

The Transformation of Political Representation and the Future of Democracy

Abstract

Democracy is presently a popular ideal in many countries which do not have such a political regime, but political distrust is growing in the old democracies. How can this paradox be understood? One interesting path is to analyse the transformation of political representation that is taking place worldwide. The lecture will first analyse the meanings of political representation, departing from mainstream Anglo-American political science. It will pay attention to the contrasting translations of the English word “representation” in other languages – the Chinese 代表 (*dàibiǎo*) expressing for example just one dimension of the English “representation”. The lecture will insist on a dichotomy between the (mostly electoral) mandated representation and embodiment- (体现 *tǐ xiàn*) grounded representation, an old European concept that conceives the representative as embodying the represented. Such a concept could help to better understand both Western (for example the famous words “We, the people” of the adoption of the US constitution) and Chinese (especially the “Three Represents” 三个代表 *sāngè dàibiǎo*) representative claims. Relying on this analysis, the second part of the lecture will stress the diversity of representative claims, provincializing the classical model of West-European and North-American representative government. It will present alternative scenarios for the future of political representation in the Global north, but also in a more global perspective, the most realistic scenarios between those of post-democracy, authoritarianism and the democratization of democracy.