also expected to probe beyond the answers of these questions (Berg 2004, 81). In the first step, the diffusion literature was used in order to develop an interview guide composed of main questions (Brinkmann 2013, 59). The main questions were broadly formulated and adjusted to a non-academic language in order to encourage people to speak out and to limit the risk that respondents are influenced to confirm any pre-developed hypothesis (Rubin and Rubin 2005, 135). Although interview questions were formulated based on the research literature, I strived to have an inductive attitude to the data provided by respondents and to be open to unexpected information.

There is always a risk that respondents, deliberately or not, provide false or biased information. As most of the interview questions used in Study IV concerned the cooperation patterns between groups in Hong Kong and groups in the mainland, the reliability of the data in this study could to some extent be secured by cross-checking if activists in Hong Kong and the mainland had

the same picture of reality. In general, groups on both sides of the Shenzhen River mentioned the same cooperation patterns. For instance, they gave similar accounts of how often activists met and under what settings. However, the reliability of answers concerning representations of reality was more difficult to confirm. For instance, groups in Hong Kong generally played up the influence they had on the democratic orientation of mainland NGOs, while mainland groups generally played it down. In these cases, it is difficult to determine any 'truth', but more correct to assess that there are different representations of reality in the LNGO community. As Study III only covers mainland based LNGOs, the opportunities for cross-checking the results are lower than in Study IV. However, this validity related problem is partly reduced since the research question in Study III is investigated using two different methods.

As all of the thesis's studies on unobtrusive data are cross-sectional, the studies on intrusive data fill an important role in investigating the critical time aspect of diffusion. Qualitative interviewing has been used to ask respondents about past processes and historical developments. When asking about past occurrences, it is important to remember that the memory of respondents may be weak. This problem has been mitigated by allowing respondents time to recall, by providing concrete cues, asking for specific recent memories and by asking for detailed and free descriptions of specific memories (Brinkmann 2013, 38). The interview data on past events has in a second step been analysed using methods inspired by process tracing. Pieces of evidence have been scrutinised in order to reject or confirm alternative explanations. The power of a hypothesis is assessed based on the quality, not the quantity, of the evidence (Bennett 2010, 208–209).

There is also a risk that respondents adjust their answers with the intention to 'please' me, as the interviewer, either because they want to be helpful or because they might wish to receive benefits, such as better relations to Swedish labour organizations. The largest risk is perhaps that activists exaggerate their democratic agenda, as they may think that Westerners are often interested in democracy promotion. In line with the advice provided by Svend Brinkmann (2013, 10–19), I attempted to avoid this trap by starting the interviews with broad questions about the groups' activities, management and ideological orientation, and only elaborating on themes related to democracy on the respondents' own initiative.

My split identity as scholar and consultant brought advantages as well as disadvantages. In line with the approach of activist and feminist scholars, I sometimes expressed my sympathy for

the labour activists (Oakley 1981, 49). I also occasionally tried to help them, for example by providing them with information on Swedish labour issues, labour organizations, and important people in the Swedish labour movement. However, following the advice provided by Marina Svensson (2006, 269), I also attempted to play down the notion that relations with me could result in benefits from organizations in Sweden, not least in order to avoid expectations I could not meet. The advantage of this strategy was that I developed a good relationship with some of the respondents. If the interviewer demonstrates knowledge, including about people in a relevant associational community and existing cooperation patterns, respondents tend to give more honest answers (Rubin and Rubin 2005, 75). It is important to reflect on why a respondent does not reveal information to the researcher. For instance, after a number of meetings, one Hong Kong organization told me that they had been cooperating with a mainland partner on a very sensitive legal case in which a labour activist had been convicted. However, when I for the first time met a representative from the mainland organization in question, he did not tell me anything about this. Perhaps he did not know about the case, or perhaps he did not trust me enough to tell me about it.

As noted by Sarah Elwood and Deborah Martin (2000, 649), the interview site is important and may affect the knowledge produced during the interview. I left to the respondents to decide where they wanted to meet for the interviews. Most Hong Kong respondents preferred to meet in their offices while mainlanders generally preferred to meet in more anonymous places such as cafés and restaurants. I also left to the respondents to decide which language they preferred to use. All but one of the Hong Kong respondents and one of the mainland respondents preferred to speak English. All but one of the mainland respondents and one of the Hong Kong respondents preferred to speak mandarin. My general approach was to record the interviews on my smartphone. However, one respondent objected to this, and I then recorded the interview by taking notes instead. I conducted all interviews and transcribed the English speaking content myself, but was assisted by two trusted Chinese speaking research assistants in transcribing the Chinese speaking content. Following the tradition in the field, the language has been somewhat polished during the transcription phase (Brinkmann 2013, 61). Confidential versions of the transcribed material are available for readers qualified to not misuse the material.

Research Ethics

Research ethics must be carefully considered in all social science, especially if intrusive data is used. Although there is some disagreement on exactly how to approach research ethics, two main principles; 'informed consent' and 'avoiding to do harm', are usually perceived as corner stones in all studies on human subjects (Berg 2004, 58). Ethical considerations were major challenges during important steps of the research process in Studies III–IV. As civil freedoms in Hong Kong are relatively well protected, the risks of inflicting harm on Hong Kong respondents was limited. However, as mainland LNGOs are often harassed by the Chinese government, it could not be ruled out that meetings with Western scholars could cause some kind of problems for activists from these groups. As noted by Heimer and Thøgersen (2006, 12), neither scholars nor Chinese informants can easily know how sensitive a research project is perceived by the Chinese authorities. However, in comparison to activists suddenly finding themselves involved in a protest activity, such as peasants protesting against land grabbing or urban residents protesting against house demolition, the mainland LNGO activists are generally more knowledgeable about political risks since they are constantly involved in sensitive issues. Nevertheless, my aim has been to provide potential respondents with necessary information about the research topic and the risks involved as early as possible. Moreover, I have tried to provide socially convenient opportunities for declining to take part in the interviews. My first contact with activists in Hong Kong as well as in the mainland was always through written sources such as e-mail or Wechat. In the first text message, I briefly described the research topic, promised them to be anonymous in the written version of the research, mentioned that the topic 'is sensitive' (*mingan* 敏感) and expressed that "I understand if you are unable to participate". Following Emily Yeh (2006, 104), I attempted to provide respondents with 'a way out'. Some of the activists I contacted did not respond to my messages, and some declined to meet me by openly referring to 'the political situation' in our written conversations.

From the activists who accepted to meet me, I asked for informed consent again just before the interview started. I did not use a written formula for receiving consent before the interviews, as I thought that might influence the respondents to become nervous and self-conscious (Berg 2004, 50). When the interview was finished, I also asked the respondents if they preferred for me to exclude certain parts of the interview from the material. Some of the respondents requested that I leave out parts of the interview, which I also did.

The pure fact that a number of activists declined to meet me pointing at the political situation demonstrates that some perceived participation as risky. Although the real risk of participation remains unknown, all participants in the research project were voluntary and informed about potential danger. As long as the risks related to the research are not too high, they can also be weighed against potential benefits of the research. If the research results in a better understanding of democratic diffusion and democracy promotion, the outcome might ultimately benefit civil society actors in authoritarian states, including many of the Chinese LNGO activists. In addition, I had the impression that most of the participating activists enjoyed having the chance to talk about their situation with an informed and interested outsider. The benefits of the research can be perceived as an advantage from an ethical point of view (Berg 2004, 48; Brinkmann 2013, 51).

Studies on social media is still a young research field, and there are to this day no general standards for research ethics in the field. Following some previous research, I believe that textual content posted on open social media such as Weibo may be used without asking for informed consent while the use of material posted on closed social media such as Wechat or QQ should require consent (Beninger 2017, 58). The ethical problems and difficulties in accessing text messages from closed social media platforms were an additional argument favouring the use of SinaWeibo as the prime source of social media material, even though this platform has lost popularity in favour of Wechat in recent years. When the sources of written content are groups involved in sensitive activities offline, as in Study III, only translated versions of their text messages are provided in the final article. Thus, it will be much more difficult to identify individual LNGO accounts based on the information provided in this article. Personal information about interviewees and the LNGOs they represent has also been made confidential in the final versions of Studies III–IV.

Content Analysis

All the material used in the sub-studies can be perceived as text. The newspaper articles and weibo messages used in Studies I–III constitute unobtrusive text data while the interview material in Studies III–IV has been transcribed to written text. Thus, content analysis has been selected as the prime method for analysing the material of all sub-studies. Content analysis has traditionally been a preferred analytical method in weibo studies (Hu, Qiao, and Fu 2017, 599), in interview studies (Berg 2004, 114) and in media

studies (Gunter 1999, 56). In content analysis, large text materials are classified and counted and hence distilled to short descriptions aiming to summarise some of their features (Bauer 2000, 133). An advantage of content analysis is that the method combines qualitative and quantitative approaches (Berg 2004, 269). The analytical method is suitable for this thesis, since the material in the sub-studies, relatively easily, can be divided into meaningful textual units that can be compared to each other. Other text analytical methods such as discourse analysis and narrative analysis can hardly be used in order to measure proportions (Silverman 2006, 164).

Coding is the core tool in content analysis. The codes represent a set of questions that the researcher applies to the data. By coding, the raw data is transformed into units that enable descriptions of the characteristics of the textual content (Holsti 1969, 94). In content analysis, the text is only interpreted by applying the coding frame (Bauer 2000, 139). The coding process usually involves at least three important stages; selection of textual units, open coding and second cycle coding. The first step of the coding process is to categorise text content into basic analytical units (Berg 2004, 271). These units will be the subject of coding. In Study II and the quantitative part of Study III, each weibo message is perceived as one analytical unit. In Study I, each newspaper article is perceived as one analytical unit. In Study IV and the part of Study III concerning qualitative interviewing, all interview data that provides information on a single LNCO are perceived as one analytical unit.

When conducting the sub-studies, the analytical process was always initiated by open coding (Berg 2004, 278). Open coding signifies that a large number of codes, derived from the theoretical literature as well as from a close reading of the material, are applied on the textual content. Codes can consequently either be perceived as concept-driven or as data-driven (Brinkmann 2013, 62). Since initial theories often proved unfit for developing a deeper understanding of the material, a relatively grounded and inductive approach was beneficial in most sub-studies. In a second step, the numerous codes developed during the first coding cycle were refined to a smaller number of categories that summarised important features of the content. This stage took place simultaneously with a new review of the theoretical literature. Thus, the final categories were developed in order to correspond both to the material and to theoretical models developed by previous research. Consequently, a combination of inductive approaches promoted by grounded theorists (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 43) and deductive methods encouraged by more theory driven scholars (Bauer 2000, 140) were applied. Finally, new

categories were used as analytical tools in order to categorise the entire material during a second coding cycle (Saldaña 2013, 207).

An important question in content analysis is how to secure reliability. One approach to this is to apply distinct and mutually exclusive analytical categories (Holsti 1969, 95). I have as far as possible attempted to design categories according to this ideal. Another common approach is to employ coders to analyse the material and measure reliability based on the degree of agreement among the coders (Anderson 2012, 286). The financial constraints of this research project precluded this method. Hence, all the coding has been conducted by myself. As an alternative, I have attempted to be as transparent as possible about the coding process. Confidential versions of the entire textual content and coding sheets are accessible for reviewers qualified not to misuse the material.⁷

The research findings of all studies reveal the presence of certain patterns as well as the proportions of these patterns. Although this thesis mainly has a qualitative approach, quantitative logic is to some extent applicable to all the sub-studies. Thus, I present information about the frequencies of analytical units assigned with certain codes in all the articles. Quantification is especially applicable to Study II and the quantitative part of Study III, as the analytical units in these studies, weibo messages, are more numerous and have a relatively similar format. Although the quantity of analytical units in Study I, Study IV and the part of Study III concerning qualitative interviewing is small and the formats of these units are more varied and complex, proportions are still interesting since the total populations that these studies relate to are relatively limited. However, as noted by Ole Holsti, proportions of certain properties do not always reveal the meaning of text content. In studies on values and representations of reality, the presence and intensity of statements usually provide a deeper understanding of the textual content (Holsti 1969, 123).

The Temporal Context of the Sub-studies

Before proceeding to the concluding discussion, the temporal context of the studies must be discussed. A problem associated with investigating contemporary Chinese politics is that China has been changing very rapidly in recent years. I started collecting data for some of the sub-studies of this PhD-thesis as early as 2011, two years

7. Supplementary material related to the method, material and results of the sub-studies is provided on my webpage under the 'research' tab (<http://www.gustavsundqvist.com>).

before Xi Jinping was appointed as China's President. As mentioned in Chapter 4, China has turned more authoritarian under the Xi administration, not least in fields relevant for the sub-studies. The propaganda system has become more focused on criticising liberal democracy as well as on emphasising the Party's ideological roots (Zhao 2016, 85). The online censorship system has become stricter, reducing the political debate on open social media platforms such as SinaWeibo (Creemers 2017, 92; Nip and Fu 2016, 127). The legal as well as de-facto space for civil society groups, even relatively moderate ones, have also gradually decreased since President Xi came into office (Yuen 2015, 51). Thus, it is important to point out that the sub-studies' results primarily concern the time periods covered by the investigations.

Chapter 7. Concluding Discussion

Due to the homogeneity in method and material of previous studies on democratic diffusion, there is limited knowledge on how the phenomenon works on a more detailed level. There is an especially inadequate understanding of how democracy spreads in China, as very few studies have investigated contemporary Chinese politics from a democratic diffusion perspective. Consequently, there is a need to develop the knowledge on how democratic diffusion works in different spheres of Chinese society, but also to deepen the more general understanding of how democracy spreads in China and in the world. As is typical for case studies, especially patchwork case studies, this thesis does not provide one single result, but many (Jensen and Rodgers 2001, 239). The sub-studies contribute context-specific as well as more general knowledge on at least four aspects of the diffusion process; (1) the actors, (2) the mechanisms, (3) the conditions and (4) the object of democratic diffusion.

Actors

Previous literature has mainly investigated democratic diffusion on the macro level, and the role of intrastate actors is still an understudied topic. The qualitative approach of this thesis makes it possible to investigate how actors on the meso and micro level such as China's authoritarian regime, civil society groups and individual Internet users influence democratic diffusion. As noted by Vitali Silitski (2009, 89), authoritarian regimes rely on both physical means, such as coercion, and mental means, such as identity, propaganda and ideology, in order to resist the spread of democracy. The results from Study I suggest that the CCP uses ideological strategies, primarily Marxism, in order to portray democracy in a more negative light and thereby limit democratic diffusion. The prominent position of the People's Daily in the CCP's propaganda system indicates that the results should be relatively generalisable to the broader official discourse in the People's Republic. The results may also be relevant for some authoritarian systems outside China. Previous studies on mental counter-strategies against democratic diffusion have mainly focused on the ideological role of nationalism, revolutionary history and indigenous culture, but largely neglected the legitimising role of complex ideologies such as Marxism (Ambrosio 2009, 69–86; Finkel and Brudny 2012b, 26–29; Korosteleva 2012, 44; Levitsky and Way 2012, 880). However, as Marxism still has ideological relevance for several non-democratic regimes, not only in China but also in states such as Vietnam, Cuba and North Korea, the general democratic

diffusion literature should arguably place more emphasis on investigating how this ideology is used to legitimise contemporary authoritarianism.

The results of the sub-studies suggest that civil society networks in Southern China, and individual weibo users, mainly play a facilitating role for democratic diffusion. Studies III–IV provide considerable evidence indicating that non-mainland actors, especially LNGOs in Hong Kong, facilitate for Guangdong based LNGOs' to promote aspects of democracy such as freedom of speech and freedom of association. Foreign states also play a role in this diffusion pattern, as Hong Kong based LNGOs often receive Western funding. However, Studies III–IV also demonstrate that the regime's repression of mainland LNGOs, including strict control of their foreign ties and financing, efficiently obstruct civil society activities.

Study II demonstrates that discussions about political scandals on SinaWeibo are dominated by weibo messages expressing social criticism. Individual weibo users frequently interact with each other by republishing and commenting on critical weibo messages. This can be perceived as an example of how certain components of democracy, such as alternative sources of information and freedom of speech, spread between individuals through SinaWeibo. That being said, criticism against the one-party system appears to be uncommon in the online debates on political scandals. Given the methodology used in Study II, it is difficult to know whether this is a result of the high legitimacy enjoyed by the regime or of the digital censorship system. Either way, the prospects of oppositional Internet users forming a critical mass able to catalyse a cascading revolution against the one-party system still seem distant.

In summary, all the articles demonstrate that intrastate actors play an important role in the democratic diffusion processes covered by the sub-studies. The interaction between actors on the macro, meso and micro level also seems to influence how democratic diffusion works. Studies III–IV provide empirical examples supporting the theoretical argument that foreign states can facilitate democratic diffusion by strengthening oppositional groups in authoritarian states (Gleditsch and Ward 2006, 918–919; Lehtinen 2014, 125; Levitsky and Way 2005, 25). However, the thesis also indicates that the Chinese regime efficiently limits democratic diffusion in all the investigated empirical fields. Thus, results from all sub-studies support Ambrosio's argument that scholars should focus more on studying authoritarian counter strategies against democratic diffusion, not least in order to deepen the knowledge on how democracy spreads (2009, 6). The methodological approach of this

thesis facilitates investigations of the roles played by intrastate actors in the democratic diffusion process, and should arguably be applied more in future studies.

Mechanisms and Conditions

The qualitative methods used in this thesis also make it possible to contribute knowledge to the relatively meager theoretical understanding of the mechanisms of democratic diffusion. Some work on this topic has been conducted; such as the overall categorisation of democratic diffusion mechanisms as imposition and emulation (Teorell 2010, 86) and the separation of the latter concept into adaptation and learning (Elkins and Simmons 2005 39–45). In Study IV, these concepts are further developed based on the relationship patterns between LNGOs in Guangdong and civil society groups in Hong Kong.

The results from Study III suggest that diffusion through international civil society networks is the main factor explaining the high density of conflict oriented LNGOs in Guangdong. According to the results of Study IV, LNGOs and other civil society organizations in Hong Kong seem to use ‘financing’, ‘consultation’ and ‘international networks’ in order to transfer democratic values and practices to their sister groups in the mainland. These strategies could be perceived as sub-categories of the imposition mechanism. Many Guangdong based LNGOs seem to welcome ‘consultation’ from groups based in Hong Kong and utilise the relatively ‘free space’ in the city in order to strengthen their own democratic orientation. These strategies could be perceived as different dimensions of the emulation mechanism. Although it is difficult to determine if these four strategies also function as mechanisms through which democracy actually spreads, plenty of evidence suggests that at least ‘financing’ seems to facilitate democratic diffusion in the LNGO network.

The results of Studies III–IV also contribute to the research on democratic diffusion conditions. Previous literature has especially focused on how proximity to democratic neighbors facilitates democratic diffusion between states (Gassebner, Lamla, and Vreeland 2013, 190; Gleditsch and Ward 2006, 930; Kopstein and Reilly 2000, 13; O’Loughlin et al. 1998, 568; Starr and Lindborg 2003, 516; Teorell 2010, 81). In line with the findings of Lankina, Libman, and Obydenkova (2016, 1 619), Study III contributes to this literature by suggesting that not only states, but also geographical intra-state regions such as Guangdong province can be affected by their proximity to democratic actors. The findings of Studies III–IV

indicate that Hong Kong, and to some extent even Taiwan, have a positive impact on the development and democratic orientation of civil society in Guangdong. Although weak compared to the Chinese regime, democracy promoting actors in the spatially and culturally proximate Greater China region seem to exert considerable influence on the LNGO community in Guangdong.

While the results of Studies III–IV primarily are relevant for the LNGO community in Guangdong and Hong Kong, they are probably also generalisable to a larger population of democratic diffusion processes. The shared geographical and political settings suggest that the results may be relevant for other civil society communities in the same region. Although generalisations between different political systems must always be done with caution, it is even possible that the theoretical results of the two sub-studies are relevant for regions outside of China where the borders of one authoritarian and one more liberal polity meet. For instance, it is possible that other special territories having historical ties to democracies, such as the Kaliningrad enclave in Russia, can play a similar role as Hong Kong in democratic diffusion processes.

In addition to spatial proximity, the sub-studies also identify media, in particular digital media, as an important diffusion condition. Although fiercer forms of regime criticism seem relatively absent in China's social media discussions, at least moderate social criticism, referred to as loyal dissent in Study II, is prevalent in discussions on political scandals on SinaWeibo. Given the prominence of SinaWeibo, and its character as an open social media platform, the results could be perceived as a fairly representative example of China's political online discourse. It is also plausible that online discussions in other authoritarian states where the degree of Internet freedom is low, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, share similarities with the pattern identified in Study II. To some extent, the results of the sub-study verify the findings of previous research suggesting that the Internet mainly facilitates democratic diffusion (Bellin 2012, 138; Lei 2011, 309; Minard 2015, 1067; Rhue and Sundararajan 2014, 51).

The Object of Democratic Diffusion

One of the most important methodological contributions of this thesis concerns how the sub-studies relate to the object of democratic diffusion. Most of the quantitative literature on democratic diffusion measures democracy on the state level by applying graded and one-dimensional democracy indexes. In comparison to the bulk of previous literature, this thesis's reliance on qualitative methods,

primary sources and a multidimensional democracy concept has two main advantages. Firstly, the application of a multidimensional democracy concept makes it possible to understand how different components of democracy spread through democratic diffusion on the local level. Study I can be perceived as an investigation of how regimes manipulate and limit alternative sources of information by using ideological strategies. Study II demonstrates how SinaWeibo can be used as an alternative source of information and a platform for practicing freedom of expression. The presence, behaviour and cooperation patterns of the LNGOs studied in Studies III–IV reveal information on how freedom of association and freedom of expression are exercised in practice, and on how these democratic components spread to Mainland China. Although qualitative investigations of democratic diffusion have been conducted before, many of these past studies focus on transitions and therefore do not identify how components of democracy spread on the local level.

Secondly, the methodological approach of this thesis makes it possible to identify local democratic diffusion processes in a stable authoritarian system such as the People’s Republic of China. The results of Studies II–IV problematise the theories of some China scholars suggesting that Chinese Internet users and civil society organizations largely lack a democratising capability (Brady 2002, 578; Leibold 2011, 1025; MacKinnon 2011, 42–44; Morozov 2011, 135; Teets 2014, 2). Although it is true that neither the rapid expansion of the Internet, nor the growth of civil society, have led to any significant liberalisation of China’s political system on the macro level, these two social forces still seem to facilitate the diffusion of some democratic components on the local level. Previous studies that have applied democracy as a multidimensional concept when investigating Chinese politics have arrived at comparable conclusions (Chen 2012, 91–92). Arguably, China scholars should be more willing to apply etic and multidimensional democracy concepts as analytical tools in order to identify these local democratisation processes.

Concluding Thoughts: Trickle Through Democracy

Is it possible to distill some broader conclusions about democratic diffusion in China from the results of this thesis? All sub-studies indicate that only a low degree of democratic diffusion takes place in China. That being said, the results of all sub-studies also indicate that at least some democratic components spread through diffusion patterns. Given the disparity of the study objects, there is reason to believe that this phenomenon is part of a larger pattern.

Although China as a whole does not move in a democratic direction, components of democracy still seem to trickle through in restricted fields of the country's political society.

It is outside the scope of this thesis to provide valid explanations to this broader pattern. However, a qualified guess is that China's powerful authoritarian regime and the country's spatial, cultural, political and medial separation from the West are factors that explain the low level of democratic diffusion. The Chinese regime's unwillingness to completely close the country from the world and the fragmented nature of the party-state (Creemers 2017, 89; Sing 2004, 24; Spires 2011, 12) may on the other hand explain why some components of democracy continue to spread in spite of the central government's obstruction. It is possible that this general pattern of democratic diffusion is not unique for China. In other powerful autocracies that are not entirely closed to the world, but still relatively separated from the West, such as Russia and Iran, some degree of democratic diffusion may also take place in restricted fields of society.

My hope is that the research approach of this thesis can be fruitfully used by other scholars who are interested in democratic diffusion, be it in China or in other authoritarian states. I believe that the application of an etic and multidimensional democracy concept combined with the use of qualitative methods and area specific material may be beneficial for a more thorough understanding of democratic diffusion.

References

- Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. 2006. *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/core/books/economic-origins-of-dictatorship-and-democracy/3F29DF90519971B183CAA16ED0203507>.
- Almén, Oscar. 2016. "Local Participatory Innovations and Experts as Political Entrepreneurs: The Case of China's Democracy Consultants." *Democratization* 23 (3): 478–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.982107>.
- Althusser, Louis. 2008. *On Ideology*. London: Verso.
- Ambrosio, Thomas. 2007. "Insulating Russia from a Colour Revolution: How the Kremlin Resists Regional Democratic Trends." *Democratization* 14 (2): 232–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340701245736>.
- . 2009. *Authoritarian Backlash: Russian Resistance to Democratization in the Former Soviet Union*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- . 2012. "The Rise of the 'China Model' and 'Beijing Consensus': Evidence of Authoritarian Diffusion?" *Contemporary Politics* 18 (4): 381–99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2012.728029>.
- Anderson, James A. 2012. *Media Research Methods: Understanding Metric and Interpretive Approaches*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Angle, Stephen C. 2005. "Decent Democratic Centralism." *Political Theory* 33 (4): 518–46.
- Backer, Larry Catá. 2009. "The Party as Polity, the Communist Party, and the Chinese Constitutional State: A Theory of State-Party Constitutionalism." *Journal of Chinese and Comparative Law* 69 (1): 101–68. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1325792>.
- Ball, Terence, and Richard Dagger. 2006. *Political Ideologies and the Democratic Ideal*. 6. ed. New York: Pearson Longman.
- Bauer, Martin. 2000. "Classical Content Analysis: a Review." In *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook*, edited by Martin Bauer and George Gaskell, 131–51. London: SAGE.
- Beck, Nathaniel, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Kyle Beardsley. 2006. "Space Is More than Geography: Using Spatial Econometrics in the Study of Political Economy." *International Studies Quarterly* 50 (1): 27–44. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3693550>.
- Beetham, David. 1991. *The Legitimation of Power*. Atlantic Heights, NJ: Humanities Press International.
- . 1994. "Key Principles and Indices for a Democratic Audit." In *Defining and Measuring Democracy*, edited by David Beetham, 25–43. London: Sage.
- Bell, Daniel A. 2007. "From Marx to Confucius." *Dissent* 54 (2): 20–28.
- Bellin, Eva. 2012. "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring." *Comparative Politics* 44 (2): 127–49.
- Beninger, Kelsey. 2017. "Social Media Users' Views on the Ethics of Social Media Research." In *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods*, edited by Luke Sloan and Anabel Quan-Haase, 57–73. SAGE Publications. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uu/detail.action?docID=4771733>.
- Bennett, Andrew. 2010. "Process Tracing and Causal Inference." In *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, edited by Henry E. Brady and David Collier, 207–19. 2. ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Berg, Bruce Lawrence. 2004. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. 5. ed. Boston, Mass: Pearson.
- Bernhard, Michael, Christopher Reenock, and Timothy Nordstrom. 2004. "The Legacy of Western Overseas Colonialism on Democratic Survival." *International Studies Quarterly* 48 (1): 225–50.
- Bing, Ngeow Chow. 2014. "Discourses on Chinese-Style Democracy in China." *China:*

- An International Journal* 12 (3): 94–114.
- Boix, Carles, Michael Miller, and Sebastian Rosato. 2013. "A Complete Data Set of Political Regimes, 1800–2007." *Comparative Political Studies* 46 (12): 1523–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414012463905>.
- Bollen, Kenneth A. 1980. "Issues in the Comparative Measurement of Political Democracy." *American Sociological Review* 45 (3): 370–90. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095172>.
- Bollen, Kenneth A., and Robert W. Jackman. 1989. "Democracy, Stability, and Dichotomies." *American Sociological Review* 54 (4): 612–21.
- Bondes, Maria, and Sandra Heep. 2013. "Conceptualizing the Relationship Between Persuasion and Legitimacy: Official Framing in the Case of the Chinese Communist Party." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 18 (4): 317–34. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11366-013-9258-y>.
- Brady, Anne-Marie. 2002. "Regimenting the Public Mind: The Modernization of Propaganda in the PRC." *International Journal* 57 (4): 563–78. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40203692>.
- . 2012a. "Introduction: Market-friendly, Scientific, High Tech, and Politics-lite: China's New Approach to Propaganda." In *China's Thought Management*, edited by Anne-Marie Brady, 1–8. London: Routledge.
- . 2012b. "Conclusion: the Velvet Fist in the Velvet Glove: Political and Social Control in Contemporary China." In *China's Thought Management*, edited by Anne-Marie Brady, 183–205. London: Routledge.
- Brinkmann, Svend. 2013. *Qualitative Interviewing: Understanding Qualitative Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brinks, Daniel, and Michael Coppedge. 2006. "Diffusion Is No Illusion: Neighbor Emulation in the Third Wave of Democracy." *Comparative Political Studies* 39 (4): 463–89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414005276666>.
- Brown, Kerry. 2012. "The Communist Party of China and Ideology." *China: An International Journal* 10 (2): 52–68.
- Brownlee, Jason. 2007. *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brysk, Alison. 2000. "Democratizing Civil Society in Latin America." *Journal of Democracy* 11 (3): 151–65. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2000.0049>.
- Bunce, Valerie J., and Sharon L. Wolchik. 2006. "International Diffusion and Postcommunist Electoral Revolutions." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 39 (3): 283–304. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2006.06.001>.
- Burnell, Peter, and Oliver Schlumberger. 2010. "Promoting Democracy – Promoting Autocracy? International Politics and National Political Regimes." *Contemporary Politics* 16 (1): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569771003593805>.
- Bush, Sarah. 2015. *The Taming of Democracy Assistance: Why Democracy Promotion Does Not Confront Dictators*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carothers, Thomas. 2002. "The End of the Transition Paradigm." *Journal of Democracy* 13 (1): 5–21. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2002.0003>.
- Chambers, Simone. 2002. "A Critical Theory of Civil Society." In *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society*, edited by Simone Chambers and Will Kymlicka, 90–110. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Chambers, Simone, and Will Kymlicka. 2002. "Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society." In *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society*, edited by Simone Chambers and Will Kymlicka, 1–10. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Chan, Jenny, and Mark Selden. 2014. "China's Rural Migrant Workers, the State, and Labor Politics." *Critical Asian Studies* 46 (4): 599–620. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2014.960709>.
- Cheibub, José Antonio, Jennifer Gandhi, and James Raymond Vreeland. 2010.

- "Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited." *Public Choice* 143 (1/2): 67–101.
- Chen, Hsuan-Ting, Michael Chan, and Francis L. F. Lee. 2016. "Social Media Use and Democratic Engagement: A Comparative Study of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China." *Chinese Journal of Communication* 9 (4): 348–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2016.1210182>.
- Chen, Jie. 2012. *Transnational Civil Society in China: Intrusion and Impact*. Edward Elgar.
- . 2016. "World Civic Politics in China: Assessing International NGOs' Influence." *China: An International Journal* 14 (4): 95–117.
- Chen, Yi-Ru Regina, and Jiawei Sophia Fu. 2016. "How to Be Heard on Microblogs? Nonprofit Organizations' Follower Networks and Post Features for Information Diffusion in China." *Information, Communication & Society* 19 (7): 978–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1086013>.
- Cheng, Edmund W. 2016. "Street Politics in a Hybrid Regime: The Diffusion of Political Activism in Post-Colonial Hong Kong." *The China Quarterly* 226 (2): 383–406. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0305741016000394>.
- Cheng, Joseph Y. S., Kinglun Ngok, and Wenjia Zhuang. 2010. "The Survival and Development Space for China's Labor NGOs: Informal Politics and Its Uncertainty." *Asian Survey* 50 (6): 1082–106. <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2010.50.6.1082>.
- Chun, Natalie, Rana Hasan, Muhammad Habibur Rahman, and Mehmet A. Ulubaşoğlu. 2016. "The Role of Middle Class in Democratic Diffusion." *International Review of Economics & Finance* 42 (2): 536–48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iref.2015.10.021>.
- CNNIC. 2017. *Statistical Report on Internet Development in China*. CNNIC. <https://cnnic.com.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/201706/P020170608523740585924.pdf>.
- Collier, David, and Robert Adcock. 1999. "DEMOCRACY AND DICHOTOMIES: A Pragmatic Approach to Choices about Concepts." *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1): 537–65. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.2.1.537>.
- Collins, Neil, and Andrew Cottey. 2012. *Understanding Chinese Politics: An Introduction to Government in the People's Republic of China*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Conrad, Björn. 2017. "Environmental Policy: Curtailing Urban Air Pollution." In *China's Political System*, edited by Sebastian Heilmann, 356–61. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Coppedge, Michael. 2012. *Democratization and Research Methods*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coppedge, Michael, Angel Alvarez, and Claudia Maldonado. 2008. "Two Persistent Dimensions of Democracy: Contestation and Inclusiveness." *The Journal of Politics* 70 (3): 632–47. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381608080663>.
- Coppedge, Michael, and Wolfgang H. Reinicke. 1990. "Measuring Polyarchy." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 25 (1): 51–72. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02716905>.
- Creemers, Rogier. 2017. "Cyber China: Upgrading Propaganda, Public Opinion Work and Social Management for the Twenty-First Century." *Journal of Contemporary China* 26 (103): 85–100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2016.1206281>.
- Csordás, Stefan, and Markus Ludwig. 2011. "An Empirical Investigation of the Determinants of Democracy: Trade, Aid and the Neighbor Effect." *Economics Letters* 110 (3): 235–37. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2010.12.006>.
- Dahl, Robert A. 1971. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press.
- . 1998. *On Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- deLisle, Jacques, Avery Goldstein, and Guobin Yang. 2016. "Introduction." In *The Internet, Social Media, and a Changing China*, edited by Jacques deLisle, Avery Goldstein, and Guobin Yang, 1–27. Philadelphia, Penn: University of Pennsylvania

- Press.
- Denk, Thomas, and Sarah Lehtinen. 2016. "Two Modes of Democratisation: Transition and State-Formation." *Quality and Quantity; Dordrecht* 50 (6): 2331–46. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11135-015-0265-2>.
- Diamond, Larry. 1994. "Toward Democratic Consolidation." *Journal of Democracy* 5 (3): 4–17.
- . 1999. *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*. Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- . 2010. "Liberation Technology." *Journal of Democracy* 21 (3): 69–83.
- . 2019. "The Road to Digital Unfreedom: The Threat of Postmodern Totalitarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 30 (1): 20–24. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0001>.
- Dickson, Bruce. 2016. *Dictator's Dilemma: The Chinese Communist Party's Strategy for Survival*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dillon, Michael. 2012. *China: A Modern History*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Dollar, David. 2018. "Decentralisation, Local Innovation and Competition among Cities." In *China's 40 Years of Reform and Development: 1978–2018*, edited by Ross Garnaut, Ligang Song, and Cai Fang, 155–63. ANU Press. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/stable/j.ctv5cgbnk>.
- Dong, Guoqiang, and Andrew G. Walder. 2014. "Foreshocks: Local Origins of Nanjing's Qingming Demonstrations of 1976." *The China Quarterly* 220 (4): 1092–110. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0305741014001180>.
- Doorenspleet, Renske. 2004. "The Structural Context of Recent Transitions to Democracy." *European Journal of Political Research* 43 (3): 309–35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2004.00156.x>.
- Doorenspleet, Renske, and Cas Mudde. 2008. "Upping the Odds: Deviant Democracies and Theories of Democratization." *Democratization* 15 (4): 815–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340802191102>.
- Dreyer, June Teufel. 2000. *China's Political System: Modernization and Tradition*. 3. ed. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Edwards, Rosalind, and Janet Holland. 2013. *What is Qualitative Interviewing?* London: Bloomsbury.
- Elkink, Johan A. 2011. "The International Diffusion of Democracy." *Comparative Political Studies* 44 (12): 1651–74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414011407474>.
- Elkins, Zachary. 2000. "Gradations of Democracy? Empirical Tests of Alternative Conceptualizations." *American Journal of Political Science* 44 (2): 293–300. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2669311>.
- Elkins, Zachary, and Beth Simmons. 2005. "On Waves, Clusters, and Diffusion: A Conceptual Framework." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 598 (1): 33–51.
- Elwood, Sarah A., and Deborah G. Martin. 2000. "'Placing' Interviews: Location and Scales of Power in Qualitative Research." *The Professional Geographer* 52 (4): 649–57. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0033-0124.00253>.
- Finkel, Evgeny, and Yitzhak M. Brudny. 2012a. "No More Colour! Authoritarian Regimes and Colour Revolutions in Eurasia." *Democratization* 19 (1): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2012.641298>.
- . 2012b. "Russia and the Colour Revolutions." *Democratization* 19 (1): 15–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2012.641297>.
- Finkel, Steven E., Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, and Mitchell A. Seligson. 2007. "The Effects of U.S. Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building, 1990–2003." *World Politics* 59 (3): 404–39. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887100020876>.
- Fordham, Benjamin O., and Victor Asal. 2007. "Billiard Balls or Snowflakes? Major Power Prestige and the International Diffusion of Institutions and Practices."

- International Studies Quarterly* 51 (1): 31–52.
- Franceschini, Ivan. 2014. "Labour NGOs in China: A Real Force for Political Change?" *The China Quarterly* 218 (2): 474–92. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S030574101400037X>.
- Franceschini, Ivan, and Elisa Nesossi. 2017. "The Foreign NGOs Management Law: A Compendium." In *Disturbances in Heaven*, edited by Ivan Franceschini, Kevin Lin, and Nicholas Loubere, 60–67. ANU Press. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/stable/j.ctt1q1crrk.14>.
- Franzese, Robert J., and Jude C. Hays. 2008. "Interdependence in Comparative Politics: Substance, Theory, Empirics, Substance." *Comparative Political Studies* 41 (4–5): 742–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414007313122>.
- Freedom House. 2017a. "Methodology." Accessed February 1, 2018. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/methodology-freedom-world-2018>.
- . 2017b. "China." Accessed February 6, 2018. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/china>.
- . 2017c. "Freedom in the World 2018: Democracy in Crisis." Accessed February 6, 2018. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018>.
- . 2017d. "Manipulating Social Media to Undermine Democracy." Accessed February 6, 2018. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2017>.
- Froissart, Chloé. 2005. "The Rise of Social Movements Among Migrant Workers: Uncertain Strivings for Autonomy." *China Perspectives* 61 (5): 30–40.
- Frolic, Michael B. 1997. "State-Led Civil Society." In *Civil Society in China*, edited by Timothy Brook and Michael B. Frolic, 46–67. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe.
- Fu, Diana. 2017. "Fragmented Control: Governing Contentious Labor Organizations in China." *Governance* 30 (3): 445–62. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12248>.
- Fuchs, Andreas, and Nils-Hendrik Klann. 2013. "Paying a Visit: The Dalai Lama Effect on International Trade." *Journal of International Economics* 91 (1): 164–77. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jinteco.2013.04.007>.
- Fukuyama, Francis. 1995. "Confucianism and Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 6 (2): 20–33. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1995.0029>.
- . 2001. "Social Capital, Civil Society and Development." *Third World Quarterly* 22 (1): 7–20.
- Fung, Archon. 2003. "Associations and Democracy: Between Theories, Hopes, and Realities." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29: 515–39.
- Fung, Archon, and Erik Olin Wright. 2003. *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*. London: Verso.
- Gallie, Walter B. 1955. "Essentially Contested Concepts." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56: 167–98.
- Gassebner, Martin, Michael J. Lamla, and James Raymond Vreeland. 2013. "Extreme Bounds of Democracy." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57 (2): 171–97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002712446132>.
- George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Gilley, Bruce. 2008a. "Legitimacy and Institutional Change: The Case of China." *Comparative Political Studies* 41 (3): 259–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414007308020>.
- . 2008b. "Taiwan's Democratic Transition: A Model for China?" In *Political Change in China: Comparisons with Taiwan*, edited by Bruce Gilley and Larry Diamond, 215–42. Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Gilli, Mario, Yuan Li, and Jiwei Qian. 2018. "Logrolling under Fragmented Authoritarianism: Theory and Evidence from China." *Public Choice* 175 (1): 197–214. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-018-0526-4>.

- Givan, Rebecca Kollins, Kenneth M. Roberts, and Sarah A. Soule. 2010. "Introduction." In *The Diffusion of Social Movements*, edited by Rebecca Kollins Givan, Kenneth M. Roberts, and Sarah A. Soule, 204–19. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uu/reader.action?docID=554733>.
- Glaser, Barney G., and Anselm L. Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Gleditsch, Kristian Skrede, and Michael D. Ward. 2006. "Diffusion and the International Context of Democratization." *International Organization* 60 (4): 911–33.
- Goodhart, Michael E. 2005. *Democracy as Human Rights: Freedom and Equality in the Age of Globalization*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Grugel, Jean. 2002. *Democratization: A Critical Introduction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Gunitsky, Seva. 2014. "From Shocks to Waves: Hegemonic Transitions and Democratization in the Twentieth Century." *International Organization* 68 (3): 561–97. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0020818314000113>.
- Gunter, Barrie. 1999. *Media Research Methods: Measuring Audiences, Reactions and Impact*. London: SAGE.
- Habermas, Jürgen. (1962) 1991. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Hadenius, Axel. 1992. *Democracy and Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hadenius, Axel, and Jan Teorell. 2007. "Pathways from Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 18 (1): 143–57. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2007.0009>.
- Hall, Stuart. 1999. "Encoding, Decoding." In *The Cultural Studies Reader*. 2. ed., edited by Simon During, 90–103. London: Routledge.
- Han, Rongbin. 2015. "Defending the Authoritarian Regime Online: China's 'Voluntary Fifty-Cent Army.'" *The China Quarterly* 224 (4): 1006–25. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001216>.
- . 2018. *Contesting Cyberspace in China: Online Expression and Authoritarian Resilience*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- He, Alex Jingwei, and Genghua Huang. 2015. "Fighting for Migrant Labor Rights in the World's Factory: Legitimacy, Resource Constraints and Strategies of Grassroots Migrant Labor NGOs in South China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 24 (93): 471–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2014.953851>.
- He, Baogang, and Stig Thøgersen. 2010. "Giving the People a Voice? Experiments with Consultative Authoritarian Institutions in China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 19 (66): 675–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2010.485404>.
- He, Baogang, and Mark E. Warren. 2011. "Authoritarian Deliberation: The Deliberative Turn in Chinese Political Development." *Perspectives on Politics* 9 (2): 269–89. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1537592711000892>.
- Heilmann, Sebastian. 2017. "Historical Foundations." In *China's Political System*, edited by Sebastian Heilmann, 23–30. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Heilmann, Sebastian, Lea Shi, and Sandra Heep. 2017. "Socialist Organizational and Ideological Features." In *China's Political System*, edited by Sebastian Heilmann, 46–56. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Heilmann, Sebastian, Yi Zhu, and Johannes Buckow. 2017. "Special Administrative Regions: Hong Kong and Macau." In *China's Political System*, edited by Sebastian Heilmann, 94–99. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Heimer, Maria, and Stig Thøgersen. 2006. "Introduction." In *Doing Fieldwork in China*, edited by Maria Heimer and Stig Thøgersen, 1–23. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Holbig, Heike. 2009. "Ideological Reform and Political Legitimacy in China:

- Challenges in the Post-Jiang Era." In *Regime Legitimacy in Contemporary China: Institutional Change and Stability*, edited by Thomas Heberer and Gunter Schubert, 13–34. London: Routledge.
- . 2013. "Ideology after the End of Ideology. China and the Quest for Autocratic Legitimation." *Democratization* 20 (1): 61–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2013.738862>.
- Holbig, Heike, and Bruce Gilley. 2010. "Reclaiming Legitimacy in China." *Politics & Policy* 38 (3): 395–422. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-1346.2010.00241.x>.
- Holsti, Ole R. 1969. *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities*. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley.
- Houle, Christian, Mark A. Kayser, and Jun Xiang. 2016. "Diffusion or Confusion? Clustered Shocks and the Conditional Diffusion of Democracy." *International Organization* 70 (4): 687–726. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S002081831600028X>.
- Hsu, Carolyn L., and Yuzhou Jiang. 2015. "An Institutional Approach to Chinese NGOs: State Alliance versus State Avoidance Resource Strategies." *The China Quarterly* 221 (1): 100–22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0305741014001568>.
- Hu, Xiao, Chen Qiao, and King-wa Fu. 2017. "Weibo." In *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods*, edited by Luke Sloan and Anabel Quan-Haase, 593–609. SAGE Publications. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uu/detail.action?docID=4771733>.
- Huang, Xing. 2017. "Special Issue: Language Studies and Methods from the Cross-Disciplinary Perspective." *Social Sciences in China* 38 (1): 199–215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02529203.2017.1268399>.
- Huntington, Samuel P. 1984. "Will More Countries Become Democratic?" *Political Science Quarterly* 99 (2): 193–218. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2150402>.
- . 1991. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- . 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Index of National Power. 2014. "CINC." Accessed February 5, 2018. <http://www.nationalpower.info/cinc/>.
- Jagers, Keith, and Ted Robert Gurr. 1995. "Tracking Democracy's Third Wave with the Polity III Data." *Journal of Peace Research* 32 (4): 469–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343395032004007>.
- Jensen, Jason L., and Robert Rodgers. 2001. "Cumulating the Intellectual Gold of Case Study Research." *Public Administration Review* 61 (2): 235–46.
- Jiang, Qing. 2013. *A Confucian Constitutional Order: How China's Ancient Past Can Shape Its Political Future*. Edited by Daniel Bell and Ruiping Fan. Translated by Edmund Ryden. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Kamrava, Mehran, and Frank O. Mora. 1998. "Civil Society and Democratization in Comparative Perspective: Latin America and the Middle East." *Third World Quarterly* 19 (5): 893–915.
- Kang, Xiaoguang, and Heng Han. 2008. "Graduated Controls: The State-Society Relationship in Contemporary China." *Modern China* 34 (1): 36–55.
- Karvonen, Lauri. 1997. *Demokratisering (Democratization)*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts. 2014. "Reverse-Engineering Censorship in China: Randomized Experimentation and Participant Observation." *Science* 345 (6199): 1251722–1–1251722–10. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1251722>.
- Kopstein, Jeffrey S., and David A. Reilly. 2000. "Geographic Diffusion and the Transformation of the Postcommunist World." *World Politics* 53 (1): 1–37.
- Korosteleva, Elena. 2012. "Questioning Democracy Promotion: Belarus' Response to the 'Colour Revolutions.'" *Democratization* 19 (1): 37–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/>

13510347.2012.641294.

- Lagerkvist, Johan. 2010. *After the Internet, before Democracy: Competing Norms in Chinese Media and Society*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- . 2015. "The Unknown Terrain of Social Protests in China: 'Exit', 'Voice', 'Loyalty', and 'Shadow'." *Journal of Civil Society* 11 (2): 137–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2015.1052229>.
- Lam, Willy. 2016. "Xi Jinping's Ideology and Statecraft." *Chinese Law & Government* 48 (6): 409–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094609.2016.1241098>.
- Lankina, Tomila, Alexander Libman, and Anastassia Obydenkova. 2016. "Authoritarian and Democratic Diffusion in Post-Communist Regions." *Comparative Political Studies* 49 (12): 1599–629. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414016628270>.
- Leese, Daniel. 2007. "The Mao Cult as Communicative Space." *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8 (3–4): 623–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14690760701571247>.
- Leeson, Peter T., and Andrea M. Dean. 2009. "The Democratic Domino Theory: An Empirical Investigation." *American Journal of Political Science* 53 (3): 533–51.
- Lehtinen, Sarah. 2014. "Demokratins förutsättningar vid staters självständighet: en studie om politiska regimer i nybildade stater." (The Conditions for Democracy in States' Independence: A Study of Political Regimes in Newly Formed States). PhD diss., Åbo Akademi University.
- Lei, Ya-Wen. 2011. "The Political Consequences of the Rise of the Internet: Political Beliefs and Practices of Chinese Netizens." *Political Communication* 28 (3): 291–322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2011.572449>.
- Leibold, James. 2011. "Blogging Alone: China, the Internet, and the Democratic Illusion?" *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70 (4): 1023–41. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0021911811001550>.
- Lenin, Vladimir Ilich. (1917) 2001. "The State and the Revolution." In *Democracy: a Reader*, edited by Ricardo Blaug and John Schwarzmantel, 244–47. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Levitsky, Steven R., and Lucan A. Way. 2005. "International Linkage and Democratization." *Journal of Democracy* 16 (3): 20–34.
- . 2012. "Beyond Patronage: Violent Struggle, Ruling Party Cohesion, and Authoritarian Durability." *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (4): 869–89.
- Li, Cheng. 2012. "The End of the CCP's Resilient Authoritarianism? A Tripartite Assessment of Shifting Power in China." *The China Quarterly* 211 (3): 595–623. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0305741012000902>.
- . 2016. *Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era: Reassessing Collective Leadership*. Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/stable/10.7864/j.ctt15hvr7t>.
- Li, Richard P.Y., and William R. Thompson. 1975. "The 'Coup Contagion' Hypothesis." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 19 (1): 63–88. <https://doi.org/10.2307/173450>.
- Liang, Zai, Zhen Li, and Zhongdong Ma. 2014. "Changing Patterns of the Floating Population in China, 2000–2010." *Population and Development Review* 40 (4): 695–716.
- Lieberthal, Kenneth, and Michel Oksenberg. 1988. *Policy Making in China*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Lin, Canchu, and Yueh-Ting Lee. 2013. "The Constitutive Rhetoric of Democratic Centralism: A Thematic Analysis of Mao's Discourse on Democracy." *Journal of Contemporary China* 22 (79): 148–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2012.716949>.
- Lindberg, Staffan I., Michael Coppedge, John Gerring, and Jan Teorell. 2014. "V-Dem: A New Way to Measure Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 25 (3): 159–69.
- Linz, Juan J. 2000. *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*. Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner.

- Lipset, Seymour Martin. 1959. "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy." *The American Political Science Review* 53 (1): 69–105. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1951731>.
- Lo, Sonny Shiu-Hing. 2013. "The Role of a Political Interest Group in Democratization of China and Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 22 (84): 923–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2013.795308>.
- . 2017. "Factionalism and Chinese-Style Democracy: The 2017 Hong Kong Chief Executive Election." *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration* 39 (2): 100–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23276665.2017.1325620>.
- Lorentzen, Peter. 2014. "China's Strategic Censorship." *American Journal of Political Science* 58 (2): 402–14.
- Lorentzen, Peter, and Suzanne Scoggins. 2015. "Understanding China's Rising Rights Consciousness." *The China Quarterly* 223 (3): 638–57. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015000776>.
- Lu, Yao, Wenjuan Zheng, and Wei Wang. 2017. "Migration and Popular Resistance in Rural China: Wukan and Beyond." *The China Quarterly* 229 (1): 1–22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0305741016001582>.
- Lu, Yiyi. 2007. "The Autonomy of Chinese NGOs: A New Perspective." *China: An International Journal* 5 (2): 173–203.
- Luova, Outi. 2011. "Community Volunteers' Associations in Contemporary Tianjin: Multipurpose Partners of the Party-State." *Journal of Contemporary China* 20 (72): 773–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2011.604500>.
- Lynch, Daniel C. 2007. "Envisioning China's Political Future: Elite Responses to Democracy as a Global Constitutive Norm." *International Studies Quarterly* 51 (3): 701–22.
- Ma, Qiusha. 2002a. "Defining Chinese Nongovernmental Organizations." *Voluntas* 13 (2): 113–30. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/A:1016051604920>.
- . 2002b. "The Governance of NGOs in China since 1978: How Much Autonomy." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 31 (3): 305–28.
- MacKinnon, Rebecca. 2011. "China's 'Networked Authoritarianism.'" *Journal of Democracy* 22 (2): 32–46. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2011.0033>.
- Macpherson, Crawford B. (1973) 2001. "Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval." In *Democracy: a Reader*, edited by Ricardo Blaug and John Schwarzmantel, 253–57. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Marshall, Monty G., Ted Robert Gurr, Keith Jagers. 2014. *POLITY™ IV PROJECT: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2013, Dataset Users' Manual*. Vienna, VA: Center for Systematic Peace.
- Marx, Karl. (1871) 2001. "The Civil War in France: Address of the General Council." In *Democracy: a Reader*, edited by Ricardo Blaug and John Schwarzmantel, 240–43. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Mayr, Philipp, and Katrin Weller. 2017. "Think Before You Collect: Setting up a Data Collecting Approach for Social Media Studies." In *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods*, edited by Luke Sloan and Anabel Quan-Haase, 107–24. SAGE Publications. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uu/detail.action?docID=4771733>.
- McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James M. Cook. 2001. "Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 415–44.
- Melitz, Jacques. 2008. "Language and Foreign Trade." *European Economic Review* 52 (4): 667–99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euroecorev.2007.05.002>.
- Mertha, Andrew. 2009. "'Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0': Political Pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process." *The China Quarterly* 200 (4): 995–1012. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0305741009990592>.
- Mesquita, Bruce Bueno de, and George W. Downs. 2005. "Development and

- Democracy." *Foreign Affairs* 84 (5): 77–86. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20031707>.
- Miao, Ying. 2016. "The Paradox of Middle-Class Attitudes in China: Democracy, Social Stability, and Reform." *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 45 (1): 169–90.
- Mill, John Stuart. (1861) 2001. "Considerations on Representative Government." In *Democracy: a Reader*, edited by Ricardo Blaug and John Schwarzmantel, 59–67. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Minard, Paul. 2015. "Does ICT Diffusion Increase Government Responsiveness in Autocracies? An Empirical Assessment of the Political Implications of China's Internet." *Journal of Contemporary China* 24 (96): 1048–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2015.1030953>.
- Moore, Barrington. 1966. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Boston: Beacon.
- Morozov, Evgeny. 2011. *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Mulvad, Andreas. 2015. "Competing Hegemonic Projects within China's Variegated Capitalism: 'Liberal' Guangdong vs. 'Statist' Chongqing." *New Political Economy* 20 (2): 199–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2014.914160>.
- Nathan, Andrew J. 1997. "Chinese Democracy: The Lessons of Failure." In *China's Transition*, edited by Andrew J. Nathan, 63–76. New York, N.Y: Columbia University Press.
- . 2003. "Authoritarian Resilience." *Journal of Democracy* 14 (1): 6–17. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2003.0019>.
- . 2015. "China's Challenge." *Journal of Democracy* 26 (1): 156–70. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2015.0012>.
- Nathan, Andrew J., and Tianjian Shi. 1997. "Left and Right in Deng's China." In *China's Transition*, edited by Andrew J. Nathan, 174–97. New York, N.Y: Columbia University Press.
- Nip, Joyce Y. M., and King-wa Fu. 2016. "Challenging Official Propaganda? Public Opinion Leaders on Sina Weibo." *The China Quarterly* 225 (1): 122–44. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001654>.
- Noakes, Stephen, and Caylan Ford. 2015. "Managing Political Opposition Groups in China: Explaining the Continuing Anti-Falun Gong Campaign." *The China Quarterly* 223 (3): 658–79. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015000788>.
- Noakes, Stephen, and Jessica C. Teets. 2018. "Learning Under Authoritarianism: Strategic Adaptations Within International Foundations and NGOs in China." *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* January: 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-017-9939-9>.
- Oakley, Ann. 1981. "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in terms." In *Doing Feminist Research*, edited by Helen Roberts, 30–61. London: Routledge.
- O'Brien, Kevin J., and Lianjing Li. 2006. *Rightful Resistance in Rural China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Brien, Kevin J., and Rachel E. Stern. 2008. "Introduction: Studying Contention in Contemporary China." In *Popular Protest in China*, edited by Kevin J. O'Brien, 11–25. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo A. 2004. "Why the Rule of Law Matters." *Journal of Democracy* 15 (4): 32–46. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2004.0076>.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo A., and Philippe C. Schmitter. 1986. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ogden, Suzanne. 2002. *Inklings of Democracy in China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center.
- O'Loughlin, John, Michael D. Ward, Corey L. Lofdahl, Jordin S. Cohen, David S. Brown, David Reilly, Kristian S. Gleditsch, and Michael Shin. 1998. "The Diffusion

- of Democracy, 1946-1994." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88 (4): 545-74.
- Pateman, Carole. 1970. *Participation and Democratic Theory*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Payne, Kenneth. 2009. "Winning the Battle of Ideas: Propaganda, Ideology, and Terror." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32 (2): 109-28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100802627738>.
- Pei, Minxin. 2006. *China's Trapped Transition: The Limits of Developmental Autocracy*. Harvard: Harvard University Press. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uu/detail.action?docID=3300397>.
- Pellerin, Camille Louise. 2019. "The Politics of Public Silence: Civil Society – State Relations Under the EPRDF Regime." PhD diss., London School of Economics.
- Pepper, Suzanne. 2008. *Keeping Democracy at Bay: Hong Kong and the Challenge of Chinese Political Reform*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Perry, Elizabeth J. 2001. "Challenging The Mandate Of Heaven: Popular Protest in Modern China." *Critical Asian Studies* 33 (2): 163-80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672710122544>.
- Peterson, Mark F., and Kenneth L. Pike. 2002. "Emics and Etics for Organizational Studies: A Lesson in Contrast from Linguistics." *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management* 2 (1): 5-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470595802002001231>.
- Przeworski, Adam. 2000. *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Material Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Punnett, Betty Jane, David Ford, Bella L. Galperin, Terri Lituchy. 2017. "The Emic-Etic-Emic Research Cycle Introduction." *AIB Insights* 17 (1): 3-6.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Pye, Lucian W. 1983. "The International Position of Hong Kong." *The China Quarterly*, 95 (3): 456-68.
- Rane, Halim. 2012. "An Alternative to the 'Turkish Model' for the Emerging Arab Democracies." *Insight Turkey* 14 (4): 47-65.
- Rauchfleisch, Adrian, and Mike S. Schäfer. 2015. "Multiple Public Spheres of Weibo: A Typology of Forms and Potentials of Online Public Spheres in China." *Information, Communication & Society* 18 (2): 139-55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.940364>.
- Rennick, Sarah Anne. 2013. "Personal Grievance Sharing, Frame Alignment, and Hybrid Organisational Structures: The Role of Social Media in North Africa's 2011 Uprisings." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 31 (2): 156-74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2013.781322>.
- Repnikova, Maria. 2017. "Thought Work Contested: Ideology and Journalism Education in China." *The China Quarterly* 230 (2): 399-419. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0305741017000583>.
- Rhue, Lauren, and Arun Sundararajan. 2014. "Digital Access, Political Networks and the Diffusion of Democracy." *Social Networks* 36 (1): 40-53. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2012.06.007>.
- Rogers, Everett M. 1995. *Diffusion of Innovations*. 4. ed. New York: Free Press.
- Rogers, Everett M., and F. Floyd Shoemaker. 1971. *Communication of Innovations: A Cross-Cultural Approach*. 2. ed. New York: The Free Press.
- Ross, Michael Lewin. 2001. "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53 (3): 325-61. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2001.0011>.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. (1762) 2001. "The Social Contract and Discourse." In *Democracy: a Reader*, edited by Ricardo Blaug and John Schwarzmantel, 44-52. Translated by George. D. H. Cole. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Rubin, Herbert J., and Irene S. Rubin. 2005. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing*

- Data*. 2. ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sæther, Elin. 2006. "Fieldwork as Coping and Learning." In *Doing Fieldwork in China*, edited by Maria Heimer and Stig Thøgersen, 42–57. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Salamon, Lester M., and Helmut K. Anheier. 1992. "In Search of the Non-Profit Sector. I: The Question of Definitions." *Voluntas* 3 (2): 125–51.
- Saldaña, Johnny. 2013. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. 2. ed. London: SAGE.
- Salmenkari, Taru. 2013. "Theoretical Poverty in the Research on Chinese Civil Society." *Modern Asian Studies* 47 (2): 682–711. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X12000273>.
- Sandberg, Mikael. 2011. "Soft Power, World System Dynamics, and Democratization: A Bass Model of Democracy Diffusion 1800-2000." *JASSS: Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation* 14 (1): 4.
- Sartori, Giovanni. 1970. "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics." *The American Political Science Review* 64 (4): 1033–53. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1958356>.
- . 1987. *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*. Chatham, N.J: Chatham House Publishers.
- . 1991. "Comparing and Miscomparing." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 3 (3): 243–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0951692891003003001>.
- Schaffer, Frederic C. 2007. "The Definition and Study of Democracy." In *Democracy: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, edited by Michael Saward, 120–42. London: Routledge.
- Schmitter, Philippe C. 1974. "Still the Century of Corporatism?" *The Review of Politics* 36 (1): 85–131.
- Schmitter, Philippe C., and Terry Lynn Karl. 1991. "What Democracy Is. . . and Is Not." *Journal of Democracy* 2 (3): 75–88. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1991.0033>.
- Schumpeter, Joseph Alois. 1942. *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. New York: Harper & brothers.
- Shaffir, William B., and Robert A. Stebbins. 1991. *Experiencing Fieldwork: An Inside View of Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park, Calif: Sage.
- Shambaugh, David L. 2007. "China's Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy." *The China Journal* 57 (1): 25–58. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20066240>.
- . 2009. *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press.
- Shi, Tianjian. 2010. "China: Democratic Values Supporting an Authoritarian System." In *How East Asians View Democracy*, edited by Yun-Han Chu, Larry Diamond, Andrew J. Nathan, and Doh Chull Shin, 209–37. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Shieh, Shawn. 2017. "Same Bed, Different Dreams? The Divergent Pathways of Foundations and Grassroots NGOs in China." *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 28 (4): 1785–811. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-017-9864-y>.
- Shi-Kupfer, Kristin, and Sebastian Heilmann. 2017. "Urban Society and New Social Forces." In *China's Political System*, edited by Sebastian Heilmann, 259–68. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Shirk, Susan. 2007. *China: Fragile Superpower: How China's Internal Politics Could Derail Its Peaceful Rise*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uu/reader.action?docID=1344831>.
- Shue, Vivienne. 1994. "State Power and Social Organizations in China." In *State Power and Social Forces*, edited by Joel S. Migdal, Atul Kohli, and Vivienne Shue, 65–88. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Silitski, Vitali. 2009. "What Are We Trying to Explain?" *Journal of Democracy* 20 (1):

- . 2010. “‘Survival of the Fittest’: Domestic and International Dimensions of the Authoritarian Reaction in the Former Soviet Union Following the Colored Revolutions.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 43 (4): 339–50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2010.10.007>.
- Silverman, David. 2006. *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction*. 3. ed. London: SAGE.
- Sing, Ming. 2004. *Hong Kong’s Tortuous Democratization: A Comparative Analysis*. London: RoutledgeCurzon.
- SIPRI. 2017. *Data for all countries from 1988–2016 in constant (2015) USD (pdf)*. SIPRI. <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Milex-constant-2015-USD.pdf>.
- Smith, Graham. 2009. *Democratic Innovations: Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Solingen, Etel. 2012. “Of Dominoes and Firewalls: The Domestic, Regional, and Global Politics of International Diffusion.” *International Studies Quarterly* 56 (4): 631–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12034>.
- Sorace, Christian P. 2017. *Shaken Authority: China’s Communist Party and the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Spires, Anthony J. 2011. “Contingent Symbiosis and Civil Society in an Authoritarian State: Understanding the Survival of China’s Grassroots NGOs.” *American Journal of Sociology* 117 (1): 1–45. <https://doi.org/10.1086/660741>.
- Spires, Anthony J., Lin Tao, and Kin-man Chan. 2014. “Societal Support for China’s Grass-Roots NGOs: Evidence from Yunnan, Guangdong and Beijing.” *The China Journal* 71 (1): 65–90.
- Starke, Peter. 2013. “Qualitative Methods for the Study of Policy Diffusion: Challenges and Available Solutions.” *Policy Studies Journal* 41 (4): 561–82. <https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12032>.
- Starr, Harvey. 1991. “Democratic Dominoes: Diffusion Approaches to the Spread of Democracy in the International System.” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 35 (2): 356–81.
- Starr, Harvey, and Christina Lindborg. 2003. “Democratic Dominoes Revisited: The Hazards of Governmental Transitions, 1974-1996.” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 47 (4): 490–519.
- Steinberg, Paul F. 2015. “Can We Generalize from Case Studies?” *Global Environmental Politics* 15 (3): 152–75.
- Stepan, Mathias, and Sebastian Heilmann. 2017. “Rural society.” In *China’s Political System*, edited by Sebastian Heilmann, 253–58. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Svensson, Marina. 2006. “Ethical Dilemmas: Balancing Distance with Involvement.” In *Doing Fieldwork in China*, edited by Maria Heimer and Stig Thøgersen, 262–80. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.
- . 2016. “Connectivity, Engagement, and Witnessing on China’s Weibo.” In *The Internet, Social Media, and a Changing China*, edited by deLisle, Jacques, Avery Goldstein, and Guobin Yang, 49–70. Philadelphia, Penn: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Tarrow, Sidney. 1998. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. 2. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2010. “Dynamics of Diffusion.” In *The Diffusion of Social Movements*, edited by Rebecca Kolins Givan, Kenneth M. Roberts, and Sarah A. Soule, 204–19. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uu/reader.action?docID=554733>.
- Taylor, Bill, and Qi Li. 2007. “Is the ACFTU a Union and Does It Matter?” *Journal of Industrial Relations* 49 (5): 701–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022185607082217>.
- Teets, Jessica C. 2013. “Let Many Civil Societies Bloom: The Rise of Consultative

- Authoritarianism in China." *The China Quarterly* 213 (1): 19–38. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0305741012001269>.
- . 2014. *Civil Society under Authoritarianism: The China Model*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2015. "The Evolution of Civil Society in Yunnan Province: Contending Models of Civil Society Management in China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 24 (91): 158–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2014.918417>.
- Teiwes, Frederick C., and Warren Sun. 2011. "China's New Economic Policy under Hua Guofeng: Party Consensus and Party Myths." *The China Journal* 66 (2): 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1086/tcj.66.41262805>.
- Teorell, Jan. 2010. *Determinants of Democratization: Explaining Regime Change in the World, 1972–2006*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Terkourafi, Marina. 2009. "EMIC/ETIC." In *Key Ideas in Linguistics and the Philosophy of Language*, edited by Siobhan Chapman and Christopher Routledge, 66–67. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uu/detail.action?docID=420672>.
- Tocqueville de, Alexis. (1840) 2009. *Democracy in America: Volumes I & II*. Translated by Henry Reeve. Auckland: The Floating Press. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uu/detail.action?docID=413158>.
- Truex, Rory. 2017. "Consultative Authoritarianism and Its Limits." *Comparative Political Studies* 50 (3): 329–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414014534196>.
- Uhlin, Anders. 1995. "Democracy and Diffusion: Transnational Lesson-Drawing among Indonesian pro-Democracy Actors." PhD diss., Lund University.
- Valenzuela, J. Samuel. 1989. "Labor Movements in Transitions to Democracy: A Framework for Analysis." *Comparative Politics* 21 (4): 445–72. <https://doi.org/10.2307/422007>.
- Vallance, Roger J. 2001. "Gaining access: Introducing referred approval." *Issues in Educational Research* 11 (2): 65–73. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier11/2001conts.html>.
- Vanderhill, Rachel. 2013. "Conclusions." In *International Dimensions of Authoritarian Persistence: Lessons from Post-Soviet States*, edited by Rachel Vanderhill and Michael E. Aleprete, 219–29. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.
- . 2017. "Active Resistance to Democratic Diffusion." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 50 (1): 41–51. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2017.01.003>.
- Vanhanen, Tatu. 2003. *Democratization: A Comparative Analysis of 170 Countries*. London: Routledge.
- V-Dem. 2017a. "About V-dem." Accessed February 1, 2018. <https://www.v-dem.net/en/about/>.
- . 2017b. "CSO repression." Accessed January 15, 2018. <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/CountryGraph/>.
- . 2017c. "CSO anti-system movements." Accessed January 15, 2018. <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/CountryGraph/>.
- . 2018. "Additive Polyarchy Index." Accessed February 28, 2018. <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/CountryGraph/>.
- Vuori, Juha. 2007. "Chinese Securitisation." PhD diss., University of Turku.
- Wang, Ming. 2011. "The Development of Civil Organizations and the Road to Civil Society in China." In *Emerging Civil Society in China, 1978–2008*, edited by Ming Wang, 1–57. Brill. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uu/detail.action?docID=717568>.
- . 2017. "An Exposition of China's New System—A Modern NGO System." In *A Discussion on Chinese Road of NGOs*, 13–31. Springer: Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3404-6>.
- Ward, Michael D., John O'Loughlin, Michael Shin, Corey L. Lofdahl, Kristian S.

- Gleditsch, and Jordin S. Cohen. 1996. "The Spatial and Temporal Diffusion of Democracy, 1946–1994." *Annual Conference of the International Studies Association, San Diego*, April 16, 1996–April 20, 1996. 1–22.
- Way, Lucan. 2008. "The Real Causes of the Color Revolutions." *Journal of Democracy* 19 (3): 55–69.
- Weale, Albert. 2007. *Democracy*. 2. ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wejnert, Barbara. 2005. "Diffusion, Development, and Democracy, 1800–1999." *American Sociological Review* 70 (1): 53–81.
- . 2014. *Diffusion of Democracy: The Past and Future of Global Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Weyland, Kurt. 2010. "The Diffusion of Regime Contention in European Democratization, 1830–1940." *Comparative Political Studies* 43 (8): 1148–76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414010370439>.
- . 2012. "The Arab Spring: Why the Surprising Similarities with the Revolutionary Wave of 1848?" *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (4): 917–34. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592712002873>.
- . 2017. "Autocratic Diffusion and Cooperation: The Impact of Interests vs. Ideology." *Democratization* 24 (7): 1235–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2017.1307823>.
- White, Leslie A. 1945. "'DIFFUSION VS. EVOLUTION': AN ANTI-EVOLUTIONIST FALLACY." *American Anthropologist* 47 (3): 339–56. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1945.47.3.02a00010>.
- Whitehead, Laurence. 1996. "The International Dimensions of Democratization." In *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas*, edited by Laurence Whitehead, 3–25. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wnuk–Lipiński, Edmund. 2007. "Civil Society and Democratization." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behaviour*, edited by Russell J. Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, 675–92. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wolfsfeld, Gadi, Elad Segev, and Tamir Sheaffer. 2013. "Social Media and the Arab Spring: Politics Comes First." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 18 (2): 115–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161212471716>.
- Wong, Daniel Fu Keung, Chang Ying Li, and He Xue Song. 2007. "Rural Migrant Workers in Urban China: Living a Marginalised Life." *International Journal of Social Welfare* 16 (1): 32–40. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2397.2007.00475.x>.
- Wong, David, and Robert D. Woodberry. 2015. "Who is My Neighbor? Cultural Proximity and the Diffusion of Democracy." *Conference: American Political Science Association*, San Francisco, September 3, 2015. 1–45.
- The World Bank. 2017a. "Industry, value added (% of GDP)." Accessed February 1, 2018. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.IND.TOTL.ZS>.
- . 2017b. "Total natural resources rents (% of GDP)." Accessed February 1, 2018. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.TOTL.RT.ZS>.
- . 2017c. "GDP per capita (current US\$)." Accessed February 1, 2018. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>.
- . 2017d. "Trade (% of GDP)." Accessed February 1, 2018. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.TRD.GNFS.ZS>.
- . 2017e. "International tourism, number of departures." Accessed February 1, 2018. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.DPRT>.
- . 2017f. "Individuals using the Internet (% of population)." Accessed February 1, 2018. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS>.
- . 2017g. "GDP (current US\$)." Accessed February 5, 2018. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>.
- Wu, Guoguang. 1994. "Command Communication: The Politics of Editorial Formulation in the People's Daily." *The China Quarterly* 137 (1): 194–211.
- Xu, Yi. 2013. "Labor Non-Governmental Organizations in China: Mobilizing Rural

- Migrant Workers." *Journal of Industrial Relations* 55 (2): 243–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022185612473222>.
- Yang, Guobin. 2009. *The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Yeh, Emily T. 2006. "'An Open Lhasa Welcomes You': Disciplining the Research in Tibet." In *Doing Fieldwork in China*, edited by Maria Heimer and Stig Thøgersen, 96–109. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Yilmaz, Hakan. 2009. "The International Context." In *Democratization*, edited by Christian W. Haerpfer, Patrick Bernhagen, Ronald F. Inglehart, and Christian Welzel, 92–106. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Yin, Dongshui, and Xiaoguang Guo. 2016. "The Role of International NGOs in the Development of Democracy in Rural China: An Empirical Study." *The China Nonprofit Review* 8 (2): 163–87. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18765149-12341312>.
- Yu, Louis Lei, Sitaram Asur, and Bernardo A. Huberman. 2015. "Trend Dynamics and Attention in Chinese Social Media." *American Behavioral Scientist* 59 (9): 1142–56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764215580619>.
- Yuen, Samson. 2015. "Friend or Foe?: The Diminishing Space of China's Civil Society." *China Perspectives* 2015 (3): 51–56.
- Zeng, Jinghan. 2014. "The Debate on Regime Legitimacy in China: Bridging the Wide Gulf between Western and Chinese Scholarship." *Journal of Contemporary China* 23 (88): 612–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2013.861141>.
- Zhang, Wu. 2015. "Protest Leadership and State Boundaries: Protest Diffusion in Contemporary China." *The China Quarterly* 222 (2): 360–79. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015000715>.
- Zhang, Xiaodan. 2017. "Rule of Law Within the Chinese Party-State and Its Recent Tendencies." *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law* 9 (2): 373–400. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s40803-017-0052-3>.
- Zhang, Xin, and Richard Baum. 2004. "Civil Society and the Anatomy of a Rural Ngo." *The China Journal* 52 (2): 97–107.
- Zhao, Suisheng. 2016. "Xi Jinping's Maoist Revival." *Journal of Democracy* 27 (3): 83–97.
- Zhu, Yuchao. 2011. "'Performance Legitimacy' and China's Political Adaptation Strategy." *Journal of Chinese Political Science; Dordrecht* 16 (2): 123–40. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11366-011-9140-8>.

Gustav Sundqvist

Trickle Through Democracy

Studies on Democratic Diffusion in
China

Since the early 2000s, democratic diffusion has increasingly attracted the attention of democratisation scholars. Previous research has been characterised by a dominance of quantitative studies investigating cross-state data as well as qualitative studies examining a relatively limited number of cases. The homogeneity of method and material in previous literature suggests that there is a lack of knowledge on how democratic diffusion takes place on a more detailed and local level as well as in different geographical and cultural contexts. China is an especially understudied case, since almost no research has applied democratic diffusion theories when investigating the country's politics.

In this thesis, four sub-studies are conducted, examining democratic diffusion in three important spheres of Chinese politics; civil society networks in Southern China, dissent on social media and the Chinese Communist Party's ideological strategies. The aim of the thesis is primarily to deepen the understanding of how democratic diffusion works in China and secondarily to increase the more general understanding of democratic diffusion. The results from all sub-studies indicate that China's authoritarian system limits and prevents democratic diffusion relatively efficiently. Nevertheless, some components of democracy still manage to spread throughout the country.