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REVIEW ARTICLE

Comparative Analysis of Political Participation in Chinese and Western Democratic Theories

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ABSTRACT

Political participation is the core of modern democratic politics and the standard and measure of political development, an enduring classic issue in political science, and plays an important role in national governance. On the basis of reviewing the views on political participation in Chinese and western democratic theories, this paper will make a comparative analysis of the connotation of political participation in Chinese and western democratic theories by using literature research and comparative analysis, and explore the essential characteristics and similarities and differences of political participation in Chinese and western democratic theories. Finally, future trends of political participation theory research in China and the West is prospected, with a view to providing reference for further study of political participation theory.

Contribution/Originality: This study is one of the few studies that makes a comparative analysis of the connotation of political participation in Chinese and western democratic theories, and explores the common fields of future political participation theory study in China and the West.

1. Introduction

Generally speaking, political participation is the standard and yardstick of democratic development (Hou, & Meng, 2002). According to Dahl (1973), one of the two defining elements of a pluralistic polity is political participation, which is a channel for the public to express preferences and grievances, and a source that facilitates the government to respond to the people through formal means. Verba and Ney (1972) further state that "democracy is almost non-existent where there is no political participation, and the wider the political participation, the more likely democracy is to occur" . It can be seen that modern politics is a typical participatory politics (Fang, et al., 2011). Political

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participation is an enduring classic issue in political science, and its importance to the governance of democratic countries is self-evident.

The thought of political participation has long been contained in the political theory of ancient Greece, but the thought of political participation in the modern sense is derived from the thought of people's rights in the modern democratic theory (Wang, 2006). Comparative studies on political participation are mostly focused on developing countries. For example, Huntington and Nelson (1988) studied the determinants and patterns of political participation in developing countries. However, there are still different opinions on the connotation and definition of political participation in academic circles, and different understandings determine the different research scope, focus and methodology. In addition, most of the existing comparative studies on political participation between China and the West focus on the behavior and institutions of political participation (Zhang, 2013; Wang, 2011), while there are few studies on the view of political participation from the comparative perspective of Chinese and Western democratic theories.

The first part of this paper will review the development process of political participation in Chinese and western democratic theories. The second part will make a comparative analysis of the representative definition of political participation in China and the West, and explore the similarities and differences in the common features of political participation in China and the West. Finally, future trends of political participation theory research in China and the West is prospected, with a view to providing reference for further study of political participation theory.

2. Literature Review

With the evolution and development of democratic politics in the process of western modernization, the importance of political participation has become increasingly prominent. Various theories about democracy are divided into two categories by some scholars, "*that is, democratic theories that emphasize civic participation and democratic theories that limit civic participation*" (Miller, & Bogdanor, 2002). Some political scholars even point out that the political history of Europe since the end of the 19th century is essentially a history of the expansion of channels of political participation. According to these political scholars' views, the evolution of western democratic politics actually follows two ways: one is the gradual increase of political participation rights, such as the right to vote, petition, appeal, form an association and other rights; The second is the gradual increase in the number of people who share the right to participate in politics. For example, the history of voting rights is that the restrictions of economic conditions, education level, race and gender are gradually removed, so that the number of people who enjoy the right to vote gradually increases, and eventually it becomes a process in which all citizens share the right (Guo, 2006). Obviously, the concept of participation derives to a large extent from the concept of democracy (Luo, 2012). Therefore, there is a need to review the view of political participation in Chinese and western democratic political theories.

2.1. Political Participation in Western Mainstream Democratic Politics

The word democracy derives from the Greek word *Demokratia*, which is made up of *Demo* (meaning people) and *Kratos* (meaning power), meaning the power of the people or the rule of the people. In ancient Greece, democracy refers to a state in which free

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people control state power and citizens directly elect state officials and make democratic decisions (Ma, 2004). The simplest and most primitive form of political participation in the Athenian city-state was the attendance of male citizens at regular assemblies to vote, draw lots, or discuss various political issues. In the 17th and 18th centuries, political thinkers Locke and Rousseau inherited the ancient Greek concept of democracy based on the theory of innate human rights and social contract, and believed that democracy is the rule of the people (Wang, 2006). Rousseau put forward the theory of popular sovereignty, and believed that the people's sovereign will cannot be transferred and indivisible, and every citizen is the master of state power, so he advocated the implementation of direct democracy with direct participation of citizens (Wang, 2006). Locke and Rousseau's interpretation of democratic theory is called classical democratic theory (Wang, 2006).

However, with the construction of modern western capitalist nation-state, the direct democracy based on a small country with few people is no longer suitable for a country with vast territory and vast people. Therefore, most thinkers advocate the implementation of indirect democracy, namely representative democracy, in which voters elect representatives, who express their will on behalf of the people, and decide all major issues of the country. Representative democracy is epitomized by Mill (1982), who proposed in his book Representative Government that "*a perfect ideal type must be representative government*" (Mill, 1982). The progressive combination of western liberal democracy and representative system effectively overcomes the deficiency of direct participation in classical democratic theory. So in a capitalist society on the basis of practical development, liberal democratic theory is becoming the mainstream of western democratic society, and in reality, fission, mutation genre division, the path is complex, but different path selection of the greatest overlap of liberal democracy is to protect individual freedom power as the core, in the form of representative for democracy, liberal democracy to flourish (Yuan, 2011).

Liberal democracy was shaped by the examination and revision of classical democratic theory, which was epitomized by (Schumpeter, 2014). He argued that it was an unrealistic fantasy to reduce democracy to rule by the people, because the3people had neither the ability nor the possibility to rule. "*As soon as the typical citizen enters the political sphere, his mental state falls to a lower level. He will not hesitate to admit that his methods of argument and analysis are naïve and confined to the limits of his practical interest. He's a caveman gain*" (Schumpeter, 2014). The task of the people is to produce a government or an intermediary for the establishment of a national executive committee or government (Schumpeter, 2014). Moreover, voters' choices-- ideologically honored as the call of the people -- are not made by voters but shaped, and the shaping of choices is an essential part of the democratic process. Voters do not decide the issues, and they do not choose members from among the qualified with perfect candour. Under normal circumstances, the ball is in the court of the candidate seeking the seat of parliament and the local leadership it implies. The voter is limited to either accepting the one he likes better or rejecting it (Schumpeter, 2014). Democracy is no longer the pursuit of a value goal, but one of many political methods, namely democratic method. In *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, Schumpeter (2014) defined the democratic method as the democratic method is the institutional arrangement for making political decisions, in which some people gain the power to make decisions by winning the votes of the people (Schumpeter, 2014). According to this definition, democracy is only the process by which voters elect politicians, and how politicians legislate and make decisions after

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they are elected is not the content of democratic politics. This is called Schumpeterian democracy or electoral democracy (Yang, 2020).

After World War II, several generations of democratic theorists, such as the famous democratic theorist Robert Dahl, Giovanni Sartori, and others, argued for Schumpeterian Democracy (Yang, 2020). The core of Schumpeterian Democracy has become the competition among political elites, but the political rights of the people have been simplified into the simple right to vote, they can only listen to the various campaign slogans and verbal promises of the candidates when they vote, and they are forgotten after the vote, let alone other kinds of political participation rights, such as the right to speak, the right to management and so on (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China [China SCIO], 2021). Therefore, it is also called Meritocratic Democracy. At this point, the modern democratic theory is no longer focus on people to participate in, no longer pay attention to the participation of ordinary people, the main advantage of the democratic political system is no longer considered with ordinary person of related with the political development of the necessary quality (Pateman, 2018). In contemporary mainstream democratic theory, the participation of a few elites is the key, and the apathetic lack of political efficacy and non-participation of the general public are regarded as the main guarantee of social stability (Pateman, 2018).

Out of dissatisfaction with the contemporary mainstream democratic theory, the participatory democratic political theory formally emerged in 1970 with the publication of *Participation and Democratic Theory* by Pateman (2018). By reviewing the viewpoints of democratic theorists in history, Pateman (2018) concluded that true democracy should be a democracy in which all citizens directly and fully participate in the decision-making of public affairs, from the design of decision-making process to the implementation of policies, citizens should participate. It is only in an atmosphere of universal participation that the basic values of democracy, such as responsibility, compromise, free development of individuals, and equality of human beings, can be implemented. After the theory of participatory democracy was put forward, it attracted wide attention in the Western world.

The rise of the theory of deliberative democracy in the late 20th century was seen as an important development of the theory of participatory democracy and the latest interpretation of the theory of participatory democracy (Pateman, 2018). Deliberative democracy is a form of governance in which free and equal citizens confer legitimacy on legislation and decision-making through dialogue, discussion and review of various relevant reasons in the process of public consultation (Pateman, 2018). It not only affirms citizens' active participation in political life, but also respects the boundary between the state and society. It tries to eliminate conflicts by improving democratic procedures, expanding the scope of participation and emphasizing free and equal dialogue, so as to ensure the realization of public reason and universal interests (Pateman, 2018). Of course, the theory of participatory democracy does not mean the negation of representative democracy. The emphasis of participatory democracy theory on participation inherits the basic spirit of classical democracy and tries to further expand the way and scope of political participation under the contemporary background, in order to alleviate the crisis and difficulties encountered by liberal democracy, and to revive classical democracy (Pateman, 2018).

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2.2. Political Participation in China's Democratic Politics

Chinese democracy is the people's democracy, and the people as masters of the country is the essence and core of people's democracy (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China [China SCIO], 2021). This essence and core determine the breadth and universality of citizens' political participation. Only citizens actively and consciously participate in the political life of the country, the modernization of democratic politics can be realized.

Chinese democracy is the inheritance and development of Marxist thought on people's democracy. According to Marxism, democracy refers to a state form, which is both a political category and a historical category (Niu, 2012). First of all, democracy is a state system and form. In other words, the system and form of a democratic country must take the people as the supreme principle and reflect the spirit of sovereignty in the people. Therefore, Lenin also pointed out that "*democracy means formally recognizing that all citizens are equal and that everyone has the equal right to determine the state system and administer the state*" (Lenin, 2004).

Second, democracy is a political category. On the one hand, democracy, as a state form, inevitably embodies class nature in class society. In its essence, democracy always belongs to the socially dominant class. "*As long as there are different classes, we cannot say 'pure democracy', but only class democracy*" (Lenin, 1985). Thus, in a society where classes still exist, the widest possible democracy is possible only if the majority of the people become the ruling class and a very small number of enemies become the objects of dictatorship. If, on the contrary, the ruling class consists of only a small number of people, and the object of its rule is the majority of the people, then the system of the ruling class, however democratic it may be designed, is only a democracy of the privileged few and not of the vast majority of the people. On the other hand, Democracy, on the other hand, represents a political philosophy that emphasizes that the legitimacy and power of government derive from the people. At the same time, government decisions should reflect the will of the broad masses of the people and respect the rights and opinions of minorities. In addition, democracy emphasizes the principle of the rule of law to ensure fair and equal laws for all citizens.

Finally, democracy is a historical category. Democracy is not permanent, nor will it last forever. It will disappear with the state. "*When all members of society, or even most members of society, learn to run the country, take the cause into their own hands... The more complete democracy is, the closer it comes to becoming superfluous.... The more democratic a state that is not a state in its original sense, the more rapidly any state will begin to wither away. When all people have learned to manage, they can actually manage social production independently.... So that the simple basic rules of all human public life will soon change from obligatory to habituated... And then... The state will die out completely"* (Lenin, 2004) and democracy will cease to exist. Based on this, Marxism's content of political participation includes two aspects: First, if the working class and the masses of the people want to be able to directly manage state affairs and realize their political rights and people's democracy, they must practice political participation. Second, political participation refers to the participation of ordinary citizens in political affairs.

Under the guidance of the Marxist thought on people's democracy, the Communist Party of China has led the Chinese people in pursuing political democracy as a goal, exploring

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in theory and practice ways and means for the people to effectively participate in politics, and forming a democracy with Chinese characteristics, that is, socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics.

In 1945, Huang Yanpei, a Chinese democrat, visited Yan 'an and had a famous *Yaodong Dui* [The conversation in the cave] with Mao Zedong (Yang, & Huang, 2021). When they talk about how to get out of the historical cycle rate of the rise and fall of dynasties, Mao Zedong confidently replies that they have found a new way to get out of the historical cycle rate. This new road is democracy. That is, let the people supervise the government, and the government will not slacken. As long as everyone takes responsibility, no one will die. This case fully proves that the Chinese Communists attach great importance to and trust the people and have a wise understanding of the people's democratic value. The founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 enabled the Chinese people, who had long suffered from feudal oppression and colonial exploitation, to become masters (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China [China SCIO], 2021). The 1954 Constitution clearly stipulates that all power in the People's Republic of China belongs to the people. China implements the people's democratic dictatorship and the people's congress system of government, marking the establishment of the democratic system in New China (Yang & Huang, 2021).

Since China's reform and opening up in 1978, the Communist Party of China has united and led the people in making great progress in developing socialist democracy. It has put forward a series of new views on democratic politics, such as people's democracy is the life of socialism and there can be no socialism without democracy, which have greatly enriched and developed Marxist theory and practice of democracy (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China [China SCIO], 2021). A socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics has gradually taken shape. The essence of socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics is that the people are masters of the country (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China [China SCIO], 2021). It emphasizes the protection and respect of human rights, and organically integrates upholding the leadership of the party, the people being masters of the country and the rule of law (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China [China SCIO], 2021).

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, on the basis of understanding the law of the development of democratic politics in China, the major idea of people's democracy in the whole process has been put forward. The core and essence of the whole-process of people's democracy is that democracy must not only have a complete system and procedure, but also must have a complete participation in practice. Whole-process people's democracy is the latest achievement in the theory and practice of building socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics in the new era (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China [China SCIO], 2021). It adheres to the people-centered approach and embodies the organic unity of process democracy and outcome democracy, procedural democracy and substantive democracy, direct democracy and indirect democracy, and people's democracy and the will of the state (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China [China SCIO], 2021). It not only further points out the direction for building socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics. It also enriches the democratic view of Marxism under the new historical conditions. This whole-process of people's democracy requires the broad masses of the people to participate in politics actively, consciously and effectively.

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3. Methodology

This paper makes use of some existing theoretical research results on Chinese and Western political participation to sort out the main viewpoints of Chinese and Western political participation.

This paper also applies comparative analysis to explores the similarities and differences of the essential characteristics of political participation in China and the West, and looks forward to the future development of the theoretical research of political participation in China and the West.

4. Finding & Discussion

4.1. Representative Definitions of Chinese and Western Political Participation

Since political participation comes from democratic political thought, different democratic political thought will produce different concepts of political participation, and the definition of political participation is also different. At present, in academic circles at home and abroad, the representative definition of political participation is as follows:

Ney and Verba (1996) defines that "*in the term political participation, we mean legitimate activities by civilians with more or less the direct purpose of influencing the choices of government personnel and/or the actions they take", "That is, actions intended to influence government decisions*". Huntington and Nelson (1988), in their book *No Easy Choices*, define political participation as "the activity of civilians trying to influence government decisions". Political participation is defined in the Encyclopedia of China: Political Science Volume (The General Editorial Committee of the Encyclopedia of China, 1992) as "*the act of citizens voluntarily participating in political life through various legal means. It reflects the status, role and range of choices of citizens' political activities in the political system*". The definition of Wang Puju's political participation is as follows: Political participation means that ordinary citizens participate in political life through various legal means and influence the constitution, operation mode, operation rules and policy process of the political system (Wang, 2006).

4.2. Differences and Similarities in the Definition of Political Participation in China and the West

It is not difficult to see that the above definitions of political participation by Chinese and foreign scholars have similarities and differences. First of all, their definitions of political participation all contain three core elements, namely, the subject, content and methods of political participation (Shi, 2010; Wang, 2006). Second, the difference lies in the size of the scope involved in these three core elements. For example, in terms of the subjects of political participation, there are ordinary citizens and all citizens. The focus is whether government officials and professional political activists are included. The scope of all citizens is naturally larger than ordinary citizens. In terms of the content of political participation, foreign scholars generally emphasize the decision-making activities that affect the government, while domestic scholars mostly emphasize the influence on the entire political system and political activities. Undoubtedly, the scope of participation in the whole political life is greater than just participation in the decision-making activities that affect the government. In terms of the method of political

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participation, there are two types: legal and voluntary. The scope of legal and illegal participation is naturally larger than that of just legal participation, and the scope of active participation and mobilization participation is naturally larger than that of just active participation. In addition, whether the act of political participation includes the attitude of participation and so on. In short, no matter what kind of democratic political thought is based on, different political scholars have confirmed that the public should have the right to political participation, but the difference is the definition of the breadth and depth of participation. For example, the mainstream liberal democratic political participation is the citizens' limited political participation, while the people's democratic participation is the citizens' maximum political participation.

By its very concept, political participation does not mean that everyone is a political manager, because wherever politics exists, only a few members of society can conduct political management. But, in a democratic age, political participation is precisely the means by which ordinary citizens can influence or control political power; indeed, this is the extent to which political participation works. Therefore, in term of the definition of political participation, this paper tends to follow the definition of political participation by scholar Wang (2006). "*Political participation means that ordinary citizens participate in political life through various legal means and influence the constitution, operation mode, operation rules and policy process of the political system*" (Wang, 2006:207).

First of all, Wang (2006) defined the scope of political participation as the whole political life, which reflects the democratic thought that sovereignty lies in the people and people rule the country. Participation in political life is not the exclusive right of a few political elites, but the right, responsibility and obligation of all people (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China [China SCIO], 2021). Citizens strive for democratic participation not only to realize their own interests, but also have the responsibility and obligation to learn to manage state and social affairs through political practice, so that everyone can independently manage themselves without external management. In this way, the management of people is transformed into the management of pairings, and the free and comprehensive development of everyone is finally realized.

In addition, the behavior of political participation is the behavior that affects the constitution, operation mode, operation rules and policy process of the political system, which reflects the whole process of democracy. The political system is mainly composed of political organizations and political institutions. The establishment of political organizations can be achieved through political elections and political voting, which is the main form of political participation, can affect the appointment and removal of major personnel, and establish organizations that the people can trust. The establishment of the political system can not only be through the way of election voting, but also through the way of political consultation, to form the best institutional policies to ensure the interests of the widest range of people. Of course, political supervision can also be used to regulate the normal operation of political organizations and political systems, especially if there are problems in political decision-making and management, it can be timely corrected, so that the whole political system can carry out sound operation. It can be seen that the process of influencing the entire political system through political participation is the whole process of participating in political life, which is the most extensive, the most real and the most effective democracy.

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Finally, legal political participation embodies the good value orientation of democracy. People pursue and yearn for democracy because democracy can provide everyone with a way to express their appeal and long-cherished aspirations, achieve fairness and justice, bring civilization and harmony, and help people realize their dreams and live a peaceful and happy life, rather than bringing unrest and war even leading a turbulent and unsettled life. Only legitimate political participation can bring peace and stability, and can fill the whole society with positive energy of truth, goodness and beauty, rather than the negative energy of falsehood and ugliness.

In a word, this paper argues that democracy is the people's democracy, democracy naturally means the people's maximum political participation, and only the people's maximum political participation can promote the real people's democracy. However, whether the current political participation is limited participation or maximum participation, political participation is crucial to the value of democratic politics, and its development goal is consistent, that is, the realization of political democratization. Therefore, political participation is always a core subject worthy of democratic political research.

4.3. Future Trend of Theoretical Research on Political Participation in China and the West

The development of modern politics is marked by the universal participation of citizens in politics. According to the common characteristics of the definitions of political participation in China and the West, which focus on the subjects, contents and methods of political participation. it is not difficult to predict that the future research trend on political participation theories in China and the West will aim to achieve universal participation, which is as follows:

4.3.1 Realizing the universalization of political participants

Everyone has the right to participate in politics, whether they are professional politicians or ordinary citizens, and this right cannot be denied. At the same time, the purpose of participating in politics is to maximize people's interests, because political rights determine people's economic, cultural, social and other rights. Therefore, from the level of political participants, the future study of political participation theory cannot be separated from the topic of how to expand political participants, whether in the form of individual or organizational participation, the universalization of political participation needs to be realized in the end, and then the democratization of realistic politics.

4.3.2 Realizing the Comprehensive Content of Political Participation

Since political involvement is all the people's right, and the political life involving all government activities in the country should be the scope of political involvement, including all direct and indirect political life, rather than limited to government decisions or personnel arrangements and other local matters. Therefore, there is a needs to research how to realize everyone's comprehensive political participation and finally realize everyone's self-management in the study of political participation theory in the future.

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4.3.3 Diversification of Political Engagement Channels

The boundaries between the political and non-political spheres of modern society have blurred, and the development of online communities has led to a diversification of political participation, with people not only focusing on political affairs, but also participating in politics through "civic activities" such as volunteering and social affairs (Putnam, 2000). The diversification of forms and causes of political participation in the Internet era has promoted the in-depth study on participation in politics in academic circles in the past 20 years (Ning, & Meng, 2019). In today's society, human beings have stepped into the digital era, and the methods and actions of citizens' political participation will develop in the direction of technological politics. Therefore, the diversification of methods of political participation has become a problem that the future political participation theory needs to study.

In short, it is important to study how to maximize the people's widespread and extensive political participation in the future study about Chinese and Western political participation theory.

5.Conclusion

By combing the views on political participation in Chinese and western democratic theories, and then basing on the comparative analysis about the definition of representative political participation in China and the West, this paper explores the similarities and differences of theoretical studies on political involvement in China and the West, and looks forward to the common fields of future theoretical studies on political involvement in China and the West, that is, how to achieve universal political participation with the broadest diversity of the people, and realize the purpose of self-management for everyone.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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