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CHINESE LOCAL CONGRESSES IN URBAN COMMUNITIES:
POLITICAL COMMUNICATION
THROUGH THE LIAISON STATION

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Chinese Local Congresses in Urban Communities:

Political Communication through the Liaison Station

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_____ (Signed)

_____ Li Ruozhu _____ (Name of student)

To My Family:

Ms. Tan Suhua,

Mr. Zhao Hongshu,

Mr. Li Bolin,

Andy, and

My dear daughter, Yavanna

致我的家人：

谭素华 女士，

赵鸿书 先生，

礼柏林 先生，

Andy，以及

我亲爱的女儿 Yavanna

Abstract

The People's Congress Representatives liaison station in residents' community (人大代表社区联络站, hereafter "liaison station(s)"), first set up in Shenzhen in 2005, was recognized as a permanent agency within the urban neighborhoods in China after the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party in 2012. Owing to the growing numbers and visibility of liaison stations, this study investigates whether such an institutional arrangement promotes the communication between the People's Congress representatives and their constituencies, and decreases the compartmentalization between elite participation and non-elite participation.

Drawing on the three representation styles of the People's Congress representatives classified by Melanie Manion (2014) and the compartmentalization theory elaborated by Woo Yeal Paik (2009), I first developed a theoretical framework on two dimensions (representation type and compartmentalization) with six potential models (pork-barrel, deliberation, penetration, mobilization, corporatism, and meritocracy). Based on the data collected through fieldwork in Shenzhen and from online archives, I then investigated which models could explain the political communication between the representatives of People's Congress and their constituencies through the channel of liaison stations. Key elements involved in the process of communication, including channel, receiver, source, message, and feedback, were examined in the analysis.

The findings suggest that liaison stations provide a form of political

communication encouraging non-compartmentalization between the participation of the People's Congress representatives (elites) and that of their constituencies (non-elites). Three of the potential models—pork-barrel, deliberation, and meritocracy—are considered suitable for explaining the process of such political communication through liaison stations, although the explanatory power of the other three models, especially the corporatism model, cannot be fully ruled out. I argue that the current move toward non-compartmentalization has the potential to develop into a more mature form in the future, but right now it remains limited and still in an early stage.

One unexpected finding is that the residents' committee plays an important role of mediator, and have combined forces with the People's Congress representatives to bridge the gap between government and residents. Residents' committees are crucial for the liaison stations' efforts to advance non-compartmentalization. The settings and operations of liaison stations are deeply embedded in the residents' committees, so that liaison stations have the opportunity to benefit from the resources provided by the residents' committees. This finding has important implications for the achievement of elite and non-elite integration in political communication: it is beneficial to introduce a third party, who has displayed a long-term commitment to both groups.

The research goes beyond the discussion mainly concerning the representation of the People's Congress in the existing literature. The findings provide more details and fresh insights for understanding the actual operation of China's representative system in grassroots governance, and for developing subsequent research on liaison stations, the People's Congress system, and democratic development in China.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In China's form of political participation, is the elite compartmentalized from the masses? Noting the prevalence and durability of so-called authoritarian regimes (Freedom House, 2011, 2014, 2015; Puddington, 2010, 2012, 2013), scholars are curious about how they survive and sustain their rules. This is especially true for the one-party regimes, "the most common type of authoritarian rule, [which] has proven to be more stable and to grow faster than other types of authoritarianism" (Magalony & Kricheli, 2010, p.123). Some studies have shown several interesting features about the stability of these one-party regimes, as Magaloni and Kricheli (2010) put it, such as they "last longer" (Huntington, 1968; Geddes, 2003; Magaloni, 2008), "suffer fewer coups" (Cox, 2008; Geddes, 2008; Kricheli, 2008), "have better counterinsurgency capacities" (Keefer, 2008), and "enjoy higher economic growth" (Keefer, 2006; Gandhi, 2008; Gehlbach & Keefer, 2011; Wright, 2008). To explain this, studies have found that successful authoritarian regimes are those that make use of so-called "nominal democratic institutions," such as having a legislature, at least in name. Those are found to be strongly associated with regime longevity (Gandhi 2009; Gandhi & Przeworski 2007; Geddes, 2006).

One famous theory for analyzing this strategy is the Cooptation theory, according to which the state allows groups from outside to enter the inner circle so as to have a formal voice in the public policy-making process; in other words, the state may broaden its appeal "by making policy concessions in a direction favored by potential opponents"

(Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010). This kind of policy compromise made "within a specific institutional framework, namely the legislature" (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, P4), was created by authoritarian regimes in order to co-opt, or absorb, the opposition by giving them a place in, but limited control over, policy. On the other hand, scholars believe that the state also implements some strategies to build mass support. As Magaloni and Kricheli (2010) claim, in these regimes, "mass support is important for the stability of the regime because it enhances cooperation within the ruling coalition," such as opening some channels for public participation and distribution of vested interests (Magaloni, 2006; Geddes, 2006, 2008; Pepinsky, 2007). After reviewing the literature on the one-party rule from 1950–2006, Magaloni and Kricheli (2010) suggest that researchers should pay more attention to the abilities of these regimes to "appease simultaneous threats to their stability from within the elites and from within the masses" (p. 126).

China is not exceptional in adopting democratic institutions in its so-called authoritarian setting (Manion, 2014). Scholars of contemporary China have focused on elites and non-elites to understand political participation there (Paik, 2009). The latter focus mainly includes public participation channels, such as village committee elections (Chen & Zhong, 2002; Hu, 2005; Jennings, 1997; Kennedy, 2002; Li, 2003; Levy, 2007; Manion, 2000; 2008; O'Brien and Li, 1999), petitions (Cai, 2004; Chen, 2005; Luehrmann, 2003; O'Brien and Li, 1995), and administrative litigation (O'Brien and Li 2004; Peerenboom, 2008; Pei, 1997). The former mainly focuses on certain cooptation instruments, such as the People's Congress, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and membership of the Communist Party (Paik, 2009).

However, when the potential opponent elites and non-elites are both equipped with a variety of resources from the cooptation process, how is the state to resist the risk of being overthrown, maintain survival, and even create prosperity? As mentioned above, the key issue is how to "appease simultaneous threats to their stability from within the elites and within the masses" (Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010, p. 126). In the Chinese context, one enlightening theory proposed by Paik (2009) is the "compartmentalized" style of political participation. In this theory, the structure of compartmentalized political participation greatly reduces the formation of cross-class networks of the type that have developed into elite-led opposition movements. "When such networks exist, they can encourage some opportunistic political elites to defect and/or challenge the incumbent party by mobilizing the non-elite masses, who see an alternative to the status quo" (p. 7). According to this observation, in some other countries, "interactions between these groups are more likely under three circumstances, namely (1) large-scale semi-competitive elections, (2) totalitarian mobilizations, and (3) revolutionary situations", but "China has not had these three elements since abandoning totalitarianism in 1978" (p. 22). The reason for this phenomenon, in his opinion, is that "this compartmentalization of participation in contemporary China stems from the lack of large-scale semi-competitive elections" (p. 22), and its consequence is "the development of exclusive local clientelist structures that cause elites' exploitation of non-elites" (p. 24).

This logic is helpful for understanding how cooptation works within the Chinese legislative institutions, such as the People's Congress. Most levels of the People's

Congress Representatives are elected respectively by the People's Congress at their next lower level. The nomination process is not openly discussed. As noted by Manion (2008), "the process remains a purely elite game" (p. 629). Under this institutional arrangement, the channels, through which the People's Congress Representatives (who are mainly elites) can directly keep in touch with their constituents, are absent.

However, if we analyze the People's Congress system at different levels, the story may be different. The "People's Congress" in the Chinese language means "great meeting of People's representatives" (directly translated from Chinese "ren min dai biao da hui,"人民代表大会). The Constitution claims it is the organ through which the people exercise state power to ensure that "all power of the state belongs to the people." The rationale for this statement is that the grassroots-level People's Congresses are directly imbuing the elections, and by extension, the higher-level People's Congresses thus have the legitimacy and confidence to label themselves as the "Representatives of the People."[1] Therefore, it seems that the directly elected grassroots-level People's Congresses provide a chance to disprove charges of compartmentalization of elite and non-elite political participation. Representatives who are labeled as local elites, such as entrepreneurs, lawyers, scholars, leaders of social groups, and presidents of universities, schools, and hospitals, are elected by direct election, which provides a potential public

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[1] According to the Organization Law of the People's Republic of China for Local People's Congresses All Levels and Local People's Governments at All Levels (中华人民共和国地方各级人民代表大会和地方各级人民政府组织法), "The People's Congresses of the provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities directly under the Central Government, cities divided into districts, and autonomous prefectures are elected respectively by the People's Congress at their next lower level. The People's Congresses of cities not divided into districts, municipal districts, counties, autonomous counties, townships, nationality townships and towns are directly elected by voters."

participation channel for non-elite voters and motivates the representatives to keep a relatively close relationship with constituencies to hear the voices of citizens.

Does this mean then that the grassroots-level arrangement of People's Congress already breaks the compartmentalization of elite and non-elite political participation? This certainly was not the case in the past because there was no officially established channel for the interaction between representatives and their constituencies, especially when the congresses were not in session. Without a formal channel, there was always some distance, or gap, between the representatives and their constituencies, so that the representatives did not know how to approach the voters for support and understanding. Neither did the constituencies have the information about how to contact their representatives to influence policy-making for local affairs. In this sense, even the directly-elected People's Congresses at the grassroots level also provided evidence to support the theory of compartmentalization.

Nevertheless, as China keeps developing, new phenomena are continually emerging, which may act as windows for us to observe the chance for change. In 2004, the revised Organization Law of the People's Republic of China for Local People's Congresses at All Levels and Local People's Governments at All Levels (中华人民共和国地方各级人民代表大会和地方各级人民政府组织法) clearly decreed that "Local People's Congresses at various levels shall maintain close contact with the voters or electoral units and primary constituencies, and listen to and reflect up their views and demands (地方各级人民代表大会代表应当与原选区选民或者原选举单位和人民群众保持密切联系,听取和反映他们的意见和要求.")." However, there was no operable

guidance about how to realize this formally. The first "People's Congress Representatives Liaison Station in Residents Communities" (人大代表社区联络站, or, liaison station) was established in 2005 by resident volunteers inside the Moon Bay residents' community of Shenzhen City, to facilitate contact and communication between the People's Congresses Representatives and their constituencies. Following this grassroots governance innovation, the liaison station concept spread widely in the following years. In 2012, liaison stations were officially mentioned in the Report of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China: "Liaison stations should be established in People's Congresses to improve the mechanism for representatives to maintain contact with the people (设立代表联络机构,完善代表联系群众制度)." The liaison stations are therefore considered as a permanent People's Congress agency within the resident communities in urban China, with offices, staff, and budgets. They are designed to function as channels to promote and facilitate communication between People's Congress Representatives and their constituencies. In the following years, the liaison station inside resident communities became more popular in urban China as a new institutional arrangement. For example, by 2015, for the city of Shenzhen alone, there were already 183 liaison stations. For all of Zhejiang Province, there were 2,600 such stations.[2]

Because "legislative development is a central component of political change, and the health of it (especially in socialist systems) can provide us with information about mass-elite relations" (Vranken, 1992), we can consider liaison stations as a precious

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[2] These two places provide official accurate numbers online, so I used them as examples.

opportunity to observe Chinese politics. The hope was for them to facilitate the interaction between the People's Congress Representatives, who are mainly local political, economic, education, and technical elites, and the ordinary citizens, their voters. Based on my pre-thesis fieldwork in Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Tianjin, I got the impression that, despite being a grassroots-level institutional arrangement, the liaison stations present certain characteristics that are useful for understanding the relationship between the representatives and their constituents. These include exploring trends in the relationship between elite engagement and public participation, and examining whether the political participation process of elites and non-elites will actually solidify the compartmentalization necessary for maintaining the survival of the regime.

Although this grassroots-level adjustment was only an embryo, Yu Keping (2010, 2012) already described it as a hope for realizing representation and thus the promotion of the democratization of China. What characteristics of this new arrangement herald some future trend that makes it worth further investigation? Firstly, as a newly institutionalized channel, the liaison station is expected to offer an opportunity to reshape the patterns of communication, or even of representation, between representatives and their constituents. Secondly, as a new arrangement related to both elite and non-elite in the grassroots governance area, it provides an excellent platform from which to observe the interaction between China's local elites and non-elites. Thirdly, as a new component of the residents' community, it may supplement a critical piece of the puzzle of the conjunction between state and society, which needs to be enlightened for future reform of the People's Congress System and even the

democratization of China.

Because of the above significance, I decided to carry out a study on liaison stations. I cold-visited 105 liaison stations within 11 months in 2016 and 2017 in order to answer a very basic question: **What is the liaison station?** Based on this, I tried to figure out its significance to the People's Congress system from both practical and theoretical perspectives.

This dissertation is based on data obtained from the above fieldwork. I hope that my readers will obtain a good understanding of the following questions:

1) What does the liaison station look like? (Chapter 5)

2) How does the liaison station carry out "liaison"? (Chapters 6, 7, and 8)

3) Does the liaison station bring anything new to the People's Congress system? (Chapters 2, 3, and 9)

Chapter 2: The Chinese People's Congress System and the Establishment of the Liaison Stations

2.1 Chinese People's Congress System

The Chinese People's Congress is a multi-level system. At the top, it is the National People's Congress (NPC). Below are the local People's Congresses.
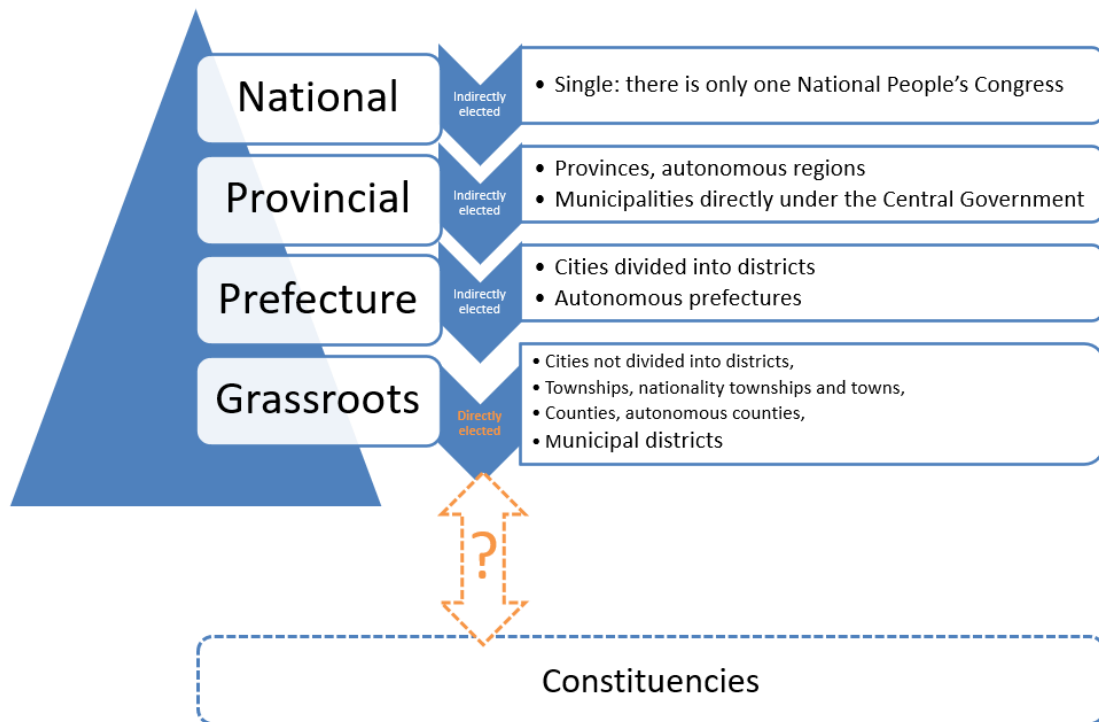
Figure 2.1 The Chinese People's Congress System

On September 15, 1954, the first session of the NPC was held in Beijing, which marked the formal establishment of the People's Congress. However, the onset of the Cultural Revolution severely undermined the Constitution and other laws, and the NPC did not hold any meetings until January 1975. After the Cultural Revolution, the

Chinese People's Congress system was gradually restored.[3]

The People's Congresses are the fundamental political system of China: "According to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, all state power belongs to the people. The NPC and the local People's Congresses at various subsidiary levels are the bodies through which the people exercise state power. The People's Congresses at all levels are constituted through democratic elections, are responsible to the people, and subject to their supervision."[4]

In practice, however, the degree to which the People's Congresses influence the state has been questioned. The BBC, for example, dismisses the Chinese Congress as a rubber stamp: "Under China's 1982 Constitution, the most powerful organ of the state is meant to be the NPC, China's parliament. In truth, it is little more than a rubber stamp for party decisions."[5] O'Brien (1990) concurs: "It is a mere formality that the people mock as a rubber stamp. In people's eyes, the People's Congress system exists in name only. People regard the NPC as a phony organ of idle talk" (p. 60). During the Mao era, in particular, it was "a legislature whose ancestry was in the 'revisionist' Soviet Union. And the 'capitalist' West had no place in the Chinese political system. It was ignored and scorned, called a 'rubber stamp' or a 'phony organ of idle talk'" (p. 3).

In recent years, however, scholars contend that the NPC has come to play a more

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[3] *The Development Process of the People's Congress System, 人大制度经历的发展历程*. The official website of National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 人大制度经历的发展历程_中国人大网. (n.d.). http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/npc/dbdhhy/12_3/2015-02/28/content_1906406.htm.

[4] *Introduction of the System of People's Congress*. Official website of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China. (n.d.). http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/c2842/column.shtml.

[5] *How China is ruled*. BBC News website. (MMIX, or 2009). http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/in_depth/china_politics/government/html/7.stm.

meaningful role in Chinese politics. Dowdle (1997) notes, "It is no longer a secret that the NPC has recently shed its "rubber-stamp" character and emerged as an independent and influential force in China's political arena" (p.1). In Xia's (1998) study of the institutional transformation of the NPC from 1978 to 1998, he found that, by taking advantage of the changes in the political environment, the Congress had created a network that allowed it to pursue legislative development and expand its functions and power.

2.2 Local People's Congresses

Local People's Congresses (including provincial, sub-provincial, and grassroots levels, see Figure 2.1) are organs of state power for specific administrative areas. Only the lowest level People's Congress Representatives are chosen by means of direct elections. Upper levels are chosen by indirect election. As described by the NPC website:

Local People's Congresses of the People's Republic of China at various levels are established in accordance with the divisions of state administrative areas, […]. Local Peoples Congresses at various levels are established through democratic elections. The People's Congresses of the provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities directly under the Central Government, and cities divided into districts and autonomous prefectures are elected by their respective People's Congresses at their next lower levels. The People's Congresses of cities not divided into districts, municipal districts, counties, autonomous counties, townships, nationality townships, and towns are directly elected by voters. […] The local

People's Congresses at various levels are the organs of state power in their respective administrative areas. Local people's government, people's courts, and people's procuratorates are elected by the People's Congresses at the corresponding levels, to which they are responsible and report their work and by which they are supervised. [6]

The functions of local People's Congresses at or above the county level include elections, policy-making, supervision, and legislation. People's Congresses at the lowest level cannot legislate.

As noted, in recent years, People's Congresses have played a more substantial role, which view can be seen in the studies on local People's Congresses. Xia (1997, 2000) has shown that the provincial People's Congresses have developed a network strategy with other powerful institutions and social groups. With the help of these networks, "the provincial People's Congresses have woven their own information links and dramatically enhanced their abilities to collect, process, and disseminate information, both from the central leadership in Beijing and from deputies and ordinary citizens at the grassroots." (Xia, 1997, p.10). Xia (1997) also sees the new role of the provincial People's Congresses as that of an "information broker" that links the government to the people: "As a result of informational efficiency and rationality maximization in decision-making, the provincial People's Congresses have become more institutionalized and been expanding their power to the extent that they are already

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[6] *Local People's Congress and their Standing Committees*. Official website of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, (n.d.). http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/pc/11_5/2007-11/20/content_1686624.htm

power players with weight in Chinese sub-national politics" (Xia, 1997, p. 10). MacFarquhar (1998) has observed that the provincial People's Congresses are beginning to assume institutional lives of their own, though not necessarily democratic ones. In Cho's (2006) analysis of Provincial People's Congress legislation, he argues that "local legislative politics, government agencies, legislative committees, and various social organizations began to take part in open-ended contests of persuasion, where they frequently both clashed and co-operated to further their organizational interests. Provincial People's Congresses, after having secured their lawmaking authority in the late 1990s, have played two distinct roles: as coordinators of conflicts of interests and as representatives of various social group voices" (p. 592).

There have also been changes in the People's Congresses beyond the provincial level in recent decades. Cho's (2002) investigation of the oversight activities of county-level People's Congresses shows that they became more confrontational with government bodies in the 1990s and much more influential. Along with the party and other government entities, they became important actors in local politics, moving from "'rubber stamps' to 'iron stamps'" (Cho, 2002, p. 724). Manion (2008) studied People's Congresses at the provincial, municipal, and county levels, and concluded that, "Local Congress representatives emerged as winners from the 1995 reforms. The reforms adjusted procedures to mandate legitimate voices for Congress representatives, and the representatives responded" (p. 628). At the same time, Manion notes that "judging simply from Congressional composition…representatives at lower Congress levels, particularly the township level, may be less inclined to act as agents of party committees

and more inclined to represent the interests of ordinary Chinese" (p. 627). In 2013, Kamo and Takeuchi analyzed the proposals submitted to the Yangzhou Municipal People's Congress and found that its representatives had increasingly represented the interests and demands of their electorate, and that the local People's Congress had become a place to present and coordinate various interests, which were often in conflict with the interests of the local Party committee. In Ma's (2015) study of budget supervision by local People's Congresses, he observes that, although the development of budgetary oversight is still in the early stages, it has already begun to "restructure the existing power relations between the People's Congresses and the government in China" (p. 699).

Other studies, in contrast, focus on the continuing limitations, rather than the strengths, of the local People's Congresses. Having conducted an investigation of "independent candidates," Yuan (2011) concludes that "the Chinese Communist Party tightly controls "direct elections" and takes every measure in those contests to prevent grassroots power from entering even the primary-level People's Congresses" (p. 389). Similarly, in a case study of the changes in People's Congress in Zhejiang from 1990 to 2009, Almén (2013) found that the central party leadership, determined to maintain its monopoly of the cadre management system, reduced the influence of the local standing committees on People's Congress cadres.

As the preceding discussion makes clear, although the statutory role of the People's Congresses is clearly formulated, the extent of their actual role is still a controversial topic that requires further investigation.

2.3 Grassroots People's Congresses

The liaison station in urban China, the research objective of this study, is mainly related to the lowest level People's Congresses in cities. Thus, I will introduce the situation of urban grassroots People's Congresses in this section as the background directly related to this study. In order to illustrate the characteristics more concretely and vividly, I use a municipal district's People's Congress as an example. Figure 2.2 outlines the characteristics and roles of the municipal district People's Congress, taking the People's Congress of M district in R City as an example, where I conducted pre-field observation. Information on the agendas of meetings, the job titles of the representatives, and topics of this Congress' proposals are presented (slightly altered to ensure confidentiality). Through this example, we can understand why the question of "how representatives keep contact with their voters" is still a problem in need of being solved even in the grassroots People's Congresses where direct elections are employed, even though, according to law, "local People's Congresses at various levels shall maintain close contact with the voters or electoral units and primary constituencies, listen to and reflect upon their views and demands."[7]

First, Representatives are elected directly by ordinary citizens. Unlike the

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[7] According to the Organization Law of the People's Republic of China for Local People's Congresses at All Levels and Local People's Governments at All Levels (中华人民共和国地方各级人民代表大会和地方各级人民政府组织法), "Local People's Congresses at various levels shall maintain close contact with the voters or electoral units and primary constituencies, listen to and reflect upon their views and demands (地方各级人民代表大会代表应当与原选区选民或者原选举单位和人民群众保持密切联系,听取和反映他们的意见和要求)."

upper levels of the People's Congress, municipal district People's Congresses work directly with voters and primary constituents (i.e., residents and resident communities). In the case of M district, from July to September in the year 20XX, the People's Congress organized the election for the new term, in which 366 representatives were voted out. M district was divided into 180 electoral sub-districts; the voters were the residents of these sub-districts. In every electoral sub-district, the number of candidates was larger than the quota. Although the nomination process was not fully open to the public, it can be assumed that the residents had at least some influence in deciding the winners. Typically, electoral sub-districts are divided according to the existing boundaries between resident communities. In the case of M district, the temporary offices of the electoral committee, who implemented the election, were built inside the resident committee (RC, 居委会) offices. Several resident communities were combined to form one electoral sub-district, and the electoral committee's staff was basically that of the RCs of these resident communities.

Second, the agenda of the annual meeting is very tight. Usually, the duration of the annual meeting is only three to five days. Like other municipal district People's Congresses, the one for M district meets formally only once a year and is attended by most of its 366 representatives. This means that 366 people must read, discuss, and make decisions about this M district's core issues of the whole year within 24 to 40 working hours. As a result, it is impossible for them to keep in close contact with voters in such a busy schedule when the meeting is in session, even though this is the time of year when they are most focused on their representation work. The agenda of the M

district annual meeting for the year 20XX gives a sense of the busy schedule (see Table

2.1).

Table 2.1 Example of a Meeting Agenda

Date		Time	20XX Meeting Agenda of the People's Congress of M district of R City
Day 1	PM	3:00	Preparatory Meeting: Discuss the meeting agenda and decide whether to approve it
Day 2	AM	9:30	Delivery of the working report and plan of government of M district
	PM	2:00	Deliberate the working report and plan of government of M district
		4:00	Deliberate the report of the 20XX budget implementation and 20XX draft budget report of M district
Day 3	AM	9:00	Delivery of the working report of the standing committee of the People's Congress of M district
		10:00	Delivery of the working report of the people's court of M district
		11:00	Delivery of the working report of the people's procuratorate of M district
	PM	2:00	Deliberate the working report of the standing committee of the People's Congress of M district
		3:00	Deliberate the working report of the people's court of M district
		4:00	Deliberate the working report of the people's procuratorate of M district
		5:00	Discuss the CV of candidates for representatives of R City People's Congress
Day 4	AM	9:00-11:00	Vote to decide on the working report of the government of M district
			Vote to decide on the report of the 20XX budget implementation and 20XX budget report of M district
			Vote to decide on the working report of the standing committee of the People's Congress of M district
			Vote to decide on the working report of the people's court of M district
			Vote to decide on the working report of the people's procuratorate of M district
		11:00	Vote to elect the representatives of R City People's Congress
		12:00	Announce the newly elected representatives of R City People's Congress

Third, the Representatives of a municipal district People's Congress do not

generally consider it a full-time job. They have other employment and job titles.

Municipal district People's Congress Representatives are, for the most part, local elites

with professional occupations. In the M district elections of 2011, most of those elected

were government officers and leaders or core members of various local organizations,

such as private enterprises, state-owned enterprises, hospitals, universities, schools,

research institutions, and social associations (see Table 2.2). As Manion (2008) has

noted, elections "remain a purely elite game" (p. 629). As a result, their work schedules are so busy that, without effective incentives, they have little motivation to spend more time and energy connecting closely with voters between sessions.

Table 2.2 Workplace and Leadership Roles of Representatives of M District in R City

	Leader	Key member
Private enterprise	95	3
State-owned enterprise	53	1
Hospital	16	5
Social association	6	0
University	9	6
Middle school	6	0
Primary school	4	1
Training school	5	0
Kindergarten	3	0
Research institution	14	0
Government officer	131	
Lawyer	3	
Staff member	5 (2 primary school teachers; 1 research institution researcher; and 2 university staff members)	

Fourth, the functions of municipal district People's Congresses do not include "formulation of local regulations." In a word, they have no legislative power. They do not function as a typical legislative body; instead, their proposals are more about specific local issues. These proposals may be related to the interests of the representatives' profession, may be related to the constituencies, or related to a wider range of interests than just the constituencies.

In the case of the M district People's Congress, 11 proposals introduced during the 20XX annual meeting were considered of significant importance by the Standing Committee of the Congress (see Table 2.3). Proposals 1 through 3 were closely aligned

to the representatives' own professional interests and called for more support from the local government. Proposal 4, while dealing with matters belonging to the representative's profession (lawyer), had a broader scope and dealt with the relationship between the law and the government. Proposal 5 is an example of a proposal that represents the interests of constituencies rather than those of the representative's profession—a traffic-related proposal proposed by a doctor. Proposal 6 also addresses the concerns of the constituencies but has a broader scope. According to a staff member, Proposal 6 "was initially only designed to reflect the complaints of residents from the electoral district of the writer (the representative), but after we found out that many communities also had this problem, we worked together with the representative to modify the proposal in order to reflect the common interests of a broader region of M district."[8]

Proposals 7 and 8 represent the interests of the entire M district rather than those of specific constituencies or professions. Bills 9 through 11 were proposed by grassroots government officers who deal with local affairs and represent the residents of their communities. These bills reflect their own professional interests as well as the interests of the community residents.

Table 2.3 Representative Proposals of M District in R City

	Proposal Title	Proposer
1	Researching ways to strengthen the capacity of maternal and child healthcare institutions	Dean of the Maternity and Child Healthcare Agency of M District

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[8] This is from an interview with a representative during my pre-field work in Jan 2016.

2	Promoting vocational skills training to support regional economic development	Principal of XX Vocational Training School
3	Creating a three‑year action plan to promote primary and middle school sports and improve student physical health	Principal of the Science and Technology Experimental Primary School in M District
4	Promoting law‑based administration, speeding up the transition to law‑based government	Lawyer, Director of XX Law Firm
5	Removing illegal sellers and smoothing the traffic of XX Road	Doctor, Director of the Department of Orthopedics of XX Hospital
6	Immediately addressing old building reconstruction problems	General Manager of XX Industrial Co., Ltd.
7	Enhancing the image of M district and developing a cultural tourism industry	General Manager XX Life Insurance Co., Ltd., R City branch
8	Establishing an economic innovation circle at A University and B University	Director of the Social Security Center of R City, M District Branch
9	Renovating the offices and activity rooms of the resident community committees to maintain the standards	Director of XX Residents' Community Committee of M District
10	Researching ways to make the XX Street environment greener	Secretary (and leader) of Working Committee of XX Street of M District
11	Researching ways to promote home‑based care for the aged	Director of XX Residents' Community Committee of M District

In summary, on the one hand, People's Congresses at the municipal district level are naturally closer to ordinary citizens than upper-level representatives. The residents directly vote for the representatives, and the representatives should maintain contact with the residents according to their duties. In addition, the proposal topics suggest that they are not only concerned with the interests of their own interest groups, but at least seem likely to advocate for the interests of the residents of their constituencies or of even larger areas.

On the other hand, there are some factors that prevent contact between representatives and voters. First, most representatives have their own full-time jobs, which keep them busy and restrict the time they can devote to Congress. In addition, the limited time of annual conventions also makes it difficult for them to contact voters

during meetings. So, even at the grassroots level, where employs direct elections, how representatives keep in touch with voters remains a problem that needs to be solved. Although grassroots issues often appear trivial and insignificant to people, the degree to which grassroots People's Congresses keep in touch with voters is actually related to the legitimacy of the entire People's Congress system, and even the legitimacy of the entire political system, because, as mentioned earlier, the People's Congress is a multilayer structure, with every level of representatives elected by the next level. The relationship between the lowest People's Congress level and the voters is the cornerstone of the legitimacy of the whole system.

Thus, the crucial question here is, how should the People's Congress system, especially the grassroots-level People's Congresses, stay in touch with ordinary people?

The People's Congress Representative liaison stations in residents' communities may provide the answers. Actually, if we search it online in Chinese, we will find some very positive descriptions of it. Such as the "Golden key to solving the Congress problem," Or "it can bridge the last kilometer between the People's Congress and the people."[9] Of course, most of them are from official media, but the interesting part is that they acknowledged that the People's Congress system does have some loopholes and problems that need solving, and that there remains a certain distance, or gap,

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[9] "多一个联络站，社会就多一个减震阀," National People's Congress official website,
http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c16115/201601/8e834b69cd814703a4c72dea62c3a5e2.shtml
"破解人大工作难题的金钥匙," National People's Congress official website,
http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c16115/201606/9171872a132f427b9daa6fb3396d11af.shtml
"人大代表联系群众的最后一公里," National People's Congress official website,
http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c30834/202001/11b9c989c2654911afc86cceb006c525.shtml

between the People's Congress and the people, as we have already noted. They use the last kilometer, a metaphor, to describe this problem and consider liaison stations as the solution. Can such a new institutional arrangement at the grassroots level help solve the problems of the whole system? Based on information from my fieldwork described in chapters 5–8, which took me 11 months to visit more than 100 liaison stations, the liaison station structure and operation will be described in detail to analyze whether they can truly facilitate communication between directly-elected People's Congress Representatives and voters. Before that, in the last part of this Chapter, I will briefly introduce the origins of this relatively new institutional arrangement.

2.4 Establishment of the Liaison Stations

At this point in the background, we can roughly take the liaison station like this: it is a kind of People's Congress branch set in the residents' communities in urban China to promote and facilitate communication between the directly elected primary-level People's Congress Representatives and their constituencies. This relatively novel institutional arrangement, according to the current public information, began in 2005 as a spontaneous act of residents in a community of Shenzhen. Thirteen Shenzhen residents, as volunteers, established the first liaison station in China for the purpose of linking the People's Congress Representatives with residents. In May 2008, the city of Shenzhen issued a policy to create pilot liaison stations throughout the entire city. At the same time, this model was spreading to other cities across China.

According to news reports and Chinese papers[10]，The first liaison station was located in 2002, when the Moon Bay community of Nanshan district, Shenzhen City, was selected as the site of a garbage incineration power plant (南山垃圾焚烧发电厂). This triggered a series of complaints from residents. A petition was circulated and there were grassroots interventions, but the situation was not resolved.

In 2005, the residents established the first liaison station in response to the complaints. The liaison station provided a means of communication between citizens and the People's Congress Representatives so that they could work together to negotiate with the government effectively.

The participation of the local People's Congress Representatives proved to be the turning point. Their intervention opened up a dialog between the government and the residents. The Nanshan district government then invited some residents to visit garbage power plants in Japan, South Korea, and Macau. After they returned, the residents made presentations of their findings to the community. Meanwhile, the government was responsive to the residents' suggestions regarding building a waste compression station, ensuring effective supervision, and other issues.

Ao Jiannan (敖建南), who emerged as the spokesman for the residents, observed that the People's Congress Representatives receive significantly more attention from the government than the general public. When there is a problem to be solved, residents

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[10] For example: Chen Wen. (2010). A Sample of Liaison Station of Peoples Representatives from Shenzhen. Journal of Decision, (9), 61-63 (陈文. (2010). 人大代表联络站的深圳样本. 决策, (9), 61-63.). Ao Jiannan's Life as an "extra representative", Nanfang Daily, February 15, 2012 ("敖建南的"编外代表"生活"，《南方日报》，2012 年 2 月 15 日).

should turn to these representatives rather than relying on their own limited means. The problem, however, is that residents did not know who the representatives were or where to find them. Ao decided it was necessary to find a way to link the People's Congress Representatives with the general public.

In 2002, Ao and four other volunteers started to work as "liaison agents," and in 2005, with 12 colleagues, he established the first liaison station in China in order to link the People's Congress Representatives with his fellow residents. The members of this liaison station were volunteers, not People's Congress Representatives, and were community leaders in property management, industrial development, and schools. They took turns performing various duties, including collecting public opinion, and coordination, and communication with the People's Congress.

The liaison station offered the local People's Congress a means to keep in contact with their constituents when the Congress was not in session. In January 2008, "the harmonious community construction of the Nanshan two-way interaction system" (i.e., the liaison station) won the "fourth session of China's local government innovation awards" and was highly praised by the Leaders of People's Congress of Guangdong Province. In May 2008, the Shenzhen Municipal People's Congress Standing Committee general office issued "Guidance of the Trial of the 'People's Congress Representatives Liaison Station' in Resident Communities," which brought the success of the Moon Bay liaison station to the attention of the whole city. Dozens of new liaison stations were built in other resident communities in Shenzhen. By 2015, there were 183

liaison stations in Shenzhen. In 2016, an online platform was created.[11]

The popularity of liaison stations has spread throughout China, particularly in municipal district People's Congresses. In 2012, they were promoted in the Report of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China: "Liaison stations should be established in People's Congresses to improve the mechanism for representatives to maintain contact with the people (设立代表联络机构, 完善代表联系群众制度)", as a term under the theme of "advancing political reforming" and sub-theme of "supporting and guaranteeing the exercise of state power by the people through the people's congress". The liaison stations are therefore considered as a permanent People's Congress agency within resident communities in urban China, with offices, staff, and budgets. They are designed to function as channels to promote and facilitate communication between the People's Congress Representatives and their constituencies. In the subsequent years, liaison stations inside resident communities became increasingly popular in urban China as a new institutional arrangement.

Still, there are doubts about whether the liaison stations will prove to be an effective bridge to the People's Congress. Growing numbers alone do not convey whether the stations have actually managed to break down the compartmentalization between elite and non-elite. This thesis examines the workings of the liaison stations in Shenzhen. It relies on material obtained first-hand from fieldwork during 11 months in 2016 and 2017. After describing the structure and operation of the liaison stations, I will analyze how well they are working in bridging the communication gap between People's

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[11] Website of Shenzhen's Representatives' Liaison Office. https://sqllz.szrd.gov.cn/

Congress Representatives and residents and their significance to the whole system.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Analytical Instruments

The theoretical framework for my study is based on Manion's (2014) classification of representation styles and Paik's (2009) theory of "compartmentalization participation." By applying Paik's notion of compartmentalization/non-compartmentalization to Manion's classification, I developed a framework, which can be tested with the empirical data from field work.

Manion (2014) divides the representation styles of the representatives of the Chinese local People's Congresses into three types: "mandate," "Leninist," and "trustee." Manion's "mandate" and "trustee" types correspond to the "mandate" and "independence" theorists, respectively, outlined in Pitkin's (1967) theory of representation: "The mandate theorist sees the representative as a 'mere' agent or representative; the independence theorist sees the representative as a free agent or trustee." The Leninist type of representation Manion describes as "guardianship by a revolutionary vanguard party, which is organized hierarchically and possessed a superior understanding of the historical laws of development discovered by Marx. As the communist party is the sole organization with the politically correct knowledge to lead society, it is also the authoritative arbiter of society's interests" (Manion, 2014, p. 319-320).

Manion (2014) designed a questionnaire to determine the representative styles of the local congress representatives. They were asked to rate their degree of agreement

or disagreement with following three statements about the relationship between themselves and their constituents:

Congress representatives should side with (*baochi yizhi* 保持一致) the majority of their constituents, because constituents best understand their own interests.

Congress representatives should obey the decisions of the Communist Party organization because the Party best represents the interests of constituents, and constituents do not always understand their own interests.

Congress representatives are able to represent the interests of their constituents, even if this means not always siding with their constituents. (p. 321)

These three statements highlight the differences between the three styles of representation: the mandate style involves siding with constituents; the Leninist requires obedience to the decisions of Party; and the trustee represents the interests of constituents independently. Based on her survey data, Manion (2014) reported that, 60 percent of the respondents "agree" with a mandate view of congressional representation, and 32 percent "basically agree" with it. The Leninist view elicited only 30 percent agreement, and trusteeship only 22 per cent (p. 321).

Table 3.1 Representatives' Views of Congressional Representation (Manion, 2014, p. 322)

	Mandate	Leninist	Trustee	
Agree	**60.2**	**29.5**	**21.6**	
Basically agree	31.8	34.0	30.2	
Somewhat disagree	6.1	27.6	28.1	
Disagree	1.9	9.0	20.2	
Total %	100	100	100	
Observations	4,912	4,810	4,802	
View closest to own view	**59.8**	**23.0**	**17.2**	100%
Observations				4,005

Manion's classification offers one way of distinguishing types of representation, and the "compartmentalization participation" theory developed by Paik (2009) also helps us to understand the relationship between the representatives and their constituents. Paik (2009) argues that political participation in China is "compartmentalized" (i.e., the participation of the elite is quite separate from that of the non-elite). Such compartmentalization discourages the formation of networks connecting the classes, without which there is a greater chance of elite-led movements. Paik views the People's Congress as an institution whose participation is restricted to the elite; the non-elite are virtually excluded. One of the critical questions I will address during the examination of the role of liaison stations will be whether these stations have challenged the established compartmentalization.

After integrating Paik's compartmentalization/non-compartmentalization dichotomy and Manion's classification of representation styles, I developed a two-dimension theoretical framework with six models: the pork-barrel model, deliberation model, penetration model, mobilization model, corporatism model, and meritocracy model (see Table 3.1). In the empirical chapters that follow, I will use this framework to examine whether non-compartmentalized participation styles have become evident as a result of the introduction of liaison stations, and to determine which model or

models best describe the communication between the local People's Congress representatives and their constituencies offered by these channels.

Table 3.2 Theoretical Framework

		Representation styles		
		Mandate	Trustee	Leninist
Relationship between elites and non-elites Participation	Compartmentalized	Pork-barrel model	Corporatism model	Penetration model
	Non-compartmentalized	Deliberation model	Meritocracy model	Mobilization model

3.1 Corporatism Model vs. Meritocracy Model

As Manion (2014) notes, the independence theorist sees the representative as a free agent or trustee, capable of acting autonomously. She cites Pitkin (1967) who argues that when representatives take "independence" too far, they simply become oligarchs. In this study, I make a further distinction between two models of independence: the first – the corporatism model – is based on the compartmentalization between elite and non-elite political participation, and the second – the meritocracy model – is based on the potential for the non-compartmentalization of elite and non-elite political participation.

Corporatism refers to policies and institutional arrangements for structuring interest representation. As Unger and Chan (1995) observe, "In a corporatist framework, the state cannot dominate directly. It leaves some degree of autonomy to organizations within each of their spheres of operation. But to ensure that that the agreements will be honored by all parties, it demands that organizations exercise some discipline and control over their own memberships" (p. 30). Manifestations of corporatism fall into two categories. The first is "social" or "democratic" corporatism, which has been

widely practiced in Austria, Switzerland, Germany, and some northern European countries. It views the political process in terms of democratic competition, social partnerships, and informal but continuous political bargaining among interest groups (business enterprises and labor unions in particular), bureaucracies, and political parties (Katzenstein, 1984). The second is "state" corporatism, in which a state grants some groups privileged status and access in return for compliance and some retention of influence (Groot, 2004). In state corporatism, the weight of decision-making power lies with the state, and the watchword is top-down control (Unger & Chan, 1995). In the Chinese institutions characterized by state corporatism, such as the Political Consultative Conference, Democratic Parties, United Front (统一战线), and Women's Federation, the members are vetted by the state, with the intention of co-opting and incorporating the elite of critical sectors (Unger & Chan, 1995), particularly, the People's Congress "can be labelled as a state apparatus designed and utilized by the central/local states as a corporatist mechanism to shape state–society relations" (Qian, 2016, p.15), by "selectively including or excluding functionally different social segments based on intentions of state elites and policy goals set by them" (Qian, 2016, p. 17).

When the corporatism model is used to analyze the relationship between the directly elected People's Congress representatives and their constituencies, it highlights one interesting possibility for political communications through liaison stations. Unlike a Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (政治协商会议，CPPCC) member's sub-sector, which reflects the interests of the group to which the member

belongs, the People's Congress electoral districts are divided by geographical location and the constituencies for a representative are the ordinary citizen area, who usually do not belong to the representative's interest group. If the state corporatism model prevailed, representatives would be prone to further the interests of their own groups and, in collusion with the local government, would exploit, sacrifice, or, at the least, ignore the interest of the ordinary citizens who elected them. According to the state corporatism model, representatives have as much independence as an autonomously free "trustee" and have less motivation to really represent the interests of their constituents. These elite representatives' political participation, then, creates compartmentalization from the non-elite participation. That is why the corporatism model is located at the intersection of the "trustee representation style" and "compartmentalized relationship", in the framework of this study.

The meritocracy model, in contrast, is located at the intersection of "trustee representation style" and "non-compartmentalized relationship." According to Skorupski (2013), "pure" meritocracy is "a political order with a constitution that vests ultimate sovereignty in a ruling group solely on the grounds that that group has relevant competence and virtue" (p. 116). Meritocracy has a long history in Eastern Asia and close ties with Confucianism, which is still influential in current political system. It offers an alternative to the choice between the ""good" democratic and the "bad" authoritarian regimes" (Bell, 2015). Bell and Li (2013) consider Singapore a meritocracy, where the goal is to choose leaders according to their talent and good character: they cite Lee Kuan Yew's description of Singaporean society: "Singapore is

a society based on effort and merit, not wealth or privilege depending on birth. The elite provides the direction, planning, and control of state power in People's interest. … Singapore is Meritocracy. And these men have risen through their own merit, hard work, and high performance" (p. 3). Bell and Li consider China another example of political meritocracy because the imperial examination system and Confucian tradition can empower people with no family wealth or political privilege to seek upward mobility as scholar-officials. Meritocracies inspire trust in ordinary people because leaders are chosen on the basis of their merits.

Although "pure" meritocracy may be an impossible ideal, the importance of meritocracy in Confucian thought and practice would indicate that another potential model of political practice in modern China is one that blended meritocratic and democratic elements. Bell (2015) argues that this combination should be meritocracy at the top and democracy at the bottom. However, my study borrows the core meaning of meritocracy (competence of politician, for example intellectual abilities, social skills and moral virtues) to discuss the possibility of its emergence in the People's Congress practice at the bottom (or say, grassroots level). Actually, some scholars already have applied the idea of meritocracy in the analysis of grassroots politics in China, for example, both Di (2017) and Zhang, Chen & Wang (2019) tried to understand and envision the grassroots political practice in rural China through the lens of meritocracy.

While the combination of democracy and meritocracy advocated by Bell (2015) is a vertical combination, the combination in my model is in a different way, that is, a combination of form and substance; People's Congresses representatives at the

grassroots level are nominally elected through democratic elections, but in the process of fulfilling their duties after being elected, they actually define their representation by practice in the way of meritocracy. Specifically, in this study, the meritocracy model can be described as follows: although directly elected People's Congress representatives may not agree with their constituencies on some specific issues, they would be trusted as responsible, independent trustees, who are able to represent the People's interest based on their own expertise and merit. Constituencies assume that their representatives will act as "converters," who will take the rough opinions of citizens and turn them into an appropriate and efficacious appeal. As there are no strong constraint mechanisms for this representation process, we should assume that if there is a conflict of interest between the elite and non-elite, the constituents' interest would probably be overruled by the elites. Still, in cases where there is no strong conflict of interest, the expertise and merits of the elite representatives would be helpful in facilitating non-elite political participation and would foster the integration of elite and non-elite participation. Also, it should be borne in mind that when non-elite constituents seek help from representatives, they tend to select the ones who have relevant expertise and merits, and similar interests. Following Confucian teachings on responsibility, the elites have motivation to keep their reputation as people of merit who are capable of absorbing the "rough" views of their constituents while retaining the independence of their own insights and ideas. According to the meritocracy model, representatives play the role of independent trustees, as they do in the corporatism model, but the relationship between the elite and non-elite is much less compartmentalized.

3.2 Penetration Model vs. Mobilization Model

Although Leninist theories are no longer as prevalent among Chinese scholars as they were decades ago, they still provide considerable insight into the state of modern day China. Manion (2014) describes Leninist representation as "an antidemocratic, elitist view of representation":

> Lenin conceived political legitimacy in ways that justify a monopoly of power by a communist party elite that is neither popularly elected nor specifically responsive to popular preferences. In Leninist theory, preferences are categorized from historical class interests. Ordinary citizens are ignorant to their own real (i.e. historical, class) interests; ipso actually, elite responsiveness to the expressed preferences of the majority does not advance society. Instead, Leninist representation is guardianship by a revolutionary vanguard party, which is organized hierarchically and possessed of superior understanding of the historical laws of development discovered by Marx. As the communist party is the sole organization with the politically correct knowledge to lead society, it is also the authoritative arbiter of society's interests. (p. 320)

Manion then questions if the self-perceived style of People's Congress Representatives is Leninist representation. She maintains that, if it were, the Representatives would "obey the decisions of the Party because the Party best represents the interests of constituents, and constituents do not always understand their own interests" (2014, p. 321).

In to my framework, this obedience to the Party on the part of representatives is the defining feature of the penetration model. China "transformed Leninism from an organizational weapon of revolution into an organizational format of governance" after 1949 and the Chinese Communist Party is the dominant political power "at the national, provincial, municipal, and county levels", and its Primary Party organizations (*ji ceng dang zu zhi*) have penetrated society so deeply that they control decision-making "in every work unit of businesses, schools, hospitals, shops, and neighbourhoods" (Chen & Gong, 1997). Although nowadays it seems the extent of the Party's penetration is somewhat less than it was, it is still a significant variable when we analyze grassroots politics.

The penetration model usually takes a very specific form in the People's Congress: When the People's Congress is in session, every discussion unit is required to establish a temporary Party organization (lin shi dang zhi bu), and the People's Congress must establish a temporary Party committee (lin shi dang zong zhi) to convey the Party's platform[12]. So how does this model manifest itself when the congress is not in session? Here, my hypothesis is this: if the actual operation at the liaison station conforms to this model, then Representatives are independent of their constituents but dependent on the Communist Party system. They obey the decisions of the Party, and their role is primarily to convey Party decisions to their constituents, and to do so at the expense of the interest of constituents; Residents' voices are intentionally ignored or even silenced

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[12] This is from an interview with a representative during my pre-field work in January 2016.

by Representatives to achieve the Party's goals. Thus, this model is located in the category in which there is clear compartmentalization between elite and non-elite political participation.

There is also a model that follows Leninist theory but that does not compartmentalize elite and non-elite political participation, which I will call "the mobilization model", that enlightened by what Paik (2009) indicated, the mass mobilizations in China such as the Cultural Revolution lead to non-compartmentalization between the elite and non-elite political participation. Unlike the penetration model, which is intent to preserve the status quo, the mobilization model relies on mobilizing non-elites to judge, purge, and even to kill local and central government officials (Esherick et al., 2006; Schoenhals & MacFarquhar, 2006). This sort of totalitarian non-compartmentalization can lead to severe social unrest and even anarchy, although Paik (2009) argues that it forces "local officials [to be] responsive to the masses to some extent," that it "constrain[s] exploitation of ordinary citizens by local governments and their officials to some degree," and that it highlights "the political presence of the masses" (p. 25).

It is difficult to imagine this totalitarian non-compartmentalization would occur in China again; however, it represents a certain political technique, which can be used by some elites to defeat other elites, of taking advantage of the discontent of non-elites, just as Lenin used mass mobilizations to ignite violent revolutions before taking the helm of the state.

In the context of the directly elected Representatives of the People's Congress, we

will examine whether there is empirical evidence that some elite Representatives take advantage of dissatisfaction of non-elites in order to defeat other elites or achieve a political goal such as to making "local officials responsive to the masses" or ending "exploitation of ordinary citizens by local governments" (Paik, 2009, p. 25).

3.3 Pork-barrel Model vs. Deliberation Model

The last set of models to be tested is the pork barrel model and the deliberation model. In the past, these two terms were mainly applied to typical democratic electoral systems. In recent years, their central meaning has been increasingly borrowed into the analysis of so-called authoritarian states, for example, China (He, & Warren, 2011; He, 2014; Jiang, 2010; Kornreich, Vertinsky & Potter, 2012; Medaglia & Zhu, 2017; Liang, 2021; Manion, 2014; Luo, Zhang, Huang & Rozelle, 2010; Gao, Liang & Xu, 2021).

As a form of mandate representation, according to Manion (2014), the pork-barrel model draws attention to certain commercial features of the relationship between representatives and their constituencies:

… the biggest component of representation in Chinese local congresses is geographically parochial responsiveness. A big component of this responsiveness (except in municipal congresses) is to 'help with some issue', activity that includes constituency service (provision of private goods), but the biggest component is to representative action on some problem constituents 'reflect' up, which mostly concern local public goods. Here, I use the term 'pork' for these goods and 'pork-barrel politics' for delegating actions. Public goods infrastructure is a large

spending category at the grass roots, about 43 per cent of village fiscal expenditures, for example, and most of the funding comes in the form of township or county government allocations. (Manion, 2014, p. 329)

Although communication is vital to the relationship between representatives and their constituencies in this model, it is still a model that is based on compartmentalization. First, it is not a process of interest integration but of merely interest exchange: while elite and non-elite collaborate in the pork-barrel model, their interests remain separate and compartmentalized. Second, it is based on an occasional targeted delivery, not on institutionalized political participation in the public policy-making process: its primary goal is not to motivate long-term regular communication between elite and non-elite.

In contrast, the deliberation model can effectively integrate the different interests of elites and non-elites (or some members of elites and some members of non-elites) by focusing on the common good, instead of targeted deliveries. According to Manin, Stein, and Mansbridge (1987), "Following a usage that goes back to Aristotle, philosophic tradition generally takes deliberation to process of the formation of the will, the particular moment that precedes choice, and in which the individual ponders different solutions before settling for one of them" (p. 345). Applying this process to democracy leads to the concept of deliberative democracy, which Cohen (1989) defines as "an association whose affairs are governed by the public deliberation of its members" (p. 67). In relatively recent years, He and Warren (2011) observed that "Authoritarian rule in China is now permeated by a wide variety of deliberative practices," including

"an increasing use of Peoples' congresses to discuss policy" (p. 296). They argue that it is possible for deliberation to characterize policy-making in authoritarian regimes:

> … it is possible for deliberative influence to affect political decision-making in the absence of democratic empowerments, assuming that (authoritarian) elites have other kinds of incentives, such as functional needs for cooperation and legitimacy. (2011, p. 270)

The deliberation model has the potential to be used to understand the practice of grassroots People's Congresses. First, it draws attention to the fact that authoritarian regimes often pursue their agenda by influencing the representation of congresses. As He and Warren (2011) note, "problems of governance in complex, multi-actor, high-information, high-resistance environments may provide elites with incentives to rely on deliberation in the lack of democratic empowerments" (p. 271). The deliberation model is a form of the mandate representation style that offers elites a way to effectively obtain information and solve problems. Second, the deliberation model emphasizes the significance of communication in the process of representation, which provides opportunities for non-compartmentalization between non-elite and elite participation. Third, the communication it fosters is not superficial, as is the case with the pork-barrel model, which involves a simple exchange of goods between elite and non-elite; instead, it offers a much more significant type of communication, "in which participants in a political process offer and respond to the substance of claims, reasons, and perspectives in ways that generate persuasion-based influence" (He & Warren, 2011, p. 271). The deliberation model aims to achieve common consent and common good. That is why

this model belongs in the category of non-compartmentalization. According to the deliberation model, the representatives use liaison stations as a channel, are motivated to communicate with their constituencies, and seek to promote the interests of their constituencies and various governmental actors in order to realize certain common interests.

3.4 Analytical Instruments

Using the theoretical framework described above, I will examine which model or models best represent the process of communication between People's Congress representatives and their constituencies by means of liaison stations. Some findings from the field of communication theory will be applied to the analysis of this process.

In their study of the contact between congressmen and their constituencies, Grimmer, Westwood, and Messing (2014) focus on the ways political representation influences government spending decisions in the US. The authors found that constituencies lack the time, capacity, and incentives to carefully track their representatives' activities in Congress. The representatives address this gap by providing their own reports: they take constituent inattention as an opportunity to deliver credit-claiming messages. And the constituents are responsive to the legislators' credit-claiming efforts. Thus, representation is realized through this dynamic process, with legislators anticipating how constituents will react to particular kinds of messages, constituents rewarding legislators for their credit-claiming statements, and other actors attempting to affect how legislators cultivate this support. Often the result of this

process is that constituents have their interests represented, but the process is a risky one because legislators may fool constituents. Although Grimmer, Westwood, and Messing's study does not address communication in China's liaison stations, it still provides some insights for the present study. It highlights the fact that political representation occurs as a result of a dynamic communication process in which the legislators and their constituents interact with each other.

Another study that focuses on the face-to-face communication between congressmen and their constituencies in the US offers further insight. Szarawarski (1999) found that "Face to face contact shapes public policy by giving legislators a continuous, unmediated and interactive flow of messages from their constituents" (p. 1). Szarawarski maintains that, while IT technology has led to a decrease in in-person exchanges, face-to-face contact is a powerful means for citizens to transmit their views to legislators, and that it plays an important role in both contemporary debates and broader questions of national politics: "while it is true that the mass media play an important role in contemporary politics and technology has make things like individualized direct mail possible, these developments have in no way taken the place of face to face interaction" (1999, p. 7). Szarawarski cites well-known studies of "home style" (such as, Fenno, 1978; Dexter, 1957; Carol Swain, 1994; Parker, 1980). "Home style" refers to the ways that legislators present themselves to constituents and that they explain what they do in Congress. Based on these studies, Szarawarski (1999) notes that there is two-way communication between congressmen and their constituencies, and that "the signals that legislators receive are as important as the ones legislators send

out" (p. 9).

Drawing on these works, I will try to understand the communication process between representatives and their constituencies, and other actors involved. Liaison stations are intended to provide a venue for interpersonal communication between representatives and their constituencies. After determining the nature of the communication, it will be easier to determine which of the six models best represents the situation in liaison station.

According to communication theory, "Interpersonal communication is the verbal and nonverbal interaction between two (or sometimes more than two) interdependent people." (DeVito, 2016, p. 4) It is communication that takes place between people who are in some way "connected" and it not only takes place within a relationship but also "has an impact on the relationship; it defines the relationship" (DeVito, 2016, p. 4). Because interpersonal communication is relational, "regardless of what you say, you are making reference, in some way, to yourself—to who you are and to what you're thinking and feeling, and to what you value" (DeVito, 2016, p. 5). In this study, I will use the interpersonal communication between representatives and their constituencies to determine the nature of their relationship, to see what style of representation characterizes their communication process, and to discover whether the relationship is compartmentalized.

The basic theory of communication is an action model, in which communication is a "one-way process". Communication begins with a source ("the originator of a thought or an idea"), and then the process involves a number of other elements: encode ("the

transposition of the idea into language or gesture"), message ("the verbal and non-verbal elements of communication"), channel ("the pathway through which messages are conveyed), decoding (the interpretation of a message"), and noise ("anything that interferes with the encoding or decoding of a message") (Floyd, 2011, p.10).

The interaction model of communication takes up where the action model leaves off. It includes all the same elements, but "it recognizes that communication is a two-way process, and adds two elements to the mix: feedback and context" (Floyd, 2011, p. 10).

In the course of this study, I analyze elements of the communication process – source, receiver, channel, message, noise, and feedback – between People's Congress representatives, their constituencies and other actors involved, through the channel of liaison station. After discussing my data and research methods in Chapter 4, I describe the basic setting of liaison stations as a channel in Chapter 5, and examine their dynamic communication processes in Chapter 6, 7 and 8 (Chapter 6 is about source, Chapter 7 is about message, Chapter 8 is about receiver, feedback and noise). In the final Chapter 9, I summarize the findings and discuss how they address the research questions.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter introduces the use of site-intensive methods (SIMS) to research on the People's Congress Representatives liaison station in residents' community (人大代表社区联络站, hereafter "liaison station(s)"), share fieldwork experience, and discuss the limitations.

4.1 Site-intensive Methods

This descriptive and preliminary study attempts to obtain first-hand information and acquire a basic understanding of the liaison station. Therefore, using SIMS as a qualitative research solution, the political communication process between People's Congress Representatives, their constituencies and other actors through the channel of the liaison station is sorted out and introduced, and some basic theoretical models are tested.

Read (2003, 2010) developed a set of methods to conduct qualitative research in the Chinese context on the field of grassroots institutions, named SIMS, referring to "the collection of evidence from human subjects within their ordinary settings, where their interaction with the surroundings informs the study just as the 'researcher's questioning does" (Read, 2010, p. 148). He introduced that such a method is suitable for studying "subtle and hidden politics" (Read, 2010, p. 148), such as China's political system at the ultra-grassroots level.

"Subtle and hidden" is an accurate description of this research topic. This study, which elucidates the interaction between the People's Congress Representatives (most of them are directly elected) and their constituencies through liaison stations in urban China, shares some requirements of methods with the "nuanced and delicate topic" of Read's study, during which he initially used the SIMS to study the relationships and

interactions between residents' committee and their constituents (Read, 2003). In this study, there is a need to examine the relationship between multiple actors (residents, residents' committees, People's Congress Representatives, and the government), and by analyzing the reciprocal network among them, to try to understand the mode of action of liaison stations. This is in accord with Read's explanation of "subtle" by raising examples, including "relationships, networks, identities, styles, beliefs, or modes of action" (Read, 2010, p. 153). Besides, my study is also sensitive to researchers and interviewees because of China's reality of grassroots politics. Only by building a relationship of trust and rapport with the actors of liaison stations will it be possible for a researcher to gain in-depth information during interviews and, on the sites, through careful observation to pick up clues that they might have unguarded. This is similar to what Read means by "hidden": "sensitive, or otherwise kept behind barriers that require building trust, waiting or observing unguarded moments, or otherwise unlocking access" (Read, 2010, p. 153).

To collect data within liaison stations' "ordinary settings," where the actors' "interaction with the surroundings" (Read, 2010, p. 148) takes place, I mainly use (1) the cold visit technique (i.e., I directly knock on the door myself, without official channel arrangement) to get access to liaison stations, to observe the most ordinary situation of their settings, and to seek opportunity for in-depth interviews and observation; (2) in-depth interviews, most of which are taken on-site, to communicate with liaison station staff and representatives of the People's Congress; and (3) observation to immerse myself in the same setting as other actors in the liaison station and to watch their behavior.

4.2 Sampling and Data Collection

"Qualitative research usually works with purposive nonprobability samples because it

seeks to obtain insights into particular practices within a specific location, context, and time" (Gray, 2013, p. 174). This study was conducted in the city of Shenzhen for the following reasons.

1) Birthplace

Shenzhen is the birthplace of the liaison station (see Chapter 2 for details). As this study is the first to systematically comb through communication details via liaison stations, it is an appropriate strategy to choose the liaison station's place of origin as an entry and breakthrough point to observe its operating mechanism. A thorough study of the birthplace will lay the foundation for future studies on other cities' liaison stations.

2) Accessibility

Access to the field is another factor under consideration. During my pre-fieldwork in Shanghai, Tianjin, and Shenzhen, I felt a relatively open atmosphere in some of Shenzhen's liaison stations. Some of them showed a willingness to talk to me during the initial contact. More importantly, the Shenzhen liaison stations are equipped with a unified official website, which makes their basic information more accessible. For example, at the least, it is important to have the exact name and address information of the liaison stations; otherwise, researchers may even not be able to reach any liaison stations accurately. The following reasons lead to this situation: (1) Liaison stations are not well known, so it is difficult for a researcher to reach them by asking strangers for directions. (2) Not all liaison stations are included in the online map, so it is impossible to reach them or to obtain the address information of all the liaison stations in a city through the online map. (3) Not every community has a liaison station, so arriving at a community does not necessarily mean arriving at a liaison station. These realities make it difficult for a researcher to directly obtain a name list and exact addresses of all liaison

stations in a city without asking for help from an official channel in advance of fieldwork. This is a major impediment to researchers who plan to use cold visits to get in touch with sites rather than arranging access through official channels. Fortunately, the official website established by the Shenzhen Municipal People's Congress for all liaison stations in the city provides this basic information directly, which greatly improves the accessibility of the liaison stations.

3) Sheer Number

In 2015, the total number of liaison stations in Shenzhen was 183. This relatively large number facilitates my research, just as Read (2003) reported when he was conducting his fieldwork on residents' committees, that "if one committee is disinterested to entertain questions and visits, the next one down the street might be" (p. 34). In this research, there was a similar need. Shenzhen provides enough liaison stations to prepare for rejection. Also, by observing the actual operation in sites, I hope to sum up Shenzhen liaison stations' overall situation, that is, to emphasize the commonalities among them. Therefore, the sheer number of liaison stations provided me with abundant information and reliability in summarizing the commonalities.

With the use of the cold visit technique, within 11 months between 2016 and 2017, I visited 105 liaison stations and obtained 72 opportunities to interview the staff of liaison stations. Of the remaining 33 liaison stations, 20 had staff members who were absent and 13 who refused to be interviewed. Every time I arrived at a liaison station, I directly knocked on the door, introduced myself, and showed my intention to interview the staff and observe their work. In the sites where I was not rejected, I conducted interviews in their offices, observed their work and their office environment, and applied further opportunities to attend some of their meetings and other activities for in-depth observation.

Besides, I met 24 People's Congress Representatives, 18 of whom I met in the meetings and other activities in liaison stations during my observations so that I observed how they perform in liaison stations. I also had an interview with five of them. Since the representatives are not in the liaison station most of the time, the other six of the 24 representatives were contacted through various channels. Finally, six representatives agreed to accept my appointment for an in-depth interview. Among them, two representatives provided particularly abundant information that I stayed with them for approximately eight hours: (1) I accompanied representative A for a whole day to observe his work periods as a representative, and we chatted during the work process and road travel. (2) I interviewed representative B in the afternoon and continued the interview during and after dinner.

Finally, on the basis of these first-hand sources, I completed a 60,000-word fieldwork record (text includes transcription from interviews and field notes from observation work).

As Read (2010) explained, the trade-offs are inherent in site-based research, notably "the balancing of breadth (studying more units, maximizing variation among them) and the depth (getting the most validity, richness, and understanding out of each unit)" (p. 146). In my research, I also have to make a trade-off between the two. In reality, the work mode of the liaison station has its particularity. Although it is a permanent institution, it does not work all the time (see Chapter 5). It does not start any observable work until it is triggered by the residents or the residents' committee (see Chapter 6). Even if I was to spend a month at the same liaison station, I might not even see it being initiated once. This prevents me from getting as much information from staying in one site for a long time as Read (2003) did. However, this low frequency cannot be used to judge that liaison stations are useless prematurely. I had to observe how they work in reality. Therefore, besides the observation during cold visits, I also

tried to apply to attend some events related to the liaison station's work, such as meetings (see Chapter 7) and other activities (see Chapter 6) for observation. It was difficult for me to be allowed in these activities. For the frontline staff of political institutions, they have risk for offering me this permission. So, most of the time, I was turned down. With my unremitting efforts, I finally participated in several meetings and other activities, where I observed a wealth of details and gained a practical understanding of the liaison station's work. These all ensure the depth of data acquisition. However, this in-depth information comes from a limited number of sites, making it difficult to generalize the insights gained with that of the entire Shenzhen city or even China. It was hoped that through my fieldwork, I would be able to obtain an overview of the general characteristics of the liaison station in Shenzhen city to describe how this relatively new institutional arrangement exists in practice. So, I also paid much attention to breadth. That was why I visited more than a hundred liaison stations, covering the core areas as well as some marginal area of Shenzhen. After most of the cold visits, I was allowed to interview the staff. I made full use of the opportunity of numerous interviews to confirm the information I have gained from my observations. In this process, to make interviews as in-depth as possible, as Section 4.3 below shows, I developed several strategies (1) to extend the interview time as much as possible to obtain more information and (2) to earn the trust of interviewees to obtain more detailed, in-depth, and relevant information. These specific practices allowed me to allocate the limited time between depth and breadth effectively, thereby obtaining a wealth of data.

In summary, my research object is the liaison station, and purposively, those in Shenzhen were chosen in their entirety to illustrate the essence of a liaison station. My fieldwork covered as many liaison stations in Shenzhen as possible, at least covering the city's core area. The sites were not arranged through official channels, and I contacted them by cold visits. Finally, within the limited time, I completed the visit to

105 liaison stations. I used (1) the "cold visit" technique, (2) in-depth interview, and (3) observation as the main components of my fieldwork, and completed a 60,000-word fieldwork record that includes transcription from interviews and field notes from observation work.

4.3 Site Experiences

During the data collection process, especially the cold visits, I have accumulated some experiences and would like to present them in this part. Hopefully, they can help readers understand the results of my study and serve as a reference to other scholars when conducting cold visits in the cities of Mainland China, especially to grassroots.

4.3.1 How to Start a Cold Visit

The steps I took to start a cold visit are as follows:

1. I search for the exact location of target liaison stations through the Internet and then go there.

2. Most of the liaison stations are inside the building of the residents' committee. Thus, after arriving at the residents' committee, I ask the first person I meet in the office (usually a staff member of the residents' committee): "Excuse me, is there a representative liaison station of the People's Congress in residents' community here?"

3. Four kinds of replies may be given: (1) If the answer is "No", I ask "Do you know the location of the liaison station of this community, please?" Then, I proceed to the location given. (2) If the answer is "I do not know", I ask him to help me ask the other staff members until confirmation. (3) If the answer is "Yes", then I continue to ask, "Which comrade is in charge of this work, please?" Usually, the person leads me to meet the staff of the liaison station or calls the person in charge to come out to meet me. (4) The most common reply is "What is the matter?" Then, I introduce myself and tell

him my intention: "I am a student, and I am working on my paper; the paper is about the community liaison station, and I hope I could inquire about something about the operation of the liaison station". When the person confirms that he cannot address my request and that only the staff of the liaison station can respond to me, he gives me one of the three kinds of answers above ("No", "I do not know" or "Yes").

4. After I get introduced to the staff of the liaison station, the staff asks me, "What is the matter?" Then, I introduce myself and explain my intentions.

5. I usually receive two types of attitude: (1) acceptance and (2) rejection (or hesitation). The most enthusiastic reply of acceptance is "Have a seat. Do you need some water?", which means that I could gain a longer interview with him. A calm acceptance reply is "What do you want to know?" Then, I know I can start my conversation with him. The rejection or hesitation reply sounds as follows: "It, it is inconvenient…" Then, I ask for the reason. The frequent reply is "too busy" or confidential reasons, such as "We never welcome interviews", "Student card and the letter could not prove that you are students, and you could be an espionage" and so on. I then insist on carrying out my task if I am rejected. Finally, I decide whether to leave or not. I start a conversation if I am accepted.

The procedure of cold visits was designed before fieldwork but also naturally developed during fieldwork. I was nervous at the beginning because each time I worried about rejection. Having finished several cold visits, I had become calm with psychological preparation.

Academic interviews are neither a media interview nor an expression of residents' opinions; thus, liaison stations are not obliged to entertain me, and rejection is reasonable. Nevertheless, no regulations exist for them to reject me. Hence, I have reason to try and take a chance; the key is how to gain the trust of potential interviewees during the first meet. In addition, giving the key information, including my intention, in a short time, it is crucial to master the details in specific operations (e.g. how to

manage some subtle details of expression, body language, the rhythm of speech and so on) to show respect and enthusiasm for my own study. I required myself to maintain a humble attitude to apply for an interview but also expressed moderate self-confidence to show that this is formal research work. In summary, cold visits are effective methods to open the fieldwork rapidly, and such visits need skills and courage to be started.

4.3.2 How to Deal with Rejection

In addition to skills and courage, cold visits need the persistence of the researcher to face rejection. The adjustment of emotions is crucial after each rejection. Under extreme situations, the interviewees would reject the interviewer with unfriendly language (e.g. "Why did you come to our office for your paper?! You should go to the library!", "We are very busy, and your paper is none of our business!"). I would have negative emotions. However, I needed to adjust my emotions because I would be making another cold visit to the next liaison station, and it may only take me a few minutes to walk there. I should not bring the negative emotion to the next liaison station. Especially in the early period of fieldwork, I easily wondered whether my research would fail once I got rejected. Mindset is crucial at this time because the progress of the fieldwork would be affected. During the cold visits, I needed to keep reminding myself the following: "There are so many sites, so one rejection does not mean failure; failure would only happen if I give up, and there would be hope if I insist"; "Interviewees are different, so the previous mean guy I met does not indicate that the next one is also a mean guy".

Amongst the 105 liaison stations I visited, 58 of them accepted my interviews. Of the 58 offices, 28 had staff who were enthusiastic and even offered me a seat after I expressed my intention. Amongst the 27 offices that rejected me or hesitated, 14 offices accepted my interview after some persuasion, and the rest insisted on rejecting the

interview. I would be disappointed for being rejected but remained optimistic upon looking at the overall results. Most of the front-line staff of liaison stations in Shenzhen were friendly with the investigation concerning the aims of the research, and they did not reject me (Table 4.1). A researcher should not lose confidence after a failure in the process of cold visits.

Table 4.1 Success Rate of Cold Visits in Fieldwork

Total amount of cold visits	105	
Directly accepted	58	55%
Accepted after further persuasion	14	13%
Finally rejected	13	12%
Not at office	20	19%

As mentioned above, I would persuade them if the interviewee rejected or hesitated at first. The following are the specific strategies for persuasion:

1. Begin with a casual chat. I usually initiated the conversation with things that are happening in the office or start with an inquiry of some public and non-sensitive information. The conversation would keep on going once we started chatting. Therefore, one key point after rejection is to try to start a topic, even beginning with some irrelevant stuff.

For example, when I visited a liaison station, an old resident was complaining to the staff of the residents' committee about an experience of being deceived by cheaters. The staff was talking to the old resident patiently. Afterwards, I started to seek an interview opportunity with the staff of the liaison station in the same big office. After I made a self-introduction, he became hesitant. I asked him, "Old people often come here, don't they?" He replied rapidly, "Yes, now the cheaters are too immoral, and they

always focus on the old people! We often post notifications to tell the mass that please do not believe in others, but there are always few effects. You know, cheating on money is not that serious, but you should know that the old people would be so worried once they were cheated, so it may lead to something wrong with their health, such as heart disease. It is so dangerous". He complained to me, and I displayed my understanding by saying, "The job of grassroots is not that easy, and your work is important to the residents…It is so lucky for the old people to have you guys". Then, he said, "Yes, the young people are so busy, so the old people have to talk with us". After several minutes, the atmosphere became relaxed. He said, "What were you saying just now? You are a student and do what? Writing paper?" Then, I repeated my opening to show that I wanted to inquire about the operational situation of the liaison station. Later, I would be allowed to raise some specific questions, "The name is liaison station, so how to carry out liaison?" He changed from hesitation to a natural appearance, and he said, "Have a seat". During my cold visits, when I was asked to have a seat, it would mean a long interview. At this time, he started to make an introduction once I sat down, "Our liaison station is …".

2. Encourage the interviewee to start the answer from a positive aspect. For example, when they refused to have a talk with me, especially for confidential reasons, I said, "I noticed from the Internet that the liaison station of Shenzhen had done a great job, so I would like to learn some successful practices from you". When the interviewee enters the lecturing mode to teach me their experiences and ideas, the interview could be started smoothly.

3. Make a detailed self-introduction. Normally, I would introduce myself as a student with the purpose of collecting materials for my degree thesis. After being rejected, I would further make a more profound introduction, such as "I was born in Mainland China and just started pursuing an academic degree in Hong Kong for not a

long time"; "I often visit Shenzhen"; "I completed my bachelor's and master's degrees in a university in Mainland China". Such information can shorten the psychological distance between the interviewees and me, thus reducing their vigilance.

4. Make a detailed introduction to the research. For example, "my research only needs to know some basic situation about the liaison station, and it is not involved with the confidential things"; "It is in the early period of the research; I don't know the actual situation very much, so you would help me a lot if you could chat with me".

5. Keep good manners. A common saying in China goes, "Don't be angry with a smiling guy". When the researcher keeps smiling, speaks in a peaceful voice, and the body emotion is relaxing, natural and polite, the potential interviewees can hardly make a rejection based on the social customs for face-to-face interpersonal communication. At the same time, keep better expression management and reduce aggressiveness effectively so that the interviewees would feel safe to respond.

4.3.3 How to Make Interviews Last Longer

Interviewees in cold visits are not prepared for the interview. Gaining some relatively real information in such a sudden interview is good, but there is also a risk that the interviewees may be reluctant to have a long talk because they are not prepared. To extend the interview time and gain much more information, I adopted the following strategies:

1. Lead interviewees to talk more about their proficient job. During the interview, each interviewee would be asked about the specific job of the liaison station. For the sudden visit, I assumed that the first part of their answer is their most familiar work. Hence, the first answers would be my probing clue for the next step so that the interviewees could talk more and be more relaxed by talking about familiar jobs. Afterwards, I would raise other prepared questions to acquire information about other

parts of the liaison station's work.

2. Avoid sensitive questions in the early period. For example, funding and elections would be the most sensitive topics in interviews of the liaison stations. The staff will refuse to answer if I ask them about these topics in the early period. Sensitive questions should be arranged in the latter period of the interview after substantial information about non-sensitive topics had been obtained. In addition, if I hoped to build a better relationship with liaison stations for further opportunities to conduct observations, then I would decide whether raising such sensitive questions is necessary on the basis of the atmosphere on site.

3. Listen to complaints patiently. Interviewees commonly complain when they talk about their jobs. Although framework and rhythm exist in the mind of the researcher, the interviewees have no idea about it, and they do not care about it. The greatest benefit that interviewees could gain from one interview is to have a stranger listen to their complaint. Hence, being a good listener and providing improved feedback to interviewees could relax them and make them provide much more information. Furthermore, information in the complaint could bring surprising harvests for a researcher. In my interview, I knew that the election process of the representative of the People's Congress is a sensitive topic, but the interviewee has been in the role to complain and disclose many details, especially the hardships during the organization of the election. Hence, I had a chance to know some specific situations during the election.

4. Satisfy the curiosity of the interviewees about the researchers. Interviewees are sometimes curious about labels, such as "PhD", "University in Hong Kong" and "paper". I would answer their question patiently and tell them what a doctorial student should do in Hong Kong and some other things they are interested in. Such a friendly chat could bridge the gap well.

5. Respect and confirm the work result of the interviewees. Although researchers

often view the reality with a critical perspective, we should have sufficient empathy when we face specific interviewees and confirm and praise the work they described. Empathy can be used to gain much more information, and it shows respect and humanistic care for the respondents. Empathy includes understanding the difficulty of another's job (e.g. "It is really a hard work when you work in grassroots level organisations since there are a lot of works and most of them are so difficult, you guys have done a great job.") and confirming the outstanding performance of the interviewees (e.g. "You are really so smart to solve the problem in this way").

6. Give a positive evaluation of the help given by the interviewees. When the interviewees are willing to accept the interview, they spend energy and time without gaining anything. Especially in cold visits, interviewees and researchers are strangers without brokers. It happens suddenly, and the interviewees are not prepared. Under this circumstance, the information provided by interviewees, regardless of the amount, contributes to the research. During the interview, always seize the right moment to express gratitude for their help. This gesture could encourage the interviewees to provide much more information, and it also shows respect to others. For example, one could praise their ability to express (e.g. "I have been confused about the question for a long time, but I have come to understand with your explanation!") or praise the positive attitude of the interviewees (e.g. "Thank you for your specific answers and I have really learnt a lot!")

According to my experience, the front-line interviewees could talk about additional details of their work and experience when they suddenly take the interview. However, in the second interview, they would probably become more cautious and even unwilling to talk because they may have reported to their leaders about the first interview, and the leaders may have asked them not to disclose information anymore. Thus, the first interview immediately after the cold visit is critical, and the researchers should try to

seize the opportunity to acquire as much information as possible.

4.4 Data Analysis

In this section, to introduce data analysis, I focus on the coding process that has a "central role in qualitative analysis" (Gibbs, 2018, p.54). "In an attempt to help find meaning within qualitative data, researchers commonly start by coding their data" (Blair, 2015). Coding means "how you define what the data you are analysing are about" (Gibbs, 2018, p.54), is "a way of indexing or categorising the text in order to establish a framework of thematic ideas about it" (Gibbs, 2018, p.54) and is "significant to organise and make sense of textual data when conduct analysis" (Basit, 2003, p.143). As mentioned in the previous section, I obtained first-hand data about the liaison station through fieldwork, which formed a 60,000-word text-form record. Based on this text, I began my coding work. The whole coding process can be divided into two stages. The first one is open coding, and the other is deductive coding. The former allowed me to explore the meaning of the data with an open mind. The latter one reorganized my data and directly provided the structure for my writing.

4.4.1 Open Coding

The first step in the process of coding was to read the 60,000-word text repeatedly to familiarise me with it and to take notes with an open mind, that is, to write down my understandings, thoughts and ideas about a section, paragraph or sentence beside the text. In this process, instead of requiring myself to come up with a sophisticated code, I just left some broad code names for future reference and to inspire later analysis.
The process was simple and straightforward in practice. I just read, selected a section of the text and then wrote down the core meanings that I had summed up in it. As soon as I encountered the same meaning again, I wrote down the same note, which is the

process of creating and reusing a code. However, the process was gradual and iterative—As I covered substantial text, I discovered the connections between many codes and then naturally merged or grouped them into a larger category or sorted out the logical relationships between them. I then took a few preliminary themes and used them to go back and look at the text that had been processed and obtained new inspirations and new codes.

Although this process was rough and preliminary, it yielded considerable gains because some themes emerged by themselves from the data. A good example is the pair of "static" and "dynamic" codes. They were not designed in the codebook before I collected the data but appeared naturally when I was doing open coding. In the later work, these two codes became central themes that enabled me to show the static setting of the liaison station and the dynamic workflow separately. These codes were useful to describe and analyse the liaison station. Finally, they directly shaped the framework of my thesis writing.

Another important example is the "residents' committee" and the more than 60 related codes for its various "actions", such as mediation, negotiation, advocacy and decision making. This example greatly aroused my interest, making me pay more attention to the role of the residents' committee in the operation process of the liaison station. With this beginning, eventually, "residents' committees as a meaningful third party is introduced into the communication process of liaison station" became an important finding of this thesis.

4.4.2 Deductive Coding

Coding is "not just labelling, it is linking" (Saldaña, 2021, p.12) and "leads you from the data to the idea, and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea" (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 137). The second phase of coding focuses on making a reasonable

linking between the data and the idea. To this end, I firstly modified the codebook I compiled before data collection using the useful codes obtained in the first coding phase and themes that were initially summarised from them. Then, I used this updated codebook to conduct several more rounds of coding.

Before data were collected, my codebook focused on (1) the theoretical framework and (2) the reality under predictions. The former included the two dimensions and six models mentioned in Chapter 3 (representation type and compartmentalisation; pork-barrel, deliberation, penetration, mobilisation, corporatism and meritocracy models), as well as six elements related to communication (channel, receiver, source, message, feedback and noise). The latter included some predictions of features of the People's congress representatives, staff and voters and their communications. Through the data collection work of the fieldwork and the first-phase coding work, I had a substantial understanding of the actual operation of the liaison station, thus greatly enriching the coding vision of reality. Therefore, the code in the codebook of reality was greatly revised, especially enriching the details of the communication process, as well as adding many codes related to the residents' committee.

In the process of modifying the codebook, I established the linking route between the data and the research problem through the code (see Figure 4.1 and Table 4.2). The research question of this thesis is "What is the liaison station?" To answer this question, three sub-questions need to be answered. They are (1) What does liaison station look like? (2) How does the liaison station carry out liaison? (3) Does liaison station mean anything new to the People's Congress system? To answer these research questions, the data were coded into five themes, and a progressive relationship was found between them. Firstly, we need to figure out what liaison stations look like statically (basic settings) and dynamically (workflow); Then, in order to answer how the so-called "liaison station" to carry out "liaison", we need, based on the descriptive result, to

highlight the sections that are closely related to political communication, that is, to clarify the communication elements involved in its settings and workflow; Next, in order to answer whether the practice of liaison stations has had any contribution to the congress system of China, especially bring about any change to the compartmentalisation state between elite participation and non-elite participation, we need to identify who the actors are in each communication elements and then try to understand the relationships between the actors to test if they match any of the six models (pork-barrel, deliberation, penetration, mobilization, corporatism and meritocracy).
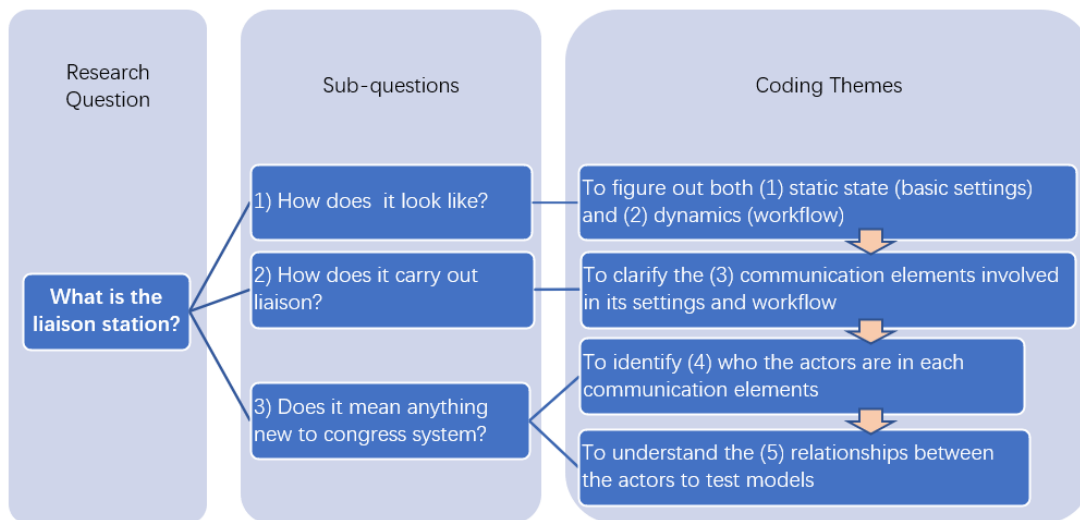
Figure 4.1 Route from Research Question to Coding Themes

Table 4.2 Code Frame and Examples

Themes	Category (Examples)	Code (Examples)	Data (Examples)
(1) Settings	Appearance	Location	*The liaison station and residents' committee are in the same physical location. (Interview 23)*
		Office	*This liaison station, again, shares the office with residents' committee. (Memo of interview 16)*

	Expenditures	Amount	*The fund is 2000 yuan per year. We spent it on the representatives' activities, for example, their transportation and meals during visits to the community. (Interview 64)*
		Sponsor	*These costs are added to the RC's accounts. (Interview 33)*
(2) Workflow	Trigger	Make appointment	*Representatives of the People's Congress are not based in our community. They are school principals and hospital directors, and so on. They rely on appointments. (Interview 49)*
	Inform Government	Information carriers	*Some of the issues raised by the residents, including travel, transportation, such as irregular signage leading residents the wrong way, they get reported. After the proposal is made, the district People's Congress or the municipal People's Congress representatives may send a liaison letter to the relevant government departments and then let them rectify the problem. (Interview 60)* *When we make a call before going through the formal procedure, the requirements we raise are more targeted, and we can save a lot of time. Sometimes they can be solved with a simple phone call, which eliminates the need for a paper procedure, which can also significantly improve efficiency. (Interview 73)*
(3) Communication Elements	Message	Cases dealt with by liaison station	*For example, there is a car repair station in our neighborhood, which is too noisy for nearby for residents. The problem is solved through the representatives. (Interview 03)*
		Filter	*Because some of our representatives deal only with issues concerning the street office, they have a clear idea what falls under their purview. If they think they can pass the issue on to the government, they may do so directly. (Interview 79)*
	Feedback	Possible routes	*Then, when the government department has handled it, or is in the process of handling it, that department will directly report back to our liaison station about results or progress. If a liaison letter was sent by a representative, the government replies to the letter. If the representative only had a chat with someone in the government, the government's feedback will be conveyed verbally to the residents through the representative. (Interview 42)*
		Feedback on-going project	*Larger problems cannot be solved immediately. It's hard for the government to do it in a month. The government will have to work for a long time. Then, at the end of the first month, the government will give you a phased response to tell you how far they have progressed, and later update you if there is further progress. (Interview 72)*
(4) Actors involved	Residents	Residents not equals to voter	*For most, their hukou isn't here. However, it doesn't matter whether they are voters or not. Once people live here, they are residents. We are available to all residents. It has never been said that the only people who can you come to the liaison station for advice and help are voters. (Interview 03)*
	Staff	Liaison station staff is also staff of residents' committee	*He is a part-time liaison station employee. His own work is about Party affairs, so he goes to XX province to improve his skills and his knowledge of Party affairs. (Interview 61)*
	Representatives	Busy	*To be honest, representatives all have a very high position or high social status. They have so many things to do that they cannot spend their energy here in liaison station every day. (Interview 63)*
		Elite	*They are all elites in their respective areas. (Interview 64)* *They are generally powerful and influential. (Interview 03)*
	Residents' Committee	Referral	*Residents will tell us [RC] first if they have any problems or comments and suggestions. For the IIV and reception activities, we, I mean the residents' committee, will decide which problems the liaison station can solve, and then tell the residents who have these problems to participate in the*

			activities, to sit down face to face with the representative, to have a chat about their problems or issues, and to hear the representative's opinions, ideas, and solutions. (Interview 64) *For example, in our community, there were water leakage problems in the exterior walls of several buildings, and we [RC] considered it should be solved as soon as possible. Later we brought representatives to the scene to investigate. (Interview 46)*
(5) Relationship Between Actors	Pork-barrel model	Targeted Services	*They all have their own jobs, and they can use their own resources to provide services to so-called voters. (Interview 53)* *Here we have a particularly enthusiastic representative, who is the head of our village [in the city]. He is more enthusiastic about our community. He is the head of our village and a resident of our community. (Interview 64)*
	Deliberation model	Negotiation	*On the day of a reception, residents will report their problems to representatives. And representatives and the RC will discuss them on the spot. For some of the problems, the representatives suggest that the RC solve them directly if they think it is possible. If the RC agrees, then there is no need to refer such small issues to the government through the liaison station. The RC will deal with them by itself. (Interview 06)*
		Compromise	*We'd love to be able to do everything for the community, but in practice it isn't possible. In some cases, even if we contact the government, it is not effective. But if the residents' committee or the residents have strong demands, we are willing to try. Even if the result is not ideal after trying, we will try our best to explain to the residents where the key problem lies. (Interview 74)*
	Meritocracy model	Interest integration	*They are filled with a sense of responsibility and become well-known in the community. Like me, most of the representatives I know are very serious about gaining a reputation in the community. We feel that since we have been elected as representatives, we want to do something real for the residents, to really solve some problems. (Interview 73)*
		Merits	*At the liaison station, we can use the positions and the expertise of People's Congress representatives to solve the problems of the residents. (Interview 36)*

Using the updated codebook, I conducted several rounds of coding. I reread my interview and observation records, with the codes provided in the codebook to label the sentences or paragraphs that met the meaning of the codes. Then, I reread several rounds to evaluate whether the text and codes matched well and made some adjustments. Then, I clustered all the sections labelled by the same code and organised them by the categories and themes provided in the codebook. Finally, the data collected by fieldwork were reorganised into a meaningful structure that can address the research questions.

Coding provided not only an effective path for my description and analysis work but also a structure for my writing. Chapter 5 includes the setting section, and Figure 5.7 presents the workflow section; a complex flowchart covers the main description content of Chapters 6, 7 and 8. The communication elements comprise the reference,

which became my basis for the systematic organisation of the findings (Chapter 5 for "Channel", Chapter 6 for "Source", Chapter 7 for "Message" and Chapter 8 for "Receiver", "Feedback" and "Noise"). On the basis of the above, the analysis of actors and the relationship between actors has become the foothold of each chapter's analysis part.

Above is my brief introduction to data analysis. The open coding stage can be considered an inductive coding process, where codes, categories and themes emerge naturally from the text. The second stage is deductive coding, which uses a finalised coding frame to code the text. Thus, my analytical approach can be understood as a combination of induction and deduction.

4.5 Limitations

The limitations of the research, particularly concerning the methodology, must be acknowledged. Firstly, the samples came from only one city and thus may pose problems for generalisation. However, the main purpose of this study is to understand the political communication process between People's Congress Representatives and their constituents through liaison stations; thus, it serves as a descriptive preliminary study. We can expect subsequent studies to conduct further work on numerous samples or conduct surveys using all the liaison stations in China. The greatest contribution of this study lies in the in-depth combination of the actual operation of the liaison station in a specific city, the elaboration of the communication and relationship between the participants and the demonstration of its basic logic. The conclusions based on such detailed first-hand data are also a fundamental contribution to future research. Therefore, although we could not directly acquire information about all the liaison stations in China, we could obtain information about the actual operation and survival logic of the liaison stations in at least one major Chinese city, and some of the

conclusions of this study are available for reference and verification in further empirical studies.

Secondly, the samples could not be designed before starting the "cold visit". This limitation is based on the subtle and sensitive context of grassroots politics in China; thus, we used site-intensive methods (SIMS) that were "kept behind barriers that require building trust, waiting or observe unguarded moments, or otherwise unlocking access" (Read, 2010, P150). Moreover, I was only able to obtain information from those sites that had not rejected me because of the above procedure, which also results in a possible bias.

Thirdly, anonymous measures were used to reassure and protect the informants. Only the name 'Shenzhen City' was disclosed; other names, such as those of municipal districts, residential communities, liaison stations and informants, were purposefully masked and denoted by code names. For all the interview quotes in this thesis, I used serial numbers as identities of the interviewees. I also anonymously described the data from observation. In Chapter 7, for example, I went through the details of a meeting where I was referring to participants by their titles (e.g. leader of residents' committee, People's Congress Representatives) and pseudonyms (e.g. Mr. Li, Ms. Hu). I also randomised information about gender. I also removed the details of the work content mentioned in the meeting to ensure that real information was not traceable. Moreover, I added extraneous material to obscure meeting details. In this article, I did not use photos that would reveal the real location of the interviewees. For example, in Chapter 7, to describe the hardware layout of the conference site, I drew a diagram rather than use a scene image. In addition, in some contexts, using specific names was convenient; thus, I always used "XX" instead of a specific place name, or specific time, such as XX Liaison station, XX Community, 20XX year. These anonymity measures were necessary, and I did my best to keep details that are important for the conclusion and to

the readers. However, these anonymous processes undoubtedly led to some loss of information.

Fourthly, my experience as a former insider may lead to some bias. In addition to theoretical and practical relevance, another reason I paid attention to this topic is I was a former People's Representative. When, why and how to contact my constituents caused confusion for me as a representative in the past, and it remained to be a puzzle for me as a PhD student because no sufficient channel was provided by the institutional arrangement to ensure effective communication between representatives and their constituents when I was in office. During the preliminary field work, I found out about liaison stations, a new channel of the People's Congress system, and felt that this might become a breakthrough in the communication process between representatives and constituents. My own work experience motivated me, and I felt quite passionate about this topic. The experience also provided me some efficient help to conduct the study, e.g. insight of implications and empathy.

However, some biases and limitations may also come from my past work experience. As a former insider, I may have lost a calm spectator's view and could lack neutrality and detachedness. Thus, when I tend to defend the representative's choice, I should be aware of this potential loophole. on the other hand, as a former practitioner, I may have my own work habits in fulfilling my responsibilities as a representative and thus could form a path-dependence in dealing with things in a certain way. This situation may affect my perception of other representatives' work approaches. Therefore, I should keep an open mind, avoid prejudice and try to obtain a deep and comprehensive understanding even when the situations are familiar to me.

I was a unique case as a representative, especially in the aspect of using liaison stations. Firstly, I was only 25 years old and an ordinary staff member in a university when I was elected to be a representative through a competitive election; thus, I had no

label as an elite in contrast to the other more than 200 representatives of that election. Secondly, the university was an independent electoral district; the voters were mainly students and teachers of the university; and the main activity in university is to teach and study, which may hold a different political atmosphere from constituents of resident communities that outside the university. Thirdly, although liaison stations widely established all over China, no such station was inside a university, so I had never used them when I was a representative. In summary, for me, the research subject is not that familiar, and even I can say that this topic is fresh for my representative career because it is mainly about liaison stations (which I never had the chance to use) in resident communities (which I never had the chance to work in); moreover, the topic emphasises the representatives' elite label (which I did not have). Thus, in the process of this study, I was a researcher who tried her best to understand the field through SIMS.

Another important limitation is the "filtering processes" of data, which may take place in this study and cause some bias. I will discuss it in detail in the conclusion section (see Section 9.4).

Chapter 5: Channel: The Basic Setting of Liaison Station

As a relatively new institutional arrangement, the liaison station has been variously described in media reports and official propaganda. It has been dubbed "the shock absorber of society,"[13] "the golden key to solving congress's problems,"[14] and "the last kilometer for People's Congress representatives to connect with the masses."[15] These descriptions imply that the station offers a means of improving the People's Congress system and fostering grassroots democracy in China. Before its role can be evaluated, however, a basic question needs to be answered: what does a liaison station actually look like in practice?

In this chapter, the physical appearance and basic configuration of the liaison station will be discussed in order to provide a clearer picture of this relatively new channel between representatives and residents. After describing the location and appearance of the site, the personnel structure and costs will be examined, at last, this chapter will end up with an overview of the work process.

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[13] "多一个联络站，社会就多一个减震阀", National People's Congress official website, http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c16115/201601/8e834b69cd814703a4c72dea62c3a5e2.shtml

[14] "破解人大工作难题的金钥匙", National People's Congress official website, http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c16115/201606/9171872a132f427b9daa6fb3396d11af.shtml

[15] "人大代表联系群众的最后一公里", National People's Congress official website, http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c30834/202001/11b9c989c2654911afc86cceb006c525.shtml

5.1 Site and Workplace

According to the regulations, liaison stations operate "under the leadership of the street-level organ of People's Congress and the Standing Committee of the District-level People's Congress."[16] This means that the liaison stations are branches of the People's Congress system. The People's Congress, however, does not usually own office buildings in residents' communities. In practice, the locales for liaison stations are generally provided by the residents' committees[17] (RCs). I visited more than 100 liaison stations and most were located in the offices of RCs. The photo provided by the liaison station for its website in Figure 5.1 is actually a photo of the RC office building where it is located.

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[16] 联络站在人大街道工作机构和区人大常委会的领导下开展工作。《人大代表社区联络站工作职责》(Responsibilities of the Liaison Stations (Published by Office of the Standing Committee of Shenzhen〔2008〕No. 45))

[17] In this thesis, the term "residents' committee" ("RC") refers to "residents' committee"(社区居民委员会), "community workstation"（社区工作站), or "city village joint stock company"（城中村股份公司）.

Figure 5.1 Image of a Liaison Station from the Official Website

Notes: The words on the outside wall of the building read: "the Office Building of XX Residents' Committee"; A note at the bottom of the image reads, "The representative liaison station of the People's Congress in XX residents' community

The workspace for RCs was tight even before the advent of liaison stations. When liaison stations were introduced, they had to be squeezed into the existing facilities. Very few have their own independent office rooms; usually, they share a common space with the RC.

How do the liaison station staff work under such conditions? According to the regulations, "in the liaison station, there shall be liaison staff, who is responsible for daily liaison work."[18] In practice, the staff of the liaison stations usually work part-time. Their full-time job is within the RC, and the liaison station work is added to their

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[18] 设代表联络员一人。代表联络员负责日常联络工作。《人大代表社区联络站工作职责》
Responsibilities of the Liaison Stations (Published by Office of the Standing Committee of Shenzhen 〔2008〕No. 45).

workload.

That is to say, when you walk into a liaison station, you will meet an RC employee sitting at a desk in the RC office, handling the work of the RC. How, then, are members of the public to know if this is a liaison station? As Figures 5.2 and 5.3 attest, they must rely on signboards: one that reads "the representative liaison station of the People's Congress in XX residents' community" hangs outside the gate of RC building and another that identifies the liaison station hangs on the wall behind an office desk.

Figure 5.2 A signboard that reads "The People's Congress Representatives liaison station in residents' community of XX District, Shen Zhen" hangs outside the gate of an RC building

Figure 5.3 A signboard that reads "The People's Congress Representatives liaison station in residents' community of XX District, Shen Zhen" placed in an RC office

As the staff assured me, this is a very common phenomenon:

(Staff:) The liaison station and residents' committee are in the same physical location; we just hang a signboard to show that here is a liaison station. There is no separate venue. —— Interview 23

(Staff:) This is our liaison station. Because our residents' committee's space is very limited, the site arrangement relies on a "resource sharing" solution, and a pile of …[signboards][19] are hanging here. —— Interview 14

Access to a conference room is also very important for a liaison station. As a bridge between residents and representatives, the station must provide a place where both parties can meet. Dozens of people can attend these meetings, so an office desk is clearly inadequate. A conference room is, therefore, necessary and is one of the standard

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[19] In addition to the signboards for the People's Congress representatives liaison station, there are also other signs are hung on the walls of RC, for instance, the Party representatives workshop（党代表工作室）and Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference members workshop（政协委员联络站）.

facilities available to a liaison station.

Figure 5.4 Image of a liaison station conference room from the Official Website

The same protocol that is followed for office rooms extends to conference rooms. In an RC, all departments usually share one conference room. Liaison stations, once established, also share the conference room. The conference room is usually described as "multi-functional" because of the LED screens that are used to identify its current use. If liaison station activities are under way in the conference room, the LED screen will display "Meeting of residents and representatives of the People's Congress." In most cases, there is also a liaison station signboard on the wall of the conference room. Information about the representatives and liaison station procedures is displayed on the walls of conference room, indicating that the conference room can be seen as part of the facilities available to the liaison station.

In short, for the most part, a liaison station is simply a shared office desk and conference room, with several signboards inside and outside confirming its existence. Although the space is limited, the fact that the liaison station (as the terminal branch of the People's Congress system) shares space with the RC (as the actual terminal of administrative system) suggests that the liaison station is deeply embedded in the daily activities of the RC.

The most important function of liaison stations is to build a bridge between People's Congress representatives and residents in order to solve problems at the grass-roots level (in Chapter 6-8, we will deal with this function in more detail). Their success depends on frequent contact with the residents. Since the RC is a locale that ensures frequent contact with residents, liaison stations that are embedded in the RC will inevitably come into contact with residents, receive first-hand information about community dynamics, and discover the problems that need addressing.

It is useful to compare the workings of "independent" and "non-independent" liaison stations. The liaison stations described above, that are located within RCs, represent the large majority. A small number of liaison stations, however, are spatially independent of the RC. Given the space constraints of shared facilities, some liaison stations have set up separate establishments. In the course of my fieldwork, I found that, not surprisingly, these liaison stations have more spacious independent offices and meeting rooms, as well as relatively stable full-time staff. Still, these "lucky" liaison stations suffer from one large disadvantage: given their physical distance from the RC, they are not as familiar with the daily operation of the community and therefore not

able to discover and solve problems effectively.

When I visited an independent liaison station (a one-story bungalow, about a five-minute walk to the RC), an employee described the dilemma:

(Staff:) You know, the activities of our liaison station depend on bringing People's Congress representatives to the residents' community. Because next to no residents come to our liaison station directly, we have to go into the community to meet the residents. Before an activity, we will ask the residents' committee to help us prepare the venue, contact the residents, and canvass resident opinions. In addition, there are some problems that already exist in the community. The RC staff know the situation very well and can communicate it to the representatives of the People's Congress when we enter the community. So, I actually need staff from the RC to do a lot of work for me every time.

One employee at the RC is responsible for working with my liaison station and generally on a part-time basis. When I ask for help for the community, this employee has the responsibility to help me with my issues. He helps me get ready for activities, and then I take the representatives to the community to join in the activities. However, to be honest, I think there is no need at all to have the representatives gather here (in the liaison station) first; it would be fine if all of us met together directly in the community. ——Interview 72

Once the liaison station is independent from the RC, it gains more spacious accommodation and a more dedicated staff, but it loses a source of first-hand information and an opportunity to have direct contact with the residents. In order to communicate with the community, independent liaison stations must ask the community RC to give an employee the part-time job of working with the liaison station. In this sense, independent liaison stations do not represent a good return on investment.

Yet because the building looks spacious and beautiful, and the full-time staff appear

to be eager to assist, the independent liaison station has become the model that is exhibited to guests from other governments. While this may bring together various governments, it contributes to the sense that the independent liaison station exists purely for the sake of appearances. It has become a beautiful exhibition, far away from the residents and their concerns.

When I visited an independent liaison station, an employee observed that it often receives groups of visitors:

(Staff:) One of our important jobs is to receive visitors. The municipal People's Congress brings visitors from other parts of the country to visit to show the performance of liaison stations in Shen Zhen, such as the recent visitors from XX province. ——Interview 72

I heard similar reports at all the independent liaison stations I visited. Still, despite their greater attractiveness, as we have noted, independent liaison stations have no effective means to organize community residents or obtain first-hand community information. Because they cannot perform their function without additional help (and the associated expense) of the RC, independent liaison stations have serious drawbacks.

To sum up, despite the material limitations, non-independent liaison stations are deeply embedded in RCs. This embeddedness gives them the opportunity to synchronize their efforts with those of the RC, to have regular updates on community affairs, and to keep in close contact with residents, all of which are conducive to their efficacy.

5.2 Organizational Structure

As was noted in the above discussion, most liaison stations are deeply embedded in RCs. Does this mean that their personnel are also deeply embedded? This section will explore the organizational structure in more detail.

According to design, the personnel of each liaison station should include several members (People's Congress representatives), one liaison station chief (a position held by a People's Congress representative), and one liaison station employee. The design is meant to ensure that representatives fulfill the major duties of the station and that the liaison station employee assists the representatives in their work. How does this work in practice? In this section, we will discuss the roles of member, chief, and employee in greater detail.
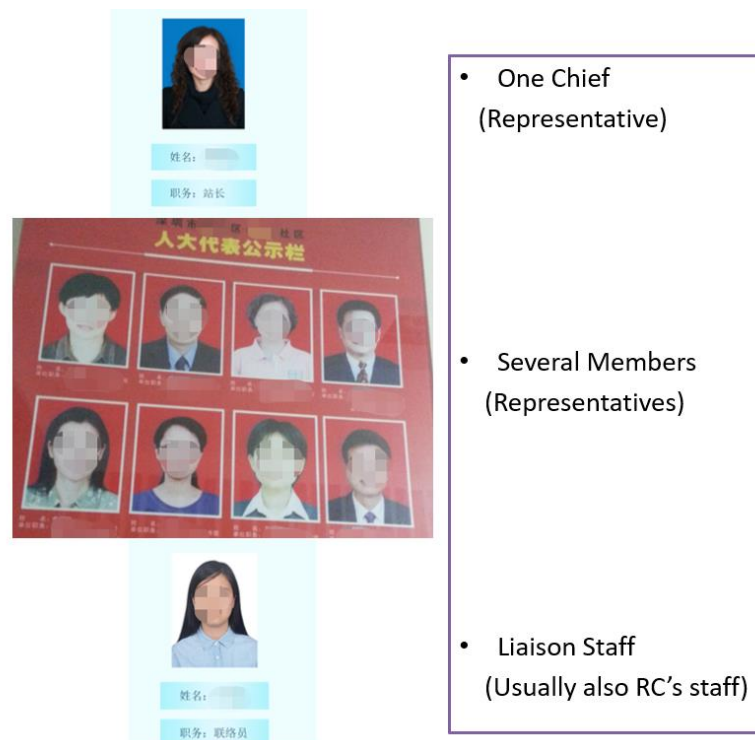
Figure 5.5 Organization Structure of a Liaison Station

5.2.1 Members

All members of liaison stations are representatives of the People's Congress, who are formally elected during the People's Congress election. As noted in Chapter 3, most of these representatives have other jobs, and their role as representative is undertaken on a part-time basis. Most representatives' full-time jobs are in relatively high positions: business leaders, school principals, government officials, doctors, lawyers, and the like. Because of their social status and expertise, and their ability to mobilize social resources, they are in a good position to help residents solve problems. At the same time, of course, they are very busy and their schedules are difficult to coordinate.

In this section, I will consider in more detail the three characteristics that distinguish liaison station members: their position as local elite, their busy schedules, and the implications of their election.

5.2.1.1 Local Elite

In the process of my fieldwork, I obtained information about the positions outside the liaison stations held by People's Congress representatives (this information is not always available on the Internet). In the course of my visits to liaison stations, I was able to obtain occupational information on 135 representatives from 21 liaison stations. Their profiles were as follows: 30% government officials; 28% business leaders; 21% researchers, doctors, and lawyers; 19% school principals; and 2% teachers and workers.

While some liaison stations were unwilling to disclose the occupational status of

their representatives, we were able to get an overall impression during our interviews with the staff:

> *(Staff:) Most of these representatives are leaders of enterprises or in some other relatively important position. ——Interview 52*

> *(Staff:) The representatives have their own jobs, have their own companies, are bosses and so on. ——Interview 31*

> *(Staff:) Representatives are not full-time but part-time. For example, the chairman of a joint stock company is one of our liaison station's representative. In addition, we have representatives who are government officers, taking charge of city planning, urban environmental management, and so on. ——Interview 36*

> *(Staff:) In our liaison station, let me give you two examples of representatives: one is the chairman of a design institute, one is the general manager of a company ——Interview 03*

> *(Staff:) They're all leaders and directors. ——Interview 33*

In my conversations with People's Congress representatives, I received a similar impression. One representative, a doctor at a hospital, described the others as "very high-level" individuals with "strong abilities and rich experience, all of whom are charming; they include the bosses of enterprises, who work in large businesses and in the government, all of whom are extraordinary." She continued,

> *I've learned so much and been so inspired by working with them. In the end we became friends and this helped me a lot. If I had not been a representative of the People's Congress, I would have had very little contact with such people in my life. ——Interview 73*

In short, "they are all elites in their respective areas" (Interview 64), and "generally powerful and influential" (Interview 03), which means they are able to mobilize social

resources to help residents solve problems:

> *(Staff:) They all have their own jobs, and they can use their own resources to provide services to so-called voters or to collect the information and opinions of residents. ——Interview 53*

From the point of view of the liaison station employees, the position and social status of the representatives are very useful:

> *(Staff:) If problems cannot be solved, we will refer them to the People's Congress representatives and solve them using their resources via the liaison stations. Those People's Congress representatives will coordinate with the relevant government departments at higher levels. After the problem is solved, they provide feedback to the residents through liaison employees. ——Interview 52*

> *(Staff:) At the liaison station, we can use the positions and the expertise of People's Congress representatives to solve the problems of the residents. ——Interview 36*

Specifically, the representatives' status as local elite can be utilized by liaison stations in the following ways:

1) When People's Congress representatives are employed in a relevant area, they can help solve residents' problems directly:

> *(Staff:) For example, one representative is a government officer of urban environmental management. If we have a problem with illegal hawking in our jurisdiction, he will help us to coordinate and solve the problem. As well, we have a representative who is a government officer of city planning. He happened to be in charge of the reconstruction of a village in a city, which is exactly the situation in our community, and he can help a lot. In cases like these, representatives take advantage of the nature of their own jobs to help residents solve public problems. ——Interview 36*

(Staff:) Contact with People's Congress representatives is based on their profession. If residents report problems that happen to be in the People's Congress representative's field of work, he or she will be able to understand and help the residents more. ——Interview 26

(Staff:) For example, Party secretary Li, whom we call Uncle Li, is the Party secretary of our street office. Most of the local public affairs can be largely resolved at his level of government. Therefore, as a representative of the People's Congress, it is very convenient for him to help residents solve problems in our liaison station. ——Interview 51

2) If the representatives' own jobs are not specifically relevant to the residents' problems, they can also exert pressure through their position and social status:

(Staff:) There's an ongoing case in which we are helping retirees solve social security problems. These old men who came to Shenzhen a long time ago were sent by the state to Shenzhen for development. They bought social security at that time, but for historical reasons, the present social security bureau does not recognize their entitlement. So, they're going after what they think is their own.

We are helping them contact a representative of People's Congress, whose own job is as a government officer in the district People's Congress office, through the liaison station. He is not directly responsible for social security, but he is actively pushing for investigations that would otherwise be difficult to carry out, such as a review of past records. As the leader of one of the higher-level government departments, he is very good at helping us to put pressure on the relevant government departments. ——Interview 29

3) If the representatives do not solve residents' problems directly, their expertise can also be very helpful:

(Staff:) Two of our representatives are engineering professionals, one at a well-known real estate company and one at an engineering company. Their expertise is

very useful to the residents in solving their problems. Many of the public issues reported by residents are related to infrastructure, and these two representatives can provide professional advice to residents. Another representative works in the district Women's Federation. He has rich experience in issues related to women's rights protection and can provide advice on many family issues in our community. There is another representative who works in the stock exchange. He is very happy to chat with the residents about buying stocks, buying houses, buying overseas properties, buying insurance in Hong Kong, and so on. All these discussions have brought the relationship between the representatives and the residents closer. What's more, his professional advice is very helpful to us when there are public problems related to finance, such as preventing financial fraud. ——Interview 14

(Staff:) Some representatives work in hospitals, some are police officers, and so on. When residents need professional advice related to their work, these representatives are good at answering and giving very professional advice. Even if they don't solve the problem directly, their professional advice can be very helpful. Without a liaison station, residents would not have easy access to such professional advice. ——Interview 09

4) Depending on their personal interests, representatives can sometimes provide expertise in certain fields. In addition to their own professional concerns, some representatives have an interest in public problems, and they have studied and addressed these problems, thus accumulating rich experiences:

(Staff:) Some representatives are solely interested in their profession, while others are interested in a certain kind of social phenomenon not related to their own jobs. ——Interview 33

(Staff:) Some representatives focus on practical matters related to People's livelihood – some on transportation and some on services for the elderly – but their work is not related to these fields. It is their personal interest. For example,

our community has recently built a service center for the elderly. A representative has been paying close attention to the community service for the elderly and has accumulated a lot of useful research and experience. He offered us a great deal of support. He contacted the residents several times to do research and put forward many suggestions based on his rich experience, which was very helpful to the work of our residents' committee. ——Interview 58

(Staff:) Some are concerned about the healthy development of teenagers, some are concerned about People's livelihood, and so on. Different representatives have different concerns and focuses, not all of which are necessarily related to their careers. ——Interview 48

5) In addition to their own job, expertise, and personal interest, the representatives' social network is also very useful when dealing with public problems.

I interviewed a representative of the Peoples' Congress who was not working in the government but was on the staff of a public institution (Interview 75). As we were saying goodbye, he asked me if my journey from Hong Kong to Shenzhen had been smooth (I had went from Hong Kong to Shenzhen that day). It happened that my customs clearance port was under construction, and I said casually, "Because of the construction, only one-third of the self-service customs clearance equipment was working, resulting in a long queue." He immediately said, very seriously, "Tell me in detail. If the problem is really serious, I will pass it on to the government department of that port for you. I am very familiar with the officials there." I said that there was no bother, the construction would be temporary and solved soon. He responded, "It doesn't matter. If you see any public issues in Shenzhen, you can tell me, and I can pass them on to friends and official channels. We all hope that Shenzhen will get better and better.

I am friends with many government officers, so I know that in fact they are eager to hear the comments of ordinary citizens, so that their work can be more people-oriented. So, I often help residents to communicate with government officers and tell them the problems that I see."

The liaison station staff that I interviewed also cited the social network of the People's Congress representatives as an important resource:

(Staff:) He is using his social status, his social networks, and, frankly, his character to exert pressure to government. ——Interview 23

The five points outlined above sum up the effect of the elite status of the People's Congress representatives on the work of the liaison stations. Their resources and capabilities help them fulfill the duties of representative, which are set out in the regulations:[20]

Representatives shall carefully listen to the opinions of the public through the liaison station and use visits to strengthen the contact with the public, grassroots units, and organizations, and accept the supervision of the public. When listening to the opinions of the public, representatives shall pay attention to publicizing the policies of the Party, laws and regulations, the relevant resolutions and decisions of People's Congress and its Standing Committee and the People's government. Representatives shall not only understand and reflect the problems but also resolve contradictions, so as to contribute to the construction of a harmonious community

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[20] 人大代表要通过联络站认真听取人民群众的意见，采取接访、走访、回访等方式，加强与人民群众、基层单位和组织的联系，接受人民群众的监督。人大代表在听取人民群众意见时，要注意宣传党的路线、方针、政策，宣传法律法规、人民代表大会及其常委会、人民政府的有关决议决定、决策，做到既要了解和反映问题，又要化解矛盾，为构建和谐社区、和谐社会作出贡献。《人大代表社区联络站工作职责》(Responsibilities of the Liaison Stations (Published by Office of the Standing Committee of Shenzhen 〔2008〕No. 45))

and society.

These are the duties that representatives should perform so as to ensure that the core functions of the liaison station are realized. (In the next chapters, we will deal with the ways the workflow is handled.)

5.2.1.2 Busy Schedules

Next to "belonging to the local elite," the most commonly cited characteristic of representatives is "having a busy schedule." They are busy because of their social status and abilities. While their belonging to the local elite brings many advantages to liaison stations, their busy schedules pose a challenge. Their tight time constraints make it difficult for liaison station staff to coordinate meetings:

> *(Staff:) To be honest, representatives all have a very high position or high social status. They have so many things to do that they cannot spend their energy here in liaison station every day. ——Interview 63*

> *(Staff:) They are very busy and have their own jobs, and they are basically the bosses of various companies, managers, and chairmen, and so on. Some are quite enthusiastic and can squeeze in the time to come to liaison stations. Some of them are really too busy, and we must be considerate of their situation when we plan our activities. ——Interview 37*

When the representatives are too busy, they will tell the liaison station staff that they are "not available" to participate in community activities. On such occasions, it could be assumed that they are prioritizing their own jobs at the expense of their responsibilities as representatives. Such a view, however, must be balanced by an appreciation of their contributions. It is because they devote their time and energy to

their work that they have become the type of successful people who can mobilize a large number of social resources for their liaison station work.

Given that representatives will, no doubt, continue to be busy, the staff's coordination of activities becomes very important. Staff must find the right times to arrange meetings with appropriate representatives and must have the flexibility to adapt to changing situations.

> *(Staff:) Because they're busy – you know, they're elite in their respective industries – it's very hard to get them all together. ——Interview 64*

> *(Staff:) Most of these representatives are heads of companies or other important positions. So, we arrange for them to take turns to participate in the activity, three to five at a time. We make arrangements according to their free time. ——Interview 52*

It follows that the representatives who are not very busy will be invited more often:

> *(Staff:) We'll see who's available and we'll make appointments with whoever has time. For many infrastructure problems, we contact one particular representative after the residents' appeal to our liaison station, because this representative has more time and often comes. ——Interview 27*

Some People's Congress representatives' full-time jobs are within the community where the liaison station is located. The ideal situation occurs when the representative is also the leader of the RC. In this case, the representative is generally at the liaison station every day since it is usually located within the RC. These representatives are also more enthusiastic because their interests are closely tied to the community's:

> *(Staff:) Here we have a particularly enthusiastic representative, who is the head of our village [in the city]. He is more enthusiastic about our community. He is the*

head of our village and a resident of our community. Other representatives don't live here and have no direct interest in this community, so, relatively speaking, they do not contribute as much to the liaison station as he does. ——Interview 64

To sum up, representatives are generally very busy, so it is vital for liaison stations to consider whether their representatives will have enough time and enthusiasm to communicate with residents effectively. Representatives who have abundant social resources, however, often do not also have abundant time, so the liaison station must create flexible working arrangements to accommodate them. The coordination provided by the liaison station staff is very important. (In Chapter 6 we will see how the workflow is arranged to maximize flexibility.)

5.2.1.3 Election

As the above discussion has shown, representatives of the People's Congress are very busy and have a high social status. So why are they willing to expend the time and energy required to work at liaison stations helping residents solve their problems? The simplest answer may be that they want to be re-elected. This section will deal with the impact of elections on liaison stations and with the non-electoral incentives that impel representatives to devote their time and energy to liaison stations. The findings help us to understand the motivation of liaison station members, and are basis for the analysis in following chapters.

At all the liaison stations I visited, I was told that the electoral district advocated a competitive election, but most interviewees were unwilling to discuss the details of the elections. Once the topic of election was raised, the interviewees' attitude went from

enthusiastic to cool, even taciturn. As a result, I would only tentatively mention elections at the end of each interview. Still, I was rarely offered a response. My information about elections, therefore, is necessarily limited. Fortunately, the focus of my research is not the process of election but the interactions at liaison stations between People's Congress representatives and residents in communities after election. Still, there are some general points about elections that help us to understand representatives' motivations.

1) Representatives face re-election. A basic assumption of the representative system is that elected representatives must fulfill their duties in order to be reappointed. In my interviews, this motivation was mentioned:

(Researcher:) Are representatives willing to solve residents' problems at the liaison station?

(Staff:) This is their duty. Since you are a member, you must perform duties. If you don't perform duties, everyone definitely will have a bad review of your performance. This undoubtedly will affect your reappointment in next session.

(Researcher:) Do they hope to be re-elected?

(Staff:) I am not sure. However, there is no doubt that the title "People's Congress representative" stands for an honor, so it is reasonable that everyone is eager to be reappointed for two sessions under the eligible conditions, right? ——Interview 64

Some of the interviewees, however, do not agree with this theory. In their opinion, the motivation to fulfill duties comes from a concern for one's reputation:

(Representative:) Actually, we can't assume that reappointment is our wish. As far as I know, everyone thinks being a member entails behaving well and living up to

the trust of leaders and the public. From a utilitarian perspective, there is no difference between one session and two sessions, because members who want to make friends with other members have already made friends. Members who desire this identity have already got it. Being a member in the second session is, at most, an honor, showing that someone does a good job. Undoubtedly, reappointment is good, but I don't think everyone strives for reappointment. To be honest, sometimes it is useless to make a great effort to achieve it. You can't do anything about it if you are not on the candidates list. And, you know, the candidates list is not determined by a single factor. Representatives perform duties, mainly because we don't want to leave a bad impression on others and don't want to be irresponsible. We just hope to live up to the trust of others. ——Interview 74

From this representative's description, we can draw at least two clues. First, it is true that some people run for election to People's Congress because they expect to gain a higher social status and expand their social network. Second, in addition to the expectation of re-election, the motivations to work effectively at the liaison station include earning trust and respect and thereby gaining a high reputation. Another representative also mentioned the reputation incentive:

(Representative:) Members are filled with a sense of responsibility, as far as I can see. Some of them are business presidents or well-established in their business, thus they are very busy. Sometimes, they are anxious about time management and really want to do something for the residents as liaison station members, but they are up to their ears in work. If they are available at all, they will definitely participate in the work of the liaison station. For example, they may have to find means of coordination so they can help communities materially or give advice and suggestions to communities. They are filled with a sense of responsibility and become well-known in the community. Like me, most of the representatives I know are very serious about gaining a reputation in the community. We feel that since

we have been elected as representatives, we want to do something real for the
residents, to really solve some problems. ——Interview 73

Re-election, then, can be seen as a motivation for members' performance of duties, but the desire to gain respect and trust, and maintain a good reputation in the community are also important considerations.

2) Residents are not necessarily voters. Shenzhen is a city of immigrants. At almost every RC I visited to, the interviewees mentioned the high percentage of people without local hukou[21] in their community. At present, in most areas of China, voters in the People's Congress elections must confirm their identity as part of the local constituency. Those without local hukou have no right to vote in the community. In short, most of the residents in the community are not voters in the community.

The liaison station's work encompasses the whole community, which includes all residents whether they have local hukou or not. When residents report public issues to the liaison station and ask for help, the liaison station does not ask whether they are eligible to vote or not.

(Staff:) Due to our proximity to the business district, there are a lot of immigrants
in our community, most of whom are from other provinces, who work in the
neighborhood shops or start their own businesses. They rent apartments to live in
this community. For most, their hukou isn't here. However, it doesn't matter
whether they are voters or not. Once people live here, they are residents. We are
available to all residents. It has never been said that the only people who can you

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[21] Hukou (户口) is a legal document produced by the state administration in charge of household affairs to record and retain basic information about the household population. It also documents the identity of every citizen. A "resident with local Hukou" can be considered as a registered permanent residence of this place.

come to the liaison station for advice and help are voters. ——Interview 03

(Researcher:) What is the approximate population of this community? How many of them have local hukou?

(Staff:) Our community has more than 60,000 residents, but only 5,000 have local hukou. Most of the residents are from other places and are renting apartments here.

(Researcher:) So, there are only 5,000 voters?

(Staff:) Yes, we require that voters have local hukou.

(Staff:) If someone is not a voter, is it okay that he or she uses the liaison station to contact the representatives?

(Researcher:) Of course. To be honest, we never thought to ask the question. Being a voter means that you can exert your power through election. However, if you want to report a public problem or ask for help, every resident is equal. We won't ignore you, whether you are a voter or not, and we never think about it. As long as the matter you report belongs to our community, we must deal with it and provide you with feedback. ——Interview 64

(Staff:) As long as you are a resident, you can come here. Whether or not you are a voter? We never think about it. We don't make distinctions. We deal with public issues involving all residents of the community. ——Interview 09

If reappointment were the only motivation of representatives, it is difficult to explain why they serve non-voters. This lends support to the view that respect and reputation are prime motivations for representatives. Furthermore, if the target population of the liaison station is not only voters but all the residents of the community, then it is identical to the target population of the RC. The RC has first-hand community and resident information. If representatives want to gain respect and trust through their work at the liaison stations, they must have a comprehensive understanding of the

residents in the community, so it is a very rational to align their interests with the RC's.

3) RC staff work on election preparations. Electoral districts are generally based on RC jurisdictions. A constituency may include one or more complete jurisdictions of the RC. Most of the workers responsible for organizing and overseeing the election are staff of the RC. During my interviews I learned that voters are apathetic about voting. The RC devotes a great deal of energy to persuading voters to vote (in order for an election to be valid, voter turnout needs to be over 50%).

(Researcher:) As staff, what do you need to do during the election?

(Staff:) I have to sort out lots of information during the election process. I have to issue many notifications. If there is no answer using the landline phone, I will use my mobile. "Hello, do you have the time to vote? Oh, I understand. Thank you." Actually, I rarely can get the message across in one attempt. If I have to give a call to 100 people, I have to call 500 times.

(Researcher:) You phone them one by one?

(Staff:) Yes. Some residents lose their temper and complain that I shouldn't bother them since it's not such a big matter. And what most of them care about is that, if they don't turn up, they don't get the small gifts we prepare for voters.

(Researcher:) Must you inform all of them?

(Staff:) I am afraid that some residents are not happy. Because there are gifts, some residents will kick up a fuss if they don't get one. "You didn't tell me, so I missed the gift." "Everyone else got the gift, but I didn't!" Therefore, I try my best to inform them.

Voter turnout is also important. It must be more than half. If voter turnout in the afternoon is not high, I have to constantly beg the voters: please come over. However, young people seldom participate in the elections because young people

are busy with work. Most voters are old people or unemployed people. After voting,

they may say "I came here to support you." I then feel that it is fortunate that I

have maintained a good relationship with the residents. Election run from 7 am to

5 pm. I am relieved when more than half of the voters turn out.

(Researcher:) Do voters care which candidates win?

(Staff:) As far as I can say, no one actively votes for any candidate. If they have a

candidate they support, why don't they come and vote actively? So, most of them

don't seem to care who wins the election, but perhaps a few do. They came to the

election basically to maintain a good relationship with me or, maybe, with the RC.

You can say, they come to give us face (面子, Mian zi). Of course, some people

also come for the small gifts. That's just my point of view. ——Interview 46

When I asked for more details, the interviewee said he couldn't talk any further

about this sensitive topic. But the details he provided reveal that People's Congress

elections rely heavily on the efforts of the RC.

The same interviewee also helped confirm three points of information I had

gathered from my observations of liaison stations:

1) The election process, especially the process by which candidates are selected, is

not fully disclosed to the public.

2) When asked how the list of candidates is created, the staff of the liaison stations

(and RCs) often answer, "It is up to the superior leaders," while representatives tend to

answer, "It is based on the trust of leaders and voters." The "leaders" include those in

high positions in the People's Congress system, the RC, the street offices and district

governments, and the community (i.e., heads of businesses and public organizations).

The actual decision-making processes and specific participants are not disclosed, but

basically it is a process of collective decision-making that involves local elites of the grassroots governance system.

3) Most of the residents do not care about this lack of disclosure, and they do not have a great interest in who finally wins the election and becomes the representative. When residents have problems that need to be solved, they will not contact the representatives. They do not reason that because they are voters, the representatives must serve them. Instead, residents go directly to the RC with their problems, and the RC judges if it is a matter for the liaison station and the representatives.

So, we can see that much of the work in the early, middle, and late stages of an election is undertaken by the RCs. The election protocol is such that communication between representatives and voters is mediated by the RC. Though it is not written into the regulations, the RC is an integral part of the liaison station. Representatives and RCs both have strong reasons to maintain a good relationship.

5.2.2 Station Chief

The chief is chosen from among the members, so the description of the members provided in the preceding section also applies to the chief. The liaison station chief must be a People's Congress representative, and since these representatives work part-time, the chief also works part-time. According to the regulations,[22] the chief "shall lead the work of the liaison station and be responsible for the planning and work arrangement."

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[22] 站长领导联络站工作，负责计划制定和工作安排。《人大代表社区联络站工作职责》(Responsibilities of the Liaison Stations (Published by Office of the Standing Committee of Shenzhen〔2008〕No. 45))

From my interviews with the staff of the liaison station, it appears that chiefs are adept at planning the station's activities:

(Staff:) The chief arranges this year's plans and activities, and makes a plan for the whole year. ——Interview 60

(Chief (representative):) At the beginning of every year, the liaison staff and I have discussions with leaders of the residents' committee about the year's work program, dealing with such things as the number of activities. ——Interview 73

However, some chiefs participate very little in the work of liaison stations. One chief I interviewed (Interview 10) was only acquainted with the general situation of the liaison station and knew very little about its specific work arrangements. He said he was very busy with his own work, so the liaison station staff essentially performed his duties for him. Once a year he makes an annual plan, and he attends very important events. The daily work is performed by the liaison station staff who make the necessary decisions and implement them.

At another liaison station, the staff observed that, although the chief was always very nice, he was also very busy and had visited the station only three times in more than six months. This chief too was unable to find the time and energy to participate in the daily work of the station (Interview 58).

According to station regulations,[23] "there should be one station chief, who is chosen by the members' collective recommendation and negotiation." Based on my

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[23] 联络站设站长一人，由人大代表互相推选。《人大代表社区联络站工作职责》（Responsibilities of the Liaison Stations (Published by Office of the Standing Committee of Shenzhen 〔2008〕No. 45)）
http://sqllz.szrd.gov.cn/Brief/ContactDuty.aspx?a=kgDPD0sRk%2bqEhVUGA1O2kYqccOKJExJJLhh Yxrsa%2fCABraGB5qsxuERTQHDQBpLj&c=HZHFFk5HAwY%3d

observations, the members that are chosen to become chief fall into three types:

1) Members with high social status. These representatives have a high position and title, and a strong influence on other members, so that they can effectively mobilize others to participate in the work of the liaison station. The demands of their own jobs, however, do not give them the opportunity to devote the necessary energy to the work of the liaison station. In these cases, the role of the staff becomes very important. The staff essentially replace the station chief as decision-maker and implementer.

2) Members who are not necessarily well-connected but who are young and energetic. These chiefs can devote more time and energy to the work of liaison station. As one of these chiefs (Interview 73) observed,

> *(Chief (Representative):) I think I become the station chief because other members are very very busy, so they definitely have no time to do this work. I am also busy, but I find it relatively easier to arrange time. After all, they are in very high positions. ——Interview 73*

These chiefs, then, have a much higher rate of participation in liaison station affairs than the first type. Of course, they do not frequently spend their days in the liaison station, but when the liaison station staff informs them that they are needed, they can adjust their schedule and be available. Despite their high level of participation, they still rely on the staff of the liaison station and the RC to act as intermediaries and even at times as decision-makers.

> *(Chief (Representative):) If there is an issue at the liaison station that should be dealt with by the chief, the staff will give me a call and I will go there. It is impossible for me to keep office hours there every day, because I have my own job.*

Of course, I have no need to stay there every day. When the liaison station is notified of a public problem by the residents, an employee will give me a call and tell me relevant details. I will then go to the liaison station to arrange for a follow-up, after negotiating with the RC about how to deal with it and which member should be contacted to address the issue or whether more members are required to engage in a community investigation or a forum for information collection. In my opinion, the RC leaders and staff have an in-depth understanding of community issues, so they will propose some good responses. Of course, I also have my opinions. We negotiate together. ——Interview 73

3) Members whose own work is in the community where the liaison station located. As previously mentioned, liaison stations are generally established in the community RC. People's Congress representatives are part-time and find it difficult to keep regular office hours at the liaison station, so when residents come to the liaison station, they rarely have the opportunity to meet with the chief in the first time. However, if the chiefs' own full-time work is at the RC, they can keep office hours in the liaison station nearly every day. This is a great convenience for liaison station staff, since the chief can be consulted at any time by the liaison station staff. In addition, when residents come to the liaison station, they will be able to speak not only to staff but the chief.

This type of chief generally holds a leadership role at the RC as well. When station chiefs are not only a People's Congress representative (and therefore familiar with the People's Congress system and very influential) but also a leader of an RC (and therefore familiar with the community and in contact with community residents), they improve the efficiency of communication and greatly promote the work of the liaison station.

(Staff:) Our liaison station chief is also the party secretary (leader) of the RC. —

(Staff:) Our chief is a representative of the People's Congress and is also the director (leader) of RC. Her scope of authority is broader and she is able to achieve a high degree of coordination. When problems are referred to the liaison station, then she can directly coordinate all resources to solve them. ——Interview 09

It can be seen, then, that, no matter which type they are, all chiefs have a close relationship with the RC. Chiefs of the first type rely on the RC staff to perform many tasks. Those of the second type depend on the RC to provide information on the community and to participate in decision-making. And the third type are themselves employed by the RC. If we add the fact that most of the staff of the liaison stations also work at the RCs, then it is not surprising that the dependency of the liaison station chief on the RC is deep and inevitable.

5.2.3 Staff

The staff of liaison offices are those who actually show up at the station every day. They can be part-time or full-time.

5.2.3.1 Part-time and Full-time

Each liaison station should have one employee according to regulations, but most of liaison station staff are not full-time. They are full-time staff of the RC who perform the liaison station duties as part of their workload, so they could be considered part-time liaison station staff.

(Researcher:) Are you a full-time employee of the liaison station?

(Staff:) I am a full-time secretary in charge of Party construction of the RC but a part-time employee of the liaison station. ——Interview 36

The liaison station staff told me that their work at the RC usually concerns Communist Party affairs and Party construction. In recent years, Party affairs and Party construction have entailed heavy workloads and the liaison stations, as a result, have received less attention:

(Staff:) I am a part-time liaison station employee, and my own job is on the staff of the RC. The daily work of the RC already keeps me very busy, so I need to squeeze in the time to do the work of the liaison station. Sometimes I need to work overtime. ——Interview 46

(On entering a liaison station, the researcher asked:) Is a liaison station employee here now?

(An RC employee not affiliated with the liaison station answered:) No.

(Researcher:) Where is he? When he will come back?

(The employee:) He is on a training program and will come back next week.

(Researcher:) Was the training program dealing with the People's Congress liaison stations?

(The employee:) I don't think he needs to learn anything about the People's Congress. He is a part-time liaison station employee. His own work is about Party affairs, so he goes to XX province to improve his skills and his knowledge of Party affairs. ——Interview 61

We should not, however, be hasty in criticizing the part-time status of many liaison employees. Their employment at both the RC and the liaison station means that they can conveniently link both resources:

(Staff:) Residents can express their demands through different channels, and there are many departments of the residents' committee that receive information from residents. The residents' committee will bring together the information received by different departments, and we will discuss and determine how to deal with. If we decide that a certain problem should be solved by the liaison station, we will help residents contact the People's Congress representative even if they did not take their demands to the liaison station first. Similarly, if a resident takes a problem directly to the liaison station, but we decide that this problem is not within the liaison station's brief, we will help the resident find other ways to deal with the problem. In short, in our RC, although there is a division of labor between the various departments [and the liaison station], there are no firm boundaries…the residents' committee and liaison station share information in depth. As the staff of the liaison station are also the staff of the RC, our dual status facilitates this kind of information-sharing a lot. ——Interview 01

Some communities have created full-time positions for liaison station staff, but this staff is still employed by the residents' committee rather than the People's Congress.

(Researcher:) This is an independent liaison station, not located in the residents' committee, right? So, are you a full-time staff of liaison station?

(staff:) Yes, I am full-time. Previously, I was an employee at the residents' committee. Then, I was picked to do liaison station work.

(Researcher:) So you still actually count as a staff of the residents' committee?

(staff:) Yes, I'm just like other staff at the residents' committee. ——Interview 71

(Researcher:) You are a full-time staff of liaison station. Who pays your salary?

(Staff:) Previously, the street office sent personnel to the liaison station. Since last year, the communities [RC] employ liaison station staff themselves——Interview 67

All of the liaison station staff I encountered during my fieldwork were hired by

RCs or street offices (which govern the RCs). Most are part-time liaison station staff whose main job is at the RC.

5.2.3.2 Designed Role and Actual Role

According to station regulations,[24] "the staff of the liaison station is in charge of daily liaison." And "the staff of the liaison station shall strengthen the ties with representatives of People's Congress; stay in close contact with residents, units, and organizations of the community; and act as a bridge between representatives and the public."

On the basis of my interviews and observation of the staff, it is evident that, in practice, their work conforms to the regulations:

> *(Staff:) As a liaison station employee, my work is to sort out information, publish bulletins, upload information to the website, and arrange activity venues. ——Interview 33*

> *(Staff:) In practice, we actually act as a contact channel to People's Congress representatives. For example, if the People's Congress requires us to host an activity, they will inform us about this matter. Then, I am responsible for informing members to come here. Of course, before carrying out activities, I put up bulletins to inform the residents. ——Interview 37*

> *(Staff:) If someone suddenly comes to the liaison station and asks the representatives for help, I, as the employee of the of liaison station, will record the*

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[24] 代表联络员负责日常联络工作。代表联络员要加强与人大代表的联系，密切联系社区居民、单位和组织，做好人大代表与人民群众的桥梁纽带作用。《人大代表社区联络站工作职责》
(Responsibilities of the Liaison Stations (Published by Office of the Standing Committee of Shenzhen〔2008〕No. 45))

relevant information, such as the name, phone number, time, and the general nature of the problem, and choose an appropriate representative to inform. Based on the information I provide, the representatives can be prepared before they meet residents. ——Interview 30

Still, the work of the liaison station staff is more complex than assisting the members in their daily routines. These liaison station staff represent the terminal branch of the People's Congress system and also the RC, which can be considered the terminal branch of government system. This dual identity gives them a subtle and important role.

As noted, given the busy schedules of liaison station members, the liaison station employee is the first person that the residents meet when they come to a liaison station. If the liaison station is taking the initiative to contact the residents, then it is also an employee who makes the first contact. The staff, then, acts as the information interface of the communication process between residents and the liaison station.

After taking down the relevant details of the resident's issue, liaison station staff will offer help, suggest a member to contact, and even directly contact a member on the resident's behalf. Staff help the residents decide who would be the best member to help with their particular problem. Different representatives have different occupations, interests, expertise, social networks, and availability; the staff is familiar with these differences, but the resident does not have this necessary background knowledge.

Once the best member has been decided upon, the staff initiates communication about the issue raised by the resident. In subsequent developments, the staff continues to play an important role in the communication process.

The staff, however, do not perform these important functions in a vacuum: their

attitudes and actions are often the result of decisions made by the leaders of the RC. In accordance with the regulations of the People's Congress system, the staff perform the daily work of the liaison station, while, at the same time, they are motivated by the interests and priorities of the RC when deciding on their communication strategies.

In subsequent chapters, we will examine how the RC plays important roles in the liaison station's communication processes, such as determining communication procedures, information screening, agenda setting, and so on. In fact the roles the RC play are so central that the liaison station can be seen simply as a means for the RC to achieve governance.

In sum, it is clear that the liaison station's organizational structure is as deeply embedded in the RC as its physical location. All the staff, some chiefs, and some members also work for the RCs. As a result, the liaison station has become an effective governance tool for the RC and the RC has helped the liaison station maintain a good performance record. The situation is mutually beneficial.

5.3 Expenditures

Because the liaison station uses the site and staff of the RC, its daily expenses are difficult to calculate. Expenses such as water, electricity, telephone, printing costs, and so on are generally borne by the RC:

(Researcher:) Who pays for the daily expenses of the liaison station?

(Staff:) These costs are added to the RC's accounts. ——Interview 33

Even bigger expenses such as staff salaries and the housing are assumed by the RC:

(Staff:) I am not very clear about the financial matters, but my part-time liaison staff job does not have extra salary; the only salary I receive is the one that the RC pays me as RC staff. ——Interview 43

In some interviews, however, I was told that the People's Congress does provide subsidies to liaison stations, which are used to cover the costs of activities and provide a small increase to the income of part-time liaison station staff.

(Researcher:) The work of liaison station means an increase in your workload. Do you receive a salary increase for that?

(Staff:) A subsidy of 100 to 120 yuan a month. This amount, you know, is equivalent to doing the work for free. ——Interview 51

(Researcher:) Are there any funds for the liaison station?

(Staff:) Yes, they're what we use to carry out activities. ——Interview 36

(Staff:) The fund is 2000 yuan per year. We spent it on the representatives' activities, for example, their transportation and meals during visits to the community. —— Interview 64

There is a sensitivity about these financial issues, and intensive probing tends to make the respondents nervous and unforthcoming, so I kept my questions fairly superficial. Still, I did establish that the People's Congress provides modest funds to subsidize part-time liaison staff and to support activities

The amount of money varies from region to region, but it is never generous and is sometimes non-existent. Certainly, the liaison station's share of expenses are borne by the RC:

(Researcher:) Is there any financial support for the liaison station?

(Staff:) For liaison stations, there is an annual fund of 2000 yuan.

(Researcher:) Is that enough?

(Researcher:) Not enough. For example, when we hold the meetings for People's Congress representatives and residents, we need to buy bottled water, books, and materials. We need to pay to have photos printed. Sometimes we need to pay for transportation and meals on the job. The amount is not enough at all. So, I think, that's why the liaison station needs to be set up in the RC, because the cost of the liaison station can be covered in the daily expenses of the RC. ——Interview 58

Like its physical location and organizational structure, the expenditure of the liaison station is embedded in the RC. This arrangement is obviously beneficial to the People's Congress. Of course, the RC also benefits from the social resources offered by the People's Congress representatives.

5.4 Work Process Overview

How do liaison stations effect their liaisons？ In a word, by bringing representatives and residents together between sessions. Establishing an official procedure for residents to meet with representatives is the essential task of the liaison station:

(Researcher:) Was there a formal procedure for meeting representatives before the liaison stations were established?

(Staff:) No. Very occasionally, there was a meeting between representatives and residents, for example, when a representative joined in an event or community undertaking, but there was no regular meeting protocol at all. ——Interview 37

(Staff:) The main significance of the liaison station is to allow representatives to make regular visits to the community when the congress is not in session. In the past, we had the impression that the representatives only appeared at the conference venue during the annual meeting, but now they can go into the

community at ordinary times to meet residents. ——Interview 70

(Staff:) There are district-level People's Congress representatives and municipal-level People's Congress representatives stationed here in the liaison station, so voters can come to "reflect up" problems they found in the community and the representatives can provide help and feedback. ——Interview 6

Still residents are not able to meet with representatives during their initial visit to the liaison station:

(Researcher:) Are the representatives here now?

(Staff:) Not now. If nothing is happening, why would they come here? ——Interview 24

(Staff:) They're not here now! If, for example, we decide to launch an activity that requires their presence, maybe every week or every month, we will tell them the schedule in advance and check whether they have spare time. Because representatives have their own jobs. They are very busy. ——Interview 63

As noted above in section 5.2.1.2, the majority of representatives are very busy with their full-time jobs and are rarely found at the liaison stations. There is a protocol that must be followed in order to establish contact between representatives and residents.

During my field work, I observed that each liaison station had posted their procedures on a wall display entitled "Responsibilities of the People's Congress Representatives at the Community Liaison Station."[25] According to these signboards, liaison station procedures are as follows:

The liaison stations shall carry out their work in accordance with the following

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[25] 《人大代表社区联络站工作职责》（Responsibilities of the Liaison Stations (Published by Office of the Standing Committee of Shenzhen〔2008〕No. 45).

procedure:

1) After receiving visits from the constituencies, representatives of the People's Congresses shall transfer the questions residents have raised to the standing committees of the People's Congresses at their respective levels through special letters.

2) Representatives of People's Congresses may transfer issues that are generally reflected by the constituencies to the standing committees of the People's Congresses, in the form of Suggestions or Criticisms.

3) Representatives of People's Congresses may do investigations and research on issues reported by the constituencies, or may suggest that the standing committees of the People's Congresses at the corresponding levels conduct inspection and research.

4) Through liaison station staff, representatives of People's Congresses give feedback to the constituencies on the implementation result and provide explanations.

5) At the invitation of relevant organizations, representatives of People's Congresses may also participate in, or appoint liaison station staff to participate in, discussions, research and coordination on relevant issues.

6) After meet with constituencies, the liaison station staff shall promptly report to the representatives and hand over the relevant materials. If the situation is urgent, they may first inform the relevant government departments and then report it to the representatives.

7) Representatives of People's Congresses and their liaison station staff do not deal directly with problems.

8) Liaison stations shall report the annual work situation in written form to the sub-district working bodies of the People's Congresses and the standing committees of the district level People's Congresses every year.

In addition to these 2008 regulations, liaison stations comply with the 2014 "Regulations on The Work of People's Congress Representative Liaison Station in

Residents' Communities of Shenzhen Municipal People's Congress,"[26] which outlines requirements and time frames for a "Liaison Letter":

The Standing Committee of the Shenzhen Municipal People's Congress uniformly formulate and issue the Liaison Letter for the liaison stations. Governments at all levels shall be responsible for reply within one month after receiving the Liaison Letter from liaison station. In matters of urgency, Representatives may also request an immediate response. The liaison stations shall make the feedback information public, except for those involving state secrets.

The designed procedure above emphasizes the importance of the position of representatives, who are responsible for transferring the information from the constituencies to the standing committee of the People's Congress, and then, to the government (or directly to government by Liaison Letter). The wording of the regulation suggests that the role of the staff of liaison stations is only that of assistant.

This is consistent with the assigned structure of liaison stations. As noted, liaison stations are designed to be the terminal branch of the congress system, completing the process connecting the constituency to its representatives. Since the representatives play the key role at the liaison station, they are the focus of procedures. All other players have the secondary role of assisting in the representatives' work. Figure 5.6 presents the communication procedure of liaison stations.

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[26] 《深圳市人大代表社区联络站工作办法》, http://www.chinanews.com/sh/2014/03-03/5900426.shtml
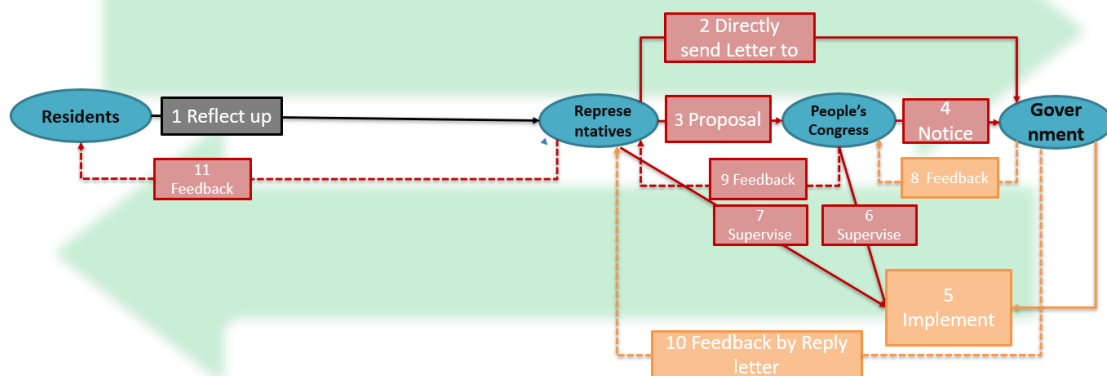
Figure 5.6 Designed Communication Procedure of a Liaison Station

Nots: "Proposal"refers to a formal contribution, such as a proposal, recommendation, or criticism.

While Figure 5.6 outlines the communication path as designed, the reality is not that simple. The actual working process is not confined to interactions between residents, representatives, and governments; another key actor is the RC. The actual workflow is shown in Figure 5.7.
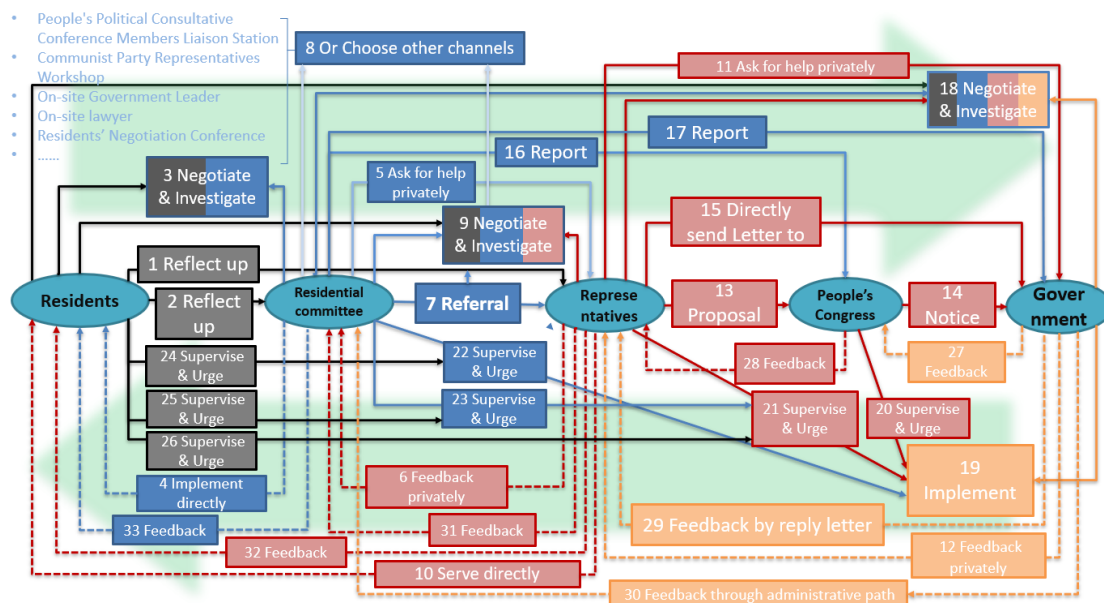
Figure 5.7 Communication Procedure of a Liaison Stations in Practice

This procedure will be explained in more details in subsequent chapters, but the following is a brief description of the numbered steps in Figure 5.7:

1. Residents communicate with representatives directly.

2. Residents communicate with RC at the outset.

3. The RC organizes meetings with residents and conducts an investigation to obtain more information about the issue reported by residents.

4. If the issue raised by the residents can be dealt with directly by the RC, the RC will deal with it.

5. & 6. The RC gets in touch with the representatives in private to ask help directly; or to ask advice about whether a problem is suitable to be solved through liaison stations before carry out step 7 "referral".

7. Carry out referral. The RC refers the information to the representatives if it is determined that the problem can be solved by the liaison station.

8. The RC may also refer the information to other channels, in addition to the People's Congress liaison station.

9. Whether it is an issue that residents directly report to the representatives or one that the RC refers to them, the representatives will discuss and investigate the issue together with the RC.

10. The representatives are sometimes able to use their own resources to solve resident

difficulties.

11. & 12. Representatives get in touch with the government privately. Sometimes private communication replaces official communication, and sometimes it serves as a prelude to official communication. Before an official communication, representatives often use their personal networks to contact interested government staff. Then they decide whether to notify the government formally.

13. & 14. The representatives inform the government through the congress system (usually the Standing Committee of the local People's Congress). The representatives can submit proposals, recommendations, criticism, and other standard documents to the Standing Committee of the local People's Congress. The Standing Committee will then formally inform the government.

15. Representatives can write to relevant government departments directly by Liaison Letter in the name of liaison station.

16. & 17. The issue is recorded by liaison station staff and reported to higher levels of government and the congress system. In all cases where residents report their concerns to the representatives or where the RC refers cases to the representatives, the staff of the liaison station must document and provide a written report of the case to the congress system and the administrative superiors of the RC (i.e., the sub-district government offices). The written report is referred to as the "registration form."

18. Before the government decides on the action it will take in response to the report from the liaison station, it will sometimes consult with the representatives, the RC, and the residents, by calling a community meeting, which is referred to as "representative

consultation conference."

19. The government implements the actions it determines are necessary.

20.–26. During the process of government implementation, the Standing Committee of the People's Congress, the representatives, the RC, and the residents may supervise and push the government.

27.–33. Feedback is provided from various sources.

The above key to Figure 5.7 describes the basic communication process of the liaison station. This diagram, which is much more complicated than Figure 5.6, shows the actual state of affairs. Comparing the two figures, we can see that there is an additional player in the second– the RC – which is an important hub of communication (attached to 15 connecting lines). Although the RC is not included in the official procedure outlined in Figure 5.6, it clearly plays an important role and its influence should not be underestimated.

In the following chapters, some of the key communication links will be analyzed in greater detail, so we can gain a more in-depth understanding of how various participants communicate with each other through this relatively new channel.

5.5 Summary

In this chapter, we described the way the setting of liaison station facilitates its role as the channel of communication between People's Congress representatives and residents. Its work space is usually located in the RC and the liaison station's share of its expenses

are borne by the RC.

Although the regulations governing liaison stations do not specify RC involvement, the liaison station is deeply embedded into the RC in terms of its physical location, expenditure, and organizational structure. This gives the RC an opportunity to play an important role in the communication process of the liaison station.

The most important function of liaison stations is to provide a bridge between People's Congress representatives and residents in order to solve public problems at the grass-roots level. The realization of this function depends on frequent contact with the residents. Since RCs are a hub for residents, liaison stations located in their premises have access to first-hand information on community dynamics and can respond to problems in a timely manner.

The People's Congress provides the RC with the social resources offered by its representatives, and the RC provides the People's Congress with the opportunity to establishing a terminal branch in the community at a minimal cost. The arrangement is mutually beneficial.

Chapter 6: Source: Triggering Communication Process of Liaison Station

Last chapter, about the basic setting of this relatively new channel, ends up with an overview of the work procedures, and next, by introducing its details, remaining elements of communication (Source, Message, Receiver, Noise and Feedback) will be analyzed from Chapter 6 to Chapter 8.

According to established procedures of the liaison station, there are several options in the initiation process：reception, IIV (investigation, inspection, and visit), and appointment. By these means, the residents' concerns are supposed to reach the attention of their representatives. These are the established means by which messages are "reflected up"[27] in the work process flowchart (Figure 5.7). In practice, however, communication is initiated not mostly through this procedure but usually through an informal "referral," where the residents take their problems to the RC and, then, the RC refers the information to the liaison station. This process is outlined in Steps 2 to 8 of Figure 5.7.

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[27] People use the phrase "reflect up problems" (反映问题, *fan ying wen ti*), which refers to actions taken by residents to communicate information (opinions, suggestions, comments, and, most often, problems) to officials (government, mainstream media, public institutions, etc.).

In addition to the roles played by representatives and residents, an important role is played by the RCs. We will find that both residents and RCs are sources of communication in practice.
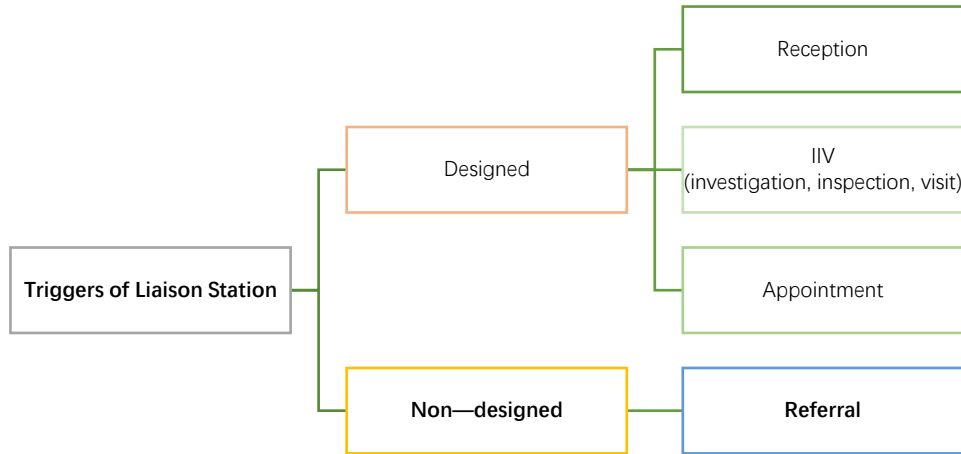
Figure 6.1 Initiation of Liaison Station Communication

6.1 Designed Triggers and Their Practical Implementation

Section 6.1 deals with the three triggers in the official procedure for initiating communication: reception, IIV (investigation, inspection, and visit), and appointment.

6.1.1 Reception

"Reception" (接访, *jie fang*) refers to representatives' attendance at the liaison station so that residents can meet with them face to face. Liaison station policy stipulates that reception activities should be carried out at regular intervals: "The liaison station is open to the people according to a schedule. Representatives receive visits from citizens

at regular intervals." [28] In practice, liaison stations abide by this policy and post signs advising residents of the reception schedule:

(Staff:) According to the requirements, representatives carry out reception activities on a fixed day every month. Here is our schedule. You can have a look. As stipulated, this schedule is arranged at the beginning of the year. We post a notice to let the residents know of the reception one week in advance. —— Interview 67

(Staff:) We carry out regular reception activities. Generally speaking, they occur at least once a quarter or, when some representatives are relatively free, maybe once a month or so. We publish the information on the Internet and inform the residents. ——Interview 68

What does a reception look like? This news photo [29] below shows a typical

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28 联络站按时对人民群众开放。人大代表每隔一定时间接访人民群众。《人大代表社区联络站工作职责》Responsibilities of the Liaison stations (Published by Office of the Standing Committee of Shenzhen [2008] No. 45).

29 I was rarely allowed to photograph liaison station activity, so I have used this image from public news from the official website of liaison station of Shenzhen, which closely resembles what I saw in the field: https://sqllz.szrd.gov.cn/

reception.

Figure 6.2: Scene of a Reception at a Liaison Station

Note: The picture is captioned "A reception of People's Congress representatives in XX community". The

banner reads "Care for the people, perform duties, and play an active role. —— By XX liaison station"

The liaison station facilitates receptions, most obviously by providing an office

space for the venue. Receptions are scheduled to correspond with the representatives'

office hours. Typically, representatives sit at one side of a table, and residents, at the

other. In good weather, the table is often set outdoors (known as "setting up a stall" [bai

tan, 摆摊]), but generally the meetings occur in the RC building.

(Researcher:) Do the representatives hold meetings in the residents' community?

(Staff:) The representatives are scheduled to visit during the second week of every

second month. We have a fixed reception venue… A few days before the reception,

we post a notice, stating the time and place. Residents who wish to meet the

representatives will come at that fixed time. —— Interview 30

(Staff:) You go to the doctor and the doctor prescribes your medicine. During the

reception, as you can imagine, the scene is like going to a doctor's office, with the

representatives acting as doctors. —— Interview 24

(Staff:) The reception can be held in the conference room, or representatives can take turns setting up outdoor stalls in the community. —— Interview 29

Receptions do not conform to a single format: there can be individual one-on-one meetings and multi-representative meetings (where more than one representative is present) (see Figure 6.3 below). Figure 6.2 shows a multi-representative meeting.

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                                          ┌──────────────────────┐
                                          │ Plan A:              │
                                          │ Normal schedule      │
                                          └──────────────────────┘
                                          ┌──────────────────────┐
                                          │ Plan B1:             │
                      ┌───────────────┐   │ Telephone duty       │
                      │ Individual    │   └──────────────────────┘
                      │ representative│   ┌──────────────────────┐
                      └───────────────┘   │ Plan B2:             │
                                          │ Flexible schedule    │
                                          │ based on availability│
┌──────────┐                              └──────────────────────┘
│ Reception│                              ┌──────────────────────┐
└──────────┘                              │ Plan B3:             │
                                          │ Postponed            │
                                          └──────────────────────┘
                                          ┌──────────────────────┐
                                          │ Plan A:              │
                                          │ Normal Schedule      │
                      ┌────────────────┐  └──────────────────────┘
                      │ Multi-         │  ┌──────────────────────┐
                      │ representative │  │ Plan B1:             │
                      └────────────────┘  │ Staff relaying       │
                                          │ concerns             │
                                          └──────────────────────┘
                                          ┌──────────────────────┐
                                          │ Plan B2:             │
                                          │ Staff inviting       │
                                          │ activists            │
                                          └──────────────────────┘
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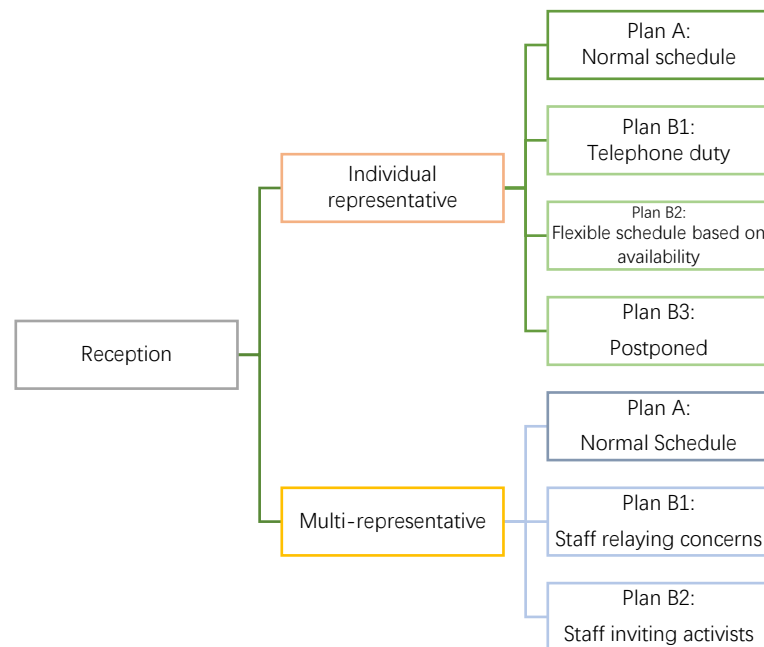
Figure 6.3 Types of Receptions at Liaison Stations

6.1.1.1 Individual receptions

When receptions are conducted one on one, representatives schedule fixed hours at a liaison station office desk in the RC building and are available to residents who wish to meet with them. Even if no residents show up, the representatives are required to be present at the appointed times:

(Staff:) A representative comes to our office every Monday evening. They come in turns, one by one. Once a week, four times a month. ——Interview 14

This type of reception is considered the norm; it follows liaison station procedures. In practice, however, there are alternatives, which have evolved as a result of the representatives' busy schedules (See Figure 6.3).

The first alternative is a reception by telephone. During a scheduled period of time, the liaison staff ensure that telephone access to the representative on duty is readily available. If residents come to the liaison station to meet with the representative, the staff arrange a telephone call:

(Staff:) Representatives… take turns, as scheduled. At our liaison station, their scheduled day is Wednesday. But they are not always here. They are too busy. When they cannot be here but they are needed, we, the staff, can call the representative on duty directly by telephone. ——Interview 29

The second alternative is a reception by availability. Representatives who find it convenient to be at the liaison station are willing to be available for more receptions, while representatives who are busy elsewhere reduce the frequency of their attendance. In a few cases, as noted in Chapter 5, the representatives' workplace is the RC: their availability makes it easier for others to reduce their reception hours:

(Staff:) Every day can be considered a reception day at our liaison station.

(Researcher:) Are there so many problems that he needs to have meetings here every day?

(Staff:) Not so many, but there are two representatives who work at our RC – one is our RC leader – so they are here nearly every day. ——Interview 51

The third alternative is the most straightforward: postponing the reception. If the scheduled time is inconvenient, the reception is often postponed:

(Researcher:) I see a notice posted on the door saying that there was a reception yesterday.

(Staff:) The People's Congress representatives were not available yesterday, so the reception cancelled. We are making arrangements for another time. ——Interview 56

(Staff:) Representatives are supposed to attend in accordance with the reception plan, but, on a particular day, a representative may not be free because of other responsibilities. If a representative cannot make it, then I ask other representatives to change their schedule. This is very flexible. ——Interview 67

(Researcher:) Does the representative come here for every visit?

(Staff:) Sometimes not! The representatives will come when they are free. They will come the next time, if they don't have time this time. Because they all have their own jobs! ——Interview 63

Given the frequent use of these alternative arrangements, the RC staff and leader are often the first people to receive people arriving with issues to discuss. When the meeting with the representative is conducted by phone, the first receptionists are liaison staff. When representatives postpone their meetings, then the people who arrive will generally report their problem to the liaison staff. As we mentioned above, most liaison staff are part-time: their main job is at the RC. When reception is based on availability, the most available representatives are those who have jobs at the RC. So, it can be seen, that in many receptions, the RC fills in for the representative by providing the initial face-to-face contact with a resident.

6.1.1.2 Multi-representative receptions

Multi-representative receptions occur when two or more representatives are available in the community at the same time. Figure 6.2 is a photograph of a multi-representative reception. The People's Congress system requires representatives to carry out collective activities periodically. The multi-representative reception, organized by liaison stations, qualifies as such a collective activity. It is, not surprisingly, a more formal and large-scale event than an individual reception.

In addition to the obvious difference in size, multi-representative receptions differ from individual ones because the former tend to focus on one issue. More than one representative is invited to attend the reception because there is a particular pressing issue that needs to be discussed. These issues are generally related to current and local events:

> *(Staff:) The focus of the reception day depends. It depends on what's in the news each month. For example, last week, our community health centre was renovated. The reception took place at the entrance of the renovated centre, so that the representatives could canvass the residents' views.*
>
> *(Researcher:) Is the choice of issues made by the residents? Who decides it?*
>
> *(Staff:) When a reception is about a new policy, we set the topic. There is another type of reception topic, which depends on what residents of our community are most concerned about these days. You know, each community faces different difficulties and challenges and those usually provide the focus of the reception. —— Interview 36*

The attendance of more than one representative at these receptions has the practical

advantage of encouraging the combination of resources. As noted in Chapter 5, representatives have different jobs, abilities, networks, and background knowledge at their disposal. When several representatives are present at the same time, they have opportunity to integrate their resources. Their co-operation and complementary abilities allow them to mobilize the efforts to address the problems raised by the residents:

> *(Representative:) Some other representatives at the same liaison station where I am affiliated run engineering businesses and have a lot of field knowledge; some are municipal government officials who know best how to interpret the policy; some are teachers and scholars, whose knowledge is very wide-ranging; and some are grassroots cadres, employed at RCs and street offices, who have a lot of experience addressing the concerns of ordinary residents and are familiar with the difficulties of grassroots work. During the reception, if these people are all present, the issue can be addressed effectively on the spot. You can imagine, on any given case, we each have our own perspective and can offer approaches and even resources based on our own strengths. These approaches and resources often complement each other, which is very helpful for the residents and the RC. ——*
> *Interview 75*

Although the benefits of many representatives attending a reception at the same time are clear, the representatives' busy schedules often make this difficult, with the result that multi-representative receptions often become events where the representatives take turns interacting with the residents (and are, therefore, not unlike individual receptions):

> *(Staff:) Most of these representatives are the heads of enterprises or have some other senior position, and they are very busy. Therefore, usually three to five representatives of our liaison station will come to our office for a reception. They will attend as long as they have free time. ——Interview 52*

(Staff:) Usually two or three come, because representatives have their own jobs, their own work, their own company. They are in charge and have other important work, so they are very busy. ——Interview 31

There are, in practice, alternatives to multi-representative receptions, just as there are to individual receptions. Because most residents work, they can rarely attend receptions during weekdays. One alternative is to have the RC staff relay residents' problems to the representatives. Another alternative is inviting activists to represent the residents' concerns.

In the case of the first alternative, the liaison station staff (who are also the staff of the RC) report to the representatives on behalf of the resident. To do so, the RC must canvass the residents in advance. The second alternative involves inviting activists who act as spokespeople for residents to participate in the reception. Most RC have a contact list of such spokespeople: they are activists who have maintained a close relationship with the RC for a long time. They are willing to communicate the interests of other residents to the RC. They often "reflect up" community issues to the RC and distribute official information to residents on behalf of the RC. Inviting activists, of course, means that the RC has screened the participants in the reception in advance; this often involves determining the issues to be discussed.

So, once again, the staff of the RC are the first line of communication with residents. They provide the initial face-to-face contact.

To summarize, receptions are a means for liaison stations to effect liaisons. They provide opportunities for residents to take their concerns to representatives. Due to

practical constraints, these are not always face-to-face meetings. As a result, the responsibility falls to the RC to provide alternatives. The RC plays a vital role in the reception process.

6.1.2 IIV (Investigations, Inspections, and Visits)

If receptions provide communication that "reflects up" the residents' concerns to the representatives, there are also liaisons that follow a top-down pattern and are initiated by the representatives. They are investigations, inspections, and visits. Investigations (*diao yan*, 调研) are undertaken by representatives to learn the residents' opinions on topics and issues that have been raised by the congress or by the representatives themselves. Inspections (*shi cha*, 视察) are assessments performed by representatives when they visit the community in order to judge the performance the RC and other community organizations. Visits (*zou fang*, 走访) allow representatives to familiarize themselves with the community by walking about, talking to residents, and visiting organizations. These visits are arranged by the liaison station.

There are differences in the emphases of these three modes of communication. Investigations emphasize the professional expertise of the representatives. They adopt the role of researcher, systematically examining an issue, forming conclusions, reporting results, and suggesting policies. Inspections emphasize the authority of representatives. During the inspection, representatives play a supervisory role, guiding and assessing the RC's performance. Visits emphasize the representative's cordial relationship with the community. Representatives get to know the residents and

empathize with their difficulties and sufferings.

Despite the differences in emphases, the protocols for all three activities are very similar. In all cases, representatives visit the community in person and discuss the local situation. As a result, in practice, the three activities tend to blend together: during an inspection, for example, investigations and visits are often carried out simultaneously. During my research, interviewees often referred to these three activities interchangeably, which is why I have treated them as the composite IIV in this study.

The liaison station acts as the assembly point for IIV, since such activities tend to be mobile. The representatives do not stay in a fixed location, but the liaison station serves as a gathering place:

> *(Staff:) A liaison station acts as a gathering place. Once the congress system has scheduled activities in the community, representatives need to get together at an agreed time. As a result, there must be a liaison station to release information to the public and let the representatives gather here before the event. Generally, they come here first, and then go into the community to visit and investigate…. So, the liaison station is like a temporary gathering place. ——Interview 53*

The representatives' agendas for IIVs can vary. Sometimes, when there is no particular issue that requires attention, the liaison station organizes an IIV so that representatives can gain a general sense of the daily lives of the community and its residents:

> *(Staff:) The situation in our community is relatively simple. There's not much going on. So, when the representatives come, they usually do some research in the community to get to know the situation of the residents or they go to some companies and stores in our area to see whether the security measures are in place or not. It's usually about these very routine things. ——Interview 40*

Most of the time, however, the IIV has a clear focus. There are two types of focus: difficulties the community is facing and "hot" topics (or recent controversial issues). According to the annual summary of a liaison station, representatives "conducted targeted investigation of hot topics and community difficulties."[30] The hot topics usually refer to decisions made by the representatives and the congress system, while the community difficulties are generally issues that the RC has drawn to the representatives' attention.

Staff at liaison stations reported that they alert representatives to community difficulties:

> *(Staff:) You know, each jurisdiction has different difficulties, and they change over time, so the issues are not the same. So, we decide the focus of the IIV according to the specific difficulty of our community at present. ——Interview 36*

In the case of hot topics, liaison office staff take their lead from the representatives:

> *(Staff:) The focus depends on what the representatives want to investigate and research. ——Interview 33*

> *(Staff:) Hot topics often refer to new policies, current politics, or what people are most concerned about at the moment. ——Interview 36*

A staff member at a liaison station described her most recent IIV. The district government had recently established "community service centres" in various communities and recruited professional social workers to provide services for residents.

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[30] "围绕群众普遍关心的'热点'和'难点'，组织代表开展有针对性的调研。"《XX 联络站年度工作总结》"Annual Summary of XX Liaison station," a document shown by the interviewee of interview 15.

These centres took over some of the administrative functions of RC.[31] Representatives of XX liaison station wanted to learn more about these newly established organizations and the ways that they would provide better service to residents:

(Staff:) Our latest investigation, or inspection activity, addressed community service centres. You know, our district government has set up community service centres in many communities. In the past, it was the community workstation [residents' committee] that provided community services, but it did not have professional social workers on staff. Now we are promoting this centre, which is staffed with professional social workers. Our community set up this centre last year. After its establishment, there was a trial period in which some problems were exposed. Then the representatives became interested in the centres, hoping to see how they would serve the residents and how they could solve the residents' difficulties. So, we organized an IIV. Representatives came to the community and were given a briefing from the director of the service centre about the difficulties they encountered when they came into the community and contacted the residents.

The representatives will do two more IIVs on this issue. Then, they will submit their findings to the congress system for the government to make decisions. Because many difficulties cannot be solved by our residents' committee, the government needs to intervene with policies and resources from the top down. They can solve the problems faced by the community service centres, so that they can develop and provide needed services to residents. The role of our liaison station is to get the representatives out into the community and help them do research on issues that they're interested in. Liaison stations provide representatives with a base and a channel to the grassroots level of the community. ——Interview 33

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[31] In this context, "RC" refers to community workstations (社区工作站). In this thesis, community workstations can be generally understood to be the same as RCs.

An IIV is supposed to provide immediate communication between representatives and residents. In practice, however, residents are not always present. Most work on weekdays. As a result, it is not uncommon for an IIV to have no residents in attendance. In such cases, it is the staff of the liaison station and the RC who convey the residents' concerns and take the representatives on a tour of the community:

> *(Staff:) Young residents have to go to work on weekdays. It's more important for them to make money. They don't care about current events and community issues. They don't care about politics. ——Interview 56*

> *(Staff:) We usually conduct these activities during working hours, so it is difficult for people who have jobs to participate. ——Interview 14*

> *(Staff:) Basically, not many people come. And we usually hold them during working hours, so I think maybe the time is not convenient for people to participate. ——Interview 37*

When residents are unavailable, the IIV can take one of two forms: the representatives are shown around the neighborhood by RC staff and discuss the situation with RC staff or the representatives meet with activists who represent the residents and whom the RC has invited to participate.

6.1.3 Appointments

If reception directs communication from residents to representatives and IIVs direct communication from representatives to residents (as shown in Table 6.1), then one might assume that a two-way communication channel has been established and the two sides will have no difficulty keeping in touch. However, since representatives are not

at liaison station most of the time, they can be difficult to locate. Appointments are one way to overcome this difficulty:

> (Staff:) Representatives of the People's Congress are not based in our community. They are school principals and hospital directors, and so on. They rely on appointments. ——Interview 49

As mentioned in Chapter 5, representatives did not have offices in the community before the establishment of liaison stations. The liaison station provides a rough equivalent to an office, since supplies venue and staff to provide assistance. Since the representatives are rarely in attendance, residents rely on liaison station staff to make appointments for meetings. The liaison station staff informs the representatives and books a time for the meeting when both parties are available. Staff is responsible for receiving the residents, registering their request, calling representatives, making the appointment, and introducing both parties:

> (Staff:) Residents call us if they have any questions. Information can be collected at the liaison station platform. If residents need to communicate with representatives, we can relay their information or we can arrange a meeting. ——Interview 53

> (Staff:) We will call the representatives to see when they are available and make an appointment. You know, they have their own jobs and they are very busy. ——Interview 71

> (Staff:) If someone suddenly comes and says that he or she wants to ask a representative to do something, then as liaison staff, we will take down the relevant information (name, telephone number, time, and description of the request), so that representatives can prepare for the meeting. ——Interview 30

The representatives come to the liaison station and meet the residents at the

appointed time. Making an appointment is like reception, but it is a step that precedes reception. Therefore, the appointment can be regarded as "the reception of reception" or *hou fang* (候访), which can be translated directly as "waiting for a reception":

> *(Staff:) We, the liaison staff, are in the charge of the "waiting for a reception." "Waiting for a reception" is like this: I am the liaison employee, and I stay here in liaison station, residents can come and ask me questions. After I record their questions, I will bring the information to representatives. ——Interview 67*

In practice, however, liaison staff also advise, and even decide, which representatives to contact:

> *(Staff:) Generally speaking, if the residents have an appointment, we will help to select a representative to deal with the matter, and if this representative fails, we will arrange for another one. ——Interview 31*

So, like the other procedures we have discussed, there is also a widely used alternative in practice when it comes to making appointments. According to some interviewees, direct meetings with representatives may be omitted entirely. Sometimes residents do not need to see the representative in person and just relay their concerns to the liaison staff:

> *(Staff:) If a resident wants to find a representative, he can go to our liaison station where he will find us, the liaison staff. He can report the problem directly to the liaison staff, who will then register. After that, the liaison staff will contact the representatives and relay the concern. We will also solicit opinions from residents. If residents feel they need to contact the representatives, our liaison staff can help them make an appointment with the representatives. If the residents think there is no need for a face-to-face interview, we report their views to the representatives*

through our liaison station, and then the representatives will report the issue to the functional departments of the government. ——Interview 42

Sometimes, the opportunity for a meeting depends on whether the representatives have time:

(Staff:)I'm a liaison staff member. If the residents have any comments, questions, or issues, they can give me the information. Then I will communicate with the congress system. Of course, if representatives have time, they can meet with the residents face to face to address their concerns. If they don't have time, we will help them communicate. ——Interview 31

As we have seen with other procedures, the liaison station plays a central role in offering an alternative that is often the practical choice. The staff will relay the residents' concerns to the representatives or even to the congress system by phone and letter, and will provide background information to help representatives understand the situation. As a result, the information received by representatives depends heavily on the interpretation and recording processes of the liaison staff. As for residents, the way in which their concerns are conveyed to representatives is also largely dependent on the interpretation and recording processes of liaison staff. In the process of interpretation and recording, the representatives are not present, so the action of liaison station staff (who are also RC staff and actually under the leadership of RC), to a large extent, reflects the will of the RC. Even when residents do meet with representatives, the liaison staff often have space to decide which representative will be present at the meeting. In sum, the RC plays a role that cannot be underestimated in the appointment process of liaison station.

Reception, IIV, and appointments provide opportunities for residents to meet representatives face to face. Such communication allows residents to pass information directly to the representatives (or "reflect up" as shown in Figure 5.7). However, when residents come to the RC, their main concern is not to meet with a representative; instead, they want help with their problem from any available source. So, residents rarely come to the liaison station directly and request a meeting with a representative. Rather, they appeal for help from the RC:

> *(Staff:) To be honest, if you ask about appointments at the liaison station, I can only say that almost no one comes to book an appointment directly. In all the years I have worked here, no resident has ever directly and explicitly aske to meet with a representative. ——Interview 42*

> *(Researcher:) Now, are there any residents who come and say directly that they want to meet with the representatives?*

> *(Staff:) That is very rare. ——Interview 58*

> *(Researcher:) Since you took over, have any residents asked directly that representatives be contacted to solve their problems?*

> *(Staff:) Not yet. ——Interview 52*

Not many people, in fact, directly make appointments or attend receptions and IIVs:

> *(Researcher:) How do residents know there are receptions or investigations?*

> *(Staff:) We'll put up a notice. The residents would tell each other.... But basically, not many people come. —— Interview 37*

> *(Researcher:) How many residents usually come when you hold a reception?*

> *(Staff:) Not many. I mean it. Not many people. —— Interview 14*

If residents rarely initiate contact with representatives, is the liaison station – the professed bridge between residents and representatives – useless? Or is it merely a one-way channel for representatives to reach out to residents？

6.2 Undesigned Triggers: Referral

In addition to the designed means of initiating communication mentioned above, there is another, undesigned, means that is frequently used – referral:

> *(Staff:) Generally, residents come to the community RC first, and then the RC will advise residents on whether to seek help from representatives through the liaison station or from some other channel. ——Interview 64*

In the case of a referral, the RC opts to send cases to representatives in order to prompt action on the part of the liaison station. Once again, the RC can be seen to play a crucial role in communicating residents' concerns through liaison station.

6.2.1 Process of RC's Referral

While I have used the term "referral" for the process described above, it is not a term that arose during my interviews with the staff. These events happen so naturally and frequently that no specific name had been attached. No one said "We provide referrals": instead, they simply describe the communication process. The following is a typical example:

> *(Staff:) In fact, our community not only has just the People's Congress liaison station. Actually, our RC is very comprehensive. The People's Congress liaison station is mainly for representatives stationed in our community. If the residents*

have any questions or difficulties, they let us [RC[32]] know. Then, we determine how to deal with it, and if the RC can't solve it, we consider reporting it to the street-level government. If they cannot solve the problem, we may go to the liaison station to ask a representative to come here to have a meeting to study together the issue. The People's Congress liaison station is just one of many resources for our work. In addition, we have the Party representative's workshop, the residents' meeting, and other platforms. We have all these platforms here at the same time. If we are only talking about the People's Congress liaison station, to be honest, the workload is not that large. Nowadays we're working on a multi-channel approaches to solving problems. ——Interview 23

Almost every member of staff interviewed agreed with the above sentiments once the interview had evolved into a more casual discussion. When, at the beginning of an interview, I asked about the liaison station's work procedure, I was told about the formal channels (reception, IIVs, and appointments), which are considered "compulsory actions" (*gui ding dong zuo*, 规定动作), the procedures to be followed according to regulations. For example, one staff warmly welcomed me and began the interview with a description of the official channels:

(Staff:) If a resident wants to meet with a representative...I can help him make an appointment with the representative… In addition, we will arrange time for representatives to visit our community every two months, for receptions, visits, investigations, and so on. ——Interview 42

After chatting a while, however, she told me that problems also can be solved by

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[32] The staff of the liaison station is usually also the staff of the RC, as noted in Chapter 5. During the interviews, liaison station staff often answered my questions in the tone as the staff of the RC. So, by "we" and "us" they often referred to the RC. In the first few interviews, I reconfirm this with the interviewees. Later, when I could figure out who "we" was referring to according to the context, I stopped interrupting my interviewees.

other means：

> *(Staff:) When residents have problems, they usually come to us [RC] first. If our RC can solve it, we will solve it directly. If it is the responsibility of the street government to solve it, we will report it…. If the street government still cannot solve the problem, we will choose other channels, including the "Leader Station Day,"[33] which is held every week. Or, when we are carrying out "area home visits," [34] residents can also report issues during the process of collecting information. There are a lot of channels. The People's Congress representative liaison station is not the only choice for us. ——Interview 42*

It seems, then, that residents usually get in touch with the RC first. If it is not an issue to refer to higher levels of government (subdistrict offices or street-level offices), then the RC will consider making a referral and requesting that the liaison station find a representative of the People's Congress. It should be noted, however, that the RC has many resources that it can use for referrals and many options in addition to the liaison station as shown in Figure 6.4.

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[33] Some street-level government officials are stationed in residents' community during "station day," which usually takes place every two months.

[34] The jurisdiction is divided into small grids by latitude and longitude lines, and each small grid is assigned a special person to collect information and hear resident concerns.

Access to Higher-level government
- People's Congress Representatives Liaison Station (人大代表联络站)
- People's Political Consultative Conference Members Liaison station(政协委员联络站)
- Communist Party Representatives Workshop (党代表工作室)
- On-Site Local Government Leader (驻点领导)

Obtain Expertise
- On-Site Lawyer (驻点律师)

Access to residents
- Residents' Negotiation Conference (居民议事会)
- Building captain (楼长)
- Grid-Man Home-Visit

Solve contradiction and disputes
- People's Mediation Committee (人民调解委员会)
- Social Worker Station (社工站)

Obtain money for projects
- Party-Mass Service Center (党群服务中心)
- Micro Projects For People's livelihood (民生微实事)
......

8 Or Choose other Channels

Figure 6.4 Residents' Committee Toolbox

Note: This figure addresses the various options of Step 8 in Figure 5.7

According to my observations and interviews, these other options include on-site local government leaders, [35] the Communist Party representative workshop, home visits,[36] etc. These various resources are the RC's toolbox:

(Staff:) Most of the problems of our community can be dealt with here at the RC. If the RC cannot solve the problem, we [RC] will think of ways to reflect up, by enlisting the help of People's Congress representatives, Party representatives, and on-site leaders. ——Interview 49

(Staff:) Residents always give us [RC] mixed messages. Residents don't classify them. When there is a problem, when there is an injustice, when there is a problem that cannot be solved, they will come and tell us. So, we, that is, the RC, will classify what they say. For example, if it is an issue of public security, we will

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[35] See footnote 33.

[36] See footnote 34.

contact the head of the police station; if it is of a legal procedure, we contact the court; if it can be reported to the street-level government, then we do so… In general, we will try to deal with these problems inside the RC. But if they are something we cannot solve, we will communicate through various channels, including the liaison station of the People's Congress. ——Interview 51

(Staff:) The RC is comprehensive. There are many channels that are integrated here. Each one provides a means for our residents to voice their concerns. Each channel receives information through the same interface, that is, our RC, and then the RC distributes the information through different channels, just like putting different hats on different people. ——Interview 09

Why does the RC have such wide-ranging discretionary power? The most important reason is that the residents take a pragmatic view: they want their problem to be solved and are not worried about the means. They come to the RC because it is familiar and approachable. The RC, then, will advise, or even decide, if this is an issue that requires the attention of a representative:

(Staff:) Residents never identify a particular person or a particular level of administration to talk to. Whoever the person is – congress representative, Party member, lawyer, or someone from any other channel – it doesn't matter. A title is not important to residents. A title means nothing to residents. When residents have a certain problem, they just want to work it out. Any channel is OK, as long as it can be solved. ——Interview 03

(Staff:) Residents often come to us, the RC, first, and we advise them on which channel to go to. ——Interview 33

Another reason that residents first approach the RC is that few know about the existence of liaison stations. When I was doing field work, every time I had difficulty

finding a liaison station, I was unable to get directions from residents. When I asked "Do you know where the liaison station of the People's Congress representatives is?" no one knew. When I followed with, "Do you know where the residents' committee is?" many were able to show me the way.

This phenomenon is regarded by the staff of liaison stations as a sign that they have not managed to enter into People's consciousness. They believe that, although they have tried to popularize the liaison stations, residents are not inclined to seek out representatives:

> *(Staff:) In fact, it is very rare for residents to come to us directly in order to gain access to representatives. One of the important reasons is that residents' awareness of our role is not strong. Generally, they come directly to the residents' committee. With problems at home and outside, such as water leakage, quarrels between husband and wife, mosquitoes, everyone comes to the residents' committee. For some big problems, it is difficult for us [RC] to solve them, but the residents still come to us directly, and then we will find other ways to solve their problems. To draw attention to the existence of liaison station, we also have a lot of promotions… like events, flyers, announcements, and advertisements. But, I think, the awareness of the residents is still relatively weak, or even non-existent, at present. In this case, we can't rush. We must wait and let it develop slowly – allow the residents the opportunity to gain a better understanding. ——Interview 58*

What guides the RC in its choice of resources to help residents with their problems? Like the residents themselves, the RC follows a pragmatic course. The RC does not base its choice on hierarchical power arrangements: they do not matter. They make their choice based on whether a particular person can solve a particular problem. If a Party

representative can solve the problem, then they will contact the Party representative; if a People's Congress representative can solve the problem, then they will contact the People's Congress representative through the liaison station, and so on.

This approach may seem very informal and unofficial, but in fact, every tool in the RC's tool box is accessed through formal and official channels. The RC is able to use these tools flexibly according to the specific situation at the grassroots level. The RC matches resources with problems: they try out their various tools until the problem is solved or every method is exhausted. From this perspective, the RC plays the role of mediator between institutions and residents:

> *(Staff:) We [RC]'ll report any problems any way. Whatever channel can solve the problem, OK, then we'll use it! From our point of view, as long as you can solve the resident's problem, we will seek help from you, no matter what system you belong to. We don't care at all. Anyway, you're here, and when we bring cases to you, you can help us fix it, and that's what we want to see. And that's it. Done! Frankly speaking, this is what happens. There are not many complicated standards. The only decision is to determine who can solve the practical problem; then we will try to communicate through the corresponding channel. ——Interview 64*

6.2.2 Informal and Formal Referrals

The RC matches the residents' requirements to representatives' resources based on a good understanding of both residents and representatives. First, their determinations are based on an understanding of community, residents, and residents' demands. In addition to the long-term understanding of the community gained by day-to-day work, the RC will also engage in discussions with residents, and conduct investigations and research

before determining which tool to apply (Step 3 of Figure 5.7). Second, the RC's determinations are based on their familiarity with representatives. As noted in Chapter 5, representatives have resources arising from their social status, expertise, experience, and networks. Through long-term co-operation, beginning with the representatives' election, RCs generally maintain close relations with representatives. Sometimes these relationships develop into friendships. Sometimes the representative is a familiar figure in the community. From my interviews and observations, I learned that some RCs initiate referrals with representatives who clearly have spare time and frequently participate in community activities. Alternatively, they may initially contact the chief of liaison station or a representative with specialized knowledge or a senior representative or a representative who works in the community RC. Sometimes these choices overlap.

The contact usually takes the form of private conversations, primarily by phone (Steps 5 & 6 of Figure 5.7). An informal telephone call is made to ask the representative to "help" or at least determine if the problem is one that falls under the liaison station's brief:

> *(Staff:) The representative of our liaison station attaches great importance to the work of the community, and often when our RC director makes a call, the representative will start thinking of ways to help our residents solve their problems.*
> *——Interview 16*

> *(Staff:) We [RC] have always maintained good relations with the representative. Sometimes when residents have some problems, if we know that a representative is very familiar with the relevant facts, then we will make a phone call to*

communicate with him directly, to ask whether the matter is one that he can solve.
Or we may also consult with the chief of the liaison station – ask him to check and
see if it is something that can be solved through the liaison station. Private
communication before a formal request will save you time and avoid detours. —

—Interview 17

(Chief [Representative]:) The RC will contact me first, generally the liaison staff
will make a phone call to me and so on. In fact, this phone call is not a direct
appeal to me, but is intended to determine whether a problem can be solved
through the liaison station. Most of the time, this kind of call is not formal, but
rather casual. After all, we've gotten to know each other pretty well. And then if I
think it's OK, we'll talk about what to do next, and then I may go to the community
to do the rest of the work. Or sometimes, I'm not sure. I'll talk to other senior
representatives. If they think it is OK, then we will organize a formal meeting
through the liaison station, and we will discuss the solution to the problem together.

(Researcher:) How important is private communication in your opinion?

(Chief [Representative]:) Private communication is very important. In fact, there
are many problems that can be solved through private communication. At the
grassroots level, issues are more complex than you might imagine, and we always
have a number of meetings to figure out a solution, including both formal and
informal, public and private meetings. Because the reality is not as simple as the
formal procedure written on paper. There are so many complicated details that
need to be explored especially when many parties must co-operate, and sometimes
private communication based on good private relationships is useful and efficient
in actual practice. We always need more a flexible and pragmatic approach to deal
with actual problems and to serve people in real world. ——Interview 73

The "flexible and pragmatic approach" of private communication is sometimes all
that is needed to solve a problem. If not, there are two ways that RC can refer the

problem to the liaison station.

1) The first is to advise the resident to take advantage of the official triggers to initiate contact with a representative – reception, IIV, and appointment. The RC may suggest residents to make an appointment to meet representatives; or to attend the reception and IIV on time as participants, to express their appeals to representatives. Thus, the RC's referral (an unofficial trigger) become a feeder of those official triggers:

> *(Staff:) Residents will tell us [RC] first if they have any problems or comments and suggestions. For the IIV and reception activities, we, I mean the residents' committee, will decide which problems the liaison station can solve, and then tell the residents who have these problems to participate in the activities, to sit down face to face with the representative, to have a chat about their problems or issues, and to hear the representative's opinions, ideas, and solutions. As, you know, representatives come to the community for receptions and visits at regular intervals. Usually, residents are not be able to see representatives immediately; instead, they wait for next activity. If it's not an emergency, we will arrange for residents to wait until the next activity where they can communicate with representatives face to face. ——Interview 64*

This type of referral boosts the productivity of the liaison station. It not only offers residents a channel to communicate their problems but also raises the profile of liaison station.

2) The second type of formal referral is: the RC could initiate the liaison station by directly inform representatives in RC's own name about a problem, without the need of specific residents to communicate to representatives. In this way, the RC would realize the will of the RC itself. When a RC believes that a problem in the residents' community

needs to be solved through a liaison station, the RC can trigger the liaison station by itself. In this way, the RC can flexibly mobilize the resources in the hands of representatives through liaison stations to solve the difficulties that the RC faces in the daily work of community governance.

> *(Staff:) For example, in our community, there were water leakage problems in the exterior walls of several buildings, and we [RC] considered it should be solved as soon as possible. Later we brought representatives to the scene to investigate. The representatives quickly contacted the enforcement team of city management department of government. After that, the captain of the enforcement team soon came to explain the situation to representatives, and then promised to repair the leakage immediately. Indeed, finally, it was resolved.*
>
> *(Researcher:) Is this a problem that the residents reported to the liaison station?*
>
> *(Staff:) No, no residents have come to tell us [RC] about the wall problem, but our RC decided to solve it through the liaison station. ——Interview 46*

The RC's own will may also include the residents' demands. When the RC initiates a liaison station process that solves a resident's problem, the resident credits the RC with the solution. In other words, by making use of liaison stations, the RC fulfills its brief to address residents' concerns. For example, at one negotiation meeting of liaison station, the leader of the RC referred a case about a community trash bin to the representatives. When the representatives were hesitant to tackle the problem by liaison station, the RC leader immediately tried to persuade them to pass a proposal to address the issue. The RC takes its role as spokesperson for the people and hopes to maintain the residents' support and trust by advocating for issues that are important to them. (Interview and Observation 91; for more details, see Chapter 7.)

As we have seen, the RC can make a referral in two ways, and they make use of this practice very frequently. Residents are the communication sources of the first type of referral, while the RC is the source of the second.

6.2.3 The RC's Importance in the Referral Process

Liaison stations are intended to provide communication between residents and representatives. No matter what form a referral takes, the RC is theoretically a third party. Why do we need the participation of this third party in the workings of the liaison station?

If the act of obtaining credit is regarded as a transaction in the broad sense, then residents and representatives can be regarded as two traders who intend to conduct a transaction to earn credit. Representatives want to be re-elected and respected, and to possess wide-ranging networks: that is the credit they want to earn. Residents also strive to earn credit, which would then be applied to solving their problems and improving their public services. In the past, these two parties could not earn the credit they wanted through direct reciprocity – they could not trade directly with each other. As discussed in Chapter 3, there is a great deal of compartmentalization in China between elite participation and non-elite participation, which make the transactions between them very hard to happen directly. Most high-level transactions take place between members of the elite class such as government officials and non-governmental elites. One party profits from complying with the regime, while the other gains stability by sharing power.

In this respect, China adheres to the corporatism model (see Chapter 3). Members of the elite class trade only with each other, while members of the non-elite also similarly trade only with each other. The currencies of the two markets do not circulate with each other. The two markets are entirely separate – the hallmark of compartmentalization.

Although the law stipulates that the representatives be elected by the People's vote, as noted in Chapter 2 and 5, It seems unlikely, that representatives would be strongly motivated by the prospect of gaining votes for re-election. To use a business analogy, when two kinds of credit cannot be directly traded with each other, the most obvious solution is to introduce a means to exchange the two currencies according to the same credit, thus linking the two separate markets into a single unified market. The reason that the previous laws and regulations provide "the market" in name only but cannot promote the "effective trade" between the two in reality, is that they had not introduced an effective third party in to be a means of exchange. The RC represents this third party – the crucial means of exchange. The liaison station's relationship with the RC means that it is able to provide a means for representatives and residents to have a transactional relationship. The RC acts as a third party in three ways.

First, the RC and the representatives are in the same elite market, so they can trade with each other. Their inclusion in this market is determined by social status and job duties. Although the RC is at the bottom of the bureaucracy, it has a certain authority in its jurisdiction. RC staff generally are pursuing a government career path. The community activists who are mobilized by the RC are community leaders who help

members of the elite class to gain prestige in the public opinion. This prestige is valued by local elites, especially entrepreneurs and leaders of various organizations, who are often chosen to be representatives. At the same time, the primary employment of some representatives is at the RC or in government departments that co-operate closely with RCs, so that these representatives have a long-term collegial relationship with RC, especially with the RC leaders. And, of course, conducting the People's Congress election is a part of the work of the RC (see Chapter 5), which gives representatives sufficient incentive to maintain a good relationship with the RC. For these reasons, representatives are willing to spend a certain amount of time, energy, and resources to help the RC solve the difficulties faced by the community, and often establish close friendships.

Second, the RC and residents also share a market and can trade with each other. The residents have bargaining power because the RC relies on their co-operation in the course of their day-to-day work. Maintaining community stability, which is the key criterion of local government performance, depends on the willingness of residents to heed the arguments and arrangements of the RC. Also, RCs are located within communities; the staff meet residents frequently and form well-established bonds. And furthermore, the problems encountered by residents have often been identified as problems by the RC as well. On many occasions, they share the same goals, particularly to gain the resources to improve community amenities. For these reasons, the RC is motivated to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with the residents.

Third, the RC has been institutionally absorbed into the relationship between representatives and residents by the liaison stations. Before the establishment of the liaison stations, some communities did not have representatives to help solve problems, and other communities had only sporadic access to representatives:

(Researcher:) Did any representatives come to the community to help before the liaison station was established?

(Staff:) No. Not until set up a liaison station. ——Interview 27

(Researcher:) Was there any contact between the representative and the residents before the station was established?

(Staff:) Yes, but not so focused. With the liaison station, their contact can be more systematic and standardized. ——Interview 36

(Staff:) When there was no liaison station, residents did not have an effective way to contact representatives. In the past, many representatives focused only on their own work, but with the liaison station, they can come together and pool their resources. Usually, when residents have things to reflect up … if we think there is a need, we will let representatives know these problems in time. So, as far as the liaison station is concerned, the residents and we, the residents' committee, make full use of it, so it does play a role. ——Interview 51

That is to say, the intermediary role of RC existed before the establishment of liaison stations, but it was sporadic and informal, not systematic and official.

Since the establishment of the liaison station, the RC has been more integral to the relationship between residents and representatives, and clearly plays a key role in providing channels of communication. This integration has evolved as a result of a

number of factors; it is not merely the result of regulatory requirements. The regulations governing liaison stations do not specify the role of the RC, but given the shared resources of the RC and the liaison station (in terms of locale, funding, personnel structure, and working processes), it is not surprising that these two bodies have developed their own mutually beneficial strategies and formed a relatively stable alliance. While the RC can use the liaison station as a means of government access, the liaison station can use the RC as a key third party.

There are three main reasons, then, that liaison stations serve as channels for residents and representatives to initiate information exchanges, with the RC acting as intermediary. The liaison station is a workable channel because it provides a unified market, where both representatives and residents can gain credit, with an effective intermediary.

When we consider to the two referral strategies discussed in Section 6.2.2, we can see that, for the first type of referral, the RC plays the role of "broker," and for the second type of referral, the RC plays the role of "dealer." In a market, if a party buys from one trader and then sells to another trader at a profit, that party is a dealer. If, instead, a party only earns brokerage fees by helping traders communicate information, match trades, and handle transactions, then that party is a broker. In the case of the first referral, as a broker, the RC effectively facilitates an interaction between the two sides, so that residents who originally had no access to representatives can contact them and express their concerns, and representatives who were unfamiliar with community affairs can become informed by the residents. Through the intermediary of the RC,

residents can access better public services and representatives can increase the participation rate in their community activities, thus showing the People's Congress that they take their job seriously. In return, the RC receives respect and gratitude from residents and representatives, and is considered as useful and valuable by both sides. With the introduction of the liaison stations, RCs also get a positive evaluation from the congress system and their own administration. In other words, they reap both institutionalized and non-institutionalized rewards for their mediating role.

In the case of the second type of referral, the RC acts as the dealer. The RC undertakes tasks on behalf of the residents and makes certain promises to the residents. The RC invests its reputation: it buys the problem, taking it into its own hands, and undertakes to find ways to solve it. This role, if successful, earns more credit from residents than that of broker, and, conversely, if unsuccessful, loses more credit. In this case, RC, as a dealer, invites the representatives to directly trade with it.

Under the intermediaries of RC, the residents give trust to the merits of representatives (expertise, competence, experience, network, etc.), and hope the merits can help to solve problems; and the representatives are willing to use their merits to serve residents in terms of local affairs, so that can earn credit. The RC and residents decide to choose a representative to reflect up concerns is mostly on the grounds that representative has relevant merits. RC and residents tend to choose representatives who have relevant merits to handle problems, in the hope that the representatives, as trustee, will take the rough opinions of residents and turn them into an appropriate and efficacious appeal based on their professional judgment, so that to resolve the issues

efficiently. Thus, based on RC and residents placing trust to and taking advantage to the merits of representatives, the interests of both residents and representatives have been institutionalized integrated in the process of participating in local affairs. In this way, liaison station provides residents and representatives with an institutionalized means of participating in local affairs.

In this sense, I saw the ways the liaison station conforms to the Meritocracy model (see Section 3.1), of which the elite participation and non-elite participation are not compartmentalized. In this model, representatives would be trusted as responsible, independent trustees, who are able to represent the people's interest based on their own expertise and merit, and this corresponds with what we describe above.

6.3 Summary

Above, we have introduced the official and unofficial initiators, covering steps 1 to 8 of the flowchart (Figure 5.7), and find out that the residents and RC are both playing as the source of the channel (liaison station). Table 6.1 summarizes the initiators of liaison station communication.

Table 6.1 Summary of Initiators of Liaison Station Communication

Triggers	Basic Liaise Direction		Official or Unofficial	Role of Liaison Station	Role of RC	Who is the Source
Reception	RPs ← Residents		Official	Office of RPs	In plan Bs: • Takes the place of representatives to meet residents; • Takes the place of residents to meet representatives; • Screens residents and information.	Residents
IIV (investigation, inspection, and visit)	RPs → Residents		Official	Gathering point of RPs		Residents
Appointment	RPs ← Liaison Staff ← Residents		Official	Front Desk of RPs		Residents
Referral	RPs ← RC		Unofficial	**Tool of RC for Governance**	**Broker** or **Dealer** (Source)	**RC and Residents**

Note: RPs=representatives, RC= Residents' Committee

The official initiators of communication include reception, IIV, and appointments. Together, they form a basic framework for the mutual connection of residents and representatives. The residents and representatives are the main actors. The liaison station serves representatives as their offices, front desks, and gathering points. In practice, however, these processes are often adapted, giving the RC the opportunity to play an important role: the staff of the RC may meet with the residents in advance, frame and screen information, or even take the place of representatives in communication with residents.

The unofficial initiator of communication is a referral, which is often used. In the case of a referral, the liaison station is one of the tools in the RC's tool box. Both the residents and the RC pragmatically consider solving the problem to be the first priority and are willing to follow the most efficient means of doing so, whether it is through the liaison station or through another channel.

In referrals, the RC acts as broker or dealer, bridging the gap between residents and representatives. Referrals are used frequently and often are the first step in initiation a more official communication.

During the initiation of communication, the core relationship is between residents and representatives, but the RC plays a critical role in enabling that relationship. This is exactly where one of the significances of the liaison station lies on. Liaison station unabashedly introduced the RC as an important third party in practice, so that facilitates the local elite and non-elite to share a stable common channel of participation, and in this channel, the interests of the two can be mutual integrated in a certain degree. In this sense, practice that confirms to meritocracy model has been observed in the communication of liaison station.

This chapter covered Steps 1 to 8 of Figure 5.7: it dealt with how communication with the liaison station is initiated. In the next chapter, we examine Steps 9 and 10 in depth and discover how the liaison station decide what messages should be channeled to the government.

Chapter 7: Determining Message: Negotiations within the Liaison Station

After communication with the liaison station has been initiated and the representatives are aware there is a problem to be solved, it is time to decide if the issue is one that can be deal with by the liaison station:

> *(Staff:) Representatives screen the problems that are brought by residents, and if they determine that they are suitable for the liaison station, they will report them, with their suggested solution, to governments. ——Interview 12*

How to decide? What is the criterion? According to the regulations, the duty of representatives is to strength their connection with the residents: "Earnestly listen to the opinions of the people, strengthen connections with the people and grassroots organizations by means of visits, and accept the supervision of the people."[37]

The regulations stipulate that representatives should listen to the opinions of the people, but not all opinions fall under the purview of the liaison station:

> *The people may report their suggestions and opinions on state workings and organizations to the liaison stations. The liaison stations will not accept suggestions and opinions about political parties, cases in judicial proceedings, and private affairs unrelated to state workings and organizations.[38]*

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[37] 认真听取人民群众的意见，采取接访、走访、回访等方式，加强与人民群众、基层单位和组织的联系，接受人民群众的监督。《人大代表社区联络站工作职责》Responsibilities of the Liaison Stations (Published by Office of the Standing Committee of Shenzhen 〔2008〕No. 45).

[38] 人民群众可以向联络站反映对国家机关、组织的有关建议意见。对于政党的建议意见、处于司法程序的案件以及与国家机关、组织无关的私人事务，联络站不予受理。《人大代表社区联络站工作职责》Responsibilities of the Liaison Stations (Published by Office of the Standing Committee

This rule seems to distinguish clearly between the acceptable and unacceptable. In practice, however, such broad criteria are of little use. For this reason, decisions about the involvement of the liaison station are usually made as a result of a series of negotiations among representatives, the RC, and residents (step 9 of Figure 5.7).

7.1 The Negotiation Cycle

To understand the decision-making process, I relied on interviews and observations. Nearly every liaison station staff I interviewed mentioned that after communication has been initiated at the liaison station, the first action is a discussion between the RC and representatives.

Sometimes it is a very brief discussion, brought up during a reception or IIV. Representatives and the RC may have no problem deciding whether the problem should be referred to the liaison station or dealt with directly by the RC. Such on-the-spot negotiations are efficient and often lead to immediate decisions for next steps.

> *(Staff:) On the day of a reception, residents will report their problems to representatives. And representatives and the RC will discuss them on the spot. For some of the problems, the representatives suggest that the RC solve them directly if they think it is possible. If the RC agrees, then there is no need to refer such small issues to the government through the liaison station. The RC will deal with them by itself. ——Interview 06*

Other cases are more complicated. When no resolution is reached through on-site

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negotiation, further meetings, private talks, and IIVs are organized to decide whether

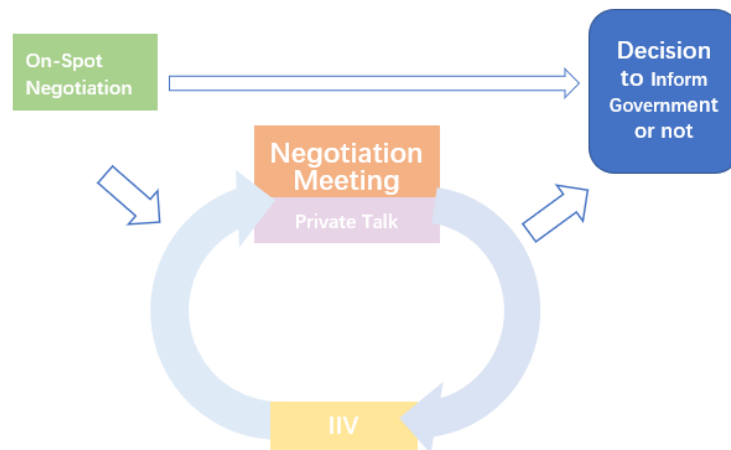or not a case should be referred to the liaison station.

Figure 7.1 Negotiation Cycle to Determine the Need for Government Referral

As with the initiation of communication, the RC is apt to speak privately with

representatives before taking more official steps. Sometimes all it takes is a phone call

to complete the negotiation. This is generally the case for simple issues, but when the

situation is more complex, formal meetings are still necessary:

(Representative:) Sometimes the community calls me up about an issue. Once I

hear about it, if I know which government department should deal with it, and if I

happen to be familiar with that department, I will immediately agree to help. At

the least, I can help the community understand the situation with the government

and determine whether we can solve the problem. Usually, if things are simple,

you can do this, so that everyone saves time. The residents, and the residents'

committee, get a quick response. For example, for a very simple matter, a small

road damage problem, residents can send me a picture and I will help report it to

the government. But if it's complicated and a resident just calls me, and I do not

always understand what is going on, I have to go to the community and talk to the residents' committee and the residents about what's going on. Go to the scene, understand the situation thoroughly. If necessary, other representatives will be invited to sit down with the residents' committees and residents to have a thorough discussion about how to solve the problem, and then we may notify the government in order to solve it. ——Interview 75

(Staff:) We can just call the representative and talk about community issues. For example, our director [RC leader] makes a phone call to bring a problem to the attention a representative, and then the representative will advise whether it is appropriate or not to inform the government through the liaison station. Because some of our representatives deal only with issues concerning the street office, they have a clear idea what falls under their purview. If they think they can pass the issue on to the government, they may do so directly. But sometimes, when representatives learn more about the situation and find that it's not that simple, they may suggest that one or two phone calls are not enough. Then, we still need to investigate and consult with more representatives.

There are personal contacts between the representatives. They are on good terms. So, sometimes, if one representative has been unable to solve a problem, he will help us to contact other representatives to discuss how to do it privately… If necessary, we will organize more formal meetings and investigations under the auspices of the liaison station. In short, we try to find a way to get things done, no matter what form it takes. We certainly hope that representatives can solve as many problems as possible, but we have to admit that there are many things that cannot be solved immediately. So, we just negotiate a course of action and try. —— Interview 79

IIV (investigation, inspection, and visit) can be an important supplement to negotiation. The operation of IIV was described in the context of the initiation of communication in Chapter 6. It operates in the same way during the negotiation phase,

but the purpose is different: to acquire the information necessary to support positions during negotiation:

> *(Staff:) If the residents do not provide a detailed report or if the information is incomplete or if there is information to be verified, then the representatives will come to the community to visit and investigation. We – the RC – will go with the representatives to the residents' homes to verify their information or to the site of the problem for investigation and inspection. For example, when residents report problems about a road, we will go to the site to have a look at the situation. ——Interview 58*

The negotiation and IIV are often repeated. Each negotiation may result in a new request for information, leading to a new IIV and subsequent negotiation. The cycle of negotiation and IIV (see Figure 7. 1) continues until it is decided whether or not the issue merits government intervention.

7.2 The Negotiation Meeting

The most important element of the negotiation cycle is the negotiation meeting. In order to investigate its workings, I asked many liaison stations if I could attend. Most denied my request, citing confidentiality concerns, but I was allowed to attend four meetings (one in full attendance and three in partial attendance). In order to give as complete a picture as possible, the meeting I was able to attend in its entirety will be examined in depth in the following sections (7.2.1 to 7.2.4). Details of the three partially attended meetings and related interviews will be provided as supplementary material in Section 7.3.

7.2.1 Venue

The venue plays an important role at a meeting. It can affect the atmosphere, the relationship between speakers, and even the direction of the meeting. To preserve confidentiality, the liaison station did not allow me to reproduce pictures taken at the scene in this thesis. Figure 7.2 shows the layout of the conference location:
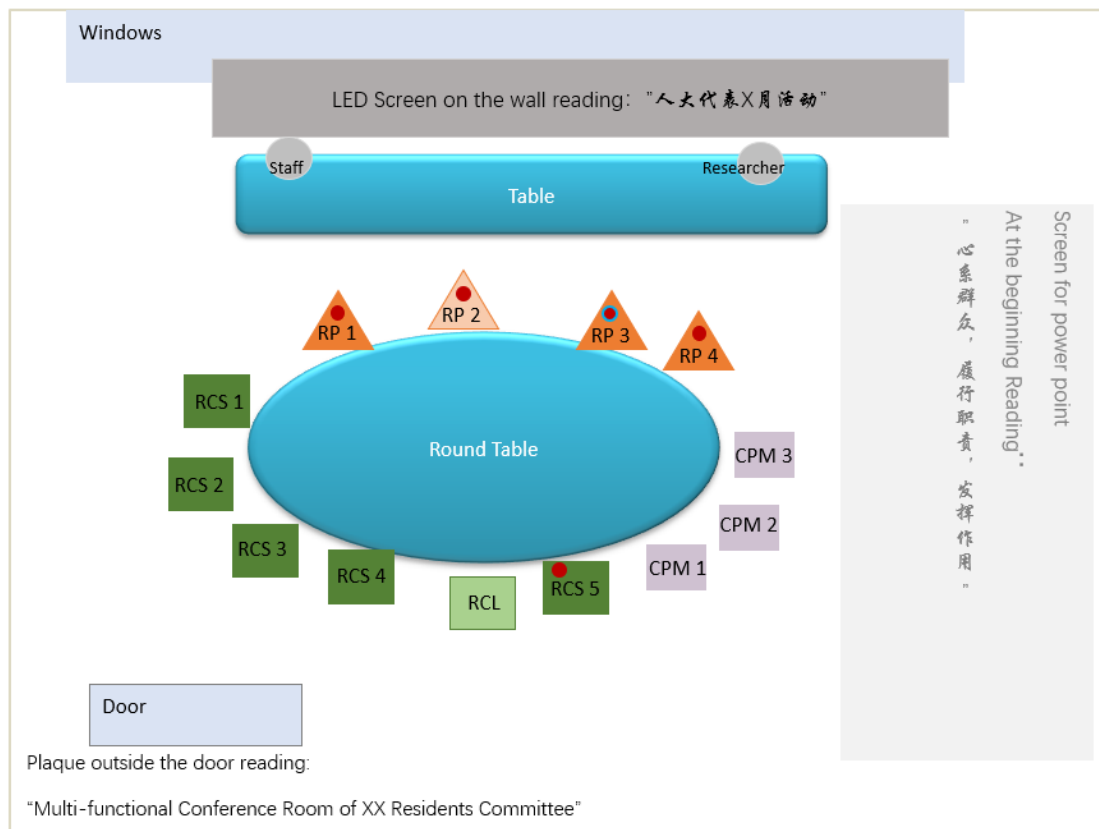

Figure 7.2 Venue Layout of Negotiation Meeting of Liaison Station

Notes:

This figure is drawn by the author according to the scene of the meeting.

RPs = Representatives of People's Congress (RP2 is municipal level, others are district level)

RCS = Residents' committee staff

CPMs = Members of the Community Party Committee of the residents' community

RCL = Residents' committee leader

Red dots = Liaison station crew (RCS5 is liaison staff, RP 3 is chief, RPs 1, 2, and 4 are members)

LED reading _____[month] Activity of Representatives of People's Congress

Screen at the beginning reading "Care for the people, fulfill duties, and play an active role."

The venue was the multi-functional conference room of the RC (described in Chapter 5). The LED screen changes its messages to suit whatever group is using the conference room at a particular time. At this meeting, the heading "___ [month] Activity of Representatives of People's Congress" was shown on the LED screen, and the slogan of liaison station was displayed on the projection screen: "Care for the people, fulfill duties, and play an active role." The atmosphere of the conference room was well-suited to the meeting.

The room was just the right size for everyone to hear clearly without a microphone. There was a large round conference table and a smaller rectangular table. The main attendees were seated around the large table: bottled water and related documents were provided. Non-speaking attendees, such as photographers, sat at the smaller table. I was also assigned to this table (the "researcher" in Figure 7.2).

The negotiation took the form of a round-table conference, which was well adapted to the accommodation of a range of participants. Sitting in a circle allows each participant to see and speak easily with others. Every attendee has the opportunity to hold the floor or join a discussion. Listeners form a U-shape, which is ideal for speaker/audience communication.

The seating arrangement appeared hierarchical. For example, RP2, as the most valued guest, was given the seat facing the door, which is traditionally considered to be the most distinguished, while the RCL, as the host, sat directly opposite. The room arrangement, then, conveys both equality (with the circular table) and hierarchy (with

the seating arrangement). It facilitates inclusive engagement, while respectfully deferring to authority.

The layout of the room was well suited to intense discussions among a range of participants. It was carefully and seriously designed, which conveyed the importance the RC attached to the meeting.

7.2.2 Topics

The meeting was called to discuss the following three issues and determine whether they fall under the purview of the liaison station:

1) Guardrail installation: there is a small slope on a road in the environs but no guardrail to protect pedestrians and vehicles from the consequent risk of falling.

2) Dustbin scarcity: there were not enough dustbins at the community garbage station.

3) Septic tank remodeling: there was only an outdated outdoor septic tank at an older building, which had an adverse effect on the environment and needed to be replaced with a modern septic tank.

The three projects were referred by the RC to the liaison station. According to the RCL, these three problems were not ones raised by two or three individuals; instead, they were problems that the RC had discovered during their daily work in the community and decided to report to the liaison station. As was discussed in Chapter 6, the RC often instigates referrals in this way. Having put together a preliminary plan, the RC presented the plan to the representatives at the meeting in order obtain their

agreement or begin negotiations.

7.2.3 Attendees

The attendees included People's Congress representatives, the leader and staff of the RC, and residents (members of the community's Party committee). Their seating arrangements are shown in Figure 7.2. Their roles will be described in the following sections:

7.2.3.1 The RCL (Residents' Committee Leader)

The RCL at the meeting held three positions simultaneously: director of the RC, stationmaster of the community workstation, and secretary of the Communist Party committee of the community. He had just transferred from the position of RCL in another community and would be considered a senior grassroots-level employee. This was his first meeting with the representatives of the liaison station of this community, and he was very polite and respectful.

During the meeting, the RCL played the role of host and directed the flow of discussion, but he was not neutral and had a clear purpose. He expressed his confident expectation that the three projects would be "proposed" by the liaison station to higher levels of government, so that the funds would be allocated as soon as possible to address the three issues under discussion.

The RCL had thought he had a good understanding of the three projects from his research and his consultation with urban management professionals. In the course of

the meeting, however, important relevant information was introduced that made him realize that his views required significant revision. RP1 raised doubts about the basic information that the RC staff had collected, which led to a long debate. When the RCL realized he had made a mistake, he immediately backtracked and was eager to maintain cordial relations with the representatives.

This example illustrates the need for flexible communication and a pragmatic attitude on the part of the RCL. He was able to revise his position, maintain good relationships with the representatives, and, through negotiation, avail himself of the representatives' networks and professional knowledge.

The RCL's behaviour can be seen as typical of the general attitude of the RC. In its provision of venue, staff, and agenda for the meeting, the RC acts as the host and the director of negotiations. It acts as an advocate for the people, not merely as a means to convey information from residents to representatives. The contribution of the RC was significant and interested. Rather than adopting a neutral stance, the RCL vigorously defended his position and was a frequent contributor to the discussion

In Chapter 6, we noted that the RC has a flexible and diverse toolbox at its disposal. At the meeting, the RC used a number of its tools: its relationship with the People's Congress representative liaison station (to gain access to the government), the Party representative workshop (to receive professional advice), and the "Micro Affairs of People's Livelihood Project" (to apply for funding).

7.2.3.2 RCS (Residents' Committee Staff)

In addition to the RCL, five members of the RCS attended the meeting. They refrained from speaking most of the time, but when the RCL was engaged in an intense debate with RP1, they provided the RCL with supporting evidence.

One of the RC staff members, RCS5, is also on the staff of the liaison station. She prepared the documents for the meeting and greeted the representatives as they arrived. It was clear that, although she was responsible for certain tasks on behalf of the representatives and the liaison station, her role was very much determined by the RCL.

7.2.3.3 CPMs (Members of the Community Party Committee)

CPMs are residents of the community. They attend meetings as both members of the Community Party Committee and ordinary residents. At the beginning of the meeting, CPM1 was introduced by RCL because she is a non-local permanent resident. According to government requirements for these meetings, there must be a non-local permanent resident without *hukou* among the members of the Party Committee (for details on *hukou* status, see Chapter 5). The CPMs did not speak much but were forthright in stating their demands. At times, they would nod to indicate their attention and agreement (for example, when the RCL commented on the importance of the issues to the residents).

At one of the other meetings I attended, Party Committee members were also invited to represent ordinary residents. At other two meetings, however, ordinary residents were in attendance but not Party Committee members, so CPMs are not

mandatory participants in negotiation meetings.

7.2.3.4 RPs (Representatives of People's Congress)

RP1 (Mr. Li) is the chairman of a state-owned enterprise located in this area. RP2 (Ms. Hu) is the chief of a hospital nearby, as well as a senior doctor. RP3 (Mr. Qi) is the director of a civil administration department of district-level government. RP4 (Mr. Wu) is the general manager of a private company located in this area. RPs 1, 3, and 4 are the district-level People's Congress representatives, and RP2 is the municipal-level People's Congress representative.

RP1 contributed the most to the meeting because his company is located nearby the sites of two of the three projects. Much of the meeting was spent in a heated debate between RP1 and the RC staff.

RP2 was afforded the greatest respect at the meeting. With a banner behind it, her seat directly faced the RCL, which encouraged the sense that she was the primary audience of his presentation. At the end of the meeting, RP2 was invited to deliver concluding remarks, which also drew attention to her important position.

RP3, the chief of the liaison station, did not host the meeting and was not very active in the discussion. He is relatively young and, at the time, had just been elected as a representative. He spent most of the meeting with his head bowed reading the relevant documents and gave brief answers only when consulted. Still the RCL commented after the meeting that RP3 was deeply involved in the preparation for the meeting.

RP4 was seated close to RP3, and also spent much of the meeting immersed in the reading material. Still, there were some private exchanges with RP3, and in the second half of the meeting, RP4, who has expertise in construction, was able to elucidate certain issues and offered to assist in further research and provide technical support.

7.2.4 Stages of the Meeting

The meeting progressed through various stages. The RCL began the proceedings by introducing the details of the three projects. Then the representatives were invited to express their views one by one. This was followed by a free debate, during which their voices grew louder and louder (in my notes, I wrote "they began to quarrel"), but after much back and forth, they arrived at some compromises and plans for next steps. In the description of the meeting that follows, I have replaced some details that could enable tracing the meeting and the attendees. Still, the account provides an overall view of liaison station negotiations.

7.2.4.1 Introduction by the RCL

The RCL was the host of the meeting and assumed the central role in the initial stages.

He introduced the attendees to each other, providing some background on new members of the RC, and, as a newly elected RCL, introduced himself to the group. He introduced the topics of the meeting and then described its agenda:

> *Today our meeting is about three infrastructure projects, and I will introduce them one by one. To finance these three projects, we hope to apply for funds from higher levels of government, so we invited you, representatives of People's Congress, to*

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attend this meeting in order to see if these projects can be proposed under the name of our liaison station, so that funds from the Micro Affairs of People's Livelihood Project can be used. We also need to ask you for advice on the design, research, tendering, and bidding for these three projects. So, esteemed representatives, please put forward your valuable comments and suggestions later. Here are the specific details of the three projects…

The Micro Affairs of People's Livelihood Project is a fund provided by city-level government for small construction projects that are supported by community members. The advantages of the fund are clear, as the RCL pointed out: "To apply for this funding, we do not have to apply to higher levels of government one by one and then wait for them to approve and allocate money as we used to do. This fund was designed for these kinds of grassroots-level issues. If the application is successful, the funds will be available quickly. And the application process is simpler."

To ensure that a project wins enough public support to apply for funding, an RC will generally organize a series of activities to draw attention to the project and invite feedback. Gaining the endorsement of People's Congress representatives is critical. Once the representatives agree that a project qualifies for the funding, the likelihood of a successful application is high. By appealing to the liaison station for an endorsement, the RC improves its chance of receiving funding. In this case, the RC is using two of the tools at its disposal: its connection with the liaison station and the Micro Affairs of People's Livelihood Project.

After his general introduction, the RCL provided details of the three projects:

a. Guardrails

(The RCL:) As you can see from the picture, there is a slope on the side of the road where pedestrians pass. However, there is no handrail at the edge of the slope. Pedestrians risk falling from the top of the slope if they are not careful; it is very dangerous. Moreover, there are signs of erosion on the edge of the slope. On rainy days, this could lead to a landslide. If a tragedy occurred, the consequences would be unimaginable....We have consulted with several engineering companies and a Party representative.39 The Party representative is employed by the construction department of government. The advice he offered is to reinforce the slope with cement and to build metal guardrails along the edge. The preliminary budget is about 80,000 yuan. We are prepared to get funding through the Micro Affairs of People's Livelihood Project... If you representatives feel that such an approach is reasonable, we could arrange to have the joint signature after the meeting. Then we can apply for the financing from the Micro Affairs of People's Livelihood Project and invite bids.

The RCL then described the application for bids and stressed that, given the hazard caused by the absence of guardrails, it was important for the representatives to apply for funding soon. Throughout the presentation, he directed his comments to RP2. At the end, however, he turned to RP1 and said, "The road in question is located at the back of Mr. Li's company." RP1 (Mr. Li) immediately replied, "Yes, I was just about to say that it is where my company located. We have wanted to have it repaired, but because it is a public road, we dare not construct without authorization." The RCL looked at RCS and asked, "Is it a public road?" One of the RCS said, "No, it seems to belong to Mr. Li's company." RP1 retorted, "That's impossible! We have been willing to repair that road for a long time. We asked the government, and the government replied that

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³⁹ As described in the Chapter 6, it is through the Party Representative Workshop.

the road was not ours, but a public road. Therefore, we dared not repair it. It is OK for us to pay out of our own pocket to have the road repaired, but if there were any accidents after the repairs, would we be responsible?" The RCL was ready to go on the next issue, so he simply said "Okay, that's all for now. Let's confirm it later."

b. More Dustbins

(The RCL:) Today, we had originally arranged for everyone to go to the site after the meeting to see the situation of the garbage station, which is located outside our community. Now, however, it is raining very heavily, so I will present the situation here by means of a visual aid. If the representatives feel that it is necessary to go to the site for investigation, we can arrange another time. We have XX people in our community, and we share a garbage station with the community nearby. But there are only XX dustbins in the garbage station. In the middle of the night, the garbage trucks come to collect the garbage. However, after dinner every day, the garbage station is full of garbage, because the number of existing dustbins is far from adequate. As a result, the residents dump their rubbish around the dustbins, which causes garbage piles and an overwhelming stench every night. These affect both the environment and public health, especially in the summer.

The RCL then provided a preliminary estimate of the number of dustbins required and their cost, and asked the representatives to assist in the application for funding from the Micro Affairs of People's Livelihood Project. He then paused for any comments from the representatives. RP2 said, "This is not hard; it's a piece of cake. You can handle this on your own I think." The RCL replied, "Yes, it does not cost much. But if this can be proposed with the other two projects, it would be advantageous. The funds from the Micro Affairs of People's Livelihood Project could be allocated more quickly." When RP2 did not respond, RCL waited a few seconds and then introduced the third project.

c. Septic Tank

Pointing to a picture on the screen, the RCL explained,

(RCL:) XX building on XX road is a seven-storey building. At the time of its construction, the standard septic system in the city had not been established: there were only open-air septic tanks. As you can see from the picture, faeces are discharged from upstairs toilets into open channels and then discharged into the open-air septic tanks. Every once in a while, septic cars come to transport the waste. This is a typical rural septic system, but it is not suited to the surrounding environment of our city. This can be viewed as a historical problem. Because of its great impact on health and the environment, we have applied for funding to provide the tanks with simple covers. But in the case of heavy rain and strong wind, the covers could be damaged and could even fall on passers-by. The residents have written a joint letter hoping that the government can help to solve the problem. Our RC consulted some construction companies, and they all said the project is difficult and the costs would be very high. But we are very determined to solve this problem, and we want to help residents to solve this practical issue no matter how difficult it would be. I hope that you can help us by looking over the plan, and making any improvements. If you think it is reasonable, please join us in making an application for funding through the Micro Affairs of People's Livelihood Project.

(RP2:) Are there any other open septic tanks for the buildings close by? Why is this the only building that has this problem?

(RCL:) There is no open tanks in the buildings nearby. This building was built during the early development of Shenzhen city when rural land was used to build urban buildings. It could be that, when the building was constructed, there was not the budget or the technology to build an underground septic tank…The specific reasons are not clear. Forty years have passed, the septic tank has been repaired again and again, but the problem has not been solved.

(RP2:) This isn't acceptable. There should not be such a situation in the city. It must be solved!"

(RCL:) Yes, that is what we think. From these pictures, we can see that the septic tank is next to residents' traffic routes. The environment here is terrible, and it is very unsafe, especially for the children and in the nighttime. Moreover, in summer, the smell is so bad that residents dare not open their windows. Therefore, I hope to raise this issue through the liaison station. At present, our budget is XX million to XX million. All the need to be replaced and then connected to the existing urban sewerage system.

In summation, the RCL said, "That is the situation of the three projects. We canvassed public opinion in the early stages of our investigation and consulted the relevant engineering companies. I would like to invite representatives to express their views today."

7.2.4.2 Contribution of the Representatives

If the meeting had proceeded according to plan, at this point the representatives would have been invited to express their views one by one. Due to the fact that RP1 had disputed the information provided by the RC, however, the free discussion phase was entered ahead of schedule and this second stage was skipped. When, the RCL asked the representatives for their opinions, there was a short pause and then the RCL said to RP1, "By the way, the building where the septic tank project is located belongs to your company. Would you confirm that this is one of the outbuildings of your company?" RP1 looked surprised and immediately responded, "No, it is not." At this point RCS4 interjected, "It is on XX Road, right next to XX, so should belong to Mr. Li's company." From this point, the two sides entered into a heated debate. The other three representatives had not been given a chance to express their views.

This was a very unexpected situation. At the other meetings I attended, the part of the agenda devoted to the representatives' statements of their views had generally run smoothly. This unexpected episode was illuminating, however, because, by magnifying the tensions among the various parties, it drew attention to the means used to reconcile the interests of conflicting parties in grassroots governance.

7.2.4.3 Free Communication

The debate continued for the first half of the time devoted to free communication. Later, the misunderstanding was resolved and RP1's mood and tone returned to normal. From that point, there was a very useful discussion of ways to implement the projects.

Since the RCL was new to the community, he relied heavily on his staff during the debate. RCS3 and RCS4 insisted that the building with the open-air septic tank was an outbuilding of RP1's company. After a careful look at the pictures provided by the RC, RP1 said that the building was not an outbuilding of his own company. And he stressed, "If it belonged to our company, we would have it fixed!" He looked angry, and his voice rose during the exchange. RCS3 and RCS4 countered, "Maybe there are so many outbuildings in your company that you don't remember it. Maybe one of your subordinates was approached about this and you haven't been told about it." They added, "As far as we know, the building is no longer used by employees of your company, but it has been rented to other residents, so you might think it is not your building. But in fact, it's still your company's property."

The debate lasted for more than half an hour. The RCS repeatedly pointed out that

the residents were suffering and that RP1 should solve the problem together with the RC. Meanwhile, RP1 became increasingly confused and angry. RP3 and RP4 contributed very little, but RP2 made an effort to moderate the debate, suggesting that everyone calm down, recheck the material, and not rush to conclusions. Her comments had a mollifying effect but only a temporary one.

In the course of the argument, RCS2, who had been intently reading the documents, made a discovery which he communicated quietly to his fellow staff members and the RCL. Then the RCL addressed the group. Over the years, the address of the building in question had been changed several times. There appeared to be two or three buildings, under different ownership, that shared the same address. This, he assumed, was the source of the misunderstanding – the RCS's mistaken assumption that the address must be linked to RP1's company. RP1 was indignant and pointed out that this should have been clarified before the meeting. The RCL then apologized, "This building is very old, which complicates things. It is our fault that we were not better prepared. We were rushed and anxious, because the residents were so demanding. We will sort this out and ensure that we are referring the same building before we report to you next time." RP1 did not reply and an awkward silence ensued.

RP 2 broke the silence:

Yes, we should make sure all the basic information is correct before the meeting, and then we can have a calm discussion of the issues we are facing. Of course, I also understand that the buildings in our neighborhood were built over a number of years. More than 30 years have passed since the "Reform and Opening up" of China. The land property rights of our neighborhood may have become confused,

and the urban management system has undergone several innovations. This is a real problem in our community. Or rather, this is a unique problem for Shenzhen, a city that has been booming for last 40 years. I think the address of the house may seem like a small thing, but I guess it's a very hard job to comb through the historical records. We're not afraid of problems. Since the problem has been found, let's investigate in a timely fashion, and then we will be closer to the solution. This is why we are sitting together in negotiation. This is exactly the significance of our meeting. I think it's good that we've brought the problem to light today. It is only when you see the problem that you can solve it. So, I hope that before the next meeting the residents' committee can confirm the information, confirm the ownership of the septic tank, and then we will work together to solve the problem.

She then smiled at RP1 and said, "I'm sure Mr. Li would like to help, too." And then she turned back to RCL again and said, "Mr. Li is one of our senior representatives. He has done extensive work and contributed a lot to the community over the years." The RCL responded quickly, "Yes, we attach great importance to the opinions of the representatives. We will do the work of verification immediately. I have also heard that Mr. Li has made many contributions to our community over the years. I believe we can continue to co-operate in the future."

RP1 softened his tone and said,

You can check the information again. I am quite sure it is not our outbuilding. However, it seems that it may be adjacent to one of ours. If you need our help, we will contribute. For example, we can contact an engineering company for a consultation. Since we often have to deal with construction projects, we are familiar with the industry. And, by the way, as for the guardrail for the slope, though I am sure that it is a public road, it is also very close to my company. If the residents' committee needs our help, we can also help to find a reliable

construction company. If you have any difficulties in funding, we can also consider helping economically. But we can't build it under our company's name because it is a public road and we can't afford to take the risk.... Our enterprise has been operating in this area for many years, and we are indebted to the residents' committee. If it is within our power to do something for the community, we will not fail to do so. We have been trying our best to co-operate fully with the residents' committee.

The RCL was very grateful for this speech. He apologized again and then invited RP3 and RP4 to address the meeting.

RP4, the leader of a company engaged in construction and property rental, immediately entered into the details of the project:

Our company has been involved in construction for decades, so I know a little bit about it. I have been looking carefully at the material you provided just now. Just from the data and pictures, I do not think it is suitable to install metal guardrails on the slope of the first project. The metal guardrail is likely causing the breach on the slope, thus creating greater safety risks. I suggest that a cement guardrail should be built after the slope is strengthened. But the cost will be high. So, I think this plan needs to be reconsidered. If the RC needs our help, our company can also provide advice. Or if the RC has budgetary difficulties, we can help economically. However, professionally speaking, the slope is really not suitable for the installation of metal guardrail. It is better not to install the metal guardrail, I am sure.

RP1's anger had by now completely dissipated. He listened carefully to RP4's analysis and then observed, "Yes, when I saw the plan just now, I was worried about it, too. I agree with Mr. Wu. And another problem with a metal guardrail is the fact that there would be big gaps in the middle of the rails, which is still a danger for children."

The RCL then invited RP3 to address the room. RP3 is the chief of the liaison station and a government officer. He said frankly, "I am not very knowledgeable about engineering, but I think Mr. Wu and Mr. Li's view makes a lot of sense. With regard to this plan, we really need to consult the professionals again. As for the septic tank project, I have a few points for discussion. If the facilities in this building are so outdated, would it be possible to include it in the city renovation of Shenzhen? If it does qualify for inclusion, would we still have to reconstruct the plumbing facilities?... But if the problem cannot be solved as soon as possible – if the city-level renovation cannot be carried out immediately – the living conditions of the residents will further deteriorate. So, we need also discuss how to proceed." The other three representatives strongly agreed with the possibility of including the septic tank project in the city renovation. They also agreed that the problem required further study. Finally, they engaged in a more wide-ranging discussion of the relationship between the local climate and construction of the slope and septic tank, similar cases in the past, possible alternatives, and so on.

7.2.4.4 Consensus

After the open discussion, the RCL and the four representatives agreed on the course of action for the three projects. As the meeting entered the third hour, the RCL said, "It seems that there are a lot of things that need to be investigated further. We should not only go to the site for exploration, but also consult with the construction department and construction companies more extensively. We should also investigate the exact

qualifications for the government renovation project. Well, it seems that Projects A and C may not be at a stage where representatives will be asked to sign off. We can discuss them further after the plans have been revised. But what do you think of the project of dustbins? Can we have your signatures now?"

The representatives all noted that the dustbins project was a small and simple problem. They wanted the RC to submit their plans to a higher level of government through ordinary administrative channels. If they ran into difficulties, then the representatives would apply for funding from the Micro Affairs of People's Livelihood Project. The RCL responded, "My experience suggests that, although the project is not big, if it is reported through the ordinary administrative system, it will take a long time. All these projects have been awaited by the residents for a long time. Judging from today's discussion, two of these projects will need more time and further investigation. As for the dustbins, if the plan is implemented as soon as possible, it will enhance residents' confidence in our work at the RC. It will also encourage residents to trust the new leadership of RC, so they will be more likely to support the work involved in the other two projects." RP2 was the first to agree with the RCL, and then other representatives followed suit. They discussed details of the project, such as the potential adjustment of the current volume and location of the garbage station and the replacement of the existing dustbins with more modern models.

By now, they had reached a consensus on all three projects: Projects a and c required further investigation and negotiation, and, for Project b, application would be made to the government as soon as possible for funding.

7.2.4.5 Preparing for the Next Meeting

At this point, the attendees agreed on six tasks to perform before their next meeting:

1) RP1 and RP4 would get in touch with their contacts in the construction industry for consultation and inquiry. RP3 (as a government officer) would consult with relevant government departments on the possibility of including the work in the city renovation plan.

2) RP2 (as a municipal-level representative) would contact other municipal-level representatives in the government to get further information on the city renovation.

3) The RCL directed RCS5 (the liaison station staff member) to prepare a brief, explaining the details of dustbin project, and to send a final draft proposal to each representatives' office in the coming week for them to sign.

4) The RCL also asked RCS5 to complete the records of the meeting as soon as possible so as to present them to the fifth representative who was unable to attend and receive her input.

5) RP1 noted that they should visit the garbage station on a fine day. Since RP2 and RP3 did not have any free time in the near future, RP1 and RP4 settled on a date to inspect the garbage station, the septic tank, and the slope. When RP2 and RP3 were free, they could conduct their own inspection.

6) Finally, they agreed that when they had gathered the necessary information about the slope and septic tank projects, another meeting would be scheduled.

7.2.4.6 Resident Evaluations

Towards the end of the meeting, the RCL and RP2 asked the residents (CMPs) if they were satisfied with the meeting. CPM3 commented, "These three projects are of great concern to residents because they have a serious impact on daily life. In particular, the lack of dustbins affects all residents in the community. I think your discussion today was very pragmatic. I hope to see rapid progress." CPM1, who was attending this kind of negotiation meeting for the first time, observed, "In the past, to be honest, we did not fully understand what representatives were doing. Many residents do not know we have a liaison station or representatives at all. Today, however, I feel that you really care about the residents' demands and are eager to solve problems for us. We, as residents, usually just want a quick solution, but we don't pay more attention to the detailed work involved. Today, I realize that you do not have an easy task. I think I will talk to other residents about what you're doing here in the meeting, so they will understand your more. Of course, I still hope you can solve our problems quickly. These three projects are very important to the daily life of the residents, and when you conduct your investigation at the site, you will agree." RP2 replied, "Thank you very much for understanding. We will go to the site and then complete the application for funding as soon as possible. Please go back and tell the other residents that the problem is in the process of being solved. Please don't worry." Then she told the RCL and RP3 that since the decision had been made to deal with slope project and garbage bin project through the liaison station, they should be prioritized and completed as soon as possible

7.2.4.7 Concluding Remarks

After the residents' contribution, the RCL invited RP2 to sum up the meeting with concluding remarks. RP 2 spoke for 15 minutes. First, she expressed her support for the new leadership of the RC. She hoped that, in the future, they would communicate frequently and work together to serve the residents. Second, she praised the other representatives for their efforts on the residents' behalf. When she came to RP1, she again emphasized that he was a senior representative who had contributed significantly to the community: "As a representative, he has rich experience and his accomplishments are also highly esteemed. In the future, the residents' committee should communicate with him more and learn from him. Many things need long-term co-operation." The RCL expressed his concurrence, and RP1 acknowledged the tribute modestly. Third, RP2 summarized the three projects discussed. She commended the RC for conveying public opinion and the representatives for their active efforts. She also expressed the hope that the projects would be completed quickly and efficiently. Finally, she evaluated the role of the liaison station from a broad perspective. She said that it acted as an important bridge between the representatives and the residents, and it should continue in its useful course.

Finally, the RCL announced the end of the meeting and expressed his thanks to the four representatives and CPMs.

7.2.4.8 Chatting after the Meeting

After the meeting, the participants chatted for about 10 minutes before getting up to

leave. The RCL and RCSs apologized to RP1 again in a more personal manner and assured him that they would study the map again and investigate the issue thoroughly before the next meeting. RP1 replied, "We have always had a good relationship with the residents' committee and have accomplished a lot together. This is the first time I have dealt with the RC's new leadership, and I believe that, as time goes by and we get to know each other better, we can clear up any misunderstandings. I sometimes speak too bluntly and impetuously, please don't mind." Again, RP2 struck a conciliatory note: "Mr. Li and I are old friends. He has done a lot for the community over the years, and I think he will keep supporting the residents' committee. The new leadership of the residents' committee has just taken office. You [the RCL] should communicate more with Mr. Li and maintain a long-term co-operative relationship. We will work together for a long time."

The RCL, who had been introduced to RP2 that morning, thanked her for coming to the meeting despite her busy schedule as a hospital chief and municipal representative. RP2 asked how the liaison station was faring. RCL praised RP3 to RP2: "Mr. Qi is young but very devoted as the chief of the liaison station. He has been actively working with the community and the liaison station since my arrival. We worked well together." RP2 then praised RP3 and observed, "Grassroots governance is a good way to train young recruits. By co-operating with residents' committees, you can better understand the situation of the people, which will speed your progress." Then RP2 took time to chat with the residents (CPMs). Finally, the crowd gathered around RP2 and she was escorted out in deference to her high status.

7.3 Analysis: Negotiations Lead to Non-compartmentalization

It is through the kind of negotiation described above that liaison stations ultimately decide what message to pass on to the government. On the basis of that meeting and the three other meetings I attended, as well as my interviews and fieldwork, I will analyze the process by which the RC and the representatives jointly screen these messages.

7.3.1 The Negotiation Quadrants

In the community, the RC assumes a variety of functions and can handle most of the routine problems faced by residents. Issues that they can solve by RC itself are usually referred to as "small matters" by the RC and liaison staff I interviewed. And in their opinion, the issues that must be referred to the liaison station are "bigger problems", which typically require collaboration with higher levels of government:

> *(Staff:) Representatives do what our residents' committee cannot do. If we [the RC] can't do it, we will refer it to the People's Congress via the liaison station. ——Interview 58*

> *(Staff:) For bigger problems that cannot be solved at the community level but only at the street level, the district level, or even the city level, the residents' committee may choose to consult the liaison station. They will refer these problems to the representatives, and then the representatives will pass them on to the relevant departments of governments to solve. ——Interview 67*

Given their access to many resources, representatives often consider the RC's "big problems" to be easy to deal with:

(Staff:) Representatives have the status, identity, and ability to solve problems effectively. ——*Interview 23*

(Staff:) Our [the RC staff's] ability, knowledge, and coordination are certainly not as strong as representatives! They can coordinate with various street-level and district-level government departments, and their knowledge is much wider than ours! Compared to them, the problems we can solve are quite limited. ——*Interview 09*

(Staff:) We [the RC staff] often take a long time to solve some problems. If we let the residents wait for too long time, they would feel that government is not helping them at all. This attitude would spread and would harm our reputation. Sometimes we will call People's Congress representatives to solve these problems, and we will use their networks and positions to find solutions. Also, they are familiar with the process for solving problems, they are more familiar with that process than we are. ——*Interview 58*

Even for representatives, however, there are issues that cannot be easily resolved:

(Representative:) Sometimes the people, even the residents' committee, have high expectations of us, but sometimes our abilities are limited when it comes to certain big issues. In other words, there are some things that even the government can't fix in a short time. When we inform government, the government tells us why the current problem cannot be solved in a short time….I can't say everything is solved, but whenever I bring up an issue, the government will give me an answer that I will pass on to the residents. ——*Interview 73*

(Staff:) To be honest, we [the RC] can solve most of the community's problem. What can't be solved is usually a wide-scale problem that requires long-term planning at higher levels of government. Some of these problems are too big for the representatives; they can't solve them, either. ——*Interview 23*

So, what kinds of problems should be dealt with by the liaison station? During the

course of my interviews, a phrase recurred to describe these problems – "not too big and not too small" (不大不小, Bu Da Bu Xiao, "BDBX" here after) (see Figure 7.3). "Not too big" are the problems that are not hard for representatives to solve; "not too small" are problems beyond the scope of the RC.

> (Staff:) Small problems we can solve directly. Big problems we consider referring to a representative. Some of the things that are hard for us to solve are actually small things for them, and in that case, they are very useful. But if it's really a large-scale policy or a stubborn problem, it's probably not going to be a one-shot solution, even for representatives….we generally say that for those "not too big and not too small" matters, letting the representative deal with them is a more effective approach. For example, there was a small park that needed some work. In the past, when the residents' committee made its own appeals to the government, they turned us down. The government thought that the work should be funded by the property management company. But the company had their own argument: it was the government's responsibility because it is part of the infrastructure. So our residents' committee suggested that the residents collectively have an interview with the representatives. One representative then went to the government to look into this matter and arranged it so that the government and the property company divided the rights and responsibilities. Finally, the government worked together with the property company to fund the park project. The problem was solved very quickly [laughs].

> (Researcher:) So, am I correct in understanding that if a problem is not easy for the RC to solve but a small matter for the representatives, then it is appropriate to take it to the liaison station?

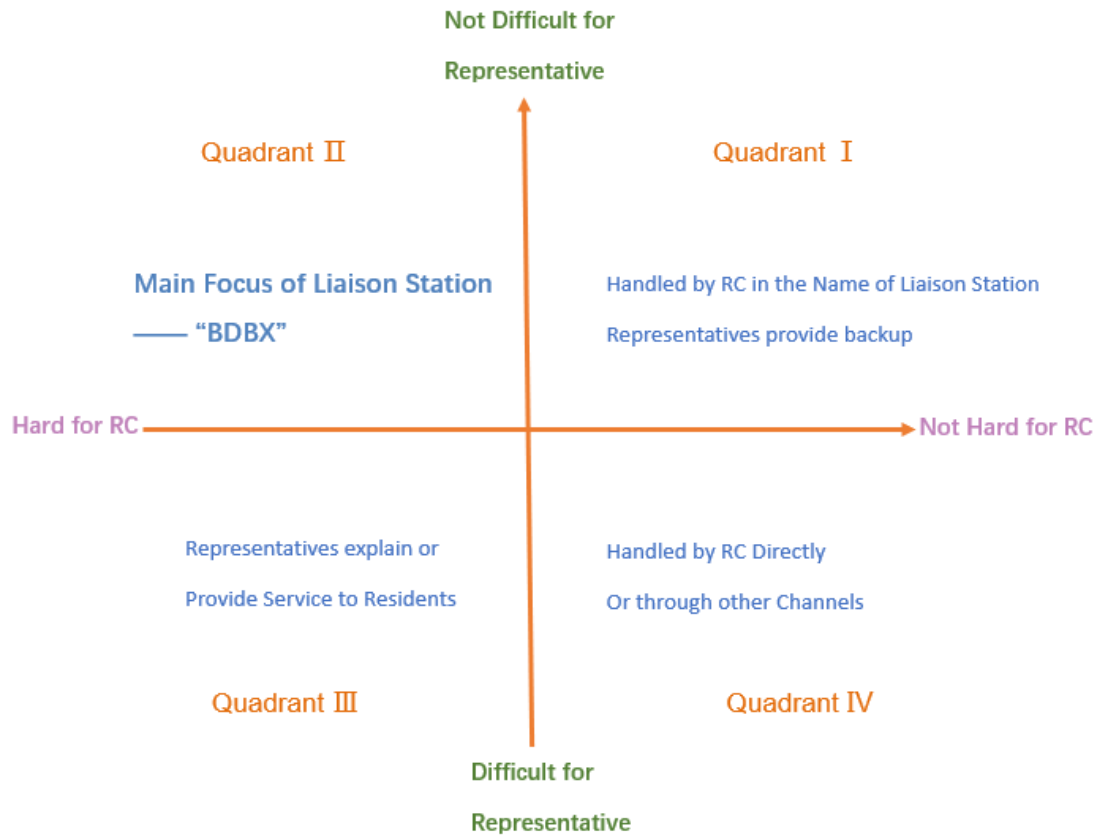> (Staff:) Yes, yes, you are right! That's exactly what I mean. ——Interview 14

Figure 7.3 BDBX Framework of Negotiation in the Liaison Station

Figure 7.3 shows that problems are categorized along two dimensions: "difficult for the RC" and "difficult for representatives." These two dimensions divide all communications with the liaison station into four categories (the quadrants).

Quadrant II refers to problems that the liaison station tries its best to address. Quadrant I refers to the problems that the RC tries to solve directly by itself: since the problem has been communicated to the liaison station, the resolution can be carried out and recorded in the name of the liaison station, but actually implemented directly by RC itself. If the RC is not successful, the representatives provide backup. Quadrant III refers to problems that are best dealt with by the liaison station but the representatives

consider difficult to resolve. In such cases, the RC expects representatives to provide

residents with an acceptable explanation or a pro tem measure to mitigate the problem.

Quadrant IV refers to problems that are beyond the capacity of representatives but can

be solved by the RC using other measures in its toolbox.

If we look at the negotiation meeting described above from the perspective of this

BDBX framework, we find that the process of negotiation is, in fact, a process of

determining the boundary between quadrants and, after that determination has been

made, a process of discussing specific solutions (see Figure 7.4).
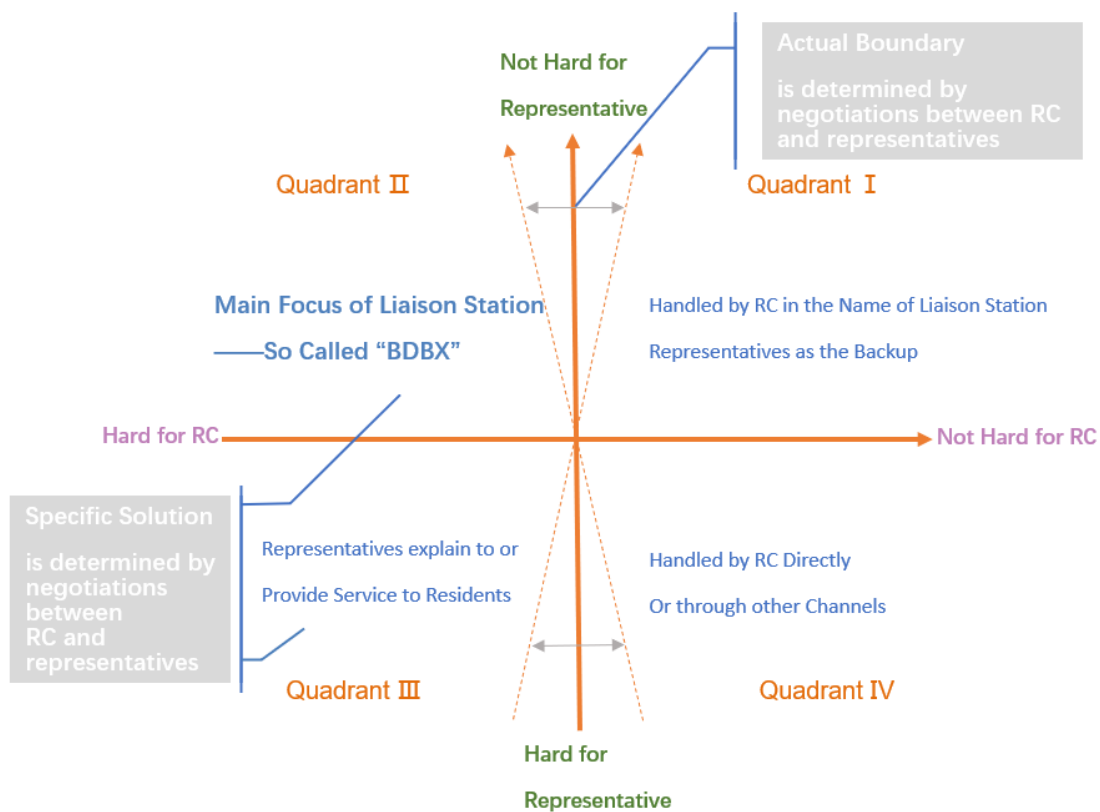
Figure 7.4 Dynamic of the BDBX Framework

7.3.2 The Boundary between Quadrants I and II

There is not a fixed boundary between Quadrants I and II; instead, it is determined by negotiations between the RC and the representatives. For issues that located near the boundary, RC tend to divide them into the Quadrant II, and representatives tend to place them into the Quadrant I.

> *(Representative:) In some cases, the RC may be able to handle a case by themselves, but they still refer it to the liaison station to see if they can get more support or get it done more quickly. We sometimes suggest that the RC communicate through regular administrative channels. If the administrative route fails, we will help. Because we can't always consume the government's attention with very small things. Resources are always limited and should be used for the most critical things, for those problems that the RC finds really difficult to solve and the residents are very upset about. In addition, if direct communication through administrative channels can resolve the problem quickly and efficiently, then going through the liaison station reduces efficiency. ——Interview 75*

> *(Representative:) There are some things that the residents' committee may be able to solve, but it may be better to solve through us. If the residents' committee does have difficulties (for example, if it does not have any positive reply after a period of time) then they can tell us and, if we think it is necessary, we will certainly try to help. For example, some of the things I mentioned earlier – the road and the environment – affect People's livelihood. With such problems, once we have investigated and proposed a solution, we can generally get a positive response from the government. ——Interview 73*

The dustbin project, discussed at the meeting, exemplifies this type of issue. The RC thought that they could probably solve the problem themselves but the process would be lengthy, so they asked the liaison station to step in (i.e., to make it a Quadrant

II problem). The representatives, however, thought that it was a "trivial matter" that could be easily solved by the RC, so were unwilling to involve the government. The representatives, therefore, argued that this should be a Quadrant I problem. If the RC tried and failed to find a solution then they could appeal to the liaison station again. The RC, however, finally convinced the representatives. The three projects under discussion were considered extremely critical by the residents. Since the other two projects could not be completed in a short time, a quick resolution of the dustbin project would help appease the residents and would benefit the image of the newly elected RCL. Under the persuasion of the RCL, representatives decided to have the liaison station address the project (that is, to place it in Quadrant II). The discussion made clear that the boundary between quadrants is the result of negotiation.

There are cases where the RC has successfully persuaded the representatives, and there are also cases where the representatives have successfully persuaded the RC. At another meeting I attended (Interview and Observation 93), the RC asked the representatives for help with nine problems. By the end of the meeting, the RC had agreed to deal with four of the nine problems themselves.

7.3.3 The Boundary between Quadrants III and IV

Similarly, boundary between Quadrants III and IV is also determined by negotiations between the RC and the representatives. When representatives think that a matter will be difficult to handle through the liaison station, they argue that the RC should deal with it (i.e., they want the problem to belong to Quadrant IV). The septic tank project

discussed at the meeting is a case in point. If it is determined that the building is part of the renovation project, the representatives are likely to consider the project beyond the scope of the liaison station and to suggest that the RC to solve the problem through other channels. When RP3 mentioned the renovation project, the other representatives and the RCL gave his comments serious attention because it was a critical factor in the representatives' follow-up strategy.

In such a case, the RC's strategy is to lower expectations, that is, to persuade the representatives to assign the problem to Quadrant III. At another meeting I attended (Interview and Observation 92), the RCL told the representatives that "even if you cannot solve the problem, it does not matter, but at least please have a try, and then explain the reasons to the residents.… That would also be a help." From the point of view of the RC, it is important for the residents to feel that the RC can be trusted. If something is difficult to solve through various channels, at least the residents should see that the RC has made an effort.

During interviews, liaison station staff members told me that sometimes the RC knew that some problems were beyond the scope of the representative's functions and powers, but, given the intense interest of the residents, the committee brought them to the attention of the representatives at meetings so the residents would have a chance to air their grievance. Sometimes help is sought from representatives just to give residents a chance to complain. In such cases, there is often some guidance provided by representatives based on their professional knowledge and experience:

(Staff:) Residents sometimes think, "I will speak. If there is any channel, it is better

than no channel. I always have to tell people about it." All right. This is especially the case with old people. When they tell someone, they feel comfortable. It doesn't have to be solved right away, but when they speak out, they feel, "Hey, someone is listening to me." They would be partially satisfied with this. And it is even better if some explanation and response is given to them. ——Interview 14

Representatives often go along with this, although they can feel a little helpless:

(Representative:) We'd love to be able to do everything for the community, but in practice it isn't possible. In some cases, even if we contact the government, it is not effective. But if the residents' committee or the residents have strong demands, we are willing to try. Even if the result is not ideal after trying, we will try our best to explain to the residents where the key problem lies. ——Interview 74

(Representative:) There are some things that the community can't solve on its own, but we don't have the power to solve either. In such cases, if the residents' committee have no other means and want our input, then we generally do our best to help. But the results are largely unsatisfactory. We have already done the best we can do. For example, in the community, there are problems with the care of mentally ill patients. Inadequate care may hurt others in the community, but it is difficult to communicate with family members and it is difficult for relevant departments to intervene. The residents' committee has been stymied by this matter and has appealed to us, the representatives. We went to a lot of negotiation meetings in the community to figure out what to do. Every time we worked out a new solution to try. But it still has not been completely solved. We will keep an eye on it, but it will be difficult to solve in a short time. This is not to say that if we fight for funding, then can be solved easily. These kinds of problems are related to weaknesses in laws and regulations, difficulties in government departments, and lack of co-operation from residents. Very complicated elements make it difficult to solve, but, of course, we will still try.

Often, we are also very helpless; we have no way to solve a problem [wry smile].
You know, some projects, as long as the funds are in place, can be addressed and
solved. In this way, we can help the residents to coordinate and solve the problem.
But many problems cannot be solved with money. Sometimes the people, and also
the residents' committee, have high expectations of us, but we often have no
options…. there are some things that even the government cannot solve in a short
time. ——Interview 73

(Staff:) Representatives make suggestions to the government, and the government
responds. But sometimes it is very complicated. For example, problems about
school. The school is managed by the Bureau of Education, but the land on which
the school is built is managed by the Bureau of Planning. Last year, we had a
problem that involved a lot of departments. We tried over and over to find a
solution, but for a long time it was not resolved. However, in such cases, the
representative will provide a detailed explanation to the residents and can gain
their understanding. ——Interview 06

In short, at the boundary between Quadrants III and IV, the RC's strategy is to
lower expectations and to persuade the representatives to consider the problem as
belonging to Quadrant III. In this situation, representatives are encouraged to act as
brokers rather than dealers (about brokers and dealer, see Chapter 6): they will do their
best but they will not guarantee the desired outcome.

7.3.4 Finding Solutions once the Boundary Is Defined

If a problem clearly belongs to Quadrant II or Quadrant III, the RC and representatives
will discuss solutions directly. The slope project discussed at the meeting, for example,

is a Quadrant II problem. It requires multi-department co-operation, so is definitely beyond the scope of the RC and does not belong in Quadrant I. It is, however, well within the scope of the representatives since the government departments involved are no higher than the municipal level, the key to solving the problem is money (once the funds are in place, the problem will be solved quickly), and the representatives have the requisite experience and expertise about infrastructure to design the plan. A problem that is difficult for the RC to solve, but easy for the representatives, like the slope project, clearly belongs to Quadrant II, so the focus of negotiations is the specific solution. The RC and the representatives discussed the existing information, identified the information that was still required, and agreed on the implementation of the IIV. In such cases, the RC's strategy is to listen to the professional opinions of representatives, and to encourage representatives to mobilize resources and inform the government as soon as possible:

> *(Representative:) A case that offers an ideal example… during a negotiation meeting in the community, the residents' committee said that the cultural facilities were not sufficient for the community. I suggested that we could build a community library. Several representatives discussed this solution and submitted the proposal to the higher government. Soon the funds were put in place to set up a community library, which was equipped with many books. You know, a lot of people say that Shenzhen is a cultural desert, but I think, with the current economic development, there is the necessary government funding so it is possible to increase investment in community cultural institutions. Through our intervention, there can be new facilities that were unimaginable before. For us, it is a small effort, but for the community it solves a large problem. This kind of project is very good and very suited to the capacities of the liaison station. ——Interview 73*

(Representative:) Some problems are too big for the residents' committee to handle by itself. But sometimes it's easier for us. For example, for large projects that need the coordination of many government departments, we will go to the community to conduct a very detailed investigation, have meetings with the residents and residents' committee, and then send on the information to the government through our channels. In this situation, the government must respond to us. I have followed this procedure several times. The problems were solved through co-operation among several departments, and the projects were implemented. For example, we had a sewage treatment problem that required the coordination of several parties, including government departments, property management companies, and representatives from many communities. Finally, we worked out a way to solve it.

(Researcher:) So when it comes to big tasks that require coordination among many departments, representatives have an advantage?

(Representative:) Right. Think about it… we come from different industries with various professional backgrounds, so when we negotiate in meetings with residents and residents' committees, we can work out more comprehensive solutions. And the government now attaches great importance to our opinions. That's how I feel at work. We are very effective at solving problems in our scope.
——Interview 75

When a problem belongs in Quadrant III, representatives cannot immediately implement systematic change. Still, they can provide some alleviation using their own resources. These partial solutions are also often decided in negotiation meetings in the community. In addition to providing policy interpretations, psychological counseling, and expertise and experience, representatives also often provide services. When visiting residents in economic difficulties, representatives often offer material and even monetary help. Representatives affiliated with hospitals may not be able to effect

medical policy reform, but they can organize doctors to come to residents' community to provide free consultations on a volunteer basis. Some of the representatives work in judicial system can also provide legal and other types of assistance.

(Representative:) For example, the current medical resources in Shenzhen are quite inadequate compared to similar cities. Residents know this intuitively. A lot of the problems arising from inadequate medical resources are reported to us by the residents' committees, and we also meet with elderly people. But there's nothing we can do to change the situation in the short term. If the residents' committee and residents are obviously angered and upset, we can only truthfully report the problem to the government. Then the government replies, outlining what the government is trying to do in terms of medical resources, what the next plan is, and so on. Then we explain the policy to the residents in more understandable language. Of course, with some specific problems, we can help directly. In that case, we will find our own way to help. For example, I know that some representatives are doctors and even chiefs of hospitals, so they often go to the community to provide free medical diagnoses and treatment, and give lectures. Some of the representatives are leaders of enterprises, who may have higher personal incomes, and will pay out of their own pocket to subsidize poor residents. This helps the residents' committees solve the problems encountered in poverty-alleviation work. At the very least, we will listen to the residents patiently and also patiently give them answers. Sometimes when they speak out, they feel better. —— Interview 73

To sum up, the representatives and the RC are both trying to identify problems through the framework of BDBX. The key to bargaining is to determine the boundary of the quadrants. Once the boundary is determined, the two sides will work together to determine a reasonable plan for communication with the government. As the mediator

between residents and representatives, the RC is both a conference organizer and policy advocate, and its strategies include:

1) agenda setting;

2) conveying the demands of the residents;

3) convincing representatives that the RC cannot solve the problem directly;

4) reducing expectations: persuading representative to try even if their efforts are futile (at least then they will be able to offer an explanation to the residents);

5) making full use of representatives' social status, expertise, experience, and other resources to reach a satisfactory solution and even obtaining direct services from representatives; and

6) adopting a flexible attitude to maintain a good relationship with representatives.

Meanwhile, the representatives' strategies include:

1) deciding which issues are appropriate to handle through the congress system;

2) applying their experience and knowledge to provide solid solutions;

3) interpreting policy based on close working and personal relationships with the government;

4) using wide-ranging networks to introduce practical and theoretical support;

5) persuading and mediating, based on prestige, authority, and networks;

6) arguing for their own interests on the basis of their job title; and

7) maintaining a long-term co-operative relationship with the RC.

7.3.5 Non-compartmentalization in Negotiations

As noted, not all communications with the liaison station are transmitted to the government. They are screened by the RC and representatives in advance. This screening is accomplished by negotiation, and the framework of this negotiation is BDBX. If BDBX is a filter, what information is passed through it and reaches the government? I asked interviewees to give examples of the types of messages processed by the liaison station:

> *(Staff:) For example, the distribution of bus stations is sparse and it is difficult to travel. Parking is difficult—there are too few spaces. Public facilities need to be upgraded. When it rains, there is serious flooding. Community health centres should be established. Issues like these. ——Interview 64*

> *(Staff:) For example, there is no traffic light at the zebra crossing near the school gate, and it was solved when the representatives took it to the government. ——Interview 63*

> *(Staff:) For example, there are no streetlights on the road children take after class, which is very dangerous or the railing on the roadside is broken…Manhole covers are required. ——Interview 56*

> *(Staff:) For example, we used to have a parking lot… which led to a lot of queuing, honking, and a lot of noise. Representatives took over the case and now the traffic department sends traffic police to control the situation. For example, there is a car repair station in our neighborhood, which is too noisy for nearby for residents. The problem is solved through the representatives. ——Interview 03*

> *(Staff:) For example, some time ago, we were able to provide office space for a social worker who serves our community through the liaison station. ——*

Interview 61

(Staff:) For example, there is a substation box outside the neighborhood that blocks the main road. ——Interview 27

Most of the issues involve the delivery of grassroots services – traffic and road improvements, garbage collections, drains, elevators, water pipes, parks, community activity centres, etc.

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding, I classified all the cases recorded on the official website of "Representative Liaison Station of the People's Congress in Residents' Community" of the Shenzhen, from 2016 to 2018 (Table 7.1). Eighty percent referred to the infrastructure. The rest mainly dealt with inquiry procedures and dispute resolutions. So it appears that the communications that are dealt with by the liaison stations generally pertain to the delivery of public goods at the grassroots level.

Table 7.1 Cases Summaries on the Shenzhen Liaison Station Website[40]

Category	Item	Count	%
Infrastructure outside community	Traffic & road	40	
	Street lights, road signs, trees along road	11	
	Construction noise and debris	7	
	Infrastructure outside community, Total	**58**	**30%**

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[40] https://sqllz.szrd.gov.cn/

In practice, the liaison station handles far more cases than this. By the time I finished the fieldwork, the liaison stations were not required to upload all cases to the official website, so only a some of the liaison stations uploaded cases.

Infrastructure inside community			
Infrastructure inside community	Garbage sewer drain	16	
	Property company dispute	8	
	Residential building facilities, elevators, water pipes, fire equipment	16	
	Primary school, kindergarten	8	
	Park, public activity space, community activity centre	22	
	Community environment	19	
	Markets, shops	7	
	Infrastructure inside community, Total	96	**50%**
Infrastructure Total		**154**	**80%**
Other	Property, labour, and other legal disputes	16	
	Endowment insurance, social security	7	
	Party member procedures and household registration procedures	9	
	Family and neighborhood dispute	5	
	Other	5	
Total		194	100%

Based on the BDBX negotiation framework, the liaison station, as a peripheral branch of the legislative system, deals with administrative affairs at the community level and can, therefore, be considered a grassroots governance tool of the RC. As Manion notes, "[the] biggest component of representation in Chinese local congresses is geographically parochial responsiveness…the biggest component is to representative action on some problem constituents 'reflect' up, which mostly concern local public goods. Here, I use the term 'pork' for these goods and 'pork-barrel politics' for delegating actions" (Manion 2014, p. 329). I saw the liaison stations deal with a large number of infrastructure issues during my fieldwork, which supports Manion's conclusion. According to my analysis in Chapter 3, pork-barrel politics is based on

compartmentalization between elite participation and non-elite participation, but in light of the type of negotiations described in this chapter, the liaison station offers opportunities for long-term regular communication between elites and non-elites. Both parties "offer and respond to the substance of claims, reasons, and perspectives in ways that generate persuasion-based influence" (He & Warren 2011, p. 271): both are intent to find common consent and common good. In this respect, the workings of the liaison station are also in line with the deliberation model, which is non-compartmentalized. The liaison station has made it possible to follow this non-compartmentalization model because it has mobilized non-institutional resources of elites in an institutionalized way.

As the description of the negotiation meeting makes clear, the representatives are local elites with abundant expertise, networks, and other resources. Their diverse backgrounds complement each other and form an even stronger synergy. The liaison station provides the RC with the opportunity to guide, integrate, and utilize the resources of elite representatives to serve the non-elite.

Further, the benefits of elite and non-elite non-compartmentalization are reciprocal. The local elites – the representatives – are also pursuing their own interests in maintaining a relationship with the RC. The transactional nature of that relationship was clear in the meeting. For example, RP3 is a relatively young government official who had just been elected as a representative. The RCL's attitude towards him was avuncular—informing and praising. It was clear that government officials are not necessarily considered dignitaries that must be treated with deference. The veteran RCL

regards RP3 as his junior, and RP3, in turn, knows that it is crucial that he gain the respect and recognition of the RCL. For a representative, credit from the RC earns credit from other representatives.

Other representatives were also keen to maintain a good relationship with the RC. Even though RP1 was engaged in a heated debate, once the misunderstanding was resolved, he immediately changed his attitude and proceeded to mend his relationship with the RC. RP4 actively shared his expertise and professional experience, and RP2 used her diplomatic skills to calm tempers, further the projects, and address the residents' concerns. I observed a similar phenomenon at the other negotiation meetings that I attended: all the representatives were eager to maintain good relations with the community, and especially with the RCL. Representatives are willing to conduct long-term credit transactions with the RC that benefit both sides.

The residents' concerns are often trivial and intricate, requiring clarification and mediation. Another benefit of elite and non-elite co-operation is that the presence of the representatives facilitates this communication progress. When tempers rose during the meeting, it was evident that trivial misunderstandings are rife at the grassroots level of governance. Liaison stations provide a platform for clarification and reconciliation of conflicting interests, even if they are conflicts between elites and non-elites. Often representatives' mediation efforts succeed in checking the escalation of conflict. During and after the debate between RP1 and the RC, RP2 cleverly saved face on both sides,

alleviated the embarrassment caused by finger-pointing, and effectively ensured the smooth progress of the meeting. The other representatives and the RC want to maintain a good relationship with a person of such high standing, so both sides were willing to compromise for her sake.

Liaison stations give residents a means of expressing their concerns and have equipped them with a middleman in the form of the RC. At the meetings I attended, residents participated in the negotiation: they were not overly vocal but they did make their interests clear and they appreciated the RC's support. The RC is the medium of direct and indirect communication between the residents and representatives. This is in keeping with the deliberation model, where the parties "offer and respond to the substance of claims, reasons, and perspectives in ways that generate persuasion-based influence" (He & Warren 2011, p. 271).

7.4 Summary

This chapter deals with the events that follow initial communication with the liaison station. The message is sent on to the representatives, who will decide, in consultation with the RC and residents, whether or not to reflect up the message to higher levels of government. The negotiation process takes the form of a cycle that includes private talks, IIV, on-site conversations, and meetings. The liaison station handles the administrative affairs of grassroots governance and generally deals with small-scale infrastructure concerns. During the negotiations, I observed fruitful dialogue between

representatives, residents, and RC staff. These communications have a contractual element that has similarities with both the pork-barrel and the deliberation models.

At this point, we have covered Steps 1 to 9 of the flowchart shown in Figure 5.7. In the next chapter, we will look at how the government is informed of issues by the liaison station (Steps 10 to 17) and provides feedback (Steps 27 to 32), and how the liaison station can reduce complications before and after the government's implementation (Steps 18 to 26).

Chapter 8: Receiver, Feedback and Noise: How the Government Is Informed and Responds through the Liaison Station

In this chapter, we describe how the liaison station channels messages to the receiver, the government, and how the government provides feedback. We then examine what measures liaison stations can take to reduce noise and facilitate the provision of feedback.

8.1 Inform the Government and Get Feedback

We already know how a message is received and filtered by a liaison station. Next, the message is passed to the government, and after the government provides input, the resulting message is returned to the liaison station as feedback. There are four carriers working in this process: proposal, liaison letter, oral communication and registration form.
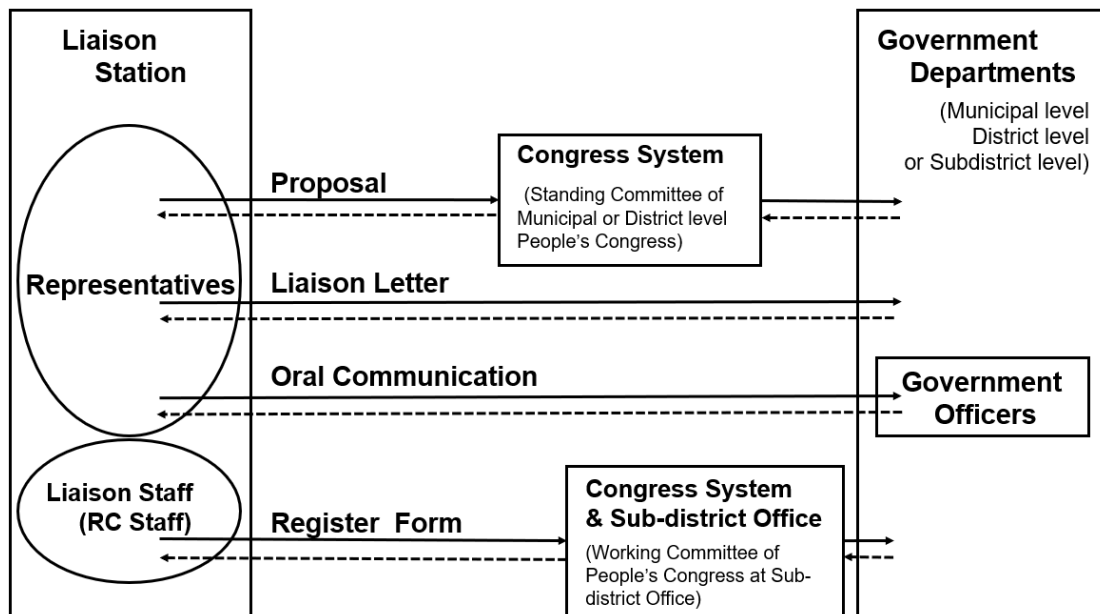
Figure 8.1 Carriers for the Liaison Station to Inform the Government and Get Feedback

8.1.1 Proposal to Congress

The first carrier is the proposal to the People's Congress system (Steps 13 and 14 of Figure 5.7).

After collecting information from residents through the liaison station, the representatives can choose to pass information to the People's Congress system, which will then inform and coordinate with the appropriate government departments to resolve the issue. This informing process is carried by the proposal, which in a broad sense also includes recommendations, criticisms and opinions. The proposal is the most traditional carrier. Before the liaison stations were established, communication between representatives and the government was conducted with proposals.

The word "proposal" is not mentioned in the regulations, and the documents used to inform the People's Congress of the public's concerns are instead referred to as

"recommendations," "criticisms" and "opinions": "Representatives may, in the form of recommendations, criticisms or opinions, put concerns forward to the People's Congress at the corresponding level or forward them to the standing committee of the People's Congress at the corresponding level for the handling of problems that are of a certain universality among the issues brought up by the public."41

Recommendations, criticisms and opinions refer to three types of written documents used to submit information on relatively small-scale issues to the standing committee of the People's Congress. The criticism and the opinion are more challenging, so they are used less frequently. Here we only discuss the recommendation, which is the most commonly used document among the three.

The recommendation can be treated as a mini version of the proposal, so when the word "proposal" is mentioned, it often refers to "proposal and/or recommendation." The biggest difference between recommendations and proposals is that a recommendation only needs to be signed by one representative, while the proposal needs to be signed by multiple representatives (usually 10). The latter is more formal and suitable for systemic and universal topics. The former is simpler and more flexible, so it is suitable for individualized issues.

In the regulations, there is no mention that the representatives can submit the information obtained from the liaison station as a proposal to the People's Congress

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41 人大代表可以就群众反映问题中具有一定普遍性的问题以人大代表建议、批评和意见方式向本级人民代表大会提出或转交本级人大常委会处理。《人大代表社区联络站工作职责》 (Responsibilities of the Liaison Stations (Published by Office of the Standing Committee of Shenzhen [2008] No. 45))

system, probably because the information obtained from the liaison station does not usually refer to systemic or universal issues. However, in practice, the representatives observe patterns in reports from the liaison station, and with a combination of further research and communication with other representatives, they can find systemic or universal issues suitable for solving with a proposal. Therefore, the proposal and the recommendation are both used in practice by representatives to carry information from the liaison station to the government.

> *(Staff:) There were no traffic lights on the zebra crossing at the entrance of the school in our village. Students and their parents were able to present this issue to the government by means of the People's Congress representatives.*
>
> *(Researcher:)By a single representative or by many representatives?*
>
> *(Staff:)Several representatives together. This was just a case put forward by our community's residents, but after communicating with representatives of several nearby communities, they found that other schools had a similar situation, and the problem needed to be addressed by the traffic administrative department of the municipal government for it to be resolved, so they mobilized more than 10 representatives from nearby communities and jointly signed a proposal to the People's Congress. Then, the problem was solved. ——Interview 63*

The advantage of proposals and recommendations is that they are directly endorsed by the authority of the standing committee of the People's Congress, which is a formal and highly institutionalized way to effectively coordinate the government's resources. The downsides are 1) the possibility of causing tension between the government and the People's Congress, because it is a formal process in which suggestions for change create pressure that challenges government performance, especially when there has

been no private communication in advance; 2) the risk of formalistic writing, because the proposal is so formal that its writing may seem superficial, making it difficult to convey pragmatism and subtlety, especially regarding matters of grassroots governance; 3) the need for the standing committee to transfer documents, reducing the efficiency of message transmission; and, 4) if a proposal is made, low flexibility. Ten representatives must jointly sign a proposal, and it must address a systemic issue.

In addition to the proposal, the regulations also stipulate that representatives can write "special letters" to the People's Congress standing committee: "After receiving a message about a problem from the public, representatives shall, according to their jurisdiction, transfer the problem by special letter to the standing committee of the People's Congress at the corresponding level for handling."42

A "special letter" is one written directly to the standing committee of the People's Congress by representatives on the topic of a specific issue. No one mentioned this type of letter in my interviews. In general, the special letter has been replaced by a "liaison letter," a new tool in use since 2014, which refers to a letter that the liaison station can send directly to the government without the involvement of the standing committee of the People's Congress in advance. According to my fieldwork, this type of liaison letter is widely used. Next, we introduce this particular carrier enabling liaison stations to liaise with the government.

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42 人大代表接访群众后，把反映的问题按照管辖权的不同以专门函件的方式转交本级人大常委会处理。《人大代表社区联络站工作职责》（Responsibilities of the Liaison Stations (Published by Office of the Standing Committee of Shenzhen [2008] No. 45))

8.1.2 Liaison Letter Directly to Government

The liaison letter (Step 15 in Figure 5.7) is the communication carrier exclusive to the liaison station, which highlights the status and authority of the liaison station.

In "Regulations on the Work of the People's Congress Representative Liaison Station in Residents' Communities of Shenzhen Municipal People's Congress" issued in 2014, the most important item concerns adding a new arrangement to the liaison station, the liaison letter.

> *The Standing Committee of the Shenzhen Municipal People's Congress uniformly formulates and issues the Liaison Letter for the liaison stations. Governments at all levels shall be responsible for replying within one month after receiving the Liaison Letter from the liaison station. In matters of urgency, Representatives may also request an immediate response. The liaison stations shall make the feedback information public, except for those involving state secrets.*[43]

"Liaison letter" refers to a letter written in a unified format and sent by the representatives directly to the government in the name of the liaison station. This type of communication was mentioned relatively frequently in my fieldwork.

> *(Staff:) Some of the issues raised by the residents, including travel, transportation, such as irregular signage leading residents the wrong way, they get reported. After the proposal is made, the district People's Congress or the municipal People's*

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[43] 深圳市人大常委会将统一制发《人大代表社区联络站联系函》，各级国家机关在收到联系函后应于一个月内负责办理答复。事关紧急的，人大代表还可以要求尽快回复。对于人民群众反映的问题有关部门给予答复的，除涉及国家秘密外，联络站要给予公示。《深圳市人大代表社区联络站工作办法》(Regulations on The Work of People's Congress Representative Liaison station in Residents' Communities of Shenzhen Municipal People's Congress) http://www.chinanews.com/sh/2014/03-03/5900426.shtml

Congress representatives may send a liaison letter to the relevant government departments and then let them rectify the problem. —Interview 60
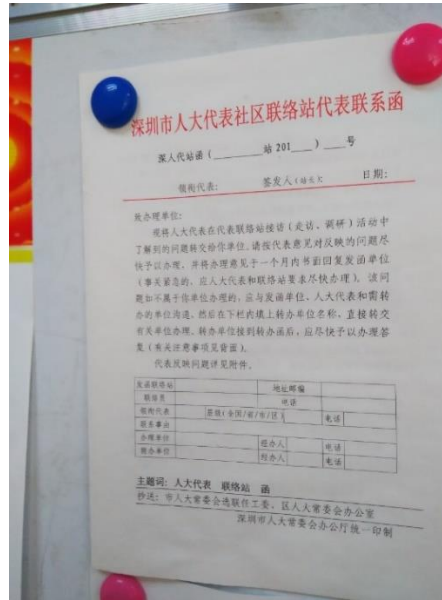

Figure 8.2 Sample of a Blank Liaison Letter (Photo taken in fieldwork)

During the interviews, most of the interviewees refused to show me hard copies of completed liaison letters for reasons of confidentiality and would only talk to me about them. Only five liaison stations were willing to show me hard copies, but would only let me use them in my study if I did not reproduce them in the paper. In 2018, a liaison station publicly posted an electronic version of their liaison letter to the Internet, which allowed me to display a completed letter in this thesis (Figure 8.3).

Figure 8.3 Completed Liaison Letter

The unified format of this letter is issued by the Municipal People's Congress and used directly by liaison stations. The letter contains four main components for the representatives to complete: information on the liaison station, information on the representatives who handle the case, the statement of a specific problem and

requirements for its solution, and the representatives' opinions on potential solutions. In addition, there is some standardized printed content that precedes the main components: the foreword written to the government and the instructions for the government. After the main components, there are printed instructions for representatives.

The liaison letter in Figure 8.3 is one that was written directly to the Municipal Lighting Environment Management Center from representatives writing in the name of XX liaison station. The main content of the letter concerns the installation of streetlights. There is a section of the road outside XX community under the jurisdiction of the municipal government that has not had streetlights installed on it, causing a potential safety hazard. The representatives suggested the following solution: "1. Relevant officers are requested to arrange personnel to visit the site as soon as possible to improve the sidewalk lighting, so that the urban landscape may be improved, enhancing the sense of security and happiness of residents in this area. 2. Please copy your reply to the Standing Committee of the District People's Congress and the Supervision Office of the District Government."

The tone of the liaison letter reflects the fact that it is directly written for the purpose of direct submission to the appropriate government department. Through it, representatives can present problems to be solved directly to the government departments in the name of the liaison station and request feedback, without any need for additional transfer and review by other actors. Compared with the proposal and recommendation that necessitate contact with the People's Congress, the liaison letter

demonstrates the direct influence and prestige of the representatives and liaison stations. This also gives the liaison station an advantage over other tools in the RC (residents' committee)'s toolbox: it can inform government departments directly in an institutionalized written form.

> *(Staff:) You can have a look [liaison station staff were showing me some hard copies of liaison letters during the interview]. These are the liaison letters. The letters contain questions brought up by some residents and suggestions from the representative on how to solve them. For example, this is a letter sent by the representative to the municipal land planning bureau, this is a letter to the urban management department of the street office, this is a letter to the land planning committee of the street office, and this is a letter to the district education bureau. Only representatives have the authority to send letters directly to the government.*
> *—Interview 71*

Equipped with the liaison letter, the liaison station gains the ability to directly influence government and thus become an entity worthy of more respect and attention from the government. Direct submission to government departments makes communication paths shorter and more efficient. It also makes the representatives more trusted in the residents' community, thus affording them more leverage with which to win credit from the RC and residents.

Despite the institutionalized nature and effectiveness of the liaison letter, the proposal and the recommendation, these carriers, which are formal documents, may lead to some tension between representatives and the government, which is not conducive to solving practical problems. In addition, due to strict format and wording restrictions, it is sometimes difficult to accurately convey subtle meaning in written

form, especially regarding the comparatively smaller concerns of grassroots governance.

Before sending a liaison letter, representatives often have to communicate verbally with officers of government departments. This somewhat offsets the shortcomings of written communication. In the following section, we discuss verbal communication in detail. Some strategies for the combined use of verbal communication and liaison letters are also introduced.

8.1.3 Formal or Private Talk

The People's Congress system provides very formal carriers for liaison stations to inform governments, as discussed above. In reality, however, one phone call or face-to-face talk can be used to efficiently and directly inform the government officers (Steps 11 and 12 in Figure 5.7).

Messages in an oral form are not necessarily informal. Sometimes an oral message works as a formal path between representatives and government. For example, in the following case, both the representative and the government used oral messages for formal communication.

(Staff:) Some time ago, a government department carried out a maintenance project on public facilities in our community. However, after the completion of the project, there were some electric wires, very thick and disorderly, piled on the road of the community, which caused great inconvenience and danger to residents. We informed the representative of our liaison station, who came, saw the situation on site and immediately called the government department to ask whether the project had been finished completely. After learning that it had, he immediately suggested

that the government department rectify the wiring stacking and conduct a self-screening in the neighborhood to prevent any further problems. The head of the government department orally promised to complete the rectification within five days. The representatives said they would soon organize an investigation to return to the community and see the effect. —Interview 16

Informal private conversations can also take an oral form. Usually, private oral communications better reflect the influence of representatives' social resources. These social resources may be the interpersonal relationships with government officials that have been established gradually after the election of the representatives; they may also be the relationships established before they became representatives.

(Representative:) At first, I knew few government officers. But after a long time of being a representative, I got familiar with some department officers, and it's made it more convenient to talk about some things. Since we are better acquainted, it will be easier to deal with things. —Interview 75

(Representative:) I knew few government officers, so I have few private conversations with them. But I also saw other representatives, more powerful people, who are quite familiar with the government departments' officers or even high-title leaders. Some of them they already knew before they were elected, because they are really, how to say, kind of elite, as I said earlier, and have rich network resources. In some other cases, they have been representatives for a long time, so they also have had lots of opportunity to get familiar with the government. Some of them are very willing to make friends with officers, and even this is sometimes one of their goals when they participate in the elections. —Interview 73

Private communication is a valuable noninstitutionalized carrier. The interviewed representatives believed that private communication based on a personal network leads

to greater efficiency, which helps them to perform their duties and serve people in a way that "takes fewer detours." This efficiency can facilitate their credit transaction with the community.

> *(Representative:) If you don't know officers privately, it is still fine if you contact them directly in a formal way. The government still attaches great importance to us and will respond very seriously. However, if you know them personally, it is more convenient to talk about some problems on a private call. It causes less ambiguity and fewer misunderstandings, and you can trust each other more from the very beginning. Definitely.*
>
> *People like me can only send a letter in a very official way, because I don't know the officers very much personally. Of course, the government treats enquiries equally. I received a very serious reply to the letter I sent, and sometimes I was touched by its seriousness. But I often feel that the exchange is not very focused; it is easy to take a detour and waste time. Because sometimes I don't understand the logic of the work of the government department. When I have such concerns, if it is not a trivial matter, I will ask other representatives to help to make a call or introduce me to their government friends. If they are familiar or friends with any relevant government department officers, then they can more easily understand what is going on here, and where the difficulty lies.*
>
> *It is not that the government treats us differently, but it must be acknowledged that its interactions with the familiar person and the unfamiliar person are completely different. This is a fact of human nature there is nothing to complain about. As far as I know, the representatives are willing to solve the problems brought up by residents, so as long as we can do something to help solve a problem, we will take that way to communicate. —Interview 73*

If one representative is not part of a relevant network, he may ask other representatives for help. Therefore, the more representatives for a liaison station, the

more diverse the background of various representatives and the stronger the complementarity between the representatives, which leads to an increased ability to integrate resources.

> *(Representative:) I think that representatives with a rich social background have really helped me a lot. For example, they help me to contact individuals, they know about the situation, and they go with me to appeal to the residents. They also help each other because everyone is good at different aspects of problem-solving. My overall feeling is that social status does not hinder them from performing their duties, but is rather very beneficial to the representatives in their role. —Interview 73*

Both formal and private oral communications have the advantage of being very flexible, enabling efficient information transfer and use in combination with other carriers.

> *(Representative:) When we make a call before going through the formal procedure, the requirements we raise are more targeted, and we can save a lot of time. Sometimes they can be solved with a simple phone call, which eliminates the need for a paper procedure, which can also significantly improve efficiency. —Interview 73*

> *(Staff:) We live in an old residential area, and there is a seafood shop at the gate that makes the environment bad. The representatives have helped the residents to solve this problem by having several talks with the appropriate government department and the property management company. This issue has been solved, but if it hadn't been solved by oral communication, they would have sent a liaison letter. Usually, we try our best not to send a letter, I mean, we won't send liaison letters unless it is absolutely necessary. —Interview 31*

In practice, the combination of private communications with other carriers can

effectively neutralize the pressure and tension brought about by formal communications.

As Interviewee 31 said, when oral communications do not suffice to solve a problem, the representatives will choose to send a liaison letter. In other words, although the liaison letter is a symbol of the prestige of the liaison station, representatives still "try their best not to send a letter" (Interview 75). The subtext of this situation is that the official letter can be regarded as a challenge to the government department from the liaison station, indicating that the deficiencies of the government's work have been made public. In contrast, direct oral communication is much softer. It makes representatives and government departments look like they are on the same team: neither party is doing a bad job, but rather each is only reminding the other of their responsibilities, and both parties help in each other's difficulties instead of challenging each other. This dynamic can maintain a conciliatory atmosphere conducive to cooperation.

However, after the government department learns about issues through the oral channel, it may require the representatives to send them a liaison letter to formally initiate the process. The subtext is that a formal letter from representatives will help the government officers to mobilize resources, thus facilitating problem-solving. When government officers solve a specific problem, they need to mobilize various resources by undertaking actions such as convincing superiors, coordinating colleagues in the same or other departments and mobilizing subordinates. These all require empowerment and endorsement. In such cases, a liaison letter in hand can give them more leverage in mobilizing resources. In addition, once the implementation is

completed according to the requirements of a liaison letter, the work results can be used as evidence of the good performance of the government department in terms of "positively responding to People's Congress representatives." Because the liaison letter is requested by the government officers, the liaison letter no longer presents a point of pressure or poses a challenge but may instead be an effective help.

Both of these situations arise in practice, which provides the case for the liaison letter's combined use with the proposal or the recommendation. No matter which situation arises in a given situation, effective oral communication is particularly important before the formal sending of a liaison letter or submission of a proposal.

8.1.4 Registration Form

The representative is the main actor in the first three carriers used to inform the government, and the liaison staff assists them. At the same time that these carriers are used, however, another carrier based on the work of the liaison staff is also used, the registration form (also called a "liaison form").

> *(Researcher:) In what way is the information sent to the government?*
>
> *(Staff:) Usually, we have a liaison form to fill, first as a visit record and then as a means of document circulation. The street-level office gives us the blank forms. We hand it over to the street-level office after we fill it in. You know, I mean, after we collect information, we summarize it and report it to the street office by filling out the form. —Interview 09*

The liaison station has the duty to report information to the "working committee of the People's Congress at the sub-district office" in the form of a "liaison form." The

working committee is directly superior to the liaison station in the People's Congress system, so it is led by the People's Congress system (the district-level People's Congress being its direct superior). It is also an integral department of the street office (the sub-district government) and is therefore also led by the street office. This committee is thus under dual leadership. Therefore, each time a registration form is submitted, the information is passed both to the government and to the People's Congress system (Steps 16 and 17 of Figure 5.7).

As a result, submitting a form does not only report the work records of the liaison station but also helps the efforts of the liaison station when it contacts the relevant government departments for problem-solving, especially when the target department is an internal department of the street office. This method makes it possible to notify the sub-district leader expediently and thus act on the target department.

> *(Researcher:) How do you send the information up?*
>
> *(Staff:) Usually, we use the liaison form, and in the form, we'll have records of visits and things like that. The congress has a committee in the street office. When we submit this form, the street office will know about this situation already, so if the street office's own department can solve it, it can be solved immediately.*
>
> *(Researcher:) Does this situation still require representatives to submit proposals or send liaison letters?*
>
> *(Staff:) Usually, we won't carry out those formalities if problems can be solved directly. If it cannot be solved, the representative will consider communicating with the government again, for example by making a phone call to talk about the situation or, if necessary, sending a liaison letter, or even jointly writing a proposal to the People's Congress. —Interview 44*

The liaison form is a default option, and it is used by liaison station staff as part of the routine jobs of the liaison station. By default, all messages channeled through the liaison station should be recorded and submitted. The contents of the form generally include the time, information from residents, a description of the issue, the duration of work to be undertaken, information from the representatives responsible, actions taken by the representatives, any replies given by the government and the signatures of residents and representatives. The whole communication process should be recorded in this form. Of course, there are exceptions in practice. For example, we have described private conversations conducted to solve problems, which are generally not recorded in the liaison form.

The form is an important circulation tool that, although more focused on records and archiving, also serves as a carrier for informing the government. Although it is not as influential as the first three carriers, it is the most commonly used. It is filled in by the liaison station staff, so the wording is shaped by the liaison staff's interpretation, framing and coding, usually under the guidance of the RC's leader. As has been emphasized above, the tactics of the liaison staff often reflect the will of the RC. Although it seems that the process of informing the government should be centered on the representatives, the RCs once again play a role that cannot be ignored.

8.2 The Government's Feedback

Feedback is the response from the receiver to the source, forming a complete loop of communication by responding to the original message. Feedback, the final step of the

communication process, is channeled through the liaison station, which makes the liaison station a two-way channel of communication between residents and the government. Representatives are required to use liaison stations to report the results of government departments' responses to residents. As the regulations say, "[r]epresentatives shall, through the liaison station staff, give feedback to the public in terms of the implementation results reported by the relevant government departments and explain it carefully to the masses."[44]

Feedback is an essential responsibility of the liaison station, which highlights the importance of the liaison stations. Previous to the establishment of the liaison station, there were no mandatory measures to ensure that representatives' feedback was transmitted to residents.

(Staff:) Feedback is very important because it makes us feel that the problem, whether it can be solved or not, at least has elicited a response.

Even small things, such as where the road or brick is broken, can be reported, and then there is a solution, there is a reply. It's a sense of responsiveness, which is much better than it used to be. It used to be that the residents, or even we who work on the residents' committee, sometimes felt like we didn't know what the government was doing at all. At least now there's a response after submitting information. Even if our suggestions are unreasonable or the problems cannot be solved, the People's Congress representatives will channel the government's feedback to the residents and have a chat with them about any detailed explanations. —Interview 03

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[44] 人大代表就相关单位的办理答复通过代表联络员向群众反馈，并做好解释工作。《人大代表社区联络站工作职责》 (Responsibilities of the People's Congress Representatives at the Community Liaison Station(Published by Office of the Standing Committee of Shenzhen [2008] No. 45))

(Representative:) I can't say that everything is solved, but every issue, as long as it is brought up, will receive an answer from the government. Then we will reply to the residents. —Interview 73

In reality, the feedback process is not as simple as described in the regulations. We first discuss the journey of the feedback from the government to the liaison station, and then from the liaison station to the residents.

8.2.1 Feedback from the Government to the Liaison Station

The carriers of feedback from the government to the representatives have been discussed in Section 8.1. As shown in Figure 8.1, each carrier used to channel messages from the liaison station to the government may also serve as a carrier for feedback. In other words, in the communication between the liaison station and the government, the messages and the feedback share the same carrier, but in opposite directions.

(Staff:) Sometimes it's a liaison letter, or just a phone call. Anyway, the representative is generally responsible for reporting the problem to government departments. Then, when the government department has handled it, or is in the process of handling it, that department will directly report back to our liaison station about results or progress. If a liaison letter was sent by a representative, the government replies to the letter. If the representative only had a chat with someone in the government, the government's feedback will be conveyed verbally to the residents through the representative. —Interview 42

Feedback to representatives through the congress system (congress sessions and the Standing Committee) in the form of proposals or recommendations is the most traditional type of feedback, which was in use before the establishment of liaison

stations. Verbal feedback is the most flexible and in-depth type, which makes it easy to explain subtleties, but it is not transparent enough. The registration form is the most common circulating document, which records the results of the government's implementation and thus achieves the effect of feedback. The liaison letter, the latest medium, is the exclusive carrier of the liaison station; when utilizing it, the liaison station is qualified to receive feedback from the government directly, which highlights the authority and coordination abilities of the liaison station. They may also be used in combination in the feedback process and in the process of notifying the government. In short, feedback is generally returned in the same way that the original message was sent.

8.2.2 Feedback from Liaison Station to Residents

There are several possible routes for feedback to reach residents from the liaison station (as shown in Figure 5.7).

The person who receives the government's feedback in the liaison station may be a representative or a member of the liaison staff. This depends on what type of carrier the government has used to give feedback to the liaison station.

If the representatives receive the feedback, they may pass it directly to the residents (Step 32), or they may give it first to the liaison station staff (equivalent to the RC) (Step 31), and then the staff gives the feedback to the residents in the name of the liaison station or the RC (Step 33).

If the liaison staff receives the feedback, the RC has also received the feedback from the government, so it can directly proceed to Step 33, informing the residents.

Two main carriers are used to inform residents. One is the posting of announcements, and the other is face-to-face communication. The former is used to announce results to the entire community, and the latter is used to provide feedback to the individual residents that reported the problem. This may be a short conversation between liaison station staff and residents and may also involve a negotiation meeting of representatives and residents where the parties have formal negotiations, with the effect of carrying out Steps 33 and 32 simultaneously.

According to the regulations, no matter what the government's response, the feedback must be given to the liaison station within one month. Therefore, the feedback received by residents may not detail the final results but rather the phased results of the ongoing project.

> *(Staff:) Larger problems cannot be solved immediately. It's hard for the government to do it in a month. The government will have to work for a long time. Then, at the end of the first month, the government will give you a phased response to tell you how far they have progressed, and later update you if there is further progress. —Interview 72*

If the feedback describes the final result and the residents and the RC are generally satisfied, the communication process on this issue will end and be declared a success. If the residents and the RC are not satisfied with the feedback, or if the feedback is a phased result, the representatives will continue to coordinate and communicate between the residents, the RC and the government until the problem is solved. Depending on whether the residents are satisfied, the liaison station will decide what action to take next, as shown in Figure 8.4.
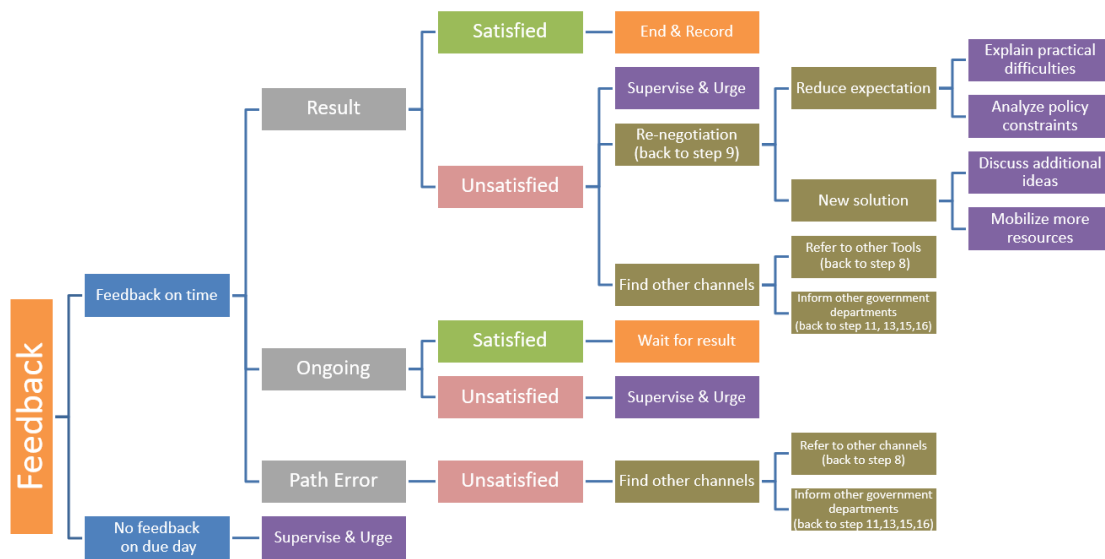
Figure 8.4 Classification and Follow-Up of Feedback Through the Liaison Station

If the residents are satisfied with the results, the problem is declared to have been resolved successfully through the liaison station. If the residents are not satisfied with the feedback, the liaison station may take one of the following actions.

1) Supervise and Urge (Steps 20-26)

The decision to "supervise and urge" involves monitoring the process and pushing for progress, which constitutes Steps 20-26 in the working process flowchart (Figure 5.7). While or after the government departments work through the problem, the representatives can send out repeated messages as requests to confirm whether the government has received correct information and to ask the government to report the latest results. The liaison station thus repeats the request for the government to solve the problem.

Representatives' statutory duties have included supervising the government since before the establishment of liaison station. The liaison station facilitates this duty by transmuting it into a new form. The supervise and urge procedure of the liaison station provides the motivation for the representatives to perform their duties: the residents and the RC supervise and urge the representatives (Steps 22-26 of Figure 5.7). In addition, it provides a specific means for the representatives to implement the power of supervision granted by the law and supervise the progress of specific issues in the name of the liaison station (Step 21 of Figure 5.7).

Supervise and urge is also an empowerment mechanism. The power of supervision over the government, which was once held only by representatives, is now shared with the RC and the residents through the supervise and urge arrangement of the liaison station.

Supervise and urge works together with feedback to form a case-tracing system. Supervise and urge has a very important corrective role throughout the communication process, effectively reducing noise and improving the quality of liaison station work.

If the residents are not satisfied with the result of a finished project, supervise and urge may be carried out to repeat the request to the government, aiming at a more desirable result.

If no feedback is given within one month regarding ongoing projects, or if residents are not satisfied with the periodic progress feedback, the liaison station may also use supervise and urge to encourage the government to make corrections in the following project process.

2) Renegotiation (Back to Step 9)

An unsatisfactory result may cause the liaison station to reconvene the negotiation meeting (described in Chapter 7) to discuss a new solution or allow the representatives to explain to the residents the reasons for the inadequacy of the current solution. New solutions generally require representatives and the RC to devise more ideas or mobilize more resources. Explaining the reasons can reduce the residents' demands by seeking their understanding and even changing their attitudes toward the current results. This usually involves explaining practical difficulties and policy constraints.

> *(Staff:) Representatives, with their high social status, broad vision and rich experience, actually know well what the key points of the problem are and why it can't be solved. So, if problems can't be resolved, the representatives can offer some very convincing explanations to the residents. —Interview 23*

Reducing expectation is often used in conjunction with new solutions, such as in the case of a systemic problem that cannot be resolved in a short period of time, so that representatives can mobilize resources to develop individual services that meet the specific needs of residents for the moment. In other words, the message that was originally in Quadrant II was reclassified into Quadrant III by renegotiation (for details about the Quadrants, see Chapter 7).

> *(Representative:) For example, the current medical level in Shenzhen is actually quite inadequate compared with other cities of the same level. Residents know this intuitively. A lot of the problems of inadequate medical resources are reported to us by the residents' committees, and we also meet with the elderly. But there's nothing we can do to solve these problems in a short period of time. If the*

community committee and the residents raise their voices, we can only report the problem to the government. Then the government replies, saying that in terms of medical resources, the government is trying to work on this, and they describe the next plan, and so on. Then we explain the policy to the residents in more understandable language. Of course, with some specific problems, we can help directly, we will find our own way to help. For example, I know that some representatives are doctors or even leaders of hospitals, so they often go into the community to provide free medical diagnoses and treatments and give lectures. Some of the representatives are leaders of enterprises who may have better personal incomes and will pay out of their own pockets to subsidize poor residents, which can also help the residents' committees to solve the problems encountered in poverty alleviation work. At the very least, we listen to the residents patiently, and also patiently give them answers. Sometimes when they speak out, they feel better. —Interview 73

3) Find Other Channels (Back to Step 8 or Steps 11, 13, 15 and 16)

In the case of an unsatisfactory result, the representatives may decide after re-negotiation to delegate the issue to another government department to solve. The RC may also use other tools (see Chapter 6 for details of the other tools), which will signal the end of the communication through the liaison station for solving the problem.

Another possibility is that the government department does give feedback, but the feedback is not about the result of the execution but is rather a notice to inform the liaison station that it has contacted the wrong governmental department. In this case, finding other channels is also necessary.

The feedback process is not a simple process of reversing the transmission of a

message, but rather a negotiation process between the receiver and the sender with the intermediary chain formed by the RC and the representatives. After receiving the feedback, residents have the opportunity to compare the results with their expectations. If they are not satisfied, there is room for them to continue to push for better results through the liaison station. Once again, this demonstrates the coordination abilities of the liaison station, which can organize multiple actors involved in grassroots governance for effective negotiations.

8.2.3 Noise Reduction

To guarantee the quality of feedback in the communication process, effective measures must be taken to reduce noise. In the previous section, we described how a message is passed to and comes back from one actor to another, step by step. There are three possibilities for the manifestation of noise in this step-by-step transmission.

First, transmission noise is caused by time delays and distance in space. Due to the working environment of the liaison station, actors are scattered across different physical spaces that may not be synchronized, so noise may occur when they send messages to each other. The second possibility is the risk of errors, including errors in the encoding process when the message is being sent and in the decoding process when the message is being received. These errors of expression and understanding may be amplified and become noise in the process of transmitting a message through the liaison station.

To solve the problems presented by this noise and ensure that messages can be transmitted smoothly for the government's consideration, the liaison station maintains

three noise reducers in the process of communication. They are "representative consultant meeting," "supervision and urge" and multi-thread feedback, which are used before, during and after the government's implementation (step 19 of Figure 5.7), respectively.

First, in the communication before implementation, a representative consultation meeting is held to allow government officers to meet with the community and have face-to-face communication with residents, the RC and the representatives to eliminate time delays and distance as much as possible.

The second noise-reducing technique is used in the process of implementation and entails repeatedly sending messages and constantly requesting feedback to confirm whether the message has been adequately received by the governments. This technique is called "supervise and urge."

Third, after implementation, a multi-thread feedback mechanism is used so that the feedback items on different lines can be verified against each other to improve the signal fidelity.

Feedback and "supervise and urge" have been described above in Section 8.2.2. The other major noise reduction technique, the representative consultation meeting, is now introduced in detail.

Attendees of the representative consultation meeting include representatives, government officials, residents, the RC and staff members of relevant enterprises and institutions. The representative consultation meeting is the largest of all of the meetings organized by the liaison station, with more than 20 people usually in attendance.

As mentioned above, it is not enough for the government to be informed because the process of transmitting the message may produce noise. Through the representative consultation meeting, the liaison station creates a direct path to help the government meet the demands of residents, go into the community to obtain first-hand information, clarify the focus of the issue and ensure smooth communication between the government and the community on a given issue. The meeting can mitigate distance in time and space, and it can reduce the coding and decoding errors caused by intermediate links. Especially when an issue is complex and involves a large number of actors, one-to-one communication may lead to very complex communication channels and high communication costs. The most efficient solution is to bring several parties together in one space.

How does the representative consultation meeting work? A liaison station staff described it this way:

(Staff:) The representative consultation meeting goes like this. First, we [the RC] collect the issues that residents are concerned about in the community, such as traffic problems. Then a meeting will be held around this theme, and the residents will be invited to come and give some suggestions on the road traffic problems. At the same time, we also invite relevant government departments, such as the Transport Bureau, the Planning Office and the Land Reconditioning Center. Better still, we invite the leaders of the street office and district government to attend. And, of course, the representatives should be invited at the same time. We sat down together and discussed the problems reflected up by the residents, and the relevant government departments answered the questions in the meeting to see if the problems could be solved and how to solve them. Just like the meeting we held at the end of last month, the discussion was about traffic problems. Our central area

traffic management is not very standard: the guardrail is not unified, the road is not smooth, the manhole covers sag, and so on. We invited 12 residents to ask questions, and the relevant departments responded on the spot about how to rectify the situation. The representatives act as mediators and witnesses and give the government a time limit, such as when the rectification should be completed, which is usually one month. When the deadline comes, we will organize residents and representatives who attended the meeting that day to visit the site again to see if they are satisfied with the result, and then decide whether to urge the government to try again to solve the problem. —Interview 67

So, what is a representative consultation meeting like? I was allowed to participate in a representative consultation meeting during fieldwork. The present residents are older and most are party members, but their speech was very straightforward and outspoken. The heads of government departments and related enterprises were very careful to answer the questions raised by the residents. Representatives helped the residents to clarify the problem and make their demands clear. They also helped the government departments to explain the practical difficulties of government operations to the residents. Generally, the representatives took the side of the residents and encouraged both sides to make reasonable compromises to reach a workable solution. The RC's leader served as host of the meeting. According to information obtained from the research conducted before the meeting, the staff of the RC is responsible for introducing the current situation of the issues at hand. The speech of the RC leader and the staff are generally in agreement with the position of the residents, joining them in asking the government to solve the problem, but their remarks were more systematic and conciliatory than those of the residents. After a solution acceptable to the residents

was finally reached, the government departments promised a time limit for its implementation, and representatives promised to supervise the government departments and report on the progress to the residents through the liaison stations.

When the opening section was over and the discussion moved into greater depth, the debate became very heated. However, the site staff did not consider me to be a resident of the community, so it was not appropriate for me to continue to listen to these substantive discussions for confidentiality reasons. After listening to my reasons for staying, they agreed to let me continue to watch the scene but repeatedly told me that I was not allowed to write about details concerning the subject of the meeting (even if it had been anonymous, it was not allowed). Therefore, I was only able to briefly describe the proceedings of the meeting, without including any specific information.

In addition, there has been some recent media coverage of such meetings. As far as I could tell, some of the reports were very similar to what I had seen on site, and the details of the representative consultation meeting can be seen in some public reports.45

To summarize, the meetings represented in the news, the meeting that I attended in my fieldwork and the meetings the interviewees described to me shared some common characteristics:

1. The liaison station has the ability to summon many government officials and enterprise managers to the community in person.

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45 For example, this news coverage of a "representative consultation meeting" was very similar to what I had seen: 《"优化固戍公交路线站点 方便社区居民出行"人大代表议事会顺利召开》 https://sqllz.szrd.gov.cn/Meeting/MeetingDetail.aspx?a=kgDPD0sRk%2bqEhVUGA1O2kYqccOKJEx JJLhhYxrsa%2fCACVSu%2fPnq6jAQDtU7mxJ8W&d=kgDPD0sRk%2bqEhVUGA1O2kYqccOKJEx JJLhhYxrsa%2fCACVSu%2fPnq6jK8niO8OHtWqdGzBAekD0%2bLcg4nJJGUE2A%3d%3d

2. The liaison station is capable of coordinating participants from different backgrounds to discuss community issues together.

3. The liaison station has the ability to create a way for residents to conduct substantive discussions with different government departments.

4. The representatives and the RC generally take residents' side at meetings and urge the government departments to solve the problem.

5. The representatives make full use of their resources to mediate and ensure the smooth progress and success of the session.

6. The RC is enjoying the multi-actor negotiation facilitated by the liaison station to solve the communities' practical problems.

To sum up, drawing on the representative consultation meeting and the multi-thread feedback and the supervision and urge discussed in 8.2.2, the liaison station not only acts as a channel through which the government may be informed about issues, but also acts to reduce noise in communication by coordinating the collective action of multi-actors in grassroots governance to reduce the costs of communication and improve the efficiency of problem resolution in process control.

8.3 Analysis: Intermediary Chain and Non-Compartmentalization

In the process of feedback, explaining policies to residents is an important action undertaken by the government officers and representatives, who are local elites. This may remind us of the penetration model mentioned in Chapter 3. In this model, elites

propagate Party decisions to ordinary citizens and suppress the expression of the interests of non-elites. Such a situation is possible in the practice of the liaison station because the elites have a large number of local resources, whereas the residents are at an obvious informational disadvantage. Once the residents' demands fail to produce satisfactory results, the process of explaining to the residents may become the process by which the elites use their informational advantage to suppress the expression of non-elite interests through discourse.

Fortunately, the liaison station has introduced the RC as an important component in practice, so this risk can be reduced. As mentioned in Chapters 6 and 7, the intermediary ability of the RC enables the interests of representatives and the residents to be integrated. Similarly, in the communication process described in this chapter, representatives also act as the intermediary between the government and residents, playing a similar role to that played by the RC in the trigger and negotiation stages. The representatives and the RC jointly play the role of intermediary between the residents and the government. Through this chain of intermediaries, the government and the residents, two traders who would otherwise find it difficult to trade credit, gain access to a unified market in which they can have credit transactions.

This kind of interest integration allows liaison stations to avoid another kind of risk, the mobilization model mentioned in Chapter 3. Although we can observe that representatives challenge government officials in support of residents, as far as I have observed, such challenges only exist at the level of work affairs. In general, representatives are, by means of mediation, matchmakers who activate the credit

transaction market and facilitate interactions between the elite and the non-elite. Thus, although I observed the possibility of the penetration and mobilization models, their explanatory power for what I observed was not much.

By relaying messages in the intermediary chain, the liaison station builds an effective channel through which residents' voice can reach the government and, more importantly, provides a channel for the government's response through the feedback mechanism. The feedback mechanism enables the government to direct information on individual grass-roots governance issues to the residents, which solves the problem of the perception that the government only engages in political communication by broadcasting and does not engage in so called "narrowcasting", that is more focused directly political communication.

As the sources of political communication in the traditional sense, the government and its departments have never lacked for broadcasting channels since the beginning of the era of mass media. However, due to the hierarchical gap, their channels of communication with the public on the most particular grassroots issues are not as well-developed. The liaison station provides an opportunity for such development through its feedback mechanism, by which government departments can deliver information on specific issues to a small-scale audience.

The clear feedback line is a major feature of the liaison station, and it is very different from the solutions traditionally offered in the People's Congress system. In the past, the public often felt that messages sent to the government went unanswered, but now, whether the problem is resolved or not, there is at least a response. Local issues

raised within the previous normative feedback arrangement of the People's Congress system would only reach the level of the representative; the government was strictly required to give feedback to representatives, but there was no effective way to regulate how representatives responded to residents. Now, by means of the liaison station, almost every feedback link must be recorded and standardized so that the government's response to the residents' concerns is guaranteed by the intermediation of the representatives. Especially after the addition of the requirement of a feedback time limit, the institutionalized feedback channel provided by the liaison station has proven effective and distinguished itself from the occasional, non-standard communication channels of the past.

Liaison stations use this intermediary chain to a certain extent to break through the compartmentalization between elite participation and non-elite participation. The liaison station provides an opportunity for the combination of the coordination abilities of the representatives and the coordination abilities of the RC, invigorating and stimulating the enthusiasm of the grass-roots elite to share resources with the non-elite.

8.4 Summary

We have introduced four carriers of two-way communication between the government and liaison stations.

Table 8.1 Advantages and Shortcomings of Carriers

Carriers	Advantages	Shortcomings
Private talk	Flexible, efficient, in-depth and soft	Hard to document, lacking in openness, difficulty of supervision, low institutionalization
Formal talk	Flexible, efficient, soft and documented	Lacking in openness, difficulty of supervision
Liaison letter	Highly institutionalized, more efficient, powerful	May cause tension, risk of formalism
Recommendation to congress	Highly institutionalized, powerful	May cause tension, risk of formalism, less efficiency
Proposal to congress	Very formal, very highly institutionalized, very systematic and very powerful	Same as above; low flexibility: requires ten representatives to jointly sign, low applicability: must be a systemic or universal topic
Registration form	Formal, routine, convenient for contacting the department at the street level	Weak; needs to be used in combination with other carriers

Each option has its own advantages and disadvantages. In practice, the liaison station will use strategies in combination, according to the situation. For example, a phone call might be made first, then the situation is assessed and the liaison station decides whether to send a letter, make a proposal or make a recommendation, and at the same time, the filled registration form is submitted as a matter of course.

For the provision of feedback from the government to the liaison station, each carrier used to channel a message from the liaison station to the government may also serve as a carrier for feedback. For the provision of feedback from liaison station to residents, there are two carriers: the posting of announcements and face-to-face communication.

The feedback received by residents may not necessarily detail the final result but

may describe the phased results of the ongoing project.

Feedback is not a simple process of reversing the transmission of a message, but rather a negotiation process between the receiver and the sender with the intermediary chain formed by the RC and the representatives. After receiving the feedback, residents have the opportunity to compare the results with their expectations. If they are not satisfied, there is room for them to continue to push for better results through the liaison station. Depending on whether residents are satisfied with the feedback, the liaison station will decide what action to take next.

At the same time, the liaison station acts not only as a channel to inform the government, but also as a denoiser that coordinates the collective action of multi-actors in grassroots governance to reduce the costs of communication and improve the efficiency of problem resolution in process control.

Representatives and the RC jointly form an intermediary chain between the public and the government. Liaison stations use this intermediary chain to a certain extent to break through the compartmentalization between elite participation and non-elite participation.

Chapter 9: Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis investigates the following research questions: What is the People's Congress Representatives liaison station in residents' community (人大代表社区联络站, hereafter "liaison station(s)") and its significance? We attempt to answer this question by addressing the following three sub-questions:

1) What does a liaison station look like?

2) How does a liaison station carry out "liaison"?

3) Do liaison stations bring anything new to the People's Congress system?

9.1 What does a liaison station look like?

Chapter 5 presented a detailed description of a liaison station, describing it as a channel for enabling communication between representatives of the People's Congress and residents. In the majority of cases, liaison stations are located within Residents' Committees (RCs) and share offices and meeting space with other departments of RCs. A large portion of a liaison station's expenditures is paid by the RCs. The organizational structure includes members, who are all People's Congress representatives; a chief, who is a People's Congress representative; and part-time staff members, many of whom also work as RC staff members.

Liaison station regulations do not explicitly assign any duties to the RC. However, in practice, the liaison station is deeply embedded within the RC in terms of physical location, expenditures, and organizational structure. This embeddedness grants the RC

a vital role in the communication processes facilitated by the liaison station.

The central role of liaison stations is to build bridges between representatives and residents to solve public problems at the grassroots level. This role relies on frequent contact with the residents. Because by nature, RCs rely on frequent contact with residents, liaison stations that are deeply embedded in RCs are able to quickly and naturally form relationships with residents, obtain information about community dynamics, and discover problems that need to be solved.

Due to this advantageous relationship with RCs, local elites in charge of liaison stations are able to maintain acceptable performance despite being too busy to engage in frequent contact with the community. In turn, liaison stations, which benefit from their various internal resources, function as an effective tool for RCs to solve governance problems. So, despite material limitations, the People's Congress and the RC both benefit from this embeddedness.

Based on this description and analysis, we can answer the first research question: What does a liaison station look like? In practice, a liaison station is a People's Congress grassroots branch embedded within a Residents' Committee.

9.2 How do liaison stations carry out "liaison"?

Chapters 6 through 8 demonstrated that liaison stations channel messages from residents to representatives to the government before finally channeling responses back to the residents. This process is diagrammed in the flowchart below (Figure 5.7). The whole process can be divided into four main stages: trigger stage, negotiation stage,

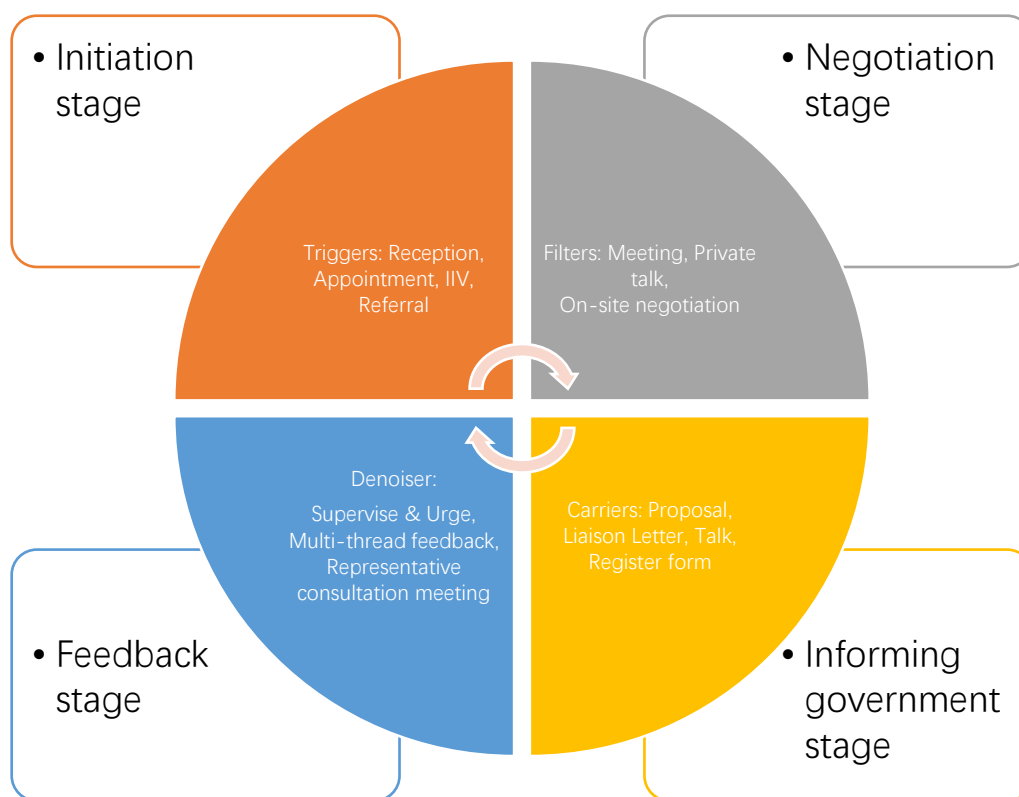informing government stage, and feedback stage (Figure 9.1).

Figure 9.1. Four stages of the communication process of a liaison station (a summary model of Figure 5.7)

The designed triggers include reception; investigations, inspections, visits (IIV); and appointments. They differ according to the operation procedure and the direction of liaison services. Together they form a basic framework enabling residents to reflect up problems and directly convey their concerns to representatives. The residents and representatives are the main actors. The liaison station serves representatives as their offices, front desks, and gathering points. However, in the actual case of these triggers, adaptations are often made according to the actual situation. This grants RCs the opportunity to play an important role. For example, an RC may meet with residents in

advance in order to screen for information or even take the place of representatives in communications with residents.

The so-called "undesigned trigger" is a referral, by which the liaison station is often used by the RC as a tool for grassroots governance. According to the principle of pragmatism, both residents and the RC consider solving problems as a top priority. Therefore, residents—and particularly RCs—are willing to flexibly choose, combine, and utilize various channels to find solutions. Moreover, even though each channel may have its own target and mechanism, they all, including the liaison station, form a toolbox that can be used by RCs to achieve their goals.

In referrals, RCs act as brokers or dealers, bridging the gap between residents and representatives. Sometimes, during this process, the RC itself—not residents—often functions to directly trigger the liaison station.

Although, in theory, the most central relationship is that between the residents and the representatives, during the trigger stage, the relationship between them is hardly viable if the RC does not participate in a mediating role. This point underscores the fundamental significance of liaison stations. Liaison stations have introduced the RC as an important third-party actor that facilitates the sharing of a stable and common channel between local elites and non-elites. In this sense, the channel is able to mutually moderately integrate the interests of the two parties.

After the trigger stage, representatives are able to view and read messages. Subsequently, representatives and RCs collaborate with residents to gradually reach a decision on whether to continue to channel the message to the government through

negotiations that typically entail considerable bargaining and mutual compromise. These negotiations take the form of a cycle that includes private talks, IIV, on-site conversations, and meetings.

In practice, negotiations between representatives and the RCs have resulted in a framework that can be described as BDBX (Meaning "not big and not small." In Chinese, "不大不小" [Bu Da Bu Xiao]). Ultimately, messages filtered through this framework are oriented around grassroots governance, especially small-scale infrastructure projects. As part of the legislative branch, the liaison station actually takes charge of the administrative affairs of grassroots governance, especially small-scale infrastructure projects.

The next stage is informing the government. There are four types of two-way communications between liaison stations and the government: proposals, liaison letters, oral communication, and registration forms. Each option has its own advantages and disadvantages. In practice, liaison stations adopt a combination of strategies according to the situation on the ground. For example, a liaison station might first make a phone call, then assess the situation and decide whether to send a letter directly to the government, draft a proposal or make a recommendation to the People's Congress, while also submitting the completed registration form as a formality.

The final stage is the feedback. In order to transmit feedback from the government to the liaison station, carriers who channel messages from the liaison station to the government may also transmit feedback. There are two means for transmitting feedback from liaison stations to residents: posted announcements and face-to-face

communication.

The content of feedback may not be final, as it may be a temporary directive amidst an ongoing project.

Nor is feedback a simple process of simply re-transmitting a message to the sender. Rather, it is a negotiation between the receiver and the sender, with the RC and representatives serving as intermediaries. After receiving feedback, residents and RCs have the opportunity to compare the results to their expectations. If they are not satisfied, they are allowed to push for better results through the liaison station. Depending on resident satisfaction with the feedback, the liaison station will decide what action to take next.

Concurrently, liaison stations not only act as channels to inform and receive feedback from the government. They also function to reduce noise by coordinating the collective actions of multiple actors within grassroots governance. This, in turn, reduces the cost of communication and improves the efficiency of problem resolution.

Representatives and RCs have jointly formed an intermediary chain connecting residents and governments. Liaison stations use this intermediary chain to disrupt the compartmentalization of elite and non-elite participation.

Based on these descriptions and analyses, we can answer the second research question: How do liaison stations carry out so called "liaison", which is emphasized in its name? In practice, liaison stations serve as channels through which messages related to grassroots governance can be circulated and processed among residents, RCs, representatives, and governments.

9.3 Do liaison stations bring anything new to the People's Congress system?

The above section described how a liaison station conducts its duties and responsibilities in practice. The liaison station acts as a communication channel between representatives and residents, as well as governments. This role provides material for the discussion of the six models presented in Chapter 3 and allows us to test which model(s) can best explain the communication process as mediated through the liaison stations.

Table 9.1. Theoretical Framework and Conclusion

		Representation styles		
		Mandate	Trustee	Leninist
Relationship between elites and non-elites	Compartmentalized	**Pork barrel model**	Corporatism model	Penetration model
	Non-compartmentalized	**Deliberation model**	**Meritocracy model**	Mobilization model

Notes: Models in blue are able to explain the data collected through fieldwork at liaison stations

9.1.1 Corporatism Model vs. Meritocracy Model

In my analysis, if obtaining credit is broadly regarded as a transaction, then residents and representatives can be regarded as traders conducting a transaction to earn credit. On the one hand, if they are to be re-elected and respected, which can be seen as the credit they want to earn, they need to develop networks with their constituents. On the other hand, residents need better public services and to have their problems resolved. That can be regarded as the credit that residents hope to earn.

In the past, both parties were unable to earn this credit through direct reciprocity,

as they could not trade directly with one another. This is consistent with our explanation of "compartmentalization" in Chapter 3. Previous studies on the People's Congress of China have observed that few transactions occurred between non-elite residents and elite representatives. Instead, transactions between representatives as elites and other elites (such as government officials) have been more pronounced: one party was able to realize their vested interests by complying with the regime, while the other gained stability by sharing power. This is the core concept of the corporatism model (for details, see Chapter 3). Elites participated in a market where they traded only with other elites; meanwhile, non-elites participated in a market where they interacted only with other non-elites. The currencies—that is, credit—of the two markets did not circulate with each other, which meant that the two markets were segmented. This is precisely the microscopic mechanism of the "compartmentalized relationship between elite participation and non-elite participation" discussed by previous scholars.

Although the written law stipulates that the representatives should be elected through a vote cast by the people—which can be considered a market enabling the two parties to trade with each another—in practice, the gap between representatives and voters is often criticized, as explained in Chapter 2. Chapter 5 also demonstrated how the relationship between voters and candidates in an election is not enough to induce interaction between representatives and residents.

When these two kinds of credit cannot be directly traded for one another, the most obvious solution is to introduce a third party as the mediating agent to exchange the two currencies into a single form of credit, thus consolidating the two separate markets

into a single unified market. Previous laws and regulations have only been able to provide a market in name. In practice, they have failed to promote effective trade between the two parties. The reason for this is that they did not introduce an effective third party into the market.

Liaison stations have rebuilt this market. Most importantly, they introduced an intermediary agent: the RC.

1）RCs and representatives exist in the same elite market and can trade with each other. This is determined by social status and job duties. Although the RC is located at the bottom of the bureaucratic hierarchy, it has certain authority within its jurisdiction, such as taking care of specific affairs of enterprises and organizations. The career paths of RC staff members often remain within government departments. That is to say, RC staff members have the potential to become officers. RC staff members, as well as community activists who can be easily mobilized by RCs, are opinion leaders in the region and can help elites obtain favorable standings with the public. These are all qualities that are valued by local elites, especially entrepreneurs and leaders of organizations, who make up the majority of representatives (see Chapter 5). At the same time, some representatives' own professions are at RCs, or in government departments that cooperate closely with RCs. Therefore, these representatives are often long-term colleagues with RC staff. Moreover, conducting People's Congress elections is one of the RC duties (see Chapter 5), giving representatives sufficient incentive to maintain good relationships with RCs. All of these factors have the potential to incentivize representatives to reciprocate with RC. To this end, representatives are willing to spend

a certain amount of time, energy, and resources to help RCs solve difficulties faced by the community and even to establish close friendships among elites.

2）RCs and residents exist in the same market and can trade with each other. First, residents have bargaining power because the RC relies on the cooperation of residents to complete day-to-day work. Without this assistance, it cannot fulfill its duties. Moreover, it is necessary to maintain community stability (维稳, Wei wen), which is a key index of local government performance. Thus, the willingness of residents to comply with the arrangements and orders of the RC is very important to the RC. Second, RCs are physically located within the boundaries of resident communities. As such, RC staff members interact with residents very frequently and maintain positive relationships with residents for long periods of time. As a result, RC staff members establish personal bonds with residents. They develop neighbor-like relationships and help each other in order to earn each other's respect. Third, the problems encountered by residents often overlap with problems that RC staff hope to solve to facilitate their work. To a certain extent, they have shared interests, as they both seek resources that will allow the community to enjoy better public services. For these reasons, RCs are incentivized to maintain mutually beneficial relationships with residents.

3) RCs are systematically and stably integrated into the relationship between representatives and residents by liaison stations. In some communities, before the establishment of liaison stations, the representatives had already practiced solving problems for residents by communicating through RCs. Those encounters, though, were sporadic and accidental rather than formalized. Following the establishment of liaison

stations, RCs became institutionally integrated into the relationship between residents and representatives.

This kind of integration occurs naturally through the combined effects of multiple practical limitations rather than rules committed to paper. The regulations do not clearly indicate the role of the RC. However, under the common constraints of the written provisions as well as practical limitations (in terms of the workplace, funding, personnel structure, and working process, as described in Chapter 5), the actors developed their own mutually beneficial strategies through self-adaptation. This, in turn, has formed a relatively stable state, resulting in the liaison stations becoming deeply embedded within RCs. While RCs can utilize liaison stations as governance tools, liaison stations can take advantage of RCs as key third parties.

As a result, liaison stations enable information exchanges between residents and representatives, with RCs as intermediaries in the hope of earning the credit they need. Thus, liaison stations can be considered as workable channels that provide a unified market with an effective intermediary.

Bearing this "transaction" idea in mind, let us return to the communication process of liaison stations in reality. In the trigger stage, residents select a representative to communicate with via the RC as an intermediary. This decision is actually based on the merits of the representatives and their expertise, competence, experience, network, etc. Residents hope that the representative, serving as a trustee, will be able to resolve issues for residents based on their professional judgment. In the negotiation stages, I observed that representatives interpreted the opinions of the residents as raw materials to be

processed using their own professional knowledge and experience. The representatives then struck bargains with the government based on their interpretations. At the same time, during the whole process, we also noticed that representatives necessarily established reputations with the RC and residents. These elements conformed to the meritocracy model. Accordingly, although directly elected representatives may not agree with their constituents on all issues, they are trusted as responsible and independent stewards of the People's interests, based on their own expertise and merit. Constituencies assume that their representatives will act as "converters" who will recast the raw opinions of citizens into appropriate and efficacious appeals. When non-elite constituents seek help from representatives, they tend to select representatives with relevant expertise and experiences and similar interests. According to Confucian teachings on responsibility, the elite should be motivated to maintain their reputations as people of merit who are capable of absorbing the unvarnished views of their constituents while retaining their own independent perspectives.

My observations in the field have been more consistent with the meritocracy model, particularly when compared with the corporatism model that also belongs to the "trustee" representative style (see Table 9.1). According to the corporatism model, non-elite opinions are suppressed or ignored. However, that is not what I observed in the field. If the corporatism model accurately described the reality, representatives, in their collusion with local governments, would be prone to furthering the interests of their own groups by exploiting, sacrificing, or, at the least, ignoring ordinary people. However, according to my observations, although representatives eagerly pursued their

own interests, they did not do so at the expense of residents. At liaison stations, representatives integrated their own interests with those of the residents through the credit market, which is mediated by RCs. Therefore, at least in my observations, the meritocracy model has greater explanatory power than the corporatism model. However, I do not plan to deny corporatism, because I must realize that the data obtained from my fieldwork is only part of the truth of the liaison station, and I cannot make an assertion that what I have presented in the thesis is the liaison station's whole practice. Where I have not observed, I cannot answer whether the corporatism model has a stronger explanatory power for the political communication in the liaison station. All I can say is that, based on the data I have, the meritocracy model appears to be more applicable.

Under meritocracy, elite and non-elite participation can be seen as non-compartmentalized (see Chapter 3). If we posit the corporatism model in the broad context of the People's Congress system, as previous scholars have argued—and we do not deny that model in this thesis—then we can find that the liaison station at least provides a channel for the People's Congress system to encourage non-compartmentalization emerging between the elite and non-elite participation. Perhaps this channel is still in a relatively early stage of non-compartmentalization, and far from successfully challenging the corporatism model. Still, it has the mixed characteristics of both models; that is, it features both compartmentalization and non-compartmentalization. In this sense, the liaison station, as a new institutional arrangement at the grassroots level, is of great significance to the whole system.

9.1.2 Pork-barrel Model vs. Deliberation Model

As a peripheral branch of the legislative system, the liaison station actually deals with administrative affairs at the grassroots level. As such, the liaison station can also be seen as a grassroots governance tool for RCs. This confirms the pork-barrel model. Manion states that the "biggest component of representation in Chinese local congresses is geographically parochial responsiveness. […] The biggest component is how representative action on some problem constituents reflect up, which mostly concern local public goods. Here I use the term *pork* for these goods and *pork-barrel politics* for delegating actions (Manion, 2014, p.329). A large number of messages related to infrastructure that channeled by liaison stations, especially targeted service provided by representatives directly to residents, were observed during my fieldwork, which confirmed Manion's conclusion. According to my analysis in Chapter 3, pork-barrel politics are a kind of compartmentalization between elite and non-elite participation.

However, in addition to occasional targeted delivery, I also observed long-term, regular communication between elites and non-elites under the institutional arrangement of the liaison station. In this relationship, actors "offer and respond to the substance of claims, reasons, and perspectives in ways that generate persuasion-based influence" (He & Warren, 2011, p. 271) in a manner that pursues an agreed-upon common good. These phenomena are confirming the deliberation model, a non-compartmentalization model of elite and non-elite participation. The deliberation model,

as a type of non-compartmentalization, is able to explain the practices of the liaison station because, as a formal arrangement, the liaison station has mobilized the non-institutional resources of elites in an institutionalized way.

First, by observing the process of negotiation, it is clear that representatives are indeed local elites with abundant expertise, strong networks, and other resources. Their diverse backgrounds complement each other through negotiation, resulting in even stronger synergistic resources. These resources, in liaison stations, can serve ordinary residents formally and institutionally through the RC intermediary. This demonstrates that the liaison station is an institutional opportunity for RCs to systematically guide, integrate, and utilize the resources of elite representatives to serve the non-elite and solve the ongoing problems of residents.

Second, as local elites, representatives have their own interests in mind. Realistically, those include maintaining relationships with RCs, which allows both parties to carry out credit transactions on a relatively equal basis in a single market, which means interest integration through substantial communication, as already noted in the last section.

Third, the affairs of grassroots governance are often trivial and intricate and therefore require clarification and mediation. In this context, the elite status of representatives facilitates communication progress by mediating conflicts.

Fourth, residents are involved in decision-making and efficiently utilize mediators, namely RCs. At meetings I attended (as Chapter 7 presented), I found that residents participated in negotiations but in a limited capacity. Despite this, both residents and

representatives still made their interests clear during negotiations. This is because they used the RC as a mediator to advocate for their respective interests, whereupon the RC employed a variety of flexible tactics in the process of bargaining, persuading, and compromising.

Direct and indirect communications between residents and representatives that are mediated through the RC display characteristics that conform to the deliberation model, according to which actors "offer and respond to the substance of claims, reasons, and perspectives in ways that generate persuasion-based influence" (He & Warren, 2011, p. 271).

In summary, liaison stations mobilize non-institutionalized elite resources in an institutionalized way. Through the institutionalized introduction of the RC, liaison stations enable representatives and residents, both elite and non-elite, to pursue substantive bargaining and reach mutual compromises. In the end, this enables both parties to consistently agree upon common goals for the delivery of grassroots public goods in a systemic form over the long term. Thus, I have observed communication phenomena that conform to the deliberation model, which is a non-compartmentalization model of elite and non-elite participation. Hence, I argue that the pork-barrel and deliberation models coexist in the practices of the liaison station.

9.3.1 Penetration Model vs. Mobilization Model

In the process of negotiation and feedback, explaining policies to residents is an important duty of government officials and representatives, both of whom are local

elites. This is evocative of the penetration model mentioned in Chapter 3. In this model, elites relay Party decisions to ordinary citizens and suppress non-elite expressions of their interests. Such a situation is possible with liaison stations because elites possess a large number of local resources, while residents are at an obvious information disadvantage. Once resident demands go unmet, elites may use their information advantages to suppress the expression of non-elite interests, even as they explain to residents why their expectations were unmet.

Fortunately, liaison stations have introduced the RC into the picture, and together with representatives, RCs form an intermediary chain that can greatly reduce the possibility of the penetration model. The intermediating function of RCs enables the interests of representatives and residents to be integrated; similarly, representatives also act as intermediaries between the government and residents. That is to say, in the relationship between residents and the government, representatives and the RC jointly play the role of intermediary, forming an intermediary chain. Moreover, through this chain of intermediaries, the government and residents—two traders who would otherwise have difficulty trading credits—have access to a unified market that can facilitate credit transactions. Once reciprocal transactions can be made, no one side is motivated to repress the expression of the other's interests. This may be why I observed elites conveying and explaining policies to non-elites, but did not observe the suppression of non-elite opinions. It is precisely because of such conveying and explaining that information asymmetry between elites and non-elites is bridged to some extent, thus promoting the integration of both sides' interests.

Simultaneously, this kind of interest integration also enables liaison stations to avoid another kind of risk: political unrest caused by the mobilization model, as mentioned in Chapter 3. In this model, non-elites are mobilized and organized by elites to attack other elites, especially those in power. Although we have observed representatives challenging government officials from the standpoint of residents, as far as I have observed, such challenges exist only on the level of work affairs. In general, representatives, by means of mediation, bring together residents and the governments to activate the credit transaction market and facilitate interactions between elites and non-elites.

Rather than threatening elites in power, the mediating effect actually helps them. Relying on the intermediary chain, which is comprised of representatives and RCs, liaison stations can effectively convey resident voices to the government, in a refined form and with some pertinent suggestions from the intermediaries. More importantly, it provides a channel through which the government can transmit a response. The feedback mechanism of the liaison station enables the government to direct information related to specific grassroots governance issues to residents, solving the problem of only broadcasting in political communication but lack of "narrowcasting".

Narrowcasting "involves direct communication towards key groups, or segments, within the electorate" (Lilleker, 2006, p.47). Since the advent of mass media, as the traditional source of political communications, government departments have never lacked broadcasting channels. However, due to the hierarchical gap, their channels of direct communication with residents are not well developed for handling specific

grassroots issues. Liaison stations provide such an opportunity through their feedback mechanism, allowing government departments to deliver targeted information on specific issues to a small audience.

This precise feedback mechanism is a major feature of liaison stations, and it differs from the traditional solutions utilized by the People's Congress. In the past, residents often felt that messages sent to the government went unanswered. Now, however, whether the problem is resolved or not, there is at least a response that can alleviate the negative emotions of residents and improve trust in elites. The prior normative feedback mechanism of the People's Congress system only went as far as the representative level. That is, the government was required to provide feedback to representatives but possessed no effective way to dictate how representatives passed the feedback along to the residents. Now, liaison stations have made it possible for almost every feedback link to be recorded and standardized. This, in turn, guarantees the government's responsiveness to residents through representatives as intermediaries. Establishing a time limit within which the feedback must be issued made the feedback channel of liaison stations more effective by distinguishing it from previous, non-standard communication channels, which relayed feedback only occasionally. According to my observations, although representatives have established closer ties with residents through liaison stations, they do not threaten the elites in power. Rather, they help elites to carry out local governance more effectively.

Due to the limitations of research methods in this study, as we have already noted in Section 9.1 and 9.2, I also do not plan to deny the explanatory power of these two

models. Perhaps the penetration and mobilization models still have explanatory power in a larger scope and broader context, though they do not match the data I obtained.

It is now possible to answer the third research question: Do liaison stations bring anything new to the People's Congress system? That is, what is their significance to the People's Congress system? Liaison stations, enhanced by the RCs as intermediaries, are able to encourage the non-compartmentalization of elite representative participation and non-elite resident participation by stimulating and invigorating the enthusiasm of grassroots elites to share resources with non-elites, although this non-compartmentalization is still in a very early stage (limited forms of pork-barrel politics, deliberation with limited public participation, engagement by meritocratic elites in relatively controlled environments), and is still existing in a broader context whose corporatist and Leninist features may be pronounced.

Based on this argument, I would like to acknowledge the complexity of the role of the liaison station, such that no single existing theory could fully or aptly characterize its functions. I hope that more theoretical innovations will emerge in the future to develop more appropriate theoretical models for grassroots practice in China.

9.4 Study Limitations

In addition to the limitations of the method already explained in the methodology section (4.5), some other limitations of this study must be noted, based on which future research could be further developed.

1. The filtering processes may take place and cause some bias.

There is a risk that the data I obtained was intentionally made available to me by the interviewees, and a lot of other potential and hidden data stayed behind the scenes. Interviewees may be prone to lead me to the best-case scenarios that put the liaison station in the most positive light. For example, the negotiation meeting discussed at length in Chapter 7 was the only one that I was allowed to observe in full, which means that all the others were filtered out. This may be the kind of selection problem that may undermine any conclusion drawn from the data. While I am fully aware of the problems this situation may bring, I must also note that this does not mean that the data used in this thesis are not meaningful. Here's how I look at it and deal with it:

First, I treat my fieldwork as a "pathological section" of liaison station practice rather than asserting that my data represent the whole reality. Through this pathological section of practice, we can see that at least the practices and phenomena I have described are taking place in the liaison station, and deserve the attention and discussion of academia, especially its emerging potential to encourage a confluence between elite and non-elite political participation. However, one needs to be careful whether to generalize the phenomenon I have described and the corresponding conclusions to a wider scope. To better understand the significance of liaison stations, a grassroots phenomenon to the whole Chinese political system, we need to conduct more in-depth investigations and research on this topic.

Secondly, before the interviews started, I expected that interviewees would tend to confide in me about their achievements and avoid talking about the so-called negative

information, so I decided to use this tendency as a strategy for establishing a rapport with interviewees. As described in section 4.3, as a cold visitor, I was a total stranger to the potential interviewees. One of my strategies for starting the interview was to invite interviewees to start talking about their success stories. This allowed them to feel relaxed and respected and gradually build up their trust in me. It is because of this trust that I may have had the opportunity to harvest some more profound and richer data in the in-depth stage of the interview (usually the second half). (Note that the process of building trust is also one of the essentials of the "site-intensive method" I use.) For example, as mentioned in Section 6.2.3, in the second half of some interviews, interviewees often described to me the actual work process, rather than just the process stipulated on paper. Based on these data, I was able to sort out the actual working process of the liaison station in detail, which is also a major contribution of this study. As another example, mentioned in Section 7.3, after trust is established in interviews, some interviewees would admit that there are many problems raised by residents that failed to be resolved by the People's Congress Representatives. It was based on the analysis of this information that I came up with a BDBX model. So, from my point of view, although interviewees certainly have a tendency to provide positive information, I had anticipated this in advance of the interview so that I was able to turn it into my trust-building strategy to get more in-depth information (including so-called negative information) and thus enhance the credibility of the information I received.

Third, while I was making my observations, I didn't feel that I was under a high level of attention. For instance, at the meeting described in Chapter 7, due to the weather

and other emergencies, the organizers and participants were very busy before and during the conference and did not have the time or energy to worry about my presence. Even after the meeting, when I said goodbye to the organizers, their eyes and expressions expressed something of a "sudden awakening of memory," as if they had been too busy to remember that I was there until I spoke to them again. In addition, as an observer, I could tell that what I witnessed in the meeting scene was natural and vivid; at least, I did not feel that they were consciously performing for me.

Fourth, my confidence in using the data that I have obtained is also due to my understanding of the field brought about by my personal experience. As a former People's Congress Representative at the grassroots level, I can judge whether the information provided by interviewees is in line with the logic of actual work from my practical experience. Of course, this can also lead to some bias, which I discuss in Section 4.5.

Fifth, for critical information, I employed triangulation. For example, if I saw a phenomenon in the observation, I verified it in the interview. What is mentioned in one interview, I will verify in other interviews. When I get information from the staff, I ask People's Congress Representatives to verify it, and vice versa. As we can see from the writing of this thesis, the interviews I cite are often from multiple sources.

Finally, I have repeatedly stated in this thesis that this is a preliminary exploratory study, whose purpose is to introduce a relatively new phenomenon into the academic field of vision, so my conclusion is limited to discussing which models my observations fit, from my perspective. Since the data I have obtained do not represent the whole story

of the liaison station, I do not deny any of the models traditionally used to explain Chinese politics. In fact, at the end of the thesis, I have concluded that there was no model that fully and accurately explained what I saw. Even the six models can only partly explain what I observed. Therefore, in the future, we need more theoretical innovation for research of the liaison station. In a word, since I am aware of the possible filtering problems, I have only emphasized which models are partially available. Nor have I denied any models.

2. The applicability of some terms in the context of grassroots China.

My theoretical model uses several terms that are commonly used in so-called typical democratic systems. For example, pork barrel and deliberation. These terms are generally thought to be used in so-called democracies where there are fully competitive elections. Meritocracy, moreover, is generally regarded as a description of the political system as a whole rather than being applied to specific practices at the grassroots level.

I use these terms in my research on grassroots political practice in China. As for the theoretical terms, my idea is that on the basis of respecting its original core meaning, scholars should have the courage to develop its connotations and extensions. Manion's 2014 journal paper is an important piece of literature that I cite in this thesis, in which she creatively and boldly uses the core meaning of the term pork barrel to discuss the practice of local people's congresses in China. It is also not uncommon to use the deliberation model to discuss the political practices of so-called authoritarian states (for more details see Section 3.3). In addition, studies using meritocracy as a lens to look at

grassroots practices, especially in China, have emerged in recent years (for more details see Section 3.1). Inspired by these previous scholars, I have borrowed the core meaning of these terms in this article, trying to transplant them into the context of the Chinese grassroots. At least from the point of view of providing a framework, perspective, and direction for my data analysis, this attempt was reasonable and beneficial. But I still acknowledge the risk of impropriety and look forward to theoretical innovations in the future based on a further study on this topic.

3. The underlying comparative perspective is to be developed.

Although the specific research object, liaison stations, is located at the grassroots level, it is of great significance to the entire political system. This significance does not exist only in China. It would be a meaningful effort to further explore the relationship between elites and non-elites, between the state and society, between politics and administration, representativeness, and the process of democratization by assessing the practice of liaison stations from a comparative perspective. As a preliminary exploratory study, this thesis provides rich details as well as a preliminary theoretical perspective, all of which are preparation for future research. It is a pity that a broader comparative perspective is not involved, and this will be one of the focuses of my research work in the next stage.

9.5 Conclusion

Based on my first-hand data gathered through fieldwork, I have described the basic

function and operation of liaison stations and discussed which models capture the nature of the political communication processes that occur between People's Congress representatives and residents via liaison stations.

After analyzing data collected from liaison stations in Shenzhen, I identified phenomena that conformed to the pork-barrel model, deliberation model, and meritocracy model, and I argue that these three models coexist in the practices of liaison stations, under a broader context whose corporatist and Leninist features may be still pronounced.

In liaison stations, according to my data, the representation styles of representatives more closely resemble "trustees" and "mandates," than "Leninism". These results confirm to and also somewhat differ from those obtained by Manion's (2014) through a subjective questionnaire. Manion observed the coexistence of three representation styles among grassroots representatives. However, in the data from my observations and interviews, I find two representation styles. But still, I do not plan to deny "Leninism" style representation. In addition, I found non-compartmentalization and compartmentalization between elite and non-elite participation are mixed in the practice of liaison station, which differs from Paik's (2009) conclusion. Paik argues that political participation in China is "compartmentalized." I argue that, in practice, compartmentalization and non-compartmentalization coexist at the grassroots level through liaison stations. When representatives act as trustees, they behave in accordance with the meritocratic model; when they act as mandates, they behave in accordance with both the pork-barrel model and the deliberative democracy model.

These three models—some of which prioritize compartmentalization while others do not—coexist in the practices of liaison stations. At the same time, I do not rule out the possibility that all this is likely to happen in a larger corporatist and Leninist context, which are compartmentalized models.

An unexpected finding is that RCs play an important role as mediators and have formed a mediatory chain in combination with People's Congress representatives. This chain can serve as a bridge of communication between governments and residents. It is the key to how liaison stations contribute to the non-compartmentalization of elite and non-elite participation. This is owing to the fact that the actual operations of liaison stations are deeply embedded within RCs. As a result, liaison stations have the opportunity to absorb the coordination ability of RCs. This finding has important implications for how to integrate elite participation and non-elite participation in political communication practice. That is, it is recommended to introduce an appropriate and meaningful third party that can generate mutually binding and beneficial relationships between all relevant actors for long periods of time.

In conclusion, what are the liaison station and its significance? In urban China, liaison stations are a kind of formal branch of the People's Congress system that is deeply embedded in the Residents' Committees. It serves as a communication channel for both the People's Congress system and grassroots governance, encouraging non-compartmentalization between elite participation and non-elite participation.

Although a preliminary study, this is the first English-language thesis to systematically introduce the liaison station of urban China, with a grassroots discovery

to contribute to the theories of the representation style, the relationship between elites and non-elites, grassroots governance, and democratic development. Hopefully, this contribution will provide the necessary information and widen theoretical perspectives in order to benefit future studies on liaison stations, the People's Congress, grassroots governance, and China's democratic development.

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