Civil Society and Political Change in Asia

Expanding and Contracting Democratic Space

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China was one of the few socialist countries to emerge from the 1990s with a dynamic, expanding economy and an intact ruling communist party. How has China's "economic transition without political liberalization" shaped state-society relations? Has civil society emerged? If so, what are its parameters and how is it affected by restrictive state regulations?

Since 1978, the People's Republic of China has experienced massive social and economic change. Political normalization following the Cultural Revolution, economic reform, and increased integration with the rest of the world have led to a great expansion in individual autonomy and a more diverse, open society. Rapid economic growth and extensive social change have not led to significant political liberalization, however. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continues to maintain its monopoly of political power and its leading position over other institutions, including the government, the legal system, and all social organizations. Associational life in China remains tightly constrained by this system, with the party-state employing corporatist regulations to achieve control and co-optation of social organizations (Brook and Frolic 1997).

The boundary separating state and society, especially organized groups, is extremely porous and in constant movement. The state is devolving institutions to society but maintaining control and influence through laws, structural affiliations, personnel, and financial measures. The state is also actively creating new groups and associations that are ostensibly social organizations but remain linked to their state creators. Groups formed independently from within society are also affected by this control and influence; indeed, no social organization in China can register without a government sponsor. Other forms of civil society are therefore emerging outside...
the realm of the regulated, legal social organization: more fluid social networks, groups "virtually" organized on the Internet, and, finally, "unofficial civil society." "Unofficial civil" society includes groups with common interests or attributes that remain outside the sphere of state-sanctioned organizations either because the state refuses to recognize them or because these groups themselves studiously avoid organization in order to maintain their autonomy and independence from the state.

Future political change will be shaped by this split between official civil society (restricted through corporatist regulations and party domination) and its unofficial counterpart. Corporatist groups are likely to experience gradual liberalization and increasing strength and influence as the Chinese state continues with market reforms, "rule of law" projects, and bureaucratic reorganization. But given the benefits of close ties in the current period, it remains unclear whether such groups will become more autonomous from the state. In fact, given the degree of mutual penetration and dependence between social organizations and state institutions, future political change in China will decidedly not occur as a standoff between state and official civil society. It is groups and interests outside the legal, organized sphere that are more likely to clash directly, even violently, with the Chinese state. Civil society's future development, its direction, quality, and relationship to the state, are contingent, of course, on changes in China's political institutions, its legal infrastructure, and the economy.

Civil Society, Corporatism, and the Chinese Case

Two analytical frameworks have surfaced in the literature as ways to understand the effects that economic liberalization and growth have on state-society relations in China. Debates centering on the fit of these frameworks, civil society versus state corporatist, have dominated research into both historical and contemporary trends in Chinese state-society relations. The civil society framework looks for the rise of relatively autonomous groups as state power recedes to make way for the market. Its major underlying assumption is that the growth of societal associations limits the power of the state. The state-corporatist framework also looks for the rise of interest associations at the societal level. The rise of associations is seen not as an indication of receding state power, however, but as an evolution away from direct state control to indirect state coordination. Loss of state power is not assumed to be a necessary result of greater market penetration.

Both of these approaches have been deployed in analysis of Chinese state-society relations under reform, with state corporatism being more dominant, because many researchers have remained skeptical about the application of civil society in the Chinese context. Variants on the state-corporatist models, usually emerging due to problems in the application of corporatism to the Chinese case, have recently become more central to this discussion. They include Philip Huang's (1993)
notion of a “third realm,” Kenneth Foster’s (2002a) “hybrid organizations,” Margaret Pearson’s (1994) “socialist corporatism,” X. L. Ding’s (1994) “institutional amphibiousness,” Baogang He’s “semi civil-society,” Michael Frolic’s state-led civil society (Brook and Frolic 1997), and many others. The central focus in this literature is the existence of a realm between society and the state that is constituted by both, but subsumed by neither. These variants of state corporatism are also rooted in China’s history, drawing from the guilds of the late Qing era and the effects of socialist organization and ideology on current developments.

The corporatist paradigm and its China-specific applications set their sights, not only on the formation of associations, but on the role of the state in initiating, running, and controlling these groups, not necessarily through repression or violence but through mutual penetration, converging interests, and co-optation. Under state corporatism, associational life is strictly controlled by the state. Characteristics of state-led formation include a pre-emption of issues, co-optation of leaders, institutionalization of access, state planning and resource allocation, development of quasi-state agencies, a political culture stressing formalism, consensus, and continuous bargaining, and the periodic but systematic use of physical repression (Schmitter 1974). All of these characteristics fit, to varying degrees, the current relationship between the Chinese state and social organizations.

It is, however, inaccurate to cast the debate as a dichotomous choice between civil society and state corporatism. These models are quite different in what they seek to explain. The civil society model is an analytical model of social change, founded on the prediction that growth in autonomous social organizations leads to greater societal independence from the state and eventually, perhaps, to democratization. State corporatism, in contrast, is a descriptive model of state-society relations in nations where the state plays a central role in controlling the growth and development of societal actors. As Jonathan Unger and Anita Chan point out, corporatism is made up of a collection of “institutional mechanisms” and as such can be deployed by many different types of regimes (Unger and Chan 1995: 37). Pointing out that the Chinese government employs state-corporatist structures to reign in and control society does little to help us understand future political change. In this sense, the civil society model is overly teleological, while corporatism is not teleological enough.

Formulations of civil society in terms of neo-Tocquevillean and neo-Gramscian, or New Left, frameworks (see Introduction and Chapter 1 above) take care to avoid this teleological bias in which civil society is highly associated with democracy. One of the key contributions of this volume is to show that civil society’s relationship to democratization is highly contingent. Unfortunately, even the more sophisticated frameworks presented in this volume have limited usefulness for our understanding of civil society in China. In both the neo-Tocquevillean and New Left schools, civil society is evaluated by its relative distance from state actors, with an implicit normative assumption that the ideal nature of civil society is independent and sep-
arate from the state. Chinese civil society can only come up short if this is the major focus of comparison. Moreover, a linear focus on movement away from the state (from no autonomy to more autonomy) will only capture one angle of China's associational life, and arguably not the most important aspect. One of the key arguments presented here is that state-civil society interaction is important because it is changing the nature of the Chinese state. This transformative effect of civil society is, however, a result of the close interdependence and mutual penetration of the state and social groups. My emphasis here echoes Suzaina Kadir's point in Chapter 10 that in Singapore as well, it is more important to study "the process of interaction and how it defines, bounds, or transforms the two sides," rather than measuring the degree of societal autonomy from the state.

State corporatism, however, also has profound limitations, because it is largely a descriptive model. Social organizations in China are indeed structured in state-corporatist fashion, but adopting state corporatism as a lens through which to try to view the full range of Chinese society would be a mistake, because it would provide an incomplete view and a static model. State corporatism cannot help us explain how authoritarian states deploying corporatist organizations to control and co-opt society (such as South Korea and Taiwan) suddenly democratize and become plural, open, competitive polities. These limitations lead me to consider other forms of civil society, above all, "unofficial civil society." In the final section of this chapter, I shall explore some of the ways in which political change may occur in China in the future in spite of the state-corporatist characteristics of social organizations.

Historical Perspective

Debates over the nature of state-society relations in late imperial times, the republican era, and contemporary China surfaced most visibly during the late 1980s, when China seemed at first to be going through a period of rapid social change and liberalization and then (after the suppression of the Tiananmen Square demonstration on June 4, 1989) to be going through a period of renewed authoritarian control and repression. The possibility of an emergent civil society during the spring protests of 1989 led to questions about the social and cultural foundations of such a phenomenon. Historians asked questions about the nature of associations in the Qing era, the pattern of life, commerce, and labor in imperial and republican urban China, the development of western-influenced associations and groups as colonialism encroached, and the effects of intellectual movements, such as the May Fourth and New Culture movements, on ordinary urban residents and the vast rural peasantry. Many of these historical debates employ the civil society model (in some cases only to criticize it), and comparisons with the post-Mao period are apparent if not explicit.4
Historical studies of Chinese state-society relations from the late Qing era to 1949 reveal several points. First, there seems to be a general consensus that Chinese civil society during the late imperial era interacted closely with state actors, leading some to argue that Chinese civil society differed in fundamental ways from that developing in Europe. Although the commercialization and urbanization of the Chinese economy led to a rapid development in a variety of associations (such as guilds and native-place and temple associations), these were more closely tied to the state, in a distinctly hierarchical relationship, than their counterparts in Europe were. This hierarchy encompassed both political and moral qualities. Second, associational life diversified and societal power (in particular, the power of the merchant class) increased as the Qing state declined and stability broke down. With the arrival of the republican era, Chinese society changed rapidly and many new types of associations gathered strength, including labor unions, chambers of commerce, and student and intellectual groups. Third, the consolidation of state power, first by the Guomindang in 1927 and then by the CCP after 1949, led to the domination and absorption of these movements by the state apparatus. Harnessed by highly mobilized parties, this initial burst of postimperial activity had illiberal consequences both in mainland China and on Taiwan.

Party-state domination of society reached its apex during the rule of Mao Zedong. Associational life in Maoist China was organized through party-controlled mass organizations and strictly controlled. Social organizations apart from these CCP-created and controlled structures were either weeded out or co-opted. Other important characteristics of Chinese society in this period include the high degree of segmentation between the rural and urban populations, the "encapsulation" of society into hierarchical institutions (the xitong at the macro level, the danwei and the jiti at the micro),6 and the relative homogeneity and egalitarianism of individual status (White et al. 1996: 22). This social structure was notable in the near total absence of horizontal links between individuals or groups. Informal relationships tended to be through personal connections and were often hierarchical too.

In the years since the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), Chinese society has experienced a reawakening. The depoliticization of daily life, the decline of ideology, the expansion of the private and nonstate sectors in the economy, the opening to foreign trade, investment, and influence, the withdrawal of the state from key functions such as labor allocation and certain aspects of social welfare—all have radically changed the way Chinese people live, work, and interact with one another and with state and party authorities. Private space and leisure time have expanded and diversified (Davis et al. 1995). A consumer revolution has taken place among urban Chinese, leading to a rapid expansion in domestic tourism, fashion, the arts, and other interests that had been severely restricted in the late Maoist period (Davis 2000).
Official Civil Society

In tandem with these changes affecting Chinese as individuals, there have been dramatic changes in how Chinese interact in collectivities, including voluntary social associations. According to Tony Saich, by the beginning of 1998, there were more than 180,000 registered social associations in China, of which slightly fewer than 7,000 were national-level organizations. Shanghai alone has over 7,000 social organizations. Saich estimates that if “all kinds of citizen run organizations and economic associations” were included, the total number of social organizations would be around one million (Saich 2000: 126).

Generally speaking, China’s social organizations have come into being in three different ways. First, many of these associations were created from scratch by the Chinese state, which has taken an active role, at both the central and local levels, in creating new entrepreneurial groups, industrial and trade associations, and groups representing different professions. Second, in order to reduce the size of the Chinese state and its budget, the government has also spun off associations from the bureaucracy. These associations may still have functions that involve public administration or regulation, however, and often the staff is simply transferred from the government institution. Frequently, these associations are housed in the same complex as the government bureaucracies that spawned them. And, third, some social organizations are created independently from within society by individuals or groups. Although reliable data are not available, it seems that this last category remains the smallest in number.

Chinese social organizations are tightly bound to the state through four major mechanisms. The first is the legal and administrative regulations that govern them. The second mechanism is their restricted financial autonomy. The third is the practice of “double-posting” government or party cadres to leadership positions within social organizations. And the fourth is the ideology of the CCP.

Legal and Administrative Guidelines

Chinese social organizations are constrained by a host of legal and administrative regulations that delineate the scope of each organization, establish the organization’s crucial legal standing, and establish the proper hierarchical relationship between the organization and the relevant state or Communist Party institution.

Vertical and Horizontal Control. The State Council issued the main regulations guiding the establishment of social organizations in China in 1998.7 The “Regulations for Registration and Management of Social Organizations” (shehui tuanti dengjiguanli tiyao) set out the requirements that social organizations must meet, as well as the necessary steps that must be taken to ensure legal recognition. Requirements include fifty individual members or thirty unit members, a fixed domicile, and the possession of a full-time staff and adequate funding (the amount
depends on the scope of the organization). It is difficult for small, poorly funded organizations to reach these basic requirements. More onerous for all social organizations, however, are the stipulations for proper registration and supervision. These regulations set out a system of hierarchical organization that ties the social organization to two supervising bodies: the professional business unit (yewu zhuguan danwei) and the authorizing government body (dengji guanli jiguan). Every social organization in China is vertically linked both to a guarantor and to the regulating government authority.

As stipulated in the regulations, a professional business unit (PBU) must be found to serve as guarantor of the social organization. This unit must be responsible “for the supervision and guidance over social organizations’ activities being conducted in accordance with the law and the articles of organization” (Ge 2001). Although most PBUs are departments of governments (local, provincial, national) or of the Chinese Communist Party, the PBU may be an enterprise or a higher-level social organization. The regulations do not specify what relevant documents must be submitted to the PBU for approval. Nor do they specify the time frame in which PBUs must decide the fate of a social organization. PBUs are not required to furnish reasons for declining an application of a social organization (Ge 2001).

After a social organization has found a PBU, it then makes an application to the registration and administration organs (dengji guanli jiguan), usually the local civil affairs department or, in the case of national social organizations, the Ministry of Civil Affairs. These government bodies are then responsible for annual inspection of the social organization, for the verification of any violation of the regulations, and for imposing administrative punishments on social organizations that violate regulations or any relevant laws (Ge 2001). These organs must make a decision within sixty days about any social organization; if an application is rejected, they must explain why. Reasons for rejection or dissolution include the vaguely worded clause that “social organizations shall abide by the Constitution, laws, administrative regulations, and state policies.” During 1990–92, for example, the State Council reexamined and reverified all social organizations and dissolved those that were found to be “against the four fundamental principles of the constitution.” From 1997 to 2000, the State Council again reinspected all social organizations and dissolved those found to be “spreading the thought of bourgeois liberalization” (Ge 2001).

The guidelines regulating the supervision of social organizations set high standards for membership, staffing, and funding. At the same time, these regulations set onerous standards for proper registration and authorization. Every social organization must find another work unit willing to take responsibility for it. Every social organization must also satisfy vague but broad measures of political correctness.

Overlap and Competition Among Organizations. Government regulations also require that organizations must not overlap one another significantly in scope or
purpose. Competition and pluralist interaction between social organizations is discouraged. The 1989 regulations on the formation of social organizations proclaimed: "There is no need for the establishment of a social organization where there are other social organizations whose business scope is either identical or similar to that of the proposed social organization in the same administrative area" (Ge 2001). The restrictive corporatist framework is indicated by ministerial provisions aimed at preventing social organizations from "being excessive in number, developing without planning, overlapping of business among the organizations, enrolling members repeatedly, and making members suffer excessive economic burdens." The regulations also warn against "malicious competition among the organizations, which in turn leads to all kinds of shortcomings for society" (Ge 2001).

In sum, then, the legal and administrative regulations guiding the establishment of social organizations fit well into the state-corporatist framework. Social organizations are vertically and horizontally integrated into government and party structures—ensuring avenues for control, co-option, and surveillance. Once established, they are permitted to have a monopoly of representation. Competition between them is discouraged.

Financial Autonomy, Political Dependence

Social organizations can be divided into three broad categories: organizations devolved from the socialist state (previously designated as bureaus or government departments or groups from one of the mass organizations); organizations created by the state (GONGOs); and organizations set up through the initiative of private individuals or groups. Groups devolved from or created by the party-state are top-down social organizations; groups initiated within society are from the bottom up (Kang 2001). Generally speaking, top-down social organizations receive some financial subsidization from the government, whereas bottom-up groups are expected to raise funds from society. Expectations of financial autonomy combined with expectations of political correctness sometimes create problems for social organizations. As one Chinese analyst (Kang 2001) commented: "Their activities must not directly damage the governmental interests and go against its will, otherwise the government will directly stop their activities or ban them. At the same time, social organizations' activities must meet with the needs of society, otherwise they can't receive the approval and support of the society and lose their basis for existence." A case study of the Chinese Youth Development Foundation (CYDF), one of the best-known social organizations in China and responsible for Project Hope, a fund-raising initiative to send donations to impoverished rural youth and improve rural education, revealed the same problem. Social organizations suffer from a "paradox of legitimacy." They must get legitimacy from a branch of the Communist Party or government body and get legal authorization from the state.
At the same time, they must find legitimacy within market society. The case study concluded: "This latter legitimacy is even more important for their survival in the market and international environment" (Yuan and Sun 2001).

At this time, however, the avenues by which social organizations can achieve financial autonomy are narrow. The regulations of 1998 stipulate that social organizations should safeguard and increase their financial worth through measures that are "legal, safe, and effective" but do not clarify what these measures might be (Li 2001). Social organizations that attempt to provide social welfare to marginal groups often compete with private enterprises or, even worse, with state-owned enterprises that are the beneficiaries of state subsidies. Because social organizations are not permitted to participate in for-profit activities and receive scant government subsidization, they are often hard-pressed to compete in this environment (Yang 2001). There is also little official encouragement for private contributions—for example, tax policies that would encourage greater individual or corporate giving to domestic social organizations. This further limits the domestic resources of social organizations.

*Double-Posting of Personnel*

The rigorous registration and approval process for a social organization tends to have two effects. First, it privileges top-down social organizations—organizations that are being spun off or devolved from government or party institutions. These groups can rely on their prior government resources, including funding, expertise, staffing, and links to the government, enterprises, and the media. Second, even for the bottom-up organizations, the prerequisites for approval (finding a PBU and then applying for legal registration to another government office) draw the social groups into closer and more intimate contact with government and party institutions. The result is the penetration of the social organization by the state or party—and the practice of double-posting—appointing government or party cadres to serve jointly as officials of the social organization.10

This interpenetration occurs at all levels of social organization, but it is most obvious within the large national-level groups. The Chinese Youth Development Foundation, for example, is an offshoot of the Communist Youth League (CYL), one of the mass organizations. CYDF's board of directors is drawn entirely from the leadership of the CYL. The CYL directs their appointment to CYDF and supervises their work (Yuan and Sun 2001). The highest honorary positions of the CYDF, moreover, are filled by former or present leaders of the CYL (Li et al. 2001). This penetration through double-posting is also seen in the major Chinese business associations, including the Young Entrepreneurs, the Shanghai Entrepreneurial Society, and the Chinese Association of Enterprise Directors.11

Double-posting is not only a national-level phenomenon. The evolution of the Shenzhen Voluntary Federation (Shenzhen Shi Yiwuongzuo Lianhehui), a particu-
larly activist and independent group, shows similar trends. It was first established as a division of the Shenzhen City Communist Youth League in 1989 to serve the needs and protect the rights of young migrant workers, and its development over the next decade demonstrates both the potential and the limitations of social organizations (Yi and Yong 2001). By 1990, the Shenzhen Voluntary Federation had broken off from the Shenzhen CYL and established itself as a social organization under the CYL’s direction. Personnel are double-posted, but the Volunteers note that their methods are different from those of most other social associations in China: the Shenzhen Volunteers must give prior approval to any staff sent from the Shenzhen CYL. The Volunteers also choose their leaders in competitive elections. But even an independent and feisty organization such as the Shenzhen Voluntary Federation is bound to the state and party and penetrated by CCP personnel. CYL members sit on the Volunteers’ Secretariat (Mishuchu) and “advise the Board of Supervisors on their daily work” (Yi and Yong 2001).

Party-state penetration of social organizations through double-posting of personnel is not uniformly recognized as bad for the growth of social associations. It allowed the Shenzhen Voluntary Federation to develop from a group of 400 in 1993 to a group of 30,000 in 1999. Private business associations value high-profile cadres or former cadres in leadership positions because they lend credibility, prestige, and the powerful suggestion that the group enjoys good connections with officialdom. Given the degree of corruption and the continuing importance of personal connections (guanxi) in Chinese business circles, double-posting and penetration are likely to persist for some time.

**Ideology and Interest Representation**

A final constraint to the development of Chinese social organizations is the ideology of the CCP—in particular its ongoing commitment to serve as the encompassing group for all legitimate societal interests. This monopoly on interest representation reduces social organizations to a subordinate role and restricts their ability to speak for their members or their cause. The CCP conception of how interest representation should occur falls far short of a pluralist model of competition and even differs somewhat from the traditional state-corporatist model of interest representation by hierarchical, peak associations with heavy state control and mediation. In China, the Communist Party remains the final arbiter of society’s interests and the sole legitimate representative of the interests of the entire Chinese people. The newest example of this encompassing impulse of the CCP is the “Three Represents” theory pushed by Jiang Zemin. The Three Represents extend the CCP’s representation past its traditional constituents—workers and peasants—to the “advanced cultural and productive forces of society.” The most notable implication of this theory is high-level support for the inclusion of private entrepreneurs in the party’s ranks, a phenomenon that has already occurred locally in many areas.
Two Case Studies: Labor and Capital

To demonstrate the effects of these constraints, two key cases of social organization are examined here: labor and capital. These cases are critical because they involve two of the most dramatically changed groups since the onset of the reform period in 1978. The state's attempts to regulate and control both labor and private capital reveal the way state intervention and state-led organization of civil groups shapes the direction of political change.

The All-China Federation of Trade Unions

The All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) is the national association and sole legal representative of Chinese workers. The ACFTU was established in 1948, and the Trade Union Law of 1950 was one of the first laws to be promulgated by the new communist government under Mao Zedong. The ACFTU is a "mass organization" and, as such, under communism, was intended to act as a "transmission belt" relaying party edicts and government policies to workers, while conveying worker concerns and suggestions to the leadership. In practice, of course, the former function was fulfilled more effectively than the latter. Prior to 1978, the vast majority of Chinese enterprises had a trade union organization. With ownership limited to state or collective, however, the union's function within the enterprise was secondary to the factory's communist party organization. Its job was to harmonize labor relations, encourage worker efficiency, and perform certain welfare functions (To 1986).

Conflict between the CCP and the union was not unheard of—particularly in the early days before the dominance of the CCP was firmly established over all social organizations. But as Mao extended his power at the expense of other CCP officials who were more sympathetic to independent unions, the union was gradually weakened in the 1950s and early 1960s. Key union leaders were suppressed for promoting "economism" (advancing the narrow material interests of workers) over concern for the achievement of national communism. During the power struggles and chaos of the Cultural Revolution, disgruntled contract and temporary workers besieged enterprise unions. When radical Red Guard students invaded the central offices of the ACFTU in Beijing, the union ceased to exist, and it did not reappear as a coherent organization until the reforms of the late 1970s (To 1986).

The ACFTU is a corporatist body with the enterprise-level union as the base. Although industrial unions and local trade union bureaus exist, all are under the umbrella of the ACFTU. The higher level approves appointments at a lower level (Chan 1993; Howell 1990; Wilson 1990; White 1996). Since the end of the Cultural Revolution, the trade union has been revived and reformed somewhat to fit the demands of a marketizing economy. The government has revised the Trade Union Law twice, in 1992 and 2001, each time granting the ACFTU greater legal responsi-
bilities and rights (Gallagher and Jiang 2002). Current union responsibilities include organizing an enterprise-level trade union in every enterprise with twenty-five or more workers, protecting and representing workers' legal rights and interests, and aiding workers during labor disputes. Union rights are more circumscribed. The union does not have the right to organize a strike or work actions. It must remain supportive of the Chinese Communist Party and the principles of its rule. And because the higher-level authorities of the ACFTU must approve all trade unions, independent trade union organizations are strictly forbidden.

The ACFTU (including its branches at the local and firm levels) is a highly constrained association. Of all the social organizations in China today, the trade union is perhaps the weakest as measured by autonomy from the state and CCP. In terms of policy influence and interest representation, too, the ACFTU is extremely weak. In light of the strong, developmentalist views of most central and local leaders, the union serves as middleman between enterprise managers and workers, an arrangement that severely compromises its role as the representative of workers. In a repressive political environment, the union enjoys a monopoly on representation but has little credibility among workers. Moreover, the rapid diversification in enterprise ownership through foreign investment, stockholding conversions, mergers, bankruptcies, and factory leasing has led to a proliferation of enterprises without unions. In the most dynamic sectors of the Chinese economy, the entire trade union organization is marginalized—even though these sectors experience high rates of labor conflict and strikes. Much of China's labor conflict thus falls outside the state-corporatist framework and trade unions play little role in worker protests and lawsuits against their employers.

The constraints on the trade union are partly the result of its genesis as a mass organization in a communist political system. This is an important characteristic of Chinese state corporatism more generally. Unlike other regimes in which labor unions and social organizations are captured by the state and reined in by the state's control, Chinese trade unions have long been a part of the state apparatus. The current period is not one of capture but one in which the state is attempting to relax its overwhelming control and influence and devolve limited rights and responsibilities, all while maintaining a monopoly on political power.

To focus only on the organization's genesis (as a mass organization) would be misleading, however, since some mass organizations have achieved greater autonomy and diversification. Both the Women's Federation (Zhonghua Quanguo Funu Lianhehui) and the All-China Youth Federation (Zhonghua Quanguo Qingnian Lianhe Hui) have become vibrant, diverse organizations with significant NGO-like activity. These organizations have more diffuse goals and wider policy arenas. Moreover, their growing autonomy does not threaten the Chinese party-state as much as a more activist, aggressive labor movement undoubtedly would. It is not only the structure of mass organizations that restricts their autonomy; it is also how
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the state perceives the threat of autonomy. This perception dictates the degree to which the state actively controls the organization.

AFCTU leaders at the central and provincial levels at times do press for an enlarged union role and more effective representation of workers' interests. In the late 1980s, many of these issues were discussed with active encouragement by ACFTU officials. After the June 4, 1989, suppression of the Pro-Democracy Movement, however, union reform remained stalled. With the rapid expansion of the nonstate sector, layoffs, and restructuring in the state sectors that came in the 1990s, the union's role has been strengthened legislatively but not in reality. Pressure for change is beginning to emanate from other social organizations, however, which are beginning to usurp major duties and responsibilities of the trade union. Legal aid organizations, which are often under the jurisdiction of universities and therefore have less oversight than many registered social organizations, now operate in many Chinese cities and offer free or low-cost legal aid to workers involved in labor disputes and other work-related grievances. Despite the fact that the Trade Union Law of 2001 encourages trade union officials to serve as representatives of workers during the dispute resolution process, the union's role is usually minimal. There is growing conflict between the ACFTU, which feels that these new legal aid organizations are trespassing on its own territory, and legal aid activists, who feel that they are filling in for an illegitimate, malfunctioning labor union.16

Many theorists would argue that by definition Chinese trade unions should not included in civil society. Their historical identity as a mass organization under Communist Party leadership leaves them with little autonomy and probably less legitimacy in the eyes of most workers. However, as a study of how civil society develops in a late communist state, the union's problems and peculiarities are not uncharacteristic. They in fact highlight in the extreme some of the basic limitations of civil society's development in a repressive political environment. China's rapidly changing economy and social environment will, however, continue to pose new challenges related to labor that will affect the future of the trade union. As is already apparent in the legal realm, the trade union's inability to fulfill its legally mandated duties has led to the rapid development of new social organizations eager to serve as representatives of workers' interests.

Business Associations

Business associations have expanded rapidly under reform. Many have been created by the state, which seeks to incorporate entrepreneurial and business interests into structures that render them less dangerous and destabilizing to the government. These associations have been studied widely by scholars. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods have been employed. In general, the conclusions reached are overwhelmingly uniform and mutually reinforcing.19 First, Chinese business associations are not necessarily weak, but their degree of effectiveness is
not related to autonomy—in fact, high levels of autonomy may be inversely related to the association’s effectiveness as a representative of the association’s interests. Second, Chinese business associations are closely tied to the state, and associations of large firms are more embedded than associations made up of individual entrepreneurs and small business owners. Third, Chinese business associations increasingly represent the interests of their members, but many businesses continue to use vertical ties of clientelism to cultivate ties with officials. The existence of business associations and the continued importance of clientelism are not necessarily contradictory—in fact, as Margaret Pearson (1997) argues, they may be “consistent and complementary.” And, fourth, researchers of Chinese business associations overwhelmingly employ state corporatism (or its variants) as a device to describe the structure of these associations and their relations to the government.

Pearson’s study of business associations in the foreign and private sectors finds that these groups play limited but important roles in “the dual task of serving both control and co-optation functions, on the one hand, and advocacy for newly legitimized interests, on the other” (1997: 135). Pearson argues, however, that their real value to their members comes in the “vertical, informal clientelism embedded in these associations” (ibid). Members find greater access to officialdom through the association, but the association itself does not play an active role in representing members’ interests to the state. These associations instead seem to provide a space where government-business relations can deepen and thicken. There is little sense that these associations are growing away from the state.

Bruce Dickson employs two quantitative surveys to evaluate the characteristics of business associations in China (2002: 255–87). His study is particularly important because it encompasses greater regional variation than other studies, which tend to concentrate on one region. Dickson finds that both officials and business association members believe that these organizations represent the interests of their members. Most members also believe that their association influences policymaking. But Dickson also finds that in economically developed regions, government and business views tend to converge rather than diverge. Businessmen in wealthy regions are also the least likely to believe that associations can influence government policy. Dickson concludes:

In the areas that are most economically developed and where privatization has advanced furthest, the convergence of views between entrepreneurs and local officials is most pronounced. . . . Instead of seeking an officially recognized and protected autonomy, entrepreneurs seek to be embedded in the state, and the state in turn has created the institutional means for linking itself with private business interests. (ibid.: 286)

Dickson’s quantitative study accords with David Wank’s (1999) in-depth examination of government-business relations in Xiamen, Fujian province. Wank finds that as the market has penetrated China’s southeastern coast, government-business
ties have intensified and strengthened. China's emerging market economy is not taking shape along the lines of private property, increased social autonomy, and the expansion of contract-based commercial development. Instead, Wank sees a transformation from communism in which particularistic ties between private entrepreneurs and local officials increase—forming a “symbiotic clientelism.” Business associations play a key role in granting private entrepreneurs access to government functionaries: “Participation in certain business associations can dramatically increase interaction with officialdom, personalizing relationships with them and increasing support” (Wank 1999: 137). Wank finds that business-government relations under advanced marketization do not proceed inexorably toward greater separation and declining use of guanxi and clientelist ties. In fact, private entrepreneurs may become increasingly more sophisticated and expansive in their cultivation of government officials. Associations seem to play a role in this process as they offer routine and regular access to officialdom for even the least connected:

Participation in most of the aforementioned associations also enhances renown because of the exclusivity of membership. One must be invited to join; therefore membership indicates that one is successful and prosperous and, in some way, approved by government officials. Less well-endowed entrepreneurs “squeeze” membership to maximize renown. One former worker listed all seventeen of his associational affiliations and positions on his name card. The list was so long it required a fold-over sheet, so his name card resembled a small booklet. (Wank 1999: 139)

These findings from Pearson, Dickson, and Wank all point to an increasingly symbiotic relationship between government and business, which is fortified by business associations. Models based on an oppositional logic do little to explain this relationship. Moreover, the massive extent of the corruption between officials and entrepreneurs makes it hard to determine who is in charge or who is controlling whom in the web of ties and interests that bind together public officials and private businessmen (Wank 2002).

One way to understand the role of business associations is to focus less on their relative autonomy and more on their organizational evolution. Kenneth Foster’s comparison of two national-level sectoral associations reveals how business associations have evolved over the course of the reform period. He finds that certain associations (in this case the China Chain Store and Franchise Association), although initially founded by the state, may gradually grow more active and independent from the state sponsor, with activities and functions increasingly geared toward interest representation of their members and services. In the case of the Chain Store Association, the reasons for this switch seem to include the dissolution of its original government sponsor (and thus a reduction in government oversight), movement of the association’s offices out of the original bureaucracy, and expanding private and nonstate membership. Clearly, future research on business associations
must pay attention to their organizational evolution, their changing relationship to the government bureaucracy (particularly at a time of a shrinking Chinese state), and their membership characteristics.

Chinese business associations are better at representing the interests of their members than Chinese trade unions. This does not mean, however, that they are a good example of a developing civil society. Indeed, these associations are tightly bound to state organizations and actors through the mechanisms specified here. Their power, in effect, derives not from their autonomy but from their close ties with officialdom and converging goals. Business associations reflect the changing nature of the Chinese state and are better understood in a state-centric framework. Even state corporatism, with its hierarchical logic between government and business, may miss crucial aspects of the government-business relationship in regions where the private economy is dominant and growing wealthier. The symbiotic relationship between government and private business is likely to increase as entrepreneurs "join the association" of the leaders—the Chinese Communist Party.

Labor unions and business associations are thus key institutions for exploring the changing nature of state-society relations in modern China. We might expect, given the leadership's current emphasis on economic growth, that labor unions would be the one of the most severely restricted types of social organization, while business associations would be given greater autonomy to pursue economic growth and prosperity.23 This is not the case. In fact, both types of associations are encouraged to develop only in a limited and restricted fashion. Neither is allowed to drift away from the state's control. The development of both is geared toward strengthening the Chinese state and controlling new social forces that might arise to challenge the CCP's monopoly on political power. The CCP's decision in 2002 to allow private entrepreneurs to join the party is perhaps one more indication that the party-state would rather absorb China's new rich than allow private business associations to develop as autonomous social organizations.

Are these case studies unrepresentative, given the highly sensitive nature of the state's changing relationship to labor and capital? Even in areas with less political sensitivity, the state is intent on maintaining control over social organizations. Elizabeth Economy's study of environmental NGOs paints a realistic view of the extent to which these new groups can operate as activist organizations for the protection of the environment, scarce natural resources, and endangered wildlife (Economy 2004). The state has allowed these groups to flourish because they provide resources needed to solve some of the severe problems of environmental degradation caused by rapid economic growth. The Chinese state has also found that encouragement of domestic NGOs raises its international standing. Even so, Economy calls the relationship between NGOs and the state a "tightrope act." NGO leaders and activists must constantly worry about their relationship with state officials, and cultivating these relationships is an essential part of NGO work. In fact,
the informal cultivation of state officials is far more important to NGO success than lobbying or public pressure. Moreover, environmental NGOs also face the same constraints as other NGOs when it comes to registration, finding personnel, and locating sources of financing.

Future Development

Despite the state's ability to maintain control of certain organizations—the trade union, for example—it is unlikely that this ability is all-encompassing. Tony Saich (2000: 124) argues that declining state capacity and growing societal complexity make for routine evasion of formal mechanisms of control: "There is a significant gap between rhetoric and practice and between the expressed intent of the party-state authorities, a system that is itself deeply conflicted, and what can actually be enforced for any significant period throughout the entire country." This trend is likely to continue in the light of consistent state withdrawal from social welfare functions, even as unemployment, layoffs, and (the related) economic inequality continue to grow. Social organizations are increasingly filling this gap left by the state's withdrawal. These organizations run the gamut: advocacy and service for the disabled, environmental protection, consumer protection, disaster relief, HIV/AIDS work, poverty alleviation, care for the elderly, and women's rights protection and services (Young 2001).

Although these social organizations seem unlikely to contribute to dramatic political change in the near future, their role in policy reform and implementation is important and growing. Groups pushing for greater awareness of HIV/AIDS have been critical in exposing the Henan Province blood scandal, in which thousands of peasants were infected when they sold their blood. Environmental groups have also been important in increasing the environmental awareness of the government and the general public. Economy finds that some groups have also successfully lobbied for greater protection of some endangered species (Economy, forthcoming). Finally, groups formed to aid the integration of migrant workers into urban society have brought migrant issues to the forefront. Greater awareness of migrant issues may have played a role in the government's recent decision to pay more attention to migrant rights, including the problem of education for children of migrants and abuses of the custody and repatriation regulations (Rosenthal 2001; Xinhua News Report 2003).

From this survey of Chinese social organizations, it is clear that while autonomy from the state is extremely limited, there are other characteristics worth exploring that indicate the different ways social organizations and state institutions interact. To confine one's view to the relative degree of autonomy of Chinese social organizations is to miss many other key characteristics of these groups—including their organizational evolution and internal dynamics. And to see their evolution as a process either of growing autonomy or of continued dependence is to miss the way
in which the constant interaction between the state and social groups can transform parts of the state itself. This is particularly true of business associations. Their members continue to grow richer and more powerful without, apparently, the expected push for greater autonomy and distance from local officials.

**Unofficial Civil Society**

In China's repressive political environment, much change is happening outside official civil society. Protest, contention, and social expression are occurring—often in ways that are unorganized and inarticulate (Thornton 2002). Despite the unclear legal standing of these social actors, the existence of an unofficial civil society is important to our overall understanding of the Chinese case. It is, moreover, the declared aim of this volume to examine civil society "in the context of a country's prevailing circumstances" (see Introduction). In China, the growth of unofficial civil society is directly related to the state's unwillingness to deploy corporatist organizational tactics to capture, co-opt, and control new kinds of resistance and civil action. Corporatist incorporation necessarily entails the legitimation of these groups and at least some degree of recognition that their interests are justified and should be represented in policy debates. Such legitimation, however, remains anathema to the Chinese party-state.

**The Floating Population**

Estimates of the migrant labor force in China generally range from about 60 million to 100 million. Migrant workers are most often peasants who have left their rural homes to search for employment in the industrial or service sector. Although men make up the majority of the migrant workforce in China, female migrants predominate in many labor-intensive factories in the coastal developmental zones, where they are preferred for their obedient nature and "nimble fingers." Research also indicates that many migrants do not necessarily leave their region but rather simply relocate to urban or suburban areas within their home province. Nevertheless, this huge exodus of the rural population to the cities is one of the most striking changes of the reform era and is reshaping Chinese society in myriad ways.

The mobility of China's large peasant population (at the beginning of the reform period, well over 80 percent of the population still lived in the countryside) has long been restricted through the implementation of a residency permit (hukou) system, which strictly divided the population into rural and urban sections. Those classified as urban residents receive greater access to social welfare, education, and the like. In the past, urban residents were also allocated jobs, which were then generally kept for life. Rural residents did not enjoy these extensive benefits of socialism
and in addition were not permitted to move freely into cities or other regions in search of employment. This system has been relaxed under reform, and certain boundaries have eroded. Migrant workers are now allowed to look for work in Chinese cities and establish temporary, even long-term, residence in Chinese cities. The residency permit system still remains in effect, however, with key welfare benefits and perquisites of urban life denied to most migrants (Solinger 1999).

Given their second-class status in urban areas and the lack of an infrastructure able to handle such massive movements of people, migrants face numerous hardships, including inadequate access to housing, social welfare, medical care, education for their children, and even basic daily amenities. At the workplace, migrants may face severe exploitation and abuse at the hand of managers who take advantage of their semilegal status and their dependence on the workplace for basic needs such as food and housing. In several ways, Chinese internal migration poses problems that other countries have faced when confronted with large-scale international immigration—how to provide basic social welfare, for example, and how to integrate these new groups into a society that is often discriminatory and unwelcoming.

The problems of migrants have not escaped the notice of the Chinese state and certain social groups. In fact, many social associations have formed to help migrants integrate into urban society: Rural Women Knowing All (national), the Migrant Women's Club (national), the Migrant Workers' Document Handling Service Center (Guangzhou), and the Center for the Protection of Migrant Workers' Rights (Shanghai). These associations (often in conjunction with the Women's Federation) address many of the problems cited here and offer legal aid, counseling, and literacy training. These associations also play a critical role in attracting greater media attention to the plight of migrants by publishing newspapers and magazines on migrant issues.

These groups all have one thing in common, however—they are groups to protect migrants but not groups made up of migrants. According to research, large city administrations resist the formation of autonomous associations of migrants (Solinger 1999: 170; Zhang 2001). In Beijing's Zhejiang village, for example, a collection of retired doctors were continually thwarted in their attempts to set up small clinics to serve the migrant population, who were excluded from most medical care in Beijing by its high cost and linguistic barriers (Li 2001). When migrants from Rui'an (also in Zhejiang province) formed a preparatory committee for the Rui'an Itinerant Merchants Society (Rui'an Xingshang Gonghui), they originally received some support from the Beijing Industry and Commercial Federation (Gongshanglian) and the United Front Department. Based on the principles of "voluntary membership, self-elected leadership, privately hired staff, self-management of internal affairs, and private fund-raising" (Li 2001), this group was one of the first
to press for an association that would advocate for migrants, provide services to migrants, and also be initiated, run, and funded by migrants. The Beijing government ultimately refused its legal registration.\textsuperscript{26}

Migrants continue to form informal, flexible networks, usually based on native place. These social networks allow migrants to navigate the difficulties of urban life, but they remain closed out of the corporatist framework. Although other groups may offer them charitable assistance, education, and legal aid, representation of their interests is not considered to be legitimate. Legitimation would likely lead to greater demands on the state from migrants for social welfare, education, and basic services. Moreover, such legitimation would also reduce the ability of city administrators to eject migrants. It would be the first step toward recognizing their status as increasingly permanent fixtures of urban China. As the \textit{hukou} system is dismantled, as is planned, a major challenge for the Chinese state will be to integrate migrants into urban society, to recognize and protect their legal rights and interests, and to allow migrants themselves to represent migrants.

\textit{Popular Religion}

The rise of popular and unorthodox religious groups is perhaps even more problematic for the state-society relationship in China. Renewed interest in religious matters is a widespread phenomenon in contemporary China, although it has manifested itself differently in rural and urban areas.\textsuperscript{27} Rural China has experienced a great revival in popular religion—including local temple shrines, spirit mediums, syncretic sects of every kind, and underground “house churches.” In urban China, the revival has been more subdued, owing to greater state control, but there is increased attendance at the official patriotic churches even here, as well as heightened interest in heterodox beliefs, including the “qigong craze” made famous by the Falungong movement, which has been banned and repressed since 1999 (Madsen 2000; Overmyer 2003).\textsuperscript{28}

Analysis of these phenomena from the viewpoint of civil society has resulted in a generally pessimistic outlook on the contribution of religion to the development of a more autonomous and civil Chinese society.\textsuperscript{29} Richard Madsen finds that the Catholic Church, split between its rural and urban roots and its official and unofficial organizations, is ill suited to contribute to China’s civil society. Fragmented by its internal divisions, the Catholic Church and its members are unable to develop norms of interpersonal trust, reciprocity, and civil exchange. The CCP and the Religious Affairs Bureau continue to exploit this internal divide for their own benefit by generating suspicion between the official and unofficial church (Madsen 1998: 126–29).

The revival of traditional religions in China’s rural areas demonstrates characteristics that build strong local ties and social networks (Dean 2000).\textsuperscript{30} Often orga-
nized around the reconstruction of a temple, this new organizational activity strengthens local society and may even connect locals to an overseas community of emigrants (particularly in southeastern China where this revival has been most prominent) (Shue 2001). Robert Weller argues, however, that local religious associations under the current political regime will remain just that—extremely localized and fragmented:

The Daoist Association and religious bureaucracy are attempts to control religion; occasional clampdowns on "superstition" or religious "charlatans," or forbidding temples from doing large public rituals of renewal, are attempts to repress. The state has eased up greatly on religion over the last decade, yet any larger kind of growth is clearly out of the question under the current regime. Temple religion will remain localist and communitarian, but it also remains an important point of concentration for social capital. (Weller 1999: 88)

Both Madsen and Weller, although examining quite different types of religious revival, find that religion’s contribution to civil society is constrained by the political institutions created by the state to control and co-opt official religious organizations, while repressing religions that do not strictly respect the hierarchy of party over belief. Underground house churches and local temple associations alike build their own internal social capital, but the effects on the development of civil society are limited.

Popular religious groups outside the legal, corporatist apparatus can, however, be important loci of resistance to the Chinese state. This is no small point if one considers the crucial role that "syncretic popular religious sects and secret societies" have played in the weakening and overthrow of imperial rulers (Shue 2001: 20). As Vivienne Shue notes, these groups reject the party-state’s claim to a monopoly on a “doctrine of truth,” based, not on Confucian learning and morality, but on scientific rationalism and modernization, which serves to buttress the CCP’s hold on power, despite the decline in socialist ideology and socialist practice (as evidenced by the smashing of the iron rice bowl and other socialist institutions).

Popular religious groups that subscribe to alternative truths and systems of belief face severe repression. Such movements are not incorporated into the state’s apparatus of social control through registration and penetration. Instead, they are condemned as unscientific and retrograde—evidence of the low quality of Chinese peasants, workers, and other marginalized groups. Their search for a higher truth and morality go directly against the state’s own dogged insistence that whatever the differences between current ideology and practice, the CCP remains the only legitimate representative of and ruler of the Chinese nation. According to Shue (2001: 20): "Until and unless the Chinese state moves on to a newer repertoire of legitimation claims—one that does not include official knowledge of ultimate ethical truths—we can expect popular religious belief and practice to continue to be per-
ceived always as a potential, and sometimes as an active, counterhegemonic danger to stability and order. Because these groups cannot be incorporated into the state's vision of Chinese society, they remain on the outside.

Given the high levels of state repression of unofficial religious groups, as well as other barriers, it is difficult to measure the extent of their membership and influence, not to mention the particular dynamics of this type of unofficial civil society. Influence also varies considerably by region—for example, most unofficial Chinese Catholics live in Hebei Province, while most Tibetan Buddhists live in Tibet or on its borders. External reports, however, find that the number of unofficial Chinese Catholics is at least equal to the official Patriotic Catholic Church and may be even twice as large. Likewise, registered Chinese Protestants are estimated to be between 0.8 and 1.2 percent of the total population, while an "estimated 2.4 to 6.5 percent worship in Protestant house churches that are independent of government control." Falungong adherents were at one point believed to number in the tens of millions. But given the dogged campaign to rout them out of Chinese society since 1999, the sect's numbers have fallen rapidly, perhaps to one million or less.

We have seen, then, how certain social organizations remain outside the state-corporatist framework of control through co-optation and penetration. Through analysis of two very different groups—migrants and followers of popular religions—we can observe how the state refuses to legitimate these groups, and how these groups respond to their marginalization. In the case of migrants, denied the right to organize, a vast number of informal networks, associations, gangs, and secret societies have arisen, most often based on native-place affiliation. Rural religious groups continue to build informal and highly fragmented associations. Given their local foundations and the resistance of the state, it is unlikely they will evolve into a broad-based rural civil society. And in the case of urban unorthodox religious movements and sects, in the wake of the Falungong movement, these groups currently bear the overwhelming repressive attention of the Chinese state (Chen 2003; Tong 2002).

China's Intellectuals

Any discussion of Chinese civil society would be incomplete without a discussion of Chinese intellectuals, who by historical tradition and cultural impulse tend to place themselves at the forefront of social change. The 1989 Pro-Democracy Movement was the most recent period of intellectual ferment and mobilization for political and social change. Since that time, most observers have become somewhat pessimistic about the role of Chinese intellectuals in future political change. As is rightly pointed out, Chinese intellectuals, broadly defined as those with higher education, have materially benefited from the past decade of economic reform. For those with technical or other advanced training, professional opportunities have
China

widened and offer a level of material comfort that was heretofore unknown. Some of those formerly known as intellectuals in the traditional sense have now become professionalized as doctors, engineers, lawyers, and managers of private and foreign-invested companies. Intellectuals who have remained engaged in research and teaching have also felt their choices shift. Government- and university-supported research institutes have blossomed, allowing intellectuals some degree of policy influence and a relatively wide range of freedom to pursue research and writing. Opportunities abroad have also attracted a large number of Chinese intellectuals, many of whom have been able to combine the academic freedom of the West with continued involvement in Chinese intellectual circles through academic collaboration and informal networks.

In addition to these institutional changes wrought by economic reform, Chinese intellectual discourse has become more varied and complex. While nationalistic writing has tended to gain the most attention in the West, Chinese intellectuals have wide-ranging views on the nature of their society and its relationship to the outside world, especially the United States. The ability to debate and discuss has vastly expanded, although there are still limits on what the government allows to be openly debated or published. The Internet and various other methods of electronic exchange of information have vastly improved this exchange, particularly informal modes of communication and debate. Access to external news outlets and other organizations also allows much more information about events, both internationally and within China, to be disseminated. Chinese dissident groups also continue to exist and operate externally, although their influence is somewhat limited by their distance and a good deal of fractious infighting. Chinese dissidents who have attempted to organize or disseminate information within China have, however, been dealt with very harshly, receiving long prison sentences or expulsion. Unlike South Korea and Taiwan in the 1980s, China has no viable internal political opposition.

Intellectual contribution to civil society formation in China has certainly been critical. Many of the most dynamic organizations are situated within universities, where they enjoy some degree of protection and autonomy. Unlike in 1989, when student leaders actively resisted collaboration with other sectors of society, especially workers, student groups have begun to reach out to those who have not benefited from the market. This is apparent in the explosion of social organizations that offer help and aid to society's "weak groups" (ruoshi qunti). Weak groups in this definition include women, children, workers, especially the unemployed, the poor, the disabled, and the diseased. In the event of some larger shock or political crisis, this growing concern for other social groups may indicate a new opportunity for intellectuals to cut across traditional boundaries and link up more effectively with other social groups.
The Chinese intelligentsia is not necessarily hampered as a force for political change by its somewhat fractured nature. The diffuse, informal networks and the lively debate that occurs spontaneously on the Internet are both good indications of the latent power of Chinese intellectual society. Organizationally speaking, Chinese intellectuals' associational life may be well controlled and monitored by the party-state, but there is significant activity occurring beyond the bounds of organizations through informal channels, global linkages, and virtual public space on the Internet. The effects on government policy are difficult to measure under normal circumstances, but in the event of a larger political crisis, intellectual ferment would be difficult to ignore or control. As we learn in the Burma case study in this volume (Chapter 12), formal organization and government sanction are not always necessary for civil society to develop and to learn certain tactics of communication and interaction that become critical when the political winds shift.

**Avenues of Future Political Change**

The existence of a large "unofficial civil society" outside the realm of state control and management may indeed be evidence of a stronger civil society in China, but it is a civil society that is still hampered and constricted by the state's own activist policies in shaping, managing, and co-opting social organizations. The implications for political change are important but hard to specify. If the Chinese state continues to control social organizations so strictly, many of these unofficial groups will continue to operate behind the scenes, but with possibly frequent spontaneous eruptions onto the political scene. Political change wrought by these types of groups is most likely in the event of an economic crisis or severe downturn in which large numbers of people, especially the urban unemployed and the rural migrant population, confront increased economic deprivation. It is this type of political crisis that is also most likely to unleash the latent power of China's intellectuals by tapping informal networks and linkages home and abroad.

A second avenue of political change is more gradual but still significant. In fact, it seems already to have begun to occur. This type of change is best defined as a mutual penetration of the state and social groups that has a transformative effect on the state itself. One existing instance of this is the overlap between the party-state and wealthy entrepreneurs. Much of the research on the state-centric models (state corporatism and its variants) shows that in China's postsocialist reality, new organizations are often formed through the merging of state bureaucracy with social groups. The complex relationships that develop within organizations—and between organizations and the relevant state authorities—cannot be fully understood through models that posit an oppositional logic or even, as in the case of state corporatism, a hierarchical logic. Burdened by the legacy of state socialism, Chinese state-society relations are not proceeding in a linear fashion toward civil society's
ever greater independence from the state. To understand future political change in China, therefore, one must pay attention to the shifting boundary between state and social groups—including those that may seek out a close, mutually beneficial relationship with state institutions and in doing so affect change within the state itself. This type of gradual political collaboration between the party and China's new economic elite does not necessarily bode well for liberal political change.

A third avenue of political change is civil society's capture of state-led associations or institutions, such as occurred during the prodemocracy movement of 1989. After the students in Beijing took over Tiananmen Square, organized groups and delegations began sending donations and other expressions of sympathy and support. Many of these groups were government-run or government-organized, including the ACFTU, state-run newspaper and television stations, and factory and bureaucratic "work units" (Walder 1991: 485). Civil society's capture of such key organizations is very intriguing as a model for future political change. In this scenario, the dependent nature of Chinese civil society becomes far less important. In fact, the high level of state-led organization may be seen as a benefit to civil organizations, since it provides the structure necessary to mobilize individuals and groups.

In conclusion, then, it is necessary to emphasize the contingent nature of civil society's development. Its evolution cannot be understood in a vacuum or unidimensionally along a spectrum from dependence to autonomy. We must also pay attention to changes in political institutions, legal rules, and infrastructure, as well as to economic indicators such as urbanization, patterns of inequality, and unemployment. The development of civil society in China is tightly constrained by the institutions and structures outlined in this chapter. Yet by far the most constraining element is the ideology of the CCP, which continues to assert that it can encompass all legitimate interests and groups. Given the growing complexity of Chinese society, such encompassing power is surely in doubt. Thus it is likely that the realm of unofficial civil society will continue to grow. The CCP, consumed with the risk of legitimating "unruly" groups such as migrants, continues to ponder the risk of incorporation and acceptance. One hopes that China's leaders are also pondering the risks of inaction and excessive reliance on repression.

Notes
1. These are the so-called GONGOs—government-organized NGOs.
2. The civil society framework began to be applied to modern China in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a comparative framework between China and postsocialist countries in eastern Europe and as a way to understand the development and limitations of the prodemocracy movement of 1989. Timothy Cheek (1998: 219–52) summarizes the overall progress of the civil society framework. For a review of the civil society literature, see Gu Xin 1993–94. For key articles in this debate, see, e.g., Wakeman 1993; Strand 1990; Rowe 1990.

4. These debates are summarized and elaborated in Huang 1993.

5. This conclusion is overdrawn in that it simplifies European civil society. See Bermeo and Nord 2000.

6. The xitong is a vertical bureaucratic system; the danwei is the work-unit structure within which nearly all Chinese urban residents lived and worked; the jiti is the rural collective that structured rural work and life.

7. These were a comprehensive version of the provisional regulations issued in late 1989 in the aftermath of the student uprising. An English version of the regulations is included in Young 2001. For an analysis of the regulations, see Ge 2001.

8. This article of organization and several of the others cited can be found in “The Network of Foundations and Nonprofit Organizations” at http://chinanpo.org (accessed 3/7/2004), an informative, up-to-date website (in Chinese).

9. The funding of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (one of the mass organizations under socialism), explained in the following case study, is somewhat different. Trade union branches are generally beholden financially to the enterprises in which they are based.

10. Double-posting occurs within the trade union branches at the firm as well, but it is slightly different, as explained in the following case study.

11. From the websites of these organizations, Nevitt's examination of private business associations in Tianjin also found the leadership positions filled with United Front Department cadres—paid by the CCP and appointed by party leaders to head these business associations (Nevitt 1996: 33).

12. Social organizations are dependent on the state and party because they copy their organizational structure from state bodies—leading to a highly bureaucratic structure that lends itself well to penetration by similar state and party institutions (Yuan and Sun 2001).


14. In a survey of state-owned enterprise workers in 1993, some 46.5 percent believed that "the union doesn't play a large role." Other statements in the report on workers' attitudes reveal a cynical view of their position in the factory: "Now in reality it is the boss who has the final say;" And on the union: "The union is part of the administration, we have no confidence in the union" ("Guanyu quanguo gongren jieji duiwu zhuangkuang de diaocha baogao" 1993).

15. For the effects this marginalization has had on political change in China, see Gallagher 2002.


17. Attempts by workers and activists to establish independent unions and to mobilize workers have been dealt with very harshly, ending in long prison sentences for most labor leaders. Han Dongfang, a mainland labor activist in exile in Hong Kong, runs China Labour Bulletin. This organization follows attempts by mainland activists to mobilize workers as well as government policies and labor conditions. Radio Free Asia broadcasts a program with Han on Chinese labor issues into the mainland.


19. Extensive research has been done on Chinese urban entrepreneurs and Chinese business associations. There seems to be a general consensus in the literature that while Chinese business associations are developing quickly, the civil society framework is poorly designed
to capture the “mutually penetrated” nature of business associations and local state institutions. See, e.g., Solinger 1993; Pearson 1997; Goodman 1999; Parris 1999; Wank 1995.


21. This point is expanded in Wank 2002 and linked explicitly to recent corruption scandals.

22. These points are elaborated in Foster 2001.

23. Many other types of organizations that deal with sensitive issues such as AIDS and religion are also severely restricted and monitored.


25. By “inarticulate” I mean to capture the spontaneous and fleeting (but reiterated) resistance that occurs between Chinese social actors and the state. In some ways, this resistance is similar to James Scott’s “weapons of the weak” and his focus on small acts of resistance by unorganized individuals rather than the organized and articulate expression of associations.

26. Ibid. For more information on this group, see also Solinger 1999: 270–72.

27. For a comprehensive examination of religion in China, see China Quarterly, special issue (2003).

28. As Richard Madsen and others have pointed out, Falungong was not unorganized. It was in fact a highly effective, albeit decentralized, organization. Its ability to organize and plan the spring 1999 demonstration was one reason for the state’s ban and repression of the organization that began in July 1999.

29. For an optimistic view of civil society’s future, see Johnson 2003.

30. Tsai 2002 finds also that temple associations and lineage groups increasingly play important roles in the provision of public services in many villages. She notes, however, that reliance on these traditional social organizations often has deleterious effects on state building and governance in the countryside.

31. It is not surprising that membership in Falungong, for example, attracted the losers in economic reform, including laid-off workers, the unemployed, and the sick and elderly. See Madsen 2000.


33. See ibid., which notes that Falungong, otherwise known as Falun Dafa or the Wheel of Law, “blends aspects of Taoism, Buddhism, and the meditation techniques and physical exercises of qigong (a traditional Chinese exercise discipline) with the teachings of Falun Gong leader Li Hongzhi (a native of the country who lives abroad). Despite the spiritual content of some of Li’s teachings, Falun Gong does not consider itself a religion and has no clergy or places of worship.”

34. Naughton 2002.

35. These intellectual debates are well analyzed by Fesmire 2001. There are also many articles and books on the resurgence of Chinese nationalism. Zhao 1997.

36. For an overview of the ebb and flow of the intellectual-state relationship, see Goldman 1996.

37. For an overview of attempts to form an opposition party, see Wright 2002.
38. There is now also much academic research on China’s weak groups, see, e.g., Zhang Minjie 2003.
39. I believe that many groups have a fair degree of operational autonomy even given the
government restrictions discussed above. Once a group engages in behavior that is deemed
politically problematic, however, these restrictions become much more meaningful and can
determine the group’s future survival.
40. For other essays about the role of social groups in 1989, see Wasserstrom and Perry 1994.

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